

DAILY MEDITATIONS ON THE BELGIC CONFESSION

by pastors of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America

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APR
Articles 13-14

Article 13: Divine Providence.

We believe that the same God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment; nevertheless, God neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed. For his power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that He orders and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner, even then when devils and wicked men act unjustly. And, as to what He doth surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire into farther than our capacity will admit of, but with the greatest humility and reverence adore the righteous judgments of God which are hid from us, contenting ourselves that we are disciples of Christ, to learn only those things which He has revealed to us in His Word, without transgressing these limits.

This doctrine affords us unspeakable consolation, since we are taught thereby that nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father, who watches over us with a paternal care, keeping all creatures so under His power that not a hair of our head (for they are all numbered), nor a sparrow, can fall to the ground, without the will of our Father, in whom we do entirely trust: being persuaded that He so restrains the devil and all our enemies that, without His will and permission, they cannot hurt us.

And therefore we reject that damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God regards nothing, but leaves all things to chance.

April 2 – The Providence of God
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Acts 17:24 - 28

In the next series of 21 meditations, we are going to consider what the Belgic Confession has to say about the great truth of the providence of God. This is a subject so wonderful we can with great benefit meditate on it for twenty one days and even much longer. The 'providence of God' is His willing, active and personal care for all His creatures. The God of providence is everywhere present in all the universe. He is at no time absent from it or ignorant of any of the events that take place in the world. He Himself has created the world and remains active in it. He is not Himself part of the universe. He is highly and gloriously exalted above the entire universe. He is the sovereign almighty God ruling over all the universe according to His own will and good pleasure. The Psalmist absolutely distinguishes the true and living God from idols by declaring, "But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased." (Psa 115:3) By His almighty hand, God upholds the very existence of every creature. The creature cannot exist by itself. To speak of an independent and self-existent creature is to use contradictory language. Without the active and willing operations of God's providence, the creature would return to nothing.

The providence of God includes His daily care and provision for all His creatures by His Fatherly hand. One of the most beautiful and detailed Psalms speaking of the providence of God is Psalm 104. This Psalm speaks of all creatures waiting upon the Lord. He gives each creature the food it needs at the time of need and according to the nature of every creature.

In His amazing providence, God guides the whole of His vast creation that is millions and millions of miles broad and occupied by creatures, the largest of which are far larger than the small planet we live on. God guides the stars in their courses. The moon and the stars arise and set at a definite time every day at His command. This does not happen by chance or by some so-called natural law inherent in the universe.

The providence of God includes His guidance of the history of the nations of the world and all the events that take place in time. God has a purpose in this history and by His sovereign almighty power, He ensures that this purpose is realized without fail. We cannot understand the meaning and significance of history without knowing the truth of God's providence.

The providence of God includes His care and protection as the Lord and Savior of His people in the world. Nothing in the whole of our life happens outside of the providence of God. Even the very hairs of our head are numbered and not one of them falls to the ground without the will of our heavenly Father. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). When we know the truth of the providence of God, we rely on Him and trust in Him completely. We find our comfort and peace in the truth of the providence of God. Even when God sends us very difficult trials and when enemies seem fierce and strong, we need not be afraid.

There are great mysteries about the truth of God's providence. There is great comfort in always being conscious of this truth in all of our life.

April 3 – Faith in the Providence of God
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Matthew 6:25 - 34

We know the truth of the providence of God only by faith. Every article of the Belgic Confession begins with the statement "We believe"! This is important to take note of and to remember as we consider the wonderful aspects of the providence of God, spoken of in this article of our confession.

The natural man who is an unbeliever cannot and does not know the providence of God, even though his whole life is determined by and controlled by the providence of God. The unbeliever often mocks the providence of God. God will judge this man by the daily operations of his providence even though he refuses to acknowledge God. Psalm 73 speaks of how God sets the rich, prosperous, proud and evil men of the world in slippery places and casts them down into destruction. This is also part of the fearful, mighty and constant operation of the sovereign providence of God.

We know the amazing truth of the providence of God only through faith in God and in His Word. There are so many passages in the Bible that speak of the reality and operations of the providence of God. We shall consider these in the course of our 21 meditations on this wonderful subject. We should read these passages over and over and be comforted again and again by the amazing truth of the providence of God.

When we say 'We believe in the providence of God!' we say this with great amazement and wonderment, and with fear and trembling. There are great and fearful truths regarding the providence of God that cause us to worship God in humility with godly fear.

The God of providence is Spirit and invisible in His being. The operations of God's providence are hidden to the eye of the natural man and known only by the children of God through the faith that God Himself works in our hearts. There are mysteries in the providence of God that are far beyond our understanding. God's ways and God's thoughts in His works of providence are higher than our ways and our thoughts. Read Isaiah 55: 6 - 10.

Sinful man cannot know the truth of God's providence through mere natural reason or scientific investigation. The providence of God is seen in the order and harmony in all the universe. However, there is in the world also much that seems confusing and hard to reconcile with the truth of God's providence. We believe the truth through humble faith in our hearts even when we cannot fully understand.

We are called to submit to the operations of God's providence in faith and obedience. This is especially important when there are operations of God's providence in our lives that involve trials and sufferings for us and mysteries beyond our understanding. Our faith must be stirred up by the constant reading of the Word of God and meditation on its truth. Only then will the truth of God's providence be the source of great comfort and peace for us.

May the Lord give us daily the blessed comfort and assurance of knowing the providence of God in our lives.

April 4 – The Mystery of the Providence of God
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Isaiah 55: 8 -13

We are still making some general comments on the wonderful subject of the providence of God before we enter into a discussion of some of the specific wording of the Belgic Confession in Art. 13.

The truth of the providence of God explains for the believer why certain events take place in the world in which we live and in our personal life. The truth of God's providence is reasonable to the child of God. The things that take place in the providence of God cannot be explained by unbelieving human philosophy and the investigation of human science. In fact such philosophy and science, because it is developed by the unbeliever, constantly strives to overthrow the truth of God's providence and somehow to deny it. Sinful man does not want to acknowledge the truth of the providence of God. He would rather entertain the imagination that he is free in all of his life in the world. He mocks the whole idea of the providence of God ruling over and directing all the events that take place in the world.

The child of God wants by faith to learn and consider the truth of the providence of God and even in a measure to understand the ways of the Lord. Such a consideration of faith fills the child of God with wonder, amazement and the worship of God.

But there are also truths of the operations of God's providence that are far beyond our very limited and small understanding. God is greater than our understanding. He is infinite in His own being and wisdom and goodness. He is absolutely sovereign in His providence, doing all things according to His own good pleasure.

We must humbly submit to the truth of God's providence in our lives, even when the ways of the Lord are mysterious and deep and beyond our understanding. The Psalmist declares concerning the works of God, "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known." (Psa 77: 19).

In considering the truth of the providence of God in the world and in our own personal lives, we always need to remember what Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

Faith in the providence of God makes us greatly interested in the truths of God's providence that He has revealed to us in His Word. We want to know these truths more and more. Knowing these truths is important for our life of obedience to God and service unto Him.

But there are also truths of God's providence too high for us. There are mysteries in the operations of God's providence. These we receive and submit to in quiet faith and humility without always demanding understanding.

The truth of God's providence means that God rules. He does whatsoever He pleases. His wisdom is absolutely perfect. To believe the providence of God, we must have quiet trust in Him even when we cannot understand. We may not seek with ungodly desire to pry into the things which God has not revealed and are greater than all human understanding.

April 5 – God Does Not Forsake the Creatures of His Hand
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Psalm 104:1 - 24

I hope you take the time to read all of Psalm 104. It is a marvelous Psalm about the providence of God!

Art. 13 of the Belgic Confession makes many great statements about the truth of God's providence. In our series of meditations, we are going to consider some of these statements in the light of the Word of God. A confession is of value only when it summarizes and explains the Word of God. In the first three meditations, we made more general comments on the truth of the providence of God. In the rest of our series of articles, we will call your attention to the specific statements and truths outlined by the Belgic Confession.

The truth of the providence of God is intimately related to the truth of creation. One who does not believe in the truth of God as the creator of the universe, cannot know and believe the truth of God as ruler and caretaker of the universe. Denials of the truth of creation as revealed in Holy Scripture are common even in the church world today. Many have wrongly given way to what is called 'theistic evolution' which tries to explain the truth of creation by trying to harmonize it with the unbelieving theories of modern science. This is impossible. We say 'we believe in God the creator.' We also then confess 'we believe in God who is the God of providence.'

The same God who created the universe and all creatures in it also upholds all things continually by the Word of His power. God surrounds the being of every single one of His creatures. He guides the whole course of the existence of His creatures. He continually provides for the need of all His creatures according to the nature he gave each creature by His work of creation.

The creature cannot exist by itself. It is absolutely dependent on its Creator for all things. God must give to every creature its food and all things needful. See Psalm 104: 27. If we have the time, we should read all of Psalm 104. How beautiful is this Psalm in its vivid description of the wonderful operation of God's providence in all of His creation.

The providence of God is the revelation of His goodness, faithfulness and love for His creatures. If God fails to provide for the creatures of His hands, He would not truly be God and His faithfulness could be called into question. The providence of God is about God's everlasting and unchangeable love and goodness.

God's providence in relation to the care of His children is wonderful. The providence of God is His constant and unfailing personal care and provision for us. We cannot care for ourselves by our own wisdom, power and intelligence, for even these must constantly come from God. Believing this truth of God's faithfulness is absolutely essential for us as His children. We need to be constantly reminded of the care of God for His children. Such reminders will deliver us from anxiety in our lives.

Let's end this meditation today by meditating on the beautiful description of the care of God in His providence. Read and meditate on Matthew 6: 25 -32. May the words of this passage be your comfort in the day that is before you.

April 6 – Not by Chance but by the Sovereign, Wise and Good Providence of God
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Matthew 6:25 - 31

There are really only two possibilities: either all things come by mere chance or fortune, or they come by the wonderful providence of God. The latter we know when we believe in God. When men reject the truth of God and His providence, they are given over to a world governed by cold and blind fate, determinism, chance and fortune.

It is awful to be in the darkness of unbelief and to imagine that all things in our life and in the world are by chance. This is the hopelessness of atheism. It means that one is without hope or comfort because one has no God. These will live in fear and have no certainty at all for anything that takes place in their lives. There is for them no purpose and meaning in life. They end their life in pessimism and utter despair.

Imagining that all things happen by mere fate or chance has over the years taken the form of various philosophies. Ancient pagan philosophy and religion teach that the events of our life are determined by the movement of the stars. Those in such darkness check their horoscope for the predictions of the day. Pagan religions trust in a multitude of deities, each vying for the attention, worship and service of men. These deities often are at war with one another. Today one wins, tomorrow another. But an idol is nothing. Idols of wood and stone have eyes but they see not, ears but they hear not, hands but they handle not (Ps 115:5-7). The idol gods of the heathen cannot hear or help those who call upon them.

