

# The Theology of Wilhelmus a Brakel

*A deductive study of  
a Brakel's magnum opus,  
The Christian's Reasonable  
Service*

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327 Historical Theology - 1 Credit*

# Course Outline

## *Lecture #1: Historical assessment of Brakel's life and ministry*

### **I. Introduction**

#### **A. Father Brakel and Dutch Reformed Orthodoxy**

1. His preeminence among the Dutch divines
2. The pervasive and ongoing influence of *The Christian's Reasonable Service*.

#### **B. Wilhelmus à Brakel and the Dutch Second Reformation**

1. The Dutch Second Reformation (DSR) defined:  
*"The Dutch Second Reformation is that movement within the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church) during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which, as a reaction to the declension or absence of a living faith, made both the personal experience of faith and godliness matters of central importance. From that perspective, the movement formulated substantial and procedural reformation initiatives, submitting them to the proper ecclesiastical, political, and social agencies, and/or in conformity therewith pursued in both word and deed a further reformation of the church, society, and state."*
2. The chronological boundaries: William Teelinck (1579-1629) & Theodore VanderGroe (1705-1784).
3. The DSR and European Pietism
4. The uniqueness of the DSR: It aimed for national reformation
5. à Brakel's ministry: At the center of the DSR
6. *The Christian's Reasonable Service (CRS)*: The "textbook" of the DSR

#### **C. Wilhelmus à Brakel and English Puritanism**

1. The striking similarity between the CRS and Puritan writings
2. The pervasive influence of translated Puritan writings during the DSR era
3. CRS: A bridge between the DSR and English Puritanism

### **II. A Biographical Perspective**

#### **A. à Brakel's Youth and Education (1635-1662)**

1. Born on January 2, 1635 as the son of Theodore & Margaretha à Brakel
2. Wilhelmus à Brakel feared the Lord from his youth
3. 1659 – 1662: Candidate for the holy ministry

**B. *Pastor in Friesland:***

1. Exmorra: 1662 -1665
  - a. His ministry blessed to an initially indifferent congregation
  - b. His marriage to Sara Nevius
2. Stavoren: 1665 -1670
3. Harlingen: 1670-1673
4. Leeuwarden: 1673-1683
  - a. One of six ministers
  - b. Organization of conventicles
  - c. His support of Jacobus Koelman
  - d. The VanGiffen controversy

**C. *Pastor in Rotterdam (1683-1711)***

1. Installed on Nov. 21, 1683
2. Three major events during his Rotterdam pastorate:
  - a. His struggles with the Labadists
  - b. His battle for the independence of the church
  - c. His publication of the CRS
3. August 30, 1711: His last sermon preached
4. October 30, 1711: The day of his homecoming!

**D. *à Brakel's Magnum Opus: The Christian's Reasonable Service***

1. The most popular dogmatics of the Reformed in the Netherlands
2. A masterful synthesis of Puritan and DSR theology (“North Sea” theology)
3. W. à Brakel: One of the outstanding theologians of European Pietism
4. At least 26 editions have printed since its original publication
5. The English edition has already been translated into Russian and Chinese, and is now being translated into Korean as well.

### **III. The Christian's Reasonable Service**

#### ***A. à Brakel's objective in writing this work: to minister to the congregation***

1. Written for church members—not theologians
2. A work permeated with practical applications

#### ***B. The experiential dimension of this work***

1. à Brakel speaks the language of Scripture from and to the heart
2. His experiential content:
  - a. firmly rooted in objective truth
  - b. thoroughly Christo-centric
3. His goal: The experiential application of divine truths to the souls of men

#### ***C. The general outline of this work: the six loci of Reformed Systematic Theology***

1. The organizing principle of the book: The Covenant of Grace
2. The three major divisions of this work:
  - a. Systematic theology (1-41)
  - b. Christian Ethics and Christian living (42-99)
  - c. The History of God's redemptive purpose
3. 60% of the book devoted to soteriology
4. The CRS includes an extended treatment of spirituality and sanctification

### **IV. Concluding Considerations**

#### ***A. The appendix and à Brakel's exposition of Revelation***

1. His exegesis was governed by his millennial views (modified Post-mil)
2. His exposition of Revelation has become an obscure part of his work

#### ***B. Some noteworthy features of the CRS:***

1. The scholarship and precision of Voetius
2. The teaching of Witsius on faith and the covenants
3. Better insights on biblical theology of Coccejus

#### ***C. God's stamp of approval upon this work***

1. Already recognized shortly after its initial publication
2. Continually acknowledged for nearly three centuries
3. Confirmed by the world-wide reception of the English translation

## ***Lecture #2: Brakel's Experiential and Practical Applications***

### **Volume 1**

#### **Chapter 2: The Word of God**

Sixthly, read, search, and meditate upon the Word of God with all diligence and persistence. This should even be the practice of kings. "And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life" (Deu. 17:19). It is the duty of scholars as well. "Give attendance to reading" (1 Tim. 4:13). It is the privilege and obligation of the lowly and of every individual. "Search the Scriptures" (John 5:39); "Have ye not read?" (Mat. 12:3).

The eunuch read while riding in his chariot (Acts 8:28). The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). How everyone ought to practice this in private, prior to going to work, both by himself alone, and with his family! At noon when one nourishes his body, he ought also to nourish his soul. In the evening after work, one must end the day by seeking some refreshment from the Word of God. In the meantime, while engaged in his occupation, by meditating upon what has been read, the soul will maintain communion with God. He will be enabled to understand the spiritual meaning as well as to experience the power of God's Word. This will cause the soul to grow in grace, protect against vain thoughts, control the tongue, suppress corruptions, and direct man to fear God (I: 77).

#### **Chapter 3: The Essence of God**

It is essential that one considers God to be His God in Christ. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God is to be found in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Outside of Christ, God is a terror, and can only be viewed as terror, and can only be viewed as a consuming fire. In Christ, however, one may have liberty; and God reveals Himself to such who approach unto Him in that way. Then one will be able to better endure the light of God's countenance, rejoice in it, and therein glorify God. One ought to be cautious, however, of becoming too free and irreverent when considering God as Father in Christ and in the contemplation upon His perfections which are unveiled by the covenant of grace (I: 138).

#### **Chapter 4: The Divine Persons**

Being temples of the Holy Ghost, how holy ought the conduct of believers to be, in order that He might find delight in dwelling in them! How carefully one should seek to prevent the desecration of the temple of God, either by personally engaging in sin or by causing others to sin. "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy" (1 Cor. 3:17). How careful we should be not to grieve the Spirit by either blatantly sinning in spite of His warnings, by a careless walk, or by resisting the way in which He leads us. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4:30). Rather, acknowledge His indwelling, willingly yield to His operation, listen to His comforts, and willingly follow in the way of His leading, in order that He may delight Himself in you and may work in you with ever increasing efficacy. Behold, must you not admit that faith in the Holy Trinity is profitable? Is it not the only foundation of a truly godly life and the fountain of all comfort? (I: 191).

#### **Chapter 5: The Decrees of God**

Do you desire to profit from this comforting doctrine? First, seek to rid yourself of inordinate and close attachment to earthly things, and be diligent in renouncing your own will. The things of this earth are not your portion, and therefore cannot satisfy. Have you not often experienced that instead of resulting in more holiness, they rob you of your peace and spiritual liberty, hindering you from running your course with joy? Have you not often perceived in retrospect that

it was God's wisdom and goodness that He did not give you the desire of your heart, and that at times you were uncomfortable when your desire was granted? Why then are you so set upon receiving your desire? Is it not much better to rest in God's decree? (I: 207-208)

## **Chapter 6: Eternal Predestination**

The assurance of one's election also affords much liberty and gives much support in prayer. One may approach unto God and say, "My Father! Hast Thou not known me by name and have I not found grace in Thine eyes? Hast Thou not eternally known me to be one of Thy own, chosen me to be Thy child and the object of Thy love, and wondrously to glorify me by Thy grace, mercy, and faithfulness, which manifests itself in the way in which Thou hast led me and wilt lead me? Therefore, oh Father, consider the trials and tribulations which I fear, the troubles which press me down, and my sinfulness which oppresses me. These matters I desire, these are the needs of my body, and these are my spiritual desires. May it therefore please Thee to look down upon Thy chosen one and upon the object of Thy favor. May it please Thee to hear me and to grant my desire." How this yields liberty, familiarity, faith that my prayer will be answered, and quiet submission! (I: 249-250).

## **Chapter 7: The Covenant of Redemption Between God the Father and God the Son Concerning the Elect**

The covenant of grace and our covenant transaction with God in Christ has its origin and basis in this covenant of redemption between God and Christ. From this covenant issue forth the beginning, continuance, and end of man's salvation. Before anyone existed, and before the gospel was proclaimed to them, it had already been decreed and established in this covenant when each of the elect would be born; when and by what means they would be brought into the covenant, the measure of grace, comfort, and holiness; and the quantity and nature of the tribulations and crosses they would have to endure in this life. All this has been determined and all the aforementioned matters issue forth from this covenant. Therefore the elect on the one hand need but be still and to let the Lord work. They need but to open their mouths to receive, for whatever is comprehended in the articles of this covenant will most certainly be given to them. On the other hand, they must focus upon this covenant, be active in entering into the covenant of grace, and living therein, they must make it the foundation of their life. This will motivate the godly to proceed with understanding and steadfastness, neither resting in the steadfastness of their faith or godliness nor, as one so often is inclined to do, being tossed to and fro when both appear to diminish. In consequence of this, they will acknowledge that the manifestation of every grace and influence of the Holy Spirit proceeds from this covenant. They will be enabled to exclaim feelingly, joyously, and lovingly, "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen? (Rom. 11:36) [I: 262].

## **Chapter 8: The Creation of the World**

Therefore distill your own comfort from this and reason as follows: The Lord has known me and accepted me to be His child. This I know by the Holy Spirit who has been given to me, and has wrought light and life in my soul, however small it may be. The Lord is the Creator of heaven and of earth; everything belongs to Him and is at His disposal. Thus, I shall not lack anything and all will therefore be well, for on the one hand the Lord loves me and on the other hand He desires and is able to help me. He has promised and declared, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). Therefore, acquiesce in this, and if things do not proceed according to your wishes, then look unto your Maker and submit yourself to His holy will. Approach Him as His creature, as His child; pray, wait upon Him, lean upon Him, and always let the Lord, who has made heaven and earth, be your reliance (I: 278-279).

## **Chapter 9: Angels and Devils**

How I wish that I could be instrumental in causing the hatred of believers towards the devil to be more lively and intense, that they may be more careful against being beguiled by his subtle temptations or cooperating with him in other ways! That all of this would motivate believers with bitter hatred for, and antipathy against, the wicked enemy of our Lord Jesus, to be courageous and to do battle against his assaults. "Whom (the devil, vs. 8) resist steadfast in the faith" (1 Pet. 5:9) [I: 303]

## **Chapter 10: Concerning Man, Particularly the Soul**

Here is reason to approve of the justice of God if He requites the sinner according to his ways and condemns him. Here the incomprehensible goodness and wisdom of God shines forth in that He reconciles such evil human beings-- although not all of them--with Himself again through the Mediator Jesus Christ. He caused this Mediator to come forth from Adam as holy, having the same nature which had sinned, to bear the punishment of the sin of man's own nature and thus to fulfil all righteousness. Such human beings He again adopts as His children and takes to Himself in eternal bliss. To Him be given eternal praise and honor for this. Amen (I: 330).

## **Chapter 11: The Providence of God**

I beseech you, however, to endeavor by constant activity and by continually focusing vividly upon and viewing it to familiarize yourself with this truth. May you thus continually perceive God's hand working in and by secondary causes in such a manner as if these causes did not exist, but as if God worked these things immediately. Endeavor by thus being continually exercised to acquire a habitual frame of mind which will make it clear and easy for you to see God at work. Believe me, this requires more effort to learn than you may think. Our atheistic and worldly hearts continually detract us from such observations and acknowledgement, and this will bring on a darkness which will hamper us. Therefore, apply yourself in this matter, praying for much light to enable you to be attentive and to be continually engaged in such observations. You will experience that your soul will derive great benefit in every way (I: 350).

## **Chapter 12: The Covenant of Works**

Therefore look away from the covenant of works. It has been broken and salvation is no longer obtainable by it. This exhortation is necessary since even God's children are often inclined to dwell upon their works, and accordingly, are either encouraged or discouraged. The unconverted are always desirous to perform something, being of the opinion that all can be made well with prayer and reformation; however, in this way they shall be deceived. Let the covenant of grace be precious to you. Turn to the Mediator of this better covenant. Enter into this covenant, give heed to it, and consider the first man to be dead (I: 367).

## **Chapter 13: The Breach of the Covenant of Works**

Thus the covenant of works has been broken and it would be to the advantage of God's children to look away from this covenant. How much yearning there still is for the covenant of works! This becomes evident both in the manifestation of unbelief when falling into sin--as if sin would nullify all the promises and as if one must find something within himself before coming to Christ--and by secretly resting in our own works, being more encouraged when things go reasonably well. Therefore one must make Christ in the covenant of grace the foundation for all rest and comfort and seek holiness from Him as a principal element of salvation (I: 380).

## **Chapter 14: Original and Actual Sin**

There is neither sorrow over this sin (i.e., the sin against the Holy Ghost—BE), nor a seeking of forgiveness and repentance. Therefore those who are concerned can perceive from this how mistaken they are, and that they have thus not committed this sin. They are merely being deceived by their darkened heart, even though their concern proceeds from a tender disposition. Moreover, the devil joins in to cast such souls to and fro and if possible to bring them to despair (I: 404-405).

### **Chapter 15: Man's Free Will and the Punishment due upon Sin**

Now consider all this together, and take some time to meditate on how completely abominable, condemnable, and hopeless your situation is. If you are unconverted, it may be a means to stir you up to seek and to ask, "Is there yet help? Is there no hope? Is there yet a way whereby I may be saved?" If you are then directed to Jesus Christ as the way, He will become precious, and you will earnestly seek to become a partaker of Him by faith. If you are converted, the contemplation upon the state of sin, no matter what it may have been for you prior to your conversion, will make and keep you humble; it will teach you to esteem Christ highly and to make use of Him continually. It will motivate you to glorify God, this being an expression of gratitude for sending His Son to deliver poor sinners through Him and to lead them to eternal felicity (I: 425)

### **Chapter 16: The Covenant of Grace**

Fourthly, the Lord shall turn no one away who in truth comes unto Him through Christ--even if for so many years you have been disobedient to this friendly offer; even if until now your entire life has been nothing but sin; and even if until now you have done abominable things, are a murderer, an adulterer and fornicator, a thief, a slanderer, and a liar. If only you would but acknowledge your sin, have true sorrow, and have a true desire to be a partaker of this covenant in all its ramifications, and of its Surety so that through Him alone you may become a partaker of all these benefits. Be not discouraged, for there is hope concerning this matter. Come, for the Lord will certainly not cast you out, but will receive you, as He has said. You may observe this in all the promises, such as in John 6:37, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (I: 450).

### **Chapter 17: The Necessity of Satisfaction by the Surety Jesus Christ**

Oh, that you were truly destitute and perplexed! Then there would be hope for your salvation, not because of your perplexity, but because there is a Surety for such perplexed ones--Jesus Christ, whose voice sounds forth, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mat. 11:28). To you who are perplexed, without hope, destitute, and troubled, I proclaim that there is one Savior--a Savior unknown to the heathen. Although they know that there is a God, nevertheless they do not know that there is a Savior and Surety who is proclaimed among us. This Surety calls you, invites you, and promises to save you if you come to Him. Therefore rejoice in such a blessed reality. Look outside of yourself, go to Him, receive Him by faith, and be saved (I: 491).

### **Chapter 18: The Divinity, Incarnation, and Union of Two Natures in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ**

No one could be Surety and bring man to God but He who was God and man in one Person. The Son of God first had to be personally united to the human nature before sinful man could be restored into friendship and union with God. Behold, how great a work it is to save a sinner! What manifold wisdom was required to conceive such a remedy! All the holy angels together could not have conceived such a remedy as God has conceived and revealed. They are desirous to look into this, but they shall never be able to comprehend it. What a blessing it is that none but

He was able to do this, that He has sent His own Son for this purpose and caused Him to unite personally with the human nature! What omnipotence is required to execute such a design! (I: 511).

## **Chapter 19: Concerning the Three Offices of Christ, and Particularly His Prophetic Office**

Come to this Prophet, humbly beseeching Him that He will teach and guide you. "Shew me Thy ways, O LORD; teach me Thy paths; "Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me" (Psa. 25:4-5); "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law" (Psa. 119:18). Then believe that He shall hear you and grant you wisdom. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering*" (James 1:5-6), that is, doubting neither the power and the willingness of the Lord nor the fact that He will grant any matter at His time, in His manner, and in a measure determined by Him (I: 529)

## **Chapter 20: The High-Priestly Office of Christ**

If therefore the Lord leads us in difficult ways, and brings us in a situation where we must lose our life for the truth's sake, may we then not love our life and deem it precious, but offer it willingly to the Lord as a sacrifice. Paul said, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim. 4:6). There is no more glorious death imaginable than to die as a martyr for Christ. Oh, how blessed is he who may thus use Christ as Priest, and who himself may be a spiritual priest! (I: 560).

## **Chapter 21: The Kingly Office of Jesus Christ**

Since the Lord Jesus is King, you must *trust* Him, and with confidence consider yourself safe under His protection. Seek no protection apart from Him. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust" (Psa. 91:1-2); "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (Psa. 2:12). In the Lord Jesus everything is to be found which can bring about rest. He is all-sufficient, omnipotent, good, faithful, and true. To trust in Him is to magnify Jesus in all His perfections (I: 571).

## **Chapter 22: The State of Christ's Humiliation**

Who are you for whom Christ has suffered all this? In yourself you are nothing but sin within and without, and therefore your nature is so hateful, abominable, intolerable, and damnable. What incompatibility there is between Jesus and you! Sink away in your wretched condition and acknowledge yourself to be unworthy that anyone, let alone God and the Son of God would look after you and think upon you. Above all, consider that everything is to be found in you which would cause the Lord Jesus to be repulsed by you and refrain from doing good to you. Focus on your wretched condition until you perceive yourself to be entirely as we have just described you to be, and then betake yourself in faith to the Lord Jesus. Be humbled, but be not unbelieving, by this view which passes all understanding, namely, that Jesus should love you, and that He would love you to such an extent that out of love for you He would suffer and die. Believe, however, that such is the case, and confess, "This is the LORD's doing; and it is marvelous in my eyes" (I: 616-617)

## **Chapter 23: The State of Christ's Exaltation**

There is nothing more delightful for a child of God than to behold Jesus. It is God's desire that His children be joyful, for He frequently exhorts them to this, promising that He will meet "him that rejoiceth" (Isa. 64:5). There is

nothing in which they find more inward and consistent joy, than in beholding the glorified Jesus. Therefore let your meditations of Him be sweet (I: 657).

## Volume 2

### Chapter 28: The Offices of Minister, Elder, and Deacon

The salvation or damnation of precious and noble souls hinges upon your labor. When viewing a church full of people, be reminded that every person has an immortal soul and by nature is traveling upon the broad way to destruction, a destruction which will be everlasting. There are no other means whereby they can be helped but by you in whose mouth the Lord has placed the word of reconciliation. If you allow them to go their own way, they will be lost. Whose soul would not be moved to help them? If someone has but fallen in the water, everyone will cry for help and do whatever he can to help. How moved one ought to be when reflecting upon the eternal destruction of men according to body and soul. You, having been sent by the Lord Jesus to help them, ought especially to be moved. Would you not, as much as possible, combine all your skills to help them by instructing, exhorting, and rebuking them, and thus take such souls by the hand to draw them out of the fire, removing them as spoil from the gate of hell and bringing them to the feet of Jesus? (II: 153).

### Chapter 29: Ecclesiastical Authority

Therefore, if someone cherishes his own salvation and the practice of godliness, he must not resist those means which are subservient to this. Even if he were not willing to submit himself for his own benefit, love for the congregation ought to motivate him to this; for when this key does not function, the congregation will degenerate. The use of this key, on the contrary, purifies the congregation, makes others fearful of sinning, and delivers those who are weak from that which offends. It will cause the church to demand respect from those who are without, who in turn will aspire after godliness and salvation and will be enticed to join the church. Blessed is the congregation where this may be practiced. "For there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Psa. 133:3) [II: 187].

### Chapter 30: Regeneration

*Question:* "What must I do to be saved?"

*Answer:* Do you mean this? Do you say this in truth and in earnest? Would you be willing to miss all that is delightful in the world? Would you be willing to part with your sin which you deem to be so delightful, well-intentioned advantageous, and enjoyable? Is the idea of being reconciled with God, to love, fear, and serve God in all godliness more desirable to you than anything else? Is it your desire to be acquainted with Him? Do you desire it more than anything else? If you say, "Yes, I mean this in earnest," then I reply, "Repent and believe the gospel." If you reply in turn that you know very well that you will then be saved indeed, take special note that it is an inexpressible mercy and privilege that you can be saved upon faith and repentance. God is not obligated to save you in this way, but it is His sovereign goodness alone that He promises and bestows salvation in this manner. Therefore, repent!

*Question:* Am I able to? Is this within the realm of my ability?

*Answer:* (1) Be assured that it is your duty, which is a fact of which you approve.

(2) Try it once, and upon beginning you will first of all experience that you are blind, and that you are neither acquainted with God, Christ, the way to Christ, the regenerate state of the soul, nor with the essential nature of true holiness. How will you respond to that with which you are not acquainted? Furthermore, you will experience that,

when it comes to the point of engaging yourself, you will find yourself unwilling. Your unwillingness is the initial step towards neglect. In addition to this, the wickedness of your nature is so great, sin is so strong, and the matter so difficult, that you will indeed not be able. Therefore sink down in your misery and inability, and as far as you yourself are concerned, be without hope and in despair.

*Question:* What counsel do you have? Is there then no hope for me at all?

*Answer:* There is no hope to be found *in you*, but there is hope *with God*. There is hope for you since you live under the ministry of the gospel, which is the means--yes, the only means--whereby God converts souls. Rejoice, therefore, that you may live under the means and that God grants you conviction and a desire for repentance and salvation. Be diligent in the use of the means, in hearing sermons, and in attending catechism classes. Read God's Word frequently and attentively, or let someone read it to you. Join yourself to the godly and request that you be admitted to their gatherings. Yield to the inclinations to pray and to be godly.

*Question:* Shall I then be converted and saved if I do all this?

*Answer:* Your efforts will not move God to grant you repentance, but God will also not exclude you if you do not exclude yourself. You have reason to hope since God has thus far brought you under conviction. Wait therefore for the least movement of the Spirit, respond to it, and be careful that you do not resist it. Be thus consistent in your use of the means and do not relent if time and again you are drawn away by your lusts (II: 258-259).

### **Chapter 32: Concerning Faith**

True believers, you who may have the root of faith within you, I yet wish to exhort you with a word or two. It grieves me that you make so little progress in faith, and trust so little in Christ. It grieves me that when trusting you are so little exercised with the promises and are so infrequently engaged in reflecting upon God's perfections in Christ....While believing in Christ, make continual use of the promises of which you have become an heir, which are all yea and amen in Christ. In whatever situations you may be, according to either soul or body, seek for a promise which is applicable to such a situation and acknowledge it as infallible truth. Then apply it to yourself as having been made to you, encourage your heart with it, rejoice in it, and with assurance await its fulfillment. You will thus glorify God and with courage endure all tribulations (II: 304-305).

### **Chapter 34: Justification**

A justified soul, every day anew ought to endeavor to be justified. This is not to suggest that he could fall away from his justified state, but because the voice of divine acquittal in God's Word, and by His Spirit to the heart, is so sweet, and sins, which time and again come in between, also necessitate justification. A justified soul must always acknowledge sin as sin. Sin remains sin committed against God and makes the sinner subject to guilt and eternal condemnation. Even though Christ has made satisfaction for them and as Advocate immediately presents the satisfaction, and even though the Word justifies the believer who time and again falls and arises, I maintain nevertheless that sin retains its nature. A justified soul must see and feel his sin also as such, and thus acknowledge himself to be condemnable as far as he himself is concerned. He must thereupon confess his sins, by faith receive the merits of Christ unto justification, and thus be justified in reference to a given sin. This is the practice of the saints, this we are commanded to do, and upon this the promise of forgiveness is made, all of which has been shown in the above. Therefore take heed to your actions, be on guard against defiling that which is good, and beware of the sinfulness of evil. This will humble the soul, exalt grace all the more, make Jesus' merits all the more precious, and cause him to walk all the more circumspectly (II: 412-413).

### **Chapter 39: Holy Baptism**

In reference to your baptism, continually ask: Has Christ died for me? Has not His blood been shed for the washing away of my sins and unto my reconciliation with Thee? Art not Thou my Father and I thy child? Is not baptism a

seal to me? Can this seal be broken? Of course not; thus the forgiveness of my sins, reconciliation with Thee, and all the benefits of the covenant of grace are my portion. I shall hold fast to this and thus will go my way with joy and courage. Strive to be exercised in this and it will greatly strengthen you that, without your knowledge, you have already been sealed in your infancy. Yield not to unbelief by being tossed to and fro continually, asking yourself: Am I regenerated, am I already a believer, and is baptism indeed a seal to me? How this will injure you and rob you of the efficacy of baptism (II: 521-522).

### **Chapter 42: The Life of Faith in Reference to the Promises**

A wise and more advanced Christian is more concerned about the wise and sovereign will of God than about the fulfillment of his desires. In such a frame he prays, believes the promises, and submissively waits upon their fulfillment. To be submissive is not the same as renouncing, devaluating, or nearly abandoning the promises. Rather, it is an enlargement of the promise, since it will be fulfilled in a better and more beneficial way than if our passionate desires were fulfilled. How often there is perplexity upon receiving one's desire, as was true for Israel upon receiving the quails! How frequently we must thank the Lord for not giving us our desire, subsequently perceiving that it would not have been good for us! Therefore, believe the promises, expect their fulfillment, and joyfully leave the time, measure, and manner to the Lord. You will then trust as a child and be established (II: 635).

## **Lecture #3: Brakel on the covenants** (chaps. 7, 12-13, 16, and appendix of vol. 4)

### **Chapter 7: The Covenant of Redemption**

#### *The Covenanting Parties of the Covenant of Redemption*

By virtue of this eternal covenant there has been an eternal relationship between the Son and His suretyship. This He demonstrated already in His government of the Old Testament church immediately after the fall, prior to His incarnation. This raises a question: Since the Father and the Son are one in essence and thus have one will and one objective, how can there possibly be a covenant transaction between the two, as such a transaction requires the mutual involvement of two wills? Are we then not separating the Persons of the Godhead too much? To this I reply that as far as Personhood is concerned the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. From this consideration the one divine will can be viewed from a twofold perspective. It is the Father's will to redeem by the agency of the second Person as Surety, and it is the will of the Son to redeem by His own agency as Surety (I: 252).

#### *The Existence of the Covenant of Redemption Scripturally Verified*

That there was such a covenant made between Jehovah and the Lord Jesus concerning the elect can be verified as follows. First, in Ps. 89:28,34 it is recorded, "My mercy will I keep for Him for evermore, and My covenant shall stand fast with Him. My covenant will I not break." Proof that mention is made here of the covenant between God the Father and the Lord Jesus is clearly evident. It is a known fact that the Psalms contain many references to the Lord Jesus, and that David in many respects was a type of Him. Therefore, Christ is also referred to as *David* (Hosea 3:5). In this Psalm mention is made of David and of the Lord Jesus as He is typified by David (I: 253).

Secondly, this is also evident in Zechariah 6:12-13, "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the Lord: Even He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne: and the *counsel of peace* shall be between them both."

We cannot understand both to refer to Jews and Gentiles. They are indeed united in one church in the New Testament, but not the least mention is made here of them. Therefore this idea cannot suddenly be inserted here. The pronoun "them" indicates that mention is made of two who have previously been mentioned, who are none other than *Jehovah* and the *Branch* (I: 254).

"Them both," however, refers to *Jehovah* and the *Branch*, the latter being the Messiah. In one glance it can be discerned that the reference is to these two. "Thus, speaketh the Lord of hosts . . . the BRANCH . . . He shall build the temple of the Lord," which is the work of the Messiah. He who would build the Lord's temple, that is His congregation, would be endowed with the necessary qualifications: to rule and to be a priest. Therefore, rulership and priesthood are descriptive of the Branch who would accomplish this work, and thus it reinforces our contention. He, the Branch, would be engaged in the Lord's work to which He had been commissioned: the building of the Lord's temple. This required mutual understanding and consent as well as consultation, counsel, and wisdom. Thus the Father and the Son not only agreed to promote the *peace of the elect*, but they also agreed about the manner of execution, that is, it would be accomplished by the Prince of Peace, the Branch, who had the necessary qualifications for this task (I: 255).

Thirdly, this is also confirmed in Luke 22:29, where it is stated, "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me." It is not stated *oJrivxw* (*horizo*), nor *diatavttw* (*diatatto*), but *diativqemai* (*diatithemai*). This word means as much as to promise something to someone by way of testament or covenant. From this word *diathvch* (*diatheke*) is derived, which means "testament? or "covenant." Thus, the verb "to appoint? includes the idea of covenant, and by virtue of this covenant He would receive the kingdom. This is expressly stated in Galatians 3:16-17, where it is recorded, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the *covenant*, that was confirmed before of God in Christ," etc. Thus, we have here the covenant, the promises, and the fact that these have been made to Christ, as well as

the fact that this covenant has been confirmed in Christ. Therefore, there is a covenant between God and Christ (I: 255).

### *Practical Observations Concerning the Covenant of Redemption*

Thirdly, the covenant of grace and our covenant transaction with God in Christ has its origin and basis in this covenant of redemption between God and Christ. From this covenant issue forth the beginning, continuance, and end of man's salvation. Before anyone existed, and before the gospel was proclaimed to them, it had already been decreed and established in this covenant when each of the elect would be born; when and by what means they would be brought into the covenant, the measure of grace, comfort, and holiness; and the quantity and nature of the tribulations and crosses they would have to endure in this life. All this has been determined and all the aforementioned matters issue forth from this covenant. Therefore the elect on the one hand need but be still and to let the Lord work. They need but to open their mouths to receive, for whatever is comprehended in the articles of this covenant will most certainly be given to them. On the other hand, they must focus upon this covenant, be active in entering into the covenant of grace, and living therein, they must make it the foundation of their life. This will motivate the godly to proceed with understanding and steadfastness, neither resting in the steadfastness of their faith or godliness nor, as one so often is inclined to do, being tossed to and fro when both appear to diminish. In consequence of this, they will acknowledge that the manifestation of every grace and influence of the Holy Spirit proceeds from this covenant. They will be enabled to exclaim feelingly, joyously, and lovingly, "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen?" (Rom. 11:36) [262].

## **Chapter 12: The Covenant of Works**

In the eighth chapter we have depicted Adam in his eminent, holy, and glorious nature. We shall now speak of him as being in covenant with God--the covenant of works. Acquaintance with this covenant is of the greatest importance, for whoever errs here or denies the existence of the covenant of works, will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus. Such a person will very readily deny that Christ by His active obedience has merited a right to eternal life for the elect. This is to be observed with several parties who, because they err concerning the covenant of grace, also deny the covenant of works. Conversely, whoever denies the covenant of works, must rightly be suspected to be in error concerning the covenant of grace as well (I: 355)

*The covenant of works was an agreement between God and the human race as represented in Adam, in which God promised eternal salvation upon condition of obedience, and threatened eternal death upon disobedience. Adam accepted both this promise and this condition (I: 355)*

First, "...these (the heathen), having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts" (Rom. 2:14-15). If men even after the fall have a law written in their hearts and are thus a law unto themselves, be it imperfectly and in obscurity, much more so would Adam in the state of rectitude have had a law. The reason for this conclusion is that the law of nature proceeds from the knowledge of God. Since Adam, after the fall, had a far superior and clearer knowledge of God than the heathen, he therefore also possessed the law in a far superior way. Knowledge of the law and conformity to it is a perfection of man's nature. He, who after the fall has the most knowledge of and is most conformable to the law, is superior to others. Since Adam was perfect, he consequently was superior in knowledge of and conformity to the law, and thus a law was given to him (I: 357).

In addition to the law of nature God gave Adam a command which in His sovereignty He could or could not have given: the command *not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, the name of which we have referred to previously. This may readily suggest the question, *Why did God give this commandment to Adam?* Had God not given this commandment to him, he would not have sinned (I: 359).

In the foregoing we have shown that the law given to Adam was the law of the ten commandments. The law of the ten commandments has the promise of eternal life appended to it, as can be observed in Matthew 19. A young man asked, "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Christ answered, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mat. 19:16-17). This is also confirmed in the following texts: "Ye shall therefore keep My statutes,

and My judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them” (Lev. 18:5); “The commandment, which was ordained to life” (Rom. 7:10); “...and in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psa. 19:11). Thus Adam had the promise of eternal life (I: 360).

We have thus observed the activity of the one party: God giving the law to Adam, which in content was identical to the ten commandments, promising him that same eternal felicity which Christ has merited for the elect and grants unto them upon faith. We have observed that God gave the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as a sign of a probationary nature, and the tree of life as a sign of a sealing nature. Thus all the required conditions have been shown as far as the one side of the covenant is concerned. We must now in addition bring into view the other party and his engagement, this being a prerequisite for a covenant transaction (I: 363).

Adam was perfect and therefore, since God could rightfully command, and Adam, due to his perfect obedience could not refuse, he could not do otherwise than accept this condition and promise. Could a rational creature, having a perfect knowledge of communion with God in a lesser degree, be anything but in love with and desirous for a higher degree of this most blessed communion? (I: 364)

The fact that Adam and Eve accepted the promise and condition is also evident in their refraining from and refusal to eat from the forbidden tree, the Lord having forbidden them to do so. When there is obedience in response to a prohibition and a refusal to transgress, there is an acceptance of promise and condition. Such is the case here, as is evident from the history in Genesis 3. Consequently Adam and Eve accepted the condition and promise, and it therefore follows that there was a genuine covenant between God and man.

We may thus draw the conclusion which we have sought for and found. Whenever there is a law as a condition, promises related to the fulfillment of that condition, signs of a probationary as well as a sealing nature, namely, the acceptance of both condition and promise, there is then a covenant. All of this is true here, and thus there was a covenant between God and Adam (I: 365).

Having established the former, the following proof is that much more clear. We base our proof on Hosea 6:7, “But they like men [Footnote: The Statenvertaling reads as follows, “Zij hebben het verbond overtreden, als Adam,” that is, “They have transgressed the covenant as Adam.” The argumentation which follows focuses on the fact that in à Brakel's opinion the English translation “as men” is incorrect, and should have been translated as “as Adam.”] have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.” Here mention is made of a covenant--a covenant with Adam--and the breaking of a covenant. Two difficulties must be removed here: whether the word “Adam” ought to be translated as “man” here, the reference not being to Adam but rather to other men, and whether the word *Berith* should not be translated as “law”; so that there is no reference to a covenant here at all (I: 365).

### **Chapter 13: The Breach of the Covenant of Works**

The eating from this tree was not a minor sin, even though the eating of the fruit itself was a small matter. Rather, it was a dreadful crime in which the breaking of the entire law was comprehended. It was a breach of love, obedience, and the covenant, resulting in the perdition of himself and all his descendants (I: 372).

Nevertheless this covenant remains in full force, obligating the entire human race (that is, all who have not been translated into the covenant of grace) to obedience and subjecting men to punishment, since the fulfillment of the promise continues to be contingent upon obedience. “This do, and thou shalt live.” Although man cannot obtain the promise since he does not fulfil the condition, the promise nevertheless remains part and parcel of this covenant (I: 375).

However, when God permits man to exit this covenant of works and enter into the covenant of grace, he is no longer under obligation to that covenant. “For ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). “For if the (first) husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband” (Rom. 7:2). To the believer the law is no longer a condition of the covenant of works, but a most desirable rule of life. Thus, when he sins, he no longer breaks the

covenant of works, as he is no longer obligated toward it. Rather, he sins against this most desirable rule of life which has been given to him in the covenant of grace. Such sin is not committed by the new man within, but by the flesh which remains in him. And although these sins themselves are worthy of punishment, believers shall not be subjected to punishment since the Surety has taken their sins upon Himself and has fully paid their debt (I: 376).

Whereas the covenant of works had been broken and rendered impotent so that felicity was no longer to be obtained by it, and the covenant of grace had replaced this covenant for believers, God did not want Adam to yearn for the covenant of works or its sacrament, the tree of life, as this covenant was no longer efficacious. Rather, the Lord wanted them to turn from this covenant, putting all their hope and seeking all their comfort in the promised seed of the woman. "Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the Garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" (Gen. 3:23-24, 22) [I: 380].

## **Appendix #1: The Church of the OT from Adam to Abraham**

The Old Testament or Covenant encompasses the entire period from the gospel declaration in Paradise until Christ. During this entire time frame there was no diversity in its manner of administration--an administration which functioned during this entire period by way of promises and figures. However, relative to the subjects of this administration, we can make a chronological distinction between the church *prior* to Abraham and *thereafter*. Prior to Abraham the church consisted of various nationalities--as is true in the New Testament era. However, God took Abraham and his seed to be His church. Thus, subsequent to Abraham's time, other nations rapidly became estranged from true religion. This pure religion was preserved, however, among the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, when speaking of a national covenant, it must be understood as the covenant of grace established with that particular nation. The term does not imply more than that (I: 374-375).

*Question:* Did the Old Testament begin with the first promise in Paradise, or did it begin at Mt. Horeb, consisting in the inheritance of Canaan as a type of heaven?

*Answer:* Some distinguish between the time before Mt. Horeb, referred to as the time of promise, and the time after Horeb, referred to as the Old Testament but not a *covenant*, which they distinguish from a *testament*. The first period they designate as a period of freedom, the other as one being under the hard yoke of bondage. This latter period would neither consist in the holding forth of the promises of salvation through Christ, nor as being the covenant of grace, but rather consist in the inheritance of Canaan.

We respond in the first place by saying that *Scripture does not make a distinction between covenant and testament*, since the one word (*berith*) is used in the Old Testament, and the word (*diatheke*) is used in the New Testament. Furthermore, Scripture makes no distinction between these matters. Even the very time period they exclusively want to be designated as the Old Testament is referred to as a covenant in Scripture, describing this era in such terms as cannot be applicable to a testament. "Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers...because they continued not in my covenant" (Heb. 8:9). The heir cannot disannul the testament, but a member of a covenant can break a covenant. They distinguish between testament and covenant by reason of the entire construction of their argument being founded upon this distinction. If one were to refer to it as a testament, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would have to be assigned to the first time frame, called the time of promise. By assigning them to this testament, the period of the Old Testament could neither be designated as a period of hard bondage, nor be limited to the inheritance of Canaan as being the substance of the Old Testament. They did not have Canaan in their possession as yet, but only the promise that their descendants would possess it. However, as we have shown in the appropriate place, the distinction between covenant and testament is unfounded (IV: 385-386)

We have hereby demonstrated that the Old Testament did not begin at Sinai, but with Adam; and that the Old Testament did not consist in the inheritance of Canaan as being an example and pledge of heaven. Consequently, the period from Adam to Moses can no longer be referred to as the *time of promises* in contrast with the time after Sinai; the entire period from Adam to Christ is the time of promise. What the apostle says of the fathers of the Old Testament in Hebrews 11:13 is most certainly true for the believers of that time: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them" (IV: 392)

## Appendix #2

This raises the following question: *Is the covenant made at Horeb the covenant of grace itself, or is it a national, external, and typical covenant, having as its only promise the inheritance of Canaan--and is thus the point at which the Old Testament commences?*

We answer as follows: It is the covenant of grace itself. This transaction is but a solemn renewal of that covenant of which all believers since Adam have been partakers. God renewed this covenant with Abraham and his seed, confirming it with the sacrament of circumcision (IV: 403).

That the covenant made at Horeb was the same covenant made with Abraham is first of all evident from the fact that it contained the same promises, had the same rule of life, and had the same manner of worship (IV: 405). It is also agreed that the covenant of grace has been since Adam and will remain the same in essence until the end of the world--as in our opinion it has been irrefutably proven in the previous chapter that the Old Testament began with the very first promise in Paradise. Consequently, it follows with equal certainty that the contrast between the Old and New Testaments cannot be one of essence. Since the New Testament constitutes the covenant of grace--the New Testament having been nonexistent during the Old Testament, existing subsequent to, instead of, and with the annulment of the Old Testament implied--then all who lived prior to the time of the New Testament would not have had a covenant of grace. There would then have been no fear of God, no knowledge of the mystery of salvation, and no forgiveness of sins; whereas people were indeed saved and did possess all the benefits of the covenant of grace (IV: 409).

The covenant contrasted with the covenant of Sinai, and which, as has been stated before, in this context is represented by Sarah, is the new covenant. In its essence it already existed in the Old Testament; the godly were partakers of it, and by it they obtained redemption and the eternal inheritance. Relative to its administration, however, it is a new covenant which had its beginning with the suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. As far as essence was concerned, this covenant was one and the same as the old covenant. It is a gracious covenant, pertains to heavenly benefits and a heavenly inheritance, and begets free and heavenly children. "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26). This covenant, administered in the new manner, is so very fruitful in bringing forth free and spiritual children (IV: 416).

## Appendix #4

The difference of opinion consists in this: The common sentiment among the Reformed is that the Suretyship of the Lord Jesus in the Old Testament was identical to that of the New Testament. He has taken upon Himself and removed all the sins of all the elect (and thus also of all Old Testament believers) for the purpose of rendering payment for them by His suffering and death. Old Testament believers have thus been as free from guilt and punishment as are New Testament believers (IV: 449).

There is one single covenant of grace which is and remains the same from Adam until Christ's coming unto judgment--a covenant in which all partakers have an equal portion and the same rights, and of which Jesus Christ is Surety (Heb. 7:22). Since there is but one covenant and one Surety, and all the partakers of the covenant have equal rights and partake of this covenant in the same way, Christ must also be the same Surety at all times, and His suretyship must be of the same efficacy both before as well as after His actual satisfaction.

The apostle states in express terms that Christ was the same Surety in the Old Testament as He was in the New Testament: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8). *Yesterday* pertains to the past; that is, the days of the Old Testament when those were alive of whom the apostle states in verse 7 that we should follow their faith and consider the end of their conversation. *Today* pertains to the present time, that is, the days of the New Testament. The thrust of the apostle's argument is that we should no less put our trust in Christ and have no less expectation of a good outcome as did the believers in the Old Testament, since the Lord Jesus is the same now

as He was then. (IV: 430).

*Proof #5:* Old Testament believers were saved and translated into heaven immediately upon their death. This is not the point of contention. However, either they were in heaven while yet subject to guilt and punishment until Christ died; or they were fully justified from all guilt and punishment, and declared to be heirs of eternal salvation which they already possessed. If they were still subject to guilt in heaven, they would also have to fear that the moment would arrive when subjection to punishment would yet be required, and that it would be possible for them to be expelled from heaven and be cast into hell. These are contradictory matters indeed: to be saved in heaven while yet being subject to guilt and punishment, fearing the possibility of expulsion (IV: 453-454).

Thus, relative to this suretyship, future payment and actual payment are of equal efficacy. If Christ is the vicarious Surety of believers subsequent to their death, He is also such prior to their death. They are the very same elect; God does not change toward them, and Christ did not change relative to His suretyship each time a believer died. Thus, in the Old Testament the Lord Jesus was a vicarious Surety in the absolute sense of the word (IV: 454).

All errors in this matter arise from comparing God and His doings with man and his doings--which conflicts with Isaiah 55:8--and from comparing the Surety Jesus Christ relative to death and the righteous judgment of God with the functioning of human sureties relative to monetary debts. We have refuted this, and have confirmed that Jesus Christ as Surety, as to method and efficacy, is the same in both the Old and New Testament; that is, in having taken both the guilt and punishment from the elect upon Himself. It thus follows that believers in the Old Testament, as far as the essence of the matter is concerned, have been in the same state of reconciliation, sonship, peace, and friendship with God as have believers in the New Testament (IV: 456).

## Appendix #5

God promises to establish the covenant of grace in the New Testament, even though both parties agree that it has existed without change since Adam until the times of the Messiah, and will remain so until the coming of Christ unto judgment. Just as one cannot deny the existence of the covenant of grace in the Old Testament, though it was promised to the New Testament church, the reality of the forgiveness of sins in the Old Testament can likewise not be denied simply because it has been promised to the New Testament church. From all this it can be clearly deduced that whatever is promised to the New Testament church in this text, already existed in the Old Testament church. The contrast does not pertain to the matter itself, but rather to the manner of administration and the degree of application. The agreement lies herein: The covenant of grace and all its benefits is as much a reality in the New Testament church as it had been in the Old Testament church (IV: 475).

It is evident from Hebrews 11:39 that all these matters are as we have stated them to be: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith." What was the object of their faith? None other than Christ who had then been promised and who now had come. Abel's eye was upon Christ when he sacrificed, for thereby he obtained witness that he was righteous. This could not have occurred in any other way but by a faith which looked unto Christ (vs. 4). The faith of Enoch who was taken up looked unto Christ (vs. 5). Abraham's faith looked unto Christ, the promised seed, and thereby he was justified (vs. 12; cf. Rom. 4:11-22; Gal. 3:16). Moses looked unto Christ, whereby he esteemed the reproach of Christ the greatest of all riches (vs. 26). For this Christ they all yearned, and even though they did not receive Him in the flesh, they nevertheless saw Him from afar, believed in Him, and embraced Him (vs. 13) [IV: 476].

Let us consider all the things mentioned together: Those who have Jesus as their vicarious Surety; those who have complete forgiveness of sins; those who have an active faith in God through Christ which engenders peace and joy; those whom God calls His friends and children, dealing with them in a familiar manner as one would with children; those who address God in Christ with the name Father; those who have fellowship with God as their Father in a familiar, sweet, soul-satisfying manner, and delight themselves in Him--those most certainly have the Spirit of

adoption. Old Testament believers had all the aforementioned, however, and thus they did not have the spirit of bondage, but rather a childlike disposition and the Spirit of adoption (IV: 480).

## **Lecture #4: Brakel's emphasis on the church** (chapters 24-26)

### **Chapter 24: Concerning the Church**

#### *The Church: Known from the Word of God*

This one church is made up of all the elect who have been called from the beginning of the world and are yet to be called until the end of the world. They are Christ's peculiar people (Titus 2:14). "To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven" (Heb. 12:23); "...Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). This one congregation is partially in heaven, and is called *the church triumphant*, to which reference is made in Revelation 7:9-16. This, however, is not the subject of discussion here. This congregation exists also partially upon earth and is called *the church militant*. It is the church militant which is the subject of this chapter. One can view this church either in its entirety, dispersed throughout the entire world, or as individual congregations in a nation, city, or village. As such one can refer to the church of England, of the Netherlands, or of Rotterdam (II: 5).

#### *Clarification of the Invisible/Visible Church Distinction*

This one church in its militant state upon earth manifests itself at times more openly in her public assemblies, confession, and holiness. She is then called the *visible church*. At other times she is more hidden from the eyes of the world by prevailing errors, ungodliness, or persecutions. Then she is referred to as the *invisible church* (Rev. 12:14) [II: 5].

One may also not divide the church into a visible and invisible church as far as the members themselves are concerned, as if the one had different members from the other. Then all the elect, that is, those who truly have been called and converted, would mentally be separated from all others in the church and constitute the *invisible church*, whereas converted and unconverted together, gathering in one church, and having only in common the external call, historical faith, confession of the truth, and the external use of the sacraments, would constitute the *visible church*. This is, in our opinion, an erroneous view, generating many confusing thoughts and expressions concerning the church. When a speaker or writer refers to the church, one will then be in doubt as to whether he is speaking of the so-called invisible or visible church (II: 6).

