

time, the Almighty would smash the foundations of their kingdom!

Second, in order to keep His people from fearing man and forgetting Him, Jehovah reminds us of His work as the Creator of Israel: “And forgettest the LORD *thy maker*” (13). Here the Most High declares, “I made you My people in accordance with My unconditional election of you. Yet you forget Me! How could you?” Likewise, in the New Testament, God’s true church witnesses, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Third, in order to keep His people from fearing man and forgetting Him, Jehovah reminds us of His work as the Redeemer of Israel: “But I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The LORD of hosts is his name” (Isa. 51:15). The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob divided the Red Sea so that His ransomed people could pass through safely, whereas the Egyptians were drowned by the roaring waves. In answer to the prayers of the spiritual Israelites (9-10), Jehovah would redeem Israel from the Babylonian captivity, just as He did from the bondage of Egypt.

The result is described figuratively: “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). The full, spiritual, gospel reality of this is redemption from the bondage of sin, Satan, death and hell through Christ’s blood. We must not be like foolish Israel in fearing man and forgetting God given the greatness of the Lord Jesus and His ransom!

All by themselves, the words of this article and those in the previous two issues will not enable us to remember the Lord our God or strengthen us against the fear of man. The great truths of God’s glorious names, His creation of heaven and earth, and His formation and redemption of the church will not console us apart from the glorious, inward work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Christ brings God’s Word to our hearts with power: “I, even I, am he that comforteth you” (12).

Our heavenly Father commissions true preachers of the gospel with these words, and the Spirit blesses His elect, according to His eternal purpose: “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’s hand double for all her sins” (40:1-2; cf. 61:2).

When Jehovah says emphatically, “I, even I, am he that comforteth you” (51:12), it is as if He is asking us, “Do you really think that I, the great Creator and Redeemer of the church, could really be asleep or forget you?”

By now you should feel the force of our text: “who art thou, that thou shouldst 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? ... But I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The LORD of hosts is his name” (12-13, 15)!

*Rev. Stewart*

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# *Covenant Reformed News*

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## **Fearing Man and Forgetting God (3)**

“I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldst 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).

Since the fall, fear is a part of human life in our disordered world for everybody, every day, in many different ways and to varying degrees. Scripture speaks of fear as especially involving the “heart.” “Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear” (Ps. 27:3; cf. Deut. 20:3; 28:67; II Sam. 17:10; Isa. 7:4; 35:4). Since “out of it [i.e., the heart] are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23), we must keep it diligently from all misplaced fears. There are people who are, sadly, crippled by sinful fears. We need to get this issue of unbelieving fear straight, for expelling it is a vital part of Christian godliness and a major theme in the Bible.

In our day, the fear of man is practically institutionalized in the form of political correctness (PC). PC is against the freedom to witness boldly of Jesus Christ in all spheres according to the full revelation of His Word. PC is the fear of man writ large. PC is the fear of offending man with the gospel, and it encourages people to get offended very easily. PC involves the fear of law cases (and being sued) and the fear of losing your job or business for the sake of the truth, especially when Scripture opposes the secularist ideology and the popular sins of the day. PC, to use the language of Isaiah 29:21, “make[s] a man an offender for a word.”

“The fear of man bringeth a snare” (Prov. 28:25). The one whom you fear is your master, the one who controls you. Through embracing PC, one becomes a creature, and even a slave, of the anti-Christian elite. In the language of the book of Isaiah, one becomes a citizen and devotee of Babylon. Think of how awful it would be to have people with this carnal mind as ministers, elders, deacons and members of the church institute! Yet this is happening in more and more places, sadly.

First, in order to keep His people from fearing man and forgetting Him, Jehovah reminds us of His work as the Creator of the universe: “And forgettest the LORD ... that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth” (Isa. 51:13).

The Babylonians stretched out their empire in the Middle East (in accordance with God’s eternal decree) but Jehovah stretched out the entire heavens. Soon He would roll back their empire! The Babylonians laid the foundations of their transient empire (in God’s sovereign province) but the Lord laid the foundations of the whole earth! In little

*(continued on p. 4)*

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## “Ye *Shall* Receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit”

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A lady in England asks, “Why does the apostle Peter, in Acts 2:38, use the future tense when he says, ‘ye *shall* receive the gift of the Holy Ghost’? I am puzzled because we must already have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit in order to repent and trust in Christ ‘for the remission of sins.’”

