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EDITORIAL COMMENTS

--Prof. H. Hanko--

With this issue of the Journal we begin Volume VI. It seems surprising when one stops to think about it that five years of publication have already passed. That our God has made it possible to publish this paper for so long is reason for gratitude. In the meantime, the list of those who receive the Journal has also steadily increased. The list of those who receive this paper includes names from many different parts of the world as well as many from our own country. Because the Journal is sent without cost, it is possible, of course, that some of you who receive it do not care to have the Journal any longer. We are therefore, asking all those who do not wish to receive this paper to write us so that we may remove your names from our mailing list. The cost of publishing and mailing the Journal is quite high, and we would like to send the Journal only to those who are eager to receive it and who enjoy reading it.

In this issue Prof. Hoeksema includes an expanded lecture which was originally given to an Officebearers' Conference of Classis East. It deals with the subject of "Family Visitation." We are aware of the fact that family visitation is an aspect of the work of the office of elder which is emphasized almost exclusively within the Reformed tradition. However, even in many Reformed circles, this practice has fallen into disuse. Nevertheless, historically, the churches of the Reformation have always considered this an important part of the responsibility of the office of elder; and the work reaps untold fruit in the lives of the people of God. If this article serves the purpose of increasing here and there the emphasis placed upon family visitation, and if it leads some who have not performed this work before to introduce it in their own congregations, this article will not have been in vain.

Prof. Hanko continues his discussion of the old and new

man in Scripture. Hopefully this discussion will be completed in next Spring's issue of the Journal.

The Editors take this opportunity to express to all our readers our sincerest prayers for the blessings of Almighty God upon you in this season in which we commemorate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and the grace of the eternal Jehovah in the new year which lies ahead.

THE OLD AND NEW MAN IN SCRIPTURE

--Prof. H. Hanko--

A BRIEF REVIEW

Although this essay is intended to be a continuation of a former article in the Journal, it is well to begin with a brief review since our previous article appeared almost a year ago.

In our former article we called attention to an article in The Banner of Truth in which Donald MacLeod developed his thesis that the traditional idea of Paul's concept "the old man" was erroneous. Especially he inveighed against three parts of this traditional idea:

- 1) that the old man is to be equated with indwelling sin;
- 2) that the old man remains in the believer;
- 3) that the putting off of the old man is a life-long process.

In proof of his contention that these ideas are wrong, the author discussed the three passages where the term "old man" is found. Two of these passages, Col. 3: 9 and Rom. 6: 6, make use of the aorist tense in Greek when describing the putting off or crucifying of the old man. Since, the author claimed, these aorist tenses speak of a once-for-all action, the putting off of the old man is something which happens only once in a life time. The regenerated child of God has his "old man" put off once and forever, and need never do this again. Eph. 4: 20 is the third passage which uses the term "old man"; and this passage must be explained in the light of the other two. MacLeod's conclusion is therefore, that one makes a serious mistake when he speaks of the old man as still present in the regenerated child of God.

We also called attention to a series of two articles which appeared in the Reformed Journal in which Dr. Anthony Hoekema expressed concern for the fact that the Christian, generally speaking, has too low an estimate of himself from a spiritual point of view. He makes a plea for a more positive self-image in the life of the Christian. He does not want the Christian any longer to have such a low appraisal of himself, but hopes that he can persuade the Christian to upgrade this spiritual self-image so that he sees himself more as a saint than as a sinner.

In support of this contention, Dr. Hoekema also deals with 'three exegetical problems.' The first is a consideration of the well-known passage, Rom. 7: 14-25. Dr. Hoekema takes the position that this passage speaks of Paul as an unregenerated man, i.e., Paul is contrasting here his life prior to regeneration with his life after regeneration. Hence, the rather severe things Paul has to say about himself in this passage are things which were true of him only before he was regenerated. They are true of him no longer. And the child of God therefore, must not gain for himself a self-image patterned after what Paul has said in Rom. 7: 14-25.

Secondly, Dr. Hoekema comments on various passages in I John. Especially I John 3: 9 draws his attention. Discussing this passage in connection with 1: 8,9 and 2: 1, Hoekema interprets this to mean that "the regenerate person may on occasion fall into sin, but he cannot live in sin." Sin in the believer's life is not habitual, but extraordinary and infrequent.

Thirdly, Dr. Hoekema treated briefly Phil. 3: 7,8 to point out the decisive nature of the victory over sin.

His conclusion was that it is a serious mistake to speak of an old man as still present in the believer. After referring also to the same passages as MacLeod, Hoekema concludes that the old man is an old way of living which the child of God has forever abandoned. It is true that the believer still sins occasionally, for he has not yet attained to complete perfection; but, nevertheless, the believer must consider himself to be done for all time with the old man of sin which was in him.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION

The questions posed by these articles are important. This is true for several reasons.

In the first place, they are important because they involve questions of the interpretation of Scripture. Any subjects which deal with such important Scriptural concepts as "old man" and "new man" and which deal with exegesis of important texts in Scripture are subjects which ought immediately to rouse our interest.

Secondly, there are, as appears from the articles, various important doctrinal questions which are implied. We refer not only to the whole doctrine of sanctification which is involved in this

discussion, but also various aspects of this doctrine. MacLeod, e.g., warned in his article against the error of antinomianism and pleaded for his position as a way to escape antinomianism. Because antinomians have always attempted to escape personal responsibility for sin by blaming all their sins on their old man, they have fallen into the error of denying effectively the work of sanctification in the life of the child of God.

On the other hand, especially Hoekema (as we pointed out in our last article) comes very close to falling into the error of perfectionism which teaches, not so much that the believer actually does attain spiritual and ethical perfection in this life, but that nevertheless, the believer comes very close to perfection because sin is only an infrequent and occasional lapse in his conduct. And it must be remembered that perfectionism has always been characteristic of Arminianism. This is not so strange when one stops to think about it, for Arminianism and perfectionism have this in common that they never quite manage to take sin seriously. That is, they always tend to speak of sin only in relation to the deed, and seldom as it is part of man's nature. Hoekema's Arminianism comes through especially in his position that Rom. 7: 14-25 is a description of Paul prior to his regeneration.

Thirdly, there are practical considerations involved in this question. Does the regenerated child of God have an excuse to blame his sin on his "old man" and thus escape personal responsibility for his sin if he maintains that he still possesses such an old man? Is this the logical conclusion? or, at least, the inevitable result? Is it true, as Hoekema maintains, that the whole idea of an "old man" still present in the believer, leads to an unwarranted and harmful "self-image" for the Christian? Is such a "self-image" in conflict with the description of the child of God as God's Word describes the regenerated and sanctified saint?

And yet, there are other practical considerations. The whole question of sanctification is an important one for the Christian also from a subjective point of view. Before his own sanctified consciousness he must know what Scripture has to say about the work of God in him. He must know what God has accomplished through

grace in his life. If he sees himself as worse than he ought, he not only might be tempted to dodge the responsibility for his sin, but he will fall into the error of doing despite to the work of sanctification which God has wrought within him. But if someone tells him incorrectly that he is almost perfect, he might be driven to despair by all the sin which he still finds in himself and conclude that, since the norm of the sanctified child of God is nearly perfection, he is not sanctified.

Hence, for more than one reason, we do well to consider this whole question in the hope that it will contribute to the discussion of the meaning of sanctification; but also with the prayer that it will be of some assistance to pastors who must deal daily with sheep who face the problem of sin.

WHAT ABOUT THE AORIST TENSE?

At this point in our essay it becomes necessary to examine the Scriptural passages which mention the "old man" and especially concentrate on the whole question of the aorist tense which looms as such an important part of the argument.

But before we do that, it is well to take a look at Rom. 7: 14-25. This passage reads:

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members,

warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Admittedly, this is not an easy passage, and there are problems in its interpretation which find no ready solutions. But this need not, at this point, detain us. The question which we face is whether this passage is a statement of the apostle Paul in which he describes his life prior to his regeneration; or whether he speaks of things concerning himself as a regenerated child of God. This is an important question for our discussion. If Paul is speaking as a regenerated child of God and describing himself as one who is regenerated (as we believe that he is), it cannot but strike us that he has some very unpleasant things to say about himself and he presents a very harsh description of his spiritual life even though he is saved and restored by the power of God's grace.

But what if the passage describes Paul before his regeneration and conversion? Is this a possible interpretation? We believe that it is not. And we believe that a careful examination of this passage will show this.

In the first place, it is clear from the context that Paul is speaking of himself, and of God's saints with him, as he and they have been made dead to the law and alive to Christ. (vs. 4) He therefore contrasts his former state and the former state of God's people with the present one. "For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter." (vss. 5, 6) He is therefore, throughout, speaking of the present state of the believer.

This is also true of the conclusion of this entire passage: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin."

Speaking of his present state, he concludes with a sharp contrast between what he does with the mind (he serves the law of God) and what he does with the flesh (he serves the law of sin). He does both--at the same time.

In the second place, if one takes the position that Paul is speaking here of himself as he was prior to his regeneration, he ascribes to himself powers which Scripture everywhere and emphatically denies to the natural man apart from grace. Paul speaks of the fact that, apart from grace and the work of salvation in his heart, he is able to condemn the evil which he does (vs. 15); he is able to will the good and hate the evil (vss. 15, 19); he is able to will not to do the evil (vss. 16, 20); he is able to delight in the law of God (vs. 22). These are precisely activities of the mind and will which Scripture says are impossible for the man who is devoid of the grace of God. Man is, by nature, totally depraved. He is, according to Eph. 2: 1, "dead in trespasses and sins." Not only is he unable to do anything good in the sight of God; he is unable even to will the good. His will is in bondage to sin.

It is no wonder then that the Arminians especially have always insisted that this passage refers to Paul prior to his regeneration. (cf. our former article.) It is only in this way that they have been able to maintain their position that the natural man is able to will the good. And it seems obvious that anyone who desires to refer this passage to Paul prior to his regeneration must, of necessity, fall into the serious heresy of Arminianism.