From that which has been said it is now evident in what manner we view the church in this treatise: We speak of a Church consisting of true believers only, which on earth wars against her enemies and for the faith, at times being more and at times less visible to the human eye. As far as her internal, spiritual frame is concerned, she is invisible; but she is visible in reference to her public assemblies and members (II: 8).

*The church is a holy, catholic, Christian congregation, consisting of true believers only, who by the Holy Spirit have been called through the Word of God, are separate from the world, and are united to their Head and each other with a spiritual bond, and thus are united in one spiritual body. All of this is manifested by a true confession of Christ and of His truth, and in striving against their and Christ's enemies, doing battle with spiritual weapons under the command of their Head Jesus Christ to the glory of God and their salvation II: 8).*

The unconverted are not members of the external, visible church. Believers only constitute the true church. They alone are members of the church, regardless of how one views them (II: 9).

Fifthly, this is also evident in 1 John 2:19: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us." Those who went out were the unconverted, who prior to their departure were in the church but nevertheless did not belong to the church. Thus, the unconverted, even though they are in the church, are not of the church, and therefore no members of her (II: 12).

There is no argument over the fact that both good and evil men are to be found in the church. We are not proposing, however, the chaff to be a "member" of the threshing floor, that is, the church. Chaff is present on the threshing floor as chaff and not as wheat. All that is in the church is therefore not of the church (II: 13).

By maintaining that only true believers are members of the church, we do not claim that there are no unconverted in the congregation, but that they are not present as true members there. There neither has been, nor will ever be a church upon earth in which there are no unconverted, that is, those who merely run along; yes, the latter are generally in the majority. There is a significant difference between being *in the church*, and being *of the church* (II: 14).

### *The Characteristics of the Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Christian*

We have thus observed that the church is a congregation--a congregation consisting of true believers. We shall now proceed with further analysis of the description previously given, and present the characteristics of the church: she is *one, holy, catholic, and Christian* (II: 15).

The church is one, however, in nature and essence, being identical at all times and in all places, wherever that may be. She is one in reference to the same doctrine of immutable truth, and to the same faith, Spirit, and holiness (II: 15).

One ought not to be of the opinion that the holiness of the Old Testament church was but a typical holiness, a depiction of the true holiness of the New Testament, consisting only in separation from other nations, in washings, in abstinence from unclean and the use of clean food, etc. Rather, true regeneration and sanctification were a reality in her as well as in the New Testament church (II: 16).

In the New Testament, however, the church is catholic, that is, universal as far as locality, nationality, and time is concerned. She is now dispersed over the entire world, and is found now here and then there. She consists of various nations, and it is immaterial whether one is a Jew or a Gentile. She will never cease to exist, but will endure until the coming of Christ on the day of judgment (II: 19).

She is named "Christian" because she alone embraces the doctrine of Christ, and the life of Christ manifests itself to some degree in her life. "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection" (Heb. 6:1); "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 1:9); "But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) [II: 19].

### *The True Church Refers to Herself as Reformed.*

To distinguish the true church from all erroneous assemblies, we call ourselves *Reformed*--not, however, in reference to doctrine, as if we had changed or improved the same. No, according to God's Word the truth remains impeccably preserved. We do so, however, in reference to errors which permeated the church. These the church has cast out, departing out of the midst of Roman Catholic heresy by which she had been so long oppressed, and reforming the church according to the precepts of God's Word (II: 20).

### *God, the Keeper of His Church*

As God gathers the church, He likewise also *keeps* her, so that the church is not eradicated. There has always been a church upon earth and it will be upon earth as long as the world exists. Certain particular denominations in various localities can either become fully apostate concerning the faith and become heretical, or be eradicated by persecution, but the church itself cannot be eradicated. If she is eradicated in one locality, she will grow again in a different locality. This is abundantly confirmed by experience. We do not merely maintain that there will always be believers and elect, who are dispersed in various places and living in isolation, but that there will always be a congregation--this not being due to the steadfastness and strength of the church itself, but by the will and preserving power of God--a church more or less visible, and more or less corrupt (II: 23).

### True Distinguishing Marks of the Church

The primary and most eminent distinguishing mark is *purity of doctrine--doctrine consistent with the Word of God*. We are not now dealing with those who deny fundamental principles, but rather with those denominated as Christians who acknowledge God's Word to be the infallible truth. We must therefore consider how God's Word defines the distinguishing marks of the true church. Let him depart who does not wish to conduct himself according to God's Word. However, he who wishes to esteem the Word of God as the only rule of life and doctrine will be able to perceive from this Word that only that church is the true church which has the true doctrine, consistent with the Word (II: 30).

Secondly, one would be in much greater danger of error if one were to depend on the mere testimony of an assembly, since false churches also claim to be the true church. Consequently one must have an infallible and dependable distinguishing mark which is free of error and cannot cause one to err. This is only true for the Word of God. If one therefore hears a church make claim of being the true church, and one examines doctrine and life by this Word and finds them to be in harmony with it, one can say with the believing Samaritans, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). It thus remains certain that the Word is the true distinguishing mark by which it is ascertained which church is true (II: 34).

If holiness is a distinguishing mark of the church, we will be able to identify the church by the same, and thus a church where true holiness is absent is not the true church. Other churches also boast of holiness, but all that is called holiness is not holiness. Therefore we must first determine from God's Word what true holiness is (II: 35).

True holiness springs forth from true faith. Where true faith is absent, true holiness will likewise be absent. Faith receives Christ as Surety unto justification and sanctification (John 1:12). By faith the soul is truly united with Christ (1 Cor. 6:17). By faith Christ, who is their life, dwells in their hearts (Eph. 3:17). Faith purifies the heart (Acts 15:9). Faith worketh by love (Gal. 5:6), and faith causes them to bring forth good works (James 2:18) [II: 35].

We hold the *third* distinguishing mark of the true church to be *the proper administration of the Sacraments*. Again this must be determined from the Word of God, and thus not be viewed independently but rather in conjunction with the other distinguishing marks. Wherever the first distinguishing mark is to be found, the others will be found likewise (II: 36).

These keys must not be used independently, however, but in conjunction with all the other distinguishing marks; their correct use must be determined by the Word of God. If those who err in doctrine and lead offensive lives are excluded, whereas those who are orthodox in doctrine and godly in their walk are included, the keys are used correctly; and by this one will be able to identify the true church. If anyone is included, however, regardless of what their doctrine and life may be, or if those are excommunicated who are orthodox in doctrine, while including in the fellowship of the church those who err, then such a practice is very evidently a mark of the false church. As imperfection is to be observed everywhere, and since this accompanying imperfection does not nullify the matter itself, there is also imperfection in the use of these keys. Although in one particular church these keys are used more consistently than in another church, one will find the proper use of the keys in the church (II: 36, 37).

In considering all these distinguishing marks together, one will clearly observe which church is the true church, and will publicly have to declare that only the Reformed Church is the true church, in contradistinction to all so-called churches, whatever name they may bear. The world is filled with books in which writers demonstrate irrefutably that these distinguishing marks are only applicable to the Reformed Church, and we are able to demonstrate this to all who would like to contradict this. We therefore rejoice in the grace of God: *His holy Name be therefore praised and glorified for this to all eternity!* (II: 37).

### *The Reformed Church Vindicated as the Continuation of the True Church*

Such is the witness of these parties. Do you yet ask whether the Reformed Church existed prior to Luther? To this I reply that she was to be found among those of whom we have just made mention; that is, those residing in Piedmont among the Waldenses. Our doctrine is identical with theirs, and in all aspects we are together in mutual agreement with the Word of God (II: 39).

### *The True Church Engaged in Spiritual Warfare*

We did furthermore state that, *under her Head Christ Jesus the church battles with spiritual weapons against her and Christ's enemies*. In this respect a distinction is made between the *church triumphant* and the *church militant* (II: 42).

### *Scriptural Proofs that the Pope of Rome Is the Antichrist*

Throughout the entire world the church service, the mass, etc, are conducted in the *Latin language*, which must be viewed as an extraordinary providence of God, whereby it is clearly proven that he is the antichrist (II:45).

When we apply all this to the pope, then they resemble each other as two drops of water, as we will subsequently demonstrate. We have thus considered the name 666 and all the circumstances related to it, as well as who would bear this name. He who cannot conclude from all this that the pope is the antichrist must be blind, since the pope's name and activity are entirely consistent with all this (II: 46).

This has even further strengthened our second proof and has answered the exception by demonstrating that the reference is not to pagan Rome but to Rome under the dominion of the pope, who would perform all that is stated in Revelation 13 and 17. He must be blind who cannot see that this does not refer to the emperors, but rather to the pope who succeeded them. Therefore it is obvious that the pope is the antichrist (II: 49).

All who confess not to be Roman Catholic, all who do not wish to acknowledge him as the head of the church, all who do not go to mass to worship the god of bread, all who do not carry a chaplet or cross or manifest in any other way that are of popish persuasion, must be expelled and are not able to practice their business, profession, or trade. They are all subject to opposition, tortures, violence, monasteries, prisons, galleys, the gallows, theft of property, and deprivation of children. Does this not bear witness to the entire world that *the pope is the antichrist*? (II: 51).

How correctly our forefathers have acted when they, upon God's command, departed from Babylon! It is everyone's duty never to have fellowship with the antichrist, and to die as martyrs for the cause of Christ rather than to be in the least manner polluted by him and his activities (II: 53).

### *The True Church Glorifies God*

We have previously stated that the primary *purpose* of the church's existence is *the glorification of God*. Since the church is the kingdom of heaven, the people of God have God as their Father and the Lord Jesus as their king, so the glory of God can be observed when these people live in the love and fear of God. This is true when they are obedient to Him as their Lord, trust in Him as the almighty and faithful One, and live pure and holy lives personally among each other and towards others. The Lord's name is desecrated, however, when this people who are called after His Name do not conduct themselves accordingly. It is the Lord's will that His Name be hallowed by the coming of His kingdom (Mat. 6:9-10). He has formed that people to show forth His praise (Isa. 43:21); to show forth the praises of Him who hath called them (1 Pet. 2:9); to be to the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 8:23); and to "be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God" (Isa. 62:3). Therefore "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Mat. 5:16).

The secondary objective is the *salvation of the elect*. The church functions as a mother (Gal. 4:26), and has within her the Word of God as an incorruptible seed (1 Pet. 1:23). As such she is fruitful unto the conversion of many souls, "And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her" (Psa. 87:5). By means of the preaching of the Word, the Lord will add to "the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47) [II: 53-54].

## Chapter 25: The Duty to Join the Church and to Remain with Her

The church is the glory of Christ. It is there that Christ is confessed and proclaimed throughout the world, being held forth as a banner upon a hill around which one must gather himself. This is the city upon a hill, and a light shining in the darkness. She is the means whereby the truth is made known and preserved, and the means unto the conversion of souls. Everyone is therefore obligated to facilitate this by joining himself to the church (II: 56).

### *Motives for Joining the Church*

To stir you up and to make you active concerning this, calmly consider first of all that there are but two kings in this world, each having a kingdom: the kingdoms of Christ and of the devil, which are mortal enemies to each other. A third kingdom does not exist. Every person upon earth or is either a subject of King Jesus or of the devil, the prince of darkness. No matter who you are individually, you are truly a subject of one of these two kingdoms. You are neither neutral nor a subject of both kingdoms simultaneously. Therefore, to which kingdom do you presently belong? What do you have to say for yourself? If you neither know nor have ever given this any thought, come and sit next to me for a moment; let us consider this matter, and then make a heartfelt and eternal choice. Whose subject do you wish to be? Whom do you choose to be your king? (II: 56).

### *The Glory and Elegance of the Church*

In this church there is both glory and elegance. For a moment give attentive consideration to the glorious state of that kingdom and its true subjects. The earth and the nations are enveloped in darkness; however, wondrous light is to be found in the church. The glory of the Lord illuminates this city of God and the Sun of Righteousness enlightens it with His light. Outside of her is nothing but pollution, abominations, and ungodliness; however, within there is her holiness, purity, and glory.... Ought not everyone therefore to delight himself in Zion, and be desirous to be a member of this church, a fellow citizen of the saints, and a member of the household of God? Should not everyone be desirous to submit himself to the protection and government of this King? For not only are all the these things said concerning this kingdom and this King, but all are most certainly true. (II: 58).

### *Degeneracy Within the Church: Not a Reason to Separate from the Church*

It is not sufficient to merely join the church, to remain with her for some time, and thereafter to separate from her. *One ought never to break away from and leave her under the pretense that the church is degenerate, in order to establish a pure church*, for: First, the Lord has never blessed such endeavors. There have always been those (in the first church, both prior to her oppression by the antichrist as well as since the time of the Reformation) who under this pretense have broken away from the church. The Lord, however, has always overturned such endeavors, and such undertakings have collapsed of themselves when the initial instigators died. Due to a just judgment of God, however, such individuals have rarely perceived their errors and made confession of them, and have rarely rejoined the church. Rather, having been given over to their own stubbornness, they have remained independent as people without any religion, or they have succumbed to heresy and have joined themselves to such assemblies which most fully agreed with their errors. Such was the case with the *Brethren* in Hungary, and in our days the *Labadists* have arisen who have boasted of great things (II: 60).

It is a dreadful sin to depart from the church for the purpose of establishing one which is better, for the church is one, she being the body of Christ. To separate oneself from the church is to separate from the people of Christ and thus from His body, thereby withdrawing himself from the confession of Christ and departing from the fellowship of the saints. If one indeed deems the church to be what she really is, one will then cause schism in the body of Christ, grieve the godly, offend others, give cause for the blaspheming of God's Name, and cause the common church member to err (II: 61).

The Reformed Church is the only true church, albeit that her purity varies with locality. The truth is still preached purely there, sins are rebuked and resisted, and there is both the teaching of and exhortation to godliness. Thousands

of godly persons are to be found there who practice holiness in a much purer fashion than those who have separated themselves. Christ dwells and walks among them. The Holy Spirit is still active by means of the Word, still converts souls daily, comforts the converted, and causes them to grow. Discipline is still exercised towards those who err in doctrine and life. In some localities this is practiced more consistently than themselves perceive and are aware of. What foolishness it is, therefore, to leave the church and to enter into a barren wilderness! (II: 62).

### *Degeneracy Within the Church: Not a Reason to Abstain from the Lord's Supper*

God's command concerning the Lord's Supper can be observed in the following passages: "Take, eat...Drink ye all of it" (Mat. 26:26-27); "This do in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:24). Who dares to ignore such express commands of Christ? Who dares to suggest that to partake or not to partake is a matter of indifference? What mention is made here of any limitation, a limitation being contingent upon the condition of the church? (II: 63).

The sacraments are seals of the righteousness of faith (Rom. 4:11), and the communion with the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). It is the duty of each Christian to give diligence to make his calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10). To this end all means, and the way which the Lord has ordained unto that end, must be utilized. Since the sacraments are seals engendering communion with Christ, each believer is obligated to make use of them (II: 65).

To confess the Lord Jesus Christ, His doctrine, and His church belongs to the most significant objectives of the Lord's Supper. Observe this in the following passages: "This do ye...in remembrance of Me...ye do show the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:25-26); "For we being many are one bread, and one body" (1 Cor. 10:17). It is an absolutely necessary, appropriate, and Christ-glorifying duty to confess Christ, for this duty builds up the congregation and refreshes the soul (II: 65).

### *A Warning not to Engage in Schism*

To make one's absence so obvious, under the pretense of making a public statement, is to be guilty of schism. Even if it does not cause the church to be torn asunder, it is at the least a major step in that direction. The sentiments of the members become divided and collide. Every person has his own faction and clings closely to those who belong to his party, thereby opposing others. The bond of love is severed and the one becomes estranged from the other... From all this it is evident that absenteeism is schismatic or causes schism, which is a criminal offense. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10) [II: 67].

These arguments ought to convince a Christian sufficiently that he is not permitted to abstain from partaking of the Lord's Supper due to the degeneracy of the church (II: 69).

With the aforesaid, I confess that the church is indeed degenerate, a matter which grieves me in the deepest recess of my soul. Prior to this I have borne public witness to this, and by way of this medium I still lift up my voice like a trumpet, crying aloud without sparing, showing the people of the Lord their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins. Oh, that all who read or hear this read would take this to heart! Oh, that men would repent and be amazed at the longsuffering of God by still leaving His church in our land, enjoying a peaceful existence; that one would justify the Lord if He were to punish us and cause us, one day, to come to nought! With sorrow and shame I acknowledge my own failure, and consider myself guilty. May the Lord graciously forgive me, and make me more faithful and holier both personally and in my ministry (II: 73).

### *The Duty to Partake of the Lord's Supper, Even When Members who Give Offense also Partake*

It has at all times been God's intent to leave the church subject to such degeneracy while in the world. Consider the church from Adam to Christ, and you will observe that the Lord was not pleased with the majority of those belonging to it. At the time of Christ's sojourn the Jewish church was terribly corrupted, with multitudes of baptized disciples forsaking Him, thereby manifesting that they had not been truly converted (John 6:66). Paul declared that

the congregation of *Corinth* was carnal (1 Cor. 3:3), that fornication was in vogue among them (1 Cor. 5:1), that some partook of the Lord's Supper while being drunk (1 Cor. 11:21), and that some were void of the knowledge of God (1 Cor. 15:34). In the congregation of *Galatia* there were those who should have been excommunicated, but who nevertheless remained within the congregation (Gal. 5:12). In Philippians 2:21 Paul states the following concerning many in the church, "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Read the letter of Jude, and Revelation 2 and 3, and you will observe how degenerate those churches were. Instead, one will find exhortations and directives relative to the church's obligation to excommunicate those who lead offensive lives. In none of the texts referring to degeneracy within the church are the upright forbidden to partake of the Lord's Supper in those churches (II: 74-75).

We have thus shown how the partaking of the Lord's Supper with those who give offense can be prevented by keeping them from the table, which the church is commanded and obligated to do. Participation with those who give offense can also be prevented by withdrawing oneself and abstaining from coming to the holy table. There is no such command, however, but it is forbidden as we have proven by way of our previous arguments. Those who stay away from the table are thus guilty of sin, and they are doing their utmost to dissolve the unity of the church and to cause her to fall apart (II: 80).

### *A Rebuke Towards Persons who Leave the Church to Establish a Purer Church*

When the Lord determines the restoration of His church, He will pour out His Spirit more abundantly upon His church, or He will give a general unction of His Spirit to all the godly, and either excommunicate all who give offense or to depart themselves as occurred with the exodus from Babel and when the iconoclasm occurred. Until such is the case, let us do our duty within the church (II: 84).

## **Chapter 26: The Communion of Believers with Christ and with Each Other**

### *The Relationship Between Christ and His Church*

The Lord Jesus not only gives many and excellent benefits to His church, but they [the Lord Jesus and His Church] mutually belong to each other, are united with each other, and exercise communion with each other, all of which is wondrous beyond comparison. These three elements comprehend all true felicity (II: 87).

### *The Nature of the Union Between Christ and His Church*

This belonging to each other also implies union. The nature of this union is inexpressible, and can better be experienced by the believer than expressed in words. This union is neither one of essence as the divine persons are one, nor personal as the human nature has been assumed by Christ as divine Person. This union is also neither one of mixture as water and wine are mixed, nor does a transformation take place as if believers would become Christ Himself, and thus would become God or Christ. This union is neither a sacramental union such as the union between the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper with the body and blood of Christ, nor is it merely an external relationship. It also does not consist in the believer's conformity to Christ in the way of sanctification.

Rather, this union is established:

- (1) by the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ in believers. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16);
- (2) by spiritual marriage (cf. Ezek. 16:8; Hos. 2:19-20);
- (3) by faith which, by its very nature, unites. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. 3:17).
- (4) by love which, due to its very nature, cannot tolerate separation, but seeks the most intimate of unions. "My Father shall love him, and We shall come unto him, and make Our abode with him" (John 14:23); "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35). This union is therefore real, essential, true, complete, without any reservation, eternally inseparable, spiritual, and without any corporal dimension (II: 89).

### *Union with Christ Will Necessarily Result in Communion with Christ*

As a consequence of belonging to each other and the resulting union, there will of necessity be *communion*; that is, the exercise and utilization of this relationship. This communion is both with the Person of Jesus Christ and with His benefits.

First, believers have and exercise communion with His Person. A temporal believer concerns himself only with the benefits and has no interest in Christ Himself. Believers, however, have communion with the Person of Jesus Christ, but many neither meditate upon nor closely heed their exercises concerning Christ Himself. They err in this, which is detrimental to the strength of, and impedes the growth of, their faith. Therefore we wish to exhort them to be more exercised concerning the truth of belonging to each other, and the union and communion with Jesus Himself. They will then better perceive the unsearchable grace and goodness of God that such wretched and sinful men may be so intimately united with the Son of God. Such reflection will most wondrously set the heart aflame with love. It will strengthen their resolve to put their trust in Jesus without fear. It will give them strength and liberty to obtain everything from Him to fulfil the desires of their soul, causing them to grow in Him, which in turn will generate more light and joy (II: 90-91).

### *Exhortation to Seek Communion with Christ*

Since believers are partakers of Christ and all His benefits, how heartily and continually they ought to be exercised concerning this union! (II: 92).

### *The Manner in Which Believers Exercise Communion with Christ*

This communion is exercised in the following manner: In *beholding* the Lord Jesus in his beauty, desirability, and fullness. In doing so one attentively contemplates upon the Counsel of Peace, in which the Son of God out of love for His elect willingly offered Himself as their Surety. From there one descends to meditate upon His assumption of the human nature, His bitter suffering in its entirety, and then His cursed death. From there one proceeds to His resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God. In all of these one beholds His love, His willingness, the efficacy of the atonement, and all His fullness unto the salvation of the sinner. Here the soul pauses with longing eyes desiring a further, clearer, and closer view of His perfections. He desires to find delight in such contemplation, to be ignited with love, to joyfully acknowledge and approve of Him as such, and to praise and to magnify Him. In this manner a believer beholds Jesus (II: 94-95).

The soul who thus beholds Jesus, the heart going out in love towards Him, will share with her Beloved the frame of her heart, her love, and her grief for not loving Him more. She will bring all her needs to Him, reveal her desires to Him, make supplication to Him, plead affectionately with Him, and beg of Him sweetly for the fulfillment of her desire. She listens to what Jesus has to say to her, turns herself to His Word, deeming it to be the voice of her Beloved (II: 95).

### *Exhortation to Remain Steadfast in Exercising Communion with Christ*

Rather, acquaint yourself with Him. Let the exercise of this communion be your daily task when you are alone, when you are in company, and when you are engaged in your profession. May Jesus always have your ear, and may there always be a view upon Him (II: 96).

### *The Communion of Saints on Earth*

How refreshing it is for God's children, being hated by the world, to have communion with each other, to make their needs known to each other, and in love and familiarity to have communion with each other! They exercise communion with God's church in general (which is dispersed over the entire face of the earth), as being the sole people of God, as being the sole adherents to the truth and the way of salvation, and as confessing Christ alone to be their Head. Since they have the very same Spirit in common, as well as the same interests, they thus rejoice when

the church prospers, and likewise grieve when elsewhere the church does not fare well. Their prayers and thanksgiving are for the church in general. They exercise communion with the church within the kingdom or republic in which they are subjects, as well as with the specific congregation of the city or village in which they reside. Yes, their communion is most specifically with the godly, doing so, however, within the context of the church. They may have a special relationship with some, which, however, does not cause them to separate themselves from the church or to cause schism within the church, since they cherish the church above their chief joy upon earth (II: 100).

This communion manifests itself in many and various deeds. First, they will *diligently join the assemblies of God's people* in order to hear the Word and to partake of the sacraments. They, with David, rejoice in this (Psa. 122:1). They unite themselves with the church, the congregation, and all the godly who are present there--and as fellow professors join all who profess the Lord Jesus. In doing so they bear witness that this congregation is the church of Jesus Christ; they are members of and have communion with her, have the same interests, and wish to live and die with her. In doing so they publicly testify that they confess Jesus as the only Savior, and as the only Head of the church. In this manner they reveal themselves to the world and to the congregation (II: 100-101).

Communion is exercised *by being good examples to each other, and by following each other's example in doing good*. Exemplary behavior is marvelously effective in attracting others. Christ is the perfect example, "leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Believers, however, in whom Christ has been formed, must manifest the image of Christ, also with the objective to be a good example to others. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Mat. 5:16); "In honour preferring one another" (Rom. 12:10); "Shew me thy faith without thy works" (James 2:18); "So that ye were ensamples to all that believe" (1 Th. 1:7); "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works" (Titus 2:7) [II: 103].

There is the happy advantage that one can be an example in the congregation whereby others can be stirred up unto godliness, and that one may also himself be stirred up to follow the examples of others. When both of these aspects are practiced, there is communion of saints (II: 102).

#### *The Blessedness of the Church Where Communion of Saints Functions*

We have discussed with you the communion of saints. Everyone will have to agree that the church that functions in such a manner is blessed indeed, while praising everyone who is thus engaged. A true believer, with shame, will be convinced of his neglect in this area. May everyone therefore be stirred up to exercise communion of saints in such a fashion.

(1) The entire congregation will thereby shine forth as a light upon a candlestick, as a city upon a hill, will be to the honor and glory of Christ and be respected by all who are without.

(2) The congregation will be built up by this; the godly will be stirred up by the examples of others to walk likewise; and many will be converted as a result of this. One would observe a great influx of those who are without who would acknowledge that God dwells in her midst and she is truly the church.

(3) It will engender great mutual joy and union. Love and peace will so refresh believers that they would readily do without the love of those who are of the world. Yes, they will be able to courageously endure and ignore all contempt, slander, and persecution of the world.

(4) The Lord will richly pour out His blessing upon such a congregation. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!...for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Psa. 133).

(5) Such will hear the declaration of this delightful voice, saying, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I shall make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Mat. 25:21) [II: 105-106].

## **Lecture #5: Brakel on the office of ministry** (chaps. 27-29)

### **Chapter 27: The Government of the Church**

No kingdom, republic, home, or society can exist without order. This is also true for the church. God is a God of order, and it is His will that all things be done honestly and orderly. The Lord Jesus is the only and all-sufficient Head of the church--her only Lord, only Master, only Bridegroom, only Mediator, and only Foundation. Since the Lord Jesus is very God, He does not need the help of men to gather and govern His church. As it is the Lord's common way to govern and direct all things mediately, however, thereby manifesting His wisdom and goodness, the Lord Jesus likewise deals with His church in all aspects by means of men. For this purpose He has appointed *shepherds, teachers, elders, governing bodies, ministers, etc.*, to serve in His church (II: 107).

#### *Bishops Have no Authority over Other Ministers*

Elders and bishops have one and the same office. Elders are bishops, and bishops are elders. In our language the use of the word "bishop" is equivalent to the use of "elder" (cf. Acts 20:17). There it is written that Paul "called the elders of the church," whereas in verse 28 these elders are called *bishops*, "over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers* (bishops)" (Acts 20:28). It should also be noted that in this one city there were several bishops, whereas Roman Catholics maintain that one congregation, yes, various and many congregations together must have but one bishop. This is evident in the following text, "to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (Phil. 1:1). In this one city and congregation there were several bishops who, along with the deacons, are greeted by him. If there had been other teachers and elders not comprehended in the term "bishops," he would have mentioned them likewise, for he even makes mention of the deacons who have a subordinate office. From this it can clearly be deduced that there were but two offices in the congregation: bishops and deacons. It thus follows that the word "bishop" refers to both ministers and elders (II: 114).

Thus we have observed that the government of the church is neither vested in one who is the head over all others, nor ought the church to be governed by bishops exercising authority over other ministers via whom they would govern various congregations. Rather, all ministers are of the same rank. The one is not inferior in his office to the other. As equals they must work together in all things (II: 117).

Everyone will readily admit that there must be instruction for both young and old, that worship services must be conducted to hear God's Word and to give expression to the unity of the congregation (II: 117).

#### *The Necessity of a Divine Commission for the Ministry of the Word*

Consider also Romans 10:15, where it is written, "And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Rom. 10:15). It is as much as being stated that no one can or may preach without being sent. One cannot evade the issue here by saying that Paul only referred to his time period, for such a limitation is nowhere to be found. The time frame is immaterial both then and now, for the matters and their conjunction remain the same in essence (II: 118-119).

#### *The Elements of the Internal Call to the Ministry*

This commission is both *internal* and *external*. An extraordinary, divine declaration is not an element of this *internal commission*. God does not do this, or does so only on very rare occasions, and thus one need not wait for this. There are other matters by which one may be assured of his internal calling.

To these belong, first of all, a knowledge of the office. One must know what it means to be a servant of Christ, to be the mouth of the Lord, to proclaim that great gospel, to teach ignorant men the way of salvation, to be instrumental in delivering men from the devil, and to lead them to Christ. One must know that it consists in comforting those who mourn, stirring up the indolent, bringing back those who have strayed, exposing hypocrites and temporal believers to themselves, defending the truth against error, rebuking the ungodly, helping to keep out or expelling from the church those who lead offensive lives, and adorning the church, so that by the holiness of those who profess the truth she would bring glory to Christ. One must know that it consists in being an example and in being able to give an account of the souls entrusted to him. How can he who is neither thoroughly acquainted with

these matters, nor perceives the weightiness of it all, nor takes this to heart, have intentions to be faithful? All of this must be known, considered, and experienced in order to be conscious of one's calling.

Secondly, there must be some knowledge of one's aptitude for this work. A fundamental knowledge of divine truths and thus being satisfied with a speculative knowledge of these is not sufficient. Rather, one must experience the power of these truths in his own heart, having been converted thereby. He will thus be able to speak from his own experience. He must also have the aptitude to clearly express his thoughts, and must have a voice which is capable of being heard by others. Even though the most qualified person must say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. 2:16), one must nevertheless be conscious of some aptitude. Shortly we shall consider this aptitude more comprehensively.

Thirdly, there must be an extraordinary love a) for Christ and a desire to make Him known; b) for the church to present her as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2), and to cause her to shine forth with light and holiness to the honor of God; c) for the souls of the unconverted to snatch them from the fire, as well as of the converted to strengthen, comfort, and continually provide them with spiritual food.

Fourthly, one must be willing to deny all that is of the world, such as honor, material goods, yes and even life itself. If someone is of low social status and wishes to become someone of renown or to acquire material goods by way of the ministry, his objective is entirely wrong. He would be much happier as a shoemaker, for in my opinion there is no man more abominable than an unregenerate minister who uses the holy things of God to his own advantage.

Fifthly, there must be a great desire for this work (1 Tim. 3:1). There must be continual stirrings to give oneself to the Lord by way of this work, and there must be a concern about whether or not one is called. There must be anxiety when ulterior motives are perceived in the heart which in turn causes one to entertain the thought to refrain from this work; or when the heaviness of the task, and a sense of inability causes one to look up against this work, engendering a desire to be relieved from this work, as with Moses and Jeremiah. The stirrings will nevertheless persist and overcome the objections. This in turn will give him more liberty before the Lord and he will find himself more willing than beforehand because by the objections he will have a clearer view of the motives of his heart. Then his heart does not condemn him, but rather convinces him of his sincerity in this matter.

By these and similar arguments one can ascertain his internal calling. We will now proceed to consider the external calling (II: 121-122).

Within an established church (which has the primary prerogative to call), one can readily distinguish between: the *commission* to the ministry, the *call* from and unto a particular church, and *ordination* in her midst (II: 123).

For preaching as God's ambassador and the administration of the sacraments cannot be separated. The Lord Jesus assigns preaching and baptism to the same persons in Matthew 28:19 (II: 124).

Such a commission gives liberty not only to conduct oneself as an ambassador of Christ in one's own particular congregation, but wherever one may travel, as such a commission pertains to the office in general (II: 124).

### *The Need for Persons in the Ministry to Examine Themselves*

Let every minister consider and reflect before the Lord, examining himself and answering upon the following questions: Have I been sent of God, or did I run myself? Do I know what pertains to this office? Was I convinced that I had some aptitude for this as far as external knowledge is concerned, and am I likewise spiritually acquainted with the experience of regeneration, faith, hope, love, holiness, God's dealings with the soul, spiritual warfare, and the various conditions of the soul, in order to bring forth old and new things out of the treasure of my heart, to address everyone according to his condition, and particularly to give everyone publicly and privately his portion by way of personal experience, and to speak from heart to heart? Did I have a special love to preach Christ, to be instrumental to the conversion of souls, and to promote the welfare of the church? Was I continually stirred up in my soul to accept this work? Has it been my concern whether or not the Lord has sent me, and have I prayed much in order to know this? Have I at times been desirous not to be engaged in this work, considering the magnitude of this task and my inability? Were those desires to draw back repeatedly conquered by love for this work, or was I frequently put at ease and confirmed in my intention? Have I been troubled by ulterior motives which time and again

disappeared by perceiving my sincere motive in the presence of the Lord? Did I perceive a frame of heart by which I was willing to deny myself by parting with material goods, honor, and my life for the Lord Jesus and His church? Or did I only pursue honor and prestige, the acquisition of material goods by which to improve my temporal circumstances, and which, outside of this office, would have been poor and insignificant? Or had I advanced in my studies to such a degree that I of necessity had to proceed? Did I ever really examine myself concerning these matters, or did I merely run without such self-examination?

Concerning the external calling, ask yourself: How did I arrive in this congregation? Did I flatter the elders of the congregation, thereby soliciting their favor? Did I establish friendships in order to control these friends? Did I give gifts? Did I interact with the worldly members of the church in order that they would impose me upon the congregation? Has money been promised and given in order thus to come to this congregation, and if this was done by friends without my knowledge, did I make restitution after this came to my knowledge? (II: 125-126).

He who is convinced of his divine commission must then also view himself as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus. As such, and with that authority, he must perform all his work, such as preaching, catechizing, the administration of the sacraments, visitation, and the use of the keys of God's kingdom. This will make him bold and faithful, and he and his work will receive more approbation. In this manner all ministers must conduct themselves concerning their commission (II: 127).

A proper consideration of the commission, the qualifications, and the authority of ministers (who not only proclaim beneficial truths but who are ambassadors of Christ), as well as the fact that Christ has deemed the congregation and each individual member worthy of having an ambassador sent to them to speak to them in His Name that which He has commanded them will have a powerful effect upon the hearts of the members. The ministers must therefore impress this upon the congregation, and the members must instruct each other concerning this, so that everyone may acknowledge and hear the minister as such (II: 128).

## **Chapter 28: The Offices of Minister, Elder, and Deacon**

### *The Qualifications for the Ministry*

A thorough knowledge of theology is, however, an absolute requirement for a minister. He ought not to be satisfied with having memorized a summary statement of truth--having lodged some propositions in his brain merely to pass the examination in a respectable fashion--and with possessing much knowledge as is necessary to put together a sermon by using a variety of books. Wretched minister and wretched congregation where such is the case! (II: 132).

All of this is nevertheless of no avail if he himself has not been illuminated and converted by the Holy Spirit, so that the truths which he reads in God's Word are also found in his own heart. He should know by personal experience what conversion, prayer, believing in Christ, the wrestlings of faith, the subtle delusions as well as the assaults of Satan, darkness, the sealing work of the Spirit, self-denial, and mortification of sin, etc. are. He will then be a Timothy who from a child had known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make him wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). He will then be a "scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven," and "like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Mat. 13:52). He will then be able to say, "That...which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; that...declare we unto you" (1 John 1:1, 3) [II: 132-133].

Secondly, such a person must be *apt to teach* (1 Tim. 3:2). All good theologians are not able to be pastors and teachers. Everyone does not receive the gift to communicate the treasure of truth, to make oneself understood, and by revelation of the truth to express himself in a clear and desirable manner to the consciences of men. He may be able to edify himself, but with his treasures of knowledge he will be of little benefit to others, which, however, is the specific objective of the office of pastor and teacher (II: 133).

One must not be *pretentious*. One then seeks to create the appearance of gravity even though such is not the case, or

desires as it were to be pointed out with the finger and have people say, "There he is." One accordingly becomes pretentious in all things, wears his hat accordingly, holds his head in the air, and walks with a ridiculous gait. How abominable is such ridiculous pretention which has self-aggrandizement as its mother! (II: 133).

Fourthly, a minister must excel in *love for Christ, His cause, and His sheep*. This must be evident to the congregation and will be very conducive to edification (II: 133-134).

This love will cause a minister to pray much for the congregation and pray that he himself might receive grace to communicate this to the congregation. He will study for his sermons prayerfully, and he will prayerfully traverse the street towards the pulpit. His prayer is not that he may avoid disgrace or shame, nor that he may speak in a manner pleasing to the congregation, rendering him honor and respect and enabling him to draw crowds. If such is his secret motive (even if he does not say so expressly) and he pretends to have another motive while praying for the honor of God and the edification of the congregation, he frequently does this to satisfy his conscience, but his own honor is his primary motive. Love, however, will cause him at all times to pray for the congregation, thereby seeking her benefit. "Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith" (1 Th. 3:10) [II: 134].

There is no creature more abominable under the sun than a minister who seeks himself, for he uses God and all that is sacred to satisfy his own evil lusts. How abominable it is to display holy zeal in prayer, preaching, and speech, and yet to have nothing but strange fire or to pretend love for God in order to receive love and honor for self! This abominable frame is accompanied by another dreadful vice: *envy*. Always being fearful that others will diminish his reputation, he begrudges others their excellent gifts and graces. It grieves him when he perceives that the ministry of others finds entrance, brings souls under conviction and leads them to Christ, and causes souls to be moved and melt away in quiet tears under their ministry. He ought to accomplish this, and this ought to come about by His agency. Yes, he will abhor those who have been drawn by the ministry of others. Those who love other ministers become an object of his hatred. Where is love then for Christ and for souls? He not only fails to pursue the objective of the ministry, but he has an objective contrary to this. *Whatever is not suitable to accomplish his objective is not fit for use at all* (II: 135).

He must be *diligent*. A lazy and indolent man is not fit to be a shepherd. The office of bishop consists of work (1 Tim. 3:1), and such a man must be vigilant (1 Tim. 3:2)... The Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, was occupied from early morning till late in the evening, and was engaged in prayer during the night... If someone has come into the ministry for monetary reasons, or to lead a nice, soft, and easy life, he ought to return from where he came, for this office requires work. He who wishes to receive money without work possesses it unrighteously (II: 135).

A minister must therefore diligently give heed to his internal condition and his external behavior. He is like a polished diamond; the smallest hair or thread on it will easily be detected. He must be aware of the fact that he is observed to a far greater degree than one would be inclined to think; and that men are more aware of his internal condition than he would suspect. This concludes our discussion of the required qualifications of a minister (II: 136).

### *The Duties of a Minister*

He must have the heart of a preacher; that is, he must stand in awe of the God in whose Name he preaches, and with love seek the welfare of the souls to whom he preaches. He must know himself to be entirely *undone* in himself and have a lively impression of his own inability, so that he will not trust too much in having studied properly. He ought to *pray much beforehand*, not so much to get through the sermon, but for a sanctified heart, for a continual sense of the presence of God, for suitable expressions, and for a blessing upon his preaching to the conversion, comfort, and edification of souls. His concern ought not to be whether the congregation will be pleased with him and will praise the sermon, but his motive must rather be a love for the welfare of the congregation (II: 138).

He ought to use all his scholarship to formulate the matters to be presented, in order that he might express them in the clearest and most powerful manner. While using his scholarship, however, he must conceal his scholarship in the

pulpit. To labor to be reputed as being scholarly, and to bring much Latin into the pulpit for this purpose, is only a seeking of self. Every word of Latin is nothing but a pound of flesh (that is, carnality) and is frequently held in contempt by scholarly divines, whose objective it is to make themselves pleasing to the consciences of men by the revelation of the truth. I am not now referring to the practice of extracting the full meaning of the original Hebrew and Greek words (II: 138).

Upon arrival at home, he immediately ought to go to his room and consider in what frame he has preached. There he ought to humble himself before God concerning that which was lacking, to thank the Lord for His assistance, and to pray for a blessing upon the Word for himself and for the congregation (II: 139).

Visits in homes where one receives a good glass of wine or some other form of refreshment cannot be designated as membership visitation. Due to this, there would be insufficient time to visit other homes, and other members must then be satisfied with only a word or two. How wretched are such ministers and how wretched are those house visitations conducted in such a manner! (II: 141).

As ministers are the mouthpiece of God in preaching, they are likewise the hand of the Lord Jesus to give His bride the wedding ring. In this task the minister must conduct himself with the greatest reverence for God. Each time he must renew the impression that he performs this task as an ambassador of Christ, that he imparts the signs and seals of the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he seals to every participant the promise of the gospel, namely, that "whosoever believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." If the minister administers the sacraments without this spiritual frame, performing this labor in a thoughtless and lackadaisical manner, he is then guilty of a dreadful desecration of the holy things (II: 141).

As a minister must use this key by making specific application, he must likewise do so publicly from the pulpit. He must first of all give a clear analysis of who true believers are, so that every one may perceive what his own condition is; he must then proclaim to such the forgiveness of sins. On the other hand, he must clearly and forcefully uncover the condition of the unconverted, proclaiming unto them that they are still objects of the wrath of God and must anticipate condemnation if they remain unconverted. The minister must use this key faithfully with much tenderness of heart, without respect for persons, and with boldness, upon the authority given him by Christ, to promote the building up of His kingdom. He must therefore give heed to the manner in which he uses this key. If he leaves this key unused, he is unfaithful to Christ and His church (II: 142).

### *The Duties of an Elder*

Their purpose for being in church is not to sit upon a soft pillow in front of the church, nor to imagine that they stand above other members and thus can order them around. They may also not behave as if they were lords and masters over the ministers, it being their duty to give heed to the doctrine and life of the ministers. It is also the task of ministers to give heed to the doctrine and life of the elders. They also may neither oppose the good counsel of the ministers within the consistory, nor deem it to be a masterpiece if they succeed in checkmating the minister. Neither is it intended that the elders be but "yes-men" who blindly follow the minister in his wishes. Rather, it is their task in all humility, and with wisdom and love, to assist the ministers in promoting the welfare of the church. As is true for ministers, the labor of elders is also twofold, for they perform these labors either individually or in cooperation with other consistories, Classes, and Synods (II: 145-146).

The primary task of elders is to "take heed...to all the flock," and "to feed the church of God" (Acts 20:28; cf. 1 Pet. 5:1-3). This means that they must endeavor to keep the congregation together, to return those to the flock who have strayed, and to be watchful against wolves who come from without to create unrest among the members with false doctrine (II: 146).

Secondly, *they must particularly give heed to the walk of each member.* There must be careful supervision as to how one conducts himself at home; that is, whether there is love and harmony and whether each member in his particular position of the household conducts himself properly towards others (II: 146).

### The Qualifications of a Deacon

The apostle describes the required qualifications for deacons. "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well" (1 Tim. 3:8-9, <12). Add to this all the virtues they must have as Christians in order to be examples to others. They must especially manifest those virtues which flow out of the virtue of generosity (II: 150).

Thirdly, the deacons must also *care for the souls* of their poor, for they are as fathers to them; and whatever one member is obligated to do to another, they must excel in doing so to those over whom the Lord has placed them.

(1) They must instruct the ignorant, and bring them to the church service and to catechism instruction.

(2) They must exhort, rebuke, and comfort according to individual circumstances.

(3) They must visit the sick, either preparing their souls for the hour of death, or exhorting them to increase in godliness if they may again become healthy (II: 151).

### Exhortation to Faithfulness in the Execution of the Offices

First of all, ministers, elders, and deacons, does not the Lord Jesus, the King of His church, call everyone of you to your respective office and task? It is considered a great honor in the world to be the ambassador of a king. Here, however, we have the Lord of lords and the King of kings, who is very God Himself, the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His Person, who as Mediator is exalted at the right hand of the Father, who is seated with the Father on His throne, and who is crowned with honor and glory. It is He who has called you to His service, having sent you forth with a message recorded in His Word. He who reveres this King, who has spiritual eyes to perceive that this spiritual honor is incomparably greater than worldly honor, and that the honor which God and the Lord Jesus bestow upon the holy angels and the children of God is not to be compared to any honor bestowed by men, will deem it to be the highest honor to be His ambassador and messenger (II: 152).

What manner of person would you be if you either would allow these wondrous benefits, talents, opportunities, and esteem to be unused, or if you were to display them proudly, seeking to attain worldly honor with spiritual benefits? They are too precious for this. Acknowledge therefore their preciousness and may you burn with zeal to use them for that purpose for which they have been given, namely, to serve your Lord and to be beneficial to His church (II: 153).

Thirdly, the salvation or damnation of precious and noble souls hinges upon your labor. When viewing a church full of people, be reminded that every person has an immortal soul and by nature is traveling upon the broad way to destruction, a destruction which will be everlasting. There are no other means whereby they can be helped but by you in whose mouth the Lord has placed the word of reconciliation (II: 153).

Fourthly, reflect upon the congregation over which the Lord has appointed you as overseers. It is the church of God, the Church which Christ has bought with His blood, which Christ has loved, and for which Christ has given Himself. There you have the Lord's precious sons and daughters, his darling children, over whom the Lord has appointed you as nurses. Will you then not tenderly treat such darlings of the Lord--protecting them from the violence of those who wish to harm them, keeping them from error, giving them food and drink, and instructing them as such beloved ones of the Lord Jesus? Did Jesus buy them with His blood and would you not concern yourself with them? If the love of Jesus towards His church fills your heart towards the church, it will also make you diligent to care for her with all your might and to seek her welfare.

How dreadful will this investigation and interrogation be for many overseers! How pitiful and dreadful will be the sentence that will be pronounced upon them! If only they had never been born and had never been an overseer! What will it be to perish due to one's own sins, and then also to be burdened by so many souls. They will see you in the last judgment and rise up against you, saying, "You knew very well that I was ignorant, and that I lived in sin. If you had looked after me--had warned, rebuked, instructed, and led me in the way of salvation--I would have been saved. Look, however, you unfaithful minister, you unfaithful elder, I am now going lost! Let God require my blood

from your hand, and deal with you as a wicked and lazy servant!" (II: 155).

However, what a precious moment it will be for faithful ministers, elders, and deacons when the Lord will make manifest their labors, their prayers for the congregation, their special discourses, their exhortations, their warnings, and the manner in which they gave direction to souls. He will then cause them to enter into glory, saying, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Mat. 25:21) [II: 155].

## **Chapter 29: Ecclesiastical Authority**

### *The Necessity of and Biblical Basis for Ecclesiastical Assemblies*

The propriety of such assemblies is first of all evident when considering the need for such assemblies. It is naturally evident to man that there can be no republic or society without having an assembly of those who have been appointed as rulers. This is particularly true when such republics and societies include various provinces, cities, and villages. It is thus also a requisite in the church that her elders assemble, not only in each individual church, but also in the provinces. In turn, there must be assemblies representing several and/or many provinces. If need be, there must also be assemblies consisting of delegates from all churches throughout the world, for there is but one church. In this manner the unity of doctrine will be preserved, and the church will be delivered from confusion (II:157).

### *The Purpose of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*

This authority is permanent, is neither contingent upon locality, nor does it originate in the elders, as if they were proprietors of the church. They do not have this authority in and of themselves, and they may not exercise authority as they wish. This authority is neither naturally theirs nor has it been bestowed upon them, for this authority is and remains Christ's. They are but servants by whom Christ exercises His authority (II: 159).

### *The Two Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven Identified*

*The first key is the proclamation of the Word of God.* The Lord has given this Word to His church, and has authorized His servants to proclaim it in His Name. "He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; (Luke 10:16). Because of this authority they proclaim to believers the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36); "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). With this same authority they close the kingdom of heaven for unbelievers and the unconverted; that is, as long as they remain in such a condition and do not repent. "Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil" (Rom. 2:9); "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36) [II: 159].

*The second key is Christian discipline.* This has been given to the church as an administrative power to *close* the kingdom of heaven to those who give offense and are ungodly, and to *open* it again to those who repent concerning their former life, promise reformation of life, and confirm this with their deeds (II: 160).

