

*"All scripture is given by inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for
correction, for instruction in righteousness."*

2 Timothy 3:16

Letters to a Young Believer | Professor Herman Hanko
Published by Ishu Mahtani
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ISBN 978-981-08-0235-6

All references to Scripture are to the King James Version.

References are made in the book to the Reformed confessions. These Reformed confessions include: The Heidelberg Catechism, the Confession of Faith (sometimes called “The Netherlands or Belgic Confession), and the Canons of Dordrecht.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank God for leading me with His mighty Hand, guiding me, nurturing me as a young believer, and drawing me near unto Him through my youth, until this day. I am grateful to Sis Anthea Lin for “asking” me if she could assist me with the compilation of this work. Her expertise in the designing and coordination of the letters made it much easier for me to get this work done more efficiently. My most hearty thanks to Prof. Herman Hanko for agreeing to this project, and the much time the Professor has taken to go through the letters over and over again, to ensure its suitability for this work. To God be the power and the glory and dominion, forever and ever. Amen.

1 Corinthians 15:57, “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Preface

Dear Christian Friends,

Every young believer prays about obtaining good biblical answers to the many day to day issues in life. Oftentimes we grapple with life's issues pertaining to work, health, family, social life, and so forth, don't we? There are times when we may have decided to keep all unresolved thoughts within ourselves. But at other times, we may have tried to seek counsel from the world, looking for "quick-fix" solutions. In the world in which we live, we can be bombarded daily with various opinions, counsels and bits of advice from lawyers, doctors, psychologists and people from various other professional fields. But oftentimes, the "worldly" ideas and solutions which these men try to provide may not be what we are looking for. They may also not be what God would have us do, and therefore not good for our souls. I truly believe that in order for us to quench our hunger and thirst for the truth, for peace, and above all, for comfort in our lives, we will need to look for answers to our questions that can be found only in the Bible.

As a convert from Hinduism, I look back and realize that I had many questions in mind as a young believer. Over time, these questions had been flooding my mind, and I had wished so often that I could find some really good answers for them. I decided to pen my thoughts and email them to a kind and learned man, with whom I have maintained contact for several years. My hope was that he might be able to enlighten me further; I was seeking for answers from a more biblical perspective. As a young believer, I knew that I had so much I could learn. I needed answers to

questions concerning God: who He is and how He differs from the gods of Hinduism. I needed to know what God's plan was for me in this great and wide world. I needed to know what would happen to me when I died, and what my relationship with others ought to be. So many thoughts... I needed so many answers.

Anyway, I decided to email some of these questions to Professor Hanko. Professor Herman Hanko is a member of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. He began his Church ministry in 1955, and he continued to serve as Minister of the Gospel of Christ and Professor of the New Testament and Church History until the year 2000. After the year 2000, Prof. Hanko was granted the position of a Professor emeritus, although he continued to teach a Bible class, preach and write.

It is my prayer that this book may encourage you who read this book, to grow in your faith and knowledge of His Word. I hope you will take the time to ponder its contents and to search the Scriptures to ensure that what you read conforms to the Word of God that is found in the Bible. Having done this, you will realize that the Questions & Answers found in this book are most assuredly based on good Biblical Reformed Principles.

Ishu Mahtani, 2008

Psalm 83:18, "That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth."

Foreword

The Christian religion is unique among all the religions of the world. It is unique because, while all other religions are born out of the sinful minds of men and are expressions of sinful man's hatred of God, the Christian religion does not have its origin in the minds of men, but rather in the mind of God. It is a revealed religion, given from God to man. This revelation of God to man is contained in the Bible, for the Bible is a book inspired by God Himself through His Holy Spirit.

It is not surprising therefore that the Christian religion differs from human religions in every respect. It differs in the truth it teaches; it differs in its explanation of the origin of the world, the nature of the world, the purpose of the world; it differs in its description of man: from whence he came, why he is here, where he is going. And it differs in its description of how man ought to live in this world. The differences are deep and profound.

One who is brought by the grace of God out of heathendom to faith in Christ is confronted with an entirely new system of thought, a new world-and-life view, and new ideas, formerly strange to him, but now wonderful and amazing. He stands before new demands on his life, new ways of looking at the things of this world, and new paths to walk and explore.

It can be and surely is an exciting journey into new paths. Each new understanding brings a thrill of joy and amazement. Each new calling reveals to him a greater glory of the God who loves Him more than he has ever known.

But sometimes such a one needs help from another who has long walked the paths of truth and holiness, and who is familiar with the way, the dangers, the obstacles that need to be overcome, and the destination towards which one travels in this life. Even when we travel by car or by foot to places we have never been, we frequently need help – even though we may have a map. So it is in the Christian life. The Christian is on a journey. The “roadmap” is the Scriptures. But he sometimes needs help to read the map.

A dear fellow saint found himself in need of some direction from time to time. It was my privilege to help him understand the “roadmap.” I am thankful for this privilege, and I hope and pray that what is found in this book will help others who confess faith in Christ, to find the way mapped out in God’s Holy Word.

Professor Herman Hanko

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1 Jesus is God

Dear Prof,

If Jesus is very God, what am I to do if the person to whom I am trying to bring this truth does not believe me?

Dear young believer,

The final appeal of the child of God is to the Word of God. It is the one and only source of proof which we have for our doctrines. When one will not believe that Scripture is the Word of God, there is no way he will believe what we say or what anyone else says. Nor ought he. We must bow before the authority of Scripture, for it is not what man says, but what God says. Even when one argues by asking: But how do you know that the Bible is the Word of God? We answer: because the Bible itself says so (II Tim. 3:16, II Peter 1:20,21 etc.) We use the Bible because God uses the Bible to save His people. God uses nothing else but the Bible. Not our arguments; not our wisdom; not our proof. Just the Bible. Read the last verses of Luke 16 when the rich man in hell asked Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn the rich man's brothers. Verse 16:31 reads, "And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Greetings and blessings,
Prof.

2 Triune God

Dear Prof,

As Christians, we learn from the Bible about our Triune God. However, how can we try to teach others about this? It seems to be something that is not easy to do?

Dear young believer,

I am not sure that I understand your question, but take you to mean: How do I discuss the doctrine of the trinity in an understandable way with another Christian? And, is there any help to be found in a book or article?

Two books come to mind. The first is J. I. Parker's book *Knowing God*. This is a very good book, although it deals more broadly with the doctrine of God than with the trinity only. But there is some help here.

The second book is C. S. Lewis' book, *Mere Christianity*. The last part of the book, Book IV, which deals with the general subject "Beyond Personality," is Lewis' radio broadcasts over BBC in which he explained the Christian doctrine of the trinity to an audience of unbelievers and mixed people in the British Isles. You might find that somewhat helpful. At least, I would give it a try.

My own approach, if discussing this doctrine with a Christian, would be to try to show him that the doctrine that God is three in person and one in essence is important because it makes God a living, thinking, knowing, willing God; not the cold abstract God of the Muslims, or a kind of fate. And because it makes God a living and knowing God, it also makes Him a covenant God who lives in fellowship with Himself, a fellowship between the three persons who are completely united in one essence with one mind, one will, one purpose. He is, therefore, infinitely blessed, infinitely glorious, infinitely happy. And He is one with whom we can have fellowship.

Greetings in our Savior,
Prof.

3 Animated Movies

Dear Prof,

Sometimes I think about whether it is okay for Christians to watch animated movies. Can we watch movies such as “Ice Age” which is an animated movie?

Dear young believer,

I am not really sure what a movie of animated creatures is like, nor do I know anything about “Ice Age,” for, frankly, we have never paid attention to these things. When our children were home, we refused to have television in the house, but chose rather to fill the house with books for the children to read.

Nevertheless, I do think that animation is not necessarily sinful. I think indeed it belongs to the area of Christian liberty. The objection against movies is the wrong of drama, i.e., of people acting out the lives of others. This is not the case with animation. However, I am told that many programs on TV that make use of animation are filled with violence and evil speaking. It would seem to me that these would be harmful for children. Animation used for purposes of instruction would be good. Animation strictly for entertainment would be in the area of Christian liberty.

In Christ’s service,
Prof.

4 Christmas

Dear Prof,

I wish to ask you about Christmas. I wonder whether we observe Christmas in the correct manner. Can you kindly enlighten me about this practice, please?

Dear young believer,

The question you bring up is an interesting one. I sometimes think that we do it wrongly. In the Netherlands, there was, what was called St. Nick's Day. This was a week or two earlier in December than Christmas. On that day, families came together, special meals were cooked, and gifts were exchanged. This was done entirely apart from the commemoration of the birth of Christ. On December 25 the birth of Christ was commemorated with special worship services. But it was entirely separate from all the trappings of Christmas in America.

Many of the trappings of Christmas are pagan in origin. A few such are: Christmas trees, yule logs, wassail, exchange of gifts. They were incorporated into the church from paganism during the expansion of Christianity in Europe the first five or six centuries of the post-apostolic age. The Roman Catholic Church adopted a policy that instructed missionaries to incorporate into the Christian religion any pagan festivals and practices which it could, but give to them a "Christian" veneer.

To answer your question, it seems to me that the best way is simply to speak to others of the meaning and importance of Christ's incarnation, to stress the wonder of salvation through God become man, and to point people to the fact that this is, after all, the important thing. All the other trappings of Christmas could easily be destroyed and forgotten and nothing would be lost; our everlasting hope is in heaven.

Christmas always leaves me somewhat uncomfortable because of its commercialization. Our family actually does very little about Christmas in the way of shopping, exchanging gifts, etc. We do get together as a family, at least that part of the family which is able to come together. But we usually do this before or after December 25. We have no Christmas tree nor do we do any decorating of any sort.

In Christ,
Prof.

5 Called to be a Missionary

Dear Prof,

Nowadays I come across many who claim to be evangelists, missionaries and even preachers. Does one need to be ordained before he can become an evangelist or a minister? Can any one decide to proclaim himself as a missionary and begin the work of spreading the gospel on a personal basis?

Dear young believer,

You ask an important question and one which is not being very much considered in today's world. Scripture, it seems to me, is clear on the following:

- 1) Evangelists held a special office in the apostolic era, which was absorbed into the office of missionary after the apostles died. Hence, it exists no longer.
- 2) A preacher is the one office in the new dispensation, which Scripture recognizes as being a legitimate office in the church, along with elders and deacons.
- 3) A preacher is ordained; hence, holds an office established by Christ Himself, and the one holding that office is put in office by Christ Himself and given the authority to preach. No one else has that authority to preach.

4) Missionaries are preachers. They are also ordained to the office of preacher. But they are sent by Christ to those outside the church with the work of gathering the church in other lands.

5) Professors in the Seminary are also preachers. Seminary instruction is the official work of the church, and the professors are ministers of the gospel, preachers, ordained to their office, with the official commission of Christ to preach the Word. Their work is preparing young men for the ministry. Their instruction is, therefore, official preaching, for Christ calls and qualifies young men for the ministry through professorial teaching.

6) In Ephesians 4 Paul speaks of those who are “pastors and teachers.” By that he means pastors who are professors in the church’s Seminary, and pastors who, in their preaching from the pulpit, teach. They teach the Word of God.

7) This official preaching is decisive in the work of salvation. It is impossible to be saved without hearing the preaching. That is, with the exception of totally mentally retarded people and elect infants who die in infancy. Official preaching is that which saves. This is the clear teaching of Rom. 10: 13-15, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”

8) All God's people are to be witnesses of the gospel. They are to be witnesses in all their life. They are to be witnesses in their daily pathway in life as God puts others on their pathway. God may use this witnessing, but He uses it to bring others under the official preaching by means of which God saves His elect.

9) We must never confuse the two. The lines must be clearly drawn. Scripture itself draws them. If we blur these lines, then presently every one who thinks himself capable of witnessing suddenly becomes a preacher. And he preaches outside the control and direction of the church, so that one gets a hodge-podge of witnessing that is confusing and unsettling and is of no good to God or to the church. We may have opportunity to witness before groups, but this is not preaching, and we ought not to be gathering groups together before which unordained people "preach." A person may give a Christian witness in the courtroom if he is called to testify there. A man at work may give a Christian witness before his fellow workers if he is called to speak on matters related to his place of employment, etc. But he may not preach.

I hope this helps a bit to draw the lines and make the Biblical distinctions.

Your brother in Christ,
Prof.

6 Marriage

Dear Prof,

When is a married couple considered married? Is it when they both sign some legal papers which legally consider them as a married couple or only after they consummate it in intercourse?