In the third place, we must be very clear on the point that Paul is not here a perfectionist. He does not speak of an occasional lapse into sin or an infrequent failure on his part to do exactly what the law prescribes. From this point of view, Paul has some very unpleasant things to say about himself--even though he is regenerated. And every child of God who knows himself in the light of the Word of God will agree. Paul writes that, although he hates evil, nevertheless, he still does evil. He does not want the evil, yet he commits it. He knows that in himself (that is, in his flesh), dwells no good thing. He has the will to

do the good, but he knows not how to perform it. The good that he desires, he does not do, and the evil which he does not desire, he does. And he is forced to conclude with the bitter cry: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This is not the language of a man who stands on the border of perfection. This is not a man speaking who has almost attained to the perfection of full sanctification. This is not even what a man says who finds most of what he does to be good. It is the language of a man caught up in a severe and bitter battle against sin which rages mightily within him and presses from him a sharp and anguished cry.

In the fourth place however, we must not be led by all this to conclude that Paul has very little good to say about the work of sanctification within him. The antinomians have made capital of this passage. They have pointed to all these severe expressions which Paul uses to describe himself and have concluded that the regenerated child of God can really expect nothing good to come forth in his life. They have dwelt long and extensively on the sharp criticism of himself which Paul makes; and they have overlooked completely the many things which Paul says about the work of grace in his heart. We must not make this mistake.

Paul insists here on several important truths. Although he does evil, nevertheless, he does not allow it. (vs. 15) Although he does evil, he does not will it. And, in fact, he consents to the law that it is good. (vs. 16) The will to do good is certainly present with him and he delights in the law of God after the inward man. In fact, he can even say that although he does the evil, it is no more he that does it, but sin which dwells in him. He hates everything he does. And, indeed, even to see himself as a wretched man is the work of grace within him; and this spiritual insight is something which can only be the fruit of sanctification; for the sinner, apart from grace, is unable to make such a spiritual evaluation of himself. And, although he asks the question: Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? he immediately adds the answer with a thrilling cry of thanksgiving, that he is delivered by God through Jesus Christ.

He presents himself therefore, as a warring Christian who is deeply immersed in a fierce and unrelenting battle. The battle is

carried on within himself between the law of God which he serves with his mind and the law of sin which he serves with his flesh. The battle is constant and without relief. The struggle goes on all his days. The tension and conflict is always there. Sometimes indeed sin comes to the fore in his life--so much so that he speaks of the fact that "I" commit these sins: "I do the evil which I would not." But the battle described is not one in which the outcome is uncertain. It is not a battle which can, at any time, go either way. It is not a battle in which Paul himself does not know who shall finally be the victor. It is a battle in which the "inward man" is always victorious. Sin is always conquered in him. He can and does rest always in the deliverance that is his from God through Jesus Christ.

Finally, Paul makes a sharp distinction here between the "inward man" and his flesh. All the good which he performs is the good of the inward man. And all the evil which is still so much a part of his life is evil which his flesh commits. It is true that he does not divorce his flesh from himself. He does not, as the antinomians do, hold, so to speak, his flesh at arm's length and accuse his flesh, as something apart from himself, of all these horrible sins which are present with him. He makes no effort to shift the blame for his sin away from himself and on to his flesh which is not really a part of him. If this were what he does, he could never say: "For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." Nevertheless, he distinguishes sharply between the inward man which delights in the law of God and his flesh and the sin which dwells in him. This is also the distinction which Scripture makes in other places between the inward and the outer man. Cf. e.g., II Cor. 4: 16: "For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. And this is principally the same distinction which Scripture makes between the "old man" and the "new man."

And that brings us to those passages where these terms are used.

It will be remembered that when the authors which we quoted in our former article took the position that the believer has once and for all time put off the old man, they based their

arguments in large part on the fact that in Col. 3: 9 and Rom. 6:6 (two of the three passages where the expression "old man" is found) the apostle uses the aorist tense. Interpreting the aorist tense in the Greek as indicative of one-for-all action, these men took the position that the putting off of the old man is a once-for-all event.

Putting off the old man is neither a continuous process nor a present duty; it is an accomplished fact. It is incorrect, therefore to speak of the old man as remaining in the believer. (Banner of Truth, p. 15.)

Before we enter into a discussion of these passages, it is worth our while to investigate whether or not the aorist tense is precisely the kind of tense which the authors assert.

A close investigation of this matter will prove the opposite. It is true that the basic meaning of the aorist tense in Greek is that it indicates, generally speaking, punctiliar action. In this respect, it differs from the imperfect tense which indicates continuous action beginning in the past and, usually, continuing up to the present. The aorist is therefore a tense which gives a snapshot, in distinction from the imperfect tense which presents a moving picture.

But although this is the basic idea of the aorist, there are many different uses of it in the New Testament. We may enumerate the following:¹

¹Cf. on this matter such grammars as A Grammar Of The Greek New Testament, by A. T. Robertson, pp. 831 ff., Moods and Tenses Of New Testament Greek, by E. D. Burton, pp. 31 ff., Essentials of New Testament Greek, by R. Summers, p. 67. These uses are less clearly distinguished in Winer's New Testament Grammar, pp. 275 ff.

1) The indefinite aorist, sometimes called also the historical or constantive aorist. While the basic idea of this use of the aorist is that it describes a past act in its undivided entirety, there are three different kinds of action described, and this use of the aorist is subdivided as follows:

a) a momentary action. Such a use is found in Acts 5: 5 where Ananias is described as giving up (ἐξέψυξεν) the ghost.

b) an extended act or state which nevertheless constitutes a single fact. Thus Paul uses the aorist in Eph. 2: 4 to describe the great love of God wherewith He loved (ἠγάπησεν) us. It would be altogether contrary to the Scriptures to say that this verse describes a love of God which is a once-for-all act, completed and finished in the past and no longer true today. And it is quite possible that it is this use of the aorist which is found in Col. 3: 9 and Rom. 6: 6.

c) a series of acts constituting a single fact. There is also this use in Scripture, an example of which may be found in Mt. 22: 28. This verse contains a question of the Jews put to Jesus in which they ask the Lord to which one of seven brothers a single woman would belong in heaven because all seven "had" (ἔσχον) her in life.

2) The inceptive aorist, also sometimes called the ingressive aorist. This use emphasizes the beginning of action which leads to some state resulting from the action. An example of this is found in II Cor. 8: 9: "For we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, (ἐπτώχευσεν), that ye through his poverty might be rich." The English translation finds it necessary to make use of the word "became" to express this idea.

3) There is what is called a resultant aorist or effective aorist. The emphasis of this use is upon the end of the action. It therefore implies effort or intention although almost always successful effort. A clear example of this use is found in Mt. 27: 20. The chief priests and elders are here described as persuading (ἐπεισαν) the people to ask for Barabbas instead of Christ.

4) There are two additional uses of the aorist which are not so relevant to our discussion.

a) the gnomic aorist which is used in various proverbs and

comparisons where the English would use the present. An example of this is in I Peter 1: 24: "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth (ἐξηράνθη), and the flower thereof falleth away (ἐξέπεσεν)."

b) the epistolary aorist where the writer puts himself in the place of his reader and describes a fact present for the writer but past by the time the reader reads it. Eph. 6: 22 contains such an aorist: (ἔπεμψα).

It is clear from all this that the meaning of the aorist must be settled by the context if one is to determine the precise shade of meaning which the author has in mind. And, from a consideration of these various uses along with the whole use of the aorist in Scripture, we may conclude that the peculiar characteristic of the aorist tense is that it lays emphasis on the action of the verb and on the nature of the action, and has little, if anything, to do with actual time.

William J. Martin, in an essay entitled "I Corinthians 11: 2-16: An Interpretation"² writes extensively concerning the use of the aorist (along with the present imperative) in the Greek. While distinguishing between the two, he nevertheless points out that the aorist is often used to indicate actions which can go on for some time because the aorist emphasizes action. He writes:

A vast literature has grown up around the problem of the character of the aorist in general and the Greek aorist in particular. While the Greeks themselves recognized that the tense-forms combined time-relation and "aspect" in their meaning, they referred to the future and aorist simply as indeterminate forms of the verbs outside the tenses proper.

²Apostolic History And The Gospel, ed. by Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970, pp. 231-241.

To describe action which is completed in the past, there is another tense in Greek, the perfect. Peculiar to the perfect tense is the fact that it describes action completed in the past, but always in such a way that this action results in a state which continues until the present. One would think that if, in the passages referred to above, Paul had meant to describe an action completed in the past but which results in a state continuing to the present, he would have used the perfect tense. This is, in effect, precisely the way in which MacLeod describes the putting off or crucifying of the old man.

From all this we may conclude that there is no argument which can be based on the use of the aorist tense in support of the contention that we, no longer, because we are sanctified, possess an old man.

But what about the passage in Eph. 4: 22-24? The whole passage, beginning with vs. 20, reads:

But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

The argument centers in the phrases "that ye put off", and "that ye put on". These phrases are translations of two Greek words which, grammatically, are aorist infinitives. The argument here also is that these aorists are indicative of a once-for-all act which was completed in the past and which is not to be performed ever again. MacLeod, in his article, calls attention to the fact that the infinitive has various uses in the Greek, and that, almost certainly, the idea is not here that of an imperative. The apostle does not mean to admonish the Church to "put off the old man" and "put on the new man." He is rather stating a fact--a fact which has taken place at the moment of their regeneration and which cannot be repeated.

It is true that the infinitive has various uses in the Greek

New Testament. It is also true that the infinitive as an imperative almost never appears, if at all. But this does not alter the fact that even here the aorist infinitive can have the force of action which goes on over a period of time. Most probably these infinitives are to be taken as infinitives in a noun clause. The apostle means to say that this putting off of the old man and putting on of the new man is the content of what the Ephesians had heard and had been taught. (vs. 21).

We can make therefore, a few observations on this passage.

In the first place, we call attention again to the fact that the aorist tense of the infinitives need not necessarily denote a simple snapshot action completed in past time. Hendrickson, in his commentary on this verse refers to John 2: 20 where an aorist passive indicative is used to denote the action of building the temple, which action was carried on over a period of forty-six years and was still in progress.³ The aorist is not concerned primarily with time elements. Rather it is intended to emphasize the nature of the action described by the verb.