### *The Steps in Christian Discipline*

The purpose of excommunication is to *exclude* offensive members from the church, no longer to recognize them as her members, and to keep them from the Lord's table. Such an extreme measure is arrived at by way of several steps (II: 160).

### *The End and Objective of Christian Discipline*

The end and objective of Christian discipline is spiritual and thus neither pertains to all men as such, nor to the meting out of physical punishments. It only pertains to people who are members of the church whose doctrine and life are not in harmony with God's Word (II:161).

*They who administer censure* must do so in all...*humility*, thereby manifesting that they do not engage in this in a domineering sense, but rather as servants who manifest sorrow and *compassion* with the wretched circumstances of such persons. Thus, in doing so, they are pursuing the welfare of these persons as well as of the congregation (II: 162).

The kingdom of heaven is thus closed by way of Christian discipline. Such closure, however, is not permanent, but lasts only until such persons repent, and by confession and deeds show their heartfelt sorrow in immediately turning from their errors or offensive life and instead lead an exemplary and godly life. In such an event the kingdom of heaven is again opened for them by reacceptance into the fellowship of the church as a brother and a sister or readmittance to the Lord's table. In doing so there must be a manifestation of joy and love, since there is even joy in heaven over every soul which repents (Luke 15:7, <1>10). Such restitution is to be observed in 2 Corinthians 2:6-7, where we read, "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow" (II: 163).

### *The Foundation for Christian Discipline*

We, on the contrary, answer in the affirmative and maintain that the Lord Jesus has vested the church with such authority. This authority is entirely distinct from the authority of civil government and must be executed only on behalf of Christ and not on behalf of the government (II: 164).

All this terminology pertains to being vested with authority to do such and such; the church is therefore vested with authority. Such authority does not originate with the civil government. Thus the elders, in the use of this authority, are not servants of the government. Rather, this authority originates with the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of His church, and the elders of the church exercise this authority as servants of Christ (II: 165).

Civil government does not have the authority to use the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Those keys have not been given to it, but rather to the church. The civil government punishes those who disturb the peaceful coexistence of its subjects, doing so by way of corporal punishment. The church, however, punishes those who act contrary to truth and godliness, doing so with spiritual discipline. They both have different objectives and there is thus a different manner of punishment. He who is disciplined by the church may nevertheless be a good subject of the government (II: 168).

### *The Relationship of the Civil Government to the Church*

This generates another question: *Does the civil government have any authority at all with regard to the church? If yes, what does or does this not consist of?*

We wish to preface our answer to this question by stating that first, all members of the clergy--ministers, elders, and deacons--are subject to the civil government as *individuals*, and thus are in one and the same category as other people. I repeat, as individuals. This is not true, however, as far as their ecclesiastical standing is concerned, for as such, they are subject to consistories, Classes, and Synods, and thus they are subject to the only King of the church, Jesus Christ (II: 168).

*Question:* What authority does the civil government not have?

*Answer:* It has no authority whatsoever *in* the church and may not rule over the church as lord and masters. Government officials may not act as if they are sent-servants of Christ--in Christ's Name preaching, administering the sacraments, using the keys of the kingdom of heaven, commissioning ministers, appointing elders in the church, and decreeing what or what will not be preached concerning divine truths, and what are or are not the fundamental points of the Christian religion. They also have no right to depose and expel ministers who are godly and blameless in doctrine and life, and who have been lawfully called as the ministers of given churches. They may not, as lord and master over the church, reject such men, declare the calling to be null and void, efface it, etc. The government has no authority relative to such ecclesiastical matters, for in doing so she would reach for the crown and scepter of the

Lord Jesus, whose prerogative this is. Those governments who are not refrained by the many examples of divine judgment will pay a bitter price for such a practice (II: 170).

### *The Differences Between Civil and Ecclesiastical Governments*

Civil government is an authoritative government. In the church, however, there may not be the least lording over the other (1 Pet. 5:3). All government in the church is characterized by service and is entirely executed on behalf of another, that is, Christ (II: 171).

Civil governments rule by the sword. The church, however, rules by means of the keys of God's kingdom; that is, by proclaiming the gospel, administering the sacraments, by either forgiving or not forgiving sin, by disciplining those who give offense, by rebuking, by refusing admittance to the sacraments by refusing church fellowship, by reinstating those who repent, and by commissioning and calling the elders of the church. These things are all interrelated, and the church which does the one, does the others also. Any person who is not devoid of intelligence, or who is not deliberately wicked and ungodly, but yields to reason and the Word of God will have to conclude by all this that civil government has nothing in common with the manner in which the church must be governed (II: 172).

From all this it is very evident that the church has received her own administrative authority from Christ and she administers the same on His behalf. The civil government does not have the least authority in, nor power over, the church to thus rule her. This applies to the doctrine, the sacraments, the use of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the calling and sending forth of ministers and elders of the church (II: 173).

### *The Responsibility of the Civil Government with Regard to the Church.*

We must now consider also *what authority the civil government has with regard to the church*. Such use of its authority we wholeheartedly uphold. The duties of the government *with regard to* the church are threefold. It has 1) the power of protection, 2) the power to legislate concerning external circumstances, and 3) the power to subdue evil influences (II: 178).

It is the duty of civil government not only to uphold the second table of the law, but also the first. It must see to it that God is honored. It may not tolerate any idolatry, worship of images, or any false religion within her jurisdiction, but must rather eradicate these. It must prevent the vain use of God's Name by way of cursing, swearing, and blasphemy. It must prevent the desecration of the Sabbath, punish violators of this commandment, and see to it that the gospel is proclaimed everywhere within its jurisdiction. It must see to it that the church, as the darling of the Lord Jesus, is protected and preserved; and that neither internal dissension nor any external oppression disturb or destroy the church, but that instead she be safely preserved in the use of the privileges and liberties which her King Jesus has given her (II: 179).

Therefore we say that the civil government has authority *with regard to* the church, rather than *in* the church. Neither civil governments nor any other individual may exercise power in, or over the church, for Jesus is her only King. The civil government has, however, an obligation *with regard to* the church. There is a significant difference between "in" and "with regard to." A civil government has authority *with regard to* marriage, but no authority in the marriage; *with regard to* a household, but not within the household. It likewise has authority *with regard to* the church, but not in the church. We have thus shown what authority the civil government has *with regard to* the church, and what authority the elders have in the congregation (II: 179-180).

### *The Proper Use of the Key of God's Word*

*The first key is used by ministers when proclaiming the Word of God.* To what degree must they be careful and tremble when they use this key? But also, how bold and faithful must they be in using this key?

(1) It must continually weigh upon their heart that this charge has been entrusted to them, and that as ambassadors of Christ they must carry out this charge on His behalf. They are not engaged in their own work but in

the work of Christ.

(2) They must continually remind themselves that the eye of the Lord Jesus is upon them, and that He takes careful notice of their frame of heart, their objective, and the zeal with which they engage in their ambassadorship.

(3) They must continually impress upon themselves that the salvation and damnation of the souls entrusted to them are related to the manner in which they use this key (II: 180).

As faithful and emphatic as the ministers must be in the use of this key, so must the members also be attentive when the kingdom of heaven is opened or closed; that is, when sins are declared to be either forgiven or retained. They must pay careful attention to the description of the states and qualifications of those persons for whom heaven is either opened or closed, and ascertain to which group they belong. They must then apply what is spoken to themselves and consider the act of opening and closing as having been performed in reference to them, as well as the fact that it is the Lord Jesus who thus deals with them, which therefore renders it certain and efficacious. This ought to fill the unconverted with fear and ought to motivate them to immediately repent and thus escape the wrath to come. This ought to cause the converted to rejoice and endeavor, with spiritual joy, to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they have been called. Oh, if the keys of God's kingdom were used and applied in such a manner, what impression the ministers would make! (II: 182).

### *The Proper Use of the Key of Christian Discipline*

*The second key, Christian discipline, is used when both ministers and elders are assembled together.* If there is any area where degeneration is to be observed, it is in the neglect of the use of this key. It is true that one congregation does more in this regard than another, and some are rather faithful, but in general it seems as if the Lord Jesus did not give this key to His church. Not only are the small foxes which spoil the vine not caught, but great wolves have dominion there. How the wall has been broken down so that the vineyard is vulnerable to being trampled upon! The wild boar is rummaging in her, and the leaven is leavening the entire lump. This causes God's Name and His church to be blasphemed, the sacraments to be desecrated, the good plants to be choked by the weeds, and God's blessing to be withheld from His church. All this takes place because the ungodly have a place among His people. It is therefore to be feared that the Lord may one day remove the candlestick of His Word from such a locality (II: 183).

### *A Final Exhortation to Be Faithful in the Use of the Key of Discipline*

You are the cause that the church is becoming degenerate to the core. You are responsible for all the consequences of this. As a result, God's Name is dishonored, many people are kept from joining the church who otherwise would do so, souls are destroyed who by the use of the keys of God's kingdom would repent, and the flourishing of godliness is obstructed. You will be the cause that one member imitates the other in the commission of evil, and that the godly are oppressed and secretly must sigh over the wretched condition of the church. Know that the Lord will bring you into judgment for all these things, and that there you will have to give an account of the manner in which you have ruled the church entrusted to you and concerning the souls over whom the Lord appointed you as an overseer. The Lord will demand the blood of all those souls who will perish due to the neglect of the use of this key. Oh, what a weighty responsibility this is, and how dreadful will God's judgment be upon all unfaithful elders! Oh, that many would never have been elders! Oh, that all elders would be stirred up and, in this matter, would lift up their hearts in the ways of the Lord! (II: 185).

Thirdly, censure has in view the welfare of both those who are under censure and of the congregation. Therefore, if someone cherishes his own salvation and the practice of godliness, he must not resist those means which are subservient to this. Even if he were not willing to submit himself for his own benefit, love for the congregation ought to motivate him to this; for when this key does not function, the congregation will degenerate. The use of this key, on the contrary, purifies the congregation, makes others fearful of sinning, and delivers those who are weak from that which offends. It will cause the church to demand respect from those who are without, who in turn will aspire after godliness and salvation and will be enticed to join the church.

Blessed is the congregation where this may be practiced. "For there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Psa. 133:3) [II: 187).



## **Lecture #6: Brakel on adoption, peace, and joy** (chaps. 35-37)

### **Chapter 35: The Adoption of Children**

#### *Justification Includes Spiritual Childhood*

In the previous chapter we have shown that justification does not only consist in acquittal from guilt and punishment, but also in the bestowal of the right unto eternal life and in God's child being declared an heir of eternal salvation. To this end Christ was placed under the law, "...made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4-5). The apostle speaks of this in Romans 8:15-17, where we read, "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Thus, justification includes spiritual childhood, and this we shall presently discuss (II: (II: 415).

Thus, the Gentiles also became partakers of the adoption of children, as well as they who then believed in the Savior. They were God's children, addressed Him lovingly with the name of Father, and did not need to stand from afar but rather had access to the throne of grace. They were not merely satisfied to have Canaan as if that were the earnest and type of heaven, but rejoiced in salvation itself as their inheritance (II: 416).

#### *The Excellency of the Origin of Spiritual Childhood*

Oh children of God! you must, however, consider your descent to be from God Himself, not only as Creator (which you have in common with everyone else, and which can only cause us to be ashamed, considering that we have fallen away from this majestic God, have thus become His enemies who are worthy to be punished by Him), but that you have been adopted as children by Him and appointed to be the objects of His fatherly goodness! (II: 417).

A godly beggar is a thousand times more exalted and glorious than the greatest monarch who has ever been in the world (II: 418).

The more base the condition of God's child was by nature, the loftier it is to be in the state of being a child of God, and the more glorious it is to be delivered from this misery and to be exalted to such glory. From being a child of the devil to becoming a child of God, from being a child of wrath to becoming the object of God's favor, from a child of condemnation to becoming an heir of all the promises and a possessor of all blessings, and to be exalted from the greatest misery to the highest felicity--this is something which exceeds all comprehension and all adoration (II: 419).

#### *The Excellency of the Manner in Which Sinners Are Translated into Spiritual Sonship*

(1) God has regenerated them by His Holy Spirit (II: 419).

(2) They are children by reason of *adoption*. God decreed from eternity that in time He would adopt them from the human race to be His children and heirs of eternal life. "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:5). According to that decree He actually adopts the elect--each at his own time. "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8:15), "that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:5) [II: 419].

(3) God has betrothed them to His Son by way of a spiritual marriage, by which they are united to Him in one Spirit. Concerning this betrothal we read the following: "And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies" (Hosea 2:19) [II: 420].

(4) They are children by reason of being united to the Son of God as members of one body (Eph. 1:23). Since the

Head is the Son of God, this is likewise true for the members, who, together with the Head, constitute one body (II: 420).

Consider these four matters simultaneously, and upon proper reflection, it will cause a believer, with adoration, to be in ecstasy and to say: "I, who like other men lay in my sins; who was subject to the wrath of God; who was hateful, abominable, and intolerable--I have been known of God from eternity, have been ordained to be His child in His decree, and in time have been snatched from hell, and have been adopted as a child, as a child of that great God! I, who am but despised and maimed, have been betrothed to the Son of God--and this with the approbation of His Father and by reason of the incomprehensible love of the Son! I, who was dead in sins and trespasses, have been quickened by the omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit! I have been born of God! This is incomprehensible and transcends all adoration. However, even though it is marvelous in my eyes, it nevertheless is the Lord's doing. Therefore I ought to rejoice over all this honor and glory, over such love and benevolence. I shall therefore love Him in return and magnify His Name to all eternity." (II:420-421).

### *The Excellency of the Privileges of Spiritual Childhood*

(1) God *cherishes* them as His children with a fatherly love. Oh wondrous love! God, who is love, sets His infinite love in motion to cherish with love such persons who in themselves are hateful, despicable, and condemnable. This love is not generated by the desirability of the object, but it originates within Himself, being desirous to love and to love specific individuals. Observe the following concerning this love: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3) [II:421].

(2) God has His eye upon them as a Father, to keep them so that no evil will befall them. "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore" (Psa. 121:3-8). How safely may such a child rest and trust under the shadow of His wings! He need neither fear nor be careful, for the Lord cares for him (1 Pet. 5:7) [II:421].

(3) Since He preserves them, He cares for them in all that they need according to body and soul, so that they need not be concerned as to what they shall eat and drink and wherewithal they shall be clothed, for their heavenly Father knows what they stand in need of. He who feeds the fowls of the air and clothes the lilies of the field with more glory than even a Solomon, will He not provide food and clothing for His dear children? The Lord Jesus impresses this upon us in this convincing manner in Matthew 6:25 (II: 422).

(4) God has compassion and pity with them in all their bodily and spiritual ailments. It pleases the Lord to lead His children to heaven through many adversities and tribulations, in order that they may thus learn to know and feel their sins, be kept humble, be weaned from the world, be stirred up to prayer, be motivated to trust in Him, to attentively acknowledge His help and His preceding grace, to give all things into His hands and to be satisfied with His government (II: 422).

(5) Since they are children, God hears and answers them as their loving Father. As children they take refuge to their Father in their perplexity and by reason of this relationship they call Him, "Abba, Father!" In an intimate manner they bring their needs before Him, and with teary eyes they tell Him what their sorrow is. They cry out, "My Father, the cross is so heavy and it is so very painful for me; it lasts so long and I do not see my way through. Thou art able to help me, however, for Thou hast promised it and Thou dost indeed have compassion with me. Therefore, my Father! help me, support me, and deliver me!" The Lord looks upon such children in love, and is pleased with their childlike complaints and their taking refuge to Him. He shall most certainly answer them and deliver them at His time and in His manner. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11:13); "How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" (Mat. 7:11) [II: 423].

(6) Since they are children, they are free (II: 423). [1] They are free from the covenant of works. [2] They are also free from the old ceremonial administration. [3] They are free from the power of Satan, who will neither have power nor dominion over them as he did prior to their conversion (2 Tim. 2:26). [4] They are free from the dominion of sin. [5] They are free from eternal condemnation (II: 423-424).

(7) Since they are children, they are also heirs of God, that is, of all the temporal, spiritual, and eternal benefits of the covenant of grace. "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). What an unspeakable inheritance this is! They may indeed exclaim, "The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Psa. 16:5-6); "Oh how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!" (Psa. 31:19) [II: 424].

God Himself is their inheritance; "The LORD is my portion" (Lam. 3:24). It is incomprehensible and inexpressible what this is. No one can comprehend this unless he has enjoyed in some measure what it will be when the soul, with full satisfaction, will enjoy God in an immediate sense. Of this we can say nothing else but, *Oh, how great this is!* (427).

Consider and attentively reflect upon the fact that you have become a child by adoption, by betrothal to Christ, by regeneration. Consider the glorious privileges which are therefore yours: to be loved by God, to be preserved by God, to be cared for in all things, to have the compassion of God in all tribulations, to be heard of God in prayer, and to be an heir of God. Our understanding is too small to perceive the magnitude of all this; it is impossible to fathom this; in adoration one must exclaim, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance" (Psa. 33:12); "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD" (Deu. 33:29) [II: 427].

### The Marks of Sonship

In the previous chapter we have shown that one can be assured of his justification, that is, both of forgiveness and of his right to this blessed inheritance. We have shown that he must endeavor to be assured of this, and that, being delivered from fear, he should as a child serve and honor God with love and gladness. To that end compare yourself with these marks, and by way of comparison determine what your state is (II: 428).

I repeat, have you taken refuge to Him, received Him, surrendered yourself to Him, and are conscious of all these motions (of which you can be conscious if you but take notice of them)? You may then conclude as follows: I believe, and since my faith also pertains to childhood, since faith unites one with Jesus the Son of God and causes one also to be betrothed to Him, and since there is the promise that believers receive power to be the sons of God, I thus perceive that I am a child of God by faith (II: 428).

Secondly, spiritual childhood may be recognized by the bearing of God's image. A father generates a son according to His image; a human being brings forth a human being, and a child has the same human nature as the parents. The Lord likewise regenerates His children according to His image (cf. Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24). He makes them partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4), and "followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. 5:1) [II: 429].

As long as we are on this side of eternity, however, the image of God will be imperfect in man; the best among God's children has but a small beginning, and still has much of the old man. This engenders the battle between the Spirit and the flesh and its lusts (Gal. 5:17), and a praying against sin, and for sanctification. Thus this strife yields proof that a person bears the image of God, for if it were all flesh, there would be no opposition and therefore no strife. Instead, there would be peace in the enjoyment of one's earthly pleasures. If you therefore perceive the principle of God's image to be found in you in truth, you may and must proceed with the conclusion that you are a child of God and an heir of eternal life. I am speaking here of the veracity rather than the degree of this matter (II:

429).

### The Analogy Between Natural and Spiritual Childhood

(1) A child of God, aside from desiring the tender love of God, *is desirous for the continual presence of God.* (II: 431).

(2) Like a child, she is *humble* before the countenance of her Father and perceives herself as a worm and a nothing. In this frame she bows before Him and submits to Him as a weaned child. "LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child" (Psa. 131:1-2) (II: 432).

(3) The soul of a child of God is *willing* to do the Lord's will; that is her joy and delight. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness (Psa. 110:3); "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22); "Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him" (2 Cor. 5:9) [II: 432].

(4) All these texts confirm the love of God's child toward God; and as they love God, *they likewise love the children of God.* "Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him" (1 John 5:1). This is an evidence of being a child of God, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14) [II: 432].

### The Need to examine One's Self Whether He Is a Child of God

We have thus briefly presented to you the nature of a child of God, in order that it would provide both converted and unconverted with a suitable mirror by which they can perceive what their spiritual state is. Consider now the three marks mentioned earlier together, and if it is your desire to know whether or not you are a child of God, bring yourself into the presence of an omniscient God, and compare yourself with these marks. Then listen to what your conscience has to say (II: 433).

(2) See to it that, while perceiving that it is in truth with you, the magnitude of the matter and your unworthiness would nevertheless keep you from determining what your state is. That is a manifestation of pride, for it would be as if you do not want to receive anything unless you would be worthy of it, and as if the gift would have to be commensurate with your worthiness. Know that God gives His children everything above and beyond, and contrary to, what they deserve; the best of them is as unworthy as the least among them, and it is all "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Eph. 1:6). Therefore, if God has and will bestow this upon you, then receive it all, doing so with much humility, and yet with gladness.

(3) See to it that your remaining corruptions do not cause you to deny the truth, for we know that God gives His children all things here only in part; in the best of them He allows many corruptions to remain (II: 434-435).

### The Obligations of Spiritual Sonship

Those who are now convinced that they are the children of God are under obligation to conduct themselves as children of God.... First, entrust everything according to body and soul to your heavenly Father without fear and anxiety. "Therefore take no thought...for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (Mat. 6:31-32) [II: 435].

Secondly, honor and fear your heavenly Father with a childlike heart. This most intimate and sweet relationship between God and His children may definitely not diminish their esteem for God.... As a child of your Father, request from the Lord all those things which are the focus of your good desires. This is the reason why the Lord does not fill His children to overflowing in this life, but permits much emptiness to be in them, so that they would make their childlike desire known to Him and beg of Him for the fulfillment. Make all your needs known to your Father, that is, whatever presses you down, threatens you, and you long to have; do this as intimately as a child would ask

his father. Do not then tremblingly stand from afar, but rather, as a child, use the boldness which you have received and cry out, "Abba, Father." (II: 436).

Fourthly, submit yourself as a child to the chastisement of the Lord as being the chastisement of a Father. The Lord deals with His children in a human fashion; when they misbehave, desecrate the Lord's institutions, and do not keep His commandments, He will visit their transgressions with the rod, their unrighteousness with plagues, and both body and soul with numerous afflictions (II: 437).

Fifthly, obey God as your Father and endeavor to be like Him. Here we have the distinction between true and natural holiness, for the exhortation is as follows: "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet. 1:14-15); "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. 5:1). Manifest the light and the new man which is within you, as well as your conformity to the divine nature. Manifest that the goods of this world are not your portion, and that you have a better and more satisfying portion (II: 437-438).

Sixthly, live as children in mutual love and peace, so that men may see that the Spirit dwelling in you differs from the one dwelling in them (II: 438).

## Chapter 36: Spiritual Peace

### Spiritual Peace Defined

In this peace the former enmity is taken away; God desists from this, now being reconciled by the blood of His Son, and believers desist from this, now having received another heart by the Holy Spirit. The apostle speaks of this: "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled" (Col. 1:19-21) (II: 440).

### A Triune God: the Cause of this Peace

(1) From eternity God has had thoughts of peace toward them, and in *the Counsel of Peace* has ordained the Son to be a Surety to accomplish this peace by Him. He has a peaceful heart and delights in peace; for this reason He is frequently called the God of peace. "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16:20).

(2) The Son's entry into the world was accompanied by the holy angels who jubilated, "On earth peace" (Luke 2:14). He reconciles the elect with God by His death. "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him" (Isa. 53:5). For this reason He bears the name "Prince of Peace" (Isa.9:6), "Melchizedek, king of Salem," that is, peace (Hebr. 7:1-2), and He is called "our peace" (Eph. 2:14).

(3) The Holy Spirit brings this peace into the heart of believers: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17) [II: 441].

All believers are equally partakers of this peace, that is, as far as their state and the veracity of this matter are concerned. The application of this peace, however, varies greatly as far as its sensible enjoyment is concerned. Some enjoy it in a greater measure and others in a lesser measure. Some remain in this peaceful condition for a long period, and so to speak live in it; others experience this peace rarely and it rapidly dissipates (II: 442).

### The Various Ways in Which this Peace Manifests Itself

First, sometimes this peace will reveal itself in a *hope* that one will as yet attain to it (II: 442).

Secondly, it manifests itself sometimes in *quietness* within the soul, even though the soul neither dares nor is able to determine that she is a partaker of Christ, and although she cannot yet be assured by way of the reflex act of faith, the grounds of which she does indeed behold (II: 442).

Thirdly, this peace sometimes manifests itself in *being delighted and being satisfied* (II: 443).

Fourthly, sometimes this peace manifests itself in *being assured* of the forgiveness of sins and of being in the state of grace--this being true, however, in the absence of joy and many sweet inner motions. She knows in whom she has believed, she entrusts herself to Him, she believes that she will be saved, and upon that truth she stands firm even though she does not have the taste of the blessedness of her state which would enable her to find sweet delight in it. "...but I obtained mercy" (1 Tim. 1:13) [II: 443].

Fifthly, this peace sometimes manifests itself in *having free access* to the throne of grace (II: 443).

Sixthly, this peace sometimes manifests itself in *a delightful joy* that the Lord has been reconciled with her, her sins forgiven her, that the Lord has made her one of His favored ones, and the recipient of salvation (II: 443).

Seventhly, this peace sometimes manifests itself in its *essential form and excellency*. God, who is peace, fills the soul with His peace and fully encompasses her with peace; and the soul is thus irradiated with peace from all sides (II: 443-444).

Behold, believers, these are the many different ways in which this peace manifests itself. Who of the godly--if he has given heed to the mercies of the Lord, and if he has some remembrance of his former experiences--would dare to deny that he has ever enjoyed something of this peace? And if he has experienced something of this, let him be assured that, even though the feeling vanishes, this peace between God and his soul will never be broken. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you" (John 14:27) [II: 444].

### *The Sweetness of this Peace*

When the believer experiences this peace with God, he can readily bear all crosses and also "glory in tribulation" (Rom. 5:3). Then they find themselves to be in Paul's condition: "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). Then death is no terror unto them, but only a departing in peace (Luke 2:29), even if, due to their witness of the truth, they must die a violent death. This peace causes martyrs to sing and rejoice in the midst of torture and flames. If already here peace with God is so sweet and invigorating, what will it be when there are no more sins which time and again disturb the peace, and when there will no longer be estrangement from God, but rather eternal unity in joy, love, and peace! "For how great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty!" (Zec. 9:17). [II: 445].

### *The Characteristics of True Spiritual Peace*

First, one who possesses peace in truth is much exercised with peace; he cannot live without it, and if he does not find it, he is restless, in bondage, and goes about with a heavy heart. "...neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin" (Psa. 38:3) [II: 446].

Secondly, the one who is at peace has reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ as the basis for his peace; there is no peace as long as sin is not removed, and sin cannot be removed except by the blood of Christ; however, one cannot be a partaker of this except by faith. For this reason a gracious person continually goes to Christ, receives His offered atonement as a ransom, humbly and prayerfully comes to the Father while wrestling with the promises, and thus obtains peace. "...that in Me ye might have peace" (John 16:33); "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace" (Rom. 5:1); "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing" (Rom. 15:13); "...preaching peace by Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36) [II: 446-447].

Fourthly, true peace is tender and is readily impaired, and those who have peace readily perceive the impairment of this peace. It does not always please God to bring His children with the bride into the banqueting house, or with the disciples upon the holy mount, or with Paul into the third heaven (II: 447).

Fifthly, they who truly have peace actively guard against sin and endeavor to live in tender godliness before the countenance of God (II: 448).

### *An Exhortation to Self-Examination*

You who are not exercised with this peace, are not restless about its absence, are not concerned about having and preserving it, and are not suspicious as to whether or not your peace of mind is of the right sort; you who effortlessly and as a matter of course have attained to this peace, that is, without the wrestling of faith to receive Jesus as a ransom, and to be reconciled by His blood applied to the heart by faith, and only there to find your conscience purged of dead works; you who have a peace of which God is not the focus and which you enjoy apart from being in the presence of and in communion with God; you who are always stable and always have and are at peace within (except that shame and harm or a crime may occasionally trouble you), and you are not conscious of the fact that this peace is readily impaired and the heart immediately troubled about the absence of this peace; you who due to this inner peace of mind are not prompted to be on guard against all sins (also those of the heart) and to live a life pleasing unto God; I assure you that your peace is nothing but a carnal peace, and that God's eternal and unbearable wrath hangs above your head (II: 449).

On the contrary, you who have ever enjoyed this peace in some measure as previously delineated, and you who perceive that the five marks of this peace enumerated in the foregoing are truly found within you, see to it that you do not deny this grace under any pretext. You would sin against your conscience, grieve yourself, and impede your growth in peace and godliness. Go with your conscience into the presence of God, bearing witness that the inner frames mentioned earlier and their inner motions are truly within you. Acknowledge it to be thus, that is, that you have peace with God, even though the light and the sensible enjoyment of it may have disappeared (II: 449).

### *Exhortation to Seek and Preserve this Peace*

Secondly, be much exercised to preserve this peace--whatever the measure of it may be--for it is tender and is very readily impaired a) by laxity in maintaining, exercising, and pursuing this peace (Song of Sol. 5:3); b) by not heeding one's heart or by imposing less restraint upon sinful inclinations (Psa. 37:3); c) by falling into greater sins (Psa. 51:10); d) by quenching or not yielding to the promptings of the Spirit and by desiring to go upon a different way (Is. 63:10); e) by esteeming earthly things too highly, by having our heart set upon them in seeking after them, or by being too troubled when one has to miss them (James 4:4) [II: 451].

Strictly adhere to your times of spiritual exercise; neither neglect it, nor engage in it hurriedly, as if you would only do so to satisfy your conscience; rather, remain prostrate before the Lord, however barren you may be, and wait to see if some light may not dawn. If not, be not discouraged, but keep your soul humble as a weaned child, and maintain that quiet hope that God will return. Let there be a determined resolution to nevertheless be willing to seek the Lord as long as you live, being desirous rather to die at His feet than to depart from Him. And the Lord who is good to the soul that seeks Him will at last say, "Mary! My child, here am I," upon which the soul will rejoice. "Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always by all means" (2 Th. 3:16) [II: 452-453].

## **Chapter 37: Spiritual Joy**

Man was created to rejoice; joy is his life and health. Sorrow is contrary to his nature, and if man had not sinned, he would not have been sorrowful for one moment. A young child shows its joy by laughter and skipping around; all that man does, he does to be happy. Sorrow grips, presses, oppresses, and brings pain to the heart, whereas joy enlarges the heart and causes one to be refreshed by leaping for joy. This is true in the natural, and also in the spiritual realm (II: 455).

*Joy is the pleasure, delight, and rejoicing of the heart. It is the expression of a spirit set at liberty (or enlarged), generated by a present blessing or due to the anticipation of a future blessing (II: 455).*

The Lord, however, causes His favorites to see that all this is nothing but vanity, sin, and sorrow, and that all joy and happiness consist in having communion with Him. This is the spiritual joy which we shall now discuss. In considering this joy we shall deal with 1) the nature of this joy, 2) the opposite of this joy, 3) that which resembles this joy, and 4) the parameters of this joy (II: 456).

### *The Nature of Spiritual Joy*

*This spiritual joy consists in a delightful motion of the soul, generated by the holy Spirit in the heart of believers, whereby He convinces them of the felicity of their state, causes them to enjoy the benefits of the covenant of grace, and assures them of their future felicity (II: 456)*

No one can manufacture this joy himself, but it is an inexpressible work of grace by God the Holy Spirit. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy" (Rom. 15:13); "For the kingdom of God is...joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17); "Make me to hear joy and gladness" (Psa. 51:8). For this reason David calls the Lord, "God my exceeding joy" (Psa. 43:4). If someone desires this joy, let him be sensibly convinced that he cannot manufacture this himself and that he is also unworthy to receive it; let him thus come through Christ to the Father and pray in His Name, "Make us glad according to the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil" (Psa. 90:15); "Rejoice the soul of Thy servant: for unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul" (Psa. 86:4) [II: 456-457].

### *The Opposite of Spiritual Joy: Sorrow*

Now compare sorrow and joy with each other and observe the great difference between the two. From this can be deduced the exceeding excellency and desirability of this joy, as well as the goodness of God (which exceeds our thoughts): such people (who are only worthy of eternal sorrow) are by Him filled and will eternally be filled with such exceeding joy. Furthermore, since God's children encounter many sorrows in this life, no one ought to be too dejected as if they were no child of God, for what they encounter is no different from what all God's children encounter. It can also be that one is sorrowful, humble, and ashamed over sin, mourns over the absence of sweet communion with God, and nevertheless rejoices in the assurance of one's state, as well as in the promise that his sorrow will be turned into joy. He conducts himself wisely who accustoms himself to be joyful by faith, even though he weeps due to oppression (II: 458).

### *Counterfeit Spiritual Joy*

The third matter to be considered is that which *resembles* this joy or *counterfeit joy*.... This difference needs to be carefully defined so that those who have counterfeit joy may be convicted, and those who possess true joy may be assured and, with liberty, make progress in this true joy (II: 458-459).

If someone considers himself to be joyful and is nevertheless not tender in his walk, but instead lives in the world and yields to his lusts, doing everything with the wrong objective and in seeking self, his joy is not a joy in God, but is a counterfeit joy. Whenever joy proceeds from faith, however, functions in communion with God, and begets tenderness, willingness, actual opposition to sin, and the practice of godliness; then there is true joy. Let the heart of such a person rejoice, and endeavor to continually live in this joy (II: 460).

### *The Parameters for this Joy: the Fear of God*

Therefore, whoever wishes to live in this joy ought to endeavor greatly to *fear God*. He must reverence Him and be on guard against sin. "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (Psa. 2:11) [II: 461].

### *Exhortation to Believers to Seek Spiritual Joy*

Therefore, come believers, "Serve the LORD with gladness: come before His presence with singing" (Psa. 100:2). Have you not tolerated this heaviness and sorrow long enough and spent your time being melancholy? Recognize and

acknowledge the grace which is in you--however little it may be. Consider the disposition of other children of God, not dissimilar to yours, and God's dealings with them. Be in submission to the measure of grace the Lord bestows upon you; do not continue in sin (as you and the Lord know that it is a heavy burden to you), but rather go with them to the Surety. Let neither unbelief nor inadvertent ignorance concerning the grace which is in you, nor a coveting of greater grace apart from submission, cause you to remain sorrowful any longer. Come, allow me to take you by the hand and instruct you in this matter. Permit yourself to be persuaded, be flexible, and do not resist (II: 461-462).

Secondly, believers (even the most feeble) are entitled to and have reason for joy, for it is one of the promises of the covenant of grace (II: 463).

Therefore, value the excellency of the promised benefits, the infallibility of the testament which is confirmed by the death of the testator. Rejoice therefore in your title to the inheritance and in the certainty of future possession, even though you do not enjoy it as yet. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous" (Psa. 97:11-12). It is sown, and it has been sown for you, and therefore you will also harvest at the appointed time; rejoice in this hope: "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple" (Psa. 65:4) [II: 463].

Thirdly, God is pleased with the joy of His children. It is His will that they delight themselves, value the benefits, fully trust in His Word and in His promise, and jubilate, leap for joy, and sing His praises with joyful and singing lips. Cheerfulness and joyfulness are a delight to Him. "But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel" (Psa. 22:3-4); "Thou meetest him that rejoiceth" (Isa. 64:5). Is it your desire to do something which is pleasing to God? Is God's nearness, His presence, and your familiar encounters with Him, your desire and your delight? Accustom yourself then to live joyfully by faith (II: 463-464).

A joyful person will very readily despise the things of this world and cross providences do not oppress him very much. The practice of virtue will be a delight to him, and his joy will make it so attractive; yes, it will make him attractive. He will be suited to woo others, comfort those that mourn, and stir up those who are lax; everything suits him and he is desirous to do everything. Therefore "be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart" (Psa. 32:11) [II: 464-465].

### *The Believer's Diffulties Answered*

The cause and foundation for your joy must not be found within yourself and your virtuousness, but rather outside of yourself and in Christ. If a person had to wait with being joyful in the Lord until he is without sin, he would never rejoice his entire lifetime, for the most eminent saint sees more sin in himself than does a little one in grace, since the larger measure of light reveals to him that which is lacking in his virtuousness, whereas others may see little of it (II: 465).

The normal way to assurance consists on the one hand in giving heed to the Word of God, and on the other hand in comparing yourself with this Word, coming thus to a conclusion--a conclusion made in the presence of God while praying, believing, and reasoning. This is the manner by which a man is assured. To that end we have previously, at various occasions and in various ways, convinced believers of this by presenting the marks of grace to them (II: 466).

### *Exhortation to Use the Means to Attain to this Joy*

To that end you should first of all continually exercise faith in Christ, reflect upon the truths pertaining to the atonement and God's way in which He leads man to salvation, and put your trust in Jesus, leaning upon Him. To entrust yourself thus to Him, without seeing Him or apart from any feeling, is the way that leads to joy (1 Pet. 1:8).

Secondly, continue to read and acknowledge the Word to be what it really is: the Word of God. Acknowledge that it addresses itself at that particular moment to you. Search for the promises, deem them to be unbreakable, and when you apply them to your soul as such, you will experience joy. "For thy word hath quickened me" (Psa. 119:50).

Thirdly, pray much, and acquaint yourself with the Lord by praying to Him, communing with Him, making request to Him, and laying before Him all that you lack and desire, especially your desire for joy. "Make me to hear joy and gladness" (Psa. 51:8); "O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days" (Psa. 90:14).

Pursue the promise and lift up your heart to the truth that whatever you will pray for in Christ's Name, He will indeed give you. By being thus engaged in prayer the soul will experience more and more of this joy.

Fourthly, engage much in holy contemplation and meditation. Reflect upon who and what you are, the ways the Lord has led you hitherto, and upon your former mourning, seeking, and tears. Reflect upon the comforts and deliverances which the Lord has frequently given you, upon the benefits of the covenant of grace (each individually), and upon future glory and all that the soul will forever enjoy there. This is suitable to cause the soul quietly to rejoice. "My meditation of Him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD" (Psa. 104:34).

Fifthly, be much on guard against yielding to a sinful routine in your life. Even if there are no great falls, this yielding, this drowsy carelessness, and this departing from God will readily rob us of this joy. Rather, one ought to refrain from unrighteousness, and, upon falling, arise each time again and immediately run to the fountain once more; this will, time and again, quicken joyfulness. May the God of our exceeding joy gladden you! Amen (II: 466-467).

## **Lecture #7: Brakel on the Lord's Supper** (chaps. 40-41)

### **Chapter 40: The Lord's Supper**

#### *The Lord's Supper: Instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ*

From this institution it is also evident how the ministers of the Word must administer the Lord's Supper today, and must consecrate the bread and wine. This is not to be done by muttering under one's breath and by pronouncing the words "for this is My body" while blowing and hissing as the wizards do. "...Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter" (Isa. 8:19); in this they are imitated by the papists. Rather the act of consecration, that is, setting wine and bread apart for sacred use, occurs by way of benediction and blessing, thereby requesting that God, who in His great goodness has given Christ, would also bless these signs so that they may be efficacious to the sealing and strengthening of true faith. After this the minister breaks the bread, and gives and distributes it to the communicants, doing likewise with the cup thereafter (II: 528).

#### *The Matter Signified in the Lord's Supper*

When seeing these signs, the communicant must not end in them mentally, but must proceed to the matter signified, that is, to the body and blood of Christ--broken and shed to satisfy God's justice for the sins of believers. Thus, he must unite the sign to the matter signified. One must not do so on the basis of his own imagination, for then he would be able to ascend to the suffering and death of Christ by way of the physical; rather, one ought to do so upon the basis of Christ's institution. It is thus not a union established by way of human imagination, but it is a union in the true sense of the word. However, it is not a local or physical union, but a spiritual union which has its foundation and derives its veracity from Christ's institution. This union therefore does not relate to the substances of bread and wine as they are in the dish and in the cup at that moment, that is, apart from being used in the sacrament. Instead, this union comes about when the communicant, by virtue of Christ's institution, exercises faith, taking note of the instituted relationship between the sign and the matter signified. This is similar to a stone which, taken from a pile and placed as a boundary marker upon the land, is not changed as far as its nature is concerned, but as to how it is viewed (II: 532-533).

#### *The Harmony Between the Sign and the Matter Signified*

Since these signs are not only symbolic, but also sealing, the believer thus accepts them as seals and, upon the basis of the promise, presses them upon his heart, believing that Christ's body has been broken for him, and His blood has been shed for him. He believes that thereby he has the forgiveness of sins and is a partaker of Christ and all the benefits of the covenant confirmed in Christ's death. A believer thus receives Christ while partaking of the signs and uniting the sign to the matter signified. He considers the signs as tokens of Christ's love for him, His merits on his behalf, and of His immutability in making him an eternal partaker of it. It is thus that this spiritual food and drink nourish and refresh him in his spiritual life (II: 533).

#### *The Purpose for the Institution of the Lord's Supper*

Secondly, there is the *sealing* function. Previously we have also shown that the sacraments are sealing in nature. Thus, the bread and the wine seal to the believer that they are partakers of Christ and all that He has merited by His suffering and death; they are not merely signs of the mutual communion of believers, as is the view of the Anabaptists and Socinians. This is confirmed in the following passages: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16); "...this is My body" (Mat. 26:26); "...this is My blood" (Mat. 26:28). It is the goodness of God that He not only promises the forgiveness of sins to believers, nor only depicts by whom and how they receive the forgiveness of sins, but He furthermore gives them an earnest and seal, in order that they would believe that God indeed is, and will eternally remain, a reconciled God and Father to them in Christ, so that by this knowledge they may live in comfort and joy. Since the Lord Jesus has instituted this sacrament as a seal, believers must use it as

such, and they, upon receiving the sacrament, must consider themselves as being sealed and rejoice in their temporal and eternal blessedness.

It must be administered to true believers. Only true believers have a right for themselves to the promises, Christ, and the communion of saints, and thus also to the signs of the covenant. The church, however, does not judge concerning man's internal state; the knowledge of someone's regeneration is not the basis upon which she admits one to the holy table, but she admits all who have made a conscious confession of the true doctrine of the gospel, and who lead a life which is in harmony with their confession.

The location where this sacrament is administered does not relate to its essence, and is therefore immaterial. It does not matter if it is a public meeting place--called "church"--, or if it is a private home, mountain, valley, or cave. One must adjust himself to the condition of the church, that is, whether she be in a state of freedom or in a state of persecution. It must, however, occur in the gathering of the congregation, regardless of whether she be great or small. The bringing of the Lord's Supper to the sick borders on superstition. The secret celebration of the Lord's Supper with a few members of the congregation in a secret home is nothing less than schism (II: 566-567).

Both time and frequency cannot be determined and it is of no relevance as far as the essence of the sacrament is concerned. It is most desirable that it be administered upon the Sabbath Day when the congregation gathers, as well as at such a time when one would normally eat a meal, so that as a result of the physical desire for food, one would be that much more fit to partake of this spiritual food symbolized by the bread and wine. Christ instituted it in the evening, since He could not do so any earlier due to the last Passover having to be eaten in the evening. He also could not have instituted it at a later moment since His suffering began during that same night. We have thus considered this sacrament in its nature and attending circumstances. The observance of this sacrament will be considered in the next chapter (II: 567).

## **Chapter 41: The Practice of the Lord's Supper—Preparation, Celebration, Reflection**

Everything that is of the greatest benefit to a child of God is most severely attacked by the devil and his cohorts; this is also true of the Lord's Supper. A heavy cloud of numerous heresies has ascended from the abyss of hell to obscure the essential nature of this sacrament--a cloud which we have driven away in the previous chapter by means of the light of the truth. When the devil can no longer obscure the truth, he then endeavors either to prevent or corrupt the exercise concerning this truth. He does this by bringing all manner of ruffraff into the church and leading them to the holy table, knowing that this will seriously impede the blessing (Jer. 5:25-26). He also does this by most vehemently assaulting believers during the time of preparation, thereby causing them to fall into sin and subsequently into unbelief--and by diverting them so that they will neglect to spend time and to be engaged in that to which this time of preparation obligates them. Each believer must therefore be especially on guard during this season and strive to use this sacrament to his benefit. To this end it is needful that there be a good *preparation for, celebration of, and reflection upon, the Lord's Supper* (II: 569).

### *The Need for Preparation*

Fourthly, it is also God's command that he who approaches unto God in an extraordinary manner should also prepare himself to that end. When the Lord was about to descend to the people upon Mount Sinai, the Lord gave command to Moses, saying, "Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day" (Exo. 19:10-11). When Israel was about to cross the Jordan dry-shod by a divine miracle, it was commanded, "Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you" (Josh. 3:5). When Moses approached the burning bush--a symbol of God's extraordinary presence--he heard the voice, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exo. 3:5). When Samuel invited Jesse and the elders to the sacrifice, he said, "Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice" (1 Sam. 16:5). Whenever the priests would approach unto the altar, they first had to wash themselves. Therefore, we also, when about to approach to the holy table, must first prepare ourselves (II: 570).

One must enter in God's way, and God generally bestows a blessing upon serious preparation, be it that which one had in view or that which is most beneficial for him at that time. To such a person the promise will be fulfilled, "And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). The soul will then not accuse itself of slothfulness, but will find peace in her sincere endeavors. From this, one can perceive the necessity of preparation (II: 571).

### *The First Aspect of Preparation: A Stimulating of Desire*

The meeting place where the Lord's Supper is administered is at that moment none other than a portal of heaven--with Jacob one may say of it, "Surely the LORD is in this place...how dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. 28:16-17). Heaven opens itself in such a place, and the rays of divine glory and grace descend to that place, filling it with the very presence of God. The Father comes to His people with His favor and reveals Himself in a familiar manner to His favorites, addressing them as *Ammi, ruhamah!* that is, My people, and object of My mercy! I have loved thee with an everlasting love and therefore I have drawn thee with loving kindness. I have come here to meet you in order to make known to you, and to cause you to feel, My delight and My love. The Lord Jesus, the Bridegroom, comes in His love to them to have this supper with them and to cause them to enjoy it together with Him. With love and delight He views them as they surround Him. It is there that the Holy Spirit is active, filling the soul with light, grace, and comforts (II: 573).

Secondly, consider this gathering as being led into the inner chambers (Song of Sol. 1:4) and into the king's palace (Psa. 45:15), where many wonders are shown them which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, which has never entered into the heart of man, and which God has prepared for them that love Him. Oh, what glorious matters the Lord shows them there, and what sweetness He causes them to taste there! (II: 574).

Thirdly, consider for a moment the sweet and friendly invitation of the Lord Jesus Himself. He has no need of you; He could have passed you by and have invited others. However, He now says to you, "Come, for all things are ready!" (II: 575).

Fourthly, at the Lord's Supper a public confession of the Lord Jesus is made. It is then that the celebrating church professes publicly before the entire world, and proclaims that Jesus Christ is the only and sufficient Savior, their Head, and their Lord. She commemorates His suffering and death as the only atoning sacrifice, and she declares the death of the Lord to be the only foundation for peace, comfort, and life (II: 575).

Fifthly, one exercises communion with Christ in the Lord's Supper. Is not that the focus of all your desires, and the essence of your spiritual life? Is not your soul troubled in the absence of such communion? It is there that the Lord Jesus assures believers of being a partaker of Him as well as of His love toward them. It is there that the Holy Spirit generally works in a more perceptible manner (II: 576).

Sixthly, not only is there a sealing communion with Christ in the Lord's Supper, but there are also times when one may enjoy extraordinary graces which engender ecstasy. A person may at times, with the disciples, be brought to the holy mountain and see Christ in His glory. Occasionally, he is there led into the banqueting house, and He spreads His love over him as a banner (II: 576).

Seventhly, consider furthermore the blessed company which gathers there, for there God's children are gathered together before the countenance of their heavenly Father and their beloved Jesus in order to find mutual delight. There they express their love to each other; there they fully separate themselves from the world and despise its love since they find satisfaction in their mutual love for each other. There they express their love, not only for those with whom they are acquainted, but also toward all believers with whom they are not acquainted (II: 577).

Eighthly, one furthermore gains strength from the Lord's Supper in sanctification, the mortification of sin, and the living of a life that is pleasing unto the Lord--for the food and drink of this meal yield strength and refreshment. Here faith is strengthened; love is stirred up and becomes more steadfast; and here is union with Jesus, the very life

of the soul, and willing commitment to serve the Lord (II: 577).

