

FALLING ASLEEP IN JESUS

52 MEDITATIONS

BY

ABRAHAM KUYPER

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Dr. Jan H. Boer

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TRANSLATOR'S COMMENTS

Do you ever ask yourself, “What is time?” You experience it every moment, but can you define or describe it? Does it ever end? Is there time in heaven? Tough questions for which you may find help in these meditations. Or another tough one: What does it mean to be baptized on behalf of loved ones already departed?—I Corinthians 15:29. Or: Will we recognize each other in the after-life as married couples? All sorts of intriguing questions Abraham Kuyper deals with in these meditations, but not always in a consistent way. He presents us with an imaginary and expansive celestial “sociology” that is interesting—but sometimes I cannot avoid the question “how Biblical”? Sometimes he leaves you questioning or, perhaps said better, pondering. But that’s what meditations are supposed to do—make you ponder the wonderful things of God. There probably is no greater mystery to be pondered than heaven—except, of course, that of the Trinity Himself.

I don’t know how familiar you are with Abraham Kuyper, but you should know that, though he died in 1920, only a few years ago the American Evangelical Christian magazine *Christianity Today* declared Kuyper to be one of the three most influential Evangelical theologians of the twentieth century in the USA. Not that many people know him or read him, but they are influenced by people who write about him or who are influenced by him. There’s a kind of grandfather effect rippling through the Christian community. This is advanced by quite a number of colleges, universities, think tanks, and social organizations in a number of countries, including South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Nigeria, United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, Canada, USA, Netherlands, and Hungary.

Let me put it this way. Imagine a man who organized a political party and became his country’s Prime Minister, who organized a university in Amsterdam that has several thousand students today, who organized a labour movement, a housing movement, founded newspapers and wrote countless books, many of them tomes that have been translated into English and Korean and several other languages. In fact, Kuyper re-organized his entire country, the Netherlands. Can you imagine a man of such wide-spread action and influence also writing books about angels, devils and heaven and other such spiritual topics? Well, that was Kuyper.

I have written more extensive introductions about Kuyper in other books of his I have translated. I will not repeat what I have already written there about him. These introductions can be found in a number of places, primarily on the KUYPERIANA page of my website < www.SocialTheology.com > as well as on the website Christian Classics Ethereal Library of Calvin University < <https://ccel.org/ccel/kuyper> >.

I invite and encourage you to turn there to find out about some of his history, his worldview, his style of writing and, not the least, his constant mixing of faith, reason and imagination. In fact, the *first word* in his Foreword to this book is.... “Art;” in other words “imagination.” In another meditational book, *Near Unto God*, he wrote, “Although we come to know Him better through our intellect, our imaginations and feelings also aid us in finding Him. All of these means bring us closer to Him.” If you miss the word “revelation” in the above sentence, you will find it on practically every page of the book you are now reading. In *this* book, he repeats it time and again that all that is good and useful for us to know has already been revealed and we must not exceed the limits of that revelation. However, I find him frequently pushing the edges with the use of reason and imagination. I often find myself ending up with the question, “Where did that come from?” But after all is said and done, a combination of revelation, reason and imagination has given us much rich food for thoughtful meditation.

But the central focus in this book is as the title indicates, *Falling Asleep in Jesus--* Jesus. Jesus. Jesus—He is the centre of these meditations. The last paragraph of almost every meditation ends with Him.

One final point is the age of this book—over a century old. This means that especially scientific references are not always up to date. I have sought to modify some terminology, but it remains a bit of a drawback. This is the most noticeable in reference to psychological matters. I do not always support some of Kuyper’s statements here. They are, I surmise, often products of his own rich imagination, not even of the psychology of his day.

A few household items. As in my own writings and in my other Kuyper translations, I capitalize all names and pronouns referring to God. With apologies to all sisters, I use the masculine for these names and pronouns. Though I personally do not object to refer to God by feminine pronouns, it will be too distracting and even offensive to too many readers. Names and pronouns referring to satan and his cohorts, however, are all in the lower case. They simply do not deserve the respect implied by the upper case.

In my effort to give emphasis to female and male alike, I use the feminine pronoun wherever possible in odd-numbered chapters and male pronouns in the even-numbered chapters.

Each chapter title both in the Index and in the text itself is followed by an asterisk (*) to make them easy to locate.

Dr. Jan H. Boer
Vancouver, Canada
2024

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD*

Art reflects appearance, not being, nor reality. but an appearance that aims higher than earthly reality. It does so in such a way that the reactions, disorder and complaints it evokes in us are of a very different character than those evoked by life itself.

“Our brief life is like the grass” is a mournful musical composition by Frederick Chopin. It causes a chord of sadness to vibrate in your heart, but the grief that tears up your heart when you stand at the deathbed of a loved one, hurts in a much different way and cuts much deeper. Meditations about the holy mystery of falling asleep in Jesus can therefore never touch the right chord as long as they are evoked only by a consciousness of art. They will only well up in your heart in holy melody when your heart, wounded by your own deep sorrow, finds consolation and reconciliation in the whispered certainty that the deceased fell asleep in Jesus.

If the meditations in this bundle touch a stirring, benevolent chord, this can only be explained by the sorrow that evoked it. At times of such soulful sorrow, the heart struggles till it transcends its sorrow in God.

A writer will express this also for the ears of others and that is exactly how such meditations can reach their destined audience. Everything David, the royal harp player, sang came either out of his own suffering or out of his own jubilation. And even though as king he was animated by a much higher historical power, looked at from a distance, it remains true even among us that the written word aiming at our heart succeeds the most when it finds an echo in our own spiritual experience.

That is the case here in this writing and it is on that basis that I dare to hope that what is offered here is different and better than what is offered with the cowardice about which Job complained with respect to his friends. If there are those whose hearts are struggling, may what mine has gone through drip from these meditations as a balm for the wounds of their soul.

Abraham Kuyper, October 26, 1902.

Chapter 1*

Falling Asleep in Jesus

*We believe that Jesus died and rose again.
And so we believe that God will bring with Jesus
those who have fallen asleep in Him.
1 Thessalonians 4:14*

In the valley of the shadow of death, the great highway along which all people travel, splits into two. One side of the road leads to eternal life; the other follows the steep downward path to eternal death. Some, having reached that sharp junction to the valley of death, may turn onto the road leading to the House of the Father above, while others may pursue the hollow way into the depth, but by then it is no longer by choice. The die has been cast.

It all depends on how the person passed away. We prefer to take this most important moment of finally falling asleep as far as possible. We even try to peek beyond her death. The body loses its warmth; the separation of soul and body is completed by God. This can take place only after our final breath. Even at this very last moment, the power of grace can still do what we do not know. The dying process does not normally happen in just the twinkling of an eye and it does not happen only before *our* eyes and ears, but also before the eyes and ears of the Almighty. When it is completed, the tree has been felled and the last fibre cut, the eternal state and circumstance sets in.

As it is at that point, it will remain. That's the point at which the road to the above opens for those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, while the dark trail into the depth opens for those who do *not* belong to Jesus. It all depends on Jesus. The world may have mocked Jesus, cursed Him and shrugged Him off by the bitter death of the cross. This same world may continue to misunderstand Jesus and dispute His Lordship, but nevertheless every person will one day experience that his lot depends eternally on Jesus.

Jesus is the only Son of the Father, God's own dear Son. That is the reason that whoever does not kiss the Son is against God. Whoever belongs to the Son, is welcomed by the Father into His House, but who does not belong to the Son, has no part in the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven. It all depends on Jesus.

This is not just a manner of speaking as if Jesus, standing at the junction in the valley of death, just acts according to His whim, allowing this one in and that one out. It all depends on whether at that moment it will be clear you belong to Jesus, whether you have a share in Him and are incorporated in Him. That is what Scripture means by falling asleep *in Jesus*.

In Jesus!

Do not confuse the depth of this mystical expression. Here you ought not to think of Jesus' *person* so much as his mystical *body*. Whoever has been incorporated in the body of Jesus, is *in Jesus*. But this body is not the body of flesh and blood that He adopted in His human nature from Mary. That physical body is now glorified and the glorified physical body of the redeemed will be like it. Jesus in a glorified body; you in a glorified body.

This is all about the *mystical* body of the Lord. It is just as one speaks of the "body" of the state or the "body" of the people, or the "body" of an association or institution. The Latin for body is "*corpus*," from which we have derived the term "corporation." A corporation has a *head* in its board and under the board it has *members*. According to Scripture, there is a body that belongs to Jesus and that body is the *congregation, the Church*.

So far, there is nothing mystical about it. As there are all kinds of communities of people in the world and such communities all have a body with a head and members, so it is here. There is one community of all born-again sinners and that community forms one single body. That body has its head in Christ and all the born-again members belong to that body.

The mystical nature of this Body lies in what the Scripture says, "the Head of the Body, the Church... so that in everything He might [be fulfilled] and have the supremacy" (Colossians 1:18). In Scripture, this "fulfillment" is called "the *pleroma*." The *pleroma* of the sun, for example, constitutes the entire sphere of the sun wherever its beams penetrate. The light is not only the flame, but the entire sphere of light-beams that the flame creates around itself, everything that the flame makes visible, the fullness of its light.

That's how it is here. Jesus is not prescribed or delimited by His person, but a sphere of love, light and life is emitted from Him. That emission is not simply a light, but one that creates light, that evokes life that develops into blossom and then fruit. This emission of light from Jesus, this life-creating, animating emission of Jesus in human beings is not something separate from Him, but it is He Himself. It can be said that the sun is in us or it is in the flower, that the sun can be averted or kept out by drawing the drapes. So also Jesus Himself is in the Church, in our heart, in our good works. Those who draw the drapes on Jesus in the windows of their soul, ban Jesus.

All this together where Jesus penetrates, illuminates and brings hope, is the sphere that belongs to Jesus. That is His Body and whoever belongs to it is His, is incorporated in Him. Whoever dies in that spirit has *fallen asleep in Jesus*.

The difference comes into view in this way. A corporation is formed in the world; a body of members unite into one, establish an association, create a set of statutes and appoint a board at its head. All of this is an act of their will; it does not simply flow out of their life. They can disband such a corporation or withdraw their membership, for all mysticism of life is lacking.

With the Body of Jesus it is very different. You neither become a member of the Body of Jesus by a simple act of the will nor by joining it, but by being *born* into it. You don't become a member by joining but by Jesus Himself incorporating you with your hidden being, with the kernel of your heart, with your inner soul life, by giving you spiritual roots. You don't join, but Jesus incorporates you by means of the emission of His life, by basking in His love, with the radiance of His light that penetrates you as the sun penetrates the ground, the plant, its blossom and its fruit or flower.