Dear young believer,

There are two events which make a marriage before God. The first is the legal aspect. The state has a word in this aspect of marriage. When the state declares two to be married, they are married before God. The second is the consummation of the marriage in intercourse. There is some dispute on this latter point, however. There are instances where a marriage has been legally performed and, for one reason or another, it was impossible to consummate the marriage. The marriage was then annulled. But I have grave reservations concerning the legitimacy even of this. It seems to me that the legal marriage makes two people married before God. I can really think of only one exception, and that is when one of the two who were married legally lied to the other in a significant matter about something that made the consummation of the marriage impossible. But the general truth of the matter is that when a minister, as an agent of the state, pronounces two married, they are married before God.

Greetings in the Lord,
Prof.

7 Salvation

Dear Prof,

Will whom God has elected to be saved have heard the word when Christ finally appears or would some of those who are saved, be saved without hearing the word?

Will those who did not hear the word - e.g those who died prematurely, being unborn - be saved, since they did not hear the word?

Does faith come before hearing - or does one need to hear the word of God being preached before he or she can have faith?

Dear young believer,

I think that all who are elect will have heard the word when the Lord returns. Exceptions might be unborn or newly born babies; but their salvation would be no different than the salvation of elect babies who die in infancy. You must remember, however, that there will be only a few elect on the earth at the Lord's return. Persecution will have all but destroyed the church.

While we may not limit God in any way, for He can do whatever He pleases, nevertheless, the Scriptures tell us that hearing the Word is necessary to salvation – again with the exception of elect babies who die in infancy or mentally retarded who have no contact with the world about them. (I think the Westminster Confession takes the same position.)

Rom 10:17 seems to settle this issue: “Faith cometh out of (original Greek) hearing, and hearing by means of (original Greek) the Word of God,” where “the Word of God” refers to the preaching, as is clear from the context where the apostle is speaking of the preaching. So, the preaching, by the work of the Spirit, creates hearing; and hearing, again by the work of the Spirit, creates faith. Yet it must be remembered that hearing and faith take place simultaneously. When Lazarus was in the grave, Jesus called, “Lazarus, come forth.” That very voice of Christ, powerful and efficacious, created hearing in the dead corpse of Lazarus, so that he obeyed. But he was, by that voice, raised from the dead and made to hear Jesus’ command, “Lazarus, come forth.”

In Christ’s Service,
Prof.

8 Our place in Heaven

Dear Prof,

In John 14, we read about how God has promised each one of us a place in his heavenly mansions? Is this true?

Dear young believer,

John 14:1-3 is a text on which I have often preached, both for Ascension Day and at funerals. The word “mansions” in the KJV really means “resting places.” The idea is that God is the Father of His people, that all the elect are members of His family, and that He has a beautiful home for them in heaven in which He will live with them forever and ever. Each saint has his or her own place in that home – just as in any covenant family, each person and each child has his or her own place. Here on earth, when one of the children is missing, we say: “His place is empty.” If God takes that child away from us early in life, we say: “His place is now empty.” No one else can fill that place, not even a new child brought into the home through birth. So in heaven there will be no empty places. But the main idea is that of covenant fellowship with God and Christ and our dwelling with Him under one roof, so to speak; that is, living in the great heavenly family of God’s elect.

We must always be careful that we do not think of heaven in terms of this earth and what we know here. We must not be earthly and carnal in our thinking about heaven. Paul himself describes the things of heaven as those things “which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor ever entered the heart of man to conceive of.” I am sure that when we come to heaven we will say with the Queen of Sheba, when she saw Solomon’s kingdom in all its glory: “The half has not been told me!”

In Christ,
Prof.

9 Loving our neighbours

Dear Prof,

As a child of God, I am taught to love my neighbor but it is not always easy. Some neighbors can be quite difficult to show our love and concern to. I refer especially to our fellow church members; I find this can be quite challenging. Can you advise me about this?

Dear young believer,

I have dealt with people who have offered their services to those in need and have been rebuffed and, in fact, told to keep their nose out of other people's business. The ones who wanted to help were deeply hurt. There are, however, a couple of things that you can remember in this matter.

Your conduct depends upon the reason why one rejects overtures of love. Some people are very, very private and have great difficulty entering fully into the life of the communion of saints. Apart from their desire for privacy, they are faithful members of the church, although frequently they do not involve themselves as fully in church activities as one would want.

But there are others who do not always walk faithfully in their calling to seek the welfare of the church. They are not always at worship services when they ought to be and can be; they are frequently so engaged in activities of questionable value that they neglect the obligations of the church. They may even be walking in some real sin.

To love our neighbour requires that we respect and honor a person who is “private” in his life. We do our best when the occasion requires it to involve such a one more fully in church life, but we honor their desire to be alone.

When one walks in a way displeasing to the Lord, love demands that we attempt to point such a one to his/her sin and to admonish such a one to get involved in the life of the church by forsaking sin and seeking to please Christ. But we must do this in a way which is as inoffensive as possible. That is, we must do this with an effort to understand the problems which others face; we must do this with humility knowing that we ourselves fall far short; and we must do this with a genuine desire to seek the salvation of our fellow saints.

When our efforts to help are rejected, we must persist. When the Lord gives us an opportunity to speak to such a one, we must take that opportunity to try to encourage, to help, to express our concern. Nor do I think we ought to try hard to “find out what pleases them.” It is better to point them to their calling as servants of the Lord Christ.

In Christ’s name,
Prof.

10 Working with Unbelievers

Dear Prof,

Over the years, I have realized that my thoughts and desires have changed since I became a Christian. As a businessman, I face many challenges at work. How should a Christian businessman behave in a heathen environment?

Dear young believer,

Truly it is not easy to be a Christian businessman, and, I think, it is getting more and more difficult, at least in this country. I have known a few businessmen who often talked about the problems they face and the many difficult decisions that have to be made in the light of their commitment to the truth of the gospel and their calling to walk as God's covenant people in the world. It is not easy.

Your letter indicates to me that you are also sincerely struggling with these problems and are looking at your problems from the perspective of a child of God who earnestly desires to do what is right and good in God's sight. For that I give thanks to God. To recognize the problems is half the battle. There are "Christian" businessmen who do not even see the problems involved in running their business in a Christian way. They are hopeless.

But to get to your specific question: In the first place, I do not think that the fact that you are yourself a sinner enters into the picture. Think of us who are ministers. Every Lord's Day we are required to speak to God's people, reprimand them for their sins, call them to repentance, and admonish them to walk a godly life. Yet we know, when we say these things, that we are also very great sinners. The only way we can handle this is to realize that, although we must speak the Word of God, we ourselves must put ourselves under that Word. We must preach to ourselves as well as to the congregation. And we must let the congregation know by our words and deeds that we do not consider ourselves to be without sin, but that we need to go together to the cross of Christ for forgiveness.

I do think, after having said this, that a Christian businessman has the right and calling to require that the people whom he hires conform themselves to the rules of conduct which he lays down. Even the wicked do that. The ungodly owner of a business has the right (and exercises it) to require of his help that they conform to his rules in their work place. A Christian must obey his employer unless, of course, the demands of the employer are contrary to the Word of God. So an employer has the right to require employees to observe his rules.

And, if you have that right, you have also the right to terminate the individual who will not conform himself to those rules. This must be done in such a way that it is clear why you are terminating his position in the shop, but it may be done, and, indeed, must be done, especially when the conduct of an employee is contrary to Christian principles. Perhaps the individual is not himself/herself

a Christian. You may not and cannot force Christianity on them. But you do have the right to demand of them that their outward conduct conform to Christian principles. If, for example, they take God's name in vain, you have the right to insist that they do not do this while they are working.

In this country, it is not so easy to fire someone. He has recourse to various government agencies and lengthy, time-consuming and costly lawsuits can sometimes follow. And so Christian employers are very careful when they hire and consult at length with an individual about what is expected of him/her before hiring.

Further, an employee may occupy a strategic place in the business and it may be difficult to replace him/her. I would think that, perhaps, a good tailor would be difficult to replace in your business. I know that would be the case here. Then it is a question of your success in business. But I do think that it is exactly at this point where your remarks about business success are so much to the point. Sometimes we may have to put the business in jeopardy by our decisions; or, if not that bad, we may have to make a decision which seems to be harmful to the company. But one must, I think, maintain his Christian principles even then. The approval of God is more important than anything else, and we must not sell our souls to the devil for business success.

We shall remember you in our prayers that God will give you wisdom to face these problems. But we shall remember you thankfully for your sensitivity to them and your willingness to do that which is pleasing in God's sight.

With Christian greetings,
Prof.

11 Depression

Dear Prof,

I realize that not only unbelievers, but believers also may suffer from depression. Why do Christians suffer from depression and is it wrong for believers to suffer from depression?

Dear young believer,

I received your letter this morning and will answer it as best I can. I am by no means an authority on mental illnesses and confess openly that I understand little of the workings of the human mind. Nevertheless, I have studied the matter at some length, pondered it often over the years, and dealt extensively with those who have suffered depression. I hope you will appreciate the fact that it is impossible to be anywhere near accurate with advice concerning a person without knowing the person and without being able to talk to the person. So, in the nature of the case, I shall have to be general.

There are many reasons for depression, some of which are physical. That is why I always suggest to a depressed person that he/she have a complete and thorough physical examination to determine whether there is anything physically wrong. From your letter it seems this person has already had that. But I would want to know whether the physical was thorough and complete, and whether it was done by a competent doctor who takes the time to examine a person carefully.

Recent illness, surgery, child birth, menopause – all these things can also bring on depression. The point is that when one is physically weak depression is more likely to occur. I have guided people through a period of physical weakness with the promise that as they gain strength they will also escape their depression, and this has happened.

Another aspect of depression is a lithium imbalance which can be corrected by very careful and closely administered doses of lithium. That this person comes from a family with a history of depression suggests that there may be a chemical imbalance lurking in the background. But the prescribing of such a drug and the monitoring of its use can be done only by a psychiatrist – at least in this country. Nevertheless, I personally doubt whether lithium, even though it helps in certain cases, is the sole solution to the problem. And here we get into the area of psychiatry.

I am personally convinced that depression always has a spiritual cause, even if it is the result of predominantly physical problems or weakness. That spiritual cause may, however, be for different reasons. I will mention a few:

- 1) An unresolved problem

- 2) A specific sin – although the sin need not necessarily be an overt sin such as theft or adultery; it may be a sin such as self-centeredness, spiritual indifference brought about by covetousness, or worry. I have found that the problem is sometimes an inability to assume one's God-given place, do the work required, stick to it through thick and thin, see the work through to the end, and do so relying upon God. Some pastors are always looking for greener

pastures, are always figuring out how they can get into something different from their present task, are always maneuvering to open new doors, and are, consequently, doing a half job in their present calling. Such a half job begins to weigh on their consciences and their inability to stick to what they are doing; their hearts and souls are aggravated by their half-hearted commitment to their task.

3) An unholy pre-occupation with one's self. This is almost always a factor involved. It differs from selfishness or self-centeredness in that it is continuously a certain feeling sorry for oneself. I work harder than the next man. I am not understood or appreciated – by my wife, or my children, or my fellow saints, or my employer, etc., etc. I am ignored or looked down upon, or overlooked and people think of me as without any value, etc. So depression has many causes and is complex.

But what to do? It is that in which you are most interested. Well, for one thing, a person can get so deeply mired in depression that he needs some kind of professional help to extricate himself. If he is a Christian he needs desperately a Christian psychiatrist. But he also needs spiritual counseling and guidance. A Christian doctor can give that, or a pastor or a fellow saint – provided such a one knows how to handle the situation.

The solution is to tear such a one away from his/her preoccupation with self, point one to the cross (for forgiveness where sin is present, for strength to do the work assigned, for contentment in one's place in God's kingdom, for peace in one's heart amidst the cares of life.) To get such a one who is depressed to do this is almost impossible. He may speak of his efforts to do this, but

add: “It doesn’t help.” The problem is that such looking to the cross has to be with total and complete self-forgetfulness. Such a one has to quit looking at their navel, and start looking to heaven where Christ is. These have to get it through their heads that it doesn’t matter one speck what happens to them; the only thing that counts is Christ’s honor and glory. They have to be so absorbed in devotion for the cause of Christ that they have neither time nor energy to consider themselves. Introspective and easily dissatisfied people have much trouble doing this.

Paul’s chapter in Philippians 4:13 is particularly helpful. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Or in Philippians 4:11, Paul confesses what we all need to learn. “I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.” Such depression is never life-threatening. However, if one is deeply depressed, there is always a danger of suicide. But that can happen only to one who is not a child of God, as a general rule.

In Christ,
Prof.

12 Dealing with our neighbours

Dear Prof,

As Christians, how should we behave towards our neighbor? What if our neighbors are unbelievers?

Dear young believer,

The general command which governs our behavior towards others is found in the words of the law: “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” Our neighbor is anyone whom we meet on our pathway: our wife, our children, our fellow saints, our customers, our associates, etc. To love our neighbor implies the following:

- 1) We must love them for God’s sake, for we are to love the Lord our God, and loving our neighbor is an expression of our love to God.
- 2) To love our neighbor is to seek their good. Their good is their salvation, which includes also providing for them when they are in need, attending to their problems, troubles, cares, etc., but always showing them the way of the Lord.
- 3) When we love our neighbor who is already one with us in the family of God, then that love is mutual and becomes a bond of friendship and fellowship.