Many in our modern day world have rejected every idea of God. They look to science to give them guidance. These believe that everything is ruled by natural law. They try hard to somehow influence natural law for their advantage. But the 'forces of nature' are powerful. If everything is governed by the blind force of natural law, then the whole idea of chance is impossible. Then the world is determined by the laws of nature and by the rule of cause and effect. What awful darkness and despair finally engulfs the life of unbelieving and ungodly men. Even the most highly educated of our modern world live in this deep darkness of meaninglessness, despair and confusion.

The believer boldly confesses from his heart through the faith God has graciously given, I BELIEVE IN GOD! The God whom we believe in is sovereign, almighty, good and wise. He accomplishes all things according to His good pleasure, for His glory and for the good and salvation of His people.

We believe that whatever takes place in the world and in our own personal life is firmly in the hands of the Lord. We know that God is good and wise. He loves us as a Father loves His children. He knows and does only what is good for us, His children. He is able to work all things for the good of those who love Him. Even though there are many things which we cannot understand, we know that God rules and that we have nothing to fear. Even the deepest troubles in this life, and the fierce enemies that we face are under the control of the great and wonderful God of providence. Believing this, we have peace, comfort and the final and blessed hope of eternal life and glory.

April 7 – God Rules Over the Great Things of the Universe
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Psalm 8

The Belgic Confession states, “We believe that the same God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune and chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will.” The two most important words which we want to pay special attention to in our meditation for the next few days is “all things.”

In order to think about the providence of God ‘in all things’, we need to remind ourselves what is all included in those things governed and ruled by God according to His will.

One way in which we consider the greatness of the providence of God is to look to the heavens and consider the stars. He created the greatest of the creatures of the universe and He rules over them continually by the almighty power of His amazing providence.

The Bible uses the number of stars to illustrate something that is beyond all human ability to number. The promise of God to Abraham was that his descendants would be greater in number than the stars.

In considering this question I decided to look this question up through an internet search on my computer. I was astounded by the answer to a question about the number of the stars. With the unaided human eye on a clear night, we can see several thousands of stars. To get an idea about how many stars there are, you would need to travel to several places in the world from which to view the stars in the heavens above you. Of course, not all of the stars are visible from one standing place on the earth. You would have to travel to various parts of the earth to be able to count the stars visible to the naked eye and perhaps you can count thousands of the stars by just seeing them with your own eyes.

With a good pair of binoculars you could perhaps count as many as 200,000 stars. If you could look through a telescope of average power and took the time to count, you could see as many as 15,000,000 stars. Many of these stars are larger than our sun.

The milky way, the galaxy we live in, is over 120,000 light years across, according to astronomers. A light year is how far light travels in a year at the speed of 185,000 miles per second. Roughly, this would be about six trillion miles. Astronomers estimate that the milky way alone has about four hundred billion stars.

There are giant galaxies that are estimated to having more than one hundred trillion stars. Again, according to the observable universe, astronomers estimate that there may be as many as 170 billion galaxies. All of these boggle our mind.

Can you count the stars? To our greatest human imagination, they are more than we could ever number.

God created them all! And God rules over them all. God is greater than all. He is absolutely sovereign in His rule over all of His creation. Every single one of the multitude of these stars is guided and controlled by God, and moves according to His will and good pleasure. God is almighty to uphold all of these stars. If God would withdraw His power from these billions and billions of stars, they would all return to nothing. This is what they were before He created them.

The Psalmist in Psalm 8, in great amazement and astonishment, asks the question. “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” The great God of the stars cares for every detail of our life. How wonderful it is to know this!

April 8 – God Rules Over the Smallest of His Creatures
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Matthew 6:25 - 34

God created very tiny creatures. His creatures are made up of tiny creatures such as atoms, electrons and protons. These are so small that they cannot be seen by the naked eye. Our bodies are made up of thousands and thousands of cells. In a very short time, these cells die and are replaced by others. Some say that most of our body cells are replaced between every seven to ten years of our life. God rules over all of this. He never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

From the day of our birth, our bodies are invaded by germs and organisms that destroy our bodies and cause diseases to come into our bodies. We are born as babes and grow to maturity. In just sixty, seventy or eighty years, and in few cases ninety years, our bodies have been so much under attack by these invading creatures that we die. After we die, worms destroy our bodies in the grave and we return to the dust out of which we were created.

All these things are also under the providential control of the Lord. He has formed us from our conception in our mother's womb. Our members, according to Psalm 139, were all written in God's book. God made us as tiny babes, helpless and defenseless in ourselves. From our mothers' womb we were cast upon the Lord. See Psalm 22: 10.

The classic example of how detailed the providence of God is in our own lives, is the truth that even "the very hairs of your head are all numbered" Matthew 10:30. This passage is given to us to comfort us with regard to our enemies who persecute us and threaten our lives. Luke 21:16-17 records the same words of our Lord Jesus for our comfort in connection with the fearful things that will happen in the last days shortly before the return of our Lord Jesus. "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish."

The control of God's providence is contrasted with the many things totally outside of our own control. In Matt 6:25, Jesus tells us not to be anxious about what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or what we shall put on because the Lord in His providence cares for us. He is the God who takes care of the common sparrow so that none fall on the ground without the will of our heavenly Father. He is the God who clothes the lilies of the valleys with array grander than Solomon. In both Matt 6 and Matt 10, Jesus tells us that in comparison to God's small creatures, we are in the sight of God of much greater worth and greater concern. His love and constant personal care of us is so much greater. This is the wonder of the providence of God.

And there are so many things that are outside of our control. We cannot make one of our hairs white or black. And we cannot by taking thought add one cubit to our stature. We cannot add even one moment or hour to our lives. Our whole life is in the providence of God. Our life will come to its conclusion on the day God has determined for us.

There have been those in the world that have mocked the very idea of such intimate and total control of the providence of God in our lives. We believe what the Lord tells us and find great comfort in it. How amazing is the providence of our God.

April 9 – God Rules Over the Powers of Creation and the Seasons of the Year
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Psalm 147

When we confess that God by His providence rules and governs all things, we need to think about what 'all things' includes. We sometimes experience in the world in which we live, the mighty forces of nature: the wind, storm, sea, lightning and thunder, sudden fearful earthquakes. All these are under God's control.

The most dramatic judgment that ever came upon this world was the flood. There may have been between two and three million people on the earth at the time of the flood. God destroyed them all. He only saved alive believing Noah and his family, only eight people altogether.

After the flood, God declared that while the earth remains "seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." (Gen 8:22). Implied is that all these times are in the hands of the God of providence.

We are interested in what the weather will be. We say 'it will rain,' or 'it will be sunny' or 'it will be cold'. We commonly use language that ignores the truth of the providence of God. When we experience in our daily life the various kinds of weather and the changing of the seasons of the year, we should think about the providence of God. Even the rising and setting of the sun, the passing of day into night, these also are according to the abundant testimony of the word of God in the providence of God. Our bodies are dependent on the cycles of nature for rest and rejuvenation.

The changing of the seasons is very important. Man must cultivate the land and plant the seed at just the right time to expect a harvest. He is entirely dependent on the providence of the Lord for the harvest. God must send the rain and the sunshine for the harvest. Without such operations of God's providence, man will die.

We often complain when inclement weather spoils our plans for the day. If you live in an area of the world such as I do, there are times when there is so much ice and snow that we cannot even get out of our house to go to church.

The Lord in His providence rules over the so called regular seasons and climate changes through the year. Scripture makes plain that God in His providence also sends violent disturbances in nature. He sends earthquakes, violent storms and the eruption of mountains. Droughts, famines and pestilences also are controlled by the Lord. In some of these events, thousands of the inhabitants of the earth die.

The book of Revelation as well as other parts of scripture makes clear that what man calls natural disasters are in fact the signs of the judgment of God on the earth and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Recently the world became familiar with what is called a tsunami. Earthquakes take place in the depth of the sea, creating huge waves. Large land mass can suddenly be inundated by water. Whole seaside villages, and even large sections of the great cities of the world, can be utterly destroyed suddenly. The world in recent years experienced a tsunami that took away the lives of thousands of people in a fearful day.

Are such mighty events also in the providence of God? Many would vehemently deny this. But what does scripture say? There are many questions that need to be answered. Think about it. Meditations should cause us to do this.

April 10 – God Rules Over the Rise and Fall of the Nations
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Daniel 2:19 - 23

What is included in the 'all things' that are governed and ruled by the providence of God? The answer to this question reveals how mighty and how significant the providence of God really is. God gives us the understanding and wisdom to know about the truth of God's providence in the world in which we live. We are taught to fear the Lord, His mighty power and judgments in the earth.

The book of Daniel tells of the rule of God's providence among the nations of the world. God gave a dream to the heathen king of Babylon. He had built a mighty world empire after his seemingly invincible army had conquered one nation after another, including Judah, the special chosen nation of God's people.

After the proud heathen king Nebuchadnezzar had built his great kingdom, he walked in his stately palace and boasted, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" (Dan 4:30). Immediately after this boasting, in a moment God made this proud king insane and drove him out from his palace to live like a wild beast of the field until he had acknowledged the sovereignty of the God of heaven.

In the book of Isaiah, we read of the greatness of God over the nations of the world. "Who hath directed the spirit of the LORD, or being His counselor hath taught Him? With whom took He counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge, and shewed to Him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All the nations before Him are as nothing; and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity." (Isa 40:13-17).

In America and Singapore, many of us enjoy a great measure of wealth and prosperity. There are other nations of the world in which this is not the case. All of this is included in the providence of God. Have you thought about this?

We must not be proud in boasting in the prosperity and glory of the nation we might be living in. Even the very fact that we are living in such a nation, was determined by the providence of God in our lives.

Rev 18:4 prophesies that at the end of the world all nations will be joined together in the kingdom of antichrist. The kingdom of antichrist will in the providence of God be allowed to exercise dominion over the whole world for a very short time.

But the time will come suddenly when the kingdom of antichrist will be destroyed in one day. No powerful earthly nation or ruler will be able to prevent this from happening. The inhabitants of the world will mourn over the end and destruction of the kingdoms of the world.

The truth of God's providence over the history of the nations is a fearful thing. We are called by the Word of God to be wise. We are called to separate ourselves from the ungodly world, to submit ourselves to God and consecrate our lives to Him. We are called to look for the glorious coming of the kingdom of Christ.

April 11 – God Rules and Governs the Personal Life of Each One of Us
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Deuteronomy 8:7 - 20

When we think about all the things that are ruled and governed by the providence of God, we certainly must think of our own personal life. We have already in past meditations considered the truth that Psalm 139 speaks of. God in His wonderful providence formed us in our mother's womb. The Lord saw our substance from the very beginning of our existence, and all our members were written in His book.