### *The Second Aspect of Preparation: An Examination of Self*

Many have a wrong perception of themselves; they measure themselves by themselves. They deem themselves to be fit, for they have no disagreement with their neighbor, are baptized, diligently go to hear God's Word, live in such a manner that no one can say anything about them, and believe that Christ is the Savior--one must thus not doubt that one will also be saved and that Christ is also his Savior. Therefore all is truly well--Christ invites and commands us, and I then wish to be obedient to the Lord in this respect. Others add to this the fact that, prior to that time, they refrain from indulging in their bosom sins, read pious books, and pray more frequently. One thus puts himself into a pious mold and peacefully attends, eating and drinking judgment to himself (II: 578).

When believers make themselves unworthy of the Lord's Supper by giving offense, living in strife and hatred, or cleaving to a given sin to such an extent that prior to the Lord's Supper they do not wish to make a full resolution to part therewith and thereby, they thus sin in a double measure and ought to deeply humble themselves before the Lord. Let such remain in the sanctuary during the administration of the Lord's Supper, stand afar off, and observe the partaking of the Lord's Supper by believers. Let them thus mourn by themselves and think, "I may not be among them" (II: 580).

1) A true believer will perceive within himself that with all his heart--albeit the one time more perceptibly than at other times--he yearns for the Lord Jesus in order to be justified by His blood, to be clothed with His holiness as merited by His fulfillment of the law, and to be renewed and sanctified by His Spirit. He will perceive that he yearns for, longs for, cries after, flees to, waits upon, and surrenders himself to Him. He wrestles against unbelief in order that he may bring Jesus into his heart, and to be assured that he believes in Him and is a partaker of Him and His benefits.

(2) He will perceive that he cannot be satisfied with believing that he has received grace. He desires with all his heart the possession, the enjoyment, and the relish of the benefits of the covenant. He will perceive that he is enamored with being truly united to God, with a life in which there is an impression of the Lord's presence, with peace of conscience, and with the love and fear of the Lord. When he misses this, he is troubled, and if he has lost this, he cannot rest until he receives it by renewal; for this is his life, delight, and felicity.

(3) He will perceive within himself a hatred and distaste for sin, a grief when he sins, a repeated rising again and a fleeing to the blood of Jesus unto reconciliation, and a delight and love to live a life which is pleasing to the Lord. He perceives within himself a warfare between the flesh and the spirit. The lusts of the world continually draw him to the world and away from God, whereas the spirit--that which has been regenerated, his spiritual life within him--continually draws him away from sin unto God. He also perceives, to his grief, that the flesh at times has the upper hand in this battle, whereas at other times, to his joy, the spirit prevails.

If someone perceives that these frames and exercises are truly to be found within him, he will be able to come to the table, even if he lacks clear assurance. Many believers lack this assurance either due to ignorance of the Word, weakness of their historical faith, fear of deceiving themselves, or they may see so much sin coexisting with grace. Such may not refrain from partaking, but rather are obligated to come forward with the multitude which keeps holyday, so that by using the signs, the promises--which are made to such as have just been mentioned--may be sealed to them (II: 581).

### *The Third Aspect of Preparation: Spiritual Adornment*

This *spiritual adornment* consists, first of all, in *an enlivening of historical faith* by a quiet meditation and reflection upon the entire work of redemption, together with approval of and joy over the goodness, wisdom, righteousness, power, and truth of God which manifest themselves in the work of redemption (II: 582).

Secondly, spiritual adornment consists in the endeavor to *come into a spiritual frame whereby one can be an object of free grace*. This transpires when you observe yourself in reference to your insignificance and sinfulness in order to be humbled thereby (II: 584).

Thirdly, this spiritual adornment consists in *a restoration in and renewal of the covenant of grace*.... Give heed therefore to the sincere, earnest, and urgent invitation and calling of the Lord Jesus; listen to His lovely voice. Stir up your desires thereby and by way of that covenant surrender yourself earnestly and willingly to the Lord Jesus as if you had never done so before, saying, "I now do this with my whole heart and by this covenant I wish to, and shall, live and die" (II: 586).

Fourthly, this spiritual adornment consists in *a sincere resolution to lead a more holy life*. "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8)... What bliss it is to be among those saints and glorious persons and, with them to appear before the countenance of the Lord, to confess Jesus, to glorify God, and to receive a blessing! Who would not be carried away with desires to be among them, and with them endure the sweet and the bitter, prosperity and adversity? [II: 587]

Sixthly, spiritual adornment also consists in having a heart *which is moved in love toward all God's children*, regardless of whether one knows them or not--yes, a heart filled with love which extends to all men. "And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity" (2 Pet. 1:7) [II: 588].

*The advice* I wish to give is that I deem it to be most beneficial to have a *day of fasting and prayer* prior to the Lord's Supper--be it that one either does not work and eat at all, or that one works little and eats the simplest of foods. Let every one consider the circumstances in which he is, that is, whether he is in service or free, rich or poor, or whether he is in an ungodly or godly family. The Lord has left it to our discretion to what extent we wish to restrict ourselves, except that there be one day which we designate for the purpose of setting ourselves apart (II: 589).

### ***THE CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER***

The person who has prepared himself in the aforesaid manner, must not sleep too long in the morning, lest time slip away and he were to come in a hurried frame of heart. He must also not arise extraordinarily early, lest he be dull, sleepy, or exhausted during the hearing of the sermon and the administration of the Lord's Supper, for an exhausted body inhibits the motions of the soul. He ought to arrive in church punctually with clean and appropriate clothing, that is, without either a careless or proud appearance. If someone is poor and has no other clothing except his daily garments, and if even this is very plain, let him not refrain from attending, for the Lord looks upon the heart rather than on the clothing (II: 589-590).

*While sitting at the table*, consider yourself as being seated in the brightness of an open heaven, shedding forth its light upon the table and all seated guests--and thus also upon you. Consider yourself to be in the presence of God your heavenly Father, and Christ your Bridegroom. Sink away in your insignificance and let a childlike awe and reverence arise in your soul, while saying, "Surely the LORD is in this place....This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. 28:16-17). Be observant and do not fear, for the Lord has determined to bestow much grace upon you in Christ. Remain steadfast in the faith, and glorify God in His grace and Christ for the perfection of His atonement (II: 591).

Neither expect a miracle here nor an extraordinary measure of elevation, light, or ecstatic joy. If the Lord gives you this, enjoy this good thing while it may be your portion. Be it known, however, that it is the common way to exercise faith, and to assure you by means of these signs--as being seals and pledges--that as certainly as you eat that bread and drink that wine, so certain is it that Christ has died for you and loves you; thus strive to attain peace in your conscience by faith (II: 592).

While eating and drinking, apply Christ to yourself, unite yourself to Him in truth, with steadfastness and in love. Ascend to the immutability of the covenant, which has now been sealed to you, saying, "My beloved is mine, and I am His" (Song of Sol. 2:16) [II: 592].

I have presented each of these matters to you individually to motivate you to come to the Lord's Supper in a proper frame. Do not trouble yourself, however, to practice these matters in such an order. The soul must at such a time have freedom and the Holy Spirit operates at such times in divers manners. Rather, by reading or rereading what has been stated before, you will engender a habitual tendency in the soul, and you will become more fit to engage yourself by way of such a frame. "Happy is that people, that is in such a case" (Psa. 144:15); "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple" (Psa. 65:4). Blessed is he who may thus be led into the inner chambers of the gospel, who may say, "To see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary. Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee" (Psa. 63:2-3) [II: 592-593].

### ***REFLECTION UPON THE LORD'S SUPPER***

Be very careful to conduct yourself well after the Lord's Supper. If Satan has not been able to gain the advantage over you in the preparation for and celebration of the Lord's Supper, he will yet endeavor to get the advantage over you after the Lord's Supper. After the Lord Jesus had been baptized, He was tempted of the devil, and after the disciples had celebrated the Lord's Supper with Christ, they were in that same night offended and dispersed, and Peter was sifted as the wheat. After Paul had been drawn into the third heaven, there came an angel of Satan who buffeted him. This is generally also true for believers--after having been comforted they must arm themselves against the assaults of the enemy, so that he may not get a hold upon them. As one must be on guard against the enemy, he must likewise take special care to conduct himself appropriately toward God, his Benefactor. We may indeed apply to this spiritual meal what God demanded of Israel upon their arrival in Canaan with its abundance: "When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which He hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God" (Deu. 8:10-11) [II: 593].

#### ***Reflection to Be an Expression of Gratitude***

Reflection consists of *joyous gratitude*: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Psa. 103:2); "Praise the LORD, call upon His Name, declare His doings among the people, make mention that His Name is exalted. Sing unto the LORD; for He hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee" (Isa. 12:4-6) [II: 594].

#### ***Reflection Must Consist in the Anticipation and Enjoyment of Having Fellowship with God***

Reflection consists in a continual looking unto and *having fellowship with the Lord*. "...walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1); "And Enoch walked with God" (Gen. 5:24). To that end it is necessary that one views God in Christ as a reconciled Father. Even when spiritual light dissipates, if one falls into sin and if strife comes, one must nevertheless hold fast to the immovableness of the covenant. It is neither your feeling nor your standing or falling which determines the steadfastness or stability of the covenant; rather, it is based on the immutability of God. "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee" (Isa. 54:10); "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6). Therefore do not succumb so readily; hold fast what you have, be steadfast in faith, and conduct yourself manfully. If, according to your feeling, you cannot conclude the certainty of your state, then make the conclusion judgmentally. Observe this in the following passages: "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:11); "Because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead" (2 Cor. 5:14). Therefore set the Lord continually before you and live in a continual dialogue with Him--at one time pray, then ask for counsel, then express your dependence upon Him, then wait upon Him, then reverently worship Him, then rest in Him, then thank Him, and then again, offer yourself to His service. Acquaint yourself thus with Him (II: 596).

Behold, such is the eminent felicity of fellowship with God. Since you have entered into covenant with God, however, and this covenant has been sealed to you, you thus have the privilege to walk humbly with your God--this also being your duty. Therefore, acquaint yourself with the Lord, have peace, and let your holiness shine forth (II: 597-598).

*Reflection Must Result in a Despising and an Abandoning of the World*

Reflection consists in *a despising and an abandoning of the world*. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15-16). You are obliged to abandon the world, for this is inherent in the covenant into which you have entered and which has been sealed to you. This means that God alone is my desire, resting place, joy, delight, and the One whom I fear. The world is therefore from now on, of no significance. It is merely to be used as a means through which one traverses as a stranger in order to come to the fatherland (II: 598).

*Reflection Consists in a Public Manifestation of One's Christianity*

Reflection consists in *a public manifestation that one is a Christian and a member of the covenant*. Therefore, from now on wear the livery of Christ by walking as He has walked (1 John 2:6), so that all who observe you may know that you are loyal to Jesus and His cause (Acts 4:13) [II: 599].

*Reflection Must Manifest Itself in a Public Confession of the Lord Jesus*

Reflection consists in *confessing the Lord Jesus*. The Lord's Supper obligates you to show forth the death of the Lord until He comes (II: 599-600).

Many are desirous for all these spiritual frames and complain that they do not have them. They indeed have much reason for this; however, what is the reason for all this? They themselves are certainly to be blamed, for they are lax in seeking. It is too difficult a duty for them to be thus engaged in spite of darkness and spiritual dullness. He who does not work will not eat, he who does not pray will not receive, and he who does not seek will not find. In the realm of nature God grants temporal blessings only upon the use of the means; God deals likewise in the spiritual realm. Therefore if you desire these things, actively seek them (II: 600).

## **Lecture #8: Brakel on Biblical Spirituality -- I** (chaps. 42, 57-61)

### **Chapter 42: The Life of Faith in Reference to the Promises**

#### *An Exhortation to Concerned Souls*

However, if there may be some concern and desire to be delivered from hell and to eternally enjoy salvation, give heed, and let such divine counsel be agreeable to you. The righteous and good God has given His Son Jesus Christ--who is God and man--as Surety, who, by His suffering and death, has accomplished eternal reconciliation and redemption, and by His holy obedience has merited a perfect righteousness. As His servant, I offer this Surety to you in His Name--yes, you who read or hear this read, the God of heaven calls you to freely receive this Surety as your ransom and righteousness. This Jesus, who is good and true, invites you in a most friendly manner to receive Him and to fully surrender yourself to Him, assuring you that upon coming He will not cast you out but will most certainly take you to Himself into eternal felicity. Should you not listen to such a God who calls, and to such a Jesus who extends such a friendly invitation? Shall this not move your heart? Do such offers then have no attraction for you? Shall eternal felicity and deliverance from hell not be matters of concern for you? How I wish that the Lord would illuminate your understanding, incline your will, and stir up all your affections to receive that Surety, to enter into that great covenant of grace and be saved! May the Lord Himself draw you powerfully and translate you out of yourself into Christ Jesus. May he grant you faith, regenerate you, grant you life in union with Christ, and may He also cause you to grow and increase in this life--for it is God who works in you both to will and to do (II: 604-605).

Secondly, one must not focus upon his corruptions for long periods of time in order thereby to sink even deeper into his misery and to be more brokenhearted; as if being more brokenhearted prior to conversion would make one more acceptable before God; as if it were a condition upon which you could, and without which you could not come to Christ; as if it were the basis for our liberty to receive Christ. Rather, brokenheartedness is only necessary to cause you to go out of yourself and to take refuge with Jesus. If this is brought about by sorrow over your sinful state, it makes no difference whether your sorrow and brokenheartedness are great or small. Their only purpose is to drive you, while yet unconverted, out to Jesus (II: 605).

#### *Believers Cannot Make Progress in Their Own Strength*

A believer, a converted person, who now desires to increase in this life must carefully guard against any notions about his own strength. He must endeavor instead to habitually discern his impotence, for then he will be more dependent upon the Lord in every deed. He will then gratefully acknowledge every good thought, be kept from much falling into sin, avoid many temptations, and be steadfast in the ways of the Lord (II: 607).

#### *Our Obligation to Use the Means in Spite of Our Impotence*

*Question:* Must one then simply let go and refrain from action until God irresistibly intervenes and works everything within us? Is man nothing but a stock and a block which does not move itself, but can only be set in motion by external means?

*Answer:* First, an unconverted person cannot and will not do anything; and a converted person cannot do anything without Christ, for God must also work in Him to will and to do as has been shown in the above. It is, however, the duty of both, both being convinced of this. An unconverted person has the illusion that his corruption is not such that he cannot repent when he wills. He imagines that he, indeed, is willing and that it is in his hands (II: 611).

A Christian must be faithful in regard to this spiritual life, so that it will not decline due to his carelessness and listlessness; rather it ought to increase due to his diligence. By God's common influence, one should frequently be able to do much more as far as this life is concerned. Exhortations are intended to revitalize us time and again. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18); "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure"

(Phil. 2:12-13), that is, do not work in your own strength, but rather in dependence upon divine influence--which will time and again precede, and stir up and sustain you, so that your labor will not be in vain. "If ye then be risen with Christ (that is, if you have spiritual life within you, let this life be active), seek those things which are above" (Col. 3:1). To that end it is necessary to exercise faith unto justification and by faith to be exercised with the promises (II: 611-612).

### *True Holiness: A Fruit of Being Exercised with Justification*

All true and pure holiness issues forth from being exercised with justification by faith, and therefore, more than anything else, one must earnestly endeavor to be exercised with this (II: 612).

These divine revelations are the foundation upon which saving faith rests. Since all fullness is to be found in Jesus, and since this fullness is being offered to you personally by this good Jesus, receive Him then as your Jesus with a ready and willing mind, heartily surrender yourself to Him, and entrust your soul entirely to Him in order that by Him you may become a partaker of all the benefits of the covenant. The acts of choosing, receiving, surrendering, and entrusting constitute saving faith. The promises are applicable to a person who is thus engaged. "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John 1:12); "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36); Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (Psa. 2:12) [II: 613].

### *God's Offer of Grace in Christ: The Basis for the Exercise of Faith*

Many are in the dark concerning the exercise of faith and act confusedly in this respect. They make themselves the starting point; they turn to Jesus, they pray for grace by the blood of Jesus, they flee to Him, they take hold of Him, and in this manner they hope that He will as yet receive them and be moved to bestow grace upon them. In themselves these matters are good; however, the correct manner of conduct is lacking here. They seek to move Jesus, whereas they ought to know and believe that Jesus was willing, called them, and offered Himself, saying, "Whosoever will, and whosoever thirsteth, let him come." This offer must be the basis for their liberty to receive Him, and men must make this offer the basis for their assurance--namely, that they, having received Him upon His offer, truly have the forgiveness of sins and are partakers of all the benefits of the covenant.

If you are therefore stirred up to turn away from yourself and to go to Jesus, approach Him upon the basis of the offer of grace; be not hindered by the objections mentioned before, and your goings will become more established (II: 614).

The nature of faith is such that it does not remain with the receiving of Jesus, but presses on to justification and to a life of love and holiness by faith (II: 614).

The pronouncement of this justifying sentence is made in the Word of God by means of all the promises made to believers. The believer seeks out these promises, being convinced that he believes in Jesus and that God has thus made these promises to him, declaring him to be an heir of all those benefits, such as: forgiveness of sins, freedom from curse and condemnation, having God as a reconciled Father, being a child of God, being an heir of God, being a fellowheir of Jesus Christ in eternal glory, etc. The stronger that faith in Christ is, and the greater the measure of clarity is with which the promises made to believers are perceived and in a lively sense are received by faith and applied to the soul, the more clearly the believer will hear the pronouncement of the justifying sentence by the righteous Judge, and the greater the measure of peace and joy will be. The efficacy of justification will, however, be tasted in a most lovely and sweet manner if the Holy Spirit causes the soul to discern her grace, applies the promises to the heart, and says to the soul, "I am thy salvation; thou art Mine; I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (II: 615).

### *The Believer's Need for Daily Justification*

A believing soul is not satisfied with having received Jesus by faith only once, but she does this time and again, both when she has fallen into sin and endeavors to restore the disturbed peace, as well as outside of such a situation. She

is desirous to live continually in union with Christ and to be continually in amazement about, and to rejoice in, the great work of redemption (II: 615).

### *Cross-bearing and the Believer's Use of the Promises*

The great question is: How will one bear the cross in order that he may be sanctified thereby? To this I answer: *by faith in the promises* (II: 617).

In order that God's children would not succumb due to the multitude and variety of bodily and spiritual afflictions, but be sanctified thereby, the Lord has made many promises to them whereby a believer must be exercised in order to be comforted and strengthened (II: 617).

To be led further into the cross, however, and to remain there for a long time, so that one neither sees an opening anywhere nor a means of deliverance--then to remain steadfast in the faith, and to bear the cross courageously (persevering in the ways of the Lord while having a lively hope of eternal glory), that is the work of mature men—work that requires effort (II: 617).

However, do you have love for God? Do you desire to be reconciled with Him and continually live in fellowship with Him? Do you desire to enjoy in Him, through Christ, peace which passes all understanding, and live in humility, meekness, and submission? Is it all your delight, in willing obedience, to live a life pleasing to the Lord? Is it your choice that the Lord be your only and all-sufficient portion, and to delight yourself in the Lord? And do you have eternal life as your objective, and do you lay hold on it? Therefore choose then also the way of the cross, the way of temptations, dark providences, and many perplexities, since that is the Lord's way with His children whom He leads to glory. You must also go the way which Christ has gone. Let all your endeavor not be how to avoid or cast off the cross, but rather, how you may bear it courageously and be comforted in it--yes, bear it joyously. You will do so when you exercise yourself with the promises--then, if not deliverance, the divine consolations will be most precious to you (II: 617-618).

### *How the Promises Are to Be Used*

When considering a promise, one must carefully note to whom the promise is made. To appropriate promises to oneself without having a foundation for doing so is great foolishness and imagination; this will deceive the soul unto her destruction. One must therefore consider the promises in their context. With each promise, one will find a description of the characteristics of the persons to whom they are made. It will then be necessary to examine one's self as to whether these characteristics found within. If yes, then one must come to the express conclusion: "This promise has been made to me by the great, omnipotent, good, and immutable God, and this promise will therefore most certainly be fulfilled in me. I thus conduct myself accordingly with certainty as if I already had the matter." In this manner, one will attain to assurance and glorify God as being true (II: 618).

He who, in reading the Bible, has accumulated numerous promises to be readily available upon becoming subject to a trial has a great advantage (II: 619).

Therefore read your Bible frequently, and accustom yourself to find a promise or an example for every occasion, and you will experience that evil will neither grieve you, cause your faith to waver, nor cause you to be in despair and to be discouraged (II: 619).

Therefore in order that the promises be efficacious, it is needful that the Holy Spirit Himself bring them to mind and reveal that these promises have been made to them, since they have these characteristics. He must furthermore cause them to see the glory of the promises and their certainty, and comfort them thereby (II: 620).

First, seek out a promise which is applicable to your situation. Consider this promise as having been made by the God of truth to His children, and that they will be fulfilled with more certainty than certainty itself. Consider that the behavior of His children (whatever it may be) will not cause God to change and nullify His promises since this given

promise has been made in an absolute sense--as is true for all the promises of the covenant of grace. Their fulfillment is not contingent upon any condition from man's side, even though there are such promises regarding temporal things (as, for example, in Isaiah 1:19-20).

Secondly, consider carefully the characteristics of them to whom the promise is made; they are either expressed in the immediate context of the promise or in the condition. Compare your condition with this in the presence of the Lord and let the Lord and your conscience be the judge as to whether these matters are in you.

Thirdly, immediately look unto the Lord Jesus--be it that you are currently in a frame in which faith is in exercise and you enjoy intimate union with Jesus, or be it that to a greater or lesser extent you are in need of renewing the act of faith--and thus take notice that all promises are yea and amen in Him; that the right to these promises has been merited by Jesus; and that a believer (be he strong or weak) is an heir of them all, and thus also of such and such a promise in particular.

Fourthly, then turn to yourself and to the promises, and consider them as having been made to you--yes, made to you by the immutable God, and that they will be fulfilled for you more certainly than certainty itself. This is the kernel of the matter. However, how rarely one engages himself in this way!

Fifthly, therefore, depend on and adjust your circumstances to this, and rejoice as if you had the matter already, saying, "My God will give it to me at a time when it is most beneficial for me, and with this divine wisdom I am satisfied." Comfort yourself with this when they pertain to cross-bearing, and be exercised with it when they pertain to illumination, spiritual revelations, and strength for sanctification. Keep this promise in view, present it to the Lord, remind Him of the promises, continually lay hold of this promise, and in laying hold of the promise be prayerfully exercised with this while taking hold of the Lord's strength (II: 620-621).

### *Specific Promises for Specific Circumstances*

Are you truly satisfied to be in that condition, or does your soul languish? Are you oppressed and miserable when you think upon God, even though you forget about yourself when you are among people and appear to be in good spirits in your conversation? Do you have what you desire? Are you satisfied? You will have to answer, "No, but what good does that do?" Would the world and its enticements be able to satisfy you if you could have everything according to your wishes? You will answer, "I think not." Why are you then continually so oppressed by your sensitive insensitivity as if you had consumption? Has Jesus departed? Has the Comforter that should comfort your soul departed far from you? Is there no communion with God; is there no way by which you may approach; is there neither life, seeking, nor finding? Perhaps you will answer, "I do perceive this, but the feeling is gone." Let me ask you, "Would it be your desire that the Lord would take the initiative with your soul and reveal Himself to your soul as your God? Is it your desire that the Lord Jesus would make Himself known to you as your ransom and your righteousness? Do you desire that the Lord would say to you, 'I am Thy salvation; thou art Mine and thy sins are forgiven thee; I shall nevertheless save thee'? Is it your desire that the Lord would revive your faith, hope, and love, and quicken you in prayer, thanksgiving, doing battle against sin, and sanctification? Would you then be delighted and be in your element? If you answer: "Yes, that is it; but what good does it do me, for I do not have it? I cannot work for it and I shall not attain to this anyhow, and I therefore give up with a sigh." Do you think that such a frame can proceed from the natural man? Do you not perceive the operation of the Spirit in this? If you were to detect this frame in someone else, you would say to such a person: "Be of good courage, for your insensitivity issues forth from the excessive extent and duration of this painful experience as well as from discouragement; the Lord will indeed return to you." This I also say to you, for it is still true for you, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee" (Psa. 73:25) [II: 624-625].

Lastly, are there then no intermissions? Is not your heart occasionally softened; do you not occasionally pray, weep, and look upward to heaven whether there is grace and Spirit for you? Are you not occasionally enabled to receive Jesus, and do you not occasionally have some comfort and a lively hope? Is not this then evidence that there is life within? Therefore have courage, and once more lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees. To that end consider the following (and similar) promises, and be exercised with them in the manner pointed out to you above. "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15) [II: 626].

Is Jesus absent, and is your soul troubled because your Beloved has departed? Does your soul melt as you think of former times when you were able to pray, weep, wait, yearn, and long; when you were able to lean upon Him in such a delightful manner, when you lost yourself in mutual love and requested everyone neither to disturb nor awake your love until it would please Him; when He kissed you with the kisses of His mouth, His left hand was under your head, He embraced you with His right hand, you were sick with love, and found delight under the shadow of His favor? Do you miss all this? Have numerous sinful and grievous afflictions come in their place? Is your life consumed by sorrow and your years with sighing? Come, and attentively give ear to the promises. "For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul" (Jer. 31:25); "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me...to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isa. 61:1-3); "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Mat. 5:4) [II: 627].

Are you conscious of the power of corruption? Do the lusts of the flesh war against the soul? Are you losing the battle? Do vain imaginations and sinful stirrings of the heart have the upper hand? Does your most besetting sin manifest itself strongly, take you captive, penetrate, and rage furiously? Does it make you despair? Do you think that in your entire lifetime you will not be able to overcome, since your soul is wounded time and again? Does sin rob you of all your liberty before God, and of all your desire and spiritual life? How must you persevere? Consider the following promises: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them" (Ezek. 36:26-27); "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33) [II: 629].

#### *The Use of the Promises in Cross-bearing and unto Sanctification*

These and similar promises have a twofold use. They comfort so that believers with courage and joy may willingly take all manner of crosses upon them, bear them with ease, and assure themselves of an advantageous and glorious outcome. They also have a sanctifying effect, since by faith in the promises one continually lives in the presence of the Lord, acknowledges Him as omnipotent, good, reconciled in Christ Jesus, and true. With quiet trust one depends upon Him and remains steadfast in all that transpires, as seeing Him who is invisible. This is the fountain of pure holiness, and we thus become partakers of the divine nature through the promises. Therefore, whatever your condition may be, take hold of a promise, appropriate this to yourself as having been made to you by the God of truth, present it before the Lord and with humility and boldness beseech Him in Christ Jesus for the fulfillment of this His promise. Then remain focused upon these promises and be exercised with them. Let them be your strength in the battle, since you will most certainly obtain what is promised (II: 629-630).

#### *The Benefits of a Waiting Patiently for the Fulfillment of the Promises*

One is not always capable of receiving the promised matter; rather, the Lord by way of postponement prepares the soul to be able to receive and make use of the promised matter properly (II: 630).

Postponement teaches one to believe without seeing and to acknowledge God as being truthful, even though He does not fulfill the promise as yet (II: 630).

Postponement teaches one to know and acknowledge God as being sovereign and only wise, who makes all things beautiful in His time. To be thus exercised is holiness and God-glorifying (II: 630).

Postponement will humble you, causing you to see your unworthiness and to understand that God will not give it to you for your sake (II: 630).

Postponement causes one to yearn for the Lord; it causes one to wait, to be quiet, and to be content with the present (II: 630).

Postponement makes the soul more grateful when the desired matter arrives, causing the soul to rejoice all the more and to preserve it more carefully (II: 631).

### *Observing the Time and Manner of Fulfillment*

It does not suffice to focus only on the promises, to appropriate them in Christ, and to wait patiently upon the fulfillment. Rather, it is also very necessary and beneficial that you take careful notice when and in which manner a promise is fulfilled, and then subsequently bring to remembrance the previous fulfillment of the promise. Yes, you should record the fulfillment of each promise, along with its specific circumstances, so that you may have a record of them--a record which one ought to read frequently. David gives us an example by saying, "And forget not all His benefits" (Psa. 103:2).

### *The Misapplication of Promises*

There are no promises for the unconverted in the Bible. They deceive themselves, regardless of what promises they may appropriate to themselves. These will not be fulfilled, for they are "without Christ, being...strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope" (Eph. 2:12). Only believers are the "heirs of promise" (Heb. 6:17). All the benefits of the covenant of grace are for them and will most certainly be given them (II: 632-633).

A believer may have inordinate desires for a specific temporal matter of which he has no need in his station of life--be it either that this matter at first suddenly comes to mind, or that, due to circumstances it gradually takes hold of him. The excessive desire for this matter prevents submission and causes him to imagine that he will either be delivered or obtain a matter which he desires excessively, although it has not been promised by God but he has promised himself II: 633).

The outcome is that the matter is not obtained and one must come to the conclusion that he has wrongly applied a promise to himself due to an excessive desire for a given matter (II: 634).

A wise and more advanced Christian is more concerned about the wise and sovereign will of God than about the fulfillment of his desires. In such a frame he prays, believes the promises, and submissively waits upon their fulfillment. To be submissive is not the same as renouncing, devaluing, or nearly abandoning the promises. Rather, it is an enlargement of the promise, since it will be fulfilled in a better and more beneficial way than if our passionate desires were fulfilled. How often there is perplexity upon receiving one's desire, as was true for Israel upon receiving the quails! How frequently we must thank the Lord for not giving us our desire, subsequently perceiving that it would not have been good for us! Therefore, believe the promises, expect their fulfillment, and joyfully leave the time, measure, and manner to the Lord. You will then trust as a child and be established. Take the following text to heart: "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD" (Psa. 107:43) [II: 635].

### *The Christian's Obligation to Walk Godly Among Men*

It is therefore, first of all, necessary that you have and maintain a soul which is pure and undefiled, fully devoted to God, and finds her existence in communion with God. You will then--as was true for Nehemiah--be able to speak with men while simultaneously praying unto God (Neh. 2:4-5). It is with such intent that you must leave the home, and in order to preserve such a condition within, you must pray each time when going out. He who in the solitude of his home is not exercised in continually turning to God, walking with a perfect heart, or acknowledging the Lord in all his ways; who in believing union with the Lord Jesus does not strive to cleanse the heart from world-conformity, vanity, cleaving to sinful lust, and a continual thinking upon vain imaginations; and who does not continually exercise himself to be of a spiritual disposition--such a person, when in the company of and engaged in conversation with others, will not be fit to maintain this good disposition which as yet he has, although he be beset with the corruptions mentioned before. The good frame of heart will readily vanish and you will not have within yourself a fountain bringing forth all manner of spiritual matters to your personal benefit and that of your neighbor. Instead, you will frequently speak of spiritual matters for conversations's sake, doing so, however, without inner warmth and without causing the hearts of others to burn within them. Yes, you will even become engaged in worldly

conversation, and upon arriving home your spiritual frame will have vanished and you will have a restless conscience. Therefore, you must especially endeavor to have a pure heart (II: 636-637).

You know by experience that you cannot depend on man, and yet the love and fear of man so easily creeps in. What is the cause of this? It is self-love and a desire to be esteemed and honored. This begets the fear that you will not conduct yourself wisely enough, as well as a desire to be well-liked. Oh, much that is good is spoiled by this idol, and how much edification is prevented in this way! (II: 637).

If you are in the presence of an unconverted person or with people who espouse an erroneous religion, you must (without affectation, pride and nonverbally) by your manner of speech and the subject matter of your conversation convey that every righteous person is more excellent than his neighbor, that the righteous are of a more excellent spirit, and that there is a distance between them as great as there is between light and darkness, life and death, and the children of God and the children of the world. Along with such a disposition one must manifest humility, self-denial, common love, modesty, and be accommodating, so that in parting from them (you must not be there long--it is not safe there) you will leave behind some conviction in their heart. I am not suggesting that you must always speak of spiritual matters; a wise person will know both time and manner. A Christian may also speak of worldly and civil matters; but then he must be on guard not to do so in a vain manner, but all conversation must be moral, dignified, and in moderation (II: 637-638).

## Chapter 57: Love Toward God

### Love Toward God Defined

Love is the sweet motion of the heart toward God--infused into the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit--whereby they, by virtue of union with Him and in view of His perfections, delight themselves in God, and in a joyous embrace of His will fully surrender themselves to His service (III: 264).

The Holy Spirit, igniting love *in the hearts of God's children*, operates in harmony with man's nature. Man cannot love what he does not know and his love cannot go beyond that which he knows. The Holy Spirit thus also works this love by the medium of knowledge. God gives enlightened eyes of understanding to His children. He reveals Himself to them, they know His perfections, and the love of God is thus ignited in them. "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8); "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Mat. 22:37) [III: 265].

To love God is a privilege of the elect. They, as others, were the children of wrath. However, God draws them out of the state of sin, gives them life and a child-like disposition, *and thus also a loving heart*. Since they are born of God, and since God is love, their nature resembles the nature of their heavenly Father, and they love Him. Their intellect, will, and affections have not only been rendered capable, but they are also active in love toward God. It is not sufficient for them to nourish love within, but they are active in manifesting this with their tongue, eye, and the entire body. They are thus known as lovers of God and are therefore also referred to as "those that love." Ye that love the LORD, hate evil" (Psa. 97:10); "They that love His Name shall dwell therein" (Psa. 69:36) [III: 266].

### The Deeds Whereby Love Toward God Is Manifested

Wherever there is love toward God in the heart, God will first of all be *esteemed* and exalted exceedingly far above all that exists, this being true not only as far as judgment is concerned, but also with the entire will. Whatever is glorious, adorable, and eminent vanishes before the glory of God, and in esteem for that glory one will say with full acquiescence, "Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty" (1 Chr. 29:11) [III: 266].

Secondly, there is *joy* in love. If the soul is permitted to have an intimate view of God, she cannot mourn, but that view rejoices the heart so that all reason for sorrow disappears (III: 266).

Thirdly, there is *reverence* in love. If the soul in a loving disposition lifts herself up to the Lord, the glory of the Lord will illuminate her in such a measure that she dares not look unto the Lord with uplifted eyes, but she will bow down and be astonished that she is permitted to love the Lord (III: 266).

Fourthly, love is *active*. Love motivates the seeking of communion, and the soul is intent upon this. It searches out all opportunities to draw near, and brings herself into the presence of the Lord, so that the Lord might cast an eye upon her and look upon her, and that she might also see Him (III: 267).

Fifthly, where there is love, there is *delight in the enjoyment of this love*. When the soul is near to God and can delight herself in mutual love, she can miss everything; she will then be well satisfied (III: 267).

Sixthly, where there is love, there will be *grief* over absence and being at a distance. A loving soul will readily perceive if she is near or afar off. This will immediately trouble her (III: 267).

Seventhly, where there is love, there is *willing obedience*. There will be joy if one may render a service to the loved one, in doing something in which the loved one finds delight. Such is also the case here. If we love God, then we will also find delight in His will (III: 268).

Eighthly, where there is love, *the objects of love and hatred will be identical*. The enemies of the one will also be the enemies of the other, and the friends of the one will also be the friends of the other (III: 268).

Ninthly, where there is love, one will *sacrifice everything for the loved one*. Such is also the case here; he who loves God will readily surrender to God all that he has (III: 268).

Tenthly, love cannot be satisfied unless there be *a most intimate and perfect union* (III: 268).

#### Indications of the Absence of Love Toward God

Now consider these three matters together and draw a conclusion. "He who is without the nature and the deeds of love toward God, loves the world, and lives in self-love, does not love God. However, I am without the nature and the deeds of love toward God. I love the world and I am completely wrapped up in self-love; I therefore do not love God" (III: 270).

#### The Wretched Condition of Those who Do not Love God

However, you who are lovers of God and who have read attentively what I have said concerning the nature and deeds of love, examine your heart relative to this. Did not your heart approve of all this and did it not receive a desire for the love of God? Did not your heart become convinced that you truly love God, even though this love is still very small and imperfect? Rejoice therefore in this most precious gift, for it is not due to the goodness of your nature that you have begun to love God. It has been given to you out of grace and it has been bestowed upon you due to God's love for you. It is an evidence that God has known you from eternity. "But if any man love God, the same is known of Him" (1 Cor. 8:3) [III: 272].

#### Believers Stirred up to Love Toward God

If there is then a small beginning of the love of God in you, stir it up, so that the spark may become a flame. You, who grieve that you love the Lord so little and desire with your whole heart to love Him more, hear and permit your soul to be instructed regarding the love of God.

First, love is the purest of all virtues and no virtue is comparable to it--yes, a virtue is no virtue if it does not derive its luster from this virtue. We never resemble God so much as in love, for "God is love" (1 John 4:8). He who loves is a partaker of the divine nature (III: 272).

Thirdly, believers, the infinite God who is the eternal Love, loves you! "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3); "For the Father Himself loveth you" (John 16:27); "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us" (Eph. 2:4). The sun cannot shine upon a mirror or it will reflect, nor upon some polished metal, or it becomes warm and reflects warmth in return. Can a man resist the love of Him who is most lovely and adorable, and who desires to be loved in return, without love being activated? Would not then the love of

God toward you--the God in whom you believe--having indeed seen and tasted a small ray of that love, set your hearts aflame with that love? "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19) [III: 273].

Sixthly, love is holiness and begets holiness--which believers long for and desire so strongly. Love preserves a believer in communion with God. "And he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16). This is not only a sweet, but also a holy and sanctifying disposition. Love teaches what the duty is, stirs up to the duty, and guides in the execution of the duty. Without love the very best deed is deficient (1 Cor. 13:2). Instead, all must transpire in love. "...that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4) [III: 274].

### *Believers to Abstain from that Which Hinders an Increase in Love*

You therefore who delight to walk in the love of God, henceforth abstain from that which until now has hindered you from increasing and from breaking forth in love (Isa. 54:3). These hindrances are the following: *ignorance; partial love; infrequent communion with God; unbelief; fearfulness* (III: 276).

## **Chapter 58: Love Toward Jesus Christ**

### *Jesus Christ: The Object of Love Revealed in the Gospel*

The Lord Jesus has few who love Him in the world. He would have more if He willed to have more, but He deems most of them not worthy of this. It is a great privilege and grace for the few who have been granted to love Him--and those who love Him, love Him so much that they will even give their life for Him. They will love Him until their death and to all eternity (III: 277).

### *The Grievous Sin of Being Acquainted with Jesus and yet not Loving Him*

Many know Jesus according to the letter, but not internally by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, such also have no love for Him. They do desire Him as a servant to protect them from hell and to help them get into heaven--of which they also have no correct perceptions. Beyond that they have no use for Him. There is no entering into covenant with Him, no surrendering to Him, no receiving of Him by faith unto justification and sanctification, no heart-union, and no exercising of fellowship with Him. They are neither acquainted with His presence nor with His absence. They are satisfied if they are but good church-members, partake of the Lord's Supper, live honestly, and have the illusion that they will be saved. On that basis they proceed--even though Jesus remains a stranger to them, remaining outside of their heart and thoughts. Since you are acquainted with human love, you will thus perceive that you have no love to Jesus, whom you ought to love more vehemently than men. You may say that you love Jesus. But then I ask you, "How is this evident? Is there esteem and reverence for Him? Do you grieve and long for Him? Do you endeavor to live in immediate union with Him? Is there a resemblance between your nature and His? Are you obedient and do you keep His commandments? Is there love for the most eminent among the godly? Is there an aversion toward the unconverted, of whom we have dealt with in the above, and of whom you yourself are convinced? If you consider your love toward men, and apply this to love toward Christ, then you must be convinced that you do not love Jesus--whatever good thought you may also have concerning yourself" (III: 278-279).

### *The Wretched Condition of Those who Do not Love Jesus*

All who do not love Jesus, focus for a moment upon your wretched condition. You can first of all be convinced by the Word of God that it is impossible to be saved without faith. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). To be disobedient to the Son is not to believe in Him; it is contrasted with believing in the Son. "...but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). You do not believe in the Son, even though you believe that He is who He is, and that He is a Savior for all believers. For you do not love Him and wherever there is no love, there is also no faith--"faith which worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6). Faith without works is dead (James 2:26). If you do not wilfully want to deceive yourself, then you must pronounce the sentence of not being saved upon yourself (III: 279).

Thirdly, you who do not love Jesus are the most cursed creature under the sun. Listen to the following passage, and make application to yourself--a passage which cannot be read without terror: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema (= accursed) Maranatha" (1 Cor. 16:22). It is the greatest curse imaginable. Not only

will this curse come upon such, but they themselves will be the curse, and therefore "shall be an abhorring unto all flesh" (Isa. 66:24). You will eternally be in that condition if you do not repent in this life. You will experience what is written in Luke 19:27: "But those Mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before Me." Oh, that the terror of the Lord would persuade you to believe! (III: 280).

### *Impediments to an Assurance of a Love for Jesus*

As wretched as those are who do not love Jesus, so blessed are they who do love Him. He who does not love Jesus, readily imagines that he loves Jesus, but he who loves Jesus in truth frequently fears that he does not love Him. Such a person finds two reasons within himself causing him to have such suspicion about himself: He does not feel the sweet motions toward Jesus which, in his opinion, ought always to be inherent in love. Furthermore, if he loved Jesus, he would be more obedient to Him and live a holier life.

Such ought to know first of all, that the probability of love being present is very great if one is so suspicious of his conduct. If this is accompanied with a desire to love Him, and if there is grief that he does not love Him; if this does not only issue forth out of a fear for the judgment which will come upon those who do not love Him, and a desire to be saved (thus desiring love as but a means to acquire something); but if these concerns issue forth and are accompanied with the desire to love Jesus--since one delights in the act itself of loving Him--then there is not only a probability, but there is proof that one loves Jesus. It is natural for upright souls to distrust themselves if they do not clearly perceive a matter within themselves. Such is the conduct of God's children. "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa. 139:23-24) [III: 280-281].

### *Marks of Love for Jesus*

Fourthly, what is the reason for your sorrow? What is the focus of your yearning? When are things well with you? Is it when you earn a profit, are loved by many, and have success in everything according to your wishes? Is your answer, "No, but in the midst of prosperity I do become sorrowful if I think that my Jesus has departed. If I hear or see someone who loves Jesus, my heart is overwhelmed, my tears quietly run down my cheeks, I lift my eyes upward toward Jesus, and I sigh, "Where may my faithful, sweet, and beloved Jesus be? Why does He tarry so long?" He is my love, my joy, my life, my rest, my all, and I can no longer live in estrangement from Him. Oh, that He would turn to me, visit me, kiss me with the kisses of His mouth, and ignite my love by His love! How I would then delight myself, and how I would sit under the canopy of His overshadowing love! I would become drunk with love. And if He refreshes me with His presence, the earth is too low and the world too small for me. My soul then wishes to be delivered from this and I must be in heaven. Then I long to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Here soul and body are too weak to endure the influences of love; here Jesus departs again; after light comes darkness; and after warmth coldness. Therefore, oh blessed eternity! Oh, to be eternally with Jesus!" (III: 283).

### *The Blessedness of Those who Love Jesus*

How blessed are you who love Jesus, for God loves you! "He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father" (John 14:21); "For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me" (John 16:27). The Lord Jesus loves you: "He that loveth Me...I will love him" (John 14:21). If you are loved by God and the Lord Jesus, they will do everything to you which issues forth from eternal love. Would God then not behold the beloved of His soul, deliver them from all that would harm them, and provide for them in all their necessities? "Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: and Thy glory above all the earth; that Thy beloved may be delivered: save with Thy right hand" (Psa. 108:5-6); "For so He giveth His beloved sleep" (Psa. 127:2) [III: 284-285].

### *Exhortations to Increase in Love Toward Jesus*

Love begets love. Jesus, however, loves you with the greatest love imaginable. Since He is love, He can therefore love those that are not loveable, and delight Himself in blessing His beloved ones. His love toward you is an eternal love, and thus without beginning and without end; it is a most intimate and vehement love. Meditate for a moment upon all in which he manifests His love toward you.

- (1) He came into the world for your sake.
- (2) How He has been despised and what griefs He has borne!

- (3) You are still bound upon His heart.
- (4) Consider in what a lovely manner He has drawn you to Himself.
- (5) How frequently He has spoken to your heart!
- (6) He will at last bring you unto Himself into heaven in order that you may be eternally with Him (III: 286-287).

### Guards Against all that Impedes the Exercise of Love Toward Jesus

Henceforth be diligent in maintaining, increasing, and frequently stirring up this love. To that end you must be on guard for some matters, and despise others.

First of all, be on guard against *ignorance*.

Secondly, be on guard against *partial love*.

Thirdly, be on guard against a *lack of fellowship*.

Fourthly, be on guard against *unbelief*.

Fifthly, be on guard against *willful sins*.

Sixthly, be on guard against *fearfulness*, that is, to be in some measure ashamed to confess Him (III: 288-290).

## **Chapter 59: The Fear of God**

### Two Kinds of Fear: Slavish and Filial Fear

Relative to this fear, a distinction is made between slavish and filial fear. *Slavish fear* causes a slave to do the will of his master for fear of being hit. Such slavish fear of God is better than a stubborn and insensitive despising of God and His judgments. It is useful if someone is brought to repentance by this (cf. Mat. 3:7; Amos 4:12). Someone who is presently converted need not be concerned whether or not his conversion is genuine, because he was driven to Christ out of fear for damnation rather than love to God, for we have shown that we must cherish our well-being and fear that which is evil for us--this compelling us to repentance (III: 292).

### The Definition and Nature of Filial Fear

Filial fear is a holy inclination of the heart, generated by God in the hearts of His children, whereby they, out of reverence for God, take careful pains not to displease God, and earnestly endeavor to please Him in all things (III: 293).

Filial fear is engendered by *reverence for God*. God is the object of this fear. "O fear the LORD, ye His saints" (Psa. 34:9). God is eminent, glorious, and majestic within Himself--also if there were no creatures. "Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty" (1 Chr. 29:11) [III: 294].

Reverence for God engenders in God's children *a careful guarding against displeasing God* by disobedience and the commission of sins, and a being *active to please Him in all things*. Solomon frequently presents these manifestations of the fear of God in his proverbs. "Fear the LORD, and depart from evil" (Prov. 3:7); "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil" (Prov. 8:13); "By the fear of the LORD men depart from evil" (Prov. 16:6). We also read this in Jeremiah 32:40: "I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me." We read furthermore: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7); "The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death" (Prov. 14:27). This is the nature of the fear of God (III: 295).

### Exhortation with the Intent to Convince Those who Do not Fear God

And what about you? Examine yourself. What will you answer upon the question, "Do you fear God?" Is your focus in your walk of life upon the Lord? Does reverence for His majesty arise within when you think about Him, speak of Him, or hear mention made of Him? Do you reverently bow before Him, and do you tremble if you are about to address Him in prayer? If a sinful thought or motion arises within you, does the fear of God motivate you to suppress it? Does the fear of God prevent you from all sinful association with men, fornication, unrighteousness, lies, backbiting, cursing, wrath, and other sins? Does reverence for God motivate and urge you to the practice of religion and to do whatever the Lord has enjoined you to do as being pleasing unto Him? Or do you love the things of this world? Are all your concerns related to the acquisition and preservation of these things? Do you look to

people as if they were able to give or withhold them from you? Do you seek to please them even if it displeases God, and are they the measure of your fear? (III: 295-296).

### *The Serious Consequences of Being Void of the Fear of God*

Be assured that if you continue on without fear for the Lord--even though you may peacefully approach your end--the terror of the Lord will at last come upon you. When you will be forsaken by everything, the Lord will be a terror to you and strike terror into you. Oh, how many are there who breathe their last breath with consternation and full of terror! Remember Belshazzar, and consider that you will likewise experience this. "Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another" (Dan. 5:6). In that condition he departed from life (III: 296-297).

### *The Fear of God in Believers*

We will now turn to you, believers. You will indeed observe your deficiency in this, but you will also be able to perceive that the Lord has put the principle of His fear within you.