4) When our neighbor is an unbeliever, then love is not and cannot be a bond, but is instead an expression of our desire that they be one with us in our faith in Christ. It involves witnessing by our life and conduct as well as our words.

5) This must be done with wisdom and discretion. Surely it is clear that our witness to our unbelieving wives may be different from our witness to a customer who enters our store.

Basically all must be treated in the same way. But the circumstances make a great deal of difference as to how we carry out this command of Christ. And with those of like precious faith with us we have a rich and full fellowship in the truth of Christ, something impossible with unbelievers.

It is a difficult obligation in the circumstances in which you find yourself, and you need much wisdom. May God grant it. You are much in our prayers.

In Christ,
Prof.

13 Is Jesus very God?

Dear Prof,

Is Jesus truly God? I think when we try and bring the gospel to others, it may be one thing to say that Jesus is Christ our Saviour, but it may be more difficult to say that Christ is very God? Are icons of Christ wrong?

Dear young believer,

First of all, yes, those who have pictures and icons of Jesus do indeed worship idols. See Lord's Day 35, 96-98.

Question 96. What doth God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.

Question 97. Are images then not at all to be made? God neither can, nor may be represented by any means: but as to creatures; though they may be represented, yet God forbids to make, or have any resemblance of them, either in order to worship them or to serve God by them.

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

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

This is another reason why it is good to have Heidelberg Catechism preaching in the church.

Secondly, the very questions raised were the questions discussed in the early church. The church had not yet formulated the doctrine of the trinity and the divinity of Christ. Many wondered why the church confessed that there is only one God, and yet, that Christ is God as well. The church's answer is to be found in the Nicene Creed, a most important document and basic confession of the church. You may find it in the back of our Psalter, or in the copy of the Three Forms of Unity.

The answer, briefly, is this. God is triune, i.e., He is three in person and one in essence. The three persons are Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christ is the second person, the Son who came into our flesh, born of Mary. He had no earthly Father, for God was His Father. He united in the one divine person of the Son of God the full and complete divine nature and a human nature which was like us in all things except sin. This is taught in the Chalcedon Creed, found in the same place, the back of the Psalter, as the Nicene Creed. It too is one of our creeds.

Thus Christ is both truly God and truly man. He is Immanuel, God with us. He is divine and human, both at the same time. God was in Christ reconciling us to Himself.

That is the answer in short. You will find it taught also in the Heidelberg Catechism and in the Confession of Faith.

Greetings and blessings in Christ's love,
Prof.

14 Holy Bible

Dear Prof,

Why is the Bible called holy? If the bible is the Word of God surely we need not emphasize its holiness?

Dear young believer,

If the Bible is truly the Bible, then it is holy. However, there are some good reasons why we add the word “holy.”

The word “Bible” is only a translation of the Greek word “biblios.” This Greek word means “book” and is used for any book. Hence, the word “holy” was added to distinguish this one book from all other books. The word “holy” is a good word to add because of the fact that the Bible is God’s Word, and so it is without error, mistake, fault or lack. It contains all we need to know for our salvation. Also, the Bible itself talks about the Scriptures as “holy Scripture.” We are only following the Bible’s own usage (See II Timothy 3:15).

So “Holy Bible” means: “The Book which is holy because God wrote it” even though He used human men. It remains the Word which God wrote. The problem is that we have reserved the word “Bible” only for Scripture when, as far as the word is concerned, it can refer to any book. So we ought to keep that name. It is a reminder of how the Bible differs from every other book that has ever been written.

15 Offer of the Gospel

Dear Prof,

I often hear the word offer when one speaks about the gospel. When we use the word offer, is it actually something which we do to someone in order that we may get a human response to our act? Is “offer” a good word to use when we speak about the gospel?

Dear young believer,

I think it is very dangerous to use the word “offer” today. Having said that, we must remember a few things:

1) In the years immediately following the Reformation the word “offer” was repeatedly used. But what was written was in Latin. And the Latin word which is translated “offer” is *offere*. That Latin word means, “present, hold forth.” This is the sense in which it is used in Canons 3/4, 9. The Canons of Dordrecht is a creed of Reformed Churches. And this is the sense in which it is used in the Westminster Confession.

2) The trouble is that nobody uses it that way any more. When one uses the word “offer,” one uses it in the sense that the Arminians use it. The Arminians mean by it to express that God offers salvation to men in the hope that they will take it; that it is then up to man to accept or reject the offer; and so on the basis of what he does he will be saved or damned. Our English word “command” is much closer to the meaning of the old Latin *offere* than our word “offer.”

3) The term is not found in Scripture. The Scriptures never speak of an offer of salvation, but always the command to repent of sin and believe in Christ. If it is not found in Scripture, why should we use it? Especially if it is so badly misunderstood in our day? It will only confuse, leave wrong impressions, and serve the purpose of the lie.

4) Isaiah 55:1 is certainly a command. It is even formulated that way in Scripture. It is first of all directed to those who are thirsty, who only are the elect in whom God has worked salvation. It is secondly, specifically a command and not an offer: "Come ye, buy, and eat." If it were an offer, it would read: "I have prepared water for you all. I want you to drink of it. I offer it to you in the hopes that you will come and drink of it."

With Christian greetings,
Prof.

16 Quick & the Dead

Dear Prof,

I read in the Heidelberg Question & Answer 52 that Jesus will come to save the “quick and the dead”. What does this mean?

Dear young believer,

The meaning of the words “quick and dead” in the Heidelberg Catechism are the same as the meaning of the expression found in the Apostolic Confession. “Quick” here means “living.” “Quick” is an old English word for “living.” The point is that when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again at the end of time, He comes as Judge who will judge all men. There will, however, be many living at the time when Christ comes, wicked and righteous.

They will not die, but immediately be brought into the presence of Christ to be judged. But all the dead will also be raised – all who lived from the beginning of time. All will be before Christ’s great throne to be judged. What an awesome event that will be! Think of the confrontation between Christ and Antichrist, he who claimed to be Christ and who deceived the whole world other than God’s people. Our judgment will be in Christ, for He died for us. Hence, we need not fear the judgment.

Greetings,
Prof.

17 To sue or not to sue

Dear Prof,

In this modern world, we use the word “to sue” so often. It has somewhat become a norm. Should we take some form of legal action against the people of God in certain circumstances in life?

Dear young believer,

We are not to return evil for evil, also in this respect. This interpretation is supported by Jesus’ words at the end of Mt. 5 where He instructs us to give to him who asks for our coat, our cloak also. In the sphere of the church, this interpretation is supported by Paul’s words in I Cor. 6:1-8 where we are told not to take a brother to court to sue him.

However, there are circumstances in life in which we must find exceptions. One such circumstance is referred to in the Church Order where the rule is that we may appeal to the courts of the land as church when the royal government of Christ is infringed upon. Some churches have sought police protection, for example, when during worship services, neighbors made such noise that worship was impossible. Further, when in the split of 1953, those who left us laid claim to the name Protestant Reformed, we went to court to keep our name.

It may also be necessary in business when dealing with unbelievers. If a businessman would not sue to collect debts, he would soon be a marked man and no one, in the ruthless world of competition, would pay his bills. Then the businessman could just as well go out of business. In this situation he would have the right to sue.

Greetings in our Lord's name,
Prof.

18 Christ's Divinity

Dear Prof,

Is Christ really divine and can we share this with others?

Dear young believer,

The doctrine of the divinity of Christ is so fundamental to the Christian faith that every sermon in the PRC either specifically teaches it or assumes it to be true. I personally have emphasized it in several sermons in the last month or two. If Christ divinity is not preached it may be because it is assumed that every one holds to it and understands it.

The doctrine is not a barrier to evangelism, but an essential and fundamental part of our witness — a truth of Scripture that sets the Christian faith apart from all unbelief and pagan religions.

The early church faced the problem of how there could be only one God and at the same time Jesus Christ was very God. The answer of Scripture, an answer adopted by the early church at the Council of Nicea, said that this was possible because God is triune: one in essence and three in person. The second person of the holy trinity, the Son, became flesh when He was born of the virgin Mary.

He took the whole divine nature of God and united it to the human nature which he received from His mother. The union was in His person, the eternal person of the Son of God.

This has been the confession of the church since 325 AD, nearly 1700 years ago. It is interesting that, throughout church history, any kind of Arminianism which ascribes some part of the work of salvation to man, has ended in denying the full divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is because all our salvation is only of God, and unless Jesus Christ is fully God, all our salvation cannot be in Him alone.

In John 8:58, Jesus says, “Before Abraham was, I am.” That word “I am” is really the name Jehovah, which means I am. See Exodus 3:14. Jesus was saying in effect, I am Jehovah. That name was so sacred to the Jews that they would not ever speak it, because it referred to God. This is why the Jews tried to stone Christ when He applied it to Himself.

Jesus’ claim to be Christ included His claim to be God. The Jews knew this. When He said in Nazareth He was the Christ, they tried to push Him off a cliff. When He was before the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas put Him under oath and asked Him to swear that He was the Christ the Son of the living God. And when He did, they condemned Him for blasphemy because He made Himself God.

Although this doctrine is on practically every page of the NT, look at Rom. 1:3, 4 and Rom. 9:5, where the text literally says that Christ is “over all, God blessed for ever”; I Tim. 3:16 where Paul speaks of God manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world,

received up into glory.” Thomas says of Christ: “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28). Isaiah 9:6 calls Him “Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” And so I could go on and on and on.

An ancient creed of the church, which is one of our creeds, says that one cannot be saved if he does not believe this truth.

Christianity is not a moralistic religion, even though it teaches and demands holiness. Christianity is a body of doctrine which one must believe.

In the hands of the eternal Son of God,
Prof.

19 Reformation

Dear Prof,

I wish to ask you whether the term “Reformation” can still be used now. Since the Reformation was something which happened in the past as the people of God broke away from the ungodly leaders, can we say that reformation even continues till this day? Do the modern day churches need another reformation? Is this the meaning of Hebrews 9:10?

Dear young believer,

Hebrews 9:10 is indeed the only time the word “reformation” appears in the Scriptures. Your description of the verse is correct provided you understand, as I think you do, that the text refers indeed to the coming of Christ and not the Reformation of the sixteenth century. The latter is called “reformation” because it was the “re-forming” of the church of Christ by separation from Roman Catholicism and its corruptions, and a return to the truth of Scripture. In that respect, our commemoration of Reformation Day is a looking back to the traditions of the sixteenth century reformation because that reformation was the great work of God in restoring His church to truth and purity. Since the time of the great Reformation the Church has undergone additional reformations as the Church, once sound in doctrine and life, became apostate. Many modern day churches are in need of reformation. God’s way of preserving His Church is through reformation.

Many blessings, in Christ,
Prof.

20 God's Sovereignty

Dear Prof,

If God is sovereign, why did He allow sin into our lives?

Dear young believer,

Your question reminds me of an incident in my teaching of Catechism many years ago. A girl was present in the Catechism class from the Roman Catholic Church. She was a new convert, a very serious young girl, and an intelligent person. She absorbed the Reformed faith eagerly and readily, but had great problems with the sovereignty of God over sin and evil. We had a rather large class and many in the class suggested ways and means to help her understand this doctrine. We talked about it over and over again. Sometimes we spent an entire class on it, but she could not see it.

Finally I had said everything I knew to say. And so I said to her: "Let's not try to understand it now. Just answer one question. What would you rather have and serve? A sovereign God or one who cannot do everything?"

She put her head down in her arms on the table. It was deathly quiet in the room. I said nothing and waited. It seemed like a long, long time during which no one moved and everyone seemed to quit breathing. I do not know how many silent prayers went to heaven during those minutes of quiet. Suddenly she raised her head and her face was shining bright, with the tears streaming down her cheeks. She looked at me and said, "I want a sovereign God!"

You could almost hear the class relax in relief. It was a stirring moment. She never had any trouble with this doctrine again.

Although man always remains accountable for his sin, God sovereignly willed that Adam fell, and so all man became sinners in Adam (Romans 5:12–14). This was God's will so that His greater glory might be revealed in the highest way through Jesus Christ.

In Christ's service,
Prof.

21 Sin & Evil

Dear Prof,

I find that because of sin, evil persists in the lives of God's creatures. How does sin affect our lives? How does the devil come into the picture as far as the sins in our lives are concerned? Do the judgments in the form of sickness and calamity, which God sends in our lives, work for our good?