This is all mystical, because you cannot trace its origin or its way of operating. It does take place within you, but at first without your knowledge. It is as you are received and born and thus become member of your father's family without your contributing anything or noticing it. That's how the Holy Spirit generates you and gives you birth in this family of Jesus and this family is His Body into which you are incorporated and become member, but which you notice only later.

Later, though, your will begins to play a role in confessing and manifesting your membership in the visible Church, but this is a mere by-product. In this visible Church there are many members who are neither member of the above family nor of the Body of Jesus.

That Body of Jesus lies behind and under the Church that is visible. The mystical Body of Jesus forms the background and the foundation . You as a child of God belong to it spiritually, fundamentally, with the root of your being. As the sun never ceases its emissions, so Jesus cannot be thought of without that Body, for that Body is His *pleroma*, that is, the fulfillment that fills all in all.

Everything in dying depends on all the above.

Here on earth the Body of Jesus has been inserted into the midst of the earthly body. They have not yet been separated from each other. That's what takes place at death. Death separates the two. At that time, everything that belongs to the Body of Christ, completely and purely departs from the body of this world.

It *cannot* be otherwise. Whoever falls asleep in Jesus stays with Him eternally. However, whoever falls asleep outside of Jesus *cannot* be part of Him. The phrases, the confessions, the pious words at the time of death undoubtedly also have some meaning, but you cannot depend on it. It may only appear so, in which case it has no value. *Being in Jesus* is the only thing that counts. Good works, works of charity, dedications and devotions at the time of death *may* be signs of being incorporated, but they can ~~5xx~~ also be mere appearance. Even if you gave all your goods to the poor but had no love, it is of no value. All of this has meaning only if it flows out of Jesus' work in our heart. The decisive point is belonging to Jesus, not through calculations but in reality itself, *being in Jesus*, being incorporated in His spiritual Body. This holds true for the little child that dies in its crib as well as for a Methuselah who lived for more than nine centuries (Genesis 5:27). Thus, if you perceived or noticed that the person you lost to death was *in Jesus*, then you can rest assured that she fell asleep *in Jesus*.

As to the time allotted you by God and in so far as it affects your own soul, it always comes down to this point when death is near: you must flee and avoid everything that robs you of the certainty of being *in Jesus*. To pant after and grasp every morning and every evening for that blessed soul sense of being *in Jesus*,

deepens and clarifies the issue for you. To do that with such seriousness that, should the Lord call you on that very day, your dying would be a grateful and jubilant falling asleep *in your Saviour*.

Chapter 2*

Being with Christ Is Far Better

*I am torn between the two:
I desire to depart and be with Christ,
which is better by far....
Philippians 1:2*

Mysticism is precious. So, ensure that you do not misuse its tense cries of the soul as idle gossip in your discussions, in your writings or, if you are a preacher of the Word, in your preaching. Such hollow sounds constitute a deadly danger to the depth and seriousness of our emotions. To prevent you from becoming superficial or sound like a piercing shrill you should never allow the soul cries of mysticism to flow out of your pen or over your lips without first having these sounds go through your own soul and you have impressed your own soul with them. A preacher who has felt one single pious phrase deeply, has thought it through clearly and expressed it tenderly and contextually, enriches and refreshes you. However, a man who eloquently spouts out one pious declaration after another and lets them drone into our ears like the sound of a trumpet, exhausts you and dulls your piety. This is true especially when we together as a group stand at the entrance to the valley of the shadow of death, whether we do this to see a beloved depart or whether to prepare each other for our own way through this valley.

In the above, our ordinary language fails us, for we have no words for what is experienced in that somber valley. It is only natural that in this context we use common phrases in which the experiences of dying and mourning are expressed. It is equally natural that God's beloved children prefer to borrow such expressions primarily from Scripture.

But then we ought not to simply gloss over them, for their fundamental seriousness lives neither in their width nor depth, but in the warm, deeply thought-out and

intimately-experienced words. Just when everything is overwrought, the inner strength of our soul lies in the calm release of the bonds that engulf us.

That is what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church of Philippi. He desired to pass on and to be with Christ, for that was best by far. Would this same deep expression fit our own soul life? Would it be sincerely and truly meant if everyone of us were to adopt these high words for ourselves? If God were to take our words seriously and touch us with a mortal disease, would there not be a terror of the soul rather than gratitude for having our prayers answered?

He who first wrung these words out of his soul was no ordinary believer but an extraordinarily blessed man. He enjoyed promptings of the Holy Spirit like none other. In addition, he was single without wife or children. Stronger yet, he suffered bitter persecution and was imprisoned in Rome, threatened with execution.

Add to the above that he himself had seen Christ on his way to Damascus. The soulful ecstatic glory of this personal meeting with Christ had left behind an irrepressible nostalgia in his soul. This clarifies for you how such a man, who had no expectations from the world before him and for whom life's struggle was a slow death, could testify so deeply without any exaggeration. He longingly looked forward to endlessly enjoying the experience he enjoyed at that one moment on his Damascus journey, and that this was by far the best for him.

It is just such an event with the same word on your lips for just a few seconds that can be truthful if you experience this in highly serious circumstances and live into it with your entire soul. But when you repeat these words thoughtlessly, while actually filled with totally different thoughts that set you back, then you get used to this hollow phrase that you have not lived yourself. In the latter case, you mimic Paul but are not really expressing yourself and what you mimic from this prisoner in Rome does not constitute the truth in your soul.

The phrase "to be with Christ" had a mystical meaning for Paul. He knew very well that at the moment of death only his soul, separated from the body, would enter continued communion with Christ. Therefore he himself added that he longed to be released, i.e., to be freed from his visible body. The Apostle John writes, "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (I John 3:3). This does not refer to our condition right after death but to what awaits God's children after the

resurrection. Paul testifies, “Though we once regarded Christ in this way (after the flesh), we do so no longer” (2 Corinthians 5:16). His strong desire to be with Christ did not point to anything bodily but to communion of souls, not a mere staring at His glory but the enjoyment of an outpouring of the spiritual.

That is the reason Paul does not say “to be with *Jesus*,” but “to be with *Christ*,” for there is a marked distinction between those two names. When we think of *Jesus*, in our imagination we think of His human appearance; when we think of *Christ*, our eyes are fixed on the Centre of our spiritual salvation.

It is true that later, Paul entertained the silent expectation of experiencing the day of Jesus’ return, without going through death but via a wonderful metamorphosis to move into glory, but that is not his concern here. When he wrote that being with Christ “is better by far” (Philippians 1:23), he was thinking of dying in order as a separated soul to approach his Saviour in full communion.

Is such a spiritual communion to be expected only after passing on? Definitely not. Jesus Himself said, “I will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23). In the Book of Revelation we have the promise of Jesus to the saved soul seeking Him, that He comes here on earth already to celebrate the Last Supper or Eucharist. The entire Scripture and all of the history of Christ’s Church testify to this spiritual communion with His saints. What happens before death and after death is thus not different in principle. With His grace, majesty and Spirit (Matthew 28:20), Christ is omnipresent and thus is near us also in this life.

Nevertheless, there is a marked difference in the degree of communion. Even the holiest children of God enjoy such rich communion with Christ here on earth—but only for brief moments. And then the storms of life return with their distractions, their superficiality, and externality in which the soul wanders far from the presence of Christ.

After death, this ceases. The world no longer has a hold on us. Living has transitioned into death for us. What happens here only sporadically but is tasted deeply, is then enjoyed forever without interruption.

While here the “body of sin” of the present dispensation and through the memory of the past continues to build a wall of separation between us and Christ. At death,

that wall collapses with the result that our communion with Christ becomes more intimate than it ever could be on earth. To be without sin and without memory of earlier sins will amount to divine richness for the saved soul.

We do not know where the almighty Father of the spirits will gather His saved elect after they pass on. We cannot even conjure up their forms in our imagination. We do not know each other except in the body and thus are bound only to it, but the spirits are free. Whoever falls asleep in Christ will be as the angels in heaven and all considerations regarding measurable distance falls by the wayside. From the spiritual perspective, distance plays no role.

But the released soul will then not only enjoy its spiritual senses, but it will then for the first time see the depth of truth with spiritual eyes and hear it with the ear of the soul. The sphere of life will be gloriously expanded. In this sphere of the higher life, Christ will be the spiritual centre of all God's angelic hosts along with the throngs of His redeemed, who are full of sparkling life. It is a celestial secret to what degree of development and richer fulfillment the redeemed soul can live in such a sphere of life. But certain it is that it is only then that the Lord God will reveal the hidden seeds of spiritual power and riches that He has hidden in the heart of mankind. Flowers in which we never recognized beauty shall bloom; precious stones that blinded us here to their splendour, will sparkle. This all will be enjoyed as direct and continual radiation from Christ into the centre of the soul and of a love that the soul cannot carry in our current phase. The heart will be set afire for Christ.

We reverently ask where all this leaves God and whether then the most tender worship of our soul already here, but especially on the other side of the grave, will not reach out to the Eternal Being, as per the Psalmist's song, "When I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing Your likeness" (Psalm 17:15). Note again that Paul speaks of being with *Christ* and not with *Jesus*. Many readers do not catch on to this distinction and end up in a "Jesus veneration" that diverts them from the Eternal Being.

But if you insist on the phrase "being with Christ," does that not constitute possessing God in Christ Himself? Is He Himself not God to be praised above everything into eternity? If then the redeemed soul seeks the Eternal Being, not in

the hiddenness of His Being, but in His revelation, can she then find God , that Eternal Being, revealed in a different and richer revelation than in the Son of His love? Does not anyone who has Christ have the Father in her? And is it not in that same Christ that all access to the Holy Spirit belongs? Outside of Christ, everything is darkness and mysterious, but in Christ the crystal-lined window is opened so that the redeemed saint can look into the depth of the Divine Being.

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us,” to which the answer was, “Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:8-9). The redeemed soul does not ask such a question anymore. She is with Christ and sees God in and through Christ.

Chapter 3*

The Mortal Swallowed up by Life

*For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened,
because we do not wish to be unclothed,
but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling,
so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.
2 Corinthians 5:4)*

After you have witnessed someone dying with your own eyes, it seems that death, that awful enemy of both God and humans, finally succeeded in devouring this precious life. It was not its first attack, for in most cases that we see, a dying person is first placed on her sick bed and experiences fear of death.