- (1) Do not you desire that disposition of the fear of God as we have described it in the foregoing?
- (2) Do you not perceive heart-felt intentions and initiatives to walk in the fear of the Lord?
- (3) Is your desire for the fear of God entirely impotent and your prayer entirely fruitless, or do you perceive the principles of it in your actions? (III: 297-298).

### *Believers Rebuked*

We are to be severely reprimanded, if, knowing that God is majestic, having experienced how good it is to humbly walk with the Majestic One, and knowing how invigorating it is to walk in the way of uprightness, we nevertheless neglect to thus focus upon the Lord and fear Him continually. This makes us vulnerable to all manner of sin. When the doorkeeper sleeps with the door wide open, every lust can then enter and exit without any impediment--and even if we are aware of this, there is nevertheless no strength to oppose this and we are overcome before realizing it. If then, with Samson, we wish to offer resistance, we will have lost our strength (III: 298).

The third sin committed against the fear of God is *to fear man*--a sin to which the godly are still vulnerable.... This is a dreadful sin, for first of all God has forbidden it. "Fear not them which kill the body" (Mat. 10:28); "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die" (Isa. 51:12). Secondly, it is the greatest act of contempt toward God if He must yield to man for you. It is idolatry and a sin of the heathen. "Who...worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). Thirdly, it is a denial of the providence of God--as if God did not reign; as if the creature could function independently. Fourthly, it affects and troubles you continually. Fifthly, it cause you to fall from one sin into the next, and you ought therefore to be ashamed over your previous fear of man. Be warned and give heed to the exhortation of the Lord: "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Isa. 2:22). Follow David in his noble courage. "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Psa. 118:6) [III: 299-300).

### *Incentives for the Fear of God*

It is not sufficient to be on guard against the sins which are contrary to the fear of God; rather, it is our great duty to conquer them all by the fear of God. The livelier the fear of God is, the less sin will have any effect. Therefore in the future commit yourself fully to tenderly fear the Lord your God in order that the fear of God may guard you and direct your thoughts, words, and deeds. Oh, if only I could make you more lively in this. Give careful attention to the following incentives; may you be tender and pliable (III: 300).

The Lord has pleasure in those that fear Him. It ought to be a very precious matter to us that God is pleased with us. It ought to be our great desire and earnest endeavor to be pleasing to the Lord. God is, however, pleased with the fear of God, for therein the acknowledgement and the glorification of His perfections coalesce. "The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear Him" (Psa. 147:11). How lovely it is when man delights himself in God and when God finds pleasure in man! (III: 301).

## Chapter 60:

Obedience is the willing subjection of God's child to God, as Lord and Father in Christ, in order to comply with His commands (III: 303).

### The Object and Subjects of Obedience

*The object is God.* All that obligates us to obedience and all that can incite us thereto is to be found in God. He is the First, and the One who alone is majestic, glorious, and holy. He is the Creator from whom man originates and through whom he exists in his motions. He is the One who is worthy to be obeyed and the only Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. Every man is obligated toward obedience by virtue of the nature of God and of his own position relative to Him. That obligation is upon everyone and is acknowledged and subscribed to by everyone--even by the heathen. God requires it from His people in Scripture. This is not so because God has need to be served by man's hands, but because He is worthy, human nature mandates it, and it constitutes the well-being and felicity of man (III: 303-304).

### The Nature, Goal, and Manner of Obedience

However, the man who has been born again and has received a new nature, does not only know and acknowledge the fact that he is naturally subject to God, but he willingly subjects himself to God, renders himself available to Him for service, and says with David, "O LORD, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant" (Psa. 116:16). He surrenders himself with his entire heart. "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom. 6:17) [III: 304-305].

*The manner of obedience consists in willingness; obedience is a willing subjection.* It neither grieves the obedient person nor is it a grievous burden to him that he is subject to God even in a natural sense. He would never desire not to be subject to God--yes, even if he were free, even if it were his choice whether to be subject and be obedient to God, he would out of love subject Himself and fully surrender himself to God in order to be obedient to the Lord in all things. He therefore willingly embraces his subjection and is determined to obey the Lord on a completely volitional basis. "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land" (Isa. 1:19). This willing disposition consists in... (III: 306-307).

### A Convicting Question: Are We Obedient Toward God?

Therefore, examine yourself attentively. Do you submit yourself to the Lord? Are you acquainted with the Lord's majesty and His worthiness to be obeyed? Do you know of conscious transactions with Christ as Surety and Mediator, thus to be reconciled with God by His suffering and death, and as a child to serve Him as a Father in filial love? Do you render yourself available to the Lord's service in all things--doing so with a heartfelt willingness? And how do you fare relative the performance of your duty? Is there consistency, tender carefulness, and zeal? Does all this manifest itself? If you wish to deal uprightly with yourself, you will perceive whether there is true obedience to be found with you (III: 308).

### A Reprimand for the Disobedient

First, all of you who do not manifest the nature of obedience as delineated above, all your deeds, however good you may esteem them to be, are but apples of Sodom and grapes of Gomorrah. They are but splendid sins, which have an appearance of being good--however, not in truth (III: 308).

For the disobedient, nothing remains but eternal destruction. That will be their end, as it was the end of the disobedient first world (1 Pet. 3:20). Know therefore and consider that it is an evil and bitter thing for you to have forsaken the Lord your God--and if the becoming nature of obedience and the majestic glory of God cannot move you to obedience, then permit the fear for God's wrath and judgments to do so (III: 311).

### A Reprimand for God's Children

There can be a *resistance toward obedience*. At times disobedience manifests itself in a more powerful and sinful manner. The desire to commit a sin can at times be so strong that the sin breaks through, even when the obedient

heart manifests itself, and, while not striving much against it due to weakness, it nevertheless groans under it. It can even go so far that for a long time a believer goes about with a disturbed heart, and cannot come to a lively, earnest, and perfect intention and determination to fully and permanently abstain from that sin. Sometimes it even goes further, so that the will, for a time, seems to dominate (III: 312).

### An Exhortation to Obedience

Obedience is a very sweet work. The Lord does not impose a hard service upon His children, nor does He cause them to serve Him with hardness. "His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3); "For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Mat. 11:30); "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12); "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the ways of them" (Psa. 84:5). They are smooth and delightful ways. "Great peace have they which love Thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psa. 119:165); "It is joy to the just to do judgment" (Prov. 21:15). Your own heart chooses this way, and you yourself find delight in it. What Paul says of himself, you say likewise: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). Therefore lift up your heart in the ways of the Lord, embrace the will of God, and incline it toward obedience, for "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Prov. 3:17); "Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble" (Prov. 3:23) [III: 313].

## **Chapter 61: Hope in God**

Hope is a propensity infused by God into the hearts of believers by means of the Word, whereby they patiently, actively, and with assurance anticipate future promised benefits (III: 318).

### The Nature of Hope

*The nature* of hope consists in a *sure expectation*. Hope is not the equivalent of possession; whatever one possesses, one cannot hope for. "Hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" (Rom. 8:24). Hope expects and anticipates that which has not been observed as yet, is not yet present, but which is yet to come. "But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:25). The apostle therefore conjoins expecting and hoping--the latter explaining the former. "According to my earnest expectation and my hope..." (Phil. 1:20) [III: 318].

The object of hope consists in the promised or future benefits. God Himself is the supreme good and the complete felicity of man. In the covenant, God promises Himself to believers and God is thus the object of hope. God is, however, also the Promisor and Giver of all salvation to His children, and He is thus once more the object of hope. Those who exercise hope look to Him, expect from Him, and rest in Him as the One who is good, true, immutable, and omnipotent. "Hope thou in God" (Psa. 42:5); "And have hope toward God" (Acts 24:15). He is therefore called "the hope of Israel" (Jer. 14:8) [III: 319].

### The Objects of Hope

Hope has as one of its objects *eternal felicity*. Hope is a "hope of salvation" (1 Th. 5:8); "The hope which is laid up for you in heaven" (Col. 1:5); "...hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2); and the hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2)... He cannot be at peace unless he is assured of his eternal felicity. God promises this to believers and they must hold this before them as the goal to be attained, and therefore strive and reach out for it. Since God promises salvation, they must hope for, anticipate, and expect it with assurance. That will engender comfort and a zeal for godliness (III: 321).

Hope focuses *upon promised benefits*. Where there is no promise there can also be no hope; and if there are promises, there can likewise be no hope unless these promises have been made unto us. Only believers are heirs of the promise and therefore they alone are able to hope. When Scripture therefore speaks of hope, it simultaneously speaks of promises, and it is thus called "the hope of the promise" (Acts 26:6); "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2). The heathen are therefore said to be *without hope*, due to being "strangers from the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:12) [III: 321].

To the object of hope we join the *subjects* of hope--who are the children of God. An unconverted person has no basis for hope, since there is no promise for him whatsoever. Furthermore, being dead, he can also not bring forth the deeds of life. To have hope is the privilege of God's children only (III: 322).

### *The Cause and Means of the Exercise of Hope*

*The cause* of the exercise of hope is God alone. God promises the matters: "And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life" (1 John 2:25). God gives the matter which is hoped for and has been promised: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8) [III: 322].

*The means* is the Word. In the Word, God presents the matter in its beauty and preciousness. In the Word, He presents the Mediator by whom the promised matters have been merited, and by the Word God works faith in the Savior--and by faith hope is wrought in us (III: 322).

### *Patience: The Adjunct and Result of Hope*

Hope has as its *adjunct* patience. There is much time, much cross-bearing, and much strife between promise and possession. Then hope comes and shows the glory of the benefits and the certainty of becoming a partaker of them. This is followed by patience, which supports hope so that it does not succumb due to tribulations, the latter being the way in which God leads to the possession of the promised matter. Since there is no other way, and since we must either let go of the benefits and forego them, or along with the end must simultaneously choose the way, hope becomes thereby thus a *patient expectation* (III: 323).

The *result* of hope is holy industry. Hope neither causes us to be inactive nor will it tolerate occupation with other things; instead, it engenders holy industry to attain the end in the right way.... This is conveyed by the following exhortations: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24); "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1) [III: 324].

### *A Call to Serious Self-Examination*

You, therefore, having been convinced by a three-fold variety of questions that you do not have a true hope, consider how wretched you are, for there is not a single promise to be found for you in the Bible--there is not one whereby you can comfort yourself. Rather, all the threatenings and all the curses recorded in the Word of God are applicable to you. They will become a reality for you if you do not repent. Hear for a moment what the Lord says concerning your hope. "The hypocrite's hope shall perish: whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web" (Job 8:13-14). It is indeed woven together, but it is the weakest structure there is. When removed by either the wind or a mop, it lies there--fully undone. "But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost" (Job 11:20). What will it avail you that you have deceived yourself with an imaginary hope if you find yourself to be excluded? Therefore, awake and repent (III: 326).

### *The Godly Rebuked and Exhorted*

The godly are also to be rebuked for the feebleness with which they exercise hope. For they have reason to hope, and the principle of hope is already within them--something they ought to be convinced of in answering the three questions presented above. Yes, it is a great error that they are more engaged in striving against their hope than to stir it up--as if they had only then accomplished something when saying, "My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD" (Lam. 3:18). All promises have been made to you. Why do you not acknowledge this to be so, being judgmentally convinced that it is true within--the Word of God being the judge here? How is it possible that the heirs of the promises have so little dealings with them, and so rarely strive for possession of, hope in, and longingly and joyfully expect the fulfillment of the promises? (III: 326-327).

Hope is a strong consolation in cross-bearing, and in all the tribulations of this life; in all things it causes to focus to be upon the promised benefits. "So shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these

words" (1 Th. 4:17-18). The person who exercises hope will adduce the following proof: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Hope perceives the profit of tribulations and the glory which will follow it. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17) [III: 329].

Hope sanctifies the soul. The imagination and the wish leave the work undone, but a sure hope stimulates activity. Since the matters hoped for are spiritual and holy, they thus also sanctify the person exercising hope. This is all the more so since the way in which God leads His children to glory is the way of holiness. This is to be observed in 1 John 3:3: "And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." Hope in and of itself is precious, and it is furthermore precious since it engenders courage, joy, and holiness (III: 329).

Seventhly, in addition to all--this being the most eminent virtue--hope glorifies God and it glorifies the Lord Jesus (III: 329-330).

Therefore, all who desire to glorify God, be active to exercise hope continually. Be continually engaged in seeking for all manner of promises in the Word of God, appropriating them to yourself, and relying upon them. Do not cease to pray that the Lord may cause you to hope. Stir up others, and let the exhortation of others to hope steadfastly, find entrance into your hearts. While you are thus engaged, you will experience that your hope will not make you ashamed, but that you, upon patiently anticipating their fulfillment, will most certainly become a partaker of these blessings at the appointed time (III: 330).

## **Lecture #9: Brakel on Biblical Spirituality II** (chaps. 62-66)

### **Chapter 62: Spiritual Strength or Courage**

Spiritual strength is an undaunted steadfastness of heart, given by God to His children, whereby they, while entertaining a lively hope of acquiring the promised benefits, overcome the fear for all danger and opposition, unyieldingly engage in warfare, and courageously persevere in obedience toward God (III: 331).

*Both object and goal are identical here.* Spiritual strength relates to the good that is to be acquired and the evil that is to be overcome. God promises many benefits to His own according to body and soul, doing so, however, upon the condition that they will be acquired via the means commanded and ordained by God. The spiritually valiant person is acquainted with them, loves them, believes the promise, and anticipates them in hope. With this perspective he initiates his endeavor, follows after it, and seeks to apprehend it. In this work much is encountered to resist it: loss of honor, possessions, and even life. One will encounter, shame, contempt, ridicule, hatred, opposition from every perspective, poverty, illness, and all manner of adversity. All of that has the potential to engender fear, and through fear to cause either the full or partial cessation of the endeavor. Spiritual courage will not yield, however, but will persevere all the more vehemently. It cannot be moved by anything; and it does not even count life dear (Acts 20:24) [III: 332].

#### *The Essence of Spiritual Strength*

*The integral essence of spiritual strength consists in a valiant steadfastness of heart.* This in turn consists, first of all, in there being a *lively hope*. The benefits hoped for are so desirable that they can endure all that is uncomfortable. Hope in the faithfulness and truthfulness of the promising God makes acquisition such a steadfast and unquestionable fact, that the stronger the believer is in this respect, the stronger his courage will be (III: 333).

#### *The Origin of Spiritual Strength*

*The origin of this strength is God.* "He shall strengthen your heart" (Psa. 31:24); "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength" (Isa. 40:29).

First, God grants a clear vision of the glory of the end to be attained, that is, of the benefits to be acquired. He presents the acquisition of them as being a certain and immovable fact. The clearer the intellect perceives the end in view and the more powerfully the heart is assured of its certainty, the greater spiritual strength will be and the more fervent its manifestation will be. Observe this in the Lord Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). Observe this also in Moses, who esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:26) [III: 334].

Secondly, God assures the soul of His help and support, and impresses upon the heart His promise relative to this. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness" (Isa. 41:10) [III: 334].

Thirdly, the Lord shows the limitations, insignificance, and impotence of all that opposes (III: 334).

Fourthly, the Lord shows them the goodness and righteousness of the matter which they are undertaking--showing them that He has commanded them to do so and that it is not their cause but His (III: 335).

Fifthly, the Lord shows them the ungodliness and the unrighteousness of those who oppress them (III: 335).

Sixthly, the Lord shows them the help which He has previously afforded them--both according to body and soul (III: 335).

Seventhly, the Lord comforts the soul engaged in warfare by inwardly assuring her of His grace. It is as if He says to her, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (III: 336).

### *The Effect of Spiritual Courage*

*The effect of spiritual courage is a courageous prevailing in the battle and a courageous perseverance in obedience toward God.* That competence or propensity which never translates into deeds is useless. God has given His children grace for that very purpose--not that it would remain dormant and concealed within them, but in order that they would labor with it (III: 336-337).

First, *the believer perseveres in the battle.* A Christian must continually be in armour, for he is in the church militant. The enemies, the devil, the world, and the flesh are continually active and continually make assault upon his life. He must therefore continually be active in resisting them. The command is: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke 13:24); "Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3); "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 6:12) [III: 337].

He does what the Lord wills him to do, and externally he manifests himself to be a Christian by his deeds. He does what needs to be done and says what needs to be said. He is not disturbed by the barking of those dogs and lets them know this. He courageously proceeds and causes them to yield, saying with David, "Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God" (Psa. 119:115). Such is the nature of spiritual courage (III: 338).

### *The Godly Rebuked for their Deficient Strength*

"And fear not them which kill the body" (Mat. 10:28); "Fear not, little flock" (Luke 12:32); "Why are ye fearful" (Mat. 8:26); "Be careful for nothing" (Phil. 4:6). In spite of such truths, we tremble and shudder for the present, and mostly for the future. This fear robs us of courage, hinders us in our duty, and draws us away to that which is not becoming. Where the spiritually courageous person overcomes fear, we who ought to be courageous will be overcome by fear. We allow ourselves to be abused by the enemy, and the heroes perish in the battle. Where is this bold steadfastness? (III: 341).

### *Exhortation to be Courageous*

The crown of glory must be worth so much to you, so precious must spiritual life and fellowship with God be to you, and such pleasure you must find in the will of God, that you will be willing to battle valiantly all the days of your life. Do not let this weigh heavy upon your heart, thinking, "Must I be in arms and engage in warfare my entire life? Must there be such an exertion of strength my entire lifetime? That is indeed a distasteful way and there is no way whereby I will persevere." Yes, heaven must be that precious to you; or else you must relinquish it (III: 342).

Would you then allow yourself to be conquered by the devil, a despicable citizen of the world, or a vile corruption? A king is too noble to allow himself to be captured by an insignificant soldier. You ought therefore also to be courageous in a manner commensurate with your spiritual state and not yield to the despicable enemy. Do not forget your nobility, lest you bring shame upon your ancestry (III: 343).

Conduct yourself as the armor-bearer of Jonathan, who followed him and, coming behind him, killed the enemies. Follow the Lord Jesus likewise, for He goes before you and slays the enemies before you. You may then push them toward Him. Therefore, be courageous in the battle and the victory over such enemies will be sure (III: 344).

Seventhly, reflect upon those who have engaged in battle before you and consider how blessed the outcome has been for them. They are now crowned as conquerors--as is to be observed in the register of the heroes of faith-- Hebrews 11. "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience...Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord (James 5:10-11). Consider Paul: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Consider other believers who live with you--how each of them battles according to his strength. Should all of that not arouse your courage? He who therefore may behold such a

King, may be in such a magnificent army, and is surrounded by so many valiant heroes who have each decided to give their life for the Lord Jesus and to battle unto death--should he not battle courageously? (III: 344-345).

### God's Promises for Courageous Warriors

Eighthly, take seriously to heart the promises which God has promised to courageous warriors. God will sustain you while you are engaged in battle. "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart" (Psa. 27:14) [III: 345].

### Final Directions for this Warfare

First, arm yourself therefore from head to toe. Paul teaches us what these weapons are. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:13-18) [III: 346].

Thirdly, in this warfare,

- (1) Exercise *caution*, and do not go beyond the boundaries of your calling.
- (2) *Flee from those opportunities* from which you are permitted to flee, and especially those by which you have frequently been entrapped.
- (3) *Be especially opposed to the sin* which you are most inclined to commit, toward which your nature is most inclined, and which is related to your calling.
- (4) Always take refuge to Christ, for He is a sun and a shield (Psa. 84:11)
- (5) *Be continually engaged in prayer*, for all your strength must come from the Lord--and God, when He is to do something, wants to be inquired of. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (Mat. 26:41) [III: 346-347].

## **Chapter 63: Profession of the Truth**

Profession of the truth is the unwavering witness--in word and deed--of the truth of God as it is revealed, acknowledged, and believed--a truth which leads man unto salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. This profession is to the glory of God and the salvation of our neighbor (III: 349).

Christ is the marrow of this truth. The truth reveals Christ as to who He is in His Person; who He is in His divine and human natures and in His offices of Prophet, Priest, and King; and who He is in His states of humiliation (that is, His suffering and death and its efficacy unto reconciliation and the meriting of salvation for the elect) and exaltation: His resurrection, ascension, sitting at the right hand of God, and coming to judgment. This Jesus is the object of confession (III: 350).

Profession of the truth does not only require that we bear witness to the truth that Christ is the only way of salvation, but it is also a declaration of our faith in Him and of our hope upon Him. "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?" (Acts 26:27). This profession is therefore called "the profession of our faith" (Heb. 10:23). The apostle confirms this: "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15) [III: 351].

### Profession of the Truth Is in Word and Deed

We profess the truth with deeds if we:

- (1) publicly join ourselves to the true church and perseveres in fellowship with her;
- (2) display the image of the Lord Jesus in a holy walk and if Christ is formed in us (Gal. 4:19), and if we bear the image of the heavenly Adam (1 Cor. 15:49).
- (3) endure all suffering for the sake of the truth of Christ.... When a true Christian manifests himself as he is, he will become the focus of everyone's opposition. All who are thus inclined, according to their power, will persecute him

with heart and deeds, and will not rest until he is out of the way. If someone conducts himself faithfully under such circumstances, he professes Christ, and whoever is killed because of this witness is a *martyr*. The latter is the Greek word [gr] (*martur*) which means *to be witness* (III: 352).

### *The Qualities of an Unwavering Witness of the Truth*

This profession is an *unwavering witness*. In the this definition we make mention of one characteristic, but it implies several others.

First, this profession must occur *out of love* to the Lord Jesus and His revealed truth.

Secondly, it must occur voluntarily.

Thirdly, there must be *boldness*. Fear indeed remains, and this in itself is not sinful. Boldness conquers fear, however, and nevertheless perseveres. It renders a man is wiling to put everything on the line--even life itself--due to having such high esteem for Jesus, His truth, and His cause, and to seeing in it so much glory for Jesus and ourselves, and so much benefit for others.

Fourthly, there must be *caution*.... caution must govern us in our engagement. We must not step beyond the boundaries of our calling and condition, run where we have no business being, or cast the pearls before the swine.... When the Lord Jesus send forth His disciples to preach the gospel, He gave them the following instruction: "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Mat. 10:16).

Fifthly, *there must be uprightness*. All hypocrisy and ambiguity must be far removed from such a profession.

Sixthly, there must be an *unwavering commitment* [III: 353-355].

### *The Purpose of Profession of the Truth*

The *purpose* of this profession is the *glorification of our God and the salvation of our neighbor*. It is not suffering but the cause which makes the martyr--and not the cause alone, but it is the objective which makes a good martyr. This profession must proceed from love and be made for a holy purpose. The purpose is, first of all, *to glorify God*; that is, to make known the perfections of God--His goodness, righteousness, truth, etc., which come to the foreground in the salvation of man--through Christ in word and deed, and by giving expression to this by way of a holy life (III: 356).

Secondly, *it is to the salvation of our neighbor*. A Christian does not only desire to be saved himself, but he has love for his neighbor, also greatly desiring to bring his neighbor to the knowledge of the truth, and to repentance and salvation. He perceives that the confession of the Lord Jesus is a fruitful means to that end. He therefore owns His cause in time of peace as well as in time of persecution, and he is glad when he has opportunity for this. He knows that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, and that by means of speaking and experiencing the truth others are won (III: 356).

### *God Requires Profession of the Truth*

We have thus held before you the nature of professing the truth. This, however, is the duty of everyone who wishes to be saved; salvation or damnation is contingent upon it. Impress the following upon your heart: "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven" (Mat. 10:32-33). Consider furthermore what is written in Romans 10:9-10: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (III: 357).

### *Final Exhortation to Believers*

Join yourself to the godly so that it may become manifest that you are one with them in your support for Christ and your opposition to the world. Remain with the true church and be diligent in attending public worship and in partaking of the Lord's Supper. Thereby one confesses the Lord Jesus. To separate yourself from her and to remain on your own is a quiet denial of Christ and His cause. If shame and injury come upon you due to your confession, rejoice in this, for it is a small beginning of martyrdom (III: 376).

When the Lord brings persecution upon the church by the world; if errors are stubbornly adhered to in the church and if she persecutes such ministers and others who promote the truth and godliness; then oppose such and be a companion of those who fear the Lord and profess His truth. If you are cast out by those who persecute you, are compelled to join them, are robbed of your possessions due to refusal to do so, are cast into prisons, are treated as criminals--yes, are threatened with the sword, the gallows, and torture, or even put to death--then pause for a moment and reflect upon the fact that the Lord calls you to martyrdom (III: 377).

Pray frequently that the Lord may give you a bold spirit, knowing that if the Lord would withdraw His hand, you would not be able to stand, but by the least manifestation of fear you would recant. Know your weakness and distrust yourself, however much you may currently be convinced of the truth. Cleave to the Lord so that you may be faithful in the hour of temptation (III: 378).

## Chapter 64: Contentment

Since profession of the truth generally has an adverse effect upon one's temporal belongings, and since this impedes so many in being bold in their profession, it is therefore necessary that we endure such adversity by being content with the will of God in regard to temporal circumstances (III: 379).

Contentment is a Christian virtue consisting in a correspondence between the desire of God's children and their present condition--this being true because it is the will of their God in Christ and according to His sovereign determination. In this they rest with delight, in quiet confidence, joyfully, and with gratitude, trusting that the Lord will cause the present and the future to turn out to their advantage. This causes them to utilize their present condition to the advancement of their spiritual life and to the glory of God (III: 379-380).

*Contentment is a Christian virtue of God's children.* The unconverted are to all good works reprobate and are not acquainted with the nature of this virtue. When they perceive it in God's children, they despise it as a low level of intelligence, day-dreaming, Stoic insensitivity, and deem them unfit for loftier matters--this being a treasure which is hidden for them. God's children, however, have this virtue in principle, and they, perceiving the beauty of this virtue, make diligent effort to possess this in greater measure (III: 380).

### The Object of Contentment

*The object of contentment is our current condition.* Believers, being and remaining in the state of grace, encounter many things according to soul and body. Sometimes the condition of both agree in a general sense with their desires, and sometimes there is a very great discrepancy between the two. It is easy to be content if the Lord grants the desire of the heart. If, however, our circumstances do not agree with our desires, it will be a difficult task to bring our desires in harmony with our circumstances (III: 380).

### The Nature of Contentment

Thus, contentment neither excludes the having of desires nor the use of the means, but it excludes all those desires which are focused on sinful matters. This relates to all desires for all that which exceeds our needs; all vehement and passionate desires for something which normally could be lawfully desired; all mental anguish, heartache, and pouting if things do not go our way; and the use of all evil means for the fulfillment of our desire--whereby all lawful means are neglected, and God is tempted (III: 381).

However, all of this does not yet constitute contentment. Contentment consists in the *correspondence* of our desires with our present circumstances, and in a willingness to be in the circumstances wherein we are and in none other....To be contented when things do not go according to our wishes is a difficult task (III: 381-382).

### *The Foundation of Contentment*

The foundation upon which, and why we are satisfied with our present circumstances is the fact that such is the will of our God in Christ Jesus, and He has directed these circumstances to be thus.... love toward God's good pleasure has the upperhand, however, and therefore their desires correspond with their circumstances. We shall desire it to be so--even if it is with tears in the eyes--because the Lord wills it to be so. This will is precious to believers above everything else and makes all that is bitter to be sweet and that which is heavy, light. Observe this in the perfect example of the Lord Jesus: "For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6:38); "Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Mat. 26:39) [III: 382-383].

### *The Effects or Fruits of Contentment*

The effects or fruits of contentment are:

- (1) a being pleased with given circumstances since it is the will of God.
- (2) a quiet confidence.
- (3) a cheerful or joyful disposition.
- (4) gratitude.
- (5) a resting and trusting in the Lord's providence.
- (6) spiritual growth.
- (7) that God is glorified thereby, for believers thus demonstrate that the Lord is sovereign and may do with His creature according to His good pleasure (III: 383-384).

### *The Godly: Also Subject to Discontentment*

I shall now address the godly. It is sad that those who have God as a reconciled God, who have chosen God to be their only and all-sufficient portion (while rejecting all that is not God), yet have so much discontentment, because they, both according to body and soul, do not fare in this world as their nature would desire to have it (III: 386).

### *The Godly Exhorted not to Be Fretful*

Do you not perceive that this is idolatry? There is a secret departure from God, a neglect of depending upon Him, and a secret denial of God's providence. There is a secret accusation of cruelty and unwillingness on His part to care for you, of mutability, and of not being faithful to His promises. Under pretense of being concerned about necessities, there is a desire to rely upon temporal things and a living by bread alone--and even if one does not solely put his trust in temporal things, is nevertheless partially true. God and the things of this world together must grant us satisfaction. Or else, do you serve God in order that He would give you temporal things? What an evil disposition this is. How far removed this is from Asaph's disposition: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Psa. 73:25-26)! Upon coming before God, be therefore ashamed about your sinful disposition (III: 387).

All your concerns are in vain and you will not gain one penny by them. God has already decreed from eternity how much you will have. There is a "convenient" portion (Prov. 30:8) which God has appointed for everyone and which He gives at His time. No one will take away this portion from you nor will it be diminished. With all your concerns and anxiety you will neither add one nickel nor break or change the determinate counsel of God (III: 388).

As far as you yourself are concerned--you bring yourself into continual unrest, apprehension, fear, and anxiety. You rob yourself of delighting and rejoicing in God. You impede your growth, since your disposition displeases God, and renders you unfit to appropriately use the means for spiritual growth. Your concerns will cause the Word and your good inner motions to be choked, thus rendering them unfruitful (Mat. 13:22). Unbelief has opportunity to surface and will toss the anxious soul to and fro. The desire for religious exercise decreases and free access to God is hindered. The thoughts that these adversities come upon you in God's wrath cause the soul to tremble. Thus, to a great extent quietness, dependence upon God, a childlike confidence in God, and walking with God disappear. Would you lose all this for a greater or lesser quantity of bread, for getting your way, for your own honor, and for the future, of which you do not know how it will be? Oh, these matters are too insignificant to permit the well-being of your soul to dissipate (III: 389).

Therefore conduct yourself well while you are in a school in which you can learn much that you cannot learn in a time of prosperity. Take heed therefore, and be on guard not to be murmurers and complainers about your condition while walking according to your lusts (Jude 16). Rather, possess your soul in patience and be satisfied with the present. You will then be fit to serve the Lord in both prosperity and adversity (III: 389).

### *Exhortation to Strive for Contentment*

Therefore, children of God--either rich, of the middle class, of limited means, insignificant, poor, oppressed, or tossed with tempest--whoever you may be and whatever your circumstances may be, you are all in need of an exhortation, for no circumstances in and of themselves yield contentment. Learn to adjust your desires to your circumstances--regardless of what they may be--and do not endeavor to adjust your circumstances to your desires, for there would be no end to that. Cast dissatisfaction far away from you as being a harmful pestilence for your spiritual life, and possess your soul in contentment (III: 390).

Therefore, be satisfied, delight yourself, and rejoice in His promises, which will most certainly be fulfilled. It is true that the Lord does not always fulfill His promises when we judge it to be most suitable for us. However, the Lord will most certainly do it at His time. It is thus best if we do not receive it at our time; there is yet something to be learned by us and we must first be capable to use the promises well. It is the Lord's wisdom and goodness that He postpones the matter; however, the fulfillment is beyond doubt. He has not promised to give you a certain quantity, but rather as much as you will have need of. That ought to be sufficient for you and He will most certainly give it to you. Therefore, "though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (Hab. 2:3). Even if you do not perceive any means by which or from where it will come, He is almighty. He can also do it without means and sustain you and your children without food. Or else He will provide the means--even if ravens would have to bring it to you; even if He would cause bread to rain down from heaven; even if He would have to multiply flour and oil; or even if He would have to close the mouths of the lions and cause the fire to have no power. Therefore, be still and see the salvation of the Lord (III: 390-391).

Delight yourself in your circumstances, since it is the will of God concerning you--especially since God is your Father to whom you pray daily, "Thy will be done." Since you subject yourself to His will in prayer, should you then not also subject yourself to His will in His dealings with you--even if they are not according to your desires? Submit yourself therefore to God and glorify Him in doing so (III: 391).

Delight yourself in having Him as your portion, and let this satisfy you while foregoing the things of the world which you would desire to have. To that end, hold before yourself the example of Habakkuk: "Although...the fields shall yield no meat...yet I will rejoice in the LORD" (Hab. 3:17-18) [III: 391-392].

Therefore, remain focused upon the transitory nature of your existence and the insignificance of all that is of the world. Simultaneously focus upon the promises of God: He, as an added benefit, will bestow the things of the world upon you as you have need of them, and will care for you. You will then learn to be content (III: 392).

He who grants the young ravens food when they cry to Him, provides food for the birds of heaven and sustains all that lives, who grants the ungodly food and gladness, would He forget you? Would He refuse to give you that which you need? Therefore, be content, trust in Him, and be satisfied with His dispensation. Even if the measure is not according to your desires, it will be as much as you have need of. That is sufficient and that ought to be sufficient to you (III: 393).

### *The Blessed Benefits Issuing Forth from Contentment*

Contentment engenders many good things. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28).

- (1) There will be a quiet spirit, which is of great price in the sight of God (1 Pet. 3:4).
- (2) There will be alienation from the world.
- (3) It is a state in which there is prayer and communion with God.
- (4) There is a frequent experience of the help of God.

- (5) There will be gratitude.
- (6) There is a longing for the state of glory.
- (7) There is the manifestation of holiness (III: 393-394).

## Chapter 65: Self-Denial

### Self-denial Defined

Self-denial is a Christian virtue, granted by God to His children, whereby they--out of love for God's will--neither give heed to nor yield to their intellect, will, and inclinations insofar as they are in opposition to the will of God--and oppose and suppress them instead. They do so by a voluntary forsaking and rejection of all that pertains to their natural well-being, if God's cause demands such from them--this to the honor of God and the welfare of their neighbors (III: 397).

Self-denial is, first of all, a *Christian virtue*. Pagans have observed that their inner peace has been disturbed by their lusts. Some therefore sought to extinguish them by way of reason and appeared to practice self-denial in regard to some things. However, it did not issue forth from the right motive--love for the will of God. They did not have the right objective in view, but rather it was a seeking of self (be it in a different manner than others), resting in this as their peace and seeking to be honored by men. Their self-denial was thus a splendid sin which had a counterfeit luster, and was not accompanied by deeds (III: 397-398).

Secondly, the *moving cause* of self-denial is the Lord and not man himself. Man is too deeply immersed in self-love to be able to rid himself therefrom. And even if he could divorce himself from this, he would then not be able to bring himself into the opposite virtuous disposition. Self-denial does not consist in a negation, but is rather a propensity (III: 398).

Thirdly, the *subjects* of self denial are *the children of God*. The unconverted are void of all spiritual life and therefore the motions and operation of life cannot come forth from them. Rather, it is a gift to God's children as presently being in a converted and believing state. They are those who are Christ's disciples and follow Him (Mat. 16:24). Self-denial does not consist in a few deeds, but is rather a propensity and disposition of the heart. Their heart has been turned away from self-love and a seeking of self--albeit imperfectly (III: 398).

### What Self-Denial Is NOT

One must not deny his *spiritual self*, that is, one's regenerated self, which Paul refers to as *I* in Romans 7:20. This is the sin of many true--but nevertheless weak--believers: Upon falling into a sin, upon the arising of a sinful thought, and upon an assault by the devil, they immediately reject their spiritual state and think, "I have no grace; I have deceived myself and it has been nothing more than imagination." To do this is to deny received benefits and in some measure a grieving of the Holy Ghost. This is a manifestation of pride, for it suggests that we are naturally much more virtuous than others, as well as that the former good spiritual frames, motions, and deeds had come about by our own strength. Therefore, refrain from rejecting your spiritual state; preserve what you have, and render honor to God (III: 399).

We must also not deny the desire for *the well-being of our soul*, the fear of hell, the desire for faith, hope, and love, and a desire for communion with God and felicity. This was one of the erroneous arguments of the *Labbadists* whose activities the Lord has overturned (III: 399-400).

### The Specific Aspects of Self-Denial

Instead one must deny his *sinful self*, that is, the old Adam, in a general sense, with all his motions and desires--whatever the nature and contrary to whatever commandment these motions may be, and whatever the faculty of the soul and of the body may be by which such motions are executed.

*Specifically*, one must, first of all, deny his *natural and darkened intellect*; that is, to refuse to make this a rule of doctrine and life.

Secondly, we must deny *our own will*.

Thirdly, we must deny *our inclinations*.

Fourthly, we must deny *our own honor*. There is no sin more common to man and is more deeply rooted in the heart than a desire to be honored.

Fifthly, we must deny our desire for *possessions*. Man's corrupt nature focuses on the physical. He desires to possess much, puts his trust in it, and determines to live from it.

Sixthly, we must deny our *friends*.

Seventhly, we must deny our *life* (III: 400-402).

### *The Motivation for Self-Denial: Love for the Will of God*

The essence of self-denial is that its acts ensue out of love for the will of God. It is the believer's desire neither to give heed to nor yield to his desires concerning the aforementioned matters, insofar as they are contrary to the will of God, but rather to oppose and purge himself of them (III: 402).

### *The Objective of Self-Denial: The Glory of God and the Welfare of the Neighbor*

The objective of self-denial is to glorify God and to promote the welfare of the neighbor (III: 403).

### *The Unconverted and Unconverted Distinguished*

*A person who does not deny self*

- (1) is a slave of his lusts, makes that which is of the world his portion, and insists that his lusts be satisfied at any cost.
- (2) entertains great thoughts about himself.
- (3) has this proud disposition of the heart engendering a desire to be honored and perceived as such.
- (4) has himself in mind when he is or intends to be in presence of people.
- (5) takes careful notice of what everyone says of him.
- (6) will immediately be displeased at heart if, in his estimation, he is not loved, served, and revered according to his wishes.
- (7) is envious of others if they receive more love and honor, and do more business than he does.
- (8) becomes sorrowful and despondent if others do not fulfill his desires.
- (9) will be a zealous Christian in the realm of religion, as long as he can gain love, honor, and profit--yes, he even wants to be counted among the most orthodox (III: 404-405).

Over against this we shall present a person who practices a great measure of self-denial--as is generally true for a godly person--so that everyone may perceive how it ought to be, may be enamored with that condition, and endeavor to increase in it.

- (1) A person who denies self desires no honor of men.
- (2) The person who denies self does not desire *love*.
- (3) The person who denies self also does not desire *to be revered*.
- (4) A person who denies self also does not wish *to be served*.
- (5) The person who denies self also does not desire *riches* (III: 406-408).

### *The Need for Self-Examination*

The godly can also perceive hereby how much or how little of such self-denial they have. How much their heart still yearns for honor, love, respect, service, and the possessions of this world! Here their ulterior motives originate which at times pollute their very best works, cause them much grief, and rob them of all joy in their work (III: 409).

Oh, you who are godly, examine yourself closely. Seek to ascertain what it is that your heart still cleaves to and consider the abominableness of being self-focused and of such seeking of self (III: 409).

### Exhortation to Self-Denial

It is thus necessary that we courageously resist our sinful self and endeavor to arrive at a disposition and propensity of inward self-denial, as well as the manifestation of self-denial in all circumstances which occur. Take the following to heart:

First, consider your own state. Who are you that you would pride yourself in anything and seek anything for yourself?

Secondly, what is it that you desire and cleave to?

Thirdly, believers, has not the Lord granted and laid away better things for you? The Lord has granted you that steadfast and durable benefit, consisting in the enjoyment of God, communion with Christ, the experience of peace and joy, and eternal glory.

Fourthly, it is a righteous thing to deny self as far as the things of the world are concerned, for all honor, reverence, service, and possessions are the Lord's; you are not entitled to them.

Fifthly, self-denial engenders great peace. All your restlessness is the result of a seeking of yourself.

Sixthly, a person who denies self has freedom, for he has nothing to lose. He fears neither shame, hatred, nor damage to his possessions, for he has renounced all this--and whatever the Lord has loaned to him he will readily return to Him if He requires this.

Seventhly, continually hold before you the example of the Lord Jesus and His saints. The Lord Jesus has denied Himself for your sake. Would you then not renounce self for His sake?

Eighthly, even though all that we possess is not ours, and even though all that pertains to the body is not worthy of attention, God nevertheless wants to reward abundantly for whatever one has renounced and relinquished upon His command out of loving obedience toward Him, and for His Name or for His cause (III: 409-412).

### Final Advice for Those who Desire to Deny Self

If you are desirous to be in such a holy condition and have such liberty, and to be weaned from all and whatever the Lord wants us to be weaned from, then...do not imagine, however, that all has been accomplished if you have lively desires for that condition and activity, and now fully want to commit yourself to this, for *your own "I"* is strong. It was the first to reside in you and it does not readily want to depart. It is not so easy to deny self. Therefore, be aware of the strength of the old man and the weakness of the new man, and call upon the Lord for help and strength (III: 412).

## **Chapter 66: Patience**

Contentment and self-denial engender patience (III: 413).

Patience is the believer's spiritual strength which he has in God whereby he, in the performance of his duty, willingly, with composure, joyfully, and steadfastly endures all the vicissitudes of life, having a hope that the outcome will be well (III: 413).

*The subject*--that is, the seat of this virtue--*is the soul of the believer*.... patience is the ornament of a Christian. A believer views himself as being reconciled with God, and considers all affliction to come to them from God in order to promote his welfare. He has promises that the outcome will be glorious and therefore only they exercise patience. "Here is the patience of the saints" (Rev. 14:12). In order to demonstrate that no one can be patient except he be a believer, faith and patience are frequently conjoined (cf. Titus 2:2; 2 Tim. 3:10; 2 Th. 1:4). Patience most particularly resides in the soul (III: 414).

*The object* of patience is *all the vicissitudes of life*, that is, all manner of affliction (III: 414).

### The Essence or Nature of Patience

*The essence or nature* of patience consists in the enduring of affliction *willingly, with composure, joyfully, and steadfastly*.

- (1) *We endure* affliction if we take the cross upon ourselves as being laid upon us by the Lord (Mat. 16:24), follow Jesus with that cross, and perform our duty as between God and the soul only, as well as toward the neighbor.
- (2) It is a *willing* enduring of affliction.
- (3) *It is exercised with composure or a quietness of spirit*
- (4) Yes, not only does the patient soul maintain composure, but she even *rejoices* in affliction, be it that she already enjoys the blessed fruit of this, be it that she receives many comforts from the Lord, or be it that she suffers for the sake of godliness and for the name of the Lord.
- (5) The patient person endures affliction *with steadfastness*.
- (6) Patience endures affliction with *a hope of a good outcome*. In this instance the proverb is true: *Hope is the comfort of affliction* (III: 415-417).

The cause of patience is not to be found in man himself... The Lord grants the godly faith and gives them a lively view that He inflicts this affliction upon them with His Fatherly hand. He secretly sustains them by strengthening the inner man. In their affliction he comforts them much according to the soul and permits them to taste His grace. He causes them to perceive the lightness, advantage, and transitory nature of affliction. He shows them how advantageous and glorious the outcome will be. This causes them to be quiet and encouraged. They are then willing to suffer, and tribulation will then work patience, and that experience, and that hope which maketh not ashamed (III: 417-418).

*The purpose and result of patience is that believers may execute their duty well.* The patient person does not end in his affliction, his suitable disposition, in enduring his affliction well, and in the manifestation of a patient disposition. He has something much higher in view. He possesses his soul in patience in order not to be hindered in his performance, but rather to be more capable of carrying out his task. He does so by his own personal godly exercises, by letting his light shine forth, by manifesting a godly walk among men, by being an example to others, by leading others to Christ, and by boldly confessing Him (III: 418).

### *The Impatience of the Godly*

Having had the nature of patience presented to them, the godly will be able to observe on the one hand that they possess this virtue in principle; however, they will also observe on the other hand how much impatience is still to be found within them. When a spiritual cross comes upon them, when it becomes dark, when God hides His countenance and withholds His comforting influences, when He appears to neither hear their prayers nor immediately to grant the desires of their soul, then they are at once discouraged, unbelieving, and irritable. When they are surrounded by all manner of bodily afflictions, and when their afflictions are of long duration and of an excessive nature, then where is their patience? (III: 419).

At times God's children--to their shame and grief--become conscious of such turbulence; and, they rightfully ought to be ashamed and grieved, for...while being impatient, many sins merge together. An impatient person is a breeding ground for all manner of corruptions which grievously pollute the soul. There is unbelief toward God's promises, lovelessness and stubbornness toward God's will, pride (as if they were superior), envy and vengefulness toward their neighbor, and a holding in esteem the things of this world (III: 420).

### *Believers Exhorted to Be Patient*

Believers, possess therefore your souls in patience. Give heed to the following motives in order that you may be stirred up to that end.

First, it is your desire to obey the Lord, is it not?

Secondly, it is a matter of absolute necessity, and you cannot do without it. "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise" (Heb. 10:36). There is no other way to heaven except by way of tribulations. You can neither avoid nor sidestep them.

Thirdly, consider where your affliction originates. It does not originate with yourself, for you love yourself too much for this. It does not originate with men, for they cannot so much as move without the will of God, nor pull one of your hairs out. Rather, it is the Lord Himself who sends this upon you--the sovereign Lord whose hand none can stay and to whom no one can say, "What doest Thou?" It is your reconciled Father in Christ who sends this upon you in His wisdom, goodness, and love, doing so to your advantage.

Fourthly, when considering affliction itself, its nature is not such that you should sin relative to it by way of impatience.

(1) Affliction is *light*;

(2) Your affliction is but *for a short season*; it readily passes by.

(3) *The extent of this affliction has been* determined. It will last that long--not any shorter and not any longer.

Fifthly, affliction is very beneficial; it is medicine for the soul.

(1) It humbles the soul in light of committed sins.

(2) It will cause us to cautiously guard against sin and to strive for holiness.... And if you desire the way of affliction for its benefits, it behooves you patiently to take this affliction upon you and to endure it as being a wholesome--although bitter--medicine.

Sixthly, patience is a precious ornament and a profitable disposition for a believer. A patient soul is a soul which is child-like, willing, quiet, meek, which denies self, believes, hopes, and loves God. Therefore the patient person is precious and pleasant in God's sight and a suitable object for God's mercies.

Seventhly, hold before yourself the examples of the Lord Jesus and the saints so that you may be stirred up to imitate them in their patience.

Add to this the example of all other saints who have gone before you. "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:10-11). Since all those who are now bearers of the crown have been bearers of the cross, you must emulate them in the bearing of the cross in order that, with them, you may inherit the crown of life (III: 421-424).

## **Lecture #10: Brakel on Biblical Spirituality III** (chaps. 67-68, 75-79)

### **Chapter 67: Uprightness**

Uprightness is a Christian virtue which God, by means of the Word, has planted in the heart of believers, whereby they do the will of God in truth (III: 428).

Uprightness is a *Christian virtue*.... Christian uprightiness is of an entirely different nature, however; it has different objects, proceeds from a different heart, has a different objective, and differs in manner. It proceeds from union with Christ and there is thus conformity with Christ. It is therefore referred to as *Christian uprightiness* (III: 428).

The subject of this virtue is the heart of the believer.... The seat of uprightiness is neither to be found in the countenance, the clothing, the mouth, nor in their actions, but in their *heart*. Their intellect is illuminated by a wondrous light, the will embraces the spiritual matters which are revealed to them by that light, and their passions go out after those matters in order to have them in possession and to perform them in a manner pleasing to the Lord. They thus have an internal propensity, and that propensity shines forth in their countenance, clothing, words, and deeds (III: 428-429).

The object of uprightiness is the *will of God*. God has revealed to His church in the law what He enjoins and what He forbids. The upright person embraces this will willingly and joyfully as being the will of God--without any exception as far as matter, manner, time, or place are concerned (III: 429).

#### *The Pattern of Uprightness: Truthfulness*

The pattern of uprightiness consists in doing all things *in truth*....