How different each one of us is. We did not make ourselves. It is the Lord who has made us. All the differences of our character and personality were determined in the providence of God. All the gifts that we have, our intellect and our talents were all determined at the very beginning of our lives by the providence of God.

There are vast differences in our lives, such as the occupation we have, whether we are married or not, whether we have children in our marriage. We can look back at the very beginning of our lives and consider how all things in our lives were directed by the providence of God.

The measure of wealth each of us has is determined by God. Some have much more than others. Some have much less. God did not create us all equal. Some achieve great heights in their earthly occupations and establish themselves in a career in which they are able to amass great wealth and glory in the world. Others live a very minimal existence. These have a life-long struggle to earn a living. Think about how poor people are in so-called third world countries. If we have been born in a rich family and a prosperous nation in the world where there is freedom and lots of opportunities for us in our lives, we should always remember to acknowledge the Lord.

According to the passage in Deuteronomy 8, there is a great danger, strangely, when we get rich and prosperous in the world, with a position of power and honor, that we forget the Lord and boast in ourselves. This is due to our sinful nature. God reminds us in His word that it is He, not we ourselves, that gives us power to get wealth and establishes us in our lives, and perhaps, gives us much more than the neighbor. Thus, we ought not boast in our own wisdom and great achievements because our position in life is not at all because of who and what we are by ourselves. Rather, we ought to be thankful to the Lord and remember to serve Him in humility and thankfulness. We are to use all the wealth that God has given us in His service for His glory and for the cause of His church and kingdom in the world.

Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required (Luke 12:48). We are to give of the gifts that God has given to us, to the poor, those who have less than we have or perhaps those who have great need in their lives.

Those who are given great wealth have the calling of God to give liberally to support the church of Jesus Christ, of which they are members, and the causes of His kingdom in the world. The rule of the New Testament is not merely to give a tithe of one tenth as our obligation unto the Lord. We must give cheerfully and thankfully to the Lord according as the Lord has prospered us.

God does not always send us peace and prosperity and happiness in our lives. No where in His Word does He promise this. Are we ready also to accept this truth of the providence of God? We want to consider this soberly in our next meditations.

April 12 – God Rules Over Sin and Evil
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Genesis 3:1-19

When the Belgic Confession says that God rules over all things, this includes also the sin and evil that is in the world. Many do not believe this. When one takes this position, one is often accused of maintaining that God is the author of sin. Can one maintain that God rules with absolute sovereignty over sin and evil without maintaining the blasphemous position that God is the author of sin?

When we enter into thinking about this aspect of the world of God's providence, we are confronted by great mysteries. The very language that we use in talking about this subject and the thoughts we have on it must be carefully formulated.

God is holy. He is absolutely, perfectly good. There is no evil in Him whatsoever. Sin and wickedness cannot have its origin from the nature of God. In I John 1, we read that God is light, and in Him is no darkness. If God is the author of evil, then it must be the case that there is evil in God Himself. To even suggest this is to blaspheme God. Blasphemy is the greatest imaginable sin. May God keep us from committing such great evil. God cannot be charged with the evil that is in the world.

There is no doubt that this world is full of evil and great wickedness. We know from Genesis 3, the literal, sober and dreadful history, where this evil came from. Shortly after God had created the world good and perfect, the devil, a fallen angel and the great enemy of God tempted man, who fell into sin. Fallen man brought all the evil into the world when he agreed with the lie of the devil that he could become God himself. Fallen man became the servant of the devil and perpetrator of all evil.

The fall brought terrible misery into the world. It brought the suffering and anguish of sickness and disease that ends in the judgment of death for man.

When man rebelled against God, his heart was filled with enmity against God. This act was also the beginning of man's enmity of the heart against his fellow man, his neighbor. The fall of man brought pride, jealousy, selfishness and hatred into the heart of man against his fellow human being. As a result of the fall, there would be hatred, murder and crime and bloodshed among man. There would be hatred, oppression, greed and violence of all sorts by man against fellow human beings.

Shortly after the fall, we read in the book of Genesis, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually...The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." (Gen 6: 5, 11, and 12).

It is clear from this account, that God judged that the sin characterizing the world after the fall had come from man's own wickedness and corruption.

But where was God when this happened? Did God leave His throne when the fall took place? Answering this question in the right way is very important.

April 13 – God Rules Over the Natural Evil that Takes Place in the World
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Isaiah 45:1-13

When we consider the rule of God over the evil of this world, we should distinguish between moral and natural evil. Moral evil is sin, when one misses the mark of God's moral law, or breaks the commandments. Natural evil includes such things as the suffering of man in the world, the many hundreds of diseases that can befall him. It includes the great tragedies that can take place in his life, such as car accidents, and being the victim of some violent crime at the hands of the wicked people of the earth.

These natural evils include natural disasters - earthquakes, famines, violent storms, plagues, and epidemics. In recent years there was a huge tsunami in the Indian Ocean. Its mighty force killed over 250 thousand people in a very short space of time. In the history of the world, there have been earthquakes and world-wide plagues that killed hundreds of thousands of people. Great misery, sorrow and anguish came into the lives of thousands seemingly helpless people, including women and children. The reports of such horrific natural disasters fill us with terror and dread. We are immediately filled with profound sympathy and anguish for those whose lives are affected by such great calamities in ways that they are never again the same.

Is God in control of such events that take place in our world? Or do they happen outside of His sovereign control? If God is in control of these, is He not some kind of a monster? (which to say so would be the height of blasphemy). If God is good, almighty in power and absolutely sovereign in His rule in all of the vast universe, why does He not prevent these great tragedies from taking place in the world and spare so many thousands from all these sorrow, misery, suffering and death?

There are many difficult questions which are not easy to answer. There are questions that cannot be answered nor should we seek to answer them. Some things must be left in the secret providence of God. We must remain silent and certainly not challenge God in His righteous judgments in the world. God's works of providence are full of mystery and some of them are very dark. As much as man might be unwilling to admit it, the natural disasters that take place in the world are in part His holy and righteous judgment on the wicked men of the world. It is not God who is evil, but it is man who is evil by rebelling against God His creator, and not fearing His name, worshiping and serving Him as he is solemnly obligated to do. We tremble before the judgments of God in the earth.

In His just and holy wrath, God always remembers mercy. He shows us His mercy in His great salvation of His people in Jesus Christ. We all deserve to be destroyed everlastingly. From these judgments, God saves His people in His sovereign goodness and mercy. Our only comfort is that He rules over all and we cry unto Him for mercy for ourselves and also for our fellow man. And God is always merciful.

April 14 – God Rules Over the Devil
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Job 1

Are there two gods in the universe or is there only one true and living God Who is absolutely sovereign over all His creatures, including even the devil? Heathen religion teaches that there is more than one god, there are evil gods and good gods. The Christian religion teaches that there is absolutely only one God. This means that the devil, as powerful as he might be, is not God. He is not almighty. He is not able to do whatsoever he pleases in the world. The devil brought about the great tragedy of the fall. But even when he did this, he was ruled by God. The devil cannot even move outside of the providence of God.

There are three main characters in the book of Job; God, the devil, and Job. Of Job, it is said that he was a perfect and an upright man who feared God and eschewed evil. To 'eschew' means to shun and to avoid. See Job 1: 1.

The devil falsely accused Job of serving God simply because God had given Job great prosperity in the world. The book of Job proves that this was a false and slanderous accusation against the godly and upright man.

God allowed the devil to send dreadful trials in the life of Job. In one day, Job lost all of his riches and even all of his children. His wife urged him to curse God and die. He sat on what would be called today, the garbage dump. Job's life, which had once been so full of joy and happiness, was now suddenly full of sorrow and misery.

Job suffered the most dreadful imaginable misery and suffering. After the devil could not succeed in destroying the faith of Job and turning him away from God, God allowed the devil even to grievously afflict his body. Job's body was covered with boils and sores. He was in torment and absolutely miserable. Besides our Lord Jesus Christ, there has never been a man who suffered like Job. The devil was involved in all of this!

Yet God was in complete control. The devil could do absolutely nothing to Job without the sovereign permission of God. As long as God did not permit it, the devil could not destroy Job. Job at times became very discouraged. He even cursed the very day of his birth, wishing he had never even been born, So miserable was Job in all of this.

To add to the great misery of Job, three men appeared on the scene, who were supposedly long time friends of Job. These so-called friends 'explained' the misery of Job by maintaining that Job had committed some great sin in his life and now God was punishing him.

Job never denied that he was a sinner. Read his confession in chapter 42. "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes". Job was ashamed and confessed that he had sinned when he complained against the providence of God in his life and accused God of dealing with him in an evil way.

Several great lessons can be learned from the book of Job. The first is that even the devil is completely under the control of God's providence. He can do nothing even when he does his most evil works, he can do nothing except by the permission of God.

Though the trials of Job were very severe, ultimately Job knew that God was with him. Job confessed "I know that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter [last] day upon the earth" (Job 19:25) to raise Job from the dead, deliver him from all evil, and cause his life to be blessed forever in the presence of His God.

April 15 – Ye Thought Evil Against Me But God Meant It For Good
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Genesis 50:15-21

The Belgic Confession maintains that God's providence rules over all things. It even rules over the purposes of wicked men, and causes these purposes to work for a great good.

In the passage I asked you to read, we have an amazing example of the above truth from the history of Joseph in the Old Testament. It is hard to tell this story in a very short form. I hope you can persevere in reading a longer meditation today.

Joseph was the second youngest son of Jacob. Jacob probably wrongly favored Joseph over all his other sons. He showed this special favor by making the coat of many colors for Joseph.

God sent Joseph dreams that prophesied of a day that was coming when he would rule over his own father and over his brethren.

These events made Joseph's brothers jealous of him. They hated him. So cruel was their hatred that they sold their own brother into slavery. The hearts of Joseph's brethren were so hard and cruel that even the bitter crying and anguish of Joseph did not make them pity him.

Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt. An amazing chain of events took place, all under the sovereign control of God's providence. Human trafficking is one of the greatest evils among men. Joseph was purchased by the captain of Pharaoh's army whose name was Potiphar. Joseph proved himself to be a wise and faithful servant. He was made the chief servant in the house of Potiphar. His master trusted him and committed his whole estate to Joseph's care.

But Potiphar had an evil and wicked wife who accused Joseph of trying to force her into adultery with her. She made this charge to cover up her own evil lustful enticement of Joseph to go to bed with him.

Because of the false charges of this evil woman, Joseph was thrown into prison where he suffered for a number of years. This whole chain of events could have made Joseph bitter, even against God. Joseph might have rotted in despair while in prison. But Joseph continued to trust in the sovereign God of providence. As a result of this, God gave Joseph wisdom even while in prison. Joseph was given the responsibility to rule over his fellow prisoners.

While all of these were happening, God sent the dreams to the heathen king Pharaoh about the seven years of plenty and prosperity that were to come, which would be followed by seven years of severe famine. This is in itself an amazing testimony of the providence of God ruling over the seasons of the year, in times of prosperity and plenty, and also in times of famine and great distress.