In the second place it is very interesting to note that, although the two infinitives in vs. 22 and 24 are aorists, the infinitive in verse 23 is a present. When Paul speaks of the renewing of the mind, he uses a present tense which must necessarily indicate an action which continues and must continue throughout the lifetime of the believer. It seems but natural therefore,

³New Testament Commentary--Ephesians; Baker Book House, 1967; footnote on pp. 213, 214. He writes: "These aorists "to put off" and "to put on" do not indicate that the actions to which they refer are done once for all, at this or that moment in the life of the addressed. They simply summarize. They give a snapshot view. They do not indicate anything at all with respect to whether putting off the old man and putting on the new man takes place in a moment or covers a lifetime. The aorist in John 2: 20 refers to an activity that had already lasted forty-six years! Here in Eph. 2: 22-24 it is the nature of the indicated actions and the context in which the aorists occur--the fact that they are joined by means of the present durative infinitive referring to the continuing process of mental renewal--that establish the lifelong character of the putting off and putting on."

that, because this renewal of the mind stands in such close connection with the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man, (not only grammatically, but also as far as the internal thought is concerned) that all refer to activity which continues in the lives of God's people.

Finally, although as far as the grammar is concerned, these infinitives do not carry the force of imperatives, one cannot escape the fact that the imperative idea stands in the background. The whole context consists of a series of admonitions. In verse 17, the apostle urges the Church not to walk as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of the mind. Now surely, if this was no longer true of the believers in Ephesus, there would be no need of an admonition with respect to this sin. MacLeod is wrong at this point. He writes:

Secondly, the Apostle's description of the old man does not allow us to believe that this designation is applicable to the Christian believer. He is 'corrupt according to the deceitful lusts' (vs. 22), he represents 'the former conversation' (vs. 22) when they walked as 'other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over to lasciviousness to work all uncleanness with greediness.' "Can we possibly think of a believer as answering this description?" asks Professor Murray. 'However keenly aware Paul is of his own sinfulness and that of believers by reason of indwelling, remaining sin, he never approaches to such a characterization of a believer,' (Principles of Conduct, 1957, p. 216).

But the fact of the matter is precisely that the old man can be characterized exactly in this way. And the fact is that this old man remains even in the believer. If it is not there, the

need for the strong admonition in vss. 17-19 is gone:

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind. Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

Why is this description of the ungodly Gentiles so important? And why does the apostle urge upon the Ephesians not to walk in this way, unless the very real possibility exists that they do exactly that?

The apostle continues. He reminds the Ephesians in vss. 20-24 what they have learned when they learned Christ. They have learned exactly that their lives ought to be different. They have learned that they must not walk in the ways of the Gentiles because they put off the old man, are renewed in the spirit of their mind and put on the new man. It is but natural then to return again to the direct imperative form of address, as the apostle does in vss. 25 ff. No one can doubt therefore, that there is also imperative force implied even in these infinitives.

Our conclusion is therefore, that an appeal to the aorist is insufficient to support the claim that the regenerated believer no longer possesses an old man. The distinctive feature of the aorist tense is that it emphasizes the action of the verb, and does not usually concern itself with the time involved.

A LOOK AT PERTINENT TEXTS

We turn now to a positive consideration of the various texts which are involved in this question. We cannot here offer a complete exegesis on these passages, but there are several features of them which have important bearing on our subject.

The first text is Romans 6: 4-6:

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was

raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

The context of this passage speaks of a certain objection which was, in Paul's time already, raised against the truth of justification by faith alone without the works of the law. This objection is stated as follows: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" This objection has appeared repeatedly in the history of the Church. It is basically the objection of antinomianism and is raised against the truth that God justifies His people out of pure grace, by faith, and that, in no way, are the works of the law the ground of our justification. The objection states that this makes good works useless and in vain. What purpose is there in performing them if we are justified anyway? Our justification has nothing to do with our works. In fact, it is probably preferable to continue in sin, for this will result in a greater manifestation of the grace of God.

Paul answers this objection, but in a very striking way. He does not answer it by saying: the objection is invalid. It does not follow as a conclusion from the premise. There is something wrong here with the logic. Rather, he answers the objection by saying that this is absolutely impossible. That is, it is impossible for anyone who is justified to make such an objection. It is impossible for anyone justified actually to live this way--that he continues in sin. If he makes such an objection and actually conducts his life accordingly, this is simply proof that he is not justified.

The reason for this is that God does not only justify His people; He also sanctifies them. In other words, those who make this objection deny the work of sanctification. And, if they actually live according to this objection, they show they are not

sanctified; and they are not justified. Justification and sanctification belong together. Justification is the ground of sanctification; and sanctification, must according to God's own purpose, follow from justification.

Paul writes:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (vss. 3,4.)

Paul is speaking here, obviously, of the sacrament of baptism. But he is not merely speaking of the outward sign and seal, but also of the inward and spiritual reality. To be baptized into Christ in spiritual reality is to be incorporated into the fellowship of Christ's death and resurrection.

How is this possible? It is possible because, in the first place, Christ is the legal and representative Head of His people. He represented them when He went to His cross. He stood in their place. He assumed responsibility for the sin and guilt which was their's. His people were in Him in this judicial sense. As the Head of His people, He died; but also, as the Head of His people, He rose again. Thus, His people died with Him on the cross and rose with Him when He arose from the grave.

But this work of Christ, accomplished on the cross of Calvary, is also realized in His people by the power of His Spirit. The figure of baptism is the figure of burial in the blood of Christ. On this side of that burial stands the sinner with all his sin and guilt, destined for hell as the object of God's wrath. But through the death of Christ all this is taken away. Christ accomplished it all. When He died, we died. And when He arose, He left behind all the sin and guilt which He had taken as His own on behalf of His people and entered into eternal life. So, for us, on the other side of burial with Christ and through the resurrection, we stand in holiness and righteousness, heirs of heaven and objects of God's love. Passing through the baptism of burial with

Christ and rising with Him, we leave behind all that is taken away in the cross and receive all that is our salvation in glory.

Thus God performs not only the work of justification whereby the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, but He also performs the work of sanctification so that the holiness which Christ earned for us is actually worked in us through the power of Christ's death and resurrection.

This is a very important point. There have been two errors which have appeared in the Christian Church and which seem, at first glance, to be opposite extremes. There is, on the one hand, the error of Antinomianism which, in its more radical form, denies the necessity of good works. There are differences in antinomianism. Some antinomians take the position that, while good works are desirable, they are not by any means necessary. Whether one who is justified does good works or not is not really an important question. It is good if he does; but there is no real need for good works. Other, more radical antinomians, take the position that good works are harmful. It is far better that the justified child of God avoids them, for they can do nothing else but rob the grace of God of its precious character. There is even a certain kind of practical antinomianism which appears from time to time in the lives of God's people. This kind of antinomianism is not interested as such in the theory of this position. Rather it makes every effort to excuse sin in the life of the believer with a multitude of efforts towards self-justification. But all these excuses come to the point where they deny the seriousness of sin because one is justified by grace alone.

Partly in order to escape this kind of antinomianism, some have fallen into the error of Arminianism. They have reasoned that it is a great mistake to deny the necessity of good works, and the only way to avoid that mistake is to take the position that good works are necessary for salvation. They thus make good works, in one form or another, the ground of salvation. God saves those who do good works and He saves on the basis of good works. That seems, in the minds of many, the only alternative to the error of antinomianism.

And, because Arminianism always teaches that salvation is

dependent upon good works (among which good works is usually to be included the work of faith), Arminianism always has strong perfectionistic tendencies. If salvation is dependent upon good works in any sense of the word, good works proceed from the natural ability of man and not from the work of salvation. These good works cannot be both the basis of salvation and a part of salvation at the same time. This is obviously absurd. And with the tendency to ascribe to man apart from grace the ability to do good comes the tendency to deny total depravity and the failure to take sin seriously as rooted in man's nature. Perfectionism is not far removed from such a position and it ought not to strike us as being strange that perfectionist tendencies are often to be found among those who espouse some form of Arminianism. This is evident especially from Hoekema's article when he speaks of occasional lapses into sin and describes sin as faults which now and then appear in the life of the believer. And this was in connection with an exegesis of Romans 7 which could only be Arminian.

But, while these two errors of antinomianism and arminianism seem to be poles apart, opposite extremes, nevertheless it is very striking that they both are basically guilty of the same error. They both deny the sovereign work of sanctification. It is true that they deny this work from different viewpoints. The antinomian denies that God performs such a work in the hearts of those who are justified. And the Arminian denies, at least in part, that the work of sanctification is the work of God. But the fact is that both have this in common, that they deny the Scriptural doctrine concerning sanctification. This is very significant and striking.

Thus Paul teaches, in Romans 6, that it is impossible to continue in sin that grace may abound because, being baptized in Christ is being buried with Him into His death and is being raised with Him into newness of life.

Now it is true that, in a certain sense of the word, this is a work of God which happens only once in the life of the child of God. There simply can be no doubt about this at all. Surely there is no person who believes that the life of the child of God is a life which begins with total depravity, proceeds to sanctification, reverts back to total depravity, has sanctification repeated in it, again lapses into total depravity and again is

renewed by sanctification. When God sanctifies His people, He makes them holy and that work is preserved in them throughout all of life until they are finally made perfectly holy in heaven.

In that sense of the word, MacLeod is correct when he insists that being buried with Christ and raised with Him is something which happens only once in the lifetime of the child of God.

But the question is not thus answered. The question remains whether this sanctification is a completed work at the very first moment when it is performed. Does God sanctify entirely so that He makes His people completely free from sin? The answer, quite obviously, is no. And so the obligation rests upon anyone who discusses this problem to spell out carefully and precisely what this work of sanctification is in the life of the child of God while he still lives in the world. If being buried with Christ and being raised with Him means to be sanctified, is there not a sense in which the fruit of this work of Christ and our union with Him continues through all of life? And is there not a sense then, in which we can speak of daily being buried with Christ, and daily rising with Him?

It is with this in mind that we can turn to verse 6 where the apostle speaks of the old man:

Knowing this, that our old man is
crucified with him, that the body of sin
might be destroyed, that henceforth we
should not serve sin.

Now it is true that, just as sanctification is a work of God which is principally accomplished at that moment when God renews the heart, and that this work of sanctification is rooted in the cross, so also at that moment of sanctification, the old man is also crucified. It is true also that this is a work of God which is principally complete.

But the fact remains that, even as sanctification is only accomplished in principle in this life, so also is the crucifixion of the old man also accomplished in principle. The figure is indeed of the old man nailed with Christ to the cross. The old man is therefore, killed. He died when Christ died. But that old man is, after all, we ourselves as we are apart from grace.

We died as the old man of sin. But the conclusion cannot be that we now no longer have an old man with which we must wrestle. For this would imply that sanctification is complete and we are now perfect.

That this is also the meaning of the apostle is evident from the following considerations:

1) In the first place, he discusses the purpose of the crucifixion of the old man and defines this as being 'that the body of sin might be destroyed.'