- (1) There is *truthfulness which pertains to the intellect*. Thus, the intellect, being illuminated by the Holy Spirit, perceives and understands the divinely revealed matters--which pertain to the way of salvation through Christ--in such a manner as is consistent with their very essence.
- (2) There is a *truthfulness of the heart*, which is the acquiescence of the will with those divine truths to be believed and performed.
- (3) There is a *verbal truthfulness*, which is the harmony of words with the heart.
- (4) There is a *truthfulness of performance* when our countenance and conversation--regardless of whether this pertains to the spiritual or civil realm--agree with the heart which knows and loves the will of God as revealed in the Word of God (III: 429-430).

#### *God: The Origin of Uprightness*

God is the cause of uprightiness, for God grants light to know the truth, gives love for the truth, and gives truth in the heart (III: 430-431).

The nature of this virtue having been presented, everyone is obligated to exercise it. God required this from Abraham and this from all who are his children by faith. "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1); "Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God" (Deu. 18:13); "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Mat. 10:16). Your heart will inwardly be convinced of the justness of this requirement and the obligation to it. As you turn to yourself, however, and hold before you the above mentioned truth as a mirror, what manner of person are you? Do you belong to the upright? It is necessary to bring those who are not upright under conviction by showing them their wretched state; may it be a means unto their conversion. It is also necessary to convince the upright of their deficiency in this respect (III: 431).

#### *Hypocrisy: The Sin of the Unconverted*

First, you truly still belong to the hypocrites if you are yet in an unconverted state. How can your heart be upright before God if you do not know Him in the face of Jesus Christ? How will you walk in the way of uprightiness if the right way unto salvation is as still hidden for you; if you have neither an inward desire nor love to enter upon the

way to God through Christ and to tread upon the way of holiness; and if you have not even placed your foot upon that way, but yet have your darkened understanding, your stony heart, and your life in this world? All within you is corrupt and is entirely contrary to God and His will, and thus, there can be no uprightness (III: 431).

(2) As far as religion is concerned, the church will be filled with hypocrites during a season when godliness is in esteem.... There is no more abominable and loathsome thing under the sun than a minister who is a hypocrite (III: 432-433).

### True Believers: Upright in Principle

True believers are principally upright, for

- (1) they have spiritual light and life, are partakers of the divine nature, and Jesus has been formed within them.
- (2) they perceive their wrongdoings, are grieved over them, confess them, by faith seek forgiveness in the blood of Christ, and do battle against them.
- (3) they are concerned about this, since they mistrust their hearts and become conscious of their corrupt impulses. They bring their heart before the Lord and pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa. 139:23-24).
- (4) this is true in a general and universal sense of the word as far as matters, time, and place are concerned; they make no exception whatsoever (III: 435-436).

All these matters are true evidences of uprightness. With this, believers may support and comfort themselves when they are concerned as to whether or not they are upright, due to detecting so much deficiency within themselves. Nevertheless, they must humble themselves over their deficiencies and transgressions. To that end we wish to hold before them their faults (III: 436).

### The Necessity of Being Exhorted to Be Upright

Be determined to be upright and to conduct yourself as such, for uprightness is, in the first place, an absolutely and essential characteristic of the Christian, for a Christian is indeed upright. "...the upright love Thee" (Song of Sol. 1:4). Of Job we read: "That man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1); of David: "I was also upright before Him" (Psa. 18:23); of Hezekiah: "Remember now, O LORD, I beseech Thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight" (Isa. 38:3); and of Noah: "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations" (Gen. 6:9). Uprightness is also an inseparable attribute of all virtues. Uprightness is a requisite in prayer: "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24); of faith: "Now the end of the commandment is charity...of faith unfeigned" (1 Tim. 1:5); of love: "Let love be without dissimulation" (Rom. 12:9); of the entire disposition of the heart: "And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless" (1 Th. 5:23); and of our entire conversation: "Therefore let us keep the feast...with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8). Since uprightness is thus such an essential and inseparable characteristic of the Christian as well as of his work, what shall we then undertake unless we do so with uprightness? (III: 438).

Secondly, uprightness is desirable and befitting for a Christian, for the God with whom we have to do is pure Light, is the only Searcher of the hearts whom we cannot deceive, who perceives the least deviation, desires truth in the inward parts, whose eyes are upon the truth (Jer. 5:3), and who delights in those who are upright in their way (Prov. 11:20) [III: 438].

Thirdly, uprightness is a very precious ornament, and insincerity renders all virtues which someone may possibly possess despicable. However, uprightness renders all other virtues glorious, adds luster to godliness, and causes the upright to be loved by natural men, the by godly, and by God Himself.

- (1) They will be loved *by natural men*. As much as they may mock with the godly, they have esteem for the upright.
- (2) The uprightness of others is precious to *the godly*; they do not desire to have fellowship with two-faced people (Psa. 26:4). Rather, their eyes are upon the faithful and upright ones (Psa. 101:6).
- (3) However, all this is superseded by the fact that *God Himself* finds pleasure in the upright. "Such as are upright in

their way are His delight" (Prov. 11:20) [III: 438-439].

Fourthly, God evaluates his children according to their uprightness. It pleases the Lord not to make His children perfect in this life. Everything is only in part here, and daily they still offend in many things. However, they are called the upright according to their inherent uprightness (III: 439).

Fifthly, uprightness will give much liberty in the performance of our duty. Let the hypocrite fear the light, let the darkness be his refuge, let him be fearful of doing anything where opposition is to be expected, and let him be terrified and tremble due to each plague God sends into the world, but the upright will be fearless, will have the courage to stand up for God's cause, will manifest himself as a young lion, and will perform his duty (III: 440).

Sixthly, uprightness yields a peaceful life and a dying in comfort. A hypocrite continually lives in unrest and fears that he will be found out. Much calculation is required to cover one hypocritical act with the other. An upright person, however, has a peaceful conscience, and he is steadfast and sure of himself (III: 40-441).

### *The Means to Uprightness*

Therefore, by way of continual exercise, be very zealous to acquire a propensity of uprightness and to have such an entirely upright disposition--so that uprightness will, so to speak, spontaneously issue forth, manifesting itself in all your deeds.

(1) Before the Lord acknowledge the corruption of your heart and that which issues forth out of this heart, and show at the same time the hatred and aversion you have for it, and your desire for uprightness and truthfulness.

(2) Acknowledge your impotence, and that it is impossible for you to bring and maintain your heart in such an upright disposition.

(3) Pay careful attention to your heart, which leans toward insincerity, and resist this insincerity at once.

(4) If you have done something insincere, then reflect upon this for some time, so that it will deeply grieve you and that this grief may make you more careful subsequent to this.

(5) Remain continually in the presence of the Lord. The perception of the presence and omniscience of God is a powerful means unto uprightness. These two are therefore conjoined: "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17:1).

(6) As you thus proceed, focus continually upon the Word of truth. Endeavor to understand its spiritual meaning, and the truth will make you free. You will increase in a walking in the truth; and one thus enters heaven. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way" (Psa. 119:1) [III: 441].

## **Chapter 68: Prayer**

The acknowledgement of all God's perfections, and the exercise of all virtues toward God coalesce in prayer--that necessary, profitable, holy, and sanctifying duty of a Christian. Consequently, the exercise of religion is comprehensively expressed as praying and a calling upon God: "Then began men to call upon the name of the LORD" (Gen. 4:26) [III: 443].

### *The Nature or Essence of Prayer*

Prayer is the expression of holy desires to God in the name of Christ, which, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, proceed from a regenerated heart, along with the request for the fulfillment of these desires (III: 446).

The supplicant intermingles these three matters. In one motion he focuses upon himself, God, and the matter at hand. Being in that disposition, he not only presents himself before God as such, but he also gives expression to his desires before the Lord. *The expression* of desires is vividly presented in Scripture, conveying to us both the matter itself, as well as all who are or have been in such a disposition. Furthermore, Scripture stirs up inclinations toward such a disposition--yes, frequently causes a soul to be thus disposed (III: 447).

### Prayer: The Expression of Holy Desires

We call prayer an expression of holy desires *toward God*. We then look beyond all creatures--both good and evil--knowing that they are not able to help. Yes, even if they were able to help, we would nevertheless not wish to pray to them. Apart from God we do not wish to be helped, because we love God and do not wish to give His honor to another (III: 449).

He who prays aright desires to glorify God in prayer as the One who alone is *worthy of worship*, as the only *Fountain* of all good gifts, as the *omniscient One* who knows the hearts and the mind of the Spirit, as the *Omnipotent One* for whom nothing is too wonderful, as He who is *good, merciful, and gracious*, as the One who delights in mercy, as the One who waits for someone to come to Him in order that He might be gracious to Him, and as He who is *True* and has promised to hear and to give. It is for this reason that the supplicant turns to the Lord, bows before him in humility and reverence, displays his needs before him, request from Him the fulfillment of His desires, and thus waits upon the Lord. It is his delight and joy to worship God (III: 450).

### Prayer to Be Offered in the Name of Jesus Christ

Upon His death, the veil was rent in the temple so that, without any impediment, one would be able to look into and enter the Holy of Holies. Believers thus have boldness to go unto God "by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh" (Heb. 10:20). Christ is the way by which alone one may and can go to the Father (John 14:6). If we therefore pray in Christ's name, that is as much as praying for the sake of the merits of Christ. The supplicant receives Christ who is offered to him and thus becomes a partaker of Christ and all His merits. With these merits he goes to God and displays them, and in this manner he petitions God for all that he desires (III: 451).

We must take care not to be without an express transaction with and a returning unto Christ too long and too frequently, lest we lose sight of Christ and approach unto God in a more direct sense, thus dealing with God in a less humble and appropriate manner (III: 452).

### The Originator of True Prayer

A true prayer is originated by the *Holy Spirit*. . . . Under the administration of the means of grace he learns that the Holy Spirit is the author of prayer, and he learns from the Word of God that he must pray God for the Holy Spirit. By means of these natural convictions and motions the Holy Spirit works in the elect the inclination to pray and shows them that they neither have the right prayerful disposition, the right desires, nor do they express them correctly. The Holy Spirit will show them that He must work all this in them and that therefore they must pray for the Holy Spirit. They are thus secretly wrought upon to pray for the Spirit, and are therefore already praying for the Spirit by the Spirit. Those who presently perceive in themselves the beginnings of the operation of the Spirit will pray that this might be increased by the Spirit (III: 452-453).

### Prayer Under Consciousness of Committed Sin

It occasionally also happens that a regenerate person is entirely void of desires--not in essence, but in the exercise. When such a one engages in prayer he knows not what to pray, for he has no desire for anything. He has either lost sight of the desirability of the matters due to spiritual darkness, or he is discouraged due to not having received his desire after so much prayer. This will close his heart. What shall he do? Pray? He cannot. Shall he neglect prayer?--which such a person neglects all too often, and, due to such neglect, turns away from prayer entirely. That he cannot do, for his regenerated nature will not permit this and will continually incline him to pray. Such a person must not resist such feeble inclinations, which is so easily done; rather, he must be as a small child. Or, as one who comes to from a fainting spell moves about very feebly and speaks very softly, he must follow his feeble inclinations, present them before the Lord, persevere in prayer, and acquaint himself with the Lord--or else he will backslide even further. However, in doing so he will experience that "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer" (Psa. 102:17) [III:454].

### The Purpose of Prayer

They will present with urgency the merits of the Lord Jesus. Then they will remind the Lord of His mercies previously manifested toward them--as Jacob did in Genesis 32:9-12, and the church in Psalm 85:1-5. While thus engaged, faith will be quickened, love will become active, they will engage in more intimate transactions, and, with quiet resignation, will submit themselves to the will of God (III: 456).

### The Characteristics of True Prayer

The characteristics of prayer are as follows: It is engaged in humbly, in spirit and in truth, earnestly, fervently, incessantly, and in faith.

First there is humility. This is the sensible, humble disposition of the supplicant, resulting from a view of the majesty of God, and of his own sinfulness, unworthiness, and impotence either to supply for his deficiency or to have it fulfilled by God (III: 456).

Secondly, it is done *in spirit and in truth*.... Praying in spirit and in truth:

(1) consists of a praying *with the* understanding; that is, to be acquainted with the Lord to whom one is praying, the Christ through whom one approaches unto God, ourselves in our perplexity and unworthiness, the matter which we desire, and the objective in requesting the matter.

(2) is an exercise of the will, so that we desire the matters in truth.

(3) is also attended by *thoughtfulness and attentiveness*. (III: 457-458).

Spirit and truth are absolutely essential in prayer, for

(1) "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24);

(2) God requires the heart: "My son, give Me thine heart" (Prov. 23:26);

(3) God knows the heart as well as the mind of the Spirit: "...for Thou, even Thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men" (1 Ki. 8:39);

(4) God desires truth in the inward parts (Psa. 58:8);

(5) "Thine eyes (are) upon the truth" (Jer. 5:3), "for the Father seeketh such to worship Him" (John 4:23);

(6) God hates and punishes such who approach unto Him physically and not with the heart. "Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me....Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder" (Isa. 29:13-14) [III: 458].

Thirdly, there must be earnestness and fervency.... fervency is an intense motion of the heart which is engendered by a strong desire, expressed in an understanding and thoughtful manner. Fervency is the engagement of all the energy of soul and body (III: 458).

One prays more to satisfy the conscience (having prayed) than to attain to the fulfillment of his desires. Such permit themselves to be easily hindered by an unbelieving thought that they will not be heard. They do not have fervent desires toward a matter, and therefore move from the one matter to the other by merely enumerating them--matter, words, and desires being absent. This is an abominable matter. If you have no desires, then be gone. If you do not come with your own needs, you need not come simply because of God's will. He does not desire such a lukewarm, listless, and slothful service (III: 459).

Fourthly, there must be an *incessant perseverance in prayer*. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Th. 5:17) [III: 459].

When it is our duty to do so, however, we must not neglect it due to laxity or discouragement, but persevere until the Lord sweetly refreshes us, showing that our earnest praying has been pleasing to Him. We shall thus give the matter over into the hand of God, our prayer will return into our bosom (Psa. 35:13), and our peace will return to us (Mat. 10:13) [III: 461].

### Exhortation to Persevere in Prayer

In order that we be stirred up to persevere, let us consider the following matters:

(1) Perseverance in prayer is everywhere recommended and commanded as being our particular duty. "...continuing instant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12); "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance" (Eph. 6:18); "Continue in prayer" (Col. 4:2); "And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

(2) Perseverance brings the soul into a good disposition.

(3) Perseverance will cause us to obtain. Upon lengthy wrestling Jacob is blessed (Gen. 32). After a long pursuit the Canaanitish woman received what she desired (Mat. 15). Upon the frequent repetition of his prayer Elijah received rain (1 Ki. 18) [III:461].

### Praying in Faith

The fifth characteristic is that *prayer is offered in faith*. Prayer requires faith in a special sense. "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Mat. 21:22); "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24); "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1:6) [III: 462].

This requires that the supplicant appropriate all the promises of God's Word as having been made to him, and that he thus consider himself to be an heir of the promise (Heb. 6:17). He must furthermore consider that not only are all promises yea and amen in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20), but that also for him they are certain and true--particularly those that pertain to the hearing of prayers (III: 462).

However, many of God's children are deficient here. They do not actively pursue these matters mentioned and these dispositions, and they randomly give expression to their desires. Many are also weak in faith--particularly to believe that God will hear them and grant their desire. "For," they think, "how can I believe, for I am too sinful, and furthermore, I have experienced too frequently that I did not receive anything upon my prayer. For their instruction it should be noted that God does not hear for the sake of our righteousness, but for Christ's sake. Therefore for him who is in Christ--the measure of the grace of light and life is immaterial as far as prayer being answered--it is the carelessness of his prayer and his failure to exercise faith in prayer which prevents his prayer from being answered (III: 463).

### Private Devotions

In addition to this, however, everyone ought to have his private exercises of prayer, which are either prompted by extraordinary circumstances or are commonly conducted.... if we are neglectful in this, we shall perceive that communion with God will decrease. At first we shall not be aware of this, since there will be many ejaculatory prayers during the course of the day. We shall experience, however, that there will be a gradual decrease in ejaculatory prayer, and if we by renewal adhere to regular devotions, we shall perceive how far we have degenerated. Then we shall perceive that there was not such a steadfast basis for intimate communion with God, that there were no extraordinary encounters and illuminations relative to the mysteries of godliness. Yes, we shall perceive that the Spirit of prayer has departed from us and that of ourselves we are not capable to engage in fellowship with God for some period of time. Therefore he who desires to be in an assured state, to have continual fellowship with God, to attain to a higher level of illumination and experience, and to fear God steadfastly, let him strictly observe his devotional time and let him not be neglectful in this--for the devil greatly strives to bring this about (III: 465).

Someone may think, "I am much more spiritual when I utter ejaculatory prayers than when I specifically engage myself to pray. Then I become listless and darkened, and I cannot pray. I am therefore of the opinion that it is better not to observe a set time, and to pray only when the Spirit moves me." For your instruction you ought to note the following:

(1) The occurrence of listlessness and darkness is frequently due to laziness. One is not willing to wrestle...

(2) Else, listlessness ensues due to thinking that at such times one immediately ought to have a greater measure of

light, a more elevated disposition, and stronger exertion than apart from this time.

However, the cause of listlessness is generally in those who do not strictly maintain their devotion time in the activity and testimony which they may have sought (III: 466).

### The Voice in Prayer

The earnestness and the motions of the soul are at times so ardent that one opens the mouth spontaneously. Then we shall also not be plagued as much by wandering thoughts, and the soul at times gets opening by way of speaking and the motions of the soul are thereby quickened (III: 468).

### Exhortations to Prayer

Prayer is a glorious work, for it permits us to enter the inner chambers of the King of kings--of God, the Lord of heaven and earth (III: 469).

Prayer is a *sanctifying* duty. After having been with God on the mountain, Moses' countenance had become radiant. When the Lord Jesus prayed, a holy radiance came upon Him (Mat. 17:2). This still occurs if we have been much in prayer. Even if it appears that the matter for which we have specifically prayed has not been received, we shall nevertheless come away from prayer with a holy and radiant soul. Reflect upon this and your soul will take flight, and you will be desirous to pray (III: 469).

How much the saints have already received by means of prayer! By means of Moses' prayer Amelek was defeated (Ex 17:11-12). By means of the prayer of Joshua the sun and moon were made to stand still (Josh. 10:12). By means of prayer the barren Hannah received a son, Samuel (1 Sam. 1:20). By means of prayer Asa defeated Zerah, the Ethiopian, and his thousand times thousand men (2 Chron 14:9-12), and Jehoshaphat defeated Moab and his confederates (2 Chr. 20). Elijah unlocked heaven through prayer, so that it rained after three-and-one-half years of drought (1 Ki. 18:42-45). Through prayer Elisha brought a dead person to life ( 2 Ki 4:35, etc). Through prayer Hezekiah received a fifteen year extension of his life (Isa. 38:5). What great things have believers received upon prayer! However, God is still the same God. The promises upon prayer are still the same, and they were people of like passions as we were. Therefore, believers, if you desire or are in need of something, betake yourself to prayer (III: 470).

Godly reader, why do you complain about your spiritual deficiency and your bodily tribulations if you are so negligent in prayer, so lax to engage in prayer, so listless while praying, and so quickly finished? Pray if you are desirous for something. Such excuses as made by many who are lazy in the practice of prayer--and which cause grief to some tender godly persons --will not avail here. If you were diligent in prayer, you would avoid these excuses or very readily have an answer for them, so that you would not be hindered by them (III: 470-471).

### Guidance to Supplicants

*The preparation for prayer* must be contingent upon the condition in which we are. *If you are in a good frame*, you must first of all withdraw yourself from whatever you are occupied with and conduct yourself as if you were alone in the world and had nothing else to do but to walk with God. Secondly, while lifting up your soul, you must focus upon God as One who is worthy of worship, as the Fountain of all good gifts, as omniscient, as omnipotent, or in whatever manner you may be conscious of God when you lift up your heart and engage in prayer. Thirdly, you must endeavor to bring about a reverent and humble disposition of heart. Fourthly, you must lift up your heart with a sigh for the Spirit of prayer, for assistance, and for a blessing upon this exercise of prayer (III: 473).

However, you must generally not be occupied too long with preparation before actually proceeding with that which belongs to prayer itself. You could thereby easily come into darkness, become confused, and be less fit for the exercise of prayer (III: 474).

*In the exercise of prayer* you must not limit yourself to a set order; rather you must adjust yourself to the disposition of your soul which varies greatly.... It is to be done in this manner:

- (1) Be on guard against routine in your initial address--against always using the same terminology.
- (2) We must not use pompous words in prayer nor merely link one Scripture passage to another; this will rarely move either the supplicant or the hearer.
- (3) We must also not take great pains to express ourselves fluently.
- (4) At times we can be dull and be in darkness when commencing prayer. However, then we must not immediately desist and depart; instead, we must persevere.
- (5) At times we begin with much light and liveliness and then it suddenly becomes dark. We ourselves can be the cause of this. It can be that we were too high already, thus forgetting to be humble and reverent. Then we must readily sink down in our insignificance and begin by deeply humbling ourselves, conducting ourselves as a little child and thus climb upward step by step.
- (6) While praying--in the beginning, in the middle, as well as at the end--we must pray that we be heard--as we generally observe with David. Yes, not only must we pray, but we must also strive for a lively assurance that both we and our prayer are pleasing to God, and that He hears our prayer, answers it, and will most certainly give what we ask for. This assurance is neither founded upon our godliness, nor upon our ability to pray, but rather upon the promises of the Word of God and the merits of the Lord Jesus, and because those spiritual desires which we have expressed in prayer have proceeded from the Holy Spirit Himself (III: 474-476).

Since God answers, you must also see it as your obligation to observe whether God answers you and how He answers you. It is not sufficient to commend the outcome to God and to believe that He will make it well; we must also take notice of the outcome, however, and relate this to our prayers as being an answer to them (III: 476-477).

The supplicant, who attentively takes notice of the answers upon his prayers, will receive such glorious dispositions, along with the resultant fruit. And even if the Lord were to answer his prayers with nothing besides this, was it not an explicit answer? He who prays and submissively leaves the outcome to the Lord, however, will indeed have his prayers answered by the Lord. Since, however, he does not give heed to those answers, and does not relate the gifts of grace as being answers to his prayers, he will rob himself of these desired fruits (III: 477).

### *God's Answers to Prayer*

Thirdly, God answers prayer by giving the matter prayed for subsequent to prayer. It is here that the supplicant must be very attentive.

- (1) There are matters of which we know that God will not grant them all at once upon the first request, but will grant it step by step--such as growth in grace.
- (2) There are matters which God grants at once--such as deliverance from a present situation which is either pressing or threatening. This can also be true for a special matter which we desire to have, the outcome of which will either be evident within a short period of time, or there being no indication of time at all. If God grants the matter at once, he who takes note of the answer upon his prayers will readily observe that God has answered his prayer.
- (3) There are matters which pertain to others: either the church in general, a specific godly person, the conversion of our near relatives or someone else, or someone's physical well-being. If God grants such a request, and we realize that we have prayed for this, we have indeed received an answer upon that prayer and it must make us doubly grateful and joyous (III: 479-480).

Give heed therefore that you do not attribute it to the general providence of God if you receive something. More particularly, refrain from attributing it to chance, or from focussing only on the secondary causes--to which our corrupt nature is so inclined. Even Job himself came so far that he said, "If I had called, and He had answered me; yet would I not believe that He had hearkened unto my voice" (Job 9:16). Therefore acknowledge the hand of the Lord in all the good you receive--from the least to the greatest, and that which is common as well as extraordinary (III: 480-481).

Do not allow yourself to be hindered by your sinfulness, your weakness, or your deficiency in prayer, but acknowledge that the least upright sigh proceeded from the Spirit and that the Lord has therefore heard it. This will cause you to be grateful and express your love toward God. "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace:

thereby good shall come unto thee" (Job 22:21) [III: 481].

## Chapter 75: Fasting

Fasting is a special religious exercise in which a believer deprives himself for a day from all that invigorates the body, humbling himself in body and soul before God as a means to obtain what he desires (IV: 3).

*Fasting is a religious exercise motivated by a seeking after God.* Fasting due to poverty, avarice, illness, for health reasons, or a being prevented from eating food due to a business engagement is not applicable here. Rather we speak here of fasting as a religious exercise; it is God-focused and its intent is to seek God in this manner. Since all practice of religion is neither to be self-willed nor practiced according to human institutions, but only according to God's command and precept, then this is also true for fasting. It does not consist of idleness, but rather is an activity which is a day-long engagement consisting of secret dealings with God (IV: 3).

### Fasting: To Be Deprived of all that Invigorates the Body

Fasting consists foremost in *a depriving one's self* of all that invigorates the body, being desirous to bring the body for that given day into a condition of withdrawal, distress, pliability, and weakness.

It consists, first of all, in a depriving ourselves from all food (being expressed by the word fasting), for he who partakes of any food has broken the fast.

Secondly, on a day of fasting we are to deprive ourselves of all external ornamentation.

Thirdly, on a day of fasting we must deprive ourselves of all entertainment such as recreational games; taking a walk for the purpose of seeing gardens, ornamental works of art, or plantations, or going out by boat or horse and carriage merely for pleasure. "Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours" (Isa. 58:3). One must even refrain from marital union (1 Cor. 7:5).

Fourthly, we must also refrain from engaging in the labors of our calling.

Fifthly, there must also be a refraining from sleep.

Sixthly, above all things we must be carefully on guard against the commission of sins (IV: 4-5).

### Fasting: A Humbling of Ourselves According to Body and Soul

The second aspect of fasting is a humbling of ourselves according to body and soul. Soul and body are so intimately united that the ill disposition of the one begets the ill disposition of the other. When the body, due to the withdrawal of all refreshment, is rendered feeble, pliable, and is subdued, the soul will also beget such a disposition; and thus the natural disposition takes on a spiritual dimension. Fasting, in and of itself, is not a religious practice. It is only so when we seek God by way of fasting.

A humbling of ourselves consists in:

(1) the confession of sin accompanied with grief and shame.

(2) declaring ourselves to be worthy of judgment and a subscribing to justice if the Lord were to execute those merited judgments upon us.

(3) a supplicating for grace, frequently accompanied with weeping.

(4) a renewal of the covenant with the whole-hearted intent to forsake former sins and to live a godly life.

(5) the giving of alms: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" (Isa. 58:6-7) [IV: 6-7].

### The Duration of Fasting

(1) Moses (Deu. 9:9), Elijah (1 Ki. 19:8), and the Lord Jesus Christ (Mat. 4:2) fasted for forty consecutive days, during which time the Lord preserved their lives in a miraculous manner. We are not commanded to imitate this; rather, to do so is but superstition. Furthermore, no one can be without food for such a long period of time (IV: 7).

### Exhortation to Observe the Practice of Fasting

It is sad--a sign of great decay in the church--that so little work is made of fasting, both in public as well as secretly. Therefore, all who wish to lead a life of tender godliness and desire to see the good of Zion ought to stir themselves up to exercise this duty, for:

(1) God has commanded this (Lev. 23:27; Joel 2:12);

(2) The church and the saints of all ages have practiced this and have left us an example to be followed. Observe this in Judges 20:26, 2 Chronicles 20:3; and Nehemiah 9:1. References to solitary fasting are to be found in Nehemiah 1:4 and Psalm 35:13. This was not only a duty and practice in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament (cf. Mat. 6:16-18; Mat. 9:15; Mark 9:29; Luke 2:37; Acts 13:3; 14:23; 1 Cor. 7:5). Therefore, as obedient children of God and followers of the saints, engage frequently in fasting. This was the practice of the original Christian church as well as of believers at the outset of the Reformation, and even long thereafter. Do not allow this practice to die out (IV: 9).

If some of the godly have agreed to set apart a day, endeavor to join them, and stir up some other godly person to do likewise. The Lord will most certainly be among you; He will come to you and bless you. It will engender a sweet bond of mutual love, a holy mutual fellowship, and quicken both love and the performance of good works. When you make work of having solitary days of fasting, you will experience that the promise is true and will be fulfilled to you: "Thy Father...shall reward thee" (Mat. 6:18). The Lord will manifest that this is pleasing to Him. He will increase your light, and strengthen your heart in faith; you will be nearer to God in your walk, and lead a life which is more sober and thoughtful; and your conscience will be more tender, you will have more strength against sin, and receive more comfort from the Lord. He who has exercised himself in this has never regretted that he has done so, and we wish to recommend it as an exceptional means unto spiritual growth (IV: 10).

Preserve the impression of all that has transpired that day, that is, of all your initiatives toward God and of God's manifestations toward you. Give close attention as to how God responds to your day of prayer, for God will respond to it. And, if you may accustom yourself to this duty, you will discover so much sweetness in it, that you will long to have such a day of prayer by renewal (IV: 10).

## **Chapter 76: Watchfulness**

### Spiritual Watchfulness Defined

*Spiritual watchfulness* consists in watching over our soul in a careful and circumspect manner in order that no evil may befall her. Spiritual life is a precious treasure, desirable to the believer, that far excels the entire world and all that is in it. It has many enemies which lie in wait for it--not to be a partaker of it, but rather to destroy it; they hate it. A Christian must therefore be diligent in preserving this life. "Keep thy heart with all diligence" (Prov. 4:23). The believer knows the value of that life, is acquainted with his enemies and their activities, loves this life, is desirous to preserve and increase it, takes care that it is not injured, and is thus circumspect and always on guard if there is danger approaching from elsewhere. If he becomes aware of something, he is alert and stands ready with his weapons in hand to turn away the enemy, attacking all those who come too close (IV: 11).

Spiritual watchfulness is exercised with several objectives in view. It, first of all, pertains to *the spiritual influences* of the Holy Spirit, such as light, comfort, and strength--whereby the spiritual life of the soul is strengthened. Secondly, watchfulness pertains to *all that issues forth from the soul*, such as thoughts, words, and deeds, lest the soul be injured by any sin. Instead, there will be a striving that our entire conduct may be according to God's will, whereby spiritual life increases in strength.

Thirdly, the person who is spiritually watchful also keeps an eye out for *all that enters the soul*, so that no enemy will steal in to harm his spiritual life. He knows his enemies--the devil, the world, and his flesh--and he knows their wickedness and their tireless activity (IV: 11-12).

### Believers Exhorted to Be Watchful

Therefore, Christians, stir up your desire to be watchful and make work of it with the courage of a man. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13).

(1) We are by nature very drowsy. Our spiritual life is feeble, weak, has but little vigor, and indwelling corruption will very readily befuddle our understanding.

(2) The enemies are wakeful and are tireless in the execution of their assaults.

(3) How scandalous it is if we are assaulted by the enemy due to our lethargy!

(4) The wounds inflicted by the enemy are very grievous, their arrows are poisonous and burrow in deeply; and if the Balm of Gilead, administered by the Great Physician, did not heal those wounds, they would be the cause of death.

(5) When we are watchful, however, we need not fear the enemy (IV: 13).

### Guidance unto Watchfulness

He who wishes to be watchful will not easily and lazily lie down; rather, he will keep himself occupied. Such is also true here, for if we keep ourselves occupied with the reading of God's Word, prayer, singing, and engagement in the Lord's work with delight, then, even if we have but little strength, we shall be spiritually watchful. "Watch therefore: Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Mat. 24:42,46) [IV: 14].

### Physical Watchfulness

Thus both--too much or too little sleep--will cause our mind to be dull and lethargic. The metabolism of the body is not the same in all men; the one needs more sleep than the other. Thus, one who performs heavy labor needs more sleep than one who leads a quiet life in a chair. Every godly person ought to know himself in this respect, so that he will not harm his body either way and thus would commit sin (IV: 15).

### Physical Watchfulness for Religious Reasons

*To be watchful for religious reasons* is a special religious exercise in which we deprive ourselves of sleep for the entire night or a portion of it. Such time is then used entirely for the purpose of engaging ourselves in prayer, reading, and meditation--in order to crucify the flesh with its lusts and to grow spiritually.

All that we have said in our exposition of fasting is also applicable to our exposition concerning watchfulness. The one is a deprivation of food and the other of sleep. It is a *religious exercise*, for the objective is to seek God in this manner. The time is not spent in being quiet and inactive, but it rather consists of spiritual activity. It is a *special exercise* and thus we must not engage in it too often, nor make it a daily activity, for this would be injurious to the body which soon would become unfit for anything.

It consists, first of all, in a *depriving one's self of sleep*.

Secondly, it consists in a seeking after God by means of prayer, reading, meditation, or reflection (IV: 15).

### Watchfulness: Commanded and Exemplified

However, alas! this earnestness and zeal is lacking in these days which are void of zeal, and therefore, why am I even speaking here of specific days of fasting and night-watches? However, the Lord can yet let this be a means so that it will not be entirely forgotten. May someone, as yet, be stirred up by this, or at least be convinced of his lack of zeal being even too hasty in his morning and evening exercises. Such are far removed from a frame which would stir them to arise in the night--or at least that would move them to set apart a portion of the beginning or end of the night to be watchful for the purpose of engaging in prayer (IV: 17).

## **Chapter 77: Solitude**

Solitude is a separation from all men for a period of time, in order to be enabled to express ourselves more earnestly and with more freedom as we engage ourselves in seeking after God. We designate this as a separation from all fellowship with men (IV: 19).

This is a *seasonal* separation and thus not life-long as the papists do in their monasteries, which are nothing more than places of filth, dens of murder, and impure Sodoms. Then there are also the hermits among them who permit themselves to be enclosed within four walls, or who make either the forest or the wilderness their residence. We abhor this manner of life--even if it were void of all superstition and pollution. For, first of all, it is contrary to God's command who has created man as a being in need of companionship, saying, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Secondly, it is God's will that we let our light shine before men in order that they may see our good works and may glorify our Father which is in heaven (Mat. 5:16); and that we would use our gifts to the advantage, conversion, and edification of other men. We have received our talents to that end, along with the command: "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13). Thirdly, continual solitude prevents us from becoming acquainted with our corrupt heart, being humbled by this, and striving for its sanctification, there being no opportunity whereby this corruption would manifest itself (IV: 19-20).

### *The Heart Must Strive for Solitude*

We must always strive for a disposition of heart that is inclined toward solitude, so that we can engage in secret prayer while surrounded by the turmoil of the world and as we interact with people. This means that we are to be loose and divorced from all that is of this world, such as the honor, love, riches, lusts, and pleasures of men. Furthermore, it means to be free from all creatures so that they will neither have dominion over us, conquer our hearts, confuse, nor trouble us (IV: 20).

### *Special Times of Solitude*

However, in addition to this habitual disposition toward secret prayer and our normal devotional time, it can be exceptionally conducive to the increase in godliness if we occasionally designate a special time in which we fully separate ourselves from the company of men. Everyone must proceed here, however, in a manner consistent with his physical or spiritual condition (IV: 21).

### *Exhortation to Be in Solitude*

First, such was the practice of the Lord Jesus, and He has left us an example so that we would walk in His footsteps. At one time He would go to a solitary place (Mark 1:35); then He would ascend a mountain all by Himself (Mat. 14:23), and at other times He would use the Garden Of Gethsemane as His normal place of prayer (Luke 22:39). This has also been the practice of the following saints: Abraham (Gen. 15), Isaac (Gen. 24:63), and Jacob (Gen. 32). Many of the godly have prospered exceptionally in doing so. Therefore, you ought to emulate them and do likewise. If it is your mutual desire, motivated by love, to follow Jesus in this, be assured that He will meet you in love and sweeten your efforts.

Secondly, it is time and again needful for us to recover from the ill disposition we acquire in the midst of the turmoil of the world. Worldly turmoil is very capable of disturbing intimate fellowship with God and of causing us to be estranged from Him.

Thirdly, while engaged in our daily routine, we are frequently closed up within. The heart is hard, the eyes refuse to produce tears, and we become listless and dull. If, however, we then seek a place of solitude other than our ordinary location, the heart will frequently be enlarged.

Fourthly, the Lord is so good that He will meet His children in a special manner when they are in secret--even though it can be at times that all is turned upside down within while they are in secret, that they are overcome with heavy darkness, that the Lord hides His countenance for some time, and they become unbelieving, dull, and entirely empty within. The Lord will yet secretly sustain and cause them to wrestle on. Upon that wrestling the Lord will meet them occasionally in a special manner.... When Jacob laid himself down in a lonely place, the Lord revealed Himself to him, so that he said, "Surely the LORD is in this place...this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. 28:16-17). When he wrestled in solitude on the other side of the river Jabbok, the Lord blessed him and gave him the name "Israel." This had such an effect upon his heart that he said, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Gen. 32:30). When Moses was alone in the wilderness, the Lord appeared to him in the burning bush and granted him that grace to be sent forth to deliver the people of God from Egypt. When Peter was praying upon the flat of the roof he fell into a trance and the Lord revealed the calling of the Gentiles unto him. Therefore, if you desire extraordinary revelations and extraordinary comforts, seek solitary places. You will then experience that God is good to those who seek Him, and you will perceive that you will then return homeward with a radiant soul (IV: 22-24).

## Chapter 78: Spiritual Meditation

This is a spiritual exercise in which a godly person--having a heart which is separated from the earth and lifted up toward heaven--reflects upon engages his thoughts upon God and divine things with which he was already previously acquainted. He does so in order to be led further into divine mysteries, to be kindled with love, to be comforted, and stirred up to lively exercises (IV: 25).

### Spiritual Meditation: A Religious Exercise

Spiritual meditation is a *religious exercise*. It neither consists in idleness, nor is it a passive disposition in which we are but recipients, permitting ourselves to be illuminated about the divine perfections and divine mysteries--just as a mirror is irradiated by the sun. Instead, it is an exercise in which the soul is occupied in reflecting upon and reasoning about these matters, approving of them, delighting in them, is in amazement about them, and is quickened by them (IV: 25).

It is a requisite for meditation *that the heart be separated from all things and be lifted up on high...* During that time we must lay aside all cares, desires, and earthly engagements and turn heavenward toward God. This does not mean that we will immediately be in such an elevated frame, but we will be striving for this. There will be ejaculatory sighs that we may be enabled to set ourselves apart and be stirred up, as well as for the manifestation of light and grace. While thus striving to attain to a fit frame for this, we will begin to think and meditate. The soul being empty, seeks to be filled with substance whereby, while meditating, she may be nourished. She offers herself, opens herself, yearns, anticipates, and is active (IV: 26).

### The Person who Meditates

Spiritual meditation is the activity of a godly person who has spiritual light and life--the one less and the other more. He knows God and has a desire after God; this is the reason why his heart is repeatedly drawn to God. It was so sweet and delightful to him to have seen and tasted something of God that he could not forget it. Time and again it comes to mind and he is desirous that he would experience this again in a greater measure. Such meditation gives this experience a new sense of sweetness and stirs up his desires (IV: 27).

### The Object of Meditation

The object of such meditation is *divine matters of which he has prior acquaintance*. There is, furthermore, an inquisitive thinking about and meditation upon those matters with which one is not acquainted as yet but, nevertheless, desires to be acquainted with. However, the meditation in question here is a *practical* reflection upon matters with which we are acquainted, concerning which we wish to be inwardly moved again by way of meditation. He who is desirous to engage in spiritual meditation will sometimes pursue what comes to mind, and thus follow the Spirit indiscriminately from one subject to the next.... Hastiness in meditation will rob us of its fruitfulness (IV: 27-28).

### Spiritual Meditation: A Work of God's Spirit

When a man possesses spiritual life, however, this life cannot be idle; it will be active by way of meditation. Since this life originates in heaven, it will also gravitate toward heaven. If it were not repressed by natural corruption, would always, without impediment, be exercised with holy meditation. Since it is repressed, however, it wrestles with corruption and breaks through all this in holy meditation. "My heart is inditing a good matter" (Psa. 45:1). To that end it is time and again needful that there be the influence of the Holy Spirit whereby He lifts us up and maintains our life. Such is the manner in which the regenerate man meditates; however, he is moved to that end by the Spirit of God (IV: 28).

### The Objective of Meditation: Growth in Grace

The all-encompassing goal and objective of meditation is the building-up and growth of spiritual life. More particularly, it will be our objective

- (1) to acquaint ourselves with God and to have communion with Him, since that constitutes the felicity of the soul;
- (2) to rejoice and delight ourselves in God;
- (3) to be ignited with love toward God;
- (4) to be comforted when we are melancholy;

(5) to be quickened in sanctification (IV: 29).

It frequently happens that meditation is very lifeless, and that one neither finds delight nor sweetness in it so that one needs to desist. Such can occasionally be due to God's wise and sovereign dispensation. At times this can be due to meditation not being a habitual practice, as well as a lack of experience in this heavenly art. At other times it can be caused by our listlessness toward this work, and the fact that the soul is ill-disposed toward this work. We must therefore not neglect this work, however, but rather resume it at another time. And, if our occupation with this cannot be lengthy, we need to make it shorter--and we shall indeed experience that it is not in vain (IV: 29).

### Believers Exhorted

Therefore, you who are lovers of God and of holiness, learn this secret art which is practiced but little, for:  
First, God commands it;

Secondly, meditate upon the examples of the saints and let them be examples for you.

Thirdly, it is the very nature of God's children to be desirous for this.

Fourthly, herein the very essence of sweetness is to be found and it is profitable work. "My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD" (Psa. 104:34); "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee" (Psa. 139:17-18). How much profit there is to be found in this! (IV: 29-30).

I do not wish to prescribe rules to you. Begin with it and you will experience yourself which way is best for you. Only make sure that you separate yourself fully, doing so with the intention and the desire to think of nothing else during that time. Let your heart go out in prayer for the reception of the Spirit, quickening grace, as well as for guidance. If you perceive that you cannot make a beginning with this, then read a portion in the Word of God or sing a psalm (IV: 30).

## **Chapter 79: Singing**

Singing is a religious exercise by which, with the appropriate modulation of the voice, we worship, thank, and praise God. It is a *religious exercise*, for we make use of the skill and sweetness of our voice to move others to have dealings with God. (IV: 81).

Our voice and the melody in and of themselves are not pleasing to God; rather, it is the motion of the heart relative to the spiritual matters which we express before the Lord in singing which pleases Him. Both the voice and the melody are means to bring us into a spiritual frame and to lift up our hearts heavenward--as well as the hearts of those who hear us (IV: 81).

The entire world and all that is contained in it is theirs. This is also true for all forms of art; they may freely make use of them. The manner in which someone is moved by music will be consistent with the nature of his heart. A natural man will but be moved in a natural sense, whereas the melody will move the spiritual heart in a spiritual sense (IV: 82).

The spiritual man does not merely relate to the melody only; rather, the melody is complementary to the spiritual matters, and spiritual matters complement the melody--in both cases the heart is involved. Thus, it can be that the heart, being in such a frame, will either yield both subject matter and melody, or the subject matter and melody will move the heart in such a manner. The more pleasant the voices or instruments are which sing or play these melodies, the more the heart will be moved. When Jehoshaphat and two kings showed Elisha the peril in which their armies were, due to lack of water, he said, "But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him" (2 Ki. 3:15). By way of the playing of this instrument his spirit was quickened, and having been brought into a fitting frame, he received the revelation that they would receive water (IV: 32-33).

### *Singing Practiced by all Creatures from the Beginning of Time*

All that transpired prior to the time of Moses has not been recorded, but it is credible that the godly, from the time of Adam, have delighted themselves in singing. Job, who is considered to have lived during Abraham's time, makes mention of singing in his book: "Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night" (Job 35:10). After the children of Israel had left Egypt and went through the sea on dry foot, they praised the Lord in song: "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD" (Exo. 15:1) [IV: 33].

### *Scripture Enjoins Us to Sing*

Not only are we exhorted in the Old Testament to sing, but this is true for the New Testament as well. "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19); "...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16); "Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (James 5:13); "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also" (1 Cor. 14:15); "And they sung a new song" (Rev. 5:9) [IV: 34].

### *Other Spiritual Songs in Addition to the Psalms*

The decision of the Dutch Synods has been very correct indeed, namely, that none other but the Psalms of David are to be used in the churches (IV: 35).

### *The General Lack of Singing Lamented*

If the heart were more spiritual and joyous, we would more readily praise the Lord with joyful song and thereby stir up ourselves and others. I am here not only speaking of the singing in church. (There many do not even sing; and for some the very best they can do is read the psalm silently.) [IV: 35].

### *Exhortation to Sing*

It is thus needful that I stir up everyone to sing--not only psalms, but also spiritual songs. Therefore, believers, get rid of this listlessness. "Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing" (Psa. 100:2). First, you must know that singing is not a neutral matter in which you may or may not engage. Rather, it is God's command. God requires this from you and desires to be served by you in this manner as we have shown you in the foregoing. Consider these and similar quotes and impress them upon your heart as being mandatory. Begin to engage in this duty with an obedient heart; break open your mouth and your closed heart will open as well (IV: 35).

God is particularly pleased when His children praise Him in song. There where the Lord is sweetly praised in song--there the Lord will come with His blessings. "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel" (Psa. 22:3). It is noteworthy to consider what transpired at the dedication of the temple. "It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD...that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD; So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God" (2 Chr. 5:13-14). When Jehoshaphat, together with his army, lifted up their voices in joyous exclamation and song (2 Chr. 20:22), the Lord defeated their enemies. When Paul and Silas sang praises unto God in the middle of the night, the doors of the prison were opened and the bands of all the prisoners were loosened (Acts 16:25-26). Therefore, if you are desirous to please the Lord, and delight in having the Lord visit your soul and experience His help, then accustom yourself to singing (IV: 36).

Singing will move a heart which frequently remains unmoved during prayer (IV: 36).

## **Lecture #11: Brakel on Biblical Spirituality IV** (chaps. 83-89)

### **Chapter 83:**

Love for our neighbor is the fountain of all those virtues which we are to exercise toward him. However, it is humility that adorns these virtues. However excellent the performance of a virtue may be, if there is pride in the person who performs this duty, such performance will reek and be without luster. Therefore, a believer who in the way of holiness wishes to live to the glory of God and render the church honorable, must strive to be humble.

*Humility is the humble disposition of the heart of the believer--both in a personal sense and toward his neighbor. It consists in having a correct judgment concerning ourselves whereby we neither elevate ourselves above our condition, nor wish to be elevated by others as such (IV: 67).*

#### *The Adornment of a Believer*

Humility is a disposition of the heart. The beauty of this virtue is not something which is paraded and put on display to be approved of as such. It also does not consist in having the intention to be humble--a condition which may exist temporarily, but soon dissipates. Rather, humility is a propensity or a predisposition. The regenerate heart has a nature which is thoroughly humble--this humility being of an enduring nature. Whenever such a person engages himself, he does so in harmony with his heart and nature. All that he does has the fragrance of humility and is permeated with humility. The measure in which this disposition is pervasive and steadfast is commensurate with the measure of a person's exercise to be in such a disposition. This propensity, initially having been infused by God, is fortified through much exercise (IV: 68).

#### *The Object and Essence of Humility*

*The object of humility is man himself as well as his neighbor.*

(1) *It is man himself*, for due to self-knowledge he knows that there is neither excellence nor anything desirable to be found in him. In his own eyes he is a great *nothing*, and he views himself as such.

(2) The humble person also exercises his humility toward *his neighbor*. He acknowledges it to be the will of God that he love his neighbor, and this motivates him to do so. He perceives in his neighbor that which is eminent and desirable; he highly esteems it, honors him as such, whole-heartedly submits himself to him in that respect, and with this disposition he does for his neighbor what God commands him to do. In comparing himself to his neighbor, he appears in his own eyes as being copper compared to gold, and as lead compared to silver (IV: 68-69).

Humility...brings the heart low and renders it humble. Thus, the humble person will not have himself in view in his actions, and upon having performed his duty he turns to himself, humbly and quietly remaining in that place, regardless of what the outcome of his performance may be.

The other extreme relative to humility is *despondency*. This comes about when we lose all courage, give up, and thus collapse as a wet rag. This is not humility; rather it is pride, for despondency comes about when we can neither achieve our objective nor perceive any way whereby to achieve it. Humility is positioned between these two vices (pride and despondency) (IV: 69).

