

you see how the fourth virtue of the church at Thyatira qualifies the previous three.

Christ's fifth word of commendation regarding Thyatira concerns its "works:" "I know thy works ... and thy works" (Rev. 2:19). Twice this verse speaks of "works." The first refers generally to everything the congregation does; the second refers to good works.

What qualities does the infinitely holy and just God consider necessary for good works? First, their source is love for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Second, their standard is the law of Jehovah. Third, their goal is the glory of the covenant God. The nature of the good works in view in our text is especially service in the body of believers, and the characteristics of such service include faithfulness and perseverance.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said about Thyatira, "I know thy good works!" What a commendation! What an encouragement!

To all of this our Lord adds a very important concluding statement: "I know thy ... charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; *and the last to be more than the first*" (19). The italicized words refer to Thyatira's works, her good works—their quality (as such) but their quantity.

Christ here tells this congregation that they are doing works of loving, faithful, persevering service and that these good works are more than they were in their beginning! Are you doing more good works than last year? Than five years ago? Than 10 years ago? Even if you say, "I don't know," Christ knows!

By Jehovah's covenant grace, Thyatira was performing more good works. It was "stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (I Cor. 15:58). And it was abounding more and more in good works! Surely, great rewards from the liberal God will be given to such people—the reward of grace, as it is rightly called!

Christ declares that "he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end" (Rev. 2:26) will receive an exceeding great and precious reward. The Lord Jesus speaks to all seven congregations in Revelation 2-3 of "him/he that overcometh" but to Thyatira only does he add, "and keepeth *my* works unto the end."

Thus we learn that the good works of the church at Thyatira—the loving, faithful, persevering service in the church by the saints—are here called Christ's works! He performed these works in each and every member of the congregation and over many years. They are His works because they were performed by the church's members through Christ's own Spirit whom He purchased for His people on the cross.

We too must understand, beloved, that our good works are Christ's works. Christ is working spiritually in the hearts and lives of believers in true churches so that they faithfully serve their fellow saints in love. What an amazing thing!

Christ personally promises and gives rewards to all who overcome and keep doing His works to the end. We will consider our gracious and rich reward in the next issue of the *News*, DV.

*Rev. Stewart*

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"The Seven Churches in Asia," 12 sermons on Revelation 2-3 in an attractive box set (CD or DVD), is available from the CPRC Bookstore for £12/set (inc. P&P).

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# *Covenant Reformed News*

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## **Thyatira: A Persevering and Working Church**

In the last issue of the *News*, we saw that the church at Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29) was characterized by three graces: love, service and faithfulness. The Lord Jesus Christ also mentions a fourth quality of this congregation: its patience, that is, its perseverance: "I know thy ... charity, and service, and faith, and thy *patience*" (19).

Perseverance is a wonderful grace in believers and church members. The Greek word used in our text means "remaining under," that is, remaining under a burden placed there by the Lord, without buckling under it. A congregation which perseveres is one that sticks to its calling and presses on in its obedience to the living God without being disheartened, quitting or compromising.

This spiritual grace is especially necessary for church office-bearers but it ought to be a quality evident in all the members of the body of Christ. Those who do not persevere in godly church life will never achieve much in the kingdom of God, and their lives will be filled with gnawing regrets and discontentment.

It is relatively easy to do your bit when the sun is shining and all are applauding you on every side. But the grace of perseverance is vital to keep on loving your fellow church members, year in and year out, even if you learn more about their annoying ways and weaknesses.

We also need to persevere in our service to the body of the church, even if we get little thanks, or if we are treated poorly, or if we see little or no fruit for our labours, or if the church does not grow or becomes smaller.

Each church member must persevere in faithfulness. We must not give way to despairing thoughts like these: "I don't feel like doing this any more. Sure, no one will notice if I just stop or slack off from church work. Other people don't seem to be pulling their weight, so why should I bother?"

We must all be very clear as to the reason why we labour in the body of our Lord Jesus Christ! Our primary motivation must be love of the Triune God in gratitude for His great redemption of us from our sins through the cross of our Saviour, the incarnate Son of God. What drives us in our service must not be the desire to be seen or praised of men, like the Pharisees (Matt. 6:1-18). Our standard is not the behaviour of other church members, never mind the weaker ones in the congregation. Our rule is God's inspired and holy Word!