There has been some dispute between commentators as to the precise meaning of the phrase "body of sin" (τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας). Some have interpreted this to mean 'the whole mass of sin; i.e., they have seen in this an expression which refers to all the sins which the believer committed before his regeneration. This is the position of Calvin, among others. But different commentaries have pointed out that Paul is speaking in the context of the close union between body and soul and of the fact that the body is the instrument by which the soul functions and through which the sins of the soul come to manifestation. (Cf. vss. 12,13). Whatever may be the precise meaning (and we favor the latter), the fact is that this cannot be interpreted in such a way that all sin is forever gone in the life of the Christian. Scripture is very clear on the point, and none will deny that there is much sin yet present in the regenerated and sanctified saint. If then this is the purpose of the crucifixion of the old man, and this purpose is achieved; and, if sin still remains, then it can only be because the old man is crucified in principle.

2) Secondly, another purpose clause is also added. The first purpose clause is expressed by ἵνα with the subjunctive, while the second is expressed by the articular infinitive in the genitive case. And this second purpose clause is not expressive of the purpose of the crucifixion of the old man directly, but is a subordinate purpose to the first purpose clause: i.e., the body of sin has been destroyed with the purpose that sin should no longer have dominion over us.⁴

⁴Some commentators make this a result clause. Purpose and result are closely related, both looking at the same thing from a different point of view. The difference makes no essential alteration in our argument.

Here then is what the apostle means when he speaks of the crucifixion of the old man. Sin has no more dominion over us. Now, notice that the apostle does not say that sin no longer exists in us. He does not say that the result is that our old man is forever gone. Rather, he says that the purpose of the crucifixion of the old man is that the body of sin is destroyed, and that the purpose of this destruction of the body of sin is that sin no longer has dominion over us. This is important. This is the fruit then of sanctification. It ends in the destruction, utter and complete, of the dominion of sin. And this theme the apostle carries on in the following verses.

This same idea is repeated in verse 9. In verse 11 also the apostle admonishes the church to "reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin." Again, the apostle does not say, "Sin is dead in you." This would be in conflict with the rest of Scripture and would violently oppose the every day experience of the child of God. Rather, the apostle speaks of the fact that we are dead to sin. This is quite different. And so he can add: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you. . . ." vss. 12-14.

Thus, while in a certain and principle sense, sanctification is one work accomplished once for all, in another sense, it goes on all our life long. And, likewise, even as our old man was once, principally, crucified, so also does that same old man have to be put to death all our life long.

With this also Calvin agrees. He writes, in his comments on this passage:

The old man, as the Old Testament is so called with reference to the New; for he begins to be old, when by degrees he is destroyed by a commencing regeneration. (The underscoring is our's). But, what he means is the whole nature which we bring from the womb, and which is so incapable of the kingdom of God, that it must

so far die as we are renewed to real life. This old man, he says, is fastened to the cross of Christ, for by its power he is slain: and he expressly referred to the cross, that he might more distinctly show, that we cannot be otherwise put to death than by partaking of his death.⁵

There are a couple of more remarks before we end this article which we wish to make.

In the first place, this is also the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism:

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

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

What is the mortification of the old man?

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.

What is the quickening of the new man?

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. (Lord's Day XXXIII, Q. & A. 88-90.)

It is clear that the Catechism also considers this a process which goes on throughout life.

In the second place, it is clear from all this that MacLeod's description of the traditional view of the old man is not adequate. You will recall that he described the traditional view of the old man as being "indwelling sin." This is not complete. Scripture makes it very clear that the old man is not merely indwelling sin, but is also the corrupt and perverse nature with which we are born and which is, in the words of the Confessio Belgica:

a corruption of the whole nature, and an hereditary disease, wherewith infants themselves are infected even in their mother's womb, and which

⁵Pringle translation, Eerdmans, 1948

produceth in man all sorts of sin, being in him
as a root thereof; and therefore is so vile
and abominable in the sight of God, that it
is sufficient to condemn all mankind.

In the third place, we have not yet dealt with the question
of what precisely is meant by the principle killing of the old man
in distinction from this work of sanctification as it continues
in the life of the child of God. This is an important question,
but it shall have to wait, along with our treatment of the other
texts, until the next issue of the Journal, D.V.

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FAMILY VISITATION

--Prof. H. C. Hoeksema--

The immediate occasion of this article lies in a request of the Officebearers' Conference of Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Their request was for an introduction at their October, 1972 meeting which would deal with three questions concerning Family Visitation. Those questions were: 1) What is the nature of family visitation? 2) What is the purpose of family visitation? 3) By whom should family visitation be conducted? At that meeting of officebearers the writer promised to expand on the remarks which he made orally in a future issue of this journal. Besides, there was one aspect of the subject in which the elders were especially interested and on which the writer could only suggest a few thoughts at the time, namely, the method, or actual practice, of family visitation. And the promise was made that in this article that aspect of the subject would be treated in greater detail. Hence, this contribution to our journal is in fulfillment of the promises mentioned above.

At the same time, this article may be considered as somewhat of a sequel to the conference papers on Pastoral Counselling which appeared in Volume V, Number 2 of this journal, and particularly as a sequel to some of the remarks made in the course of the discussion at that conference, a discussion which is summarized in the same issue of our journal.

The writer's personal interest in the subject stems in general from the fact that pastoral counselling--or, as we prefer to call it in our seminary, Poimenics--is one of the subjects which he is required to teach in the seminary; and family visitation belongs in that area of Poimenics, although it also belongs in the area of Church Polity in so far as it is required by our Church Order. In this connection we also hasten to warn the reader that family visitation is but one phase of the study of Poimenics; and we shall have to pre-suppose some of the principles of Poimenics in the present discussion, rather than state them and elaborate on them, lest we involve ourselves in a much broader discussion than

is proper at this time. As far as our special interest in family visitation is concerned, we may note that it stems, in the first place, from the conviction that it is a Reformed and Scriptural practice which ought to be upheld, especially in our day when it is increasingly de-emphasized and even abandoned. In the second place, it stems from the conviction that we have something unique and something of worthwhile and positive value as far as pastoral care is concerned in our custom of family visitation. There is in our day a rather large emphasis on pastoral counselling (I do not care for the term, but this is the popular terminology of our day), and especially an emphasis on pastoral counselling in the sense of dealing with special problems--frequently the problems of individuals. And much of the discussion of pastoral counselling centers on this problem-solving aspect of counselling; so-called therapeutic counselling has the emphasis. There is very little written and said about what we might term the "normal sheep and lambs" of Christ's flock here on earth. And family visitation is concerned for the most part with those "normal sheep and lambs." In the third place, our interest stems from the conviction that family visitation, rightly conducted, is and can be a valuable instrument in pastoral care and in the life and well-being of the members of the flock and of the flock as a whole. Moreover, if officebearers are willing to work at it, this valuable instrument of family visitation can be improved and made even more valuable.

It is in this connection that we intend to give some attention in this article to the Method and Practice of family visitation in connection with the three questions mentioned above. We shall do that especially in connection with our treatment of the Purpose. This is probably the area in which most officebearers desire help, as well as the area where there is room for improvement. The writer is no longer a local pastor and is no longer called to engage in pastoral care. But he remembers well that as a novice minister he faced the task of family visitation for the first time with no little trepidation. This is quite possibly the one task which is most difficult for a new officebearer, be he pastor or elder. Not improbably it remains the most unattractive aspect of the work of many a pastor and elder even though he may become

accustomed somewhat to the performance of the chore. Perhaps not a few would rather be excused from this work. And not infrequently the approach is that of finishing as many calls in as short a time as possible and "getting it over with." This is, of course, a bad attitude; and it can only be detrimental for the actual practice of family visitation. If one performs a task somewhat unwillingly and under compulsion, he is less likely to perform it well. Part of the reason for all this we believe, lies in a faulty method. The writer believes that family visitation, rightly conducted, can be some of the most profitable and most enjoyable labor, both for pastor (and elders) and for flock. It is with this in mind that some suggestions will be made as to Method and Practice.

Its Nature

Family visitation is a Reformed institution of long standing. It was practiced already in Geneva under John Calvin. In the Dutch churches of the reformation period, it was officially decreed by the earliest convent of the Reformed Churches, the Convent of Wezel, 1568. Monsma and Van Dellen, in The Church Order Oomenary (Third Edition), write, p. 110:

The present reading of this article is the redaction of 1586 and constitutes an abbreviation or summary of what the Wezelian Convention had formulated on this score, and which in part reads as follows: "They (the Elders) shall faithfully investigate whether they (the Church members) manifest themselves uprightly in walk and conduct, in the duties of godliness, in the faithful instruction of their households in the matter of family prayers, (morning and evening prayers) and such like matters; they shall admonish them to these duties with consideration, but also in all seriousness and according to conditions and circumstances; they shall admonish them to steadfastness, or strengthen them to patience, or spur them on to a serious minded fear of God; such as need comfort and admonition they shall comfort and admonish, and if need be they shall report a matter to their fellow Elders, who together with them are appointed to exercise discipline; and besides these matters they

shall correct that which can be corrected according to the gravity of the sin committed; nor shall they neglect, each one in his own district, to encourage them to send their children to catechism."

This designation is too long, as was soon felt, (1586), but who would care to deny that it contains a wealth of valuable suggestive material even for this day and age?

In our present Church Order this reference to family visitation is greatly condensed. Article 23 reads as follows:

The office of the Elders, in addition to what was said in Article 16 to be their duty in common with the Minister of the Word, is to take heed that the Ministers, together with their fellow-Elders and the Deacons, faithfully discharge their office, and both before and after the Lord's Supper, as time and circumstances may demand, for the edification of the Churches to visit the families of the Congregation, in order particularly to comfort and instruct the members, and also to exhort others in respect to the Christian Religion.

Also in its re-institution of family visitation the churches were true to their reformatory character. Family visitation was not a replacement or substitute for the Roman Catholic confessional, as has sometimes been suggested. But it was a return to the practice of the early church fathers and a return to the principle of Scripture. True enough, Scripture does not enjoin that there be formal family visitation; nevertheless, it speaks frequently of individual and house-to-house care and instruction. This kind of labor is implied in an admonition such as Hebrews 13: 17: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." Or again in I Thessalonians 5: 12-14 we read of such spiritual care: "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.... warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the

weak, be patient toward all men." And in Acts 20: 20 and 21 in his farewell to the elders of Ephesus, the apostle Paul reminds them how during his two years' stay at Ephesus "...I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Many similar passages could be mentioned which, while they do not speak of family visitation as such, nevertheless point to the idea of spiritual care bestowed upon the individuals and families of the flock. There can be no doubt about it, therefore, that in instituting family visitation the Reformed churches were true to the reformation and true to Scripture.