In the midst of all this history, faithful Joseph was exalted from prison to become the chief ruler in Egypt. Joseph now had occasion to reveal himself to his brethren when they came to Egypt to buy food during the days of the famine. Another amazing series of events happened, also ruled by the providence of God. The culmination of these events was that Jacob and his entire family, who in spite of their sinfulness, were the special covenant people of God at the time, moved to Egypt. This move was in order to keep the whole company of Jacob and his family alive in the providence of God.

The passage that you were asked to read was the confession of Joseph at a crucial time in all of this history. Father Jacob died of old age and was buried. After this, the brothers of Joseph greatly feared that Joseph would avenge himself of all the evil that his brothers had done to him in past years. Surely he could not have forgotten their cruel and evil deeds of the past.

But God gave Joseph an amazing and wonderful understanding of His providence. The providence of God ruled over evil, not only for the great good of Joseph in his personal life. Joseph was exalted, as God rewarded him for his faithfulness. The providence of God ruled over all the seemingly evil things that took place, for the salvation of God's people. What an amazing thing! Many are the applications of God's providence to our own lives and the history of the world in which we live. How wonderful is the providence of God, even ruling over the desperately evil purposes of wicked men for the good and salvation of His people. What a great comfort for us to know this truth of God!

April 16 – God’s Sovereign Counsel in Christ Ruling Over the Most Wicked Deeds of Men
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Acts 2:22-33

The passage that I asked you to read for this meditation contains the most amazing record of God’s sovereign providential rule over the sin and wicked deeds of men for the accomplishment of the great good of the salvation of His people.

God sent His beloved Son into the world for the salvation of His people. We would have expected the world to receive the Son of God with joy and exultation, and given Him the honor and glory He was worthy of.

During all the years of His ministry, Jesus did nothing but good, healing the sick, making the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and even raising up the dead to life again.

The miracles that Jesus did clearly demonstrated that He was the Son of God, for no mere man could ever have done the mighty works that He performed.

Yet Jesus was hated and despised by men, even by those He came to save. This hatred was totally unreasonable. This hatred came to its culmination when the most wicked men of the world came together and condemned the perfect and holy Son of God to the accursed death of the cross. No greater evil has ever been done. Surely it was all inspired by the devil himself.

The death at the cross involved dreadful agony and torment for our beloved Lord. In the midst of its great darkness and suffering, Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46).

When they had crucified Jesus and they saw him dead on the cross, the enemies of Christ imagined that they had triumphed over Him.

But God raised up Jesus His Son from the dead and exalted Him to the highest glory and honor at His own right hand in heaven. The exaltation of Christ was the reward of God for His perfect obedience, love and amazing self-sacrifice on the cross.

The death of Jesus Christ, the exaltation that followed and the salvation that was accomplished, surely did not happen by chance. Those evil men who crucified Jesus, contrary to their imagination, did not act independently and totally free of God’s control. In fact, because of the providential rule of the sovereign God of heaven and earth, it all happened in order that Christ could become the mighty savior of His people, and made glorious in God’s own presence.

The inspired writer of the book of Acts declares that all these events took place according to the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” The meaning of these precise words is very significant. God did not passively allow wicked men and the devil to do their great evil. The truth is that God determined all of these things in His own sovereign and eternal counsel for the highest good.

The wicked men who performed the evil work of crucifying the Christ of God stand responsible and justly condemned for their evil work. We shiver even to think of the dreadful judgment all these wicked men will receive on the day of judgment and forever in hell.

But God ruled over all of these things to accomplish the exaltation of His Son and the great good of salvation of His people. What a blessed and comforting truth with the greatest implications, showing that God is absolutely God!

April 17 – God Cannot be Charged with Evil
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Deuteronomy 32:1-6

In our last few meditations we have been considering the truth that God's providence governs even the great evils that take place in the world. The supreme example of this certainly is that God ruled over the most wicked deed that men have ever done in the entire history of the world, namely, the crucifixion of the glorious and blessed Son of God. We considered in this connection what Acts 2:23 teaches. It is important to believe what scripture says about God's rule over evil. If God does not rule over evil and over the works of the devil, then evil and the devil are independent powers. If evil is independent from God, then we cannot be certain that the God will gain the victory over the devil in the end, and that the devil will not be able to overthrow the work of the cross of Jesus Christ.

In the personal circumstances of our life, God is in complete control not only over the good things which He sends us, but also in the difficult providences of sickness, trials and troubles in our life. These things are not controlled by the devil or some blind evil force independent from God, but by our loving heavenly Father. He rules over these things with such absolute sovereignty that He turns all evil which He sends, for our good and salvation.

That God rules even over all the evil that is in the world, does not make God the author or source of evil. To charge God with being the author of any evil in the world is the height of blasphemy. Yet proud and wicked man does indeed sometimes charge God with being responsible for the evil that is in the world. Defiantly he holds his fist in the face of God. He becomes angry with God because of the troubles of his life. Scripture makes plain that all the misery and suffering that is in the world is due to the fall of man, and the curse of God upon this sin. The devil is the author of all evil in the world. The history of the fall as recorded in Genesis 3 makes this very plain.

When God rules even over the devil and even over the great sin and wickedness of man, He does so in such a way that He never in any way becomes tainted with sin Himself. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. He remains absolutely and perfectly holy, the embodiment of all perfection and glory.

The mysteries of God's absolute sovereignty even over evil are far greater than the limits of human understanding. When God rules over evil, He justly condemns, and in His holy wrath destroys those who do evil, including the devil and all his hosts. God shows Himself to be absolutely and fearfully just when He sends His judgment on the world and wicked men. This should cause all of us to tremble and fear before Him.

God rules and triumphs over all evil. He has planned all things in His counsel, even the fall and the evil works of men. He is able to rule over them and destroy the wicked in such a way that they serve His own glorious purposes. His justice is revealed. The greatness of the salvation of His people and the wonderful work He has accomplished in the cross, resurrection and exaltation of Christ; everything in the history of the world, will finally serve the glory of Christ and the salvation of His people. How great and absolutely sovereign is our God! We worship and adore Him with fear and trembling.

April 18 – God’s Works in Providence are Incomprehensible
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Isaiah 40

I have asked you to read a long section of scripture. This is good and we should at times do just this with great benefit for strengthening our faith in God. Isaiah speaks powerfully of the greatness of God. He does so in order to comfort God’s people in their troubles and in the severe trials of life that God sometimes sends in their lives.

Man is sinful and proud when he demands to understand all of the works of God. In this demand, he is really imagining himself to be equal with God. But God is indeed infinitely greater than man. The works of God are greater than the limits of our human understanding. We are so small in the presence of God. He is so infinitely great!

God’s word calls us to faith when we consider His almighty providence in the world. Job states this truth when he declares, “Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea” (Job 11:7-9). Job spoke these words by the inspiration of God while he was suffering the greatest imaginable trials. He believed that all of these were in the providence of God. He confessed that the ways of God in his life were very deep and beyond all understanding. He comforted himself through faith in the greatness of God.

Isaiah the prophet comforted Judah in the midst of the great trials of the Babylonian captivity, when the people of God were in despair and at times thought that God was not strong enough to save His people.

In the rest of today’s meditation, let’s just consider again some of the amazing passages in the prophecy of Isaiah. God spake through the prophet Isaiah of His incomprehensible, amazing and wonderful greatness in His providential dealings with His people. “Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?...Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold He taketh up the isles as a very little thing” (Isa 40:12,15).

A few verses later we read, “It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:” (Isa 40:22). “Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things...” (Isa 40:26).

In a later chapter, when the people of God were in deep despair because of the great trials they were experiencing in the providence of God, God said to His people, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:8-9).

In order to believe in the truth of God’s providence in our deepest trials, and thinking about our own weaknesses and helplessness before forces and powers in the world, we need to remember and believe with deepest humility, fear, and trembling, the infinite greatness, almighty power, and absolute sovereignty of God in all of His ways.

April 19 – The Proper Attitude Towards the Incomprehensible Works of God’s Providence
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Job 42:1-6

Because the works of God are so much greater than the limits of our human understanding, we should not demand to fully understand them. We should not become discouraged and despair because we cannot fully understand them. We also should not in human pride seek to pry into the mysteries of God’s providence which are greater than our understanding. God is greater than our understanding. We should expect that. We should humbly accept that by faith. We should not judge God when the works of His providence in our life, or in the world in which we live, are beyond our understanding.

We must simply believe what should be obvious, that God is greater than we are. We are ever so small and so limited in our understanding. God sent Job many difficult trials in his life. At times Job complained and questioned God’s dealings with him in his trials. At the end, when God brought Job to his senses, he made the confession in the passage which I have asked you to read for this meditation.

Moses by inspiration of God gave this admonition to Israel in Deut 29:29. “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

God has revealed many wonderful truths concerning His power, goodness and mercy. He has revealed these things in His Word, the infallible scriptures, the Bible. We need to read and believe His Word daily, so that we might know and trust in Him, do His will and know His calling for us in our lives. We must also teach our children the wonderful truths of God for their great benefit and faith in Him.

Before the mysteries of God’s providence, we are to acknowledge with fear and trembling that God is infinitely greater than our understanding and that we are before Him but dust and ashes. Such faith gives us the proper reverence before God and proper humble knowledge of our own smallness and the severe limitations in our own lives. We are absolutely dependent on God’s sovereignty. It is He that has made us and not we ourselves. In His providence, God gives us life, breath and all things. In Him we live and move and have our being.

Especially when we consider that God even rules over the wicked deeds of men, and over all their evil devices against Him, we must be careful of our own attitude. Never must we judge God for being evil, nor demand of Him that we must be able to fully understand the wonderful works of His providence.

The inspired apostle Paul writes about God’s absolute sovereignty in the saving of His people and the severity of His justice in condemning the ungodly reprobate wicked. Afterwards, Paul in his utter amazement and astonishment makes this declaration concerning God. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto Him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:33-36).

April 20 – The Care of Our Gracious and Heavenly Father
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Psalm 73:11-24

The truth of the providence of God is not an abstract doctrine. According to Art. 13, this doctrine affords us unspeakable consolation (comfort). This comfort is particularly for those who are the children of God in the world. These have the right to call the living God, the creator and ruler of the universe, their God and Father for Jesus' sake. The providence of God is His constant personal care for His dear children. He knows them by name and constantly watches over every circumstance of their lives.

God is not the universal Father of all men (Eph 2:2-3). The ungodly refuse to acknowledge God and serve Him. They are said to be children of wrath. What could be more dreadful than to pass the days of one's life in the holy wrath of God!

We are the children of God by grace. The grace of God is His unmerited favor towards us who are undeserving, in Christ Jesus. Without the grace of God, we too would be children of wrath, dead in trespasses and sin. But now God loves us and cares for us!