But with those earlier attacks, death was not diverted. After the night during which crying weakens our hearts, there will be jubilation in the morning. Oh, how treasured the memory of the beloved not to express yourself from the heart. Nothing helped or availed and while the patient breathed her last. It was as if bitter death mocked you with all your unanswered prayers and useless worries and whispered mockingly to you, “I won after all. The morning in which you were to jubilate did not come.” There you stood with a broken heart next to the deathbed. There lay your beloved deceased, soulless, lifeless. Yes, indeed, it truly looked as if she was devoured by death. “Devoured”—such a harsh word. That’s how we speak of animal predators—they devour. Everything gone in a moment: the look

of the eye, those sweet words from the lips, that warm handshake, the facial expressions—everything gone in one fell swoop. Cold, withered, somber. Life devoured by death.

If you have no eye for anything else, you will see it that way. If you know nothing beyond this world, then you *cannot* view it any other way. And let's admit it, as things are, in the first hard moment, as your heart experiences shock, even a child of God does not always see it any other way. Oh, it is such a somber experience of staring into the emptiness and darkness of the valley of the dead when we watch someone dear to our heart enter it. Here is death dragging its victim away in front of our eyes and there are we, forced to watch this happening so painfully and powerlessly.

That's how reality is—the bitter reality of the visible. It is cowardly to deceive yourself when you hide the harsh reality behind wreaths and other decorations or you pretend to offer consolation by uttering generalities about the providential love of God. This bespeaks lack of seriousness and courage when you reach for such a blind setup and you hide the harshness of death from yourself and from others.

You have prayed, but God did not hear. Death overpowered your prayer. Is God not omnipotent, almighty? Where then is that providential love that He allowed death to have its way and, what's more, that He *sent* death and left your sick one in death's hand?

No, acknowledge that death exists because of sin. Be touched in your conscience. Admit that God expresses His terrible anger in that dying. Then, at least, you can tremble at the side of your beloved departed at God's holiness. But to speak nonsense about providential love when God allows death to rob you of your most loved here on earth, when you see that beloved life shrink before your eyes, disappear and devoured, that amounts to deceiving your own heart. You cannot do that in the uprightness of your soul. That amounts to playing with words right up to the grave.

11xx But now God's Word comes and that Word, without diminishing the slightest of that harsh reality, turns everything upside down. For your physical eye this is the way it is. But you also have an eye in your soul, an eye that will remain totally blind, that does not catch any light beam and that sees nothing till God

converts you and enables you to see spiritually. At that point, the eye in your soul begins to see reality, but an upside-down reality that shows you not how death swallows up life, but, rather, how in death *the mortal is gobbled up by life*, by immortality.

How can this be? No one will solve this puzzle for you, but it is the reality *in Christ*, this Wonderful One who Himself attacked death and forced it to let Him through into eternity and afterwards opened the way, so that death would allow all His believers to follow Him into glory unhindered.

Life, real life, is too powerful to remain tied to this earthly tabernacle. It cannot develop its wings. That is why life must eventually shake off the earthly or mortal in order to penetrate to this higher reality. It must break loose from that mortal body, a process that is dreadful to watch, but that is when life arrives at its destination. Then it develops itself to full majesty, the very reason that life must first swallow that which is mortal.

To the eye that peeks from your soul into eternity, the dead corpse is not a sign that death has triumphed, but, rather, it is a sign of the victory of life. It shows that life is now free and breathes in higher realms. That separation from the body, which is usually so hard and cruel, is now a sign of liberation, a visible and tangible proof that life has torn itself free from its mortal confines. Your beloved deceased cannot tear herself from the mortal in order to develop itself in glory—and neither can you once you have passed on. That can only be done by the King of Life, your Jesus, *if* there is life in you and *if* you are incorporated into His life.

It is not your beloved deceased who dies here, a far distance from Jesus, or your departed one who now approaches Jesus. No, He was there and He did it. And when death tauntingly laughs at you as if it had won, your Saviour laughs at your enraptured soul and shows you the crown, the palm branch of victory. He who is outside of that situation has a hard time. The unbeliever perishes when she dies. Death holds her. It is only by means of the self-deceit of wreaths and hollow phrases that she who sees her beloved pass on can speak of consolation and hope. The recklessness is terrible for her who voluntarily plugs her ears to the voice of Jesus or who attempts to break even the beginning seed of faith in Jesus in the case of others. Their waking up in eternity will be in deadly fear

Under normal circumstances, God's children are often far from understanding the grace that has come to them that they may believe and know, when they witness their beloved pass on, that they were incorporated into Jesus. However, this does not diminish the fear of sickness, the harshness of dying and the cold of the grave. All that remains. Feelings of missing the beloved and loneliness follow, while the wound in the heart *must* bleed.

But next to and above that life in the visible world with its suffering and deep sorrow, there is yet that other reality that is even more sure than what makes you burst into tears here. Out of *that* reality there radiates upon you a holy joy and heavenly peace. This awareness can be so strong that it is with you as it was in the soul of the Apostle Paul, when he wrote, "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" ((2 Corinthians 5:8). And please don't say that such faith language is unhealthy, for whoever adopts that perspective has become unsuitable for her task here below. This is definitely the case, if you do not worship your God and your Jesus, who are there only to help you, to redeem you and to lead you into eternal life, or when *you* want to be the focus and you twist God's holy ordinances towards *your* interests.

That's not how it is, if you, along with your departed and with those who remain with you, know how to live for God and for His holy Name, both in life and in death, here and in glory. He is our Father and we His children; He is the Lord and we His servants. Life here is good only for as long as we do His work here and work at the task that He has given us. Then we are born to serve Him and born again for no purpose other than that we glorify Him in His beloved Son. Then He gives us faith not in order to redeem us but for Him to glorify Himself through our redemption. Then our life is the Lord's, whether we remain here or enter eternity. And then our dying and that of our loved ones comes only at *that* moment and always under those circumstances that are ordered by Him, your God, for the completion of His council and for the honour and praise of His Name. Then you can freely say that the tears of the evening and the joy of the morning co-exist in the same heart. They are mixed in the inner life for all who want to exist together with their beloved ones only for her God. This is a weeping for the cutting pain that the wounded heart feels, the same heart from which the sounds of jubilation

and praise go out for what God has prepared for His deceased one, who served Him and left Him to console, to love and to her holy calling also for this life.

Chapter 4*

Being Clothed

*Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed
with our heavenly calling.*

2 Corinthians 5:2

The Apostle draws two images about what happens to our bodies at death. In 1 Corinthians 15:37, there is the image of wheat that is sown into the ploughed field. Through the activity of the soil and the penetrating moisture it swells up due to the incoming beams of warmth, then bursts open and undergoes dissolution. However, during that process a germ is born from which, before long, heads from seed shoot up. That's how, says the Apostle, it goes with us as well. Our physical remains are lowered into the earth and decompose in the ground. Soon its place is no longer found. However, even here there is something that remains and those remains will in due time develop into a richness of forms. A natural body is sown; a spiritual body is raised. That was the first image.

When he wrote again to the Corinthian Church, Paul added a second example, not about a grain of wheat but about the earthly tabernacle. We know, he wrote, that when our earthly tabernacle breaks down, we have a building of God that is not made by human hands but forever resides in the heavens. While the first image was from the sphere of common grace, the second one was taken from special revelation.

When God called Moses to build a "tent of meeting" for Israel, He showed him that this was to be "an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (2 Corinthians 5:2). Then there is the Word of the Lord in Exodus 25:40, "See that you make them according to the pattern shown to you on the mountain." This was so important that we are reminded twice in the New Testament (Acts 7:44; Hebrews 8:5).

There existed a mystical connection between the tabernacle in the desert and the “house of God” in heaven. When the tabernacle later is replaced by the glorious temple of Solomon, whatever was imperfect simply disappeared and the perfect took its place, but in such a way that both in the tabernacle and in the temple the original plan of God that was shown to Moses was reflected.

The glory of the work of redemption is that God Himself makes His dwelling in the heart of His saints and that the Holy Spirit prays and comforts *in us* as He does in His temple. Thus the child of God himself becomes the dwelling place of God and his body a temple of the Lord.

And now, transferring these glorious images of tabernacle and temple to ourselves in this context, Paul says that the mortal body in which we move about is the tabernacle in the desert. That tabernacle must be done away with and replaced by the glorious temple, by a house not made with hands, our complete and glorified body in heaven.

Two images, the one from general revelation and the other from special revelation, but the same rich thought. The body in which we currently exist will disappear but one day it will be replaced by a much more glorious body. Between these two, according to God’s ordinances, there exists a hidden and mystical relationship. The ear comes out of the seed; the temple comes out of the tabernacle.

However, not enough has been said so far. The question will not be suppressed whether this transition of the mortal into the immortal, will occur suddenly in a moment or whether there is a time lag between the dissolution and resurrection. This was indeed the case in both chosen images. When the seed of grain is entrusted to the earth, the stalk and the ear do not appear at once; they take many months. Similarly, when Solomon built the temple, the tabernacle was already long bereft of its first glory.

Similarly, there exists a length of time determined by God between the moment of death when we let go of our mortal bodies and shake it off. And then there is that

other moment when Christ, appearing with his holy angels, will render our mortal bodies equal with or identical to His glorified body by means of that wonderful divine power with which He subjects all things to Himself.

However, the length of this time period is not the same for everyone. It is the longest for the patriarchs from before the Flood of Noah; the shortest for those who will be born the last day on earth. And just before Jesus' return, there will be redeemed on earth whose dying is simultaneous with their resurrection. Or, to describe this last situation better, they will not die, but their mortal bodies will change at once into their glorified bodies.

The Apostle Paul praised this blessed situation twice—1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4. This is what he calls being clothed in 2 Corinthians 5, not unclothed. That is the same moment in which our earthly robe slides off and we put on our glorified bodies.

The Apostle has borrowed these clothing terms as new images from the Old Testament tabernacle. This was not far sought, for the tabernacle was composed of leather covers and drapes. The tent of this Bedouin Apostle was like the second cover that he carried along on his travels.

This is all very clear. On earth we are *clothed* with our mortal bodies. We are *unclothed* when we lay aside these earthly bodies. But we are *overly clothed* if we exchange our mortal with our glorified bodies in one single moment. On the other hand, those who experience either a shorter or a longer time span between their passing and resurrection are “naked” during that period. This is the lot of most people by far.

These thoughts contain something grievous or burdensome for the Apostle. He does not hide the fact that, being troubled, we sigh and groan in this tabernacle, because we want to be *fully* clothed, not naked. It is the same thought he also expresses in 2 Corinthians 5:2-4 —“We groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be fully clothed with our heavenly dwelling.”