In the second place, we wish to emphasize that family visitation is in its nature official labor. This can well stand emphasis in our day when the very idea of the office and of the official labor of the church is belittled both by officebearers themselves and by those committed to their care. This is not to be understood, of course, in an authoritarian sense, as though there were some special magic implied in the mere fact that one who is a minister or an elder visits an individual or family. But the greatest danger today is not that of authoritarianism; it is rather the danger of a belittling and despising of the offices instituted by Christ Himself, offices through which Christ is pleased to perform His work of grace. Family visitation is conducted by those who are called to office by Christ Himself. When a pastor or elder visits in the home of the sheep on the occasion of family visitation, it is not the same as when that same pastor and elder make a social call or come on a Sunday evening's visit. The conversation of family visitation between pastor and sheep is not the same as a mere brother-to-brother conversation, even though the latter should be a highly spiritual conversation. Family visitation involves--both for those who visit and for those who are visited--an official visit. We shall not dwell at length on this entire idea of the office: this would take us too far afield for the purposes of this essay. We only wish to emphasize the key idea that this means that it pleases Christ to speak His Word, to work His work, to impart His grace and blessings of salvation, through

this labor. Principally, this is as true of family visitation as it is of preaching of the Word or of catechetical instruction or of the disciplinary labors of the elders. To be sure, there is this limitation: this is true, of course, according as and in the measure that this labor is very really conducted in His Name and according to His Word. It is true according as Christ's own Word, the Word of the Scriptures, is at the very center of the visit.

Now there are two implications in this which are of importance both to those who visit and to those who are visited. The first implication is that of a tremendous responsibility. This is true for the officebearers. They do not labor on their own authority and in their own right and according to their own designs and insights. No, they are sent. They are servants, strictly servants --not of the church, but of the Lord Christ, Who is the Office-bearer in God's house. They are not sent to deliver their own word. They are not sent to speak their own wisdom. They are not sent to do their own will. No, they have an assigned task. They come in the Name of and upon the authority of Christ. And woe be unto them if they bring their own word and their own wisdom in that Name of Christ! Woe be unto them if they waste their time on all kinds of vain and useless and carnal conversation when they should be delivering the Word of Christ! Woe be unto them if they fleece the sheep or poison the flock instead of feeding and shepherdizing them. For their charge does not involve their own sheep, but Christ's! However, this responsibility also extends to those who are visited. How easy it is--especially, for example, in a small congregation where all know one another on a first-name basis--to forget this or deliberately and knowingly to deny it. How easy it is to assume the attitude, "It's none of his (the pastor's or elder's) business to know my personal life and affairs." Or how easily one may think to himself, "He can talk all he wants to, but I'll do as I please." The sin of this is not primarily unbrotherliness, but the sin of flouting the authority of Christ Himself. It is the calling of the flock to be in obedience, to be in submission, and that, too, as to those who watch for their souls. It is the calling and responsibility of the sheep to "esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." This has nothing to do,

you understand, with anything natural. This is the calling of the highly educated and intelligent young man with a string of degrees over against the godly old elder who probably never finished high school. It is the calling of the elderly saint with a large amount of experience in the battle of faith over against the youthful pastor who has just entered upon the ministry. It is the calling of the youth over against the elder or minister whom he might class as an "old fogey." The relationship and the calling are strictly spiritual. And in the deepest sense, what is at issue is obedience to the authority of Christ Himself. Perhaps it is not out of place to suggest in this connection that there is room for pulpit-instruction on this score, so that the church understands clearly what is taking place at an occasion such as family visitation.

At the same time, there is the implication of encouragement and assurance in this idea of the office--again, for both the officebearer and the flock. What officebearer, if he is a right thinking and consecrated servant of Christ, does not have need of the assurance which arises out of the very awareness that he is Christ's servant? He is in need of the assurance that Christ will equip him for his task. He is in need of the assurance that Christ will use him to accomplish His work. And when he looks back upon an evening's labor in family visitation and is probably inclined to be discouraged for various reasons, he is in need of the encouragement which can only arise out of the awareness that by His sovereign grace in Christ Jesus, God certainly did accomplish His work and will continue to make fruitful the labor performed and the Word spoken. He is in need of the assurance that "our labor is not in vain in the Lord." The same is true for the sheep. Is it not reason for joy and for hope and for thankfulness and for a glad reception that we know that Christ Himself comes to visit our homes in His grace and lovingkindness, comes to feed us and to instruct us, to guide us and to lead us, to warn and to admonish and to encourage us, through His own appointed officebearers?

In the third place, family visitation as part of the labor of pastoral care is classified technically as visitatio stata, in distinction from visitatio occasionata. It is fixed, regular

visitation, in distinction from occasional visitation, that is, visitation which is concerned with some occasional, special circumstance. Family visitation involves a regular visit (whether only annually or more frequently) at an announced time to every family and individual in the congregation by a committee of either two elders or of the pastor and an elder.

Right here lies the unique character of family visitation, first of all. It is concerned with what I would call the "normal" sheep. By this I do not mean a perfect sheep: there is no such sheep on this side of heaven. The "normal" sheep is the sheep with only a small beginning of the new obedience, and much sin. He is the sheep who is principally a new man, but who has an old man, a sinful nature, against which he has to fight all his life long. He is a sheep, a Christian, who is a pilgrim and stranger in the earth. He is a sheep who lives this life which is nothing but a continual death. He is a sheep in the midst of a world which stands diametrically opposed to him, a world full of temptations and allurements, a world which is mighty to persecute and to threaten persecution for Christ's sake. And he is a sheep, therefore, who is in need of all of the care of a shepherd. You see, it is not as though "normal" sheep can be left to themselves, while the "abnormal" sheep are in need of care. And by speaking of the normal sheep in distinction from the abnormal, we do not intend the term "abnormal" in any derogatory sense. In the first place, it is certainly the "abnormal" sheep who is in need of a shepherd's love and care in a special measure. Besides, in a certain sense even the "normal" sheep might be termed "abnormal" as long as they are imperfect and as long as they are here in the midst of death and in the midst of a wicked world and subject to all kinds of suffering and temptation and sinning daily. And in addition, how easily and how frequently and for how many sheep the "abnormal" becomes their daily portion, becomes such that it is almost "normal" for them. But the distinction is a valid one, nevertheless. There are those sheep who are wayward, those sheep who succumb to temptation, who walk in sin, who find themselves faced by special problems, who are assailed by doubt, who are spiritually troubled. There are those sheep, too, who find themselves in special situations, situations in which not all the sheep find themselves.

There are the sick. There are the bereaved. There are those threatened with mental break-down. There are those with marital problems. There are those with "problem children." There could be a long list of such "abnormal" situations added to those mentioned. What we have in mind is those sheep in those situations which require the special, the occasional, pastoral visit. It is in this sense that we speak of family visitation as being concerned with the "normal" sheep and with the entire flock.

Because of this, family visitation is also concerned with the "normal" care of the sheep. It is concerned with the normal feeding and the normal guidance of the sheep. As such it is, in the first place, more of a positive nature. It does not partake so much of a problem-solving, therapeutic character. This is not to say, of course, that one will not encounter such problem situations in the course of family visitation. But in the main this is not the case. For the most part, family visitation is conducted on a somewhat even keel. The visits may almost become somewhat "run-of-the-mill." Perhaps it is exactly this run-of-the-mill character of family visitation which for some makes the work difficult, so that they are somewhat at a loss as to how to go about it and how to be "fresh" every year anew. And perhaps it is this run-of-the-mill character of the normal care of the normal sheep which makes the pastoral care of abnormal sheep seem glamorous and more attractive by comparison.

This leads us to a second observation, namely, that family visitation serves the purpose of preventive care. This can indeed be very important. Family visitation affords the opportunity to discover potentially serious problems and to nip them in the bud, so to speak, before they become actually serious and severe. And it affords the opportunity to further positive, spiritual up-building; it is conducive to spiritual health and growth and development. Just as in the realm of the natural and physical we can speak of preventive medicine and preventive care, so it is also in the realm of the spiritual. An annual check-up may discover some physical problem before it becomes serious and dangerous. And good nutrition and good habits of living will foster ^{such} a degree of physical health and strength that one may be able to fight off

infection and disease far better than if he were in poor physical condition. So it is also spiritually. It would be a serious mistake, therefore, for an undershepherd to concentrate all his care and attention upon the sheep with special problems, necessary and attractive as it may be to some to engage in this labor. A shepherd who would do this would soon discover, I fear, that he has more abnormal sheep than normal sheep in his flock.

In the second place, family visitation is distinct exactly in that it concerns families. True, in some instances the visits necessarily involve single individuals; but in the main families are visited. This is different from most pastoral care of the occasional class. In the latter it is usually individuals or segments of families which are the object of spiritual care. But is there not something more involved here? When in our Reformed churches we make the family unit the object of spiritual care in family visitation, is this not in complete harmony with our covenantal approach? Is it not based upon the truth that God gathers His church and establishes His covenant in the line of the generations of believers? Is it not in harmony with the truth that God establishes and realizes His covenant with believers and their seed? Surely, this does not mean that in family visitation there is no individual care and attention bestowed. It does not mean, for example, that all the conversation takes place only with the father as head of the household, or even with the father and mother exclusively. Nevertheless, family visitation is not intended to be individualistic. In fact, all individualism is contrary to the very genius of the Reformed faith; individualism is characteristic of Pelagianism. And while family visitation certainly requires individual care, it implies that such spiritual care be bestowed in the context of the family unit, in the context of husband-wife, parent-children, brother-and-sister relationships. Especially in these times which are characterized by a degree of disintegration in family life, when the family unit has become frequently no more than an empty idea, when actual family living in many instances is a thing unknown, we should hold fast to this covenantal approach and should appreciate, rather than deprecate, an institution such as family visitation. And family visitation,

in turn, should also be employed to foster and to stress the importance of the covenant home with all its blessings and responsibilities.

In connection with the immediately preceding, it should also be understood that family visitation is not even concerned with a number of separate families which stand in no relation to one another. It deals with families-in-the-congregation. Ultimately the purpose of family visitation is the welfare of the whole flock, the congregation, to which those families belong.