#### *Humility Proceeds from God*

God is *the moving cause* of humility... Thus, humility issues forth from *a right judgment of ourselves*. The humble acknowledge that they are made of dust and reside in tabernacles of clay. They know that they have sinned and come short of the glory of God (IV: 70).

#### *The Effects of Humility*

The effects of humility are two-fold: the humble person will neither elevate himself above what his condition is, nor will he want to be elevated as such by someone else.

First, *a humble person will not elevate himself above what his condition is*. God has made a distinction between

people--both in the spiritual as well as the natural realm.

Secondly, he neither desires to be elevated by others above the condition in which he is. This would give neither pleasure nor joy, but rather sorrow and grief, knowing that he is not entitled to it. He wishes to be humbled and remain unnoticed as he passes through this world. He only desires to give rather than receive. He lets Haman have his knee-bends and Herod his praises. (IV: 71-72).

### *The Proud Rebuked*

There are but few humble persons--yes, humility is presently despised and made out to be as dullness, melancholy, evil-temperedness, and slavishness. Nevertheless, this is the disposition with which God is pleased--the contrary of which He hates (IV: 72).

Your pride will readily be detected and you will be a stench to all who observe and notice this. People will have an aversion for you, ridicule you, consider you to be a fool, will avoid your company, and if you are in the presence of upright people who will give you some attention and get you to talk, your proud foolishness will manifest itself and you will make a mockery of yourself (IV: 73).

### *The Godly Exhorted to Strive for Humility*

You who are godly, upon examining yourself you will perceive from the foregoing not only the deficiency of your humility, but also how much pride remains yet in you. Humble yourself about this, be ashamed, and strive to increase in humility.

If pride is such a dreadful sin, and if such dreadful plagues are its consequences, then you who are godly ought to see to it that this sin does not cleave to you; rather, endeavor with your entire heart to be humble within and without, for:

First, you have nothing of yourself whereof you can be proud; instead, all that is despicable is to be found in you.

Secondly, take note of God's command; God forbids you to be proud and commands you to be humble. Consider texts previously quoted in this treatise, and add the following passages to them: "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate" (Rom. 12:16); "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness" (Eph. 4:1-2); "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but...to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8).

Thirdly, your name as well as your relationship to the Lord Jesus obligates you to humility. You are named "Christian" after the name of Christ. Your relationship to Him is that you are His bride upon whom He has set His love. The Lord Jesus was humble; the perfect example of humility. Love ought to motivate us to be conformed to Him--more so because He establishes Himself as an example and commands us to follow Him in this: "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Mat. 11:29).

Fourthly, humility is a most eminent ornament. Virgins love jewelry, and a bride will adorn herself to please her husband. However, you are spiritual virgins--the bride of the Lord Jesus. I may thus address you as such: "Put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem" (Isa. 52:1). However, what is your ornament?--humility. Humility is the most beautiful ornament, and renders you pleasant before God and men (IV: 74-76).

### *Means to Learn Humility*

There are three books from which we may learn humility.

First of all there is the book of sin. Examine yourself continually in the light of your falling into sin.

Secondly, there is the book of our crosses. However bitter and distasteful the cross may be, it nevertheless teaches us humility if we take but proper notice of it. From it we shall learn how disagreeable, unbelieving, and impatient we are, all of which are fruits of pride.

The third book is the book of God's benefits and blessings. On the one side they will humble us when we consider our ingratitude in failing to end with them in the Lord with a lively heart (IV: 77).

## Chapter 84: Meekness

Meekness is the believer's even-tempered disposition of heart which issues forth from union with God in Christ, consisting in self-denial and love for the neighbor. This results in having fellowship with our neighbor in a agreeable, congenial, and loving manner; in relinquishing our rights; in enduring the violation of our rights without becoming angry; in being forgiving; and in rewarding good for evil (IV: 79).

The very term "meekness" implies that the heart must be tender. If the soul may be in such a frame, then whatever issues forth from this fountain will cause the entire disposition of a person--as well as his countenance and words--to be unpretentious and tender. "But let it be the hidden man of the heart...even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" (1 Pet. 3:4) [IV: 80].

### The Subject and Object of Meekness

Only a believer who is presently united with Christ, however, and is spiritually alive due to the influence of His Spirit, is capable of being truly meek. "Ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness" (Gal. 6:1). They are placed in contradistinction to the ungodly: "The LORD lifteth up the meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground" (Psa. 147:6) [IV: 80-81].

The *object* of this virtue is man's neighbor, that is, every person. Meekness is also practiced toward God; it relates to His commandments being embraced with a compliant and willing soul. James speaks of this: "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). It also pertains to chastisements to which one quietly submits his soul without fretfulness (IV: 81).

### The Essence of Meekness

A meek person has chosen God to be his portion, however, and perceives all that is in the world to be vanity, knowing that no one will either speak or do anything except it be according to God's will. Thus, as he trusts in God, his heart will be even-tempered and fixed. It is neither in turmoil nor restless, but rather is of an even-tempered, steadfast, and peaceful disposition. If someone assaults him in either word or deed, he will be as an even beach upon which the tempestuous waves crash and then trickle away playfully (IV: 81-82).

### God, the Moving Cause of Meekness

God is the *moving cause of meekness*. Man is naturally inclined to lose his temper, be angry, be rancorous, and to be as prickly as a sticker bush which cannot be touched without being injured by it. However, when God regenerates a man according to the image of the meek Jesus, He grants him a meek heart. The apostle therefore also lists meekness among the fruits of the Spirit. "But the fruit of the Spirit is...gentleness<sup>1</sup>" (Gal. 5:22) [IV: 82].

A virtue never functions independently. The one virtue will always beget the other, and the one will be supportive of the other. This is also true for meekness.

- (1) It issues forth from a heart that is united with God in Christ. When man has God as his portion he has everything and has no need for anything beyond (IV: 82).
- (2) The denial of self proceeds from this disposition.
- (3) The meek person also loves his neighbor. We can endure much from someone he loves (IV: 82-83).

### The Effects of Meekness

The *effects* of meekness are:

- (1) *a being congenial*, so that it is a pleasant and effortless task to interact with the meek person.
- (2) *a relinquishing of one's rights*. A meek person is a wise person; his wisdom is of a meek nature, and he is neither witless nor insensitive. He can indeed judge what is his right, and he is capable of standing up for his rights. He will

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<sup>1</sup>The Statenvertaling uses the word "zachtmoedigheid," that is, "meekness."

do so if this is God's will and he is under obligation to do so. However, he does so with quiet earnestness, freedom, and in a noble manner--always in such a manner that his meekness shines forth. If, however, there are matters in which he may yield, then he would rather do so than to gain that which is his ultimate right by fighting for it.

(3) *enduring injustice*. A meek person neither wishes to get even nor avenge himself--even if he were able to do so.

(4) *a forgiving of the committed injustice*. Forgiveness does not merely consist in a refraining from taking vengeance, meanwhile harboring animosity and hatred in the heart. Instead, it consists in not holding the offender accountable and in loving him no less than before. It means that the offender must be treated as if he had not committed the deed.

(5) *the rewarding of evil with good*. To render evil for evil is carnal, to reward good with evil is devilish, but to reward evil with good is Christian (IV: 83-84).

### *The Need for Self-Examination*

Take to heart what manner of person you are before God and what will befall you due to this.

(1) Do you have such an even-tempered and stable disposition of heart when people maltreat you in word and deed?

(2) Or do you have a cross, fretful, and irritable nature? Do you have as many spines as a porcupine does, or are you as prickly as a bush of thorns, so that one cannot be in your presence without being pricked? (IV: 84-85).

### *God's Inevitable Judgment upon Those Who Are Void of Meekness*

Therefore, as insignificant as it may seem to you that you are without meekness; as heroic as you consider yourself in your wrath and in avenging yourself, so abominable you are in the eyes of God, and so dreadful will your end be if you do not repent (IV: 86).

### *Believers Exhorted to Be Meek*

Meekness is a glorious ornament of the church. The church is the glory of Christ, and when it is glorious, God and Christ are glorified. The latter is the desire of a true member of the church. It is his desire that he may attribute something to that, and since meekness is most eminent in glory in the eyes of those who are within and without, the Christian must thus strive in an extraordinary manner to be adorned with this ornament. Meekness itself is an ornate garment which covers nakedness and adorns with beauty the one who wears it (IV: 87-88).

The meek are wise, are of a noble spirit, and have strength to conquer all resistance. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov. 16:32). The meek person will overcome where a rich person with his money, a prominent person with his prominence, and an angry person with his boisterous violence, will fail. He will conquer his enemies solely by his meekness and by rewarding him good for evil (IV: 89).

### *Advice for Improvement*

Always hold before you the example of the meek Jesus. To that end read the gospels frequently, continually taking note of the manner in which the Lord Jesus manifested His meekness. Impress this upon your heart in such a manner, so that, so to speak, the very nature of it is transferred unto you. And if something occurs which is unsettling, then allow your thoughts to turn to the gospels to ascertain whether or not the Lord Jesus has been in such a situation and how He conducted Himself under those circumstances--then follow His example (IV: 90).

## **Chapter 85: Peaceableness**

Love for the neighbor, humility, and meekness will beget peaceableness. Wherever the first three are to be found, the last will also be found (IV: 91).

Peaceableness is a quiet and contented disposition of the soul of a believer, which inclines him toward, and causes him to strive for, maintaining a relationship with his neighbor which is characterized by sweet unity--doing so in the way of truth and godliness (IV: 91).

*The object* of this virtue is our *neighbor*--all men. A peacemaker is continually at war with the devil, the world, and his corrupt flesh--and thus neither desires nor seeks to be at peace with them. The more he hates and opposes them the better he likes it. However, toward men as men --as his neighbor--he has a peaceable heart and with them he endeavors to live in peace (IV: 92).

The essence of this virtue consists in *an inclination, proceeding from inner quietness and contentment, to live in harmony with our neighbor*. A peacemaker, living in the enjoyment of peace with God, has a heart free of strife which, relative to his neighbor, is content and at peace. He does not harbor thoughts of having been wronged by his neighbor, of envy, or of any discontentment. Rather, he is at peace within--calm, quiet, and satisfied. When he thinks about his neighbor, his heart desires to dwell in harmony with him, and he interacts with him in a most pleasant manner (IV: 92).

### *A Fruit of Regeneration*

Such a peaceable disposition does not issue forth from man's nature, for the one man is as a wolf to the other. God changes that cruel and savage heart, however, and grants His children to be at peace with Him in Christ; this in turn engenders a peaceable heart toward his neighbor. "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain" (Isa. 11:6, <1>9). The Lord would transform the barbarous heathen into such persons and thus the apostle enumerates peace as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. "But the fruit of the Spirit is...peace" (Gal. 5:22). The apostle therefore wishes the peace of God upon the congregation. "Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means" (2 Th. 3:16). Thus, He is frequently called the God of peace, for He gives peace and delights in those who are peacemakers (cf. Rom. 15:33; 2 Cor. 13:11) [IV: 93].

### *The Practice of Peaceableness*

However pleasant and desirable peace may be, we must nevertheless be on our guard that we do not pursue and maintain it at the expense of the truth and godliness. Therefore, in our definition we added the following limitation: "in harmony with the truth and godliness." There are people who are fearful of experiencing the displeasure and opposition of someone else, and therefore, however much they may be set in their ways and will protect that, so to speak, with a knife in their hands, they nevertheless easily give up that which is not theirs, but rather was entrusted by God to their safekeeping, namely, truth and godliness--even if this would mean the loss of everything, yes, even their life. Such people will then hide themselves behind the phrase "peace, peace." This is clear proof that they neither belong to the peacemakers in Israel, nor do they truly have a peaceable heart.

This is the virtue which is so earnestly commanded and insisted upon everywhere in God's Word: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they will be called the children of God" (Mat. 5:9); "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace" (Rom. 14:19); "Be at peace among yourselves" (1 Th. 5:13) [IV: 95].

### *Are We Peacemakers?*

Is your soul one with the godly in Christ, and does your peaceable relationship proceed from this unity? Do you maintain a peaceable disposition from your side and do you still strive to be at peace when natural man comes against you with much evil? Is your heart at rest, content, and pleased as far as your neighbor is concerned when you think of him in seclusion--or if you see or speak with him? (IV: 96).

Or, are you convinced that you are truly destitute of this disposition and its resultant deeds? How happy would you be if you were to be convinced of this and were to remain under such conviction until you would be desirous to earnestly seek the Lord Jesus, attain peace with God and be peaceably inclined toward your neighbor! (IV: 96)

### *The Deficient Peaceableness*

And you, who truly--and in principle--have a peaceable heart (which is a rare occurrence indeed) the foregoing is also meant to be a mirror for you. How little do you resemble this disposition and the life of peacemakers! How

many discordant thoughts do you have and how sharp and biting are your words! How readily do you quarrel and entertain animosity within your heart! How this ought to grieve you! Mourn over this and earnestly seek to banish all discord, striving to have a peaceable heart and to live peaceably (IV: 97).

### Peaceableness Adorns The Christian

Thirdly, consider furthermore the glory of this virtue. It is an extraordinary ornament for a Christian.... God declares them to be His children and the heirs of salvation: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Mat. 5:9). More we cannot desire; therefore, be diligent to live in peace (IV: 99-100).

### Means to Cultivate Peaceableness

If you are desirous to live in peace:

(1) Crucify your desire for money, honor, and love; it is neither possible to have a peaceable heart nor to maintain such a disposition without self-denial.

(2) Keep to yourself and let others govern their own matters. Do not appoint yourself as a detective and judge concerning the deeds of others; close your ears for backbiters. Do not listen for what is being said about you. "A whisperer separateth chief friends" (Prov. 16:28); "Where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth" (Prov. 26:20).

(3) Be always the least--both in your own eyes as well as in your conduct toward others. Endure being wronged, and forgive such deeds (Col. 3:13). In all things yield to the will of others insofar as this is not contrary to the will of God.

(4) If someone else encounters you in an unpleasant manner, or if you perceive the first motion of displeasure within yourself, arm yourself at once and resist strife at the very outset; be completely silent (IV: 100-101).

## **Chapter 86: Diligence**

After the fall it is also God's will that man be occupied, and He appoints to every man his labor. "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called" (1 Cor. 7:20). God not only wills that man perform his calling, but furthermore, that he do so *diligently*. It is this virtue which we will now discuss (IV: 103).

Diligence is the exertion of the spiritual and physical powers of a believer whereby he willingly, joyously, and earnestly executes that task which God assigns him, doing so because it is the will of God (IV: 103-104).

That diligence which is a Christian virtue, however, proceeds from a regenerate and believing heart. Faith unites the soul with Christ, and through Christ the believer approaches unto God as a reconciled Father. This in turn begets love toward God which motivates one to please the Lord, and thus believers view their task as having been commanded them by God. This engenders a willingness to accept this task, joyfulness in performing it, and industriousness to bring it to a good end--all this because it is the will of God and in order that God might be pleased with that work (IV: 104).

### Exertion of One's Spiritual and Physical Faculties

*The essence of diligence consists in the exertion of the powers of both soul and body.* The soul of a diligent person is also fully engaged to execute the task at hand well.

First, he engages his *intellect* to consider in what manner, and by what means, he may execute that task in the best possible manner.

Secondly, *the will* is also engaged toward this duty.

Thirdly, *the emotions and affections are also engaged.* The diligent person *will be industrious, zealous,* and find delight in his work.

Fourthly, the diligent person also *engages the powers and faculties of the body* for any physical labor to be engaged in. He neither fears perspiration nor fatigue; doing the will of the Lord is worth this to him (IV: 104-105).

### *The Objective of the Diligent Person*

The laborer's objective motivates him, and this in turn determines the means he uses to attain his objective. It is thus that the diligent person is motivated by his objective: to do the will of God (IV: 105).

### *A Lack of Diligence Rebuked*

By demonstrating what diligence is as a Christian virtue, the following persons ought to be convicted: Many practice the opposite vice, namely *laziness*. This is of such a shameful nature that the most lazy man does not wish to be labelled as such. Such a man ought to know that a lazy person is a disgrace to the church, no matter what his station in life may be. Regardless of whether he is a government official, minister, elder, deacon, married or unmarried person, tradesman, businessman, or laborer--if such a man or woman is a member of the Church of Christ, he or she is a disgrace to Christ and His congregation (IV: 106-107).

### *Arguments Presented to Deter Laziness*

We have thus fully depicted the lazy person for you, so that everyone might be convinced how much or how little he resembles such a person. And truthfully, some of the godly are also not entirely free from this. Even if they are diligent, very much is lacking as far as the pure nature of diligence (as previously described) is concerned (IV: 108).

### *Believers Exhorted to Be Diligent*

To the same degree that a believer hates and flees laziness, so earnest must he be in endeavoring to be diligent, doing so in the spiritual manner as has been proposed. For, a godly person cannot but be enamored when viewing this virtue in its beauty, by it and he will earnestly endeavor to perform his physical labors in a spiritual manner (IV: 109).

Diligence is an ornament to the Christian, and it removes the slanderous accusation which worldly citizens make concerning the godly: that they frequent all church services, catechism lessons, lectures, and meetings (going from the one to the other), while neglecting their calling, not giving attention to their families, and being lazy. Citizens of the world think much of diligence and have little use for godliness. You, however, ought to conjoin them, so that everyone may be convinced that godliness renders people both diligent and upright. You will thus be an ornament to the church of God, put those to shame who slander godliness, and stir up others (IV: 110).

God holds before us His own example: to labor six days and to rest on the seventh (Exo. 20:9-11). The Lord Jesus says, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (John 5:17). It thus behooves us to be industrious. How else would you dare to expect a blessing from the Lord? Even the animals will teach you to be diligent (IV: 110).

Even if a godly person does not gather as much as he would desire in a natural sense, the Lord's blessing will nevertheless rest upon the little that he has. "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked" (Psa. 37:16). This promise will be confirmed to you: "For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee" (Psa. 128:2) [IV: 111].

## **Chapter 87: Compassion**

Compassion is the inner motion of sympathy in the heart of a believer, generated by a consideration of the misery of the other person, thus motivating the believer to assist another in very deed (IV: 114).

The godly person...has spiritual life by virtue of his faith in Christ, and having become a partaker of the nature of Christ as a result of that union, he thus engages himself, motivated by love to God and for His will. From this proceeds love for his neighbor, being inclined also to seek his spiritual welfare in order that God may be thanked and glorified by the recipient of such help. It is with such a disposition that the believer helps the needy person. The apostle therefore limits compassion to the elect who are holy and beloved: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies" (Col. 3:12) [IV: 114].

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). Our compassion must also extend itself toward those who hate us. "Do good to them that hate you" (Mat. 5:44); "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him" (Rom. 12:20). Among all natural relationships with people, our relatives are nearest to us, and they must have preference over all other people. "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8) [IV: 115].

### *The Essence of Compassion*

*The essence of compassion consists in being inwardly moved to sympathy*, which, if it is right, will always be accompanied by an inclination and willingness to help. It does not consist in either fully or partially parting with our belongings. "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor...and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3). Rather, there must be:

- (1) *sympathy*. Wherever there is love there will also be sympathy when the person being loved is in need.
- (2) *inner motions of compassion*, whereby the veracity and intensity of this sympathy is expressed, this being such that it touches and moves the heart.
- (3) *an inclination, willingness, and zeal to assist the needy person* in accordance with his need: "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath" (2 Cor. 8:12) [IV: 116].

### *God, the Fountain of Compassion*

*The origin of compassion is not found in man himself*, for man is by nature filled with all manner of evil, wickedness, envy, murderous intentions, and evil inclinations, being without natural love and compassion (Rom. 1:29, 31). However, as the regeneration and spiritual life of God's children *have their origin in God*, this is also true for the virtue of compassion (IV: 116).

### *The Effects or Fruits of Compassion*

*The effects or fruits of compassion are a being charitable and a rendering of assistance*. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

This is the virtue, the practice of which is so frequently commanded in God's Word; impress this upon your heart. "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth" (Deu. 15:7-8) [IV: 117].

### *The Need for Self-Examination*

Now turn within and now observe yourself in this mirror which we have held before you when demonstrating what the nature of compassion is. Do you belong to the compassionate? Is there compassion in your heart flowing forth out of union with the Lord Jesus, having become a partaker of His loving nature by faith? Are there motions of sympathy, mercy, and compassion to be found within you toward outcasts, the poor in general--and particularly toward those who hate and evil entreat you? Are you mostly compassionate toward the godly and the members of the household of faith? Do you take their misery to heart? Do you seek them out, and do you focus upon their need so that you might be moved by it and become willing and zealous to help them? Do you provide shelter for the poor who are homeless, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit and encourage those among the sick who are poor? Do you help and support those who have come to their wit's end, and do you lend to them without hoping for something in return? What are your answers upon these questions? If you must answer negatively, be convinced that you are not among the merciful and the compassionate. There are various types among those who are void of compassion (IV: 117-118).

### *Believers Exhorted to Be Compassionate*

And you, believers--in whom the principle of compassion is indeed to be found--can observe from the aforesaid how much is yet lacking as far as the manifestation of your compassionate nature is concerned, what an abominable sin it is to be without mercy and not to exercise compassion, and what you are worthy of due to this. May it cause you to be ashamed before God, be deeply humbled, and to abhor yourself; and may it be accompanied with a joyous and

grateful acknowledgement that the Lord Jesus has also removed these sins by His blood. May the mercy of God move you henceforth to exercise more compassion (IV: 121).

First, precepts teach, but examples attract. Therefore, observe those compassionate persons who have gone before you, having left you an example. The most perfect example is the Lord Jesus, whom you ought to follow joyfully and willingly since He is altogether lovely to you. Read but the history of His life, the gospels, and you will perceive that all His footsteps were nothing but mercy. Time and again you will read: "Jesus being moved with compassion..." (IV: 122).

Secondly, compassion is most pleasing to God and man. God loves such persons and is pleased with their doings: "God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7); "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:16). If you desire to be loved by God and to experience His love, and if you furthermore desire to please God, let your heart and hand be compassionate. People have esteem and love for those who are generous and will bless them in their heart. Furthermore, the giver experiences more joy than the one who receives the gift (IV: 122-123).

Thirdly, the poor and their needs are very powerful motives whereby a compassionate heart may be stirred up. When you observe a godly person who is poor and consider that God loves him, that the Lord Jesus has died out of love for him, that he lives in the enjoyment of the communion and love of God and that he will eternally live in glory with you; if you consider furthermore that it pleases the Lord to keep him poor in this life, and causes him to meet you so that you may have the opportunity to exercise love and compassion (even though God does not need your gift, can quickly make the poor person rich, or support him without your help) [IV:123].

Fourthly, compassion glorifies God, for when a godly poor person, having been helped by you, goes to his hut, and there rejoices before the face of the Lord, thanks God, praises His mercy, is stirred up to put his trust in God, and prays to God that He might pour out a blessing upon you according to soul and body--how can we consider all that and not have a vehement desire to be compassionate? (IV: 123).

### Guidelines for Manifesting Compassion

Having been moved to be compassionate, it is thus needful that you conduct yourself wisely in exercising compassion. To that end the following needs to be noted:

First, the persons who are to be compassionate are the rich, people of moderate means, people of limited means, as well as the poor--no one is excluded. Everyone must inwardly be moved toward compassion, this being accompanied by a ready inclination to render assistance. The gift varies, however; the one gives much, the one less, and the other little. Each is to give according to his possessions and consistent with the authority he has over certain possessions.

Secondly, the persons to whom we must be generous are first of all the godly--then unconverted citizens, widows, orphans, and the homeless. We must particularly be generous to those who are in exile, or those who must flee for the sake of true religion.

Thirdly, the gift must proceed from that which is ours and be given in a righteous manner. Therefore, to give liberally while being deeply in debt, is theft. It is an abomination before God to give a portion to the poor from that which we have obtained through unrighteous means or by way of gambling, doing so to quiet the conscience somewhat or to atone for one's wrongdoing. This is no more pleasing to God than "the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog" (Deu. 23:18), God forbidding that such funds would come into the treasury (IV: 125-126).

## **Chapter 88: Prudence**

What a rudder is to a ship, prudence is to the exercise of the virtues, the discussion of which has thus far occupied us (IV: 129).

*Prudence is the exertion of the believer's intellect, which governs him in accomplishing his intended objective by the premeditated use of suitable means (IV: 129).*

### *The Object and Nature of Prudence*

The object of this virtue is *the objective pursued and the means used in pursuing that objective*. The objective which the prudent person has in view is manifold: to enjoy God, to glorify God, to have peace and joy in God, love toward God, holiness, to refrain from sin, to practice a given virtue, to be instrumental in the conversion of one's neighbor, and to restore one who has gone astray and is backslidden, doing so by way of rebuke, exhortation, and words of comfort--in one word: all that God commands in His law (IV: 130).

The nature of prudence consists in the *government* of the intellect, affections, vision, speech, mobility, and activities, so that the designated means may be used properly and the designated objective may thus be achieved....Such self-control adorns the person engaged in the activity, renders the activity itself desirable, and causes the goal to be achieved--in spite of the magnitude of the opposition and the craftiness of the opponents. Prudence will not engender abstinence from the task at hand, but rather it will direct us in doing so (IV: 131).

### *The Moving Cause of Prudence*

*The moving cause* of prudence is God alone. By nature man is *foolish* (Titus 3:3) and *foolhardy* (2 Tim. 3:4). However, the Lord grants His children prudent wisdom: "He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding" (Dan. 2:21). David, being desirous for this virtue, perceiving his foolishness, and knowing that the Lord alone grants this wisdom, prayed: "Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments" (Psa. 119:73) [IV: 131-132].

### *Prudence Highly Exalted in Scripture*

Prudence is a great virtue which is greatly praised and highly recommended in the Word of God, and is given as an extraordinary gift to God's children. It is praised as being an extraordinary ornament: "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock" (Mat. 7:24); "Who then is a faithful and wise servant...blessed is that servant...Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods" (Mat. 24:45-47) [IV: 132].

### *The Deficient Prudence of the Godly*

The exposition of prudence is also meant to be a mirror for the *godly* who are indeed wise virgins, having chosen the best portion. If, however, they examine themselves in light of what we have presented concerning prudence, how they then ought to be convinced that they are very imprudent (IV: 135).

How imprudent they are in lending their eyes and ears for that which wounds their soul! How imprudent they are in their speaking, whereby their heart is troubled and others are offended! (IV: 135).

### *The Godly Exhorted*

First, it is a delightful ornament--an ornament which only God's children have.

Secondly, prudence is an absolute necessity, for you are surrounded by your enemies, the devil is crafty, the world is deceptive, and the flesh tempts in a most subtle manner.

Thirdly, prudence will cause you to grow and to progress from grace to grace.

Fourthly, it will cause your endeavors to be prosperous, and your speaking, conduct, and silence will be enhanced (IV: 135-136).

I am certain that a godly person who reads this will be enamored with prudence, but at the same time will grieve, not knowing how to achieve this, being immediately convicted of his very imprudent actions which have spoiled his endeavors hitherto. Such ought to know, however, that God does not grant His sanctifying grace all at one time, for He wills that we shall increase by way of strife. Therefore, be not discouraged, for you will learn while thus engaged. Rather, give heed to my advice and follow it (IV: 136).

apply yourself with much zeal and diligence. Focus upon this virtue, love it, continually hold it before you, be active in learning how to be prudent, and be exercised as such in your speaking and conduct. If you have failed, do not be

discouraged, but courageously strive to improve matters time and again. While thus engaged, you will receive more and more of this virtue (IV: 136-137).

## Chapter 89: Spiritual Growth

As soon as a seed germinates, the plant will not rest until it has attained to its proper height and size. As soon as a living creature is born, it will seek for food in order that he might grow. This is also true for spiritual life. As soon as a believer has been regenerated he will be dissatisfied with the feeble measure of grace he possesses, and will at once be desirous to grow--yes, would desire to be perfect at once. This is so typical for a believer, that whoever does not have this smarting desire is no true believer (IV: 139).

The growth of His children is the goal and objective God has in view by administering the means of grace to them.... God will reach His goal and His word will not return to Him void; thus God's children will grow in grace (IV: 140).

This is also conveyed by the manner in which believers differ as far as their condition and the measure of grace is concerned. In the church there are children, young men, and fathers. "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father" (1 John 2:13). It is in grace as it is in nature: first a child, then a young man, and after that a father (IV: 140-141).

### A Gracious Work of God

*Spiritual growth is a gracious work of God in the regenerate whereby they increase in both habitual and actual grace.*

Spiritual growth is a *work of God*. The spiritual life of the regenerate proceeds from God who has caused them to be regenerated according to His will. The preservation of that spiritual life is also from God, who, by His power, preserves the regenerate in the faith unto salvation. Else they would lose it a thousand times in one day (IV: 141).

### Peculiar to the Regenerate Only

*The regenerate* are the persons who grow. That which does not exist can neither be increased nor decreased. Growth presupposes the presence of life (IV: 142).

It can happen that a godly person who has become a man in Christ becomes weak spiritually when everything according to the body begins to weaken--yes, that prior to his death falls into a particular sin, as is to be observed in David, Asa, Solomon, and Hezekiah. Therefore, we need to pray most earnestly, "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. Now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not" (Psa. 71:9, 18) [IV: 143].

### The Growth of a Gracious Disposition

Spiritual growth occurs in reference to habitual grace as well as actual grace. We shall first consider spiritual growth in reference to *habitual grace*.

(1) The increase in gifts to edify others (even if the use of these gifts is of increased benefit to others) is not evidence of growth if such activity does not proceed from *habitual grace* being in the soul. As such an unconverted person can excel a gracious person.

(2) It is also no an indication of growth if someone increasingly refrains from sin, and becomes more eminent in the exercise of all manner of virtues, while in the meantime there is no improvement in the virtuous disposition of the heart.

(3) Spiritual growth also does not consist in receiving many comforts from the Lord, there being a greater measure of holiness at the time when one experiences this comfort. At such a time one is being carried and drawn forward. This is similar to a man carrying a child and a man taking a child that is willing to walk by the hand, thus causing him to walk more rapidly than he would be able to do in his own strength. The Lord refreshes His children at times in this manner, but when He puts them back on their own feet, they have but little more strength than was previously the case (IV: 144-145).

However, spiritual growth first of all consists *in the increase of spiritual light*. This does not consist in an external knowledge of the literal sense of the Word of God, for the converted and unconverted have this in common--yes, the latter can even excel the former in this. Rather, there is an increase in spiritual light. Such a person understands the spirituality of the truths, that is, in their essential and spiritual nature. This light has an inherent warmth which ignites the soul in love, renders one fruitful, and brings spiritual truths into the soul so that whatever is true in the Word also becomes true within. This light enables him to see God more clearly in His attributes and works--not only external to themselves but also within themselves (IV: 145).

Secondly, spiritual growth consists *in more persistent and steadfast fellowship with God*. Union with God constitutes the life, joy, and salvation of the soul. The unconverted are entirely without this, a regenerate person has but a small beginning of this, and he who may be a father in Christ has a larger measure. This is the essential issue, and everything is contingent upon it. Someone who may receive a larger measure of grace receives this in a larger measure as well, and there will be a greater measure of steadfastness. The disposition of the heart is God-ward, and the thoughts will be focused upon God (IV: 145).

Thirdly, spiritual growth consists in *making use of Christ with more understanding and a greater measure of faith*. Growth which does not center in Christ is no spiritual growth. He who is of the opinion that he only needed Christ at the outset of his spiritual life and that he is now beyond that and thus leaves Christ alone, only focusing upon holiness--even if he solely makes use of Christ as an example for holiness --has gone astray and regresses more than he progresses. He who lives, lives in Christ "who is our life" (Col. 3:4), and he who grows, grows in Christ (IV: 146).

Fourthly, *spiritual growth consists in our engagement being of a purer sort*. The more we increase, the more we shall take note of the manner in which engage ourselves (IV: 146).

Fifthly, spiritual growth also consists in an increased *manifestation of grace*. Habitual graces cannot be restrained from manifesting themselves, but will break forth as actions. When a believer is actively engaged in mortifying sin and intent upon the practice of a virtue, this will beget a frame of heart which opposes all sin and is inclined toward all virtues. The heart will become increasingly virtuous, and thus a good heart will bring forth good deeds, and the exercise of good deeds will improve the frame of the heart. When a godly person grows, he not only grows in one virtue, but in all (IV: 147).

### *Growth in the Actual Manifestation of Grace*

First, *there is growth when one becomes concerned about more sins and desires more virtues*. At the very outset of spiritual life we generally are mostly aware of these sins--and particularly of a given sin or sins--which are our most besetting sins into which we fall most frequently. We shall then consider it to be a great accomplishment if we have not committed a given sin or sins on a specific day. When we grow spiritually, however, we shall become aware of more sins and will strive more against them--not only against external but also against internal sins. This will also pertain to our negligence in our performance of virtues as well as our deficiency in the performance of these virtues (IV: 147).

Secondly, *there is growth when we persevere upon encountering powerful opposition*. Such is true if we are able to let the fiery darts of the wicked to be deflected by the shield of faith, and if we do not permit ourselves to be hindered and detracted by inward strife from the performance of our duties toward God and our neighbor, thus conquering the wicked one (1 John 2:13) [IV: 148].

Thirdly, *there is spiritual growth if we proceed with the practice of virtue with more wisdom, determination, faith, and zeal*. The initial zeal of the believer is mixed with many natural passions. At that time we shall act ill-advisedly, and, in one way or the other go beyond our boundaries. We then know neither when nor how to act. We shall be either in good or low spirits and be either active or passive. A minor event will readily cast us down, and faith, hope, and love will easily succumb. However, after frequent stumblings, falling and rising again, we shall then begin to

walk more steadfastly, will rely more upon the Lord Jesus, rely more upon Him by faith--even when the Lord hides Himself, and the feelings which the Christian is so intent upon having, depart. We shall then, nevertheless, persevere in the way which we have chosen and persevere in our seeking. Falling into sin is much more grievous than before, but we shall nevertheless not disown our state so readily. We shall rely more upon the Word and will unreservedly put our trust in it (IV: 148).

### *The Need for Self-Examination*

Has your spiritual light increased? Do you have a more continual and steadfast fellowship with God? Do you make use of the Lord Jesus with more understanding and a greater measure of faith. Are you more upright in your dealings? Has the scope of your engagement increased as far as sins and virtues both are concerned? Do you persevere more upon encountering strong opposition? Do you proceed with more wisdom, determination, faith, and zeal? What do you say for yourself? (IV: 149).

### *Concerns of Souls Addressed*

There are, however, gracious souls who in truth have not backslidden, and who, nevertheless, are of the opinion that they are backsliding, thus doubting their entire spiritual state. For they think: "Growth is peculiar to God's children, but I am a backslider and thus I am not a child of God. However, it ought to be known:

- (1) that many are not capable of perceiving their own growth. They do not remember their previous condition, and thus are not able to judge about their present condition.
- (2) that growth cannot be measured by what we were yesterday, the day before yesterday, or a month ago. Rather, we are to compare ourselves with what we were at the outset of our spiritual life and what we are now; we would then be able to discern our growth.
- (3) that a godly person has his spiritual winters.
- (4) that a tree occasionally grows more in the one branch and then again in the other branch. A child of God grows likewise: sometimes more in the one area and then again in the other.
- (5) that when we say that growth is peculiar to God's children, this is to be understood as a normal habitual tendency--just as this is true for men or for trees upon having been planted in suitable soil, from which they can extract suitable nourishment--receiving an adequate amount of rain and sunshine in addition to this. A believer can at times be deprived of suitable nourishment, or of rain and sunshine. He can even become ill or meet with an accident. Would an ill child, or he who has met with an accident, say, "I am not human for I do not grow?"
- (6) that we sometimes have fellowship with other Christians who grow much more than we do.
- (7) that we now have eyes which are more spiritual and have a stronger desire for greater things.
- (8) that the godly generally believe that they are regressing. Well, let that be as it may, for that is nevertheless a sign that they have grown. For if we had neither life nor growth, we would also not be able to regress (IV: 151-152).

### *Reasons why Believers Do not Grow as much as They Ought*

Many are hindered by their unbelief and think, "I am not a child of God anyhow; I have no grace. Why should I strive for growth?" Such are always occupied with finding evidences of their regeneration. At times their conclusion is this: "I am not converted; believers are entirely different than I am." And thus they go on despondently and desist from spiritual activity (IV: 153).

Many are too despondent to make progress, for they perceive so many vices in themselves. They are conscious of the many virtues they ought to have and this causes them to be at their wit's end. Furthermore, they deem all their efforts to have been fruitless until now and believe that all will be in vain in the future (IV: 153).

world-conformity enters the picture here. Believers still have a desire for the things of the world under the cover and pretense of their being lawful, necessary, and fitting, the real reason being love for the world (IV: 153).

many are solely hindered by laziness in their walk. Just as in the realm of nature, the soul of the sluggard is desirous but has nothing since his hands refuse to labor, so it is also in the spiritual realm. We indeed desire to be in an elevated spiritual frame and to grow as a palm tree, but we are not willing to exert any effort--and thus we also do not receive it. Effort is required here--consisting in prayer, fasting, watchfulness, meditation, and the engagement in

spiritual warfare. The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force. Therefore, you who are desirous of attaining the end must also be desirous to use the means (IV: 154).

### *Christians Exhorted to Strive for Spiritual Growth*

Therefore, Christians, to the task! Strive to grow in both habitual and actual grace, for:

First, your spiritual state is as yet imperfect and you have but a small beginning of life.

Secondly, not to grow is the equivalent of remaining in your sin and pollution.

Thirdly, the more you grow, the more the image of God will become manifest, and the more likeness to God there will be--for that is the measure of perfection held before us.

Fourthly, the more you grow, the more pleasing you will be to God. A father is delighted when his children grow, and we rejoice when we observe the growth of trees which have been planted by us.

Fifthly, God is glorified by our growth, for therein it becomes apparent that He is neither a barren nor a howling wilderness to us but rather that He is good, benevolent, faithful, holy, and omnipotent.

Sixthly, the Lord will grant many comforts to those who grow, so that they will find much delight and joy in their growth. The Lord promises that He will manifest Himself to them and make His abode with them (IV: 154-155).

### *Additional Means*

He who is therefore desirous to make progress,

*Continually feed upon the Word of God* and you will grow in consequence of this. Be continually in prayer in order that you might continually be strengthened and supported by the Spirit of the Lord--for you are weak and will not prevail in your own strength. Continually exercise faith so that you may continually be united with Christ and apply the promises to yourself. You will thus purify the heart by faith, overcome the world, and resist the devil.

While thus engaged, you will soon experience that you are progressing and increasing in strength.

should *continually be engaged in battle against all sins* and be in the practice of all virtues. However, be especially vigilant against your besetting sins--that chief sin--by which you are most frequently tempted and into which you most frequently fall, which will trigger all other sins and turn everything upside down within (IV: 156-157).

## **Lecture #12: Brakel on Biblical Spirituality V** (chaps. 90-91, 94-98)

### **Chapter 90: Backsliding in the Spiritual Life of the Godly**

As trees experience their winters in which they are void of foliage and fruits, appearing to be barren and dead, the godly likewise also have their spiritual winters. The Lord Jesus said to the church: "The winter is past," which implies that it had experienced a winter. As people are subject to numerous illnesses, the godly likewise are subject to numerous spiritual illnesses. What a most blessed time it would be if there would not be one inhabitant of spiritual Jerusalem who would say, "I am sick!" However, such is not always the case (IV: 159).

When speaking of backsliding we are thereby not to understand the daily stumblings, spiritual strife, and a lack of spirituality, which pass after a short period of time. He who is able to pray and engage in spiritual warfare will not have to complain much about backsliding. The complaints of such a believer are generally due to an increase in light and life as a result of which he perceives more sin than he did previously; thereby he is better acquainted with the nature of spirituality, perceiving that there ought to be a greater measure of this in all his activity. Furthermore, he has an increased desire for a more elevated and a more spiritual frame. Since he perceives himself to be so far removed from all this, he is of the opinion that he is backsliding, whereas in reality he is gaining ground (IV: 160).

Instead, we understand backsliding to be the very opposite of growth and the decrease of both habitual and actual graces.... Sometimes the backsliding of believers is gradual and imperceptible, being similar to Samson's case who, without his knowledge, was deprived of his strength. When he intended to use it, he perceived that the Lord had departed from him. Such is also the experience of some of the godly (IV: 160).

#### *Seasons of Backsliding: Common to Most Believers*

It is evident that saints indeed do backslide, and it thus ought not to be a strange thing to you--as if you were encountering something which other children of God do not experience. You are therefore not to disown your state, for this would cause you to backslide even further. At the appropriate occasion we have shown that true believers cannot apostatize (IV: 161).

#### *The Causes of Backsliding*

It will be subservient to your restoration and to your proper conduct while in a backslidden state, to be acquainted with the causes which engender backsliding. We shall therefore present to you the most significant of them.

First, the Lord occasionally withdraws Himself in order to prove believers and to teach them to understand things which they previously were neither acquainted with nor had committed.

Secondly, backsliding sometimes results from the commission of a particularly heinous sin, it having been committed intentionally and against the conscience. This is particularly the case if this sin gives great offense.

Thirdly, it is sometimes caused by a cleaving to sins which are of a lesser degree. This happens when in the course of everyday life we do not live as tenderly according to our conscience as usual, but rather give in to lesser sins.

Fourthly, it is sometimes caused by failure to make use of Christ continually unto justification and sanctification.

Fifthly, backsliding is sometimes caused by despondency and a disowning of our faith. Such believers do indeed have a great desire for progress and they also strive for it. Rather than gaining, however, they are rapidly regressing in their opinion. This nearly causes them to give up since they do not know how to overcome this.

Sixthly, sometimes backsliding is caused by laziness, manifesting itself either in the neglect of, or the hasty performance of, one's morning, noon, and evening devotions; that is, if time for this is available. When the bride remained on her bed, the bridegroom departed, and if we do not pray we shall not receive (IV: 161-163).

#### *Backslidden Believers Exhorted to Seek Restoration*

He who finds himself guilty of backsliding ought to acknowledge that he himself is the cause of his backsliding. Let him justify God, and if he desires to grow, let him improve this situation. Even though we would have just cause to rebuke him sharply and to threaten him, we prefer to have compassion with him in his sinful frame as well as lament

over him (IV: 164).

Would you not give everything you had--and still have--in place of the entire world? You will thus perceive how appropriate it is to acknowledge what you have received. Therefore, should reflection upon all this not cause you to melt emotionally about your backsliding? Will this not engender the following resolve in you: "I shall return; I shall arise and return to my father; I was better off then than I am now; I wish to make a new beginning?" Oh, that the love of Jesus would conquer you, so that you would return to Him and seek Him in love! Therefore, arise and begin with new zeal (IV: 166).

Frequently the Lord readily rewards sincere intentions and endeavors to repent. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8). The father of the prodigal son "saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:20). Therefore, begin, and the Lord will help you and meet you in His eternal love (IV: 166).

Therefore, remaining inactive will not gain you anything, and a despondent and fretful casting away of all hope will not deliver you from hell. Instead, arise, engage yourself, and you will experience that those who seek the Lord will find Him (IV: 167).

### Means for Recovery from Backsliding

If you wish to recover from your backsliding, then

- (1) start from the beginning. This does not mean that you are to reject everything that the Lord has previously wrought in you, and that you are to consider yourself as being without grace in an unconverted state.
- (2) As he begins, he must be firmly resolved and willing to seek until the end of his life, and to arise as often as he falls down. He should be resolved to do so even if he were never to attain that comfort and that frame which he had prior to his departure. Instead, he ought to rejoice that he may seek, pray, and strive, and that with his feeble strength he is able to do so, seldom being able to proceed without becoming faint by renewal. And if all this appears strange to him and he insists on becoming despondent over this, he will never make progress.
- (3) He must wrestle to be restored in the way of faith. Occasionally God will permit His children to see a glimpse of His countenance and to taste a little of the spiritual manna. The sweetness of this makes them so desirous that they would always wish to live in this enjoyment....Therefore, upon finding a promise in the Word of God, let him rely upon it without reservation. Let him deem these promises to be a certainty, even if a thousand spurious reasons could be produced to the contrary. Let him reason thus: "God is truthful and will confirm this to seekers--and thus also to me" (IV: 168-169).

## **Chapter 91: Spiritual Desertion**

Among all the ways in which the Lord leads His people, *spiritual desertion* is among the most unique. Believers generally do not behave themselves well when thus led, and it will thus be fruitful if we delineate the nature of this condition, comfort those who are deserted, and render them guidance (IV: 171).

### What Spiritual Desertion Is Not

First, in discussing *spiritual desertion* we do not understand this to refer to *the desertion of the unconverted*. Secondly, we neither understand this to be *an entire nor a final desertion*. Thirdly, we do not understand this to be a *decreased infusion of spiritual grace* in the one as compared to the other. In His church, God has children of various maturity. Fourthly, we also do not understand it to refer to *the cessation of extraordinary illuminations and comforts*, after which those of an ordinary nature continue. Fifthly, we also do not understand this to refer to *daily offenses*, even though they occur due to the influence of the Spirit being absent who indeed would have been able to keep us from such offenses. Sixthly, we also do not understand this to refer to *a reduction of habitual grace* (IV: 172-173).

### *Spiritual Desertion Defined*

Spiritual desertion is a lengthy withholding and withdrawal of the normal operation and influences of the Holy Spirit in the regenerate by which He illuminates them, assures them of His favor, comforts them, fortifies them against sin and temptation, and renders them help in and deliverance from bodily trials. This causes them to be in darkness, weak in faith, disconsolate, to fall into sin, succumb to temptations, and to remain grieved and fretful in the bearing of a bodily cross (IV: 173).

Thus, desertion pertains to both justification (and all that relates to it) and sanctification. The desertion of one person may pertain more to the first of these, and to sanctification with another. For the one person it is of longer duration and for the other of shorter duration (IV: 173).

There are but few who remain silent and possess their soul in patience, look to heaven for help, continue to seek even though they are in thick darkness, persevere, occasionally weep heartily, and desire to hope in the Lord--even if He were to slay them. Such are generally delivered earlier from this, and reap the most benefit from spiritual desertion (IV: 174).

### *Desertion: The Lord's Withdrawal of the Normal Operation of His Spirit*

It is of the greatest importance to know that it is the Lord who, in the state of desertion, withdraws his normal operation, infusion of grace, illumination, and comfort. In the Word of God this is represented with a variety of expressions, each of which are expressive of a specific manner of desertion.... From all this it is evident that believers do not always bring themselves into a state of being estranged from God due to their misbehavior--even though this may be the case at other times. Rather, it can be that God also hides Himself from His side and departs for a season, withholding His illuminating, comforting, and sanctifying operations (IV: 174-175).

### *Particular Aspects of Being in a Deserted State*

It is no wonder that you are so troubled, for:

First, your Father hides Himself.

Secondly, your Jesus--your Beloved--your Bridegroom has departed.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit refrains His influences, and thus what light, comfort, and joy can you then have?

Fourthly, a deserted soul is in the dark, is surrounded by darkness, walks in darkness, and does not know where she is going.

Fifthly, she is weak and impotent, for the Lord who is the strength of her life has departed.

Sixthly, she is desperate and knows not what to undertake.

Seventhly, she would desire to turn to God and indeed begins to do so, but she is not able for her way is fenced up, enclosed with hewn stone, and encompassed by thorns.

Eighthly, when she takes refuge to the Word of God in order to derive some comfort from it, it will be a closed book for her.

Ninthly, the enemies attack her from all sides, and everyone of them gets the advantage over her.

Tenthly, if only it were true that the soul in all this were as yet sensible, tender, and able to cry. But no, despondency makes her numb, closes her heart, and she is, so to speak, frozen solid in a harsh winter.

