

("hasteneth") and so Israel's fears were groundless!

By the way, Isaiah 51:14 is a figurative and spiritual presentation, and proof that Isaiah 51 was not written by someone in the Babylonian captivity long after the real Isaiah, for the physical conditions of the Israelites in exile were not too bad (cf. Jer. 29:4-7) and so many stayed in Babylon when they had opportunity to return to Judah.

The believer must remember who he or she really is. Our text puts the question to the child of God: "who art thou"? It asks, "who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass ... and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor" (Isa. 51:12-13)?

You know the Son of man, Jesus Christ, and are joined to Him who has atoned for your sins, has risen from the dead and is alive for evermore! You are immortal, for you will live after death in your soul with Christ in heaven and you will be raised from the dead in your glorified body on the last day to inhabit the new heavens and the new earth, a new world of righteousness and joy!

Why then are you worried about "the fury of the oppressor" (13)? What about God's fury against sin? Think about Jehovah's fury displayed and satisfied in the cross of Jesus Christ when He bore God's wrath against us for our awful transgressions.

You are elect and beloved, redeemed and ransomed, adopted and called by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So do not fear man!

God charges Israel: Thou "forgettest" Me (13; cf. 49:14)! What is the relationship between fearing man and forgetting God? Both the fear of man and forgetting the Lord are sins against the first commandment. These sins are related in that they are inversely proportional. The more you fear man, the less you fear God. The more you fear God, the less you fear man.

In our text, God reminds Israel and us of three of His names. First, He is "the LORD," Jehovah (51:13). In Himself, He is self-existent, eternal, unchangeable. To us, He is true and faithful in Jesus Christ. Second, He is "the LORD *thy* God" (15). Jehovah is our covenant God, according to the covenant formula: "I am thy God and thou art My people." Third, He is "The LORD of hosts" (15). He is sovereign over the hosts of heaven and earth and the sea, and His visible and invisible hosts. They are all in the service of Jehovah their master who uses them in the service of His church.

"So how could you, Israel? How could you forget Me? How could you forget My names?" asks Jehovah. Let us not be guilty of this, beloved! *Rev. Stewart*

"Listen and Wake Up!" 10 sermons on Isaiah 51:1-52:12, in a handsome box set (CD or DVD), is available from the CPRC Bookstore for £12/set (inc. P&P). Free videos and audios of these sermons can also be found on the CPRC website and YouTube site.

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church

83 Clarence Street, Ballymena, BT43 5DR • Lord's Day services at 11 am & 6 pm

Website: www.cprc.co.uk • Live broadcast: www.cprf.co.uk/live

Pastor: Angus Stewart, 7 Lislunna Road, Kells, N. Ireland, BT42 3NR • (028) 25 891851

pastor@cprc.co.uk • www.youtube.com/cprcni • www.facebook.com/CovenantPRC

Covenant Reformed News

May 2016 • Volume XVI, Issue 1

Fearing Man and Forgetting God (2)

"I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?" (Isa. 51:12-13).

There is not only the fear of man as man; there is also the fear of man's fury. Jehovah declares that Israel "hast feared continually every day because of the *fury* of the oppressor" (13). There are people who can cope with displays of power from the ungodly but will cower before their wrath. Our text describes a fear of the fury of the wicked that is daily ("every day") and continual. Beloved, by God's grace, never allow yourself to get into such a condition: fearing man, fearing man's fury and that "continually every day"!

Our text does not speak merely of fearing man and his fury; it also speaks of fearing what man can do to us. Thou "hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, *as if he were ready to destroy*" (13). The indications given by the wicked as to what they may do to us may be in the form of threats or examples; they may be spoken or unspoken; they may be subtle or not so subtle.

One way or another, our ungodly enemies leave this definite impression with us: "This is what we will do to you, to your home, to your spouse, to your children, to your family, to your church, to you legally. This is what we will do to you in your neighbourhood, in your employment, in the press, in the courts."

By God's grace, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not yield to the fear of an ungodly law, requiring them to bow down to a golden idol (Dan. 3). They did not capitulate to the fear of Nebuchadnezzar or to his fury (for he was enraged) or to the threat of the burning, fiery furnace. Maybe they had read or had been thinking about Isaiah 51:12-13 (or 43:2)?

So do not fear what the wicked can do to you, child of God! Do not spend time imagining what they may do to you. Probably 99% of such threats are not fulfilled anyway. Remember that the Lord stands with those who stand for His truth!

Our text asks, "where is the fury of the oppressor?" (51:13). Mighty Babylon is long gone. The beast-like empires of Greece and Rome were destroyed many centuries ago. All the wicked and their powers will be crushed by the Almighty!

"The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail" (14). What a picture of Israel: in exile as a captive in a pit with starvation rations! But deliverance from Babylon was coming soon

(continued on p. 4)

The Theodicy (3)

“We are often rightly told that God will not remember our sins and has removed them from us to an infinite distance (as far as the east is from the west) and buried them in the deepest sea. So how can those same sins be brought out into the open on the judgment day, with every believer being rewarded according to his works? Are our sins not to be brought up again as they are all atoned for and simply our works judged? Because surely the quality of the works will expose the sin inherent in them?”