Finally, we may point out that family visitation involves the visiting of the families in their homes. This, too, is important. It is a mistake to change this. It would be a mistake to meet the family, or even a group of families, at an appointed time in the church parlors or in the pastor's study. It is in the home that you can meet real people in a real family in the real life-situation. True, this has its limitations. The objection has been raised against family visitation that it is mechanical, or that it creates an artificial atmosphere, with the result that you do not visit real people in their real situation. And in a practical sense, this objection has a certain validity. It is certainly possible, both for the visitors and for those visited, to concoct an artificial atmosphere or to put on a virtually impenetrable shell, so that the real person is successfully covered up and hidden behind that shell. But also this can be overcome, and it must be overcome by both visitors and visited. To an extent this is a problem in all of pastoral care; it is not peculiar to family visitation. But we would again go too far astray in our discussion to treat this problem in detail.

Its Purpose and Practice

It is not difficult to outline the general purpose of family visitation. Our Church Order speaks of this purpose as far as the congregation is concerned as being that of "edification," that is, spiritual upbuilding. And as far as the members are concerned, it speaks of comfort and instruction. The original article, of which our present article is a condensation, speaks basically the same language, though it is more detailed. The reader can turn back to

this article as it is quoted earlier in this paper for the details. We may summarize the purpose as follows:

- 1) To inquire into the spiritual condition and well-being, the life and walk, of the sheep.
- 2) To inquire into their knowledge of the truth and into their growth in grace and knowledge.
- 3) To give comfort, guidance, admonition, and warning, according to need.
- 4) Thus to render to the individual members, the families, and the congregation as a whole spiritual benefit and upbuilding in the faith and in a sanctified walk.

About this purpose we must make a few remarks.

In the first place, we may observe that this is a very large and inclusive purpose. It is as extensive as life itself. It takes in every conceivable aspect of the life of the child of God in the midst of the world.

In the second place, we may note that the purpose of family visitation is not basically different from the purpose of the preaching of the Word as it is directed to the whole congregation. Of the four items mentioned above, not one could be excluded from the purpose of the preaching of the Word in the weekly gatherings of the congregation for public worship. This need not surprise us; nor need it deter us from family visitation. It simply means that there is an underlying unity between this aspect of pastoral care and the preaching. Nor need it deter us from family visitation as though the latter were useless; it only means that in family visitation we have an additional means provided for the edification of the saints and of the congregation, a means which should be thankfully received and employed. But there is also a difference. The difference is obviously this, that family visitation is more direct and personal and specifically adapted to the situation and the needs of the family being visited. And this difference should be kept in mind. The purpose of family visitation is not to preach a little sermon in the home in the same fashion as in the meetings for public worship. It is exactly this opportunity for direct, individual, personally adapted and applied ministry of the Word which makes family visitation beneficial in a way and to a degree

which cannot be attained when the Word is preached to the entire congregation at once. For family visitation to be successful it is of prime importance that the officebearers, as well as those visited, grasp this opportunity firmly and forthrightly.

In the third place, we may observe that the purpose stated above is a "large order" for an annual visit of perhaps one hour's duration. It is no wonder that the Church Order in Article 23 speaks of more than an annual visit, speaks of visiting "both before and after the Lord's Supper." The latter would imply as many as eight visits annually. True, the Church Order qualifies this by the words, "as time and circumstances may demand." And we have simply made it the custom to conduct family visitation annually on the basis, I suppose, of this "rubber" in the article. I suppose, too, that it would be almost too much to hope for that we would increase the frequency of family visitation; the tendency is rather to decrease it in our day. But simple common sense tells us that more frequent visits would certainly go farther toward the achievement of such a large and broad purpose, a purpose as broad as life itself. And while there are indeed many claims made upon the time of pastors and elders--yes, and also upon the time of the sheep--I dare say that it certainly would not be impossible to conduct family visitation more frequently, especially in a congregation of moderate size. I suggest that this possibility be seriously considered.

In the fourth place, we may observe that the purpose as stated above is rather vague and abstract, even as it is general. While it may serve as a general description of the goal of family visitation, it is not very helpful as far as actually conducting family visitation is concerned. It leaves one with many questions as to how all this is to be translated into a living, fruitful, spontaneous visit.

And this brings us to the subject of method and practice.

How must we go about conducting family visitation?

Perhaps we can narrow down the answer to this question by making a few negative observations, first of all.

In the first place, it is not the purpose of family visitation to conduct some kind of inquisition into the spiritual condition and walk of the sheep. It is not the purpose to "grill" and

to cross-examine and to entrap the sheep in the style that an attorney might question a witness in court. The sheep are not on trial. This very idea is contrary to the shepherd-sheep relationship. And apart from anything else, there is nothing which will more quickly defeat the purpose of family visitation than to leave the impression on the sheep that such an inquisition is going on. Indeed, inquiry must be made into many things. But an inquiry which takes the style of an inquisition will fail. Instead of getting at the truth concerning the spiritual condition and walk of the sheep, it will create a reaction of recalcitrance and resentment, a reaction of defensiveness and reluctance. And in some cases it will produce a reaction of fear and nervousness and a result of being tongue-tied on the part of the sheep, and especially the lambs. This approach is utterly self-defeating.

In the second place, to ask a number of general questions concerning things spiritual or concerning one's spiritual condition is also a mistake. I can remember hearing questions of that kind on family visitation. "And how is it with your spiritual life?" is a question of that kind. That is a question which I would term a real "dood doener." Indeed, it is an easy question to ask. But it is general. It is vague. You can get all kinds of answers to a question like that, or possibly no answer at all. What is a developing teenager going to answer to that kind of question? Or what is a mother going to answer, especially if she is a bit nervous and embarrassed--even though unduly--because the pastor and an elder are visiting? That is the kind of question to which you could get a one-word answer, such as "good" or "fair" or "normal." How do you proceed from that point, then? Or you could get an answer an hour long, without getting an honest answer at all. Or you could get an honest answer which might take considerably longer than an hour from some very articulate sheep. Again, this approach is self-defeating. Besides, this approach will surely lay family visitation open to the just charge that it is repetitious and monotonously the same from year to year, and therefore useless.

Others have suggested that family visitation should be conducted along a rather fixed and rigid pattern and with the aid of a set of specific questions.

In Dr. Peter Y. De Jong's book, Taking Heed To The Flock (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich. 1955), the author quotes a set of questions which was adopted by the Consistory of Utrecht, The Netherlands, at one time. They are found on pages 77 and 78:

Questions which the Elders of the church at Utrecht are to ask the members of the congregation at the time of family visitation:

1. How many constitute the particular family and who these individuals are (father, mother, children, servants, others);
2. Whether all the members of the family have received Holy Baptism;
3. Whether all the members of the family have placed themselves under the supervision of the consistory;
4. Which members of the family have been permitted to partake of the Holy Supper;
5. Whether all the members of the family faithfully attend public worship, especially on the Lord's Day, and as far as this is possible also during the week; whether there is growth in the knowledge of the truth; and whether the head of the family investigates this, particularly on the Lord's Day;
6. Whether all children of school age attend the Christian School, and if not, what reasons are given for this;
7. Whether the members of the family who do not yet attend the Lord's Supper faithfully attend catechetical classes; whether the head of the family supervises their preparation for this; and whether he is acquainted with the fruits of that work;
8. Whether those who have been permitted to come to the Lord's Supper also faithfully make use of this means of grace; and whether the father and mother of the family set a good example in this respect;
9. How those who are under church discipline are conducting themselves (this is to be done in private, especially in the case of those who are under silent censure);

10. Whether the head of the family faithfully leads the family in prayer and in teaching them the Word;
11. Whether the children and servants manifest obedience to the fifth commandment;
12. Whether there are any children away from home, and if so, in what circumstances they find themselves; whether these have already made profession of their faith; whether they faithfully attend the services where they are;
13. How the head of the family watches for the spiritual welfare of the servants which may be in the home;
14. Whether there is any difficulty or trouble in the home, and whether the members live in peace and unity with their neighbors and the members of the church;
15. How the family conducts itself on the Lord's Day;
16. Whether the family according to its ability supports the poor and the church;
17. Whether the family in any way needs the advice or help of the consistory.

Now whatever may have been the need and the use made of such a set of questions as this in the congregation of Utrecht at the time the questions were adopted, it ought to be perfectly evident: 1) That there are several questions here which ought to be unnecessary and which in our congregations would be unnecessary. The answers ought to be known and can be ascertained before family visitation is conducted. Such matters as who are the members of the household, who have made confession of faith, whether catechism attendance is faithful, whether faithful use is made of the means of grace, etc.--these are all questions which belong to the supervisory labor of the consistory. 2) In this list there are also several questions which are far too general, questions which by themselves could constitute the basis for an hour's visit. 3) If a set of questions such as this is used as a guide, it stands to reason that family visitation will be much the same year after year, no matter who the visiting officebearers are. 4) There is one glaring omission in family visitation conducted with a guide such as this, namely: the Word of God.

In his discussion of the proper practice of family visitation, Dr. De Jong also proposes a number of questions. On pages 79-82 he writes as follows:

If the congregation understands the nature and purpose of these calls, it is not awkward to begin with a direct question to one of the members of the family. And in order that the discussion may be guided properly, some of the following questions ought to be asked.