Eleventhly, all this would cause more stirring within if we could but believe ourself to be a child of God. Here is, however, the primary source of anxiety: we then believe that we are not elected, have never had grace, have nothing more than external illumination, and have indeed been cast away by God in His wrath. We furthermore believe that God will never be gracious to us, but rather that He will condemn us forever (IV: 176-178).

### *How God is Glorified in Desertion*

First, *God wills thus to be glorified*. There are others beside you who will observe how God deals with you.

(1) It is to you and them that God wishes to show His *sovereignty and freeness* in manifesting His mercy to whomever and whenever He wills.

(2) The Lord will thus reveal *the greatness of His mercy*. Not only does one become acquainted with himself as to

how sinful and unworthy he is of the least grace and how wondrous it is that God would look upon him in grace; but he also knows and acknowledges that all is vanity and that nothing but God can satisfy him.

(3) The Lord will thus demonstrate His *holiness and righteousness*, and His aversion for sin. Furthermore, the Lord hereby shows that, even though the believer is pleasing to Him in Christ, his corruption nevertheless displeases Him.

(4) The Lord will thus reveal *His immutability, faithfulness, longsuffering and truthfulness* (IV: 179-180).

We may previously have believed in, and have been acquainted with all these perfections. However, by way of spiritual desertion we shall become acquainted with them experientially. Such knowledge, such acknowledgement, and such worship far exceeds what we had before this. It is true that during a time of desertion we shall not be able to perceive all this very well, but we shall experience this subsequently. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee" (Job 42:5). Thus, spiritual desertion is subservient to the glory of God (IV: 180).

### God's Children Benefit from Desertion

Secondly, *spiritual desertion will serve the best interest of God's children*. This is not only true because they thus become better acquainted with the perfections of God and glorify them more, but:

(1) they thus also *become better acquainted with themselves*.

(2) Hereby they learn to *esteem grace all the more highly*.

(3) They are thus weaned from the world and all creatures. They no longer cleave to it, nor do they desire it. They have no need for it, and expect nothing from man.

(4) Hereby the Lord makes known to the world what graces He has planted in them, thus manifesting His omnipotence, goodness, faithfulness, and immutability. How would we have ever been acquainted with Job's patience, unless he had been in those trying circumstances?... This is furthermore confirmed when, upon having been restored, it is perceived how they emerge from this trial; how they are as tried gold coming out of the fire; how fearful they are of sin; how majestic and glorious God is in their eyes; how precious Jesus is to them; how godly, humble, long-suffering, compassionate, and obliging they are; how encouraged they are in the Lord; and how they trust in Him. And thus everyone will be astonished about their change. This will be to the conviction of worldly people. It will teach God's children to understand the Lord's ways, make them strong to hope upon the Lord in trials, motivate them to thank and glorify the Lord, and also stir them up to fear and serve the Lord increasingly (IV: 181-182).

### Desertion: Due to Specific Sins

*God will occasionally desert His children due to specific sins*. God will not desert his children in consequence of their daily weaknesses and offenses; however, He will do so in response to certain specific sins.

(1) This is true for great sins which are deliberately committed against the conscience, contrary to many inner warnings, and which cause great offense.

(2) He will do so if we become proud in our civil life, and if in the spiritual realm we pride ourselves in our gifts, knowledge, and grace; if we wish to be esteemed as a great person in the church and seek the praise of others.

(3) He will do so if we esteem the grace of God and communion with Him of little value--not judgmentally, for that cannot be, but rather with our will and in our practice and conduct. Such is true when we begin to love the world, halt between two opinions, and are divided in our heart and love: God something and the world something.

(4) He will do so if we become conceited and depart from the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus, being desirous to have something new (IV: 183-184).

### Restoration for Those in Spiritual Desertion

Sometimes God does this by way of external circumstances and events, which in and of themselves are neither capable of, nor are even a means to that end. However, God generally uses His read or spoken Word for this purpose which is applied to them. In order that we might be a means to your restoration, we shall propose some comforts and then give you some guidance (IV: 184).

It is thus our first task to convince the deserted person that he has grace.

First, reflect upon the days of old.... The fact that you are presently desirous to experience these motions again

proves that you still deem all that to have been in truth, even though you impulsively speak and think otherwise (IV: 185-186).

Secondly, consider your present state, and you will as yet detect grace in it, as despairing as you may be of your condition. Also here you are to deal truthfully with yourself; that is, as if you were judging someone else.

(1) You have light, know the way of salvation in Christ, are acquainted with having spiritual communion with God, and know what it is to have a true dealings with God.

(2) Why are you sorrowful?... "I am sorrowful because I miss God, and I cannot be happy as long as I cannot draw near to Him. If that were to take place, I would be happy." However, to perceive the deficiency of life is life, and sorrow over that which is lacking is a sure evidence of love. Such mourners are pronounced blessed, and to them pertains the promise of comfort: "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Mat. 5:4).

(3) Add to this those heartfelt desires which go out after God. If you think upon having sweet communion with God, union with Christ, a walking in love, obedience, and the service of God; and you think to yourself, "If once again I were thus"--doesn't that enliven your soul? (IV: 186).

Thirdly, acknowledge the intermittent comforts which the Lord grants you in the midst of your desertion (IV: 187).

Fourthly, be it known that it is God's common way to cause His children occasionally to experience desertions--particularly those whom He desires to give an additional measure of grace for the purpose of growth and comfort. Nothing strange is befalling you, for God does not deal with you any differently than with His other children (IV: 187).

Fifthly, the Lord will most certainly grant deliverance and restore you. He has done so to others, even though those who have not behaved themselves that well during their trial will not be fully restored in this life; however, they will receive this in heaven. Therefore, take courage and focus upon the promises of God. "In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours....And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children" (Isa. 54:8, 11, 13); "For the Lord will not cast off for ever: But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies" (Lam. 3:31-32).

### Guidance in Desertion

It now remains to give some guidance to those who are experiencing desertion, as well as to those who are called to deal with such persons. The person who is deserted must refrain himself from:

(1) disqualifying his preceding state.

(2) being insensitive toward and hardening himself against the Lord; that is, as if he did not wish to take this chastisement to heart--or if we adjust ourselves to the fact that God is not comforting us, acting as if we can do without His comfort.

(3) murmuring and being fretful.

(4) despair and despondency, thinking: "The Lord has made me the object of His wrath; it is done with me, and my hope has vanished."

(5) neglecting the means: the reading of God's Word, singing, the hearing of God's Word, and prayer. This would be identical to a person being faint for hunger not wanting to eat due to being faint.

(6) seeking any other comfort outside of God, entertaining yourself by eating, drinking, recreation, entertaining company, etc, and thus seeking rest in that (IV: 188-189).

The deserted person must also *practice* certain things. I shall not prescribe many means here, for they are as difficult to perform as the matter itself. Consider only the following:

First, strive very much for quiet and patient subjection to the Lord's dealings.

Secondly, if we become aware that the Lord has withdrawn Himself due to a specific sin--some of which we have identified in the foregoing--then it is of critical importance that we wholeheartedly repent from that sin, deeply

humble ourselves, abhor ourselves, confess it with sorrow, justify God for withdrawing Himself because of that sin, and be resolved to refrain from such sin in the future.

Thirdly, continue to habitually practice your devotions as you did in former days. Do not neglect this and do it to the best of your ability. Read the Word, even if you neither had the least desire to do so, nor were moved in the least by it. Bend your knees as you are accustomed to do, and pray as best as you know how--even if you were to read a psalm prayerfully.

Fourthly, become accustomed to living by faith. I am not speaking here of the exercise of faith in which there is utmost clarity, but rather of that faith by which we cleave to the Lord (IV: 189-190).

Those *who must deal with those who are in a state of desertion*, must pay attention as to how they ought to deal with them, for the Lord will take note of this. He loves His children who are in a state of desertion, and if anyone deserts them as well, it will displease Him. Therefore refrain from...(IV: 191).

## **Chapter 94: Unbelief Concerning One's Spiritual State**

It is not difficult to convince a truly gracious person that he is displeased with his sinful heart, thoughts and deeds; that he grieves in his heart about this; that he longs for God, for reconciliation with Him, to be at peace with Him, and to walk before His countenance in humility and godly fear; that he knows Jesus as Surety and Savior, desires Him, makes Him his choice, turns to Him, receives Him, surrenders to Him, and through Him goes to God in order thus to become a partaker of the benefits of the Covenant of Grace; that he finds within his heart an aversion for sin, sin being contrary to the will of God; that he has an inward desire to live holily before the Lord in a manner pleasing to Him; that this is time and again his goal, intent, and objective; and that he has occasionally enjoyed a sweetness and resting in God. Yes, an explicit presentation of these matters will function as a clear mirror in which he can perceive that these matters are to be found in him.

However, to convince and assure the truly gracious in this way that they are in the state of grace, and to cause them to rejoice in this, cannot be accomplished as easily, for the special operation of the Holy Spirit is a prerequisite for this. "Now we have received...the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:12) [IV: 207].

Regardless of how much or little one may be concerned about his spiritual state, to be without assurance concerning our state prevents us from rejoicing in God, manifesting gratitude, glorifying God, and impedes spiritual growth. We shall present to you the nature and causes of his spiritual disease and endeavor to facilitate its cure (IV: 208).

### **The First Cause of Doubt: Doubt About One's Election**

The first cause of unbelief concerning one's spiritual state *is a doubting of one's election*.

*Answer:* God rarely communicates with His dear children in an immediate sense, and would He then deem reprobates worthy of granting them such immediate revelations? Be assured that this is not God's voice, but rather your own foolish, unbelieving heart, the devil's devices being intermixed with this. You have not received permission to look into the counsel of God and thus you ought to leave the secret things for the Lord (IV: 209).

We must not examine our faith, hope, and love in the light of election; rather we must ascend from them to election. You are thus conducting yourself in an entirely wrong and foolish manner. You would tell others not to conduct themselves in this manner, and thereby you can perceive your own foolishness in rejecting your election (IV: 209).

Even if you were the most abominable person alive, you may still not conclude that you are a reprobate and cannot be converted. Therefore, set these foolish and unfounded imaginations aside. Let them no longer trouble you and deal circumspectly according to the Word of God (IV: 210).

### **The Second Cause of Doubt: Fear of Not Being Converted**

*The second cause of doubt is that I fear that I am not converted*, that thus the entire foundation of my religion is wanting, and therefore all that I perform from here on in is not good.

*Answer:* First, consider whether you whole-heartedly seek God through Jesus Christ unto justification and sanctification, and for peace, joy, and felicity. The issue here is not whether you know when and how it began. Secondly, few know the time of their conversion. Some were already regenerated prior to that moment which they considered to be the moment of their initial conversion. In others their initial religious exercises were but preparatory exercises and they were not converted until long after that. Thirdly, conversion rarely occurs in such a clear manner. Rather, it transpires as gradually as the rising of the sun, so that we are able to perceive only at some later date that we have changed. Yes, some are converted in their childhood so that they cannot recall having been in an unconverted state. Fourthly, it is not necessary that conversion be preceded by being greatly troubled, and by fear and trembling. Some are quietly changed by the knowledge of the truth, and without much strife and comfort. Others, due to the preciousness of the gospel, are changed in a joyful manner as Zacchaeus was. Others experience this in a way of falling and rising again, and we thus may not conclude from one type of conversion that another conversion is not right. Fifthly, even if you were motivated by self-love, you may consequently not doubt your conversion. In this respect, self-love is a virtue and is the initial motivation of many--if not all--converted persons (IV: 210-211).

### *The Third Cause of Doubt: Being Able to Believe Without Strife and Effort*

*The third cause* of doubt is the following argumentation: *I am able to believe as frequently as I desire*, doing so without strife and without effort. I hold before me the offer of grace along with the promises. I acquiesce in them and very readily surrender myself to the Lord Jesus. However, there is but little warmth and strength in it. I do not have a sensible sorrow for my sins, nor do I have a lively desire for peace, joy, holiness, and other benefits of the covenant.

*Answer:...* *The enlightened will* represents the true state of the heart, even though the affections and passions are more inactive and do not stir in a sensible manner. Although it is true that the stirring of our emotions makes us more conscious of our desires--and thus renders more comfort to beginners and little ones in grace--the intelligent will is generally of a purer nature (IV: 212).

That it is rather easy for you to acquiesce in the offer of grace and to surrender yourself to Jesus, and that you are able to do it as frequently as you desire is a manifestation of your gracious disposition (IV: 213).

What you designate as a faltering of your faith when in danger of death and other extraordinary circumstances is not the succumbing of your faith. Rather, the fruits of faith are being hindered from manifesting themselves, such as tranquility, peace, and the assurance of attaining the desired outcome. The fact that faith is active even then, is evidenced by your looking unto Jesus, your surrendering to Him, and your crying out for grace and help through Jesus (IV: 213).

### *The Fourth Cause of Doubt: The Opinion that Assurance Is of the Essence of Faith*

*The fourth cause* of doubt is the opinion *that assurance is considered to be of the essence of faith*--or at least that faith is always accompanied by assurance. We shall then reason as follows: If my faith were true saving faith, I would be assured of my saving interest in Jesus and of salvation itself. There are times, however, when I cannot even find the infallible marks of grace--faith and repentance--from which I would dare to conclude that I have true grace.

*Answer:* Be assured that without the express assurance of our saving interest in Christ we can indeed be saved. Thousands who have never had this express assurance are already in heaven, and there will be thousands of such who will come there as well.

Secondly, assurance is not of the essence of faith. To insist on the contrary is a serious misunderstanding which is both outside of and contrary to the Word of God. The Word of God calls faith a coming to Jesus, a receiving of Him, a longing for Him, an entrusting of ourselves to Him, and a leaning and a relying upon Him. However, it never denotes faith as a being assured of having a saving interest in Him, and of attaining to eternal felicity--even though felicity is promised in consequence of faith and flows out of it.

Thirdly, the assurance of having a saving interest in Jesus can be entirely absent from faith.

Fourthly, we must distinguish between such assurance which generally follows upon the steadfast exercise of faith, and the *consciousness* of being assured.

Fifthly, there is also a misconception about assurance. One designates assurance, and understands thereby, the sensible enjoyment of heavenly benefits, or at least such a measure of assurance in which there neither is nor can be the least impediment. Such ought to know, however, that both the believer and his faith are imperfect, and will remain imperfect in this life. And thus the unbelieving heart is always capable of bringing forth some doubts which would cast a cloud upon the assurance of the best among them, which are therefore rejected by them without giving any heed to these doubts (IV: 214-215).

If you say: "I have had this in some measure but I believe this to have been imaginary; else I would have retained this," then I counsel you to stir up yourself by reflecting upon the days of old and keep yourself assured that God neither has changed, nor is able to change, in His grace toward you--even though it is His normal way not to always allow His children to feel this (IV: 217).

#### *The Fifth Cause of Doubt: Being Overwhelmed by the Magnitude of Being a Recipient of Divine Grace*

*The fifth doubt* is engendered by the consideration of the *magnitude of the matter*. Some find true evidences of grace within themselves by which they could be assured that they are children of God. On the one hand, however, they receive a deep insight into the totality of their sinfulness, and on the other hand they receive a deep insight into the magnitude of this matter. They consider what it means to be eternally loved by God; for Christ to have died for them out of love; to have the Holy Spirit dwell in them as in a temple.... They consider it to be too presumptuous for them to number themselves as one of them. This prevents them from both coming to a conclusion about themselves and remaining assured of being in the state of grace--a conclusion which they otherwise would make on the basis of the grace which they perceive within themselves.

*Answer:* ... You are first of all to know and be assured that even though it is too great for you to receive, it is not too great for the Infinite One to give to you. You deem it to be presumptuous to assure yourself of being in a state of grace, even though you could come to this conclusion from clear evidences. It is instead an act of pride not to assure yourself;

Secondly, you must know that no one receives anything because they are worthy, or due to some good disposition, frame, and qualification which would move God to bless them. Others are as unworthy as you are.

Thirdly... are you of the opinion that God would change after all the benefits bestowed upon you, since He already knew you so well prior to this as well as how you would behave yourself toward Him? Therefore, honor the Lord, and joyfully acknowledge the grace bestowed upon you.

Fourthly... If you therefore perceive this great disparity within yourself, you must not be hindered by this in the acknowledgement of God's grace. Rather, this ought to motivate you to acknowledge this and to be assured by the evidences of true grace, so that you would thus glorify God, and angels and men would glorify God concerning His grace in you (IV: 219).

#### *The Sixth Cause of Doubt: Not Being Able to Pray; and Prayer not Being Answered*

*The sixth doubt* is engendered by *being unable to pray and by not being heard*.

*Answer:* The grief over a negative frame, the desire to be permitted and to be able to pray, and the desire to be heard, show that there is yet life in the soul.... in retrospect you will have to acknowledge that it has not always been this way. Previously, you were able to pray with strong crying and tears, and to persevere in doing so (IV: 219).

Therefore, seek for the causes, and as much as is in you, remove them. Be diligent in acquainting yourself with the Lord with a perfect heart, so that you will not be further estranged from Him and become more entangled in the creature (IV: 220).

Indeed, the fact that you can neither pray (about which the soul is grieved) nor receive your desire upon your prayer, ought not to cause you to be unbelieving, despondent, or fretful; for it is not a sign of being without grace. Rather, it is God's method and His good dealings with you, thereby seeking your advantage (IV: 221).

### *The Seventh Cause of Doubt: My Religion Proceeds from an Enlightened Intellect*

*The seventh cause of doubt is the following: I fear that all my religion only proceeds from an enlightened intellect. I have been born and raised in the church, I know the doctrines and only subscribe to them out of custom. Nothing deeply affects my heart, moves me, nor proceeds to bring forth a sensible sorrow, a lively sincerity, and comfort. My heart is not in anything, and nothing proceeds from my heart.*

*Answer: ... if you grieve over that which you miss and have a longing to enjoy or do a matter, then your heart is engaged. The heart is the will as governed by the intellect, and as such is displeased with sin, and finds pleasure in Christ and the way of salvation. It is thus that one takes the initiative to flee, seek, and be active. If you conduct yourself thus, you need not be concerned that you have nothing more than an enlightened mind (IV: 221-222).*

Your concern stems from the fact that your affections and sensible passions are mistaken for the heart. If these are absent then you are of the opinion that the heart is not involved. However, this is a serious misunderstanding. Our passions frequently are the result of our physical constitution. The one person is much more vehement in his affections than the other person. Our passions are generally malevolent guides. He who engages himself very passionately is not necessarily engaged in a more sincere manner than he who is active by way of his enlightened will (IV: 222).

The absence of affections may, however, not be the cause of disowning our spiritual state, for our passions are not our heart, the heart being our will as governed by our intellect. If there is the inclination of the heart; if you are conscious of the fact that it is Christ you seek after as given unto justification and sanctification; if in that frame you are fleeing unto Him, receiving Him, and surrendering yourself to Him; if, motivated by the fear of God, you pray, flee, and oppose evil, and pursue that which is good out of love to be pleasing unto the Lord; then you may unreservedly be assured that you have grace, and you are thus to rejoice in this (IV: 222).

### *The Eighth Cause of Doubt: A Being Fearful of Hypocrisy*

*The eighth doubt pertains to suspecting ourselves of hypocrisy. We then reason as follows: "It cannot be that I have grace, for in nearly all my actions my conscience accuses me that I am being hypocritical. It appears as if I am serving God, but in reality I have myself in view.*

*Answer: ... However, be it first of all known that believers are only regenerated in part and that the seed of various sins still remains in them. No sin can ever be mortified so completely that it will never surface again. This remaining corruption will manifest itself externally, this being contingent upon the condition of the body, opportunities, and other circumstances. Therefore, the one godly person will fall more into a given sin than the other. Secondly, it should be known that the fear of seeking self frequently causes us to think about the seeking of self. This will suggest to us that it is so, and the devil will create the illusion in our minds that we are seeking self (IV: 224).*

### *The Ninth Cause of Doubt: The Power of Corruption and Sin*

*The ninth cause of doubt is the great corruption within and the power of sin. A person plagued by this doubt thinks: "Justification and sanctification always go hand in hand. When holiness is absent, regeneration, faith, and justification will also be absent. An unsanctified person is not in the state of grace. Not only do I find holiness to be absent within myself, but instead I perceive nothing but sin. I have such an evil, abominable, and defiled heart, which makes me believe that there is no one who has such an evil heart as I.*

*Answer: ... Are you always in such a sinful condition, or are there times that you are deeply humbled to tears before the Lord, when you supplicate for grace, and flee to the Lord Jesus to obtain forgiveness by His blood--by which you are united to God in Christ, though not in an assured sense? Do you at such a time make spirited resolutions to refrain from those and all other sins, heartily crying out unto the Lord for strength, being presently convinced of your own impotence? (IV: 226).*

If there is yet spiritual life in you, keep courage, lift up your head from out of your sorrow, and begin your battle by renewal in the power of God who has begun a good work in you and who will also finish it in the day of Christ. He

will not forsake the work of his own hands, but "giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" (Isa. 40:29). Just as the Lord beholds the good which He has worked in you, you must do likewise do. Acknowledge it to be of the Lord, and encourage yourself thereby (IV: 227).

### *The Tenth Cause of Doubt: Unbelief Concerning Fundamental Doctrines*

The tenth doubt has its origin in unbelief concerning fundamental doctrines.

*Answer:*... First, you have not always been in this condition, and there are intermissions in this condition, during which a love for fellowship with God manifests itself. He is your desire and in Him is all your delight. When He hides Himself you are sorrowful, if you receive hope you rejoice, and when He reveals Himself you are delighted. Secondly... Why are you not at peace?... Consider especially how your heart is troubled about blasphemous thoughts. Why is this? Is it out of fear for punishment? You will perceive that this is not the primary cause, but rather that your being disturbed proceeds from the love of God, and this love cannot tolerate that we would think or speak anything that is unbecoming to God (IV: 228).

### *The Eleventh Cause of Doubt: Spiritual Darkness and Deadness*

*The eleventh doubt arises from spiritual darkness and deadness.* Such a person will say: Oh, my condition is even more wretched than all the previous ones, for I deem those happy who have feeling and who endure strife. I, on the contrary, am dead. I indeed believe everything, but it is entirely without feeling. I am neither sensible concerning the wrath of God, heaven, hell, godliness, nor sin. Everything seems to me as if it were but a dream. It is so far out of my reach that I can no longer see it; I am in Egyptian darkness. My devotional exercises have ceased.

*Answer:* ...A great number of eminent saints have been in the same condition as you currently are, and you will not be the last one. Let this support you in your hope that you will be delivered from this.... If you were as dead as you imagine yourself to be, from whence then does this displeasure with your condition, your sorrowful brooding, and your languishing proceed? A dead person does not have any feelings. However, the fact that you are sensible of your insensitivity shows that there is life--though feeble (IV: 228-229).

### *The Twelfth Cause of Doubt: Daily Crosses*

The twelfth doubt is engendered by a bodily cross.... We are then ready to think that all these things come upon us in God's wrath, and that we are not children of God, for we shall then think that if we were children of God, God would not desert us but He would help us. Yes, we are then ready to doubt God's providence, and many other thoughts and assaults will proceed from this.

*Answer:* First, this also is no reason to disown our state. Were Job, Joseph, David, Jeremiah--were all they of whom the Scriptures speak not true believers and in the state of grace? Does the Lord Jesus not give us an example of a gracious person in poor Lazarus? Nevertheless, his cross was both heavy and lengthy. Secondly, add to this the numerous declarations of God that it is His way to lead His people to heaven by way of manifold crosses: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psa. 34:19); "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22); "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (Heb. 12:8). From this you may perceive that chastisements and crosses are not a token of His wrath toward His own, but rather a token of His love (IV: 230).

### *The Thirteenth Cause of Doubt: A Lack Of Spiritual Growth*

*The thirteenth doubt issues forth from a lack of spiritual growth. Such will argue as follows:* I have been a Christian for so many years already and it is so long ago that I first came under conviction and entered into the covenant of grace. However, I cannot perceive that I have grown in any way. I am the same old person I have been for many years--yes, I cannot perceive anything else but that I have backslidden and that I backslide daily hand over foot.

*Answer:*... The promises concerning spiritual growth are always fulfilled--be it to a greater or lesser degree--according to the measure which the Lord has appointed for everyone.... Growth cannot be measured by the vehemence of our passions. These have been more vehement in former times when the change initially occurred; when from dead we became alive, and when from darkness we came into the light. They were of a less spiritual nature, however, and you would not be as delighted with them as you now imagine; that is, if you were again in your

initial condition. Rather, growth is to be discerned by being increasingly united to Christ and the activity which flows out of this union (cf. ch. 90) [IV: 232-233].

## Chapter 95: The Assaults of Satan

You should know and be prepared for the fact that the moment you are inclined to repent and you begin--even if it is but from afar--to turn to Jesus, he will exert himself with a vengeance to use all his wiles and wickedness to prevent this. If he cannot prevent this, he will endeavor to torment and trouble you, and thus prevent you from living a holy and joyful life. Therefore, from your side you are also to exert yourself fully. Gird yourself with strength and resist him courageously (IV: 235-236).

### Satan as an Angel of Light

That he occasionally approaches us as *an angel of light* is taught by the apostle: "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). This is not truly the case, but it appears to be so as far as his operations are concerned, for he often approaches the godly under the lovely pretense of godliness (IV: 236).

He may also stir someone up to be virtuous for the purpose of making him satisfied with the activity itself, keeping him from Christ and the exercise of justifying faith. Thus, he will subtly rob him of his comfort and that genuine sanctification which flows out of justification (IV: 237).

### Satan Presenting Himself as He Is: A Devil

Most of the time the devil conceals himself and seeks to convince man that he has no hand in what transpired, but rather that it is the person himself, such things proceeding from his own heart. Thereby he seeks either to prevent that which is good and to corrupt it, to bring about the commission of sin, or to bring the soul into a state of bewilderment. *In order to prevent that which is good* he has many subtle devices, leveling his assault either on faith, prayer, the hearing of the Word, or sanctification (IV: 237).

### His Primary Target: Faith and its Exercise

First, He knows that *faith* is the fountainhead of spiritual life, and he therefore seeks to obscure this in all its activity (IV: 237).

Sometimes he makes our bodily cross to appear much heavier than it is. It then seems as if there is no deliverance, but rather that it will become heavier and heavier. He will also suggest that this has not come upon you in God's favor, but rather as a manifestation of His wrath; that it is all because of your sins and is but the beginning of eternal damnation. He know how to impress this upon you sentence after sentence, doing so in an authoritative and overpowering manner. If you listen to him, his interjection will begin to have its effect, your faith will begin to falter, you will easily become despondent, and your cross will press you down. Therefore, reject all such interjections. Take your cross upon you and follow Jesus; adhere to the promise that you will be sustained and that the outcome will be well (IV: 238-239).

### His Second Target: Prayer

Secondly, since the devil knows what strength, comfort, and benefit may be derived *from prayer*, he uses all the power and subtlety at his disposal either to keep you from praying or to trouble you while praying.

(1) He will suggest as many other activities to you as he possibly can, divert your thoughts elsewhere, and induce you to postpone prayer to a given time (having something else to do first).

(2) Sometimes he suggests that prayer is a work so difficult that you cannot do, are entirely unfit for, are presently in too sinful a condition, and that you should thus wait for a season when you will be more fit for it.

(3) Sometimes he gives a deep impression that prayer is both ineffective and fruitless.

(4) Sometimes the devil, as if throwing in a handful of dust, is also busy casting other thoughts into our minds while we are praying (IV: 239-240).

### *His Third Target: The Means of Grace*

The devil knows that the Lord commonly blesses the assembly of believers, *the ministry of the Word*, and the partaking of the Lord's Supper. Therefore, he goes along to church and will seek to implement his practices upon you there also (IV: 240).

### *His Fourth Target: The Life of Sanctification*

Fourthly, since the devil knows that *sanctification* is so precious to you and in a special sense honors God and edifies your neighbor, he will lay snares everywhere to keep you from its exercise. He may suggest that you are first to be holy within, or that such and such is not your duty. He particularly knows how vividly to hold before you--and to exaggerate--those ulterior motives which he knows are yet to be found in the heart of an imperfect man, and which will readily surface in our best deeds (IV: 240).

### *His Major Objective: To Bring About the Commission of Sin*

The devil is neither satisfied with preventing you from doing good nor spoiling what you are doing, but he also endeavors to bring you *to the commission of all manner of sin*.

- (1) He frequently begins in a remote fashion, concealing his objective and goal. He will create the wonderful illusion for you that you need to relax and he will thus seek to make you idle, thereby making you a suitable object for him.
- (2) He begins with small things which initially do not appear to be sinful, thus concealing their sinfulness. As the soul yields to small sins, she will lose her tenderness and the tender fear of God.
- (3) Then again he will seek to stir you up to the commission of great sin--particularly those sins to which you are naturally most inclined. It is true, he does not know the heart, but he has taken notice of the sin which you commit most frequently; also the sin to which he previously has most easily enticed you.
- (4) When you then perceive too late what you have done, and desire to return to the Lord and to have your inner peace, former tenderness, and purity of heart restored, he will then turn the tables and will strive to lead you into the commission of other internal sins: impatience, fretfulness, unbelief, and despair. Therefore, remain steadfast (IV: 241-242).

### *Satan's interjection of Sinful Thoughts*

However, the *interjections* themselves are not your sin but the devil's instead. Nevertheless (take note of this) he will continually seek to convince you that it is your own sin. If you indeed begin to believe this, his interjections will have their effect upon you and bring you in a grievous condition. If, however, you recognize the devil's words as being his language, you will then be able to resist it that much more readily and be less troubled (IV: 243).

In these and similar assaults the devil operates undercover. His entire effort and device is to suggest that it is not he who interjects such thoughts, but rather that they proceed from the heart of the assaulted person himself. He will suggest that such sins cannot coexist with grace, and that therefore he will be eternally damned. And when would there come an end to these assaults if the Lord at His time did not intervene and rebuke Satan? (IV: 244).

### *How Interjections of Satan May Be Distinguished from a Person's Own Thoughts*

A person is frequently ignorant of the manner in which his soul functions, and he is therefore unable to distinguish what proceeds from either his imagination, the interjection of Satan, or from himself. Since we can discern these things, we are thus of the opinion that they proceed from the soul herself. When another person utters dreadful things, you will also understand what he is saying. It troubles you, and yet you know that they are not your sins, but rather those of the one who is speaking. Such is also true here.

You must also know that when the devil has been driven away from you, you will yet maintain a fearful disposition for some time as a result of what had previously been interjected. These things have also not been erased from our memory as yet; however, it is nothing more than a memory. Yes, this fearful disposition even proves your love for God, for you neither wish to hear nor think any foolish things about Him (IV: 246).

### *The Lord Enjoins His People to Battle Against the Devil*

It does not suffice to know that those fiery darts have been shot by the devil, for we shall thereby not be delivered from them. Rather, it is the Lord's will that we shall battle against the devil, and in the way of strife He will give the victory (IV: 246).

Be much in prayer. If you feel that you have but little strength to persevere earnestly and to enlarge upon your request, then look, time and again, to the Lord. Let the Lord see and hear your turning to Him, as well as your sighs and your ejaculatory prayers. Therefore, wait also upon Him from whom your help must come, and do not neglect your devotional exercises (IV: 247).

If you can avail yourself of an experienced minister or another strong Christian, reveal your strife to them and do not try to grapple with it alone. The opportunity to pour out your heart to them, their support, as well as their intercession will be a suitable means to be encouraged--and from the moment you may receive some courage you will increase in strength (IV: 247).

### *Believers Exhorted to Render Strong Resistance to Satan*

Therefore, be determined to give strong resistance. To be encouraged in doing so, stir yourself up to reflect upon these matters (IV: 247).

Such valor will give you much freedom to approach unto the Lord. How sweet it is when the Lord shows that He takes pleasure in your being engaged warfare (even if you do so with but little strength), since you have battled with all your strength and in the uprightness of your heart! Furthermore, how sweet it is when the Lord grants you some of this hidden manna as His response to this (having promised this to those that overcome), as well as when he says, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Mat. 25:21).

The devil is a conquered enemy, and therefore the victory is certain. The Lord Jesus, as the seed of the woman, has bruised his head (Gen. 3:15), and has destroyed him by His death (Heb. 2:14). He has "spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). He would indeed a fainthearted warrior who would not dare to attack a mortally wounded enemy who is already down and struggles a bit (IV: 249).

Therefore, be valiant against him. Be aware of your weakness, however, and do not trust in your own strength, for this could suddenly cause you to fall. Stay close to the chief commander, Jesus. Take refuge by Him, take hold of His strength, and fight by His strength. Pray without ceasing: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Be careful and take unto you the whole armour of God, gird your loins about with truth, and put on the breastplate of righteousness; let your feet be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; and take the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. 6:13-18). Therefore, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10) [IV: 249-250].

## **Chapter 96: The Power of Indwelling Corruption**

Indwelling corruption is among the most powerful of all causes of backsliding (IV: 251).

### *It Does not Have Dominion over Believers*

The regenerated man can never be brought to the point--not for one moment--that he would subject himself to the will of the flesh for the purpose of rendering obedience to it, either willingly or unwillingly. The regenerated man will always oppose, even if it were but by sighing against it--thus showing his aversion and crying out as if violence were done upon him. A man can take a child by the arm against its will and cause it to walk rapidly alongside of him. The child will indeed move its feet; however, not for the purpose of walking, but rather to avoid falling. Every step is an act of resistance. Such is also true when the spirit is overwhelmed by the power of indwelling corruption (IV: 252-253).

### *The Effects of Indwelling Corruption*

The effects of the extraordinary power of indwelling corruption are both sinful, grievous, and dangerous; for

indwelling corruption affects all the faculties of the soul and the body.

First, it activates the *intellect*. This faculty is the first and essential beginning of man's activity. The lusts of the old man are, however, frequently stirring at an early stage already; they will affect the intellect, even to stupefy it.

Secondly, even the will can be assaulted. The new man abhors that which is evil because of its hostility toward the will of God, and finds delight in that which is good as being pleasing to God. However, the old man has a will contrary thereto. This will so overpower the faculty of the will that the new man will have neither the power to activate its aversion for sin nor its desire for virtue. Even when, in spite of the vehement manifestation of the lust, the new man manifests itself in some measure and strives to break through, it will succumb when a sinful desire violently draws the person away to the commission of sin.

Thirdly, this indwelling corruption vehemently stirs up *the affections*, and once the affections have been set in motion, they can tolerate neither consultation nor delay, but as madmen they will run to execute that sin. They set the entire mechanism of man's inborn tendencies in motion and will drive a man on with insane intensity.

Fourthly,... Indwelling corruption will also move us to the commission of *the deed itself*. It will activate the members of the body, and for that purpose will utilize the eyes, ears, mouth, hands and feet, and all members which are involved in the commission of a sin. It is not satisfied with having committed the sin at hand but once, but rather it wants to commit this sin by renewal (IV: 253-255).

### *Believers Will Commit the Same Sins Again*

There is no sin from which a regenerated person is safeguarded in an absolute sense. Nobody can say: "I shall never fall into that sin." A person will never be delivered from the indwelling corruption of his nature. It will always prevent and defile that which is good, always stir up lusts, and daily cause a man to offend in many things, doing so either out of carelessness, or due to the sudden occurrence of an event (IV: 255).

### *The Response of the Converted Person to His Indwelling Corruption*

Spiritual life battling against it, frequently has the upper-hand, arises from falls, resists temptations, avoids opportunities, prayerfully takes hold of the Lord's strength, and remains close to the Lord. One thus proceeds sweetly, carefully, and in the fear of the Lord, thereby being kept from that sin for a longer or shorter time, even though it will manifest itself again and would wish to resurface (IV: 257).

When indwelling corruption has the upper-hand, the believer is neither joyous nor happy--as an unconverted person would be when he may indulge in his lust without harm or shame. Instead, there is much sorrow and heartache. He languishes and spends his life in sorrow, since (due to this sin) he must miss communion with God, peace, and the sensible assurance of being forgiven. Furthermore, his spiritual life weakens, and he cannot glorify God in his station in life. The more vehemently his lust appears to have free reign in this trial, the more the grief of his soul is multiplied (IV: 257).

If you may perceive that sin has no dominion over you, but rather that there is spiritual life in you which strives against indwelling corruption--even though it frequently suffers defeat--acknowledge the grace of God, be grateful for it, rejoice over it, and let it be a means to strive against indwelling corruption with renewed courage (IV: 257).

## **Chapter 97: Spiritual Darkness**

They (Christians) do not take note of the distinction between the light of beholding (which may and must be desired here below, but is reserved for heaven), and the light of faith which is reserved for those who walk upon earth, enabling them to make their way through darkness with joy. By not considering this distinction, they are not satisfied to walk in the light of faith, but rather wish to live here in the light of beholding. They thus bring trouble upon their soul and begin to think that they are yet entirely in the dark and unconverted. Yes, great darkness can even come upon them, so that even the light of faith becomes so dim that they cannot perceive any light (IV: 259).

### *Spiritual Darkness: The Spiritual Disease of a More Advanced Christian*

This darkness is, however, the spiritual disease of a person who has made some progress in the Christian life. In the absence of the normal illuminating influences of the Holy Spirit, and due to the residual darkness of his old nature,

*the light which is in him becomes so dim and is so obscured that he now beholds the spiritual matters which he previously perceived with clarity, as a distant glimmer and only beholds what has transpired in the past by way of memory. This causes him to be without joy, warmth, and direction; and to live in fear and anxiety, causing him to wander about aimlessly as being in a desert (IV: 260).*

The prophet gives counsel to those who are in such a state: "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God" (Isa. 50:10). There are seasons of darkness as a result of persecution, the absence of comfort, as well as due to blindness. However, these generally coalesce in God's children; external darkness begets internal darkness (IV: 260).

### *The Causes of Spiritual Darkness*

Natural vision can be obstructed by various causes: the disappearance of the sun, the thickening of clouds, the interference of opaque objects, disease of the eyes, or staring at the sun. Spiritual darkness likewise has various causes (IV: 260).

### *The Consequences of Spiritual Darkness*

This spiritual darkness brings believers into a sorrowful and sinful state, such as:

First, there will be *despondency*. The light of the eyes is good and rejoices the heart. Dark days, on the contrary, are days of sorrow; the night encloses everything and oppresses the heart. Such is also true for believers who have seen the light, were accustomed to walk in the light of God's countenance, did rejoice in the light, but now must miss that light, and are surrounded by thick darkness.

Secondly, during such darkness the wild beasts come forth out of their holes. All manner of sinful motions also manifest themselves in this darkness, such as unbelief, despondency, fretfulness, and murmuring. Fleeting atheistic thoughts arise in the heart, and there will even be all manner of sinful reasoning to bring the soul even into additional darkness.

Thirdly, darkness is *a fearful thing*. There is a terror of the night, and an arrow which flies by night (Psa. 91:5). Such is also the case here. We shall hardly be able to discern what grace is, and we shall not be able to perceive it in ourselves.

Fourthly, he who, in the dark, walks across a moor in which there are many trails *will easily go astray*. Such is also the case here. "He that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth" (John 12:35).

Fifthly, he who walks in darkness *will readily stumble* over something that lies upon his pathway, not being able to see it--and in his awkwardness he will readily stumble. Such is also true here. God's ways are no longer in his heart and he walks upon rough ways.

Sixthly, darkness is *an unfruitful season*. In the darkness of winter, trees stand there as if they were barren and dead. Near the south and north pole hardly any vegetation or grass grows, and whatever is sown or planted in a place which can neither be reached by the sun nor has soil will be in a sad condition. Such is also the case here. When a thick darkness envelops the soul, she will not bring forth any fruits worthy of repentance.

Seventhly, during darkness it is *cold* (IV: 261-262).

### *Means to Avoid Spiritual Darkness*

If you have been overcome by darkness, do not give up courage, for many of the godly come into this condition. It is not a sign of being without grace. You still know the Lord and His way, though from afar. This darkness is a burden to you and all your desire is for the light--not merely to be able to see, but in order to be gladdened, warmed, directed, and sanctified by it. The Lord will by renewal cause your darkness to lift and will again lift up the light of His countenance over you. You will experience that this season of darkness has been a learning experience for you in which you have learned much (IV: 263).

### *Directions for Those who Struggle with Darkness*

Maintain your scheduled devotional exercises. If you discontinue these, you will come into more darkness and become more estranged; however, if you maintain these, you will increase in light. Do not pressure yourself to be occupied with this for a long period of time, but rather do it in upright simplicity. Do not insist on adding it to the

register of your virtues, for then you would soon become discouraged. Instead do it with the steadfast objective to use it as a means to receive more light. Read the Word of God, and supplicate and cry to the Lord who hears and sees you even if you do not behold Him. You may nevertheless know Him by means of His Word. Particularly, pray for light, for light proceeds from Him alone. He can open the understanding with one word so that you will understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). He promises to give light and wisdom to those who pray to Him for it (James 1:5). And that which He is able and willing to do, He will also do, and you will yet praise Him for the help of His countenance. One day you will behold His face in righteousness and then you will be satisfied. Amen.

## Chapter 98: Spiritual Deadness

For those who have made some progress in spiritual life occasionally backslide in regard to their liveliness, and at times become subject to deadness. Even the most eminent Christian sometimes experiences this for a brief season. It can be that at the outset of his prayer he is in an entirely dead frame, insensitive, and without inner motions; however, as he perseveres he regains his prior liveliness. It can also be, after beginning in a lively manner, that toward the middle or the end he is overcome by such a pervasive deadness that he must desist (IV: 265-266).

### Believers Do Experience Deadness

Add to this the experiences of so many of the godly concerning whom you have either read or heard. From all of this you can perceive that no one should consider it strange if they also come into this condition. So many of God's children have experienced this, as it is God's way to lead His children by way of deadness to a lively condition (IV: 266).

### Its Causes

There are various causes for this. First, deadness occasionally issues forth from the indwelling corruption of the residual old nature. Much of the stony heart does as yet remain in the regenerate, and this is averse to spiritual life and its activity.

Secondly, when we neither rightly value spiritual life--however feeble it may be--nor cherish it, but instead yield to lusts and do not give proper attention to lesser sins, fall from the one sin into the other, and frequently commit the same sin so that we become accustomed to it, then our conscience will consequently become more insensitive, and that insensitivity will expand more and more.

Thirdly, unbelief concerning our spiritual state causes despondency, despondency listlessness, and listlessness discouragement. Via these steps we arrive at deadness.

Fourthly, erroneous ideas concerning spiritual life are very conducive to bring about deadness. Some are not aware of the fact that spiritual life consists in the enjoyment of union with God through Christ, and that it manifests itself in the conscious yearning of the heart after God, in being united with His will, and in conducting ourselves as being in the presence of God. Instead, such only take notice of the emotions and the sensible motions within, as well as the clear revelations of God to the soul. They consider only this to be the manifestation of life.

Fifthly, deadness is frequently caused by neglecting to acquaint ourselves with God, and continually staying near to Him as being the only delight of our soul; by the neglect of or a casual observance of our scheduled devotional times, doing so more to satisfy the conscience, rather than exercising ourselves in having fellowship with God and striving for increase in spiritual life.

Sixthly, it pleases the Lord, who is sovereign and holy in all His ways, occasionally to withdraw the normal influences of His Holy Spirit whereby we are made lively (IV: 267-268).

### Its Nature and Consequences

(1) Its nature pertains to spiritual matters.

(2) Such deadness and insensitivity is not a total deprivation of spiritual life and feeling, for spiritual life will permanently remain in believers. Rather, it is a partial deadness, as far as both measure and time are concerned. The one may recede to a lower level than the other, and the same person may at one time be more lifeless than at other

times. Yes, there can even be brief intermissions in which someone, who generally suffers from deadness, can be very tender, sensible, and lively, and is thus of the opinion that he has been delivered from it. It is, however, but a ray of sunlight on a dark and cloudy day in order that he may be supported for that which he must still endure.

(3) This deadness does not consist in an absence of sensible emotions, but rather in the coldness and lethargy of the intelligent will. The person who suffers from deadness retains his spiritual knowledge; he perceives spiritual matters in their essential nature--however, from afar (IV: 268-269).

Let us consider the *consequences* of deadness. Those who previously had a tender heart, were able to weep sweet tears before the countenance of God either due to love, a yearning, the missing of God's lovely countenance, or their corruptions--now have a cold heart. The eye cannot shed one tear. The heart cannot bring forth one feeling sigh; instead, everything is, so to speak, of stone.... In one word, it is a deplorable condition--a condition which is even more wretched since all the means of grace are ineffective for them, and all the help of men is vain. However, the Lord knows, secretly sustains, and will once more revive them (IV: 269-270).

### *Encouragement for Those who Suffer from Deadness*

The most effective method is to show him that being in such a condition is not a sign of being without grace, and that marks of grace also are to be detected in that condition.

First, to that end it ought to be known that the Lord permits many of His dear children to come into this condition. Those whom He wishes to establish most and use to the benefit of others will occasionally be subject to the severest trials and be lead into this condition. He does this to make known to them what they are and what they are able to do when the Lord withdraws His Spirit; thus He will always keep them small and humble (IV: 271).

Secondly, if you come before the Lord with composure, being fearful of ungratefully denying received grace (it being a blot upon the goodness of God), you will yet be able to perceive that you have grace. Therefore, consider the following matters collectively, and you will be able to come to a conclusion about yourself.

(1) Reflect for a moment upon former days. Consider your previous convictions, sensitivity, earnestness, tears, supplications, looking unto and receiving of the Lord Jesus, sorrow over sin, sweet enjoyment of the Word of God, tender walk before the Lord--and perhaps also peace, joy, and assurance. You know indeed that you have enjoyed all these things prior to this, and you know furthermore that all God's callings and gifts are without repentance.

(2) And as far as the present time is concerned, are you not acquainted with the Lord as He reveals Himself in the work of redemption? Are you not acquainted with the Lord Jesus and the execution of His Suretyship? Are you not acquainted with the frame of a gracious person; that is, the light he receives, the functioning of his faith, his aversion for sin, his love for God, his godly walk before God's countenance, and his desire to serve God in a manner pleasing to Him? Are you not acquainted with all this, approving of and esteeming it--and are you not desirous to be thus?

(3) Even if your inner motions are presently sluggish, lethargic, and barren, are they nevertheless not there?--namely, displeasure about your condition, and a desire to be lively in all spiritual exercises, and for the benefits of the covenant of grace? Are you not sensitive to your insensitivity--not primarily because you fear judgment, but because you are so barren and dead in spiritual things? Is not your deadness your greatest burden? What is able to comfort your soul: something temporal or is it only God in Christ? Wherever there is feeling there is life. Since you are therefore sensitive to your spiritual deadness, is not this then an indication that you have life? We are not examining you as to how strong and lively all this is, but rather as to the genuineness of it all.

(4) Are you entirely void of the activities and exercises of godliness, or are there yet sighs, prayers, and a fleeing to Jesus for reconciliation and power to be invigorated again?

### *A Final Directive for Those who Suffer from Spiritual Darkness*

Listen to the knocking and arousing voice of the Lord Jesus and reflect upon the words of the bride: "I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." She, not being worthy of arising says, "My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him...My soul failed when he spake" (Song of Sol. 5:2, 4, 6) [IV: 273].

Esteem very highly the least stirring of the Holy Spirit, as well as those stirrings you have enjoyed previously (IV: 273).

Persevere in the use of the means, even if you do not benefit from this at all; it will not be fruitless. Even if you do not notice this, it still sustains spiritual life (IV: 273).

***Lecture #13: Conclusion: Practical lessons  
from Brakel for your future ministry***

**Lessons to be Gleaned from Brakel's Life and Ministry**

1. In our preaching and teaching we must always aim for the personal application of biblical truth.
2. The aim of all theological study must be the glory of God and the edification of His church
3. As ministers of the gospel, we must be resolute and unwavering in upholding biblical principles.
4. As ministers of the gospel, we must strive for a thorough and comprehensive knowledge of Scripture so that our preaching will be a faithful echo of the Word of God.
5. As ministers of the gospel, we must jealously guard our personal walk with God.