Dear young believer,

Your distinction between sin and evil is quite correct. And your question is an interesting one. It is certainly true that evil (in the sense of disease, war, natural catastrophes, etc.) is the result of sin. There is no question about that. In Amos there is a passage: "Shall there be evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6) That is a strong statement. God is surely sovereign over all evil.

The Scriptures are quite clear too that God sends evil. He sends earthquakes. Think of the passage in Haggai: "Yet once a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, and all nations . . ." (Haggai 2:6,7) He sends evil directly because evil is His just judgment upon wicked men. He may use means. He did, for example, in the case of Job when the Chaldeans and Sabaeans, and the wind and fire took away all Job had. And they, in turn, were instruments of Satan we are told. But Satan could not do one thing without God's will.

And Job himself said: “The Lord gave; the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). And so it is throughout the whole of the Bible.

God created Satan, for he was a mighty angel. God was sovereign over Satan’s fall. It is not correct to say that God is much more powerful than Satan. To put it that way means that Satan is a power independent from God although God is stronger than he. All power belongs to God alone. There is no power anywhere, but that which is from God. God created Satan and continues to uphold him and give him his existence. So it is with all wicked men. The beat of their hearts and the breath of their mouth is every moment from God. We close our prayers with the words: “Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.” That means that all power belongs to God alone.

God indeed, in His great mercy and grace, makes His judgements upon His people work for their good.

In Christ,
Prof.

22 Passion of Christ – The Movie

Dear Prof,

When producers come up with movies such as the “Passion of Christ,” are they doing good work? Is this work promoting the gospel and should Christians encourage and support this kind of work?

Dear young believer,

I am sending you some thoughts on the letter about Mel Gibson’s movie on the passion of Christ. First of all the movie. My objections to it are as follows:

1) I am opposed on principle to all drama, but especially to re-enactments of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. The reasons can be found in my pamphlet, “The Christian and the Film Arts”.¹

2) A dramatic production of Christ is a violation of the second commandment in which we are told that it is contrary to God’s will to make any representation of God or Christ, who is God. The second commandment is important, and a violation of it brings terrible wrath upon the sinner even in his generations.

3) It is impossible to represent the suffering of our Lord who suffered the wrath of God against our sins. That cannot be portrayed, and to attempt to do so is blasphemy and sacrilege.

¹ http://www.prca.org/pamphlets/pamphlet_19.html

4) Mel Gibson is a Roman Catholic, and the film is full of Roman Catholic propaganda. Those who watch it are imbibing huge doses of Roman Catholic error.

As far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned:

1) Our confessions (Articles 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession) brand the Roman Catholic Church as the false church. Not by name, but they describe the RC church in the last part of Art. 29.

2) The Heidelberg Catechism calls the mass “an accursed idolatry.” And so it is.

3) The Westminster Confession calls the pope the antichrist.

4) The Roman Catholic Church makes the pope the representative of Christ on earth and the pope even permits people to worship him.

5) The Roman Catholic Church teaches salvation by works. This is a damnable heresy, and no one teaching it can go to heaven.

6) The Roman Catholic Church desecrates the sacraments, refuses to exercise Christian discipline, and preaches a false gospel.

7) The Roman Catholic Church has the blood of thousands and thousands of people of God on its hands who were ruthlessly killed and tortured because of their faith.

Greetings and blessings in the Lord,
Prof.

23 Satan

Dear Prof,

If God is a sovereign God why did he allow Satan the freedom and the power to do all that he does? Who is Satan and can God govern Satan?

Dear young believer,

I think, first of all, we have to clear up some misunderstandings. The devil was created as a good angel, in fact, the head of the entire angelic world. The demons who now labor with him to overthrow the kingdom of Christ also were created good angels. They fell into sin. Sin started in heaven.

The reason why they fell is this. Looking at it from the viewpoint of Satan and his devils, they were lifted up in pride and attempted to dethrone God. When they failed to accomplish this in heaven, they attempted to do the same on earth, but now through Adam. Thus their fall is their responsibility and for it they are punished everlastingly.

From God's point of view, they are reprobate. Election and reprobation takes place in the angelic world as well as among men. The reprobate angels fell; the elect angels remained standing. God's decree of reprobation is sovereign.

The devil is filled with wickedness and goes about all his wickedness in the world for which he will be eternally punished. But, though the devil remains responsible for all his wickedness, God remains sovereign. He gives to Satan his very life and being every single moment. Satan cannot move his little finger without the will of God. God is not only sovereign over the devil in some respects, but in every possible way. God is sovereign over the devil as completely as God is sovereign over the wicked in the world.

God exercises and carries out His sovereignty in such a way that God is not the Author of sin, and Satan and man remain responsible for their sin.

There are not two sovereigns in the world, God and Satan. There are not two independent powers in the world, God and the devil. How could that be? The devil is a creature. God is the Creator. Not one action of the devil, not even when he had Christ crucified, is independent of God's control and plan. Thank God for that. If the devil were in some measure independent, we could never be sure who would win in the end and our salvation would hang undetermined on the thread of the devil's sovereignty. God has eternally planned everything, including all that Satan and his demons do. Christ was delivered and crucified by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. But the wicked and Satan go to hell for doing it (Acts 2:23, 4:27,28).

We must at all costs hold on to God's sovereignty. Even the destruction of the World Trade Towers by Muslim terrorists was under God's sovereign control.

God sends pain and suffering for our chastisement. Sometimes God uses Satan and sometimes He does not. When He uses Satan (as He did in the case of Job) He is still the one who does it. Job confessed, did he not: “The Lord gave; the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” When God uses Satan, Satan does not think of the fact that God is using him (he knows it, but he is so hateful and wicked that he doesn’t think about it.), but has as his purpose to destroy God’s people. God uses Satan’s temptations and the sufferings brought on by Satan to strengthen our faith, purify it, show us the amazing power of the faith which is His gift, and to lead us to heaven. But God can directly send disease or poverty, or trouble. It doesn’t make any difference to us when we understand that it is sent by God whether or not God uses Satan. We submit to God’s will, humble ourselves under His mighty hand, and seek grace from Christ to withstand the fierce temptations of Satan.

When we are afflicted, the temptation to rebel against God, to question His ways, to quarrel with Him, to criticize Him in His actions towards us are temptations sent by Satan. They must be resisted.

I hope these things will help you in your consideration of this problem. We must confess a sovereign God. That is the bottom line. And that is ultimately the comfort of the Christian.

In Christ’s service,
Prof.

24 Man's responsibility

Dear Prof,

If God is sovereign and rules over all things, does not everything fall also under His divine will? Hence can man really be responsible for his sinful behaviour?

Dear young believer,

It is an extremely difficult truth to understand. I have literally spent hours in Catechism classes explaining these things to young people. But the best way to go about it is by pointing to Scripture passages (and there are dozens) which speak both of God's absolute sovereignty and man's (and the devil's) responsibility for his sins. We really ought not to be too surprised when we cannot understand, for God is so much greater than we are; His ways are beyond our feeble knowledge. He is the infinite One. Just read the last verse of Romans 11. Or read Isaiah 40. In fact, there are not any works of God which we do understand. We cannot even understand how God forms a baby in the womb of its mother: "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). But we must acknowledge how small we are, and we must bow before what God says in His Word. For myself, I would want nothing more than to belong to a God who is absolutely sovereign in my life. When I am in His hands, I am safe, for He loves us.

Greetings and blessings,
Prof.

25 Bible Study

Dear Prof,

I understand that as christians, we ought to be involved in the various church activities which may be good for our souls. For example, Bible study is one of the times we can enjoy the fellowship of the saints. How else can we better prepare ourselves for these Bible studies?

Dear young believer,

The very best way to prepare for Bible Study, especially when you must lead the discussion, is to follow these steps.

- 1) Read the passage you must discuss over and over again until you are thoroughly familiar with it.
- 2) Meditate on it in such a way that you always ask yourself the question: What is God revealing of Himself and His works to us in this passage? Get a very clear idea of exactly what God is saying about Himself and His glorious works.
- 3) As you go through this period of meditation, jot down ideas and notes. You should be doing this meditation over a period of days, thinking about it whenever you are able, pondering it when you can be with your Bible, and always having a pen and paper at hand to write down ideas.

4) When you have a fairly good idea of what the passage is all about, then read a good commentary. I myself always prefer to read and still do read John Calvin. He is still the best, the most Reformed and the most helpful. Write down ideas that you find helpful in him and use him to correct your own ideas.

5) Write out the finished product word for word. Do not have a general and vague idea of what you want to say, but be specific and definite, and choose your words carefully and express your ideas on paper. Then you can either read your paper, or you can be so thoroughly familiar with it that you are able to speak it without reading.

All this takes time, but the Word of God and our understanding of it are worth all the time we take to study it.

Greetings and blessings,
Prof.

26 Resurrection of the body

Dear Prof,

The bible (John 5:28) talks about resurrection. What will happen to us when we die? Will our bodies be lifted up to heaven when we die? Or will we have a new body in heaven?

Dear young believer,

In John 5:25 we read: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.” Here the reference is to regeneration, in which the elect who are spiritually dead in sin are made alive by the powerful Word of Christ. This is Peter’s teaching as well in the last verses of I Peter 1, which passage you ought to read.

In John 5:28, however, the reference is to the final resurrection from the dead. It is not surprising that both regeneration and the final resurrection of our bodies are mentioned in the same breath, for both are resurrections from the dead and both belong to the work of salvation. One might even put it this way: the work of salvation is begun in regeneration (often called in Scripture a resurrection from the dead) and finished when our bodies are raised.

But the whole work of salvation is performed by the powerful and irresistible Word of Christ, or, if you will, the Word of God through Christ. God speaks and things happen. God spoke at the beginning of time and creatures came into being. “By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.” (Psalm 33:6). “By faith we understand that the world were framed by the Word of God. . .” (Hebrews 11:3)

When Lazarus was raised, Christ stood at the door of the grave and cried: “Lazarus, come forth.” That Word gave Lazarus life and brought him back to this life — as a picture of regeneration.

When we die our souls go to heaven to be consciously in heaven with Christ, with the angels, and with the saints who are already there. But our bodies remain in the grave. At the resurrection, Christ raises our bodies. He does so by His Word just as in the case of Lazarus. Our bodies are then united with our souls.

If you had regular preaching on your creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, there would be opportunity for instruction in these doctrines. Question and answer 57 reads: “What comfort doth the resurrection of the body afford thee? That not only my soul after this life shall be immediately taken up to Christ its head, but also, that this my body, being raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul, and made like unto the glorious body of Christ.”

You ask: how can one that is dead hear the voice of Christ? That is a good question. I do not think that they can, of course. But Lazarus did not hear the voice of Christ either, for he had been dead for four days, and his body was already beginning to decay. Yet he came forth. At regeneration, the dead sinner cannot hear the voice of Christ either which calls into new life, but that voice of Christ raises from spiritual death and physical death, and gives us the power to hear. Lazarus heard Jesus command him to come forth and heard Jesus command the people to take the grave clothes off. When we are regenerated, we are given spiritual ears to hear the voice of Christ, in the preaching.

It is, however, as you indicate, a great wonder and a mysterious miracle of God's grace in saving us. But it is awesome in its blessedness and glory.

Greetings and blessings in Christ,
Prof.

27^{New Body}

Dear Prof,

As we study 2 Peter 3:10–13, I think about our physical bodies, and what will happen to our bodies when we die. Will we have new bodies in heaven? What state will we be in when we leave this earth? What will heaven be like?

Dear young believer,

The “heavens” in the text refers to the sky above us and all space with all its heavenly bodies: planets, stars, comets, galaxies, etc. The reference is to the entire creation. Man will be excluded from this, as we learn from other parts of Scripture. Yet, those who are living when Christ comes again will be changed. That is, their bodies will be changed. The bodies of the wicked will be changed into bodies that are adapted to live in hell; the bodies of the righteous will be changed so that they are adopted to live in heaven.

The elect will not be destroyed, but will be in heaven. We must remember that the great judgment when the living and the dead will be judged will take place before all things are burned with fire. And so the wicked will be in hell already and the righteous will be in heaven.

Yes, the reprobate will also be brought before the judgment seat of God, and will be in hell when the present universe is destroyed.

We will not be the same in heaven as we are now, for we will be glorified. Our bodies will be changed. Paul describes that change in I Corinthians 15. Our bodies will become more like the bodies which the angels have, although more glorious than they.

In Christ,
Prof.

28 Relationship in Heaven

Dear Prof,

Will we be able to recognize one another in heaven?
How shall it be?

Dear young believer,

I think that we shall all recognize everyone else in heaven. We will, of course, recognize our loved ones, but the relationships which we enjoy here on earth will be gone in heaven. I will recognize my wife, but she will not be my wife any more. I will recognize that she was my wife while on earth, but the important thing in heaven will be, not so much that she was my wife on earth, but that even on earth she was my sister in Christ and together we were brother and sister in God's family. All earthly ties will be gone. It is sentimental and untrue to say that we want to go to heaven to see our husband or our wife or our mother or our father.

When Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration with Christ, the three disciples there recognized them without being introduced to them and without ever having seen them before. So it will be in heaven. That is because in the glory that will be ours and the portion of all the saints, the mighty and powerful grace of God will appear in the glory of each saint in such a way that it will be shown how God's wonderful grace saved each saint

in this life and in connection with all the circumstances of this life in which each saint lived. We will see how each saint, saved by grace, has his or her own place in the one body of Christ and how God prepared each saint, while they were in the world, for his or her own predestined place in that body. In that sense we will recognize each one.

In Christ,
Prof.

29^{Heaven}

Dear Prof,

I believe every Christian thinks about heaven. Can we envision at all how heaven will be like? Is there anywhere in the bible that we can read about heaven?

Dear young believer,

Scripture does not tell us very much of what heaven looks like now and will look like when Christ comes back. This is because heaven is completely spiritual, and thus different from this world. There are no words in human languages which are able to describe what heaven is like. In II Corinthians 13, when Paul speaks in the first verses of being caught up into the third heaven (which is the glory of heaven now) he tells us that he saw things which it is impossible to describe in human words. But we know that it is far, far more glorious than anything now on this earth. In fact, it is far more beautiful than the Paradise in which Adam lived before he fell. Yet, we must remember that the real blessedness of heaven is that we shall be with Christ and with all the saints. And we shall be freed from all sin.

Now there is a barrier between heaven and earth, and the two are different in structure and material. We cannot see heaven, or hear the sounds of heaven, or smell the smells of heaven, or touch the things of heaven. We are of the earth, earthy. But when Christ

comes again and destroys this present earth, He will make the earth like heaven because the barrier will be taken away. Then there will be no more curse on the creation, no more sin in the creation, no more death among men, animals or plants. And the glory of God Himself will fill the whole earth.

In Christ,
Prof.

30 Rapture

Dear Prof,

Is the rapture something that can still happen at this time? How can we understand rapture? What does Revelation 11:11 mean?

Dear young believer,

No, no rapture. No rapture as the pre-millennialist maintains. Scripture never speaks of such a rapture.

You must understand the circumstances of Revelation 11. The church is being severely persecuted by the Antichristian kingdom. Almost all the saints have been killed, and only a few remain. (At the time of the flood, after all, there were only eight souls left out of a world population estimated to be over one billion. That also was a time of persecution and the flood is a picture of the end of the world.) The few saints will have fled for their lives, as Jesus commands (Matthew 24:15-24), to the mountains and will be able to escape only temporarily because they will be hunted wherever they go.

Not only that, but the Antichristian kingdom will be crumbling, partly because of the judgments of God upon it, and partly because of the great battle of Armageddon which will be fought at the time Christ returns. The world will be in turmoil and chaos.

Further, Christ Himself will appear in the heavens; and His appearance will bring time to an end, final judgments upon the wicked, and Christ will raise the bodies of the multitude of His people whose bodies are in the grave. He will, at that time also change those of His people who are still on earth so that their bodies also are glorified.

That is something of the picture which Scripture presents us in Revelation, Matthew 24 and other parts of God's Word.

In Christ,
Prof.

31 Cremation or Burial

Dear Prof,

As I think about my death, can a Christian wish to be cremated? Is it okay for a Christian to be cremated instead of being buried? What if I die in such a manner that my body is completely destroyed? Does it matter?

Dear young believer,

God is able to raise our bodies whether they be drowned in the sea, eaten by sharks, rotted in the ocean bottom, burned with fire, eaten by lions, or buried. Nevertheless, Christian burial has been the tradition of the saints since the beginning of time. Abraham bought an ancestral burying ground for his wife, Sarah, in which he, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah were all buried. The church has considered burial, if possible, to be proper and right because:

1) Burial shows respect for the human body as God's creation and as the temple of the Holy Spirit – as Paul tells the Corinthians (Cor 6:15-19). God saves us, body and soul.

2) Burial is an expression of faith in the resurrection from the dead, for Paul (I Cor. 15:36) compares burial with the putting of a seed in the ground. Just as the seed must die in the ground to be raised to new life, so we bury in the hope and faith that the body will be raised to new life.

3) Burial in the ground is a testimony of the believer that the very ground in which he buries the body of a loved one will someday be his own inheritance, for “The meek shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). It will be an earth purified, glorified and made heavenly, but it will be his inheritance in glory.

In Christ,
Prof.

32 Other lords

Dear Prof,

Recently I had some discussions about my beliefs as a Christian vs those who were from other faiths. They too claim that they have a lord before whom they bow down and worship. How can we speak about Christ being the one and only true God and that they worship lords who are false?

Dear young believer,

There are two parts to the answer to your question. The first part comes from what Scripture says in Romans 1. I won't quote it all in this letter; you can read it yourself. It is in vs. 18 and following. There the Bible teaches that all men, even those who never heard the preaching and know nothing about Jesus Christ, know God. God makes Himself known to them through the creation. They know "his eternal power and divinity." That is, they know that He alone is God and that He alone must be worshiped and served.

Because they are wicked, they refuse to worship and serve Him, and so they make idols before which they bow. They "change the glory of the invisible God into an image made like unto corruptible man." They deliberately, consciously, willfully and wickedly turn to idols because, as vs. 18 says, "they hold the truth in unrighteousness," where the idea is that they suppress the truth in their sin.

All this means, of course, that when they change the glory of God into idols, they do this because they know God and know that He must be worshipped. So when they worship other gods and believe in other lords, they do so in defiance of the true God.

The second part of the answer has to do with the unique character of the Christian's faith. What you describe was exactly the problem which the early church faced in the 3rd and 4th century. There were those who wanted a sort of eclectic religion. It would be composed of Greek philosophy, Oriental mysticism, pagan religion, and Christianity. It would thus create a religion in which men would accept the various "lords", including Jesus Christ, as true messengers from their particular god, and all men could be united into one all-encompassing religion. This was much like what is being done today in the ecumenical movement. It is to be found in the ideas people hold that it doesn't matter what one believes as long as he is sincere; that every religion has its good points; that, in the end, no matter who is worshiped, it is an expression of a person's desire to worship God, and therefore, acceptable.

At that early time, the church was almost destroyed through this heresy. But after a bitter struggle the church emerged victorious. It stated emphatically that the Christian religion was the only true religion and that all other religions were false.

It did so because it pointed out that all other religions were man's inventions, while Christianity was the one and only religion that came through revelation. Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, all religions, were from man. Christianity came from God.

The question was, of course, how did Christianity come from God? The answer was: through the Bible which is the Word of God. All the writings of other religions came from men, but Scripture came from God. And thus all men's writings were human in origin, while the Bible was of divine origin. This is the second part of the answer.

Thus it is that the Bible is the only religion which teaches one fundamental truth. Every religion teaches, in a certain sense, "salvation," but every religion ascribes to man the power to save himself in some measure. Thus Indian religions have their great day when they pierce their bodies to make atonement for their sin and appease the anger of their gods. Mohammedans engage in holy wars, etc. Only Christianity teaches that God loves His people and makes atonement for them. He alone saves by His own power.

Now the question is: How do we know that the Bible is from God and all other writings from men? The answer is that the Bible itself says so (Read II Timothy 3:16, 17 and II Peter 1:20, 21). The Bible makes its own claim for divine authorship.

Now you may say that that is not enough, for any book can claim divine authorship. But no other book does that in the way the Bible does. Is that so hard to imagine? When the "Institutes of the Christian Religion" claim to be written by John Calvin, we accept that at face value. When "Behold He Cometh" claims to be written by Herman Hoeksema, we accept that. When Scripture says it is written by God, we ought to accept that. And the believer does. But there is more. The Confession of Faith (which you ought to consult) says that we believe that the Scriptures come from God

because they bear the testimony of their divine authorship in themselves and the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God (Article 5).

Now that means that it is possible to believe that the Scriptures come from God only when the Holy Spirit gives the power to believe. That power of the Holy Spirit is necessary, for, apart from His work, we are totally depraved, wholly sinful, enemies of God who hate Him. That can be changed only when the Spirit works faith in our hearts. But when the Spirit works faith in the hearts of the people of God, they believe the Scriptures, and they believe the Christ who is set forth in them. They believe that Christ is God through whom God has saved a people who are unable to save themselves. Or, in other words, by faith, they come to know Christ as their Saviour in a very personal way. The old poet had it right, speaking of Christ's resurrection: "You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart!"

That Scripture reveals the one true religion is evident from the fact that Scripture has produced a Christianity that has always been present in the world from the beginning of time and remains till today. As Beza, a contemporary of John Calvin and one of the reformers put it when defending Scripture to the king of France: "I would have you know, Sire, that the Bible is an anvil that has received uncounted blows, but has broken only those who pound it." Ultimately, our religion rests on faith, and faith is the gift of God!

Greetings and blessings,
Prof.

33 Christian Jokes

Dear Prof,

Is it okay to joke about our faith? Often we find some of God's work being portrayed with some comedy. Is this okay?

Dear young believer,

For myself, I find these jokes inappropriate and bordering on blasphemy. God's truth is based on the Holy Scriptures, which is God's Word to us concerning His mighty work of salvation in Jesus Christ. To make jokes of these things seems to me to be making jokes about God's works, something that violates the third commandment.

It is better to refuse to participate in this sort of thing. To engage in it might surely involve us in sin; to refrain from it can cause no harm to us.

In Christ,
Prof.

34^DDisasters

Dear Prof,

We see all kinds of disasters around us. Increasingly, tsunamis have become common. Does all this speak of God's coming judgment on the people on earth?

Dear young believer,

You are correct that the recent disaster in the Bay of Bengal has astounded us all, and that it is the voice of God speaking loudly. Scripture tells us in Matthew 24:7 and Haggai, as well as elsewhere, that earthquakes and consequent judgments are signs of Christ's coming. "Yet once a little while and I will sake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all nations. And the desire of all nations shall come." (Haggai 2:6,7) It is a sign that presently God will move this old heaven and earth out of its place to make room for the new heavens and the new earth which God will give to His church. That believers and unbelievers are both destroyed in these calamities is not strange, for this is the way God's works. Cancer comes to all. Hurricanes destroy the homes and property of believers and unbelievers, etc. Isaiah tells us in Isaiah 1:27 that "Zion is redeemed through judgment." That was God's explanation of the captivity that was about to come on Judah. So Scripture speaks of God's judgments as the means to deliver His people: partly because the wicked are destroyed in judgment; partly because the righteous are brought to heaven

through the same judgments; and partly because we all who stay behind on earth are taught by these judgments to repent of sin, forsake our evil, look to Christ and find our hope only in Him. Or, in other words, God's judgments purify us and strengthen our faith. Catastrophes remind us that Christ is coming back and we must look with renewed hope to His coming.

Greetings in Christ,
Prof.

35 Marriage & Divorce

Dear Prof,

I wish to ask you about marriage and about divorce. Also, may a man or woman remarry?

Dear young believer,

Concerning divorce and remarriage: the best materials to read are Prof Engelsma's books, "Marriage the Mystery of Christ and His Church," and "Better to Marry." They have significant chapters in them on the question. There is also a pamphlet which may be on the PRCA website. I think its title is "Divorce and Remarriage." If not, let me know and I can get it for you.

The whole question comes down to Scripture. There are many passages that simply forbid the remarriage of one divorced. The language is clear and unambiguous. Romans 7:1 is an example. Matthew 19:1-12 speaks of adultery as the one Biblical ground for divorce. But, while it is the one Biblical ground for divorce, it is not a ground for remarriage. The text does not say that, and it cannot be made to say that. So the Biblical position is that adultery may be a ground for divorce. It may be, but is not necessarily so. If a spouse commits adultery and repents, the husband and wife stay together. (Matthew 5:32, Luke 14:18, Romans 7:1-3)

But even though Scripture allows for divorce on the one ground of adultery, it never, never permits remarriage for either spouse unless one of the spouses dies. The reasons for this are:

1) The marriage bond is a picture of the relation between Christ and His church, which is called a marriage in Ephesians 5 and many other places in Scripture, especially in the OT. That bond is unbreakable. We commit adultery as Christ's bride whenever we choose sin rather than God (See James 5:1-4). But Christ maintains the marriage. It is an unbreakable bond. So the picture in our marriages is the same. It is an unbreakable bond, only finally broken by death.

2) The way must always be open for repentance and reconciliation. If the "innocent" party remarries and the sinner repents, the possibility of reconciliation is gone.

3) It is impossible to love our neighbor (in this instance our wayward spouse) by seeking his/her salvation and by praying for him/her, if we marry another. When we pray for a wayward spouse, we want that spouse to repent. We cannot do this if we remarry. We must insist on Scripture and obedience to Christ. One who is divorced and remarried commits adultery. Shall the church approve of adultery? God forbid.