It is not that the above raises doubts in our hearts. Even though we will not be fully clothed instantly, we do know that we have a building from God, a house not made with hands but eternally in heaven. Nevertheless, even though this is so, we cannot

take possession immediately upon our death. That awaits Jesus' return. Until then, the child of God who died will miss his connection to the visible.

This does not spiritually reduce the joy of it all. The redeemed soul, freed from this body of sin and death, has spiritual organs by means of which it discovers and observes the spiritual world instantly. Life has an external and internal side. Even though everyone who dies in Jesus is cut off from the visible, from the external side of life as long as the resurrection is stayed, the redeemed and freed soul has fellowship with the deep interior aspect of life. The eye of the soul opens up to that spiritual world in a way that is holy, solemn and stately. It enjoys this situation, for it no longer is troubled by sin and temptation, and experiences only what is pure, holy and heavenly. In the middle of that pure and holy world there is the Lamb that was slain and in Him the Most Blessed Being. Anyone dying in Jesus, instantly enjoys the image of God after waking up to the world of invisible things.

Here we need sensible, physical organs, but not there anymore. Free from the body of sin, the redeemed soul lives into that holy world by its own efforts. But this does not do away with our creation ordinances. According to those ordinances, we as people are intended not only to live in the invisible but also in the visible. One who sleeps in Jesus remains human. For humans, not being able to reveal ourselves in the visible world is experienced as a serious lack. For this reason, the Apostle does not say, "As long as I spiritually enjoy Jesus, how can the visible harm me?" No, he continues to call for the glorified body. The full glory of salvation will not be realized until the naked soul is fully clothed.

This is the glory of our hope, that we *know* that this last step of grace is assured for God's saints. Throughout the centuries, the Church of Christ has confessed this hope in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the resurrection of the body."

None of us can say just how this all will be. We only know that the origin of our earthly tabernacle was a little imperceptible germ that was hidden in one tiny cell and that, by taking on stuff from this earth, our entire body emerged out of this tiny invisible germ. That earthly stuff falls away again, but the germ remains, for it is indestructible. It is there that all the factors that turn our bodies into our *personal* bodies wonderfully hide.

When Christ will some day bring this temporary latent germ in contact with the stuff of the new world, then that new body that belongs to glory will automatically emerge. It will be with us as with a shrub that, cut down at ground level, shrivels, but whose root can revive with the warmth of the spring sun. This is what holy Scripture calls the stump that remains and revives again (Isaiah 6:13) or “a root out of dry ground” (Isaiah 53:2). At that time we shall be fully clothed, not merely spiritually but *both body and soul*, to serve eternally in glory and to praise Him who Himself is Love and worthy of all our love.

Chapter 5*

Clothed in White Robes

*He who overcomes will...be dressed in white.
I will never blot out his name from the book of life,
but will acknowledge his name before My Father
and His angels-- Revelation 3:5*

Homesickness for heaven does not have the same force in every heart. There are those who long for heaven, because they have become too old for this world. The world no longer suits them and they are no longer fit for the world. When they were still in the full strength of their lives during which they excelled, the thought of death did not occur to them. But now that their strength has dissipated and sapped little by little, it clearly dawns on them that heaven is better than their current state.

Another is not yet that old, but she has run into many difficulties. Bitter losses and fearful grief has brought wound upon wound in her heart. Those wounds keep bleeding. Time goes very slow for her. Everything becomes meaningless and empty on earth for her. All those she loved have preceded her to heaven. Because of her loved ones “up there,” in her spirit she already feels more at home in heaven than here below.

Though not many, a few are homesick for nobler reasons. They love Jesus. Theirs is not just the love with which every Christian loves Him, who died for us, but a

love that makes them rejoice in Him with an unspeakable joy, even when they do not see Him. Neither is theirs a sentimental love, but a holy tenderness. Their love is tender, because in Jesus they have access to the Father and, because as the deer pants for the water, so their heart thirsts after the living God. These are the souls of which unfortunately there are only few in number, who brim full with an overflowing love of the Eternal Being.

We could continue along this line. For some it is homesickness for the above; indeed a migration to the Fatherland, to the Father's house where they feel at home. Others have a burning desire for a more glorious state than their lot on earth. Then there are those who so emotionally weep continually on earth about the endless sadness that has overpowered them, "children with bad luck" as the world calls them. They have a deep longing for the moment that the last tear will be wiped from their eyes.

O, let us and the rest of the Church of God not be deceived. Those who foster genuine homesickness for heaven and, with the Apostles, desire to be released today rather than tomorrow, they are only a few in number even among believers. Even among those who truly know that homesickness, the stimulus that drives them is seldom of the "finest gold."

But we do not deny that there is something right in each of these motivations that we just summarized. Most of them find some support in Scripture. Nevertheless, thirsting after the living God, if it is to be genuine, must be the strongest force and, equal to it, that inner fiery longing of the soul to finally, finally make an eternal break with sin and to fully die to sin.

The Apostle Paul calls this to be freed from this mortal body (Romans 7:24), while Christ Himself, with reference to the church of Sardis, describes it as being "dressed in white" (Revelation 3:4,5). But in order to experience this longing of the soul, there must be this strong, irresistible driving force of hate against satan and hate against sin that presses and pushes itself upon the heart.

Our death is not a payment for sin but, rather, a *dying* to sin. God's children remain victims of sin until their dying day. This is a confusing concept for our thought and confession and a painful reality for our conscience.

O, it sounds so delightful and enchanted when it is said, "We who have died to sin, how can we still live in it?" Or, "Our old person is crucified with Him in order to destroy the body of sin, that is, the essence of sin, so that we no longer serve sin." Or, finally, "He who is born of God, sins no more. In fact, he can no longer sin, for the seed of God remains in him." But in spite of all of this, sin continues to live in us. We continue to feel the tug of sin welling up in us. We have to confess our sins to God anew each evening.

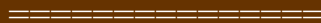
There have been people, preachers even, who exclaimed, "I've made it! For over ten years I have not sinned. It *is* possible to be a genuinely holy person already here on earth." But mostly this was followed by bitter disappointment. How often have such spiritually proud folk bitterly surprised us by gross sin!

Read and re-read what even an apostle like Paul complained about in Romans 7 about the condition of his own soul. "For in my inner being I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body making war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members" (Romans 7:22-23). And that same John who wrote in such a delightfully victorious tone that he who is born of God *can* no longer sin, did he not also write, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us?" (1 John 1:8).

Unfortunately, we need no further witness; we know it all too well ourselves. Sin remains a power also among God's children so that they constantly succumb. But it is not like the old rule of sin anymore. They no longer serve sin in their former strength. They now have sadness in their souls about their sin. It is now a hindering blemish on their white robe. They even laugh satan in his face when they pull themselves together into the centre of their faith and feel themselves hidden in Christ. However much it storms around them and in their lives and hearts, at the end they lay at anchor the certainty of their faith that is given them.

But in actuality, in their daily spiritual life, in their deliberations, inclinations, words and deeds, they keep stumbling as Paul exclaimed, “What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death” (Romans 7:24)? The same cry occasionally comes touchingly from the depth of their hearts.

If this mood remains with them, if this fiery longing arises not just now and then, but it remains, and becomes a constant, dominant desire, then a deep homesickness and a sharp soul desire arises, then death takes on a different form for them. Then the awareness arises in them that physical death becomes the only means by which they can die unto sin.



But before it comes to that, in most people by far, so much needs to change in their hearts. Just listen to the conversations. Someone proposes a plan. People approve. “O, yes, that would be great. If it were allowed, it would be delightful. But no, I will not participate, for we *may* not do it.” Actually, people would like to do it; they feel a strong pull towards it. There is a vague desire that the forbidding command does not exist. People would like to be free to sin, but they restrain themselves out of fear. They don’t refuse because it is forbidden. They would like to do it, but they do not consciously want to go against God with premeditation.

That’s where it stops. They did not cave into temptation. They won. However, the inner pull was there and the hate against sin *because* it was sin, was not yet there. And *that* is fearful and painful—that attraction to so much of what is sinful is still active in our hearts.

But there is more. We won, but too often only because we were carried along by the opinion of brothers and sisters. It was a matter of a sin that generally was disapproved of among the brothers and sisters, especially if it concerned a public sin or it was something sensual, something worldly that people would notice.

But what if no one would notice it except God? What if it was a sin of pride, of a delusion of grandeur, of our sense of honour or ambition? In short, a sin that normally is not classified as “immoral,” even though our soul knows full well that satan tempts us to such sins and that it is rejected by God in a most terrifying way.

We so often think we reject something because of God's will, but usually we do so because of human opinion.

There is still more. If we reject something because of God's will, in reality it is often more so because it is more terrible to fall into the hands of the living God, than because we love God and we carry within us the same hate with which God Himself hates sin.

The truth is that whoever hankers deeply for dying unto sin and to be clothed in that white robe, *must in her heart turn against sin itself*. She must shun sin like a poison that threatens us with death, like a snake that winds itself around her heart, as an evil power that wants to overpower her. She must recognize sin as her archenemy, as a roaring lion that goes about seeking to devour her. As we approach someone with a contagious disease with fear in the heart that we will also be infected, so we are to be aware when our hearts are touched by sin. Never again will it be, "I am attracted, but I may not." It must always be, "O, Lord, sin is approaching, so rescue, deliver, guard your servant."

Then, when sin continues to knock on the door of our hearts and we keep thinking, "That's how it will be till I die," then finally that holy longing of the soul to die emerges. And this not only because it is a throughway into life eternal, but even more because then we have forever in the depth of our lives *died unto sin*.

Chapter 6*

Equal to Angels

*Are you not in error because you do not know
the Scriptures or the power of God?
When the dead rise, they will neither
marry nor be given in marriage;
they will be like the angels in heaven.
Mark 12:24-25*

Between the reflections to which dying often tempts us and the leading thought which Holy Scripture associates with the grave, there is this rather surprising difference. With us, the sad question about seeing our departed loved one forces itself to the foreground, while Scripture always talks in the first place about being with Jesus and of rejoicing in God's image.

It isn't that Scripture excludes the possibility of seeing them again or of recognizing them, but nowhere does this seeing again show up as the actual ground of consolation in Scripture. There is no explicit mention of it in the Old Testament and neither is there any emphasis on the subject found in the New Testament.