The questioner adds this to her question: “It [i.e., the text] is used here [in my local church] to imply that no one is saved until they are baptized—that they have to do something to contribute to their salvation, a thoroughly Arminian idea. The pastor and other preachers can be Reformed in preaching to Christians but they become Arminian when addressing non-believers.”

Let us have the text, Acts 2:38, clearly before us: “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Before I answer the lady’s question, I want to make a few points about the e-mail that accompanied her question. I have received many such e-mails and letters over the years, and heard similar sorry tales on our many visits with saints in the British Isles. When I hear accounts from them of this sort of distortion of the Scriptures, it always fills me with sorrow. My wife and I literally wept when we left homes where we ministered to a few saints who faced similar problems to those of the questioner. There is no church in their area where the gospel of sovereign grace is faithfully preached. In the local churches, Arminianism is rampant and the doctrines of sovereign grace are corrupted by unfaithful shepherds who shear the sheep rather than feed them. We frequently pray for these scattered sheep who know not where to turn to hear the glorious gospel of free grace.

Godly saints who love the Lord, confess that their salvation is a gift of grace, and rely wholly on their Saviour, Jesus Christ. But, in many areas, the sermons in the churches are a mixture of Arminianism and God’s grace. No wonder they are, as the questioner is, “puzzled” by the preaching. Men who claim to be ministers of God’s Word trouble the hearts and minds of godly saints with confusion and contradiction.

Pentecostals interpret such a passage as this as teaching the “second blessing.” Though a man or woman is saved, they claim that the believer needs more to attain the second outpouring of the Holy Spirit that will enable him or her to speak in tongues (i.e., utter gibberish), prophesy, perform miracles and experience the constant bliss of unclouded communion with God.

While certainly, in the apostolic era, when the Scriptures were not completed, God gave special signs to some by which signs the truth of the gospel was verified, that is not the reference here.

Peter simply uses a very common biblical expression that explains the power of faith and its relation to salvation. You will find the future tense used repeatedly in Scripture where faith is set forth as the instrument of receiving salvation.

First of all, one does not need to be baptized to be saved, contrary to the impression the lady received in her church (“Acts 2:38 ... is used to imply that no one is saved *until* they are baptized”).

If one does require baptism to be saved, unborn babies cannot be regenerated and infants dying in infancy, even though born of believing parents, cannot be saved (contra Luke 1:15, 44; *Canons* I:17). If a minister preaches that baptism saves, then he has adopted the Roman Catholic and the “high church” Anglican heresy of baptismal regeneration.

However, I do not think that the people to whom the lady refers actually hold this. From her correspondence, it appears to me that their error springs from a more Baptist and Arminian approach to the text: baptism as a work that we do that adds or contributes to our salvation.

Second, Peter is using here the common expressions of Scripture to define the relation between faith and our conscious experience of that salvation. One can find instances of this throughout Scripture. God sovereignly begins the work of salvation in the hearts of the elect. This is regeneration, and God gives the gift of faith in regeneration.

But the efficacious calling is a part of salvation. This is the reference in the text, for Peter is preaching and God uses the external call in working His internal call in the hearts of His elect. By that sweet and irresistible call, God brings His people to conscious faith in Christ as He is set forth in the gospel. That gift of faith brings the child of God to the cross and Christ crucified, in whom our salvation is perfect and complete. By faith in Christ, we come to repentance and the assurance of our salvation, through the Holy Spirit.

The call of the gospel, heard in the preaching, demands faith in Christ from all who hear. The wicked refuse and are damned (John 12:48). God, by His Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, works faith in the elect so that they believe and are saved. Always “it is God which worketh in [us] both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Anything else is a damnable lie (Gal. 1:6-9).

Why do preachers not preach this simple and God-glorifying gospel? That way, they will not puzzle and disturb Christ’s saints but comfort and edify them! *Prof. Hanko*

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For a more in-depth look at how the Holy Spirit works in the life of the believer, order *The Work of the Holy Spirit* by Profs. Engelsma and Hanko. It is just £5.50 (including P&P) and is available from the CPRC Bookstore.

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