In Christ's service,
Prof.

36 Evangelism

Dear Prof,

As we grow in our faith and knowledge of Christ, I feel that we lack somewhat the desire to do evangelism. Do we reformed Christians fail in this respect?

Dear young believer,

I do not think that those who confess the Reformed faith are lacking in a desire or effort to engage in evangelism. It is my judgment that the most effective form of evangelism is the life of the people of God in their homes, their families, their places of work, their church. There are altogether too many people who are always busy in evangelism, but whose lives are spiritual wrecks, partly because of divorce and remarriage, neglect of children, sinful practices in their places of employment, they live in the world in a covetous and money-grabbing way, etc.

God uses the witness of a godly life to show others the real power of a Christian walk with God. Knowledge is important in the life of a Christian because: “This is eternal life, that they may know thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). There is the impulse of love involved. Because I love my wife, I want to know as much about her as I can. So in my love for God I want to know as much about him as I can. That knowledge comes from the Scriptures. But it is not the

theoretical knowledge of mathematics; it is the knowledge of love, of fellowship, of communion. The more one knows out of love, the more effective his witness may be. A child-like faith is not a faith without knowledge. It is a faith without doubt and without questioning. It is a reliance on God alone without any hesitation, a reliance that leads to obedience.

In Christ's name,
Prof.

37 Para Church Organizations

Dear Prof,

I have come across many para church organizations, which claim to do the work of Christ. There seems to be so many nowadays which claim to be engaged in the ministry. Is it the calling to set up such organizations worldwide for the cause of the gospel?

Dear young believer,

The work of para-church groups is contrary to Scripture. This is also true of individuals who go off on their own to do church work without being answerable to the church. God is pleased to use the church to accomplish His purpose, for the church is the pillar and ground of the truth according to Paul in I Timothy 3:15. That is, the church is God's means of maintaining His truth in the world.

This does not mean that all the members of the church are not witnesses of that truth in their walk and life. But they are witnesses only in fellowship with the church. They go, as it were, from the church into the world to testify of what they have heard in church.

The church can do its work only through a called and ordained ministry when that ministry comes through the official preaching of the gospel either in the established church or on the mission field. This, Paul teaches in Romans 10:13, 14.

You ask whether God can save outside the official work of the church and through para-church organizations. The answer is, of course God can do whatever He wishes to do. But He tells us in His Word what we are to do, and we are to limit ourselves to the official work of the church. That is our calling. God will take care of the rest.

We ought not to support para-church organizations, for they operate contrary to the will of God. Imagine the chaos when different organizations and different individuals are all doing their own thing without being answerable to anyone, much less to the church. We surely do not want that.

Greetings and blessings to you,
Prof.

38 Winning souls for Christ

Dear Prof,

Quite often I have heard the expression, “Winning souls for Christ.” Is this an appropriate term to use when we desire to bring the word to those who are lost?

Dear young believer,

I share your uneasiness with the use of the expression “win souls to Christ.” It has the flavor of Arminianism and the emphasis of Arminians on their own role in saving others.

However, its use in the Heidelberg Catechism is a bit different. The German, which was the language in which the Heidelberg Catechism was originally written, has, more literally, “and with our godly walk win our neighbors to Christ” (Lord’s Day 32, question & answer 86.) This still uses the word “win,” but the point of the original Heidelberg Catechism was to demonstrate concretely our calling to love our neighbors as ourselves — the underlying command of the second table of the law.

Furthermore, in the days when the Catechism was written (1563), the phrase did not have the connotation that it has now. It is one of those expressions that the Arminians have corrupted. It is like the use of “God so loved the world” (John 3:16), which is completely Biblical, but which Arminians interpret to mean that

God loves every man, woman and child who ever lived, lives now and will live — something obviously untrue. Our fathers meant by the expression “win others to Christ” that when we love our neighbors, we are to seek their good; and seeking their good means that we seek their salvation (although, of course, that also means, helping them in their need.) When God blesses our loving our neighbor, then that loving of our neighbor will be used by God to save our neighbor.

I hope this helps. Perhaps, if you know a little German, you will understand the expression which the German uses here: und mit unseren gottseligen wandel unseren Nachten auch Christo gewinnen.

Many blessings to you,
Prof.

39 Apostleship

Dear Prof,

In His earthly ministry Christ ordained apostles who were called and their calling was to bring the gospel to all nations, tongues and tribes. Do we have any apostles now in the New Testament age?

Dear young believer,

The word apostle is reserved in Scripture for those whom Christ called to be His instruments of divine revelation. See Ephesians 2:21,22 which says “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.” The twelve (with the exception of Judas, whose place was taken by Paul) were appointed apostles according to Scripture. The word “apostle” means “one sent with a commission.” Thus, the one qualification of an apostle was that he was sent by an appearance of the risen Lord. The eleven saw and were sent by Christ between Christ’s resurrection and ascension. Paul saw Christ and was sent by Him on the road to Damascus. God spoke His Word through prophets in the Old Testament and the Apostles in the New Testament.

Yours in Christ,
Prof.

40 Unity in Diversity

Dear Prof,

There are so many churches which have their own distinctives and so forth. How can there be unity? Can churches with many diversities become united?

Dear young believer,

Scripture in general and Ephesians 4:1-16 in particular are clear that the unity of the faith is a unity of doctrine. This is because all the saints are one in Christ, and Christ is the full revelation of the truth of God, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Thus unity is possible only when all saints mutually confess the truth.

There are divisions in the churches and differences in doctrine because of sin. I do not mean only sins of wrong doctrine, but also sins of motives for belonging to a given church (my friends are there, I was brought up there, I feel at home there, etc.), sins of indifference to the truth and to one's calling, sins of bitterness against others, etc. That is why God's people are found in denominations where the gospel is not purely preached.

It is wrong to belong to a church where the gospel is not purely preached and God is displeased with that. Our Belgic Confession (Art. 28) says we have the calling to belong to the true church "though the edict of princes be against it;" that is, though it

involves persecution. Because it is a sin to belong to a church which teaches false doctrine, the child of God in that church, while he himself is saved, goes lost in his generations. The church continues to depart from the faith, and the family – children and grandchildren — go along with the church of which they are a part.

What about fellowship with those in other churches? Any fellowship is determined by the degree of apostasy. I have a closer kinship to a person of a Reformed Church than to a person of a Baptist Church, because our differences are not as great.

In what does fellowship consist? We may surely have coffee with them, go out to eat with them and visit with them. But this is presupposing that we discuss spiritual things for the most part, that we witness to our faith, and that we call our “friend” to come with us to church. We do this in love for our friend because we want to see him and his family remain in God’s church and covenant and we know the dangers of staying in a church where the truth is not preached fully.

We may not, however, go to their church with them, because that is tacit approval of their going to a church where the whole counsel of God is not preached. We may not cooperate with them in the work of the church, for there is going to be conflict if we (and they) hold strongly to our beliefs.

Our fellowship with others who live in gross sin is limited. One who belongs to a church in which the gospel is not preached in truth is living in sin. He may, by the mercy of God go to heaven, but he goes lost in his generations. Our fellowship is, therefore, sharply limited.

I have had experience with this in my own relation. I have two uncles who left our churches in 1953 over the issue of a conditional covenant. They really both held to the truth, but left, one because his wife wanted to leave, and the other, because he was for some reason bitter. They both assured me that they would maintain the truth even though in the church to which they went the truth was not fully preached. They used to come to see me. They frequently told me that they did not agree with their church, but were maintaining the Reformed faith. One never came back. The other, many years after the split, did come back. But both lost their families entirely. The one uncle who came back came to me weeping. He said to me: "Prof, I am so relieved to be back where the truth is preached, but I lost my family, and it is my fault, for I led them out of the church."

I had three aunts who, when they married, left our churches and joined other Reformed Churches. Today they and their husbands are all dead. But the three aunts had, I think, 15 children between them. Today, of those fifteen children, only one even goes to church at all. The rest are gone. Their lives are a mess. Their children are hopelessly in the world. Several are divorced and remarried. One cousin's husband committed suicide because of the fornication of my cousin. Some were into drugs. And so it went. God, the law says, visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the

children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him. The church is serious business, and we may not play games with the church, ignore our responsibilities towards the church, or act as if doctrinal differences are unimportant.

Divorce and remarriage is also a doctrinal question, partly because the truth concerning the institution of marriage is a doctrine, and partly because the question of divorce and remarriage involves a question of God's covenant of grace. The doctrine of the covenant is a central doctrine of Scripture.

In Christ's service,
Prof.

41 Music

Dear Prof,

Music appeals to many in various different forms. Which kind of music should we listen to? Some churches use rock music in their worship. Can any form of music which is used to worship God be used for worship?

Dear young believer,

Music is a great gift of God. There are two traditions of music in the world: the tradition of worldly godless music which began with Jubal (Genesis 4:19-24) and the tradition of godly music to which Paul refers in Eph 5:18-20 and its parallel passage in Colossians 3:16.

Music which is pleasing to God has two aspects to it, generally. One is that the lyrics (the words) are Biblical truth. The other is that the music itself, apart from the words conveys Biblical ideas, desires and emotions. When one uses a song with words, the music must also fit the words. One does not have good music if a funeral dirge is used to sing a song of praise and joy. And vice versa.

Music itself can be very godly, so that it moves the soul to meditation, praise, solemnity, awe before God, etc. J. S. Bach's music is like this. In fact, there is a long, long tradition of gloriously beautiful sacred music that goes back all the way to the sixth century. It is a

rich and glorious heritage and my wife and I have a full cabinet of it on CDs. Music is a powerful means of communicating, especially with an appeal to the emotions. Music can make me weep, but it can make me shout for joy as well.

The music we sing in church ought to have lyrics taken from the Psalms. Years ago I was on a committee of our churches to study whether to include hymns in our worship. We read reams and reams of material on the history of music and its use in the church. We discovered to our dismay that, while there were many hymns which expressed the truth of God, every single time hymns were introduced into the worship, the church began to apostatize. In fact, during the history of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, it was said that the Arminians sang their way into the church. Every time reformation took place in the church, the church returned to the Psalms. That was instructive to me and made me become an exclusive Psalmody man. Only a fool will not learn from history.

Outside of worship one can be broader. There is a world of great music: instrumental, chorale, solo, orchestra, etc. We listen to this music and enjoy it. We listen to it in our home, in the car when traveling, and my wife plays a lot of it on the piano. We love music.

We even have some secular music that we listen to from time to time. But it is very selectively chosen. It is usually folk music, patriotic songs, or music from Scotland, Wales, or Ireland. This music is not our favorite however. Whether it is God-glorifying or not is hard to say. It lies in a marginal area. We do listen to a lot of classical music, and, in fact, we used to have tickets to the Grand

Rapids symphony which we thoroughly enjoyed. We had to quit because we frequently had other engagements. But the music of Mendelssohn, Beethoven, Handel, Haydn, etc is wonderful music and God-glorifying.

The music of the world is terrible stuff, especially in our day. It is calculated to arouse emotions of hatred, violence, fornication, rebellion and every evil emotion there is. To listen to this music is to throw one's self into the arms of Satan.

There is a gray area which, in my judgment ought to be avoided. When in doubt, don't. That is always a safe rule for the Christian.

There is also a lot of music that goes under the name of religious music. We call it 7/11 music, after the name of a chain of stores in America called 7/11 stores. They are open seven days a week, eleven hours a day. We call religious music by this name because these ditties have eleven lines and seven words. They are meaningless ditties, choruses that are repetitive, silly tunes, and utterly worthless songs when it comes to confessing God's great truth.

Greetings and blessings,
Prof.

42 God's will vs Man's will

Dear Prof,

I believe the subject matter of the “free will of man” vs God’s divine will has often been talked about. How does man’s will remain free when God is divinely in control of all things?

Dear young believer,

You ask a good question. I think the best way to answer it is to refer back to Augustine. He is one of my favorite church fathers who lived in the last half of the fourth century and died in 430 A.D., the first part of the fifth century.

He already faced the question in his day in a book he wrote, which is extant. In it he made distinctions. He spoke of the question of the freedom of the will in a three-fold sense. He defined freedom as the ability to choose in harmony with one’s nature.

1) The will is free for a man to choose as a rational and moral creature. That is, he is free to make choices in his daily life between doing one thing or another. This freedom, however, is curtailed by the fact that he is a man, i.e., he is not God, as the devil said in his temptation of Eve: “Ye shall be as God.” The devil meant that if Eve would eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she would enjoy a greater freedom even than the freedom she then enjoyed, the freedom to determine for herself what is right and

wrong (This is not freedom but slavery as history has shown). When God created every living creature He created a law for them. He created a law which defined how that particular creature would glorify Him. God not only gave a law for every creature, but gave the creature a nature that would make it possible for the creature to keep that law. A tree, for example, glorifies God by growing from the soil and reaching into the air towards the sun. Its nature of roots and branches make it possible for the tree to do this. A fish is a creature that glorifies God by swimming in the sea. God gave it a nature that enables the fish to live in the sea. A bird glorifies God by flying in the air. God gave it a nature that includes wings so that a bird may fly. God created a man to glorify Him by knowing God and speaking God's praises. Man is given a nature that makes it possible for him to glorify God in this way.