The providence of God is to be considered with adoration by those who are His children! God in His providence sometimes sends prosperity to the wicked. He might even give greater riches and prosperity to the wicked than to His children. While He sends prosperity to the wicked, God might even send severe trials to His children in the world. This might cause us to be in great distress, as was the case with the Psalmist of Psalm 73.

What a mighty difference between God's dealings with the wicked and His dealings with His children! When God sends prosperity to the wicked, He sets them on slippery places, and in the end casts them down to destruction. The blindness of sin causes the wicked to be ignorant of these things. At the same time, God directs all things in the lives of His dear children in His Fatherly goodness and mercy. He causes all things in their lives to work for their good and salvation.

The God who cares for His children, dwells in the highest heavens. He is a God of sovereign almighty power, and transcendent glory and majesty. He is the ruler over the vast universe which He created. He upholds and directs all the creatures in this universe, so that none can even so much as move without His will and providence.

This God has set His love upon us. In this amazingly Fatherly love, He has made us His children by His adoptive grace and His work of regeneration in our hearts.

By His love, God has distinguished us from the billions of people on this earth to be His children. He has distinguished us to be His children in His Son Jesus Christ, for we were by nature children of wrath. We are the objects of God's love continually as He beholds us as His dear children, redeemed by grace in His beloved Son Jesus Christ.

He loves us as no earthly father could ever love one of his children. This is true because He is God. Even the greatest earthly father is so limited in his power to protect and care for his children. There are so many things outside of the control of earthly fathers. These earthly fathers are often filled with anguish when they see their children in the midst of great suffering and trouble.

The God of providence is the Sovereign Almighty Lord of heaven and earth. What a comfort to know this blessed truth as children of the heavenly Father!

April 21 – By His Will and Constant Loving Care
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Luke 12:1-12

In the passage I asked you to read, Jesus comforts us with the truth of God's providence. He does so in connection with His prophesying that in this ungodly world, the Christian has many enemies. They persecute us and when their hatred for us grows fierce, they may even kill us. This is a growing and ever increasing fearful reality. The wicked world, under the instigation of the devil, wants to destroy the children of God spiritually. The devil is constantly attacking us. According to I Pet 5:8, the devil goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

We need not fear even the greatest of enemies, nor any danger in the world. We have the Almighty Sovereign of heaven and earth taking care of us continually. He loves us in His capacity as our heavenly Father. He has distinguished us from the world, setting us apart by sovereign grace and adopting us as His children. He demonstrated the amazing greatness of His love to us by sacrificing His only begotten Son in order that He might redeem us forever to be His own.

It is inconceivable that God the Father could ever forsake any of His children. No enemy or power in all the universe can separate us from His love. Rom 8:38-39 declares that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The providence of God involves the continual moment to moment operation of the will and power of God, directed by His amazing love, for our good and salvation. God is constantly active in His care for His people. He never slumbers nor sleeps. He will preserve us from all evil. He never lets us out of His sight.

God never desires anything else than the good and salvation of His people. He does not ever change His purpose and desire. He sometimes chastens us because of our sin. He is grieved with our sin, but even then He does not change His love for us nor turn against us to destroy us.

The providence of God has the final goal of our eternal salvation. That goal has been fixed in the eternal counsel of God. Our life in all His perfect plan will lead us to the final realization of that goal. God's purpose of saving His people through Jesus Christ will not, nor can ever fail. The Psalmist confesses before God, "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psa 73:24).

Even the hairs of our head are numbered. Who ever thinks about the number of hairs on their head? They usually fall to the ground without our will and without our care. The providence of God is so all-knowing, so all-inclusive, that even the smallest details of our life are under the amazing and wonderful control of the providence of God.

There are so many more mighty and significant things that happen in our daily life and in the world in which we live. There are so many forces greater than we are. There are so many things totally outside of our control. There are so many things in the future that God does not reveal to us now. All of these also are completely under the control of the wonderful providence of God. We are perfectly safe in the hands of our heavenly Father. What a comfort it is to know this blessed truth!

April 22 – Trusting Completely in the Providence of God
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Psalm 27

With today's meditation, we conclude the series of meditations on the wonderful truth of the providence of God in Art. 13. It is not good enough that we have a certain intellectual knowledge and understanding of the truth of the providence of God. We must constantly hold this truth in our hearts by the conscious exercise of our faith. This truth must live in our heart and be our daily comfort and peace, no matter what happens in our lives.

We are so easily distracted because of the weakness of our faith. We are so easily frightened by the great evils and dangers of the world in which we live. We are at times overwhelmed with fear and even despair because of fear of the enemy. We are discouraged and troubled because of the trials and difficulties that we experience in our lives. We sometimes think that everything and everyone is against us. We fear that God is against us, or that He has forgotten us.

Remember that the Belgic Confession was composed at a time of great trials for the church of the Lord. Christians in Belgium, where this confession was composed, were experiencing severe persecution. The Spanish inquisition was orchestrated by the church of Rome to destroy the cause of the Reformation. Sometimes, the followers of the Reformation were expelled from their places of worship. They continued however, to worship God, sometimes even in the open fields. During the worship services, the congregation was surrounded by soldiers for her protection. During this period, thousands of saints of God died as martyrs. Their faith however was in God and they were not afraid. Many of them died for the faith that was more precious to them, even than their own life. The Lord rewarded their faith with everlasting salvation. They believed that in life and in death, God would take care of them. In such circumstances, the wonderful statements about the providence of God recorded in Art. 13 of the Belgic Confession were composed.

To have the truth of God's providence as our own real comfort, we need to exercise the faith God gives us. God Himself must work faith in our hearts. We do not have it of ourselves. Our faith is often weak. One of the miracles that Jesus performed when He was yet on earth was to deliver the son of a man from a demon. The disciples of Jesus could not deliver the poor man's son from the devil. Therefore, when this man saw Jesus he ran to Him and fell down before Him. He cried to the Lord to deliver his son. Jesus answered him, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." In turn the man answered Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." See Mark 9:14-29 for the whole account.

Faith requires deep humility on our part. We must not rely on our own wisdom or strength to overcome our troubles or to prevail over our enemies. We must rather trust completely in the wonderful God of providence. He is ever present with us. Let us not be afraid. When we realize our own weakness and trust completely in Him, the knowledge of the truth of God's wonderful providence makes us strong.

Read the last 2 verses of Psa 27 again. "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say on the LORD."

Article 14: The Creation and Fall of Man, and His Incapacity to Perform What is Truly Good.

We believe that God created man out of the dust of the earth, and made and formed him after His own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy, capable in all things to will agreeably to the will of God. But being in honor, he understood it not, neither knew his excellency, but willfully subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil. For the commandment of life which he had received he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life; having corrupted his whole nature; whereby he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death. And being thus become wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways, he hath lost all his excellent gifts, which he had received from God, and retained only a few remains thereof, which, however, are sufficient to leave man without excuse; for all the light which is in us is changed into darkness, as the Scriptures teach us, saying: The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not, where St. John calleth men darkness.

Therefore we reject all that is taught repugnant to this concerning the free will of man, since man is but a slave to sin, and has nothing of himself, unless it is given from heaven. For who may presume to boast that he of himself can do any good, since Christ saith, No man can come to Me except the Father, which hath sent Me, draw him? Who will glory in his own will, who understands that to be carnally minded is enmity against God? Who can speak of his knowledge, since the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God? In short, who dare suggest any thought, since he knows that we are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but that our sufficiency is of God? And therefore what the apostle saith ought justly to be held sure and firm, that God worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. For there is no will nor understanding conformable to the divine will and understandin, but what Christ hath wrought in man, which He teaches us, when He saith, Without Me ye can do nothing.

April 23 – Creation of Man
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: Genesis 2:4-7

God created man!

Man often asks "Who am I?" Long has man been fascinated with the questions "What is man?" and "Whence is man?" Man, the unbelieving anthropologists tell us, is an organism of the class *Mammalia*. Man is the most advanced of all animals. He is intelligent. He is self-conscious. He can think, reflect, infer, imagine, speculate, argue and debate. He has discovered many of the mysteries and powers of the universe. He has harnessed them for his own use. Man, however, is not essentially different from the animals, but must be classed among them. Man, we are told, is the result of millions of years of evolution. Evolution created man. Man traces his origin back to the apes, but only proximately. Ultimately he originates from the more primitive microscopic organisms that first sprung to life in the primeval swamps of the early earth. Man is the product of luck. Man, in this view, is nothing but star dust looking at stars.

But no! GOD created man! Over against this absurd unbelief of Darwinism, we believe: GOD created man (Gen 1:27). God, who calls the things which be not as though they were (Rom 4:17), called forth man. God, who eternally decreed to create man, gave existence to man in time.

But God created man not in the way He created the other creatures. God made all other things, heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, by His Word, by omnipotent *fiat*. He said "Let there be," and there was. He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast (Psa 33:9). He uttered the word, and that word brought forth out of nothing all things that are. But God used a different mode of operation to create man. He first paused and said within Himself, "Let us make man" (Gen 1:26). God conferred with Himself, for He is a plurality of persons, Father, Son, and Spirit in one being. God conferred with Himself, not to make a plan before embarking on this significant endeavor, for He already had a plan. But He did so to reveal that we are His crowning achievement and the centerpiece of His creative work. God then *formed* man. God did not create man out of nothing by means of speech, but shaped him out of something by His own hand. He, as it were, scooped up a handful of the earth He had just made and carefully fashioned a body with head and torso, arms and legs, eyes and ears, nose and mouth. He made his body out of earth. But He was not finished. He breathed into that body, through the nostrils, to fill it with the breath of life. The lungs began to breathe. The heart began to pump blood. The brain began to send impulses. But still He was not finished. He did something more. He made man a *living soul*. No, not just a living body, but a living soul. He gave man a spiritual side. He made man different from the animals, a creature related intimately to Himself, thinking and willing, choosing and rejecting, knowing and desiring, understanding right and wrong.

God created man! Do you ask, "What is man?" Man is a creature of God, with a physical and spiritual nature, a rational and moral soul. Man is the centerpiece and culmination of God's creative work. Man is the creature through whom and to whom God would glorify Himself in the highest way.

"...What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour...O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (Psa 8:3-9).

April 24 – Creation of Woman
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: Genesis 2:18-25

God created man, but also woman.

"Male and female created He them." Such is the brief statement of the creation of woman in Gen 1. But Gen 2 tells the story.

On that sixth day of creation God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone." This reality God made known to man. He revealed it to him in an unmistakable way. He made the beasts of the field and the birds of the air come before him, two by two. Every animal had a partner, a companion. But Adam had none. In the words of the Preacher, he was "one alone, and there [was] not a second" (Ecc 4:8). This, according to the Lord, was not good, not ideal, not complete, because man was a creature made for fellowship, but he was all alone. As the Preacher would later say, "Two are better than one" (Ecc 4:9). Companionship is better than solitude. Friendship is better than isolation. Therefore, God said, "I will make him an help meet for him." That is, I will create another of Adam's kind, a helper meet for him, no mere subordinate, but a helper to meet Adam's deep need for fellowship and to complement and complete him; a companion and a friend. God put Adam into a deep sleep, reached into his chest and removed a single rib. He made out of that rib, by a mind-defying wonder, a woman. Woman she was called because out of Man she was taken.