There are first of all questions of a general nature which should be asked of all. (1) Are all the members faithful in attending divine worship and using the means of grace? That this comes first occasions no surprise. From the lips of the members themselves the officers should know whether they are interested in the service of the Lord. (2) Is there a measure of spiritual growth with each according to age and circumstances? To be able to ask this question properly the elder himself should understand the nature of spiritual life in its several manifestations. We may not expect, as a general rule, the same clear testimony from the young Christians as from those of a more mature age. Although Christ should be personally known and loved and served by all, Christian knowledge and experience deepens as the years go by. (3) Is there peace and unity in the home? Do the several members manifest love and helpfulness in their relations to each other? Often disharmony in the home will do great damage to the tender plant of faith. How careful particularly the father and mother should be in setting an example of love and godliness in the home! (4) Are spiritual matters discussed in the home, especially on the Lord's day? Where secularism so strongly prevails today and threatens the church with undoing, it is necessary to insist on the cultivation of this Christian virtue. Also in connection with this, is provision made for good reading material for old and young alike? We are living in an age, when the printed page is very influential. Books and magazines of all sorts find their way into our homes. Does the father supervise the reading of his children, especially of the young people? Nor is it inappropriate to ask whether what is heard over the

radio, particularly on the Lord's day, contributes to the spiritual edification of the family. (5) Is family worship faithfully and profitably conducted? This of course requires ideally that the father leads in audible prayer, reads the Scriptures reverently and if possible comments on the significance of the passage for the family. Likewise, the elders should know whether every member of the family, even the younger children who have learned to read, are in possession of a Bible and make diligent use of it for themselves. (6) Do the children and young people who have not yet professed Christ in the church faithfully attend the catechetical classes? Is their study properly supervised by one or both of the parents? Does the father speak especially to the young people of his family about the necessity and privilege of confessing Christ before men, also warning his children of the sin of breaking the covenant of the Lord? (7) Does the proper spiritual relation exist between the members and the church, particularly the officers? Do the parents by their words and works set an example of honoring the minister, the elders and the deacons for the sake of the holy offices to which these men have been called? (8) Do the members of the family make use of the societies? Also this opportunity for spiritual development should receive greater appreciation by our people. The elders ought to stress the value of such Bible study as well as of the Christian fellowship which is enjoyed at such meetings. (9) What is the relation of the family to the neighbors? This includes not only those who are members of Christ's church, but also unbelievers. Do the members of the family witness for Christ whenever and wherever possible? (10) How do the several members of the family conduct themselves in their daily life? Are they aware that they are "living epistles, read of all men?" The elders can do much to instil in the minds and hearts of the believers the consciousness that all of life must be controlled by the Word, and that one's

daily work is a vocation of the Lord. (11) Does the family faithfully and according to its ability support the causes of the kingdom of God? These gifts should be preceded and accompanied by personal prayers. Likewise, the parents should be asked whether they teach their children Christian stewardship, so that when these grow up and make their own living, they realize their obligations to God in financial matters too. (12) Does the head of the family try to promote the sense of true Christian distinctiveness among the various members, especially the young people?

There will of course be other questions which should be asked. First of all, the elders should direct their attention to the father and satisfy themselves that he is faithfully seeking to do his duty. (1) Is he mindful of his position as the head of the family, and does he daily strive to do justice to the obligations involved? (2) Is his authority in the home properly respected by all? (3) Does he execute his priestly duties in the home, praying for himself and his family and the church both privately and publicly? (4) Does he concern himself with the spiritual development of his wife and children, also seeing to it that the children faithfully attend church and catechetical classes and providing them with good Christian literature in the home? (5) Does he see to it that the Christian school is attended? If not, why not? (6) Does he set a good example in his personal life and in his relations to his family and his neighbors?

For the mother there are also certain questions. (1) Is she as a Christian mother aware of her position and influence in the family, especially in regard to the training of the children? (2) Does she seek to assist her husband in every way possible in his important work as head of the home? (3) Does she give all her time to her calling as wife and mother? If not, are there legitimate reasons for her to seek employment outside the

home? Is she aware of the peculiar difficulties involved in trying to be gainfully employed and still keep up her home? Does her home, particularly the children, suffer in any way, if this is the case?

Also the children are to be addressed. Some of the questions which may be asked of them include the following. (1) Are they obedient to their parents and superiors, for the Lord's sake? (2) Are they conscious of their peculiar covenant relationship to God? Here the parents have a great obligation, since they have promised to train their children in the ways of the Lord and to explain to them the way of salvation. (3) Are they faithful in attending the catechetical classes, and do they benefit from these as well as from the preaching of the Word in accordance with their age and training? (4) Are the young people preparing for profession of faith? (5) Do they understand the church's position on the Christian's relation to the world in general and to the use of amusements in particular? (6) For what calling in life are they preparing themselves? Have they given any consideration to the possibility of entering full-time Kingdom service in one form or another?

In fairness to the author, it should be added that he makes some comments about these proposed questions which should be considered in order to see them in their proper perspective. For one thing, he writes on page 78: "There is a danger that the visits become mere repetitions of previous calls, especially in the larger congregations where it is practically impossible for every elder to become acquainted with the whole church. This obstacle may be overcome to a degree, if the elders are assigned to certain districts each year and if the consistory insists on reports when family visitation is completed." He recognizes the danger of repetitiousness, therefore. And it is true that if reports are filed, it is possible to avoid going over the same ground every year anew, at least to a degree. But even then there will be repetitiousness. It is one of the dangers of such a list of questions that family visitation will fall into a routine, into a

fixed pattern, whether that pattern is completely duplicated every year or whether it be repeated over the course of a two or three year period. This difficulty and others are not overcome by the additional comments which the author makes at the end of the questions which he proposes, page 82:

It must be recognized that this list is merely suggestive. Simply to follow a set of questions, no matter how excellent and exhaustive, would breed formalism and legalism of the worst sort. But even though the above list is rather incomplete, it will not be possible to ask and answer the questions above within the space of an hour, if each question receives a fair share of attention. For that reason the elders should know what has been considered previously, if this is at all possible.

We agree, by the way, with the last remark. When pastor and elders conduct family visitation, reports should be filed with the consistory by the various teams. These reports should not be mere reports that they have visited all their assigned families; and they should not be loaded with generalities such as, "We found everything to be rather normal," or, "We found the spiritual condition to be, on the whole, good." The reports should be specific enough that the team which must visit in the following year can learn what took place at the previous year's visit and what was talked about. We believe that one of the keys to the improvement of family visitation lies in systematizing it, so that the consistory as a whole and the individual committees which conduct family visitation know what is taking place and what they are accomplishing and what are their specific aims and goals.

For the rest, we have very little use for long lists of questions. The danger is not imaginary that use of such lists will tend to make family visitation stereotyped. The danger is also very real that a list of this kind will tempt the visiting elders into attempting to cover far too much ground in an hour's time. It is admitted that in the list quoted above, there is far too much material for one visit; and this list is not even complete! It ought to be remembered that if the minister in the pulpit engages in generalities or tries to cover too much ground in one sermon,

"takes too much hay on his fork," the result is that he accomplishes virtually nothing. There is a certain law of diminishing returns at work here. The same is true of family visitation--in our opinion, to an even greater degree. The more ground we attempt to cover in one brief visit, the less ground we actually do cover the way it ought to be covered. If we "take too much hay on our fork," the result may be that we succeed in moving and lifting no hay. And it is a rather striking fact that frequently in family visitation--on a very personal and direct level--we try to cover far more ground than in an hour's sermon. This is in the nature of the case bound to be unsuccessful and unfruitful. Besides, we have very little use for the entire question-method. If you want to ask questions, why not simply mail out a questionnaire to each member of a family? Then all could think about their answers and send in carefully thought through and written replies. The direct-question method as usually employed, moreover, is of doubtful success as far as obtaining honest answers is concerned. Indeed, the visitors may well have certain questions in mind to which they are seeking the answers; and in this regard some of the items in the quotation above may be helpful. But they can frequently find the answers to their questions without asking many direct questions during their visit. And in most cases answers obtained in that way will furnish a more accurate picture of the spiritual condition and needs of the sheep than will answers obtained by blunt and direct questioning and probably in a process of probing and parrying and dodging. True, it requires a certain skill and art. It also will require study and preparation. It also requires pastors and elders to be good listeners and keen observers. But this is their work to which the Lord calls them and for which, in the way of faithful study and preparation, the Lord also equips them.

But what positive suggestions may be made? It is easy to criticize negatively and to point out the pitfalls and flaws of various suggestions made by others.

We would emphasize, in the first place, that the Word of God must have the central place in all of family visitation. This seems to be so obvious as to be almost a truism. And yet this

often is exactly the missing element in family visitation. By this I do not mean that no attention whatsoever is paid to the Scriptures, or that family visitation is conducted apart from or even contrary to Scripture. No, it is perfectly possible that Scripture is read, that it is even explained and discussed and referred to, and that what is asked and what is answered is in a general way in harmony with the Word of God, and that the admonitions and warnings and words of comfort are in harmony with the Word of God, but that nevertheless the Word of God does not specifically have the central and dominating place in family visitation. If we may make a comparison again between family visitation and the preaching of the Word, the very same thing is possible with respect to the latter. What happens in such a case is that you get a general sermon which is quite possibly Scriptural in character and free from heresy; but the specific Word of God as conveyed by the text is never specifically expounded and brought home to the congregation. Many true things may have been said. These may even be edifying in the same general way in which the sermon is generally the Word of God. Sometimes it may even happen that even though the contents of the sermon may be correct and true and even edifying and helpful, the preacher has not actually preached his text at all, but merely used it as a hook to hang his sermon on, a take-off ramp for a lecture or even an inspirational message. In any case, the Word in such instances is not properly preached; and to the extent that this is true, to that extent the results will surely not be what they ought to be and what they would be if the Word as conveyed on the wings of a particular text were preached. Now we freely grant that family visitation is not the same as sitting under the preaching. And we freely grant that a pastor or elder must be on guard against preaching a little sermon or monopolizing the hour of family visitation by commenting at length on the Scripture passage read. But this does not change the fundamental point we are making. The Word of God in the very specific sense of the word must have, and must be allowed to have, the central place in every visit that is made in the course of family visitation. And the reason is very evident, and is the same for family visitation as for preaching: we must hear CHRIST speak in family visitation. If we do not hear

Him, then all family visitation is in vain. We must hear Him in the questions with which the sheep are confronted by whatever method. It is Christ Who by confronting the sheep with these questions must create responses motivated by grace and arising out of believing hearts. It is Christ Who must admonish, Who must warn, Who must comfort, Who must instruct, Who must feed, Who must guide and point out the way. And only when Christ does this will the sheep and the congregation as a whole be built up. For Christ gathers and builds His own church! True, He uses men and He uses means. But always He does so only in connection with ^{and} in the service of His own Word. And apart from the Scriptures, He does not speak His Word. There simply is no other Word of Christ than the Word of the Scriptures.