The Old covenant does speak of "being gathered with the fathers," but this is more of a national or tribal concept than a personal expectation. One can, of course, speak of the parable of the "Rich Man and Lazarus" in which the rich man instantly recognizes both Abraham and the poor Lazarus after his death. But it must be said that knowing Abraham here is not a re-recognition and that for the rich man the re-recognition of Lazarus is more of an aggravation of his suffering than a comfort. The rich man is not in heaven, but in hell. By seeing someone again and re-recognition we do not at all mean a re-recognition of the godless, but of those who are with us in Christ.

The only assurance Scripture offers us for seeing someone again is that one who dies in the faith is gathered in the "assembly of the righteous" (Psalm 1:5) and will find those whom we carried to the grave in the hope of eternal life. Thus, all this "seeing again" is associated exclusively with the bond of faith that unites us with those who have died in Christ, but in such a manner that in the assembly of the righteous it is not those who preceded us, but Christ Himself Who remains the central attraction and that all "seeing again" and living together is subsidiary to our relationship to God in Christ.

But the above is not generally meant by "seeing again." What people generally think is mostly a continuation in heaven of the blood relationship or the friendship that bound us to our beloved departed here on earth. It is here that Christ asks,

“Are you not in error, because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?”

There is this story about a woman who died, who had been married seven times. The question arose, if earthly marriage relations are continued in the hereafter, whose wife will she be? Jesus cuts this scene off forthwith. The Scriptures know nothing about meeting each other again in such a relationship. He who still thinks in such terms, has no eye for that wonderful power of God by which He has arranged an order into life for the hereafter that is completely different from life here on earth. The marriage bond is the strongest of all bonds on earth, so that the poet Vondel could sing,

Where has a truer faithfulness between a man and a woman ever been
found on earth?

That bond that ties the heart of mother to child,
Born in pain and grief, fed with milk at her breast,
Carried so long under her heart that it joins their blood?
But stronger still is the bond of the couple
That (walks) devoted hand in hand never to separate.

And then comes Vondel’s song of praise for the marriage bond. It is exactly this strongest of all bonds that only works in the context of earthly households. It does not hold for heaven. Jesus explains clearly that this bond will not be renewed after the resurrection of the dead. “When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (Mark 12:25-27).

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Do the angels of God not know each other? Do the angels constantly and thoughtlessly pass by each other without acknowledging each other? Definitely not. But this is certain: their mutual relationships there are not based on the marriage bond or the bond between mother and child or between brother and sister. Their mutual bonds and relationships are governed exclusively according to the nature of the service they perform in God’s host. They do not have their own family life that would include their religion, their service to God. This service to God by “the servants of the Most High” is their entire life; they have no other life together in the Lord’s service.

Jesus has told us that, after dying and after the resurrection of the dead, the relationships between the faithful will no longer have the character they have here on earth. It will be a society like that of God's holy angels. That being the case, we can only conclude that earthly relationships will fall away and that only the soul's relationship to Christ and our service to God will eternally determine the nature of our being together.

Imagining that one's salvation will include his household and group of friends that he used to enjoy so much, that he will find them all back as they were on earth and continue that earlier life, except that now they are wholly sanctified, is not supported by the clear statement from Jesus, in fact definitely discouraged. Insofar as he had a bond in Christ with his beloved deceased, that bond will remain into eternity. All the rest falls away once you have become like an angel in heaven.

Even at the graveside the creature may never insert himself before the Eternal one. After the grave has been filled, the attempt to imagine the continuation of a certain level of relationship with our dear departed one, will definitely veer you away from the godly way. Such an attempt may be pleasurable, if it is a life based on memory, but it misses the mark if we think of our departed ones as looking down upon us and being aware of all we do and of all that happens to us. They have no knowledge of what happens on earth after their death.

Even the thought that our departed looking down upon us would keep us from sin, can change nothing in this context. We will avoid the sinful, not for the sake of our deceased, but because of the will of the Lord our God. "Against You, You only," David cried, "have I sinned" (Psalm 51:4). Only that which you resist because of God's will is of moral value.

So, dying does really bring about temporary separation. Only memory remains. Apart from that memory, our dead know nothing about us, nor we about them. The only thing we can be sure about is our bond with Jesus and our union in the service of our God. That union does not await our seeing each other again. Those above and we here below remain in the service of the Kingdom of God, even if a wall of

division is already built in the temple of God that prevents us from seeing each other.

Thus it is not sad sentiment, but our union in the service of the same King and the same God who is the central focus of our lives. *That* is the bond that will never be broken; *that* remains through death and grave and *that* will renew that delightful sense of union on the day of resurrection. But all this on condition that we drop all earthly thoughts and only think heavenly thoughts about heavenly things.

Even here on earth we do not always have the same relationship. At first, there is the relationship with parents, brothers and sisters. Then there is a social life with our mates at school or in our study. After that we have relationships in our own family. Going further, we have relationships with our colleagues or friends. Our social life changes when we move from one place to another. It does not need to be said that when we move, those earlier bonds shrivel. We know full well that later relationships often are very different from the former. How small and insignificant are the changes within our life circles on earth compared to the radical change that takes place when we are transitioned from our earthly circle to our heavenly surroundings and move into our heavenly service.

Now, God's arrangements for our earthly connections naturally depend on the task that we are to fulfill here. Similarly, God's arrangements for our heavenly connections are geared to the service to which the same God will assign us into eternity. From this it follows that a community of persons can be assembled for a task above that can be very different from that on earth. Persons forgotten here may be prominent up there or, in the reverse, prominent people here could be appointed to a lower status there. It is always as God's angels, who never ask for or seek anything except to be equipped for service to our Lord.

This is precisely the reason that a very different and much holier light is cast on "seeing again" and the "recognizing." All egoism falls away. It is not a case of repossessing for ourselves those who have left us behind, nor to reestablish once again our earthly household in the afterlife.

It will be more like respectfully perceiving the place that Jesus has prepared for us in the great house of the Father or what new calling has been reserved for us or what totally different service for which we have been chosen. Also, what previously hidden powers surprisingly opened up for that holy service. And then to enjoy God's wonderful arrangement that He has thus ordered for us. Also, with an eye to God's ordering, to so clearly comprehend what we never understood here on earth, like our orientation and lot in life.

And, yes, there is that bond of love, but a bond of a totally different character. Here it is a matter of building a house for ourselves, but there it will be a joy and privilege to together build the temple to the glory of our God.

Even though we are not called anymore to the same service together with our beloved departed, that should not cause us to lament nor should it disappoint us. From both sides we will not know any higher or holier joy than to see each other labour at *that* place and at *this* task that glorifies our God the most.

Chapter 7*

Many Rooms in My Father's House

*In my Father's house are many rooms;
If it were not so, I would have told you
I am going there to prepare a place for you.
John 14:2*

We humans cannot in any way imagine the purely spiritual. Within the confines of our imagination, all that is visible, touchable or physical has contours and colour, but when you try to envision a soul, you are stumped. When you want to imagine an angel, you call upon the human form and enrich it with wings. If you ascend even higher and raise your thoughts in worship to the Eternal Being, you lose yourself in the formless Infinite One.

That's how it is when you mentally try to place yourself in heaven. You may have read of a throne of God and of the triune Holy One, the seams of his robe overflowing the threshold to the throne, but that is all pure imagination with no corresponding reality. And then, when you hear of the ten times ten thousand angels crowding around the throne and of the altar of prayers before the throne, of the twenty-four elders of God's people kneeling before the altar, the scene becomes more definite. It will allow you to think about the congregation of the justified and of the saints in their white linen robes. But at the end there always comes a cruel shock that tears everything away from your eyes. After all, it is and remains all metaphor. As you imagine it on basis of those images, that's not how it is in reality.

Of course, it is the climax of superficiality when the doubter exclaims, "Then your belief in a soul, in a spirit, in a God or a heaven is nothing but imagination." After all, neither can you see power and strength such as the power of magnetism or even its opposite that repels, the power to grow and so much more that you cannot see, taste or imagine. But you do experience and see every moment that those many powers do indeed exist in nature and are effective. And so it is with courage, will power, enthusiasm, animation and many more aspects in life. You only observe them in their effect, but that effect demonstrates that these spiritual powers definitely exist.

The point is that we humans are bound in our imagination to the sensual and visible side of things. Therefore we can neither think nor speak about spiritual things except in metaphors and borrow terminology from them to interpret what we see or observe.

All of this would be impoverished if there were no inner and original bond between the spiritual and that imagery. To put it more succinctly, if the spiritual and visible world stood next to each other and the similarities that we observe between the two were purely accidental, we would be even more impoverished.

A champion is often decorated with a wreath around the head, but everyone realizes that that wreath and the victory have nothing in common. To the contrary, if we call upon God as our Father in heaven, then we recall that we humans are

created after God's image. The father title among us humans is nothing but a weak expression compared to that of the eternal Fatherhood of God.

On basis of our being created after God's image, we may declare that our human metaphors for the spiritual world is not an accidental similarity, but rests on origin and being. When you reflect that all of nature with its world of plants and animals undeniably show a bond with humans, you should suspect that even that world of nature is a reflection of the Eternal. When we read how Moses was to build the tabernacle according to the measurements God showed him on the mountain, we take a step further and dare to guess that even the works of people in some way reflect what is real above.

Did Matthew not tell us that when Jesus spoke in parables, He talked about things that "were hidden since the creation of the world"? (Matthew 13:35). And what clinches the matter finally, is that you believe that Jesus is in heaven not merely as a spiritual being, but glittering in His glorified body. From this, does it not follow that even with Jesus there must be a certain bond and connection between that glorified body and the spiritual world in which He lives?

The most important thing here is that we listen to the glorious words from Jesus' lips, that *there are many rooms in the Father's house above and that He has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us*. In heaven, this imagery must meet up with a reality. When it is said of fallen angels that they left their own abode, it tells us that they had an abode and that the faithful angels still have one.

Without thinking about tabernacles, tents or houses in their real sense, implicit in the above is that the angels as well as the redeemed have their own place where they abide. Thus heaven is not merely one floating sphere in which nothing is distinct but everything mixed. There *are* dimensions like length and breadth; there are distances and wide-open spaces where there are distinctions and units and places reserved for each one, reserved for the angels as well as for the anointed saints.

Jesus has three things to say in this context. First, there are more rooms for the redeemed. Secondly, those rooms together constitute the one single Father's

House. Thirdly, each elect is assigned one of these many rooms within the Father's House as her own place prepared for her by Jesus. Let us pay attention to all these three points.