God created man, but also woman.

God had a purpose, a significant purpose, in creating the woman. Look: God brought her unto the man (Gen 2:22). God then said, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen 2:24). Marriage was instituted as the fundamental human relationship. Marriage is the intimate union of one man and one woman whom God has brought together and joined in an unbreakable, life-long bond of friendship. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt 19:6). Let all young people who seek marriage wait patiently for the Lord to bring them their mate, and marry one with whom they are one in the Lord. Let all married people understand that they are "no more twain, but one flesh." (Matt 19:6) Let the evil thought of divorce never enter our minds. Let us husbands love our wives as our own cherished bodies and live joyfully with them all our days. Let wives love their husbands, reverence and submit to them as their God-given heads.

For only then is marriage an accurate reflection of "the mystery" (Eph 5:32). God had a deeper purpose in creating woman than merely to give Adam a friend. Adam had a Friend already. God's purpose was to create a relationship *among* men to reflect the relationship between *Himself and men*, His beloved in Christ Jesus. "The mystery" is the marriage between Christ and the Church, the intimate union of the Lamb and His Bride, whom God brought together in election, and through the cross, in an unbreakable and everlasting bond of friendship. This is the covenant of grace. Christ our Bridegroom now takes us by the hand into this covenant of marriage through His Spirit. Christ, your Bridegroom and mine, will come again to rescue us from this present evil world, to consummate His marriage with us, raise it to perfection, and inaugurate the marriage supper that will last forever!

Then we will shout with unbounded joy, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready" (Rev 19:7).

April 25 – Made in the Image of God
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: Genesis 1:24-27

Imagine yourself standing on the shore of a clear, pristine lake on a bright, sunny day, the water perfectly calm. Now look into the lake. What do you see? You see yourself looking back at you. You see a reflection of yourself there on the surface of the water. You see an image of yourself. You are looking, as it were, into creation's mirror. But there is more. For the water is calm. And therefore you see an image which is also a likeness, don't you? No ripples or waves distort your reflection. An accurate reflection of you, a likeness, stares back at you. The color of your hair and eyes, the shape of your head and body, the length of your arms and legs are all discernible. Should you toss a small pebble into the lake, however, the resemblance would vanish in an instant. Your reflection would become distorted. The likeness would disappear. Then the water would return to its settled state, and your likeness would reappear. Image and likeness reunite.

God made and formed man after His own image and likeness. What a marvel! We were created as a reflection of God that resembled God! What a wonder!

No other creature was made in God's image: Not light or the firmament or earth or sea or plants. Not the tall, majestic Redwood trees or the bright, beautiful orchids. Not the sun or moon or stars. Not the fish or fowl, not the beast or reptile. Oh, to be sure, all creatures "declare the glory of God" and show forth "His handiwork" from day unto day (Psa 19:1). Surely "the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom 1:20). No doubt creation is a revelation of God, bearing the stamp of its Creator. But apart from man, no creature was made to be an image and likeness of God. Only man was made as the mirror of God, or in terms of my illustration, the image in that lake. Man is unique.

No myth of primitive man is this! Modern man scoffs at this truth. Says he: It is a mere myth from primitive times, the product of the fertile imagination of ancient humans and primitive man's answer to the question, "What is man?" Man noticed the stark contrast between himself and the animals and reasoned that he was special and different, and that too, by divine order. He imagined to himself, "I may not be God, but surely I am like God, an image and likeness of God." But now, says modern man, we know better: man is no image of God, but a descendent of the ape.

But we vehemently reject this.

We believe Scripture: God created man; made and formed him after His own image and likeness. Do you believe that? You, my fellow Christian, have been *re-created* in the image of God by the Spirit of Christ. You are a reflection of GOD! You *look like* God! You are a special creature among all God's creatures. You are a beautiful image of God, created in righteousness, holiness and knowledge of God. You are a marvel of God's grace. Believe it!

April 26 – Image of God in Particular
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: Ephesians 4:17-24 & Colossians 3:8-10

Man was originally made in the image and likeness of God. But how in particular did man reflect and resemble God?

We may be tempted to accept the opinion that man was an image of God by virtue of his spiritual-rational-moral nature. After all, God is a Spirit, God has intellect, and God is a moral Being. Thus, man's spiritual-rational-moral nature must be the image. But perhaps we feel this is insufficient, and that more needs to be included. Then perhaps we would be drawn to make a distinction between the image in the broad sense and the narrow sense, the former referring to man's rational-moral nature, the latter to man's original goodness. Such is the doctrine of many concerning the image of God. According to this view, man lost the image only in the narrow sense through the Fall and *still* reflects the nature of God in the broad sense. I say, we may be drawn to such an opinion as a sensible explanation of this truth.

But we must resist such an explanation. Such is the product of human philosophizing. Such is not founded on Scripture or our confessions. The Genesis account does not tell us what the image was. But the Reformers argued that the new man created in us is the same as that image of God. How did man originally reflect and resemble God? In the same ways regenerated man once again reflects and resembles God according to Scripture: in righteousness, holiness, and knowledge (Eph 4:24, Col 3:10). Such is the explanation of all three of our forms of unity: "God created man good, and after His own image, in true righteousness and holiness..." (HC, LD 3, Q&A 6). "Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright..." (Canons, III/IV.1). God "made and formed [man] after His own image and likeness, good, righteous, and holy, capable in all things to will, agreeably to the will of God" (BC, Art. 14). Or, we may say, man reflected and resembled the "communicable attributes" of God: love, grace, mercy, justice, righteousness, holiness, knowledge, wisdom, truth.

What then of man's rationality and morality? It is not the image of God, but the canvas on which the image is portrayed. Image and canvas are two different things. When I go to an art museum and look at a beautiful painting, I do not suppose that the frame and canvas are part of the painting. They are only the neutral substratum on which the painting appears. If I were to take white paint and brush it all over the painting, the image would disappear, but the substratum would remain. Something ugly could be painted on that same substratum. Such is man's rationality and morality: the substratum of the image, that which makes man capable of bearing the image. But the image itself is the beautiful artwork of God's marvelous virtues which man originally reflected in Paradise.

Adam and Eve were good: not at all inclined to evil, but loving and desiring to do good. They were righteous: not guilty of a single trespass, but in a state of perfect innocence and obedience to God's law. They were holy: utterly opposed to sin and devoted to God as the highest and only good. They knew God: not just facts about Him, but personal communion with Him.

Such was the image of God. Such was lost in the Fall. Such was restored to us, to you and me, the elect of God, by Christ through His cross and Spirit. Seek therefore the things which are above (Col 3:1), today and every day, as one bearing the image of God.

April 27 – The Cultural Mandate
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: Genesis 1:26-31

God made man in His own image, capable in all things to will agreeably to the will of God, to obey God and do what God commanded.

God expressed His positive will for man in what is often called the cultural mandate: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen 1:28). Three commands entered the listening ears of Adam and Eve on that sixth day of history, which came thereby to the whole human race: First, God said, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.” God did not create all men in the beginning. He created two. He built into them the power, when joined together in the act of marriage, to reproduce. God intended for man to bring forth man, and for all men to be organically connected. God commanded Adam and Eve to reproduce, to multiply through children and to fill the earth with people. But God’s primary purpose was not merely to bring the human race into being, but His elect in the human race. Therefore, this mandate, as it now comes to us as believers in Christ, is a high and noble calling. Let us, to whom God has given the ability and right, be fruitful and fulfill this calling. God will gather His people through our seed!

Secondly, God said, “Subdue the earth.” God created a mature universe full of diversity and possibility, atomic and molecular particles, galaxies and star systems. God built into it laws and principles regarding matter, space, time, motion, light, life and so forth. God intended that these laws would be discovered, harnessed and put to use by man. God did not create man with innate knowledge of all these things. Adam and Eve did not understand everything about the world at the moment of their creation. But God made man capable of understanding. God then commanded man to subdue this vast world with its deep mysteries and possibilities. Man was to subdue it, subject it to discovery, to understanding, and to his own use and benefit, and to do so to the glory of God. But though man still eagerly seeks to fulfill this mandate, and is quite successful from an outward point of view, he now does so in defiance of God, for his own glory, and in the service of Satan, and his work will culminate in the kingdom of Antichrist. But we Christians must seek to fulfill this mandate in our vocations – in science, industry, technology, agriculture, and so forth – for the glory of God.

Thirdly, God said, “Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” God created man as the pinnacle of the created order. God made man, under Him, the king of all creatures. God created man as His office bearer, His prophet-priest-king, in the midst of the world. God endowed man with intelligence and goodness, and made him capable of ruling well over the other creatures. God then mandated man to exercise dominion, to uphold order in the animal world and care for the animals, as a steward takes care of the property of his master. This was to be done with wisdom and benevolence, not cruel tyranny. But since the Fall, man rapes and pillages, pollutes and destroys, tortures and brings to extinction the creatures God put under his care. Man rules the animals, whether as poacher or environmental activist, in proud defiance of God and for his own sinful purposes. We, as God’s people, must be good stewards of God’s creatures, exercising wise dominion, for the glory of God, who is our Father for Jesus’ sake.

April 28 – The Commandment of Life
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: Genesis 2:8-17

Adam received a commandment of life. But he received it as a commandment of death. “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:16-17). Disobey and die. Obey and live. That was the commandment of life.

From this commandment of life, many derive the elaborate doctrine of the covenant of works between God and man in Paradise. But most who speak of the covenant of works are sorely mistaken. We do not see God and man, as two contracting parties, making a pact with each other. We read only of a command issuing from the Sovereign Lord to His human creature. We do not hear God promise to give Adam life, much less eternal life, on the basis of his merits. We only hear God warn Adam that he will surely die, and lose the life he had, should he disobey. Nor does our Confession, by this phrase we are now considering, so much as hint at the idea of the covenant of works.

What then? Pay close attention to the text. God breathed into man the breath of life. God made man a living soul. Man had life. Life was a gift to man from God “who was his true life.” What is life? Life in its lowest form is mere physical energy expressed in physical motion. But life in its highest creaturely form is spiritual energy expressed in spiritual activity. Man had life, spiritual life, communion with God. Man’s life was a covenant life. But this covenant was no pact. It was a bond of intimate communion, a relation of close fellowship, a friendship of love. God was Adam’s God and Adam was God’s man. God was Adam’s Sovereign Friend and Adam was God’s friend-servant. God and Adam walked and talked together in deep, intimate fellowship. God gave Adam this life. Adam owed Him a debt of gratitude. Adam had to obey the commandment of life not to merit life, but in thankfulness for the life he had been given.