So persevere in loving the saints; persevere in service in the church; persevere in faithfulness to your calling as a member of a true manifestation of Christ's body! Here

*(continued on p. 4)*

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## Our Old Man and New Man (3)

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Our readers will recall that in the last two issues of the *News*, I was discussing the Bible's teaching concerning "the old man" and "the new man" in the child of God. I explained that Scripture repeatedly speaks of a war that goes on and must go on between these two—in the very life of the believer and, indeed, in the whole of his Christian life. The battle is unending and bitterly serious, sometimes leaving the saint weary beyond description and even, occasionally, overcome by the power of his wicked flesh.

Nevertheless, in this life-and-death battle that goes on in the Christian, the new man, the Christian from the viewpoint of God's work of grace in him, always has the victory. The Scriptures assure us of this and urge us on to be steadfast in the battle because we need not doubt that the victory will come. We are united to Christ by faith, which faith is the victory that overcomes the world (I John 5:4).

We need to be assured of our victory, because the battle is fierce and we ourselves experience times when our evil flesh seems indeed to have triumphed and we are all but buried beneath the load of our sin and guilt.

The certainty of victory lies, first of all, in our union with Christ. Christ is the Captain of our salvation, and He fought and utterly defeated our enemies: Satan, his demons, the wicked world and our own sinful flesh. The sacrament of baptism signifies and seals this victory in the elect, for it is a sign that we have been crucified with Christ and also raised with Him (Col. 2:11-12). Immediately after saying this, Paul reminds us of our regeneration: that is, of the creation of "the new man" in us (13). The victory is certain because Christ on His cross blotted "out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (14-15).

The Christ who began the good work in us will perform it until it is completed in the resurrection of our bodies (Phil. 1:6). We experience that victory in this life. We do not give up the battle in discouragement. We fight in a way analogous to the victory of an army against an invader. The battle is really won but mopping-up operations have to be carried on for several weeks after the battle is over. We are engaged in these mopping up activities, while our enemies have been principally defeated.

We are victorious over our sinful flesh in the prayer for forgiveness. We pray, as the publican did, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). The publican went home justified—assured in his heart that all his sins are so forgiven that he is righteous in God's sight. God sees no sin in him. That is victory for it is God who is our Judge!

We are victorious when we fall into sin, and lie wounded and bleeding on the side of the pilgrim's road we walk. So wounded are we that we sometimes consider giving up, for the cost of battle appears too great. But we do not give up. We fight off our weariness and continue on our path with a determination that comes from our Lord who fights in us to give us the victory He has won on the cross.

We are victorious when we walk with God in the blessed consciousness of the covenant He established with us in Jesus Christ, for it is with us as it was with Enoch, who "had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb. 11:5).

We are victorious when we come to the cross of Christ to seek help in time of need in the confidence that "it behoved him [i.e., Christ] to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." (2:17-18).

We are victorious when we know assuredly that "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin," and so we "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (4:15-16).

To cheer us in the battle, God gives us the picture of the Christian warrior (Eph. 6:10-17), victorious in the fiercest battle. His spiritual armour is defined, and he is urged to withstand the fiery darts of Satan and to stand in the confidence of the armour with which he is protected. The picture is of a warrior, bloodied and wounded, weary with a weariness that reaches his bones, a broken sword in his hand, his helmet knocked askew, who can hardly lift his arm to slay yet another enemy, yet he is still standing: "and having done all, to stand" (13). The battlefield is littered with the dead whom he has slain, but he remains on his feet! This is the victory he has in Christ Jesus, the Captain of his salvation, whose warrior he is. The perfect rest of heaven is guaranteed him with the Lord's words ringing in his ears: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant ... enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21!)

*Prof. Hanko*

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*Heidelberg Catechism* (1563):

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

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

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

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

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

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

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A box set of 12 CDs or DVDs of the 2014 BRF Conference entitled "Be Ye Holy: The Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification" is available for £12 (inc. P&P) from the CPRC Bookstore.

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

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