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To begin with, *there are many rooms for the redeemed*. The one heaven is not one seamless, indistinguishable unity. It is not a single sphere of life that absorbs everything without distinction. There are divisions, districts and regions, each with its own borders, an arrangement that creates multiplicity. Houses are arranged next to each other but they are not duplicates or identical; they are all unique so that each one has its own architecture.

There are not just extensive level plains or empty places, but homes or houses, though not like our houses that protect us against wind, rain, cold and heat, but nevertheless homes that create community within which there is a culture of living, working and enjoying. The heavenly community consists of families within which groups of the redeemed live together according to their character and talents. Heavenly families in heavenly homes that are joined together not according to their origin from the same blood, but according to God's plan of election. Neither are they all sitting in one long row that sings psalms endlessly. No, there is life and community as in a family and within that community there is dynamic activity and work without anyone becoming exhausted or tired. There is neither day nor night, but only an eternal community of glory. In my Father's House there are *many rooms*.

The second characteristic: These many homes together comprise *one single Father's House*. There are distinctions, but within those distinctions and differences there is also a glorious unity. There are no rooms next to the Father's House; they are all included together in the one single Father's House. That single Father's House extends as far as that glorious circle of homes extends itself.

On this earth a child leaves his parental home to live in his own place, but that's not how it is in heaven. There are differences and distinctions, but no separation. The redeemed remain eternally in their Father's House, but within that one Father's House, groups possess their own place.

The Temple in Jerusalem depicts this arrangement somewhat. There was the Holy of Holies in which God lived and surrounding that were rows upon rows of houses and large halls in which the families would gather to celebrate their sacrificial feasts. All of this together formed the one single temple. It is thus quite possible that Jesus borrowed His comment about the Father's House with its many rooms from the Temple. That imagery implies that communion is enjoyed with the Eternal Being in every house. In every house God lives with His saints and the saints live in with the Father.

But there is more. If all these houses together form the one single Father's House, that also means that, though the saints live in their own houses, they nevertheless also have fraternal fellowship with the saints in neighbouring places. It is a community between the houses, not in order to just come and go, but like living together in the one Father's House. It is neither a community within which the differences are overcome nor a separation of groups that excludes intimate fellowship.

Our last point here is that Jesus is preparing a place for His saints above. That promise is followed by these words, "I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am" (John 14:3). Thus our death is delayed and awaits the time when Jesus is finished preparing a place for us. In the hour of death He comes to us, takes us up to Him and brings us to the place that He reserved and prepared for us. It is thus that He called His apostles to Himself from this world one at a time and points each one to the place prepared for her as their intended house.

Now think of that white stone with a name on it that no one can read except she who receives it, and you will understand that every saint is different from all the others. In keeping with that, everyone will have an eternal task assigned only to her. In other words, they do not all have the same task, but in the one single great work of the Kingdom of Heaven, everyone has her own calling, her own destination, her own task. For that task, everyone has her own gifts, talents and

grace. Not a single one can be missed, for that would render the work incomplete. Everyone's work must take place in blessed, divine and perfect harmony.

For this, an orderly arrangement, an incomprehensibly rich community is necessary that is put together by Jesus as Head of the Church. It is He who knows at which specific moment this heavenly task of each saint is to begin. When that moment arrives, it coincides exactly with the hour of our death that is known to God and His Christ. At that precise moment of our death, that one great work of the Kingdom must have progressed to the point that it is ready for our task to begin. Anyone entering too early will not find his place ready for him. Anyone entering too late will find that work disrupted by an irreparable emptiness.

It is this "preparing a place" by Jesus that He leads as Head of the Body and as King of God's Kingdom in such a way that at the very moment of our death the moment also has arrived for our task to commence. Everything is prepared for this entry into the great work. The work of the Lord of Lords would not make progress without our taking our place at that moment in our heavenly home and our accepting our task there.

Chapter 8*

Serving Him Day and Night

*Therefore, they are before the throne of God
and serve Him day and night in His temple,
and He who sits on the throne
will spread His tent over them.
Revelation 7:15*

If there are many rooms in the house of the Father and if Christ as King is busy 24/7 preparing a place for each redeemed saint whom He receives at his death, a question arises automatically. Is there an assignment awaiting us between our death and resurrection? And secondly, do those who precede us in death already have a work assigned to them?

“*Many* rooms” cannot refer only to houses with room for all God’s elect. This *could* just as well be arranged in just one single house. One finds hotels in this world with rooms for two thousand plus guests. Justice to the notion of “many houses” or rooms is done only if we accept the notion that there is a specific family life in each room that is different from the one in neighbouring rooms. This then gives the impression that the saints do not spread themselves out in endless rows of thousands upon thousands of rooms, but that they are organized in cohorts that have close relationships, each of which forms a unit in their own house.

If the above does justice to the idea of “many houses,” this idea receives further strengthening from Jesus’ declaration that He is preparing a place there for us. This preparing a place cannot possibly refer to the work of reconciliation, for that was already completed. Jesus does not say, “I have prepared a place...,” but “I will go to prepare a place for you.” Jesus carries out this task in heaven and that thus started after His ascension.

Preparing a place assumes that everyone will find his place in one of the many rooms ready upon her death. If the intention were for many to be pressed together in endless rows, there would be no such thing as preparing a place. If that were the case, each place would point to itself right after the previous arrival had entered his place.

If, to the contrary, the place must be ready and the saint is assigned to one of the various rooms, and if every place is different from all others, then this place preparation becomes a glorious work of art. Each saint takes his place in the room that has been prepared for the precise moment of his death and that fits his orientation, his spiritual talents and his calling. There is only one such place for each saint. Confusion and mistakes are inconceivable here.

That at our entry into heaven, each one of us will be unique, different from all others, follows directly from what Jesus said on Patmos, namely that He will give each one a white stone with a name engraved that no one knows except the recipient (Revelation 2:17). The name on the stone must somehow be related to the place prepared for each one individually.

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We must take it one step further by concluding from the above that each saint in heaven already now has to perform his own work for God. That it will be thus on the new earth under the new heaven, after the last day, should not surprise us. On that new earth, in the kingdom of glory, a human life will flourish that is simultaneously visible and invisible. It does not need to be pointed out that this cannot be in an eternal void of inactivity.

But it will be very different if we restrict ourselves to the kind of existence we will experience in the intermediate state between the moment of our death and the last judgement. Many tend to imagine it either as a void or as a life of praise and thanksgiving, but this is contrary to what Scripture reveals to us. In Revelation 7:15, we read that the saints serve God day and night, long before the resurrection of the dead. In addition, in the letters to the seven churches we read that Jesus will give to those who overcome power and authority to be exercised over others (Revelation 2:26-27) and place them on a throne to reign (Revelation 3:21). He will make them pillars to carry or bear the Temple of God (Revelation 3:12).

Nothing in the above leaves the impression of a void or of a passive life of doing nothing. Rather, it gives a picture of dynamic work activity, of work that continues “day and night,” 24/7, and that comprises serving, guarding, ruling and bearing or upholding God’s Kingdom. This is further borne out by what Jesus says elsewhere, that those who have died are like the angels in heaven. Angels don’t just sit there doing nothing, but they serve God, protect His honour and restlessly carry out the high mandate that comes to them from God.

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There is this false impression that has its origin in a wrong concept of the *eternal Sabbath*. The Lord our God created heaven and earth and all that is in them in six days after which He rested from His labour. This is often misunderstood to mean that He ceased His divine work. His actual work of creation did end, but His providential work commenced at that point. It is in opposition to that false conception that we have the definitive declaration from Jesus, “My Father is always at His work” (John 5:17).

God’s Sabbath rest is not a matter of laying His ongoing life’s work to rest. To the contrary, it constitutes withdrawal from His special work of creation in order to

concentrate on His actual work. When we read that “there remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9), this definitely does not mean that with death an endless period of inactivity begins. Instead, at that point the difficulties-- grief and sorrows of life, being driven and exhausted--cease and are replaced by a totally new dispensation in which the saints, liberated of all foreign influences that have driven them throughout life, now come to the free, unforced and rich development of their inherent strengths. Our saints are not dead; they live and life means action; life without an emission of energy is unthinkable.

No one imagines that the glorified Jesus sits around idly, doing nothing. We all know that, like His Father, Jesus also works (John 5:17). We cannot imagine a single saint whose soul is not drawn into the work of Jesus. We feel perplexed when we are asked what work the saints are doing. Scripture itself describes it as serving, as guarding, ruling and as bearing the pillars that uphold the roof of the Temple. Beyond that, we are deprived of any closer and more accurate description.

However, this deprivation does not need to make us doubt the central truth itself. For example, a house servant sharpens knives and brushes his master’s clothes, while the latter spends his days at his desk reading and thinking. It would be totally understandable for the servant to think that he works hard, while his employer just sits there doing nothing. The servant can only think of work as manual labour. He does not understand that working without using one’s muscles can be the more exhausting.

The same holds true for a common foot soldier. He fights for all he’s worth until he finally collapses, while the general sits on his horse on a distant hill or, in more contemporary terms, sits at his computer and only gives occasional instructions to his adjutants. An observer unfamiliar with the situation may think that only the soldier carries the heat of the day, while his general is calmly watching the battle without doing anything.

Among us earthlings there is a wide-ranging difference between one type of work and another. Manual labourers have no idea of what constitutes “higher” work. Is it then so strange that we, who know no work except that performed here in our earthly household, don’t have the faintest idea of the work of saints above? But we

do know that the less manual and unsightly work we perform, the more energy it takes and the more it is considered prestigious and higher. We know that for the saints that have preceded us all bodily involvement in work has fallen away till judgement day and that their work is purely spiritual. It is therefore understood that such spiritual work means working fulltime, restless working even, working that is of a higher nature, even though we cannot fully explain it even to ourselves.

X=====x

Naturally, the division into cohorts of the redeemed must be related somehow to the above. This is not the way the many houses are organized on earth. Here they are arranged according to family and birth. Man, woman, children and servants all live in one single house, even though their roles are completely different. On earth, you do not find groupings according to work and talents in the family, but you do in commerce and industry, in art and science, as well as in the military.

It is striking that in Scripture the work and lifestyle of angels are never compared to family but always to the military. They are “heavenly hosts;” they form “heavenly battle orders;” they are called “Mahanaim,” meaning military camps. They are also called “Chariots of God.” All are bearing military nomenclature, which can only mean that their group divisions are arranged according to the work by which they serve God.

So, the saints are like God’s angels in heaven, living in different houses in which each one has a separately prepared place. Thus it is obvious that their divisions and groups are also arranged according to the nature of their tasks.