A fish is free when it swims in the water, for then it is doing that which is in harmony with its nature. If you give the fish greater "freedom" by putting it on land so that it can travel on land, you kill the fish. If you put a bird under water, you kill the bird. The law for fish is to be in the water, and the fish has a nature which is in harmony with and makes it possible for a life under water. So it is with man who is created in the image of God and is a rational, moral creature. The law for him is to love the Lord his God.

2) Morally, after man fell, he still chooses in harmony with his nature, but his nature is totally depraved and, therefore, he is able to choose only sin in all he does.

3) In heaven freedom will be perfect for it will be impossible to

sin. This is a higher freedom even than Adam had, for, though Adam was morally perfect he could choose for sin.

Augustine expressed it this way in Latin:

Adam in Paradise: Posse non peccare – “Able not to sin.”

After the fall: Non posse non peccare – “Not able not to sin.”

In heaven: Non posse peccare – “Not able to sin.”

Even our psychological freedom, that is our freedom to choose in the daily choices of life, is circumscribed by God’s counsel. Every detail in our life is determined absolutely by God. We choose what we do as determined by the counsel of God. But the point where God’s will touches our will, is a mysterious thing. God does so in such a way that our nature as rational, moral creatures is never violated.

Greetings in Christ,
Prof.

43 Knowledge & understanding of the Bible

Dear Prof,

I understand that there were other writings besides those which are found in our modern day Bibles. Do any of the other writings shed any light for us about God and His Word or is the Bible the only source of information for us? Should we read the other writings to gain more wisdom?

Dear young believer,

Greetings to you, in our Saviour's name.

In answer to your question: There are dozens and dozens of apocryphal writings in existence. Some belong to the Old Testament times and are, by Roman Catholics, included in the Bible. Some are a part of New Testament times. They were written for various reasons, some to record myths and legends believed by superstitious people; some deliberately to corrupt the true gospel; some historical writings describing events other than those recorded in Scripture, etc.

None of them belong in the Bible. The church was, in fact, so swamped with them that it, by official decision, decided which were canonical and which were not. As far as the OT canon of Scripture is concerned, the OT church, in about 70 or 80 B.C., met and decided what books belonged to Scripture and what books did not. The OT as we have it was the Scripture used by Christ in His

earthly ministry and on which He put His stamp of approval. The church of the NT did the same at the Council of Hippo.

The criteria used to determine what books were canonical and inspired are mentioned in our Belgic Confession (the objective testimony of the Scriptures themselves) chiefly in the fulfillment of prophecy and the subjective testimony of the Spirit in our hearts that they are of God. These criteria mean that the Bible carries within itself the proof that it is the Word of God (See p. 77). The Belgic Confession appeals not only to these texts but adds that further proof is to be found in the fact that the prophecies of Scripture have been fulfilled. Only God, who inspired prophecies long before they happened, could tell what was to happen in the future. Second, the subjective testimony of the Spirit refers to the work of the Spirit of Christ by whom faith is worked in the hearts of God's people who believe what Scripture says is true by faith.

Modern higher critics are now interpreting the Bible in the light of apocryphal books, which means that they are interpreting God's Word by the use of man's word. But the result is that information the Bible gives us must be thrown away in favor of these myths and legends which appeared in apocryphal books.

If you want to read some of these books, you can purchase them, especially the OT apocrypha, which include Bel and the Dragon, The Three Friends in the Fiery Furnace, I Macabees, II Macabees, Judith, etc. If you read them you can tell immediately that they are nothing like the sacred Scriptures. Our faith is anchored in the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever.

Greetings and blessings,
Prof.

44 To judge or not to judge

Dear Prof,

I understand that as a child of God we are not to judge another. If the Word of God teaches us this, how can we judge another when he or she teaches the wrong doctrines? Should we withhold being a judge during times when we feel that the Word of God is not being upheld?

Dear young believer,

I respect and appreciate your desire to do what is right according to the Scriptures. Nevertheless, we must be careful that we understand the Scriptures properly.

When we are commanded not to judge lest we be judged, the reference is to judging a man's final salvation. Many are always trying to judge whether a person is elect or reprobate. This we may not do. But we do need to judge, as is evident from the Lord's words in Mt. 7:15-19. We may and must judge whether a man teaches or speaks the truth and whether a man walks according to the principles of Scripture. We can do this and must do this without judging a man's salvation.

We cannot live peaceably and in fellowship with those who deny the truth or walk contrary to the Scriptures. What Paul writes in Gal. 4:9, 10 must be interpreted in the light of Galatians 1:6-9.

Divorce and remarriage is one such issue. It involves doctrine because it involves God's truth of His everlasting covenant of grace. It involves a godly walk because if, as the Lord insists, remarriage after divorce is adultery, we may not have fellowship with those who commit adultery nor may we approve of such conduct. Living in fellowship with such is the same as approving it, or, at least, saying that adultery is not important; not a salvation issue. Eph. 5:3, 11 and Gal. 5:19-21.

We must do good to all, especially those of the household of faith. But the question is: How do we do good to all? It is clear that doing good means seeking someone's salvation. A husband seeks his wife's salvation, and vice versa. A parent seeks his children's salvation. We witness to those outside by seeking their salvation and thus doing good. We seek the salvation of those of the household of faith, and thus doing good. We admonish them when they sin and encourage them when they do the right. We comfort them in sorrow and rejoice with them in God's goodness.

But especially the household of faith is the object of our doing good, for the household of faith consists of the family of those who are obedient to God and serve Him in truth and holiness. That is a unity of this one household which we must strive earnestly to protect and encourage. But when sin enters the household, sin creates division, strife, enmity and bitterness. Such sin must be expelled. Then we are doing good to the household of faith.

Greetings and blessings in Christ's name,
Prof.

45 State vs Church

Dear Prof,

Every country has a government which maintains law and order through the laws which they put in place. Has the State any power to rule the lives of the people in the same manner as the Church of Christ? Do governments uphold merely the moral law or do they also uphold the Word in doing so?

Dear young believer,

It was good to hear from you again. I received your letter rather late Saturday night and chose to wait till Monday to answer it, chiefly because I do not turn on my computer on the Lord's Day.

The question of the role of the State in society has been and is now a perplexing and difficult question. The general opinion in Reformed Churches, since the time of the Reformation, is that the State is required to enforce both tables of the law in society. This was the case in Calvin's Geneva and in practically every country where the Reformed and Presbyterian faith was established, including the Netherlands and the British Isles.

Along with the position that the State or government had to enforce both tables of the law went the idea of a State Church, in which the State not only enforced both tables of the law, but also

established one church (denomination) as the officially approved church which received the support of the State, also financially. Such a situation prevailed in the Netherlands and in the British Isles.

That idea, in turn, led to the idea of a National Church. A country with a national church is a country in which only one denomination is approved by the State and all the citizens of the State belong technically to that church. That is, all must have their babies baptized by the church; all must be married by the church; and all must be buried by the church. The church assumes responsibility for the spiritual care of all the citizens of the state. This was the case in Great Britain when the Westminster Confession was drawn up. That confession was intended to be a confession for the whole nation.

Our Belgic Confession to which we subscribe contains an article in which the State is said to be responsible for the enforcement of both tables of the law. The article is Art. 36. There is a footnote appended to Article 36, however, which says that although it is true that the State must enforce both tables of the law, such a position does not necessarily imply a National Church. The USA, at the time of its founding, was more or less established on that basis. There was no National Church because of the separation of church and state, but the State was required to enforce both tables of the law in society itself. And so this country had what were called “blue laws” — laws forbidding public blasphemy, Sabbath desecration, propagation in public of false religions, etc. These blue laws have been consistently ignored and when challenged in the courts, have been struck down.

There are many Reformed who hold to the position that the State is required only to enforce the second table of the law. That is, the State is required to enforce laws against murder, adultery, stealing and public slander. There are some in our churches who hold to this position. The reasoning is that the laws of the second table are creation ordinances and are, therefore, properly within the jurisdiction of the State. The first table of the law, especially the worship of God, is not to be enforced by the State. Because marriage is a creation ordinance, the State is required also to forbid divorce, except on the grounds of adultery, and absolutely forbid remarriage. I am more and more inclined to adopt this latter position.

The question is, however, a moot point because no government in the whole world enforces even the second table of the law, much less the first table. And, because the days grow increasingly evil, there will never be a government which enforces even the second table of the law.

Greetings and blessings to you,
Prof.

46 Sin of Adultery

Dear Prof,

I wish to ask you what a married Christian man should do if he was involved in adultery and the woman he fell into sin with was with child. Should he encourage the other woman to go for an abortion? What should a Christian do if he falls into this sin?

Dear young believer,

Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The man who fell into adultery ought not under any circumstances advise an abortion. In fact, if the girl suggests it, he should do all in his power to prevent her from having one. It would be dreadful if these two people would add to the sin of adultery the sin of murder, for all abortion is murder.

The man must also confess his sin to his wife and perhaps even to the church. He is also responsible for that child financially. He must pay the bills for the girl's pregnancy, labor and child birth, and support the child till it is come to age. The child is his, after all, and he is responsible for the child's care. If, however, the girl marries, and her husband assumes responsibility for the child and adopts it, then his responsibility ceases.

Further, he must not divorce his present wife, although she may divorce him. Even if she should divorce him, he may not marry again.

A moment's illicit pleasure, can result in a lifetime of misery for a person, and such a sin as adultery leaves in its wake misery for countless people. There is a lesson in this for us all.

In Christ's service,
Prof.

47 Purgatory

Dear Prof,

Recently I had some discussion with another Christian about purgatory. Many Catholics insist that purgatory exists. Does it really? Is there a place we will go to before we finally end up in heaven or hell?

Dear young believer,

No, no place like purgatory exists. It is strictly a Roman Catholic invention. And it has been, over the centuries, a means by which the Roman Catholic Church has extorted untold amounts of money from its members. The whole system of indulgences, prayers to saints, masses for the dead, and other abominations have all been built on the foundation of purgatory.

It is supposed to be a place of suffering in which the people in this world are sent after death to atone for the sins of which they have been guilty while in life. The only people who escape purgatory are those officially canonized by the church and given the name “saints,” when Scripture tells us that all God’s people are saints. These “saints” have performed so many good works while in their life that they have done sufficient good to atone for their sins, and have, therefore, no need to go to purgatory. In fact, saints have frequently, if not always, performed more good works than they need to atone for their sins, and it is possible for someone living on earth, according to Roman Catholic theology, to pray to a saint

in order to have some of that saint's extra good works applied to his own account to shorten his stay in purgatory; or to have some of the extra good works of this saint to be applied to someone already dead to shorten that person's stay in purgatory. Usually, however, to do this costs money.

As far as Biblical proof is concerned, there is no proof in Scripture for a purgatory. Scripture never mentions it. That means it is not taught in Scripture, and must not be an article of the faith of God's people whose faith is that only which is contained in the Scriptures.

The Roman Catholic church derived its doctrine of purgatory from the Apocryphal books, books written between the writings of the Old Testament Scriptures and the New Testament Scriptures, but which were never by the church declared to be a part of Scripture. They are such books as I Maccabees, II Maccabees, Bel and the Dragon, and others. But they are not Scripture and anyone who reads them can tell immediately that they are not Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church, however, claims they are Scripture. (See the Confession of Faith, Article 3 for a confessional statement on the canon of Scripture, and it is well to read also the three or four following articles).

The chief objection against purgatory is the denial of the sufficiency of the cross of our Lord and Saviour. If purgatory is true, Christ's death did not fully pay for my sins, but I must, after death, pay for them in the fires of purgatory where I must go before I can go to heaven. We all know that if Christ's death is not sufficient for our

sins, we will go to hell. The Heidelberg Catechism has a beautiful Lord's Day on this. It is Lord's Day 11, the second question and answer of the Lord's Day. The Catechism says that either Christ is an all-sufficient Saviour, or He is no Saviour at all.

Thus purgatory is a dreadful doctrine. It is a dreadful doctrine for these three reasons:

- 1) It slanders the cross of Jesus Christ by claiming that the cross is not sufficient.
- 2) It requires of us either good works to be saved or our own work of atonement for our sins in purgatory.
- 3) It robs us of our comfort of knowing that all our salvation is fully and completely accomplished by the Lord Christ in whom alone we put our trust.

Greetings and blessings,
Prof.