Obedience must always flow out of gratitude, not out of the desire to merit. Obedience must always be done because I have received, never in order to get. Obedience never deserves anything from God, but is always a debt to God. Disobedience flows from ingratitude. Disobedience deserves something, namely, *death*, the revoking of life.

Adam could not merit eternal life by obeying the commandment of life.

Only one man in all of history could do that. Only our Lord Jesus Christ obeyed to merit. He alone obeyed to merit because He alone is God in our flesh. He alone, as God, did not have to obey, but chose to obey. He alone, as God, was able to merit with God for willingly humbling Himself and obeying unto the death of the cross. He alone obeyed God perfectly on behalf of God’s elect. He alone sustained the wrath of God and earned eternal life for all those in Him. He alone could and did obtain everlasting, immortal, incorruptible, irrevocable life. Look not backward with longing eyes to the Garden of Eden and that life, but look forward with eagerness to the blessed life of the new creation earned for us by Christ. And rejoice now in the foretaste of that life which we enjoy in His Spirit.

April 29 – The Fall
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: Genesis 3:1-7

Man has fallen. Falling is that harmful experience in which one plunges downward from a higher to lower position. Man has fallen in the spiritual-ethical sense of the word. What a high position man formerly occupied! What a marvelous life he lived! What a lofty and wonderful privilege to be created at all, and then in the image of God! What heights of honor and excellency belonged to him! But he understood it not, nor knew it. Oh, I think he understood it in his mind, but not in his heart. He did not view it as precious. He stumbled. He willfully tripped and plummeted into spiritual ruin.

The Fall was man's first sin. His sin was multi-faceted disobedience. It was apostasy from the truth. Eve distorted what God said when she told the serpent, "God hath said, ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (Gen 3:3). God never said, "Ye shall not *touch* it", only "Ye shall not *eat* of it" (2:17). It was carnal lust, for she "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes" and she longed for the pleasure of eating the forbidden thing (3:6). It was wicked pride, for she viewed the tree as "a tree to be desired to make one wise" (3:6) and she desired to become "as gods, knowing good and evil" (3:5). But quite simply the sin was disobedience to the law of the Most High. God said, "Of this tree thou shalt not eat." Man said, "Of that tree I will eat." Man took the outlawed thing and did eat (3:6). He transgressed the commandment of life. And note well, this is *our* sin, our apostasy, our lust, our pride, our disobedience. This is not just the sin of Eve, or of Adam, but of MAN. This is the sin every man would commit, did commit in Adam, and does commit in his actual life.

Man *willfully* subjected himself to sin. He, and we, chose to sin. Man was faced with a choice: to sin or not to sin. He chose to sin. He did not act in ignorance. Nor did he have an accident. Nor did he simply fall victim to the devil's overpowering charms. But he, in the full knowledge of what he was doing, and with heart, mind and will, chose to sin. How is that possible? Many explanations to this mystery have been attempted. Augustine observed that man was not created *non posse peccare* (not able to sin), but *posse peccare* (able to sin). Man was originally able to choose to sin, even though he was righteous. But how was it that man *did* sin? Was he not perfectly righteous? He certainly was. But note well that he was not absolutely righteous. He was not righteousness. He did not possess the attribute of righteousness in himself, but had received it from God. God alone is absolutely righteous. God cannot sin. Man could sin. Man's righteousness was losable. But *why* did man choose to sin? Man sinned because God willed it in His counsel and realized it by His providence; for God works *all* things after the counsel of His own will (Eph 1:11). He did not force man to sin, nor was He responsible for it, but He certainly caused it, not out of a love for sin, but to glorify Himself by saving us from sin through Christ.

Adam and Eve, and all of us who are elect in Christ, fell into the arms of Christ. Praise God that we have not fallen into the everlasting abyss, but into His saving arms, from which we can never fall!

April 30 – The Words of the Devil
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: Genesis 3:1-5 & John 8:44

Man gave ear to “the words of the devil.”

The devil is the ancient angelic enemy of God and God’s kingdom. He did not always exist, but was created with the other angels, perhaps on day one of creation. He was called Lucifer (Isa 14:12). He was the anointed cherub (Eze 28:14). He was one of the most powerful, beautiful and wise of all angels. But pride arose in him and he said, “I will be like the Most High” (Isa 14:14). Thus, he fell and became the Dragon, the Satan (adversary), and the devil (slanderer). He drew one third of the angelic realm to his side over against God (Rev 12:4). He is the enemy of God and God’s kingdom. He desires but one thing: to destroy God and to enthrone himself as god.

And man gave ear to his words! The words of the devil are words of falsehood and deceit. “He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44). He brought forth *the lie*, the deliberate twisting and distorting of truth, as a way to beguile man and turn him against God. He did not waste any time. Immediately he entered Paradise. From the world of animals he selected the most subtle, the serpent, and inhabited it. Creeping through the garden, he looked for the woman, and finding her, he spoke. He began with a deceitful question subtly designed to cast doubt into her mind: “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Gen 3:1). Deceitful it was because he knew that God never forbade them to eat of *every* tree, but only of *one* tree. She gave ear to his words. She did not flee, but listened. She did not rebuke, but discussed. Therefore, he gleefully ensnared her with a bold lie of terrible implications: “Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:4-5). *Ye shall be as God!* Ye shall obtain divine power, wisdom and blessedness!

Man gave ear to these words of the devil. And man fell.

Beware of the words of the devil! He speaks still today. He still speaks the same old lie: Ye shall not die from a little sin! On the contrary, sin is the secret to success and happiness! God is a cruel tyrant who does not want you to find happiness. He hides the secret by forbidding sin. But I, says the devil, am on your side! I know what really satisfies, what fulfills, what gives happiness: Do what you want! If you want the fruit, eat it! If money is what you like, seek it! If cursing makes you feel better, do it! If you dislike your neighbor, kill him! If you want to have sex before marriage, go ahead! If you enjoy drinking booze or doing drugs, indulge! You are God! Do not let anyone tell you what to believe or how to behave. Believe and do what you want. Such words the devil whispers into our ears. *Beware!* Do not give him your ear! But “put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11). Pray for strength to resist. Give ear, beloved saints, to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ who died for you and crushed the head of the serpent.

May 1 – By Sin Separated from God
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: Genesis 3:7-10 & Psalm 51

By sin man separated himself from God. By sin we too separate ourselves from God.

Sin is a dark and dreadful reality. This dark and dreadful reality goes by many names in Scripture. Sin is “the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4) and the “filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (II Cor 7:1). It is evil and darkness. It is disobedience and rebellion. It is iniquity and wickedness. But sin is also the willful choice to separate oneself from God. By sin man separated himself from God in the Garden of Eden. By sin we too separate ourselves from God. Dark and dreadful reality! Horrible choice!

But what is meant by this? After all, we cannot separate ourselves from GOD, can we? From some points of view that is certainly true. We cannot separate ourselves from God spatially. Of course not! God is everywhere present! We can never escape from Him. We cannot run or hide from Him. We cannot flee from the universe or move beyond the bounds of His all-searching eye. “If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there” (Psa 139:8). Adam and Eve tried to escape from God and to hide from His presence in the midst of the trees of the garden (Gen 3:8). But what folly! Man can never separate himself from the presence of God. Nor, we might add, can those who were predestinated unto eternal life separate themselves from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39). But what then does our Confession mean that “by sin man separated himself from God?” This: By sin man separated himself from God in the moral and spiritual sense of the word. Of course! Man separated himself from the deep, intimate fellowship he enjoyed with God as his friend. Man sought to erect a barrier, a thick wall, between himself and God. He burned the bridge, as we say, and tried to undo the covenant of friendship between himself and God. He betrayed his Friend-Sovereign and violated the covenant. He alienated himself from God, became at odds with Him. He joined himself to the devil. He forsook God, who was his true life, and chose the way of death; for to separate from God is not to choose one of two equally legitimate modes of life, but to choose the way of death. To opt for sin is to make oneself the object of the wrath of GOD, the recipient of certain and eternal death in hell! Dark and dreadful reality! Horrible choice!

But, beloved saints, every time we sin we make that same choice to separate ourselves from God. We forsake God, who is our true life, and choose the way of death. We turn against Him and reject Him. We grievously violate the covenant of friendship He has established with us. We opt for the devil. Horrible choice! So let us give thanks to God for Christ who broke down that wall of partition which we erected, who abolished in His flesh the enmity, who reconciled us to God in one body by the cross! (Eph 2:13-16). Let us give thanks to God for not casting us away from His presence (Psa 51:11). Let us give thanks to God for forgiving our sins and for His Holy Spirit who enables us to choose not to sin, but to enter into sweet covenant fellowship with our God through Christ Jesus our Lord. Wonderful reality! Marvelous blessing!

May 2 – Death and the Curse
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: Genesis 3:14-24

The consequence of sin is death. Death is the result of the curse. The curse is the word of divine wrath, the pronouncement by God of His extreme displeasure, the proclamation of condemnation upon the sinner. The curse is the verdict of the Almighty upon the sinner that he is guilty and damnable. The curse is an invincible decree that the sinner shall be punished for his sin. That punishment which follows is DEATH. "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23).

Death descended upon man in the day that he ate of the tree. Death swooped down on him in that instant and devoured him. But did man really die at that moment? After all, Adam lived for 930 years before he died (Gen. 5:5)! But the question is, did he really live? Yes, in a certain sense he did live, for the Bible says he "lived." But he "lived" in the midst of death. He "lived" under the power of death. His "life" became nothing but a continual death. He entered the sphere and process of death which terminates inevitably in the rending asunder of body and soul, in the return of the body to the dust of the ground whence it was taken. He began to suffer the signs and effects of death: pain, sickness, sorrow and struggle. He came under the dark cloud of vanity and hopelessness and despair. He suffered in the knowledge of this reality: "that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other...for all is vanity" (Ecc 3:19). Death devoured man, entrapped him, surrounded him and laid claim on him. And not on him only, but on all the sons of men in his loins, including you and me. Death threatens to destroy us too. We too feel its effects. We smell its awful odour. We recoil at its painful sting. And especially when we stare into the grave of our deceased loved one.

But there is still more.

Death descended upon man not only in the corporal (physical) sense, but also in the spiritual sense. And that is the deepest sense. Man's life was not primarily or essentially his physical power and energy of movement and activity. But it was his spiritual power to know and commune with God in love. Death destroyed that power. Death in the spiritual sense rendered man incapable of doing any good and inclined to all evil. Man became dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1, Col 2:13). He entered the sphere of darkness which terminates inevitably in hell, the second death (Rev 20:14). He became through sin the slave of sin, chained up in the bondage of sin, making himself thereby liable to more and more death, greater and deeper punishment, in body and soul, in time and eternity. And not him only, but all the sons of men, including us, as we are by nature totally depraved. We experience our natural depravity in our daily struggle with sin, and the commandment which was ordained unto life, we find to be unto death, and we daily cry out, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom 7:24).