Jesus says that the redeemed do not marry and are not given in marriage. The bond of family life that has its origin in blood does not exist up there. And what other bond would there be than that associated with their special work that they are assigned in service to their God? Their special assignment in the work of God for which they are responsible is exclusively related to their unique orientation and their special talent. And so the cohorts of similar spirits are units in order to fit all their gifts and talents together in harmony to be included in the work that is assigned to the various cohorts together and communally. This is a rich social order in which everyone takes his unique place according to his orientation and

gifts. They work at that place in cooperation with other saints who have joined them in undivided harmony .

There remains for us the difficulty of imagining how the soul, separated from the body, can be so busily occupied. That is the reason so many talk of soul- sleep of the dead. Already the reformer John Calvin had to struggle against this opinion in his day.

But are the angels then not exclusively spiritual and is the fact of their working not revealed throughout Scripture? The entire argument has run into a cul-de-sac when we realize that, though the Lord our God is purely a Spirit, He is also the primary Worker who never tires and bears all things by the word of His strength.

Chapter 9*

A Place among Those Standing Before God

*This is what the Lord Almighty says,
“If you will walk¹ in My ways and keep My commandments,
then you will govern My house and have charge of the courts,
and I will give you a place among these standing here.
Zechariah 3:7*

“These standing here” before God refers to the host of angels that by their standing before the Throne expresses their readiness and disposition to carry out the high command that has gone out to them. They are not out to rule but to serve, which is indicated by the angel *standing* before the Throne of God; it expresses their servant character. The saved redeemed also serve, but they are also shown sitting with Christ on his Throne. “Sitting” here is a symbol of majority, of ruling.

In order to express that the glorified Christ has been given a name above all other names, we are told and believe that He sits at the right hand of God. This prophesy

¹ Instead of the NIV’s “walk,” Kuyper has the Dutch equivalent of “standing,” a difference with an impact in this chapter.

of Zechariah to Joshua, the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord (Zechariah 3:1), says that the Lord will give him a place among those standing before God. This indicates that the separation between life here and that above will be partially done away with.

Joshua himself is still on earth, while the angels who stand before God are in heaven. Nevertheless, Joshua will have fellowship with that higher life around God's Throne. He will not yet live there or stay there for any length of time, for the city in which he lives is still in this world. But as the resident of a walled city, in order to breathe in the fresh air and to enjoy God's rich nature, he creeps stealthily through the city gate after completing the work of the day, stands among the angels before God's Throne, so it shall be with Joshua. He will still live on earth, but in order to flee from the earthly restrictions and to breathe in the fresh soul wind, he will occasionally leave this earth to stand among the angels before the Throne to be strengthened by his access to it and then to return to his life task here below.

Joshua is not able to just make a place for himself among the spirits before the Throne. It must be given him, for no one has access to it except those given permission. That is why it reads, "I will *give* you a place..." And although this holy privilege is here accorded exclusively to Joshua in his capacity of High Priest, it must be understood that this would hold only during the Old Testament dispensation. In the New Testament dispensation, all who are in Christ have the anointing of the Holy and all redeemed have now a place in the royal priesthood and thus may approach God as priest.

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There must be a reason or a cause that the Lord God made this statement to Joshua in this particular format. We might have expected that it would say something like "I will give you permission for access to the Throne of grace, to Me as your God, to the heart of your Father who is in heaven." That's not what it says. There is nothing here about straightforward fellowship with the Eternal Being, but about standing among the angels. Although the two may have similar purport, there is a difference in the format of the expressions. It is this to which we now direct your attention.

The deepest impulse of mysticism is always to point to communion with God Himself, but this creates the danger that the soul in a nostalgic mood wants to penetrate into the Divine Being. This would constitute an abominable heresy. Alas, the history of mystics knows of too many such sad stories. Beginning in that way with the Spirit ends up mixing spirit and flesh by failing to honour the border between God and His creatures. That is the exact danger that is avoided by God's pointing to the life world around His Throne.

The contrast here is not "God and the world," but very different, "*our poor life world here on earth* versus the *rich life above around God's Throne*." It is just as the holy Apostle makes this contrast, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your minds on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:1-2). Or, if you like, as it is written in the letter to Hebrews, the "better Fatherland—a heavenly one" (Hebrews 11:1) versus being "aliens and strangers" here below (Hebrews 11:13).

Thus, there is not an endless void above us with a chilly, lifeless, unending, eternal God. No, but a God in His heavenly glory and around Him a lifestyle that in its glow and riches far surpasses all the beauty of the earth. It is not the emptiness of death, but the fullness of life around the Throne of the Lord of Lords. In that world above, it is first of all the angels we encounter, just like when we enter a royal palace, we first meet the servants, and only then do we penetrate into the rich world of the royal palace.

The mention of standing among angels expresses this even better. It is not merely a view of a crowd of the Lord's guards that is promised to Joshua. That "standing" means much more than that. In a parade, the people may watch the victorious royal forces. They may admire the scene of the marching forces from afar, but they have to maintain their distance; they may not mix with the marching rank and file of soldiers. The people that watch and the army that parades are and remain two different entities.

However, when a victorious army comes home from the battle, and it is received within the gates by admiring crowds, it does not take long before the distinction

falls away. The people freely begin to mix with the soldiers, shake their hands, give them presents and before you know it, they stand—and walk!--among the victorious soldiers. Arm in arm, soldier and citizen walk through the city.²

The Lord God gives Joshua—and along with him, every anointed saint—the privilege to stand among those surrounding the Throne. This means much more than a mere glimpse of that rich life around God. It implies that already now we are at home in that rich celestial life, belong to that world around the Throne, have communion with that world. We are citizens. Instead of being kept at a distance, we have already been admitted to a much more intimate interaction with that world.

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A very strong experience parallel to the above may come just once in a great while. At another time, it may come very faintly, but most of the time not at all. We spend most hours and days of our lives without such privileges among the hosts of God. Many of us who have a busy dynamic leading role in life that awaits us when we rise in the morning and demands our attention throughout the day, they can surrender themselves to such quiet reflection and calm meditation only in exceptional moments. Such active dynamic persons find such an oasis of life only on the Sabbath as a gracious gift from God.

Beyond that, this communion drives us only for brief moments during which we immerse ourselves somewhat deeper in prayer than we usually do. It happens only when God grabs us, shakes and shocks us, and the foundation of our existence here below trembles under our feet.

However, that communion with the life above is not a permanent condition but an exceptional gift of grace. It is only God's generosity by which He now and then grants that standing among His angels. You don't boisterously force yourself inside. The gate has to be unlocked for you, which is always through the love, grace and mercy of the Lord our God.

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² The translator has seen this personally when he witnessed the Canadian army in World War II chase the German army out of his Dutch village.

Of course, this standing occurs only in our consciousness, not in any physical reality. The Apostle Paul says. "...set your minds on things above" (Colossians 3:2). Minds think, and thinking takes place in our consciousness. That which drives us and makes us proceed is not an unconscious, unfamiliar feeling but a conscious action. Such participation in the world above is possible only in clear thinking. That thinking automatically becomes richer in proportion to the more you comprehend that life, move from vagueness to greater clarity, do not waste your imagination in wild fantasy, and letting it be restrained by God's Word.

Even though we can only consider such "standing" by thinking, let no one deny its reality. The Psalms are based on the fact that we lift our souls to the above. It is not a matter of us here, with God at a distance above, or as a philosopher thinks of that world above without God. Scripture never allows such separation and distance. If we want to lift our thought and imagination to the above, it is not some part of us that needs to go there, but our very souls themselves. Psalm 25:1 says, "To You, o Lord, I lift my soul." Or Psalm 143:8-9, "...for to You I lift my soul. Rescue me from my enemies, o Lord, for I hide myself in You." An even stronger statement, "...for in You my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of Your wings" (Psalm 57:1-2). Or "I long to dwell in Your tent forever" (Psalm 61:4). In short, it is a deed of our consciousness and requires all of our thinking.

In that action of our consciousness it is we ourselves who act; our very person is involved. It includes my "I", myself, my ego. That is our life, our soul. This uplifting of our souls is possible because there is One who pulls us towards Him, One who for a moment breaks the bonds that tie us too strongly to earthly things, but who also ties the bonds with the world above and thus helps us to experience and enjoy the unity of life in that world.

Chapter 10* **In a Loud Voice**

*In a loud voice they sang:
Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and
strength and honour and glory and praise!"*

Revelation 5:11

Numbers are relative. When you for the first time travel from hovel to village to town to city to capital, from the translator's Dutch village Lutjegast all the way to Vancouver or Lagos, you will be surprised at the size of those cities. And that goes on and on and on. What is Vancouver compared to Tokyo or Beijing?

And so it is with meetings, gatherings, masses of people. A traditional villager can hardly imagine anything greater than a full village church or a village feast in a crowded market place. When royals appear on their palace balcony in Amsterdam or London, crowds a hundred times that of the village marketplace gather. But what is that crowd compared to the hundreds of thousands that gather in larger cities like Beijing or Mexico City on just a single occasion?

The Apostle John reported on the isle of Patmos that he heard God's angels sing the song of the Lamb with a great voice before the Throne. When he looked up, he heard that the number of angels was ten thousand times ten thousand and a thousand times thousands. Now ten thousand times ten thousand is already a hundred million. Then you add another thousand times and you have billions. The point here is not to create statistics. In Revelation, these numbers express the idea of impressive greatness or magnitude; they are not the result of measurements. They serve only to give us symbolically an idea of magnitudes. The frequently occurring number of 144,000 is not meant to be taken literally. All of this is designed to express the total number of all living beings on earth who appear before God through saving grace. That number is based on the fact of twelve being a sacred number of completeness in Scripture.

Thus, those pictures of multitudes of angels and redeemed are not given for statistical purposes, but they intend to give an idea of the immense crowds of heavenly hosts and of their immense arrangements. It is like the Dutch expression puts it, "We can walk over the heads" or "It is one black crowd of people." That's how the Apocalypse presents these mighty round numbers to indicate that the angelic hosts undulate in endless and immense length and depth around the Throne of God.

Though this immense heavenly host was so large that it defied all comparisons with human crowds here on earth, the Apostle tells us that he heard this countless crowd sing with one great voice and that he could make out what they were singing. He looked and heard the voice of many angels around the Throne, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength, and honour and glory and praise” (Revelation 5:11-12). We realize, of course, that we are dealing with a vision and that this cannot be taken as a literal description of a revealed reality. But the vision did indicate that the apostle was given an *idea* of the celestial culture.