48 Dressing

Dear Prof,

With regard to being properly dressed in Church, are there strict rules to follow by which we can ensure that we honor God with our dressing? Is it okay to go to church wearing a t-shirt tucked out? If I decide to wear shorts or bermudas to church will this be giving less honor and glory to God?

Dear young believer,

What one wears to church is a matter of Christian liberty. If, for example, a very poor man came to church in very old clothing, because he had nothing else to wear, his dress could not be criticized.

But having said that, it is also true that the clothing one wears shows the respect one has for God and Christ. We come to church to meet with God in covenant communion. If we truly respect and honor God, we would dress in a decent and respectful way. Would you think it proper to come into the presence of the queen of England with shorts and a tee shirt? Would you appear in the presence of the prime minister of Singapore in sandals and sloppy clothing? I am sure you would not.

Is not our God more glorious, more powerful than all the rulers of the earth? Should not we show respect for Him far more than we show respect to earthly rulers?

I am sure you would agree with me. And I am sure that people show their careless and disrespectful attitudes towards God and the church when they dress improperly. I do not even like to see slacks on women in church.

Greetings and blessings,
Prof.

49 To live is Christ to die is gain

Dear Prof,

Thank you for your tireless efforts to educate me about the Christian living. As I read about how our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ faced enmity from the world, and how he realised that this world was not a place for Him to remain forever, I realise that this seems to be the case for us as Christians. As the people of God, we begin to slowly realise that this world has no hope for us and that the pleasures of this world cannot attract us any longer. We find that more and more we begin to live as “outsiders” in this world. How should we live henceforth as the people of God? It seems to become harder and harder to live in this world, when we are not of this world.

Dear young believer,

There is one possible misunderstanding in your letter. You write that our Lord began to realize that this world is not a place in which to stay. I am not sure whether you misspoke yourself, but you do realize, I am sure, that the Lord came into the world in order to suffer and die for His church. He was conscious of this throughout His entire life and knew that He was in the world to save sinners and that He would soon depart out of the world to go to His Father’s right hand. At God’s right hand, He rules sovereignly over all that happens in the world so that He can bring His church to glory with Him.

You are absolutely correct, however, that the Christian increasingly finds this world a very difficult place in which to live; and that he finds it difficult to live a godly life. It is so easy to be conformed to this world and enjoy life here rather than look forward to the time when we shall be in heaven.

At the same time it is also true that the Christian, as he gets older, longs more and more for heaven and for deliverance from the world.

I have found that the most help we can possibly receive in order to live a Christian life is to give time to our devotions every day. Whether this is early in the morning or at night before we go to bed, we must have time for devotions. My wife and I have devotions before and after every meal we eat and also before we go to bed at night. Each of us, separately, has devotions alone sometime during the day; I usually in the early morning.

Our devotions consist of Bible reading and prayer at mealtime, and Bible reading and reading some religious book in the evening. In my own devotions, I read the Bible in the Greek and a devotional book in the Dutch, but this is to keep up on my languages during devotions. Prayer is a crucial part of devotions and it is an opportunity to live truly in the consciousness of being with God. Living in our daily work and calling, these devotions help us to meditate during the day, while we are busy with our daily calling, on spiritual things, and to ponder God's wonderful works.

I suggest that you read my book on prayer: “When you pray . . .” Many have read it and found it helpful in their devotions. If you do not have it, you can order it from mail@rfpa.org. Be sure to give your snail mail address.

I hope some of these things help. I too know how difficult it is to walk as a Christian in the world. We need the Scriptures to be a lamp unto our feet and a light upon our pathway; and we need prayer to live close to God.

Many blessings to you,
Prof.

50 Pornography

Dear Prof,

Oftentimes relationships between a husband and a wife may grow cold, due to some reason or another. As the Word of God teaches us how to love our wives even as Christ loved His church, can a spouse use certain methods to ensure that he continues to satisfy his partner?

For example will watching certain pornographic materials for the benefit of keeping sexually motivated, be okay, if it was merely for this very reason? Or should the husband or wife never resort to such means? I think the problem may lie with us men, who sometimes wish to use such materials to try and improve our sex lives with our wives. Should men use such means to improve their sexual drives? I hope you are okay with me asking this sort of question.

Dear young believer,

No, I do not mind answering this type of question. I have faced an identical problem in my pastoral work more than once. It is true that expressions of love can sometimes be lacking in a marriage for periods of time. But to commit a sin in one's efforts to bring warmth to a relationship is not pleasing to God.

The solution is to love one's wife with expressions and gestures of love regardless of her response to you. These gestures include such necessary things as being kind and thoughtful to her, helping her any way you can, expressing your love as your God-given mate for life, and anticipating her needs. This is difficult when one receives no response in return, but one must seek God's help in doing this. If one's wife does not respond sexually, it is better to leave that aspect out of the picture for a while, as difficult as that may be. But there are many men and women who lead celibate lives for the sake of the gospel, for their mates have left them.

One needs grace in such situations, but God has promised to provide it. It is always wrong to make use of pornography, no matter what the motive. The Lord's Day in the Heidelberg Catechism explains all that is included in a violation of the seventh commandment. Our modern culture makes sex the most important activity of the human being and is geared to satisfy these sinful urges in a person. God's people must be holy as He is holy.

As with any sin, pornography can become an addiction. I have seen it destroy marriages when one of the marriage partners becomes addicted to it. And such addiction comes quickly when one gives himself over to such sinful practices.

Greetings in our Christ,
Prof.

51 Common Grace

Dear Prof,

Does God love every human being? If the elect and reprobate both receive equally the blessings such as rain, harvest and other such blessings, does it mean that God loves them all? In an article recently published by a church, a pastor mentioned that God loves only His Elect as far as His saving grace is concerned, but that God also loves others but only in so far as to provide them with other good things, and that love remains only in that manner.

They use Matt 5:43, 44 which read, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”

Hence even as God commands us to love our enemy, it goes to show that God loves them too, from a certain perspective. Can you help me in this please?

Dear young believer,

The issues which you bring up in your last letter are exactly the issues which were the occasion for the start of the PRC 85 years ago. Thousands of pages have been written on this question. The latest is an excellent book (very small paperback) by Prof Engelsma and is a commentary on Psalm 73, a key Psalm in the debate, but

one which the believers of common grace never address, for it is the death of their position. Briefly, the following errors are to be found in the position as outlined in your letter:

1) God does not love every one in any sense of the word. How can there be two kinds of love in God, one for the elect and one for the reprobate? That is sheer nonsense. This is as impossible for God as it is impossible for you and me. Try telling your wife once that although you love her more than anyone else, you also love another woman to whom you give gifts. Do you think your wife will agree to that arrangement?

2) God loves only those for whom Christ died, for all His love is rooted in the cross of Christ who died for sin. If God loves all men, then Christ died for all men, and one major point of Calvinism is lost – Limited Atonement.

3) The Scriptures teach that God hates the wicked. The Psalms especially speak of the fact that God hates all the workers of iniquity. Proverbs 3:33 teaches that the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked. Psalm 73 teaches that the riches of the wicked are a slippery slope down which the wicked slide to hell. Malachi (referring to Genesis) tells us (quoted by Paul in Romans 9): Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated. Defenders of common grace interpret Romans 9 to mean that God loves Esau less. Try telling that to your wife: I love you, but I love this other woman too, but less than I love you.

4) It is a strange God, unworthy of the name, who loves men during their lives, but throws them into hell when they die. Would you want such a God?

5) Matthew 5:43, 44 does not teach common grace. The following are to be observed:

a) There is no single place in all Scripture where material prosperity is identified with blessing. What a dreadful thing that would be if that were true. The millionaires and the billionaires would be the most blessed, and the poor, such as in Myanmar, would be the least blessed. The healthy would be blessed, but the sick would be cursed. Such teachings are fatal errors which lead men to destruction.

b) Of course, God loves His enemies. Those enemies are you and me. For we were enemies of God before He saved us. But we have no right to argue from God's love of us to God's love of all men, though they too are enemies. The text says nothing about God's love for us or for the wicked. We may not deduce from our calling to love our enemies to a love of God for all men. That is logic as its worst.

c) We are to love our enemies indeed, but we do not know who are elect among them and who are not. God always knows who are His own and who are not. He loves His own who are His enemies, but He makes them His friends through the power of Jesus Christ. That is also our goal – to make our enemies friends of God and our friends. We do this by doing good to them, as God does good to us. We tell our enemies: “God loved us even though we were His enemies. This is a great mercy and a great grace. We are so thankful for this that we want you to forsake your sin, repent, believe in Christ and know God's friendship.” We manifest God's love for us and our love of our enemies by seeking their salvation. But when they consistently refuse to repent and become God's

enemies, then we say with David in Psalm 139: “Do not I hate them that hate thee, of Lord? I hate them with a perfect hatred.”

6) Such anti-Biblical teachings as you describe open the way for the well-meant gospel offer. If God loves all men (even if His love is different from His love for His people) then God desires their salvation and does all He can to save them. Then the final decision for their salvation rests with them and we are in the coils of an Arminianism which will choke us to death. The matter is utterly and totally serious. The CRC, which taught this dreadful doctrine is now not only an Arminian church, but also a modern church, approving of women in office, teaching evolutionism, condoning homosexuality (If God loves homosexuals, we should too.), and as Arminian as the worst Arminian church in the US.

I cannot understand how men who claim to be Reformed are now going to embrace such unReformed teachings. It is a terrible mystery.

Greetings and blessings,
Prof.

52^{Trials}

Dear Prof,

When God sends us trials in our lives, how would we know whether they were:

- 1) Trials to chastise us, and to strengthen us?
- 2) Trials sent as a form of punishment so that we need to repent and change our ways?

Dear young believer,

Greetings in the name of our Saviour.

It is interesting that I just began a class last night on the very subject you bring up. The class is generally about “The Biblical Doctrine of Suffering,” but we treat the subjects which you mention.

In answer to your question, all the suffering of God’s people is chastisement. It is never anything else. God never punishes His people for any sin, because Christ bore the punishment of all the sins of all the people of God.

But God does chastise His people. Although Scripture speaks a lot about chastisement, Hebrews 12:1-13 is the key passage. Chastisement is suffering, of course, but its motive is to correct and to teach. Heb. 12:1-13 draws an analogy between the way an earthly father deals with his children and the way God deals with

us. An earthly father chastises his children when they do wrong, but he does so to correct them, to teach them, and to encourage them to walk in the right way. So God does with us. He chastises every son whom He loves. Sometimes God chastises us for particular sins; that is, He sends suffering that is directed towards a particular sin in our life. But frequently His chastisement is more general, for we sin in everything we do and God's chastisement is constant and necessary.

Our attitude towards all chastisement must always be that we receive it from the hand of our heavenly Father in humility, examine our lives, turn from our evil ways, repent of our sins, and seek the favor and love of our God.

There is much more to the subject than I have written. If any particular aspect of it remains a question, please feel free to ask again.

In Christ's service,
Prof.

53 Christ & knowledge of our sin

Dear Prof,

Recently at a Christian burial service, Jesus was portrayed as one we must turn to if we wished to have life everlasting. However, the Pastor only spoke about how because we believe in Jesus, we will surely have life and not death. I felt something was missing. I was thinking about whether churches these days tend to water down the gospel and also try to make it sound less offensive when they decide to bring the “good” news to others. The good news which they intend to bring may sound very good and pleasing in the ears of unbelievers, for even the reprobate may wish to hear about a God who loves us and who has sent His Son so that whosoever believeth in Him has everlasting life. But if sin is mentioned at the outset, and repentance is mentioned as the prerequisite for any one who wishes to go before the Lord and ask for life, then how many may wish to look to Jesus? Can you comment on this Prof?

Dear young believer,

You are right on target in your analysis of much of the preaching in our day. It is certainly true that the lack is in pointing men to sin. Today’s “gospel” is geared to make man feel good: God loves everyone; God wants everyone to be happy; talk of sin sends people on guilt trips and makes them think bad about themselves when they should have a “positive self-image.”

The whole reality of sin has been swallowed up in evolutionary theory, which teaches that our “imperfections” are remnants of our animal ancestry and are overcome with medical and scientific technology. I remember a doctor from a Christian psychiatric hospital telling a large group of ministers that people in the congregation who did unacceptable things ought to have psychiatric treatment and that discipline would only aggravate the problem.

The fact is, as our Heidelberg Catechism points out, that our only comfort in life and in death, for time and for eternity is that we belong to Jesus. How do we know we belong to Jesus? First, by knowing how great our sins and miseries are. And only then, when we have learned that we are totally incapable of doing anything good, can we come to know our deliverance in Christ. Knowing that deliverance, we have the only true comfort for body and soul. (Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 1 & 2)

Thanks for asking the question. It is a good observation you made.

Greetings in Christ and blessings,
Prof.