For this reason we cannot agree with the passing reference to the importance of and the use of the Word of God made by Dr. P. Y. De Jong on pages 78 and 79 of his Taking Heed To The Flock. There he raises the question with respect to family visitation, "But how shall they begin?" And part of his answer is as follows:

Some have profitably made use of prayer at the very beginning. This is appropriate indeed, especially since it reminds both elders and members that the work will not attain its goal unless the Lord gives His blessing. (We would say: to begin with prayer is not only "appropriate," but essential. HCH) Others have suggested beginning with the reading of an appropriate passage of Scripture, which then serves as the point of departure for the whole discussion. There are, however, certain difficulties which this practice presents. If the reading is to serve its purpose, the passage ought to be particularly appropriate for that family--not some general passage which might be discussed by anyone. Family visitation is to be distinguished from the preaching of the Word precisely in its more personal and direct application of the gospel to our lives. But also, there is the danger that the one who reads begins to comment on the passage, with the result that most of the time is consumed by the exhortation and the elders do not get to know the spiritual condition of the family at all.

We hold that the Word of the Scriptures should be the beginning, the middle, and the end of family visitation, and not merely a possible, or optional, point of departure. It may be that there are some dangers to be avoided in the actual use of this method: we certainly would agree, for example, that the passage ought to be particularly appropriate, and that the danger that the one who reads consumes all the time by commenting on the passage ought to be avoided. But these are practical matters. What we wish to establish firmly is the necessity of the Word of God being the center of proper family visitation. That Word of God must function as sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and as a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, in any questioning and inquiring that is to be accomplished in family visitation. And the light of the Word must be made to fall upon the individuals and the family, so that it brings to light, exposes, the spiritual condition, the spiritual well-being--or lack of it--of those concerned. And the light of the Word of God must be made to fall upon the life's pathway of those visited, or upon a single, specific aspect of that pathway, so that they may grow in the knowledge of their calling. To that Word the family must be led for their comfort and their encouragement and strengthening. From beginning to end, the Word of the Scriptures must be central.

For the rest, there is the question of the practical application and employment of this fundamental principle. Personally, I always attempted during my years in the pastoral ministry what I sometimes now refer to as the inductive method, or the oblique approach, rather than the method of direct questioning. I aimed, as much as possible, at getting the head of the household primarily but also the others--into a spontaneous conversation, but a spontaneous conversation which I controlled and guided. In this way I could also obtain the answers to any inquiries I wished to make, often without asking direct questions, or at least ^{without} the kind of personal question which will often abash a person or make him recede into his shell. What I strove to achieve was a natural, unrestrained atmosphere. Too often, I think, people sit "on pins and needles" in family visitation, so that they heave a sigh of

relief when it is "over for another year." And that kind of atmosphere is not conducive to success. Whatever can properly be done to overcome this is to be recommended. And admittedly, the measure of success is not always the same. Sometimes it may seem well-nigh impossible to coax any kind of conversation along. Sometimes one is almost compelled to resort to the method of direct questioning. But sometimes, too, one can begin with a specific thought of Scripture, not even engage in much exposition of that thought, and obtain an almost immediate response from the father in the family. Then as the conversation moves along and as the occasions arise, the pastor can bring out various insights and various applications in connection with the specific Word of God which forms the center of that visit. At other times, it may be necessary to engage in a brief explanation of the Word of God which you wish to leave at that home, and then draw the family into the conversation by means of a judicious question or two.

For this reason I hesitate to prescribe any set method. Rigidity is to be avoided.

You know, there are so many variables in family visitation. There are variables as far as the officebearers are concerned. There are the variables of the ability; the personality, and the spirituality of the pastor or elder who must conduct the visitation. But there are also many differences, both natural and spiritual, among the sheep. We cannot enter into detail here. But it is plain to see that all of these things have something to do with the actual approach and contact in family visitation, as well as with the specific character of the Word of God which one brings on a given visit. It stands to reason, for example, that one is not going to speak to a couple of seventy years old as though they stood at the beginning of their life's path together; and one is not going to speak to a little lamb of the flock as though he were a mature sheep. One is not going to speak to a comparatively simple soul as though he were a person of great erudition; nor is one going to speak to a person whom he knows to be of little spirituality as though he were deeply spiritual. All of the differences, both natural and spiritual, must be taken into account.

And they will surely affect one's approach. Hence, there must be a certain flexibility here; and each officebearer will have to make his own way and adjust his specific approach as need and circumstances may demand.

Rather than attempt to prescribe a set pattern to be followed, therefore, we will suggest a few guidelines.

In the first place, limit severely the ground you will attempt to cover in a visit. It is simply an impossibility to cover all that might be covered in family visitation in the course of an annual visit of an hour. Choose a certain aspect of the Christian life on which you will concentrate; and be specific even in this. Thus, for example, do not choose a general subject like "prayer." That is too broad. Limit this, for example, to a subject like personal prayer, or family prayers. If it be objected that in this way the purposes of family visitation as outlined earlier in this essay will not be reached, we reply: 1) That certainly the purposes are not achieved by a general visitation, for the simple reason that there is too much to be covered. The more general you become, the less you actually accomplish and the more bland and colorless and repetitious family visitation will become. There is too much family visitation which is like the definition of our general science course in grade school: "a little bit of everything, and not much of anything." 2) If family visitation is conducted each year with specific goals and specific subjects in view, then while the accomplishment of a single year may not seem so very great, yet over the course of the years the spiritual benefits and growth which will accrue will be far greater than repeated visits of a very general and sweeping nature. 3) Because of the interrelatedness of all of life, you will in the very nature of the case touch on various other aspects of the Christian life as you concentrate on a specific subject.

In the second place, choose the specific message from the Word of God in connection with the subject which you purpose to treat. And again, limit this severely. Undoubtedly it is wise to try to "zero in" on a very limited segment of Scripture. Sometimes it need not be so much as an entire verse or even a complete sentence. Sometimes you may limit yourself to no more than a significant

phrase or clause. Did you ever consider, for example, what you could do on family visitation with an expression such as, "When thou sittest in thine house..." from Deuteronomy 6? Such examples can be multiplied many times. And it is not difficult at all to find appropriate passages from Scripture which are adapted to any number of specific aspects of the Christian life on which you can touch in family visitation.

In connection with these two suggestions, we may make a few further remarks. For one thing, it is worthy of consideration that you conduct all the visits in a year's family visitation with the same subject in view. True, depending on the nature of the subject, you may have to make some exceptions. You could not very well talk about the home-training of children or about parental teaching-by-example in homes of single persons or of aged couples. Hence, adjustments must be made. Secondly, if family visitation is conducted by various teams, rather than by the pastor and an elder, it would be very well possible not only that all the teams concentrate on the same subject in their visits, but also that a consistorial seminar be held prior to the beginning of family visitation.

In the third place, thorough preparation is necessary. No more than a pastor should ever go to the pulpit or the catechism room with scant preparation, no more should he go on family visitation with little or no preparation. The results will be in direct proportion to the effort put forth. This preparation should go in two directions. He should make a study, in as far as that is possible, of the family to be visited. Of course, as a pastor becomes established in a congregation, he will be better able to do this. He will become acquainted with his sheep and their needs and their weaknesses and their strengths. And he should study these before he goes to visit them, so that he may be able to address the Word of God in as personal and specific a way as possible. But the pastor (or elder) must also be thoroughly prepared with respect to the passage of Scripture on which he expects to concentrate. He must be master of his subject. He must be prepared and alert to apply the Word as the opportunity arises, too, in the course of the visit. He must be ready to provide those peculiar insights into the Word of God and into its applicability

to the circumstances and condition of his sheep^{SO} that they will feel keenly that the Word of God is being brought to them personally. This cannot be emphasized too much. Family visitation involves much hard work and much prayerful preparation. He who is not ready for this could better stay at home and leave it to others. A "lick and a promise" in family visitation simply will not do.

Then there are some practical hints. First of all, allow yourself enough time--in most instances, a full hour for a visit. Secondly, always begin the visit at the throne of grace, with specific prayer for the Lord's guidance and blessing in the visit. And do so promptly! Opening prayer will automatically have the effect of shutting off the possibility of wasting fifteen minutes or so on carnal and mundane things or on social amenities. Thirdly, turn to the Scriptures; read a brief passage which includes the text or segment of a text on which you wish to concentrate; and from that point on conduct the visit as circumstances may dictate, as we suggested above.

Perhaps you will be surprised at the results which you can observe even during the course of the visit. Perhaps the results may not be so obvious. But rest assured that where the Scriptures are the center of family visitation, there Christ speaks His own effectual Word in His church and to His sheep.

By Whom Conducted

The chief question here would seem to be: should family visitation be conducted by the pastor or by the elders?

We see no real problem here.

It is true, of course, that in the Church Order family visitation falls under the labor of the elders. It is also true that, except in the case of very small congregations, if family visitation were to be conducted as frequently as originally prescribed, it would be impossible for the pastor to conduct all of the family visitation and at the same time to do justice to his other tasks.

On the other hand, it must be remembered that ministers are also elders, teaching elders; and in so far as they are elders, the work of elders, including family visitation, falls to them. This is plain both from Article 16 of the Church Order and from

the Form of Ordination of Ministers. At the same time, it is abundantly plain from both the Church Order and the Form of Ordination of Elders that the labor of family visitation belongs to the ruling elders as to those who are charged with the labor of oversight and admonition, and to their task of serving "all Christians with advice and consolation."

Hence, our answer to this question is very simple: both should conduct family visitation.

To this we would add the following:

1. Except in the case of extremely large congregations, there is no reason why a pastor cannot visit all the families at least once per year. We emphatically agree with the statement of Van Dellen and Monsma in The Church Order Commentary p. 110: "Moreover, effective ministerial work also requires close contact with the Congregation through personal work." We have little sympathy with their next statement, "...if they (ministers) are to do it (preach and teach) correctly and effectively, it will require nearly all their time,"--that is, if this is intended as an excuse for not conducting family visitation. We rather believe that a pastor should over-extend himself--if that be necessary--in order to conduct family visitation in addition to his other tasks. If need be, let him be excused from some other labors temporarily--labors such as leading various societies. Family visitation should have priority.

2. The elders should also conduct family visitation. They should accompany the pastor by turns, of course. They should also divide the work with the pastor in large congregations. But there is also no reason why the elders could not conduct family visitation in addition to the pastor's visitation. In this way every family could be visited a minimum of twice per year. This would easily be possible in most of our congregations. And it would be beneficial if done correctly.

In conclusion, let me once more emphasize in answer to this question, in the first place, that the pastor and elders should labor in the consciousness of their office. In the second place, family visitation should be conducted in obedience to the Word;

the word of mere men is nothing. And finally, family visitation should be conducted by those who are thoroughly prepared.

May we as Protestant Reformed Churches maintain this institution faithfully, and may we strive to make it an increasingly valuable instrument in the life of our congregations.