As our readers will recall, I have been discussing the theodicy in the last two articles. I intend to end the discussion with this article. The question quoted above prompted me to widen the answer to include a discussion of the theodicy because 1) it underlies the question and 2) the theodicy is rarely discussed in today’s insipid theological world. Yet it is a truth that lies at the heart of Reformed theology.

I am convinced that the lack of teaching on this subject is due to a wrong emphasis on man in preaching and writing in today’s church world. This is not the emphasis in Scripture. Scripture is God-centred. It teaches what God does, why He does what He does, and that His name alone ought to be praised and given all the glory. With today’s theologians, one hears only man, man, man. In Reformed theology, the emphasis is God, God, God. Read Ephesians 1:3-14. While the passage, only one sentence in the Greek, tells us of the astounding gifts that God gives His people, the purpose is always to show that God gives them and that He does so that He alone may be praised. The truth of the theodicy brings us to the foot of God’s throne in humble adoration.

The questioner wants to know whether our sins will be revealed in the judgment day. He apparently hopes that they are not. In that wish, he is like all of us, for our sins are so many and so great and so terrible that we really do not want anyone to know them. That they will be publicly revealed in the judgment day makes us cringe in fear.

The questioner argues that all our sins are covered by Christ’s blood and that they exist no longer. In addition to that, the questioner argues that our good works will themselves reveal their inherent sinfulness. The point is, however, not whether our sins will be revealed in the judgment day (they will be) but whether God will be justified in saving His people, who are in themselves just as wicked as anyone else in the world, and why they are saved. That is the theodicy.

In the theodicy, God justifies Himself in election, not only in reprobation, as we saw last time. God justifies Himself in a seemingly arbitrary choice to bless in Christ only some of our fallen race equally involved in spiritual ruin.

God did not choose those whom He elected because they were morally superior to others or because they performed more good works than others or because, out of the whole of fallen man, they were found more noble and of more worth. Election is absolutely free and sovereign. God chooses whom He wills to choose. His basis for electing some and not others is His own sovereign good pleasure. He has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He wills, He hardens (Rom 9:15-18).

As I said in the last article in connection with reprobation, God has the right to do this and He is under no obligation to explain to us why He does what He does. He is infinite; we are specks of dirt. He is the Creator of all; we are created. He gives life and existence to every creature; we depend on Him for every breath and every beat of our hearts. Paul again: Does not the potter have power over the clay to make a good vessel or a bad vessel (Rom 9:21)? Of course, He does. So it is with God.

The Creator may do with those He creates as He pleases. This is the basic truth. God does all His good pleasure. No one may question His right to do it.

If the church is pictured as a temple, as it is in Ephesians 2:20-22, God chooses to build the temple of the elect on Christ. He chooses the reprobate as scaffolding to make the erection of the temple possible. When the temple is fully built, the scaffolding is no longer needed and is discarded.

But there is more. To show the great wonder of God’s work of salvation, He saves from sin in the death and exaltation of His own dear Son. To demonstrate His grace, He must and does show how wicked His people are in themselves. To show the greatness of the wonder of salvation, all our iniquities will be publicly revealed.

In the death of Christ, as the satisfaction God requires to save His people from their sins against Him, God punishes His Son and not His people. The light of God’s holiness shines the brighter against the background of our dreadful sin. One can see the beam of a torch only in the dark; one can see God’s great glory especially as it shines in the darkness of our sins.

Our sins will never be manifest in all their horror until the last day. They will be publicly revealed as all covered by the blood of Christ. We stand as sinners, who are made into saints by Christ’s death. God does it all that He alone may be glorified as the great eternal author of all His works. Therefore, John tells us that we need not be afraid of the judgment because we know that God loves us (I John 4:16-18).

This is the theodicy. God justifies His work of salvation by grace alone by showing us as we are in ourselves and as saved by Christ.

God reveals as gloriously as possible that He alone is sovereign also in the work of the salvation of His elect. The greatest glory of His name is achieved through revealing all His attributes in the highest possible way. He reveals His (what we call) incommunicable attributes): sovereignty, omnipotence, eternal unchangeableness, the blessedness of His own Triune covenant life He lives as the Triune God.

He also reveals His (what we call) communicable attributes in the highest way in Christ and in all His work: His mercy, grace, love, longsuffering, patience. God reveals all these attributes when an innumerable host of elect sinners stand before Him, clothed in the white robes of Christ’s righteousness. We, who are dreadful sinners, just as bad as everybody else in the world, are saved by God and blessed eternally!

Our sins must be revealed, for only in this way can the greatness of God’s mercy be shown and can we appreciate the wonder of Christ’s work and the greatness of a God who sent His beloved Son to hell to save His people.

Prof. Hanko