Then we look to Jesus Christ our Lord who died and rose again. Him God promised already to Adam and Eve soon after they fell into sin and death (Gen 3:15). Him God sent in our flesh. He died for us, in our place, as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. He suffered the penalty of death, in the fullest sense of the word. He was cursed by God for us. He entered death and conquered it! He arose! Therefore, we cry out in faith, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom 7:25).

May 3 – Become Corrupt in All His Ways
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: Psalm 53 & Romans 3:9-19

Human nature has become, and is, morally corrupt in the fullest sense of the word. Man has become, and is, wicked and perverse in all his ways.

But is not this being a bit too harsh? After all, does not experience teach us that man is basically good? Oh, no doubt there are some “bad eggs” out there, men who are morally degenerate through and through, who inexplicably seem to delight in committing atrocious crimes, inflicting pain and suffering on others, reveling in debaucheries of the worst sort, who seem to have no conscience and no remorse in doing any kind of evil. But they are only a small minority, are they not? Surely most of mankind is guided by an inner moral compass to do what is right? Surely if given a chance, if properly taught, or perhaps reeducated, most men will be morally upright, will they not? Just look around you. What do you see? You see some evil men, but many good men: faithful spouses, hard workers, brave soldiers, devoted mothers, generous givers, and polite neighbors. Is it not a bit too harsh to say that man is wicked, perverse, and corrupt in all his ways?

So reasons the Pelagian, ancient and modern, who denies the depravity of man's nature.

But we may not be taught first of all by experience. We must be taught first by the Word of God, and experience always confirms the Word of God if we look below the glittery surface of human nature into the pitch blackness of the soul.

The Scriptures teach that man has become, and is, morally totally corrupt in all his ways: “Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good. God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Psa 53:1-3, cf. Rom 3:10-12). Every man, woman, and child on the planet today is by nature morally corrupt. That means you! That means me! And not just part, but our “whole nature” is corrupt: our body and soul, our mind and will, and, apart from grace, our deepest heart too. Our nature is wicked, perverse, and corrupt. It is totally unable to think, will, or do what is good in God's eyes. It is wholly inclined to what is evil and despicable in God's eyes. Your nature is! Mine is! It may produce actions which *appear* good in our eyes: acts of heroism, generosity, and achievement. But it cannot, and does not produce actions that are *actually* good in God's eyes. Such is the case because every outward act has an inward cause. That inward motive is inextricably linked to that act in God's eyes. That motive and that act are one. If that motive, in the deepest sense, is evil, the act is evil too in God's eyes. Man cannot, does not, and will not keep any of God's commandments in his heart. You by nature do not! I do not! Man can only, does only, and will only grossly transgress all of God's commandments. And man is corrupt “in *all* his ways.” Man is morally depraved in all that he sets himself to do or be, in private and public life, in home, work or school, and in all his human relationships.

Man is totally depraved. This article teaches the T of the TULIP of Calvinism. This biblical truth is one of the pillars, dark and ugly though it is, of the Reformed faith. The other pillar is the truth that God is sovereign in salvation. God has saved us from our moral corruption by His irresistible grace (the I of TULIP). That grace flows to us from the cross of Jesus Christ. Bow down, then, in humble thanks to God for saving you by His grace through Christ.

May 4 – Excellent Gifts All Lost
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: Romans 1:16-25

Man has lost all his excellent gifts!

What a sad fact for man! Let me try to illustrate. On our wedding day, my wife gave me two excellent gifts, a telescope and a Tungsten wedding ring, and I gave her a pearl necklace and a diamond ring. How sad it would be if we should lose those excellent gifts! Especially sad it would be if we lost our wedding rings, the symbols of our marriage-bond. But how much more sad it would be if one of us lost those gifts not by accident, but on purpose! Such is the case with man. What excellent gifts God gave him! He had the gifts of a powerful intellect, a flawless memory, and a boundless creativity. Still more, he possessed the gifts of the knowledge of God, moral goodness, and perfect blessedness. But he lost these gifts. He lost all of them! He lost them not by accident, but he intentionally threw them away. How sad, how horribly sad for man!

But wait. Did he really lose *all* these excellent gifts? According to our Confession, he lost ALL of them. But does that not imply an absurdity, namely, that man lost intellect and memory, rationality and morality? An absurdity this would be because man clearly still retains these powers. Man still thinks. He still reasons. He still creates. He still knows the difference between right and wrong. Man still employs the powers of human nature, and impressively so. Witness the history of human thought, of science and philosophy, of religion and politics. Witness the advance of civilization, the growth of industry and technology. Witness the modern inventions and achievements of man: the computer and internet, the airplane and spacecraft, and countless machines to make life better. Oh yes, man still retains the powers of the mind. But, if you can grasp it, man only retains "a few remains thereof." He has lost the gift of intellect he once had in Eden. He has lost the ability to wield his full brainpower. He only retains a few remains, a few tiny specks, a few glimmerings of his natural gifts. He only wields a tiny percentage of his total brainpower. He retains just enough of his natural gifts to remain a man.

But those remaining sparks are not the gifts of some common grace of God, as some have interpreted this article. Those few remains do not enable man to do anything good in God's eyes. They are not sufficient to empower man to perform good deeds. Oh no, man has lost ALL his excellent moral-spiritual gifts. He retains *none* of those gifts. He has *no* remaining moral goodness. But he even presses the few remains of his natural gifts into the service of sin. Those few remains are sufficient only "to leave man without excuse" (Rom 1:20, 2:1). They leave man with some knowledge of God, and of right and wrong, so that he knows better when he sins. Therefore, when man comes before the judgment seat of God, he will not be able to make any excuses for his sins. He will have to say, "My sentence is just." And God will be glorified.

But to us who are in Christ Jesus, God has restored those excellent gifts by pouring out His Spirit into our hearts. What a joyous fact! And He will perfect those gifts in us in the New Paradise of eternity. What a marvelous and thrilling hope!

May 5 – The Light in us Changed into Darkness
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: John 1:1-14

All the light that was in us has been changed into darkness!

Physical light, which now shines on us from the sun, was originally created by God as an entity by itself. God said, "Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen 1:3). God "commanded the light to shine out of darkness" (II Cor 4:6). God, moreover, saw that light, "that it was good" (Gen 1:4). It was perfectly adapted to give life to the physical world and knowledge, fellowship, and joy to the world of men. But it was also created to symbolize a perfection of His Own being. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5). God *is* light in the deepest sense of the word. This is the same as to say that God is *good*. God is goodness itself. God is the very implication of all virtues. God *is* the standard of moral goodness among men. God is light. Moreover, God created man in His Own image, reflecting the Light: good, righteous, and holy. The Light shined from God into the heart of man and was reflected outward in his morally excellent thoughts, words, and deeds. Light, and only light, beamed forth from man. That light gave life. That light resulted in knowledge and fellowship with the source of that light. That light yielded perpetual joy.

But that all changed.

Darkness descended on man.

Physical darkness is the absence of light. Darkness did not always exist, but it too was formed by God in the beginning. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen 1:1-2). Darkness is the antithesis of light. It yields death. It obstructs knowledge. It impedes fellowship. It produces fear and sorrow. Physical darkness is therefore an apt symbol of sin and evil. Spiritual darkness is moral corruption. It is disobedience and rebellion, pride and hatred, lust and greed. Darkness first entered the created sphere in the rebellion of Satan. Henceforth he is the Prince of Darkness. Darkness first entered the world when man gave ear to his words and chose sin. Right at that moment, ALL the light that was in us was changed into darkness! The light went out. The light was instantly extinguished. We plunged into darkness. Only pitch blackness remained in us, only sin and evil. We became in our very nature utterly lost in thick darkness.

Thus, when the Light of the world came (John 8:12) and shined in the midst of this thick darkness, the darkness comprehended it not (John 1:5). Of course they did not comprehend Him! Of course the world knew Him not! Men loved darkness rather than light! Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved! (John 3:19-20). Thus, when the Light of the world came, the world of darkness received Him not. Nor would we receive Him if left to ourselves.

But that too has changed for us who were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor 4:6). *We* of course did not restore that light in us. But *He* did so. God has shined His light in us His chosen ones, through Christ. But even now, the darkness remains in our flesh. We have, if you will, a dark side. Therefore, let us pray that more and more, we might "walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8) and let our light shine before men (Matt 5:16).

May 6 – Man Not Free, But a Slave to Sin.
by Rev Daniel Holstege

Read: John 8:31-47 & Romans 6:15-18

The Pelagian rejects the truth of total depravity and teaches what is repugnant to that truth: the free will of man. The Pelagian means by "free will" not merely that natural man *has* a will, makes *choices*, and is not *forced* in his choices; i.e. that he has a free will in the general or formal sense of the word. Of course that is true. Man makes choices in day to day affairs: to work or play, run or walk, eat or sleep. He does not have freedom in the absolute sense, for only God has absolute, sovereign freedom. But man has freedom in the relative sense, within the bounds of God's will. But the Pelagian means far more when he speaks of "free will." He affirms that natural man has the freedom to choose between *good or evil*. He teaches that fallen man has moral-ethical freedom. He denies that you and I, or anyone else, is by nature "wicked, perverse, and corrupt." He believes man can still choose to do good or evil. The Semi-Pelagian and Arminian are really no better. They too reject total depravity and teach free will. Though they speak of the necessity of grace, yet they teach that man can resist or accept that grace, and thus has a free will to do good or evil.

This we reject.

This our Confession rejects.

This the Holy Scriptures reject.

Natural man, including you and me in our flesh, is but a slave to sin. "Whosoever committeth sin," saith our Lord, "is the servant of sin" (John 8:34). "Know ye not," saith the apostle Paul, "that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom 6:16). Natural man is the servant of sin. He still has a will and can choose between many alternatives, but he cannot choose to obey God. He can choose many different ways to sin, but he can only choose to sin. Sin is his lord. Sin has dominion over him. Yet, though he is a slave to sin, he is a willing slave! He does not resist his master. But he freely chooses and delights in sin.

And such are we by nature.

Therefore, beloved, we have nothing of ourselves, but whatever we have has been given to us from heaven. Who of us, then, may presume to boast that we of ourselves can do any good? None of us came to Christ by our own free choice, for Christ saith, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). Who of us will glory in our own will? None of us, if we understand what Paul says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom 8:7), and this is true of us by nature. Who of us can speak of our own acquisition of saving knowledge when Scripture states, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor 2:14). In short, who among us dare to suggest any thought other than this, that all our salvation is of God, since Scripture puts these words into our mouths: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (II Cor 3:5). Let us never boast in ourselves, for we are totally corrupt, but he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord (I Cor 1:31). For the apostle saith, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). And our Lord said the same thing when He told His apostles, "Without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Let us therefore look away from ourselves unto Christ and His cross. And let us shout with joy, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!" (Gal 6:14).

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