And what was the idea? In the world above with God there are such mighty groups of living beings that communally and unitedly express themselves in such a way that all the churches here on earth and all the meetings in our squares simply amount to nothing. Our views, voices and ears are restricted to such a small distance that communal and united voices of a mere million persons is totally unthinkable among us. If you were to have four persons per square metre, already a dense situation, you would need a square of 250,000 square metres to contain that million. Even if this were imaginable, how could you possibly bring this mass to one clear, distinct expression in voice and song? But John received the idea on Patmos, the impression of a mass that is greater by many multiples. That is the reason the Book of Revelation frequently talks of that great voice.

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Sometimes reference to that “great voice” comes in other expressions such as “a loud shout like the roar of a lion” or “a voice like thunder” or “the roar of rushing waters” (Revelations 10:3; 6:1; 14:2). Especially the last expression is expressive. When the storm breaks loose, from how far do you not hear the thunder clash and the blustering of the ocean as it beats down on the beach and dunes with its roaring waves? But those mighty waves are nothing but gathered drops of water. That’s how it is with the voice of that immensely waving mass in which each angel and each saint by herself is nothing but a single drop of water. Does all this not point to a communal effort above that by far supersedes every communal effort on earth?

Full communal exercises generally do not exceed fifty with us. A well-organized gathering may reach up to five hundred at the maximum. A single voice of one individual can at most be heard by ten thousand people, at least if you exclude the

crowds listening to the latest digital devices. Among most of us such situations are limited to a narrow circle of, say, twenty persons. In contrast to our limitations, Scripture frequently gives us the impression that in the world above this practice of community basically knows no limits. Up there, there simply is nothing like the limitations caused by our distances here on earth.³

Of course, all of this can only be sketched in terms of images from this life here. We don't understand any other language. We read of angels receiving wings and flying from one end of heaven to the other; of trumpets whose sounds can be heard through all the heavens. And then we read of the gatherings of all the redeemed in the one single Father's House, of millions of beings who so express themselves together that one cannot only hear their voice(s), but all they say and sing can be understood. All of this leaves the impression of a totally free and unrestricted communal life, of a fellowship of saints the likes of which no one has ever known here on earth.



The source of the basic thought of this rich communal life lies in God Himself. We all know and feel that we can have communion with our God no matter where we find ourselves, and that there is never a single moment that God cannot hear our prayer. The omnipresence of God is no mere rational human conclusion for the child of God, but a reality. On the one hand, it is a matter of communion in prayer. On the other, there is the constant present experience of God's nearness, at least when our sin does not ban this from our heart. The same holds true for our Saviour. Distance never cuts us off from that soul-connection with the High Priest above.

Scripture shows us that there is also a fellowship among the angels compared to which our earthly communion is a mere shadow. Thus it is obvious that we can believe of the saints, as human beings, as creations after God's image, that in their highest spiritual level they will also be called and equipped for a similar community without any restrictions.

³ Translator's note: Kuyper would probably regard the latest digital sound distribution systems as inspired by the Spirit of God. See especially his discussion along this line in his *You Can Do Greater Things than Christ*. See the Kuyperiana page on < www.SocialTheology.com >.

Even the development of life here on earth points to it. At the beginning, there was no fellowship among humans except through the spoken word. Every village, every region and every nation lived apart. Then the art of writing made its appearance and it suddenly enabled us to have fellowship over distances. This was succeeded by the press that greatly expanded the richness and speed of fellowship. Then steam accelerated communications even more. After that, the telegraph and telephone made communication to the farthest regions possible. And by now, in the twenty-first century, there are virtually no limits to this development. Who can predict how all this will accelerate and simplify in the decades ahead?

All of this is implied in the basic idea of human creation after God's image and in what Holy Scripture tells us about the life above. It all completely fits increasingly with clear lines as the development of life here on earth is revealed. We do not say too much if we believe in a communal life and mutual practice among the saints above that is not subject to restrictions but that extends throughout the entire Father's House, to all houses above and to all the saints.

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Do you sense the depth of the enrichment of life implied in the above? To live without community is to vegetate. Only in community does life become living in the full sense of the word. We are not a pile of loose grains of sand, but as human beings we are organically one and we bond with others. Living together in one single communal life is the life of love and that love spreads out beams that are reflected by each saved soul millions of times, and only thus the full glory of the richest and most glorious light pours out.

Already here on earth your heart is richer to the extent you share in the joys and sorrows of others, or weave the comings and goings of their lives into your own. That is to find food and warmth for your own spiritual life in the intimacy of our lives. Alas, to how few does this occur here on earth! Your intimate circle is already considered wide if you enjoy the fellowship with, say, twenty adults. It is that sort of restriction that one day will come to an end in order to overflow into a full communal life with all God's saints.

But even then there will still be distinctions. Those many houses point to a closer connection with those who are one in mind, in orientation, in talent and calling.

But with all together, it remains one single community in the one Father's House. That is the very reason that your heart will awaken to a dynamic of love and communal life at a level it never reached your heart here, a community bound to no place or time, a community no longer *through* means but *without* means, a community of being on being and of heart to heart. And every time one would die, called by God to enter heaven, and the multitude of the perfectly justified spreads out, there will also be a new gain for you for the richness of the life in your heart. It is then that you will begin to understand properly what love is.

It is not standing by the weak or practicing mercy over those in misery, for that you can no longer do in heaven. There is no misery there anymore. There is only a life that expresses itself in endlessly living along and in others. It is in this kind of love that you first discover and then enjoy the riches that it pleased God to create in you by giving you that kind of human heart.

Chapter 11*

The Spirits of the Righteous Made Perfect

*To the church of the firstborn,
whose names are written in heaven.
You have come to God, the judge of all men,
to the spirits of [the] righteous... made perfect.
Hebrews 12:23.*

We must strictly hold on to the conviction that we humans are not trichotomous beings composed of three parts but of two. We are not body, soul and spirit, but a duality of body and soul. We are to reject the notion that a person who is not regenerated or born again consists only of body and soul, while the born-again person receives a third item, that is, spirit. What we receive in regeneration is not a human spirit but God's Spirit, who then lives in us so that we become God's Temple. Furthermore, Scripture tells us not only that the regenerated are spirits, but the unregenerate or lost as well. We read of the elect that "the spirits of the righteous" are with God, but in 1 Peter 3:19 we also read that "the spirits who are

in prison” are lost due to their disobedience. Thus all those who have died are spirits, those who died in Jesus as well as those who did not.

Those same dead are also called “souls.” Revelation 6:9 says, “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God.” Same in Revelation 20:4, “I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus.” But “soul” and “spirit” are not the same. When the invisible aspect of our being is referred to, in contrast to our visible body, almost always it uses “soul,” and almost never “spirit.” But when it is about power, action and life emerging from our invisible life, independent of our body, then “spirit” is mostly used.

Someone dead in sin does not have spirit within her in the higher sense, but if her soul is made alive from death in sin, she becomes a spiritual person, partially because she is led by the Spirit; partially because her spiritual life has come to true life.

Over against the idea that humans are a trichotomy of body, soul and spirit, we must stick to the words of Jesus, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). So, therefore only soul and body! But when it is said that the soul awakes to a higher consciousness and a sanctified power, then the word “spirit” is used. That’s why the Word of God divides soul and spirit like a sharp cutting sword and the prayer ascends that the God of Peace may save the sanctified spirit, soul and body in the future through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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This is all applicable to our beloved deceased ones. When they are presented as suffering victims of persecution, they are called “the souls of those who have died.” But if it is about those who live by faith, they are called “the spirits of the justified.” And when it is about perseverance in unbelief, they are referred to as “the spirits who are in prison.”

When the Queen of Sheba was amazed at the wealth of Solomon’s kingdom, in Kuyper’s translation, “there was no more spirit within her” (1 Kings 10:5). The angels in their active service are called “spirits.” Demons also, when through their

evil power they hold a human soul in restraint, are called “spirits.” A dying person is said to be “giving up her spirit.”

When someone sits around passively without taking any action, she may be described as “forlorn,” Kuyper’s Dutch for that being derived from “soul” (*zielig*). Over against such, we have a “person full of spirit” or a “spirited person,” one who is very active. This image of action is even associated with the Holy Spirit. That’s the reason someone may be described as “full of power and the Holy Spirit.”

It is wrong therefore to refer to deceased persons as “souls.” It gives the impression of an existence without will and power, without initiative. But if we talk about “the spirits of the justified,” we receive a very opposite impression. Spirits are beings in whom there is drive and force and who are capable of the highest level of action. Of course, such action does not come from the bodies of our departed ones but only from their souls. To picture them as actively doing God’s work, we must not think of them as souls but as spirits, who are saved for the service of their God.

It is here that we involuntarily stumble upon an almost insurmountable difficulty. During our life here on earth we cannot imagine a single deed, action of the will or any other apart from the aid of our bodies. How then are we to think of a deed or action on the part of our departed after they have been separated from their bodies and remain bereft of their bodies till Christ’s return?

She who is in such a separated state can do nothing at that moment, because she has lost control of her body. But when alive and sleeping, the effect of the soul on the body is minimal. Then we may dream and those dreams may be enjoyable or anxious. However, when we wake up, that dream world dissolves into nothingness, leaving the night behind us as lost time.

Quite possibly, most likely even, during sleep a certain development goes through our spirit, but when we wake up, we don’t have the least realization that we did this ourselves. Nothing gives us the impression that we personally have brought our spirit further while sleeping. Should it happen that while sleeping we have received greater insight into something, then we most likely see this under the

grateful impression that this was God-given while we slept, not that we ourselves continued our study while sleeping.

We do not act without the body. All our thought world, the world of our theories and imagination, does not become more clear to us except through what our bodies with their senses observe in the outside physical world. Even our language is basically made up of observations that are borrowed from the visible things in the outside physical world. Should all that is related to body and is associated with the visible world fall away along with our body, then it becomes incomprehensible for us how the spirits of the dead could still have the capacity to think, to imagine, to will, and to do.

In general, little thought is given to the intermediate state of the dead, but this leads to vagueness about life after death. Those who are serious about eternal life cannot have sustainable peace with that situation. No language to speak, no visible world from which to borrow images, no forms after which to create models. Memories are torn from their ties to life. But then how can there be a clear consciousness, a choosing of goals and directing our power to those goals? And, especially, how cooperate with others to make achieving those goals possible? These are all questions that we cannot push aside; they demand solutions.

You probably have heard of “innate thought?” As the expression has it, it is most likely a false fabrication, but it is based on a deep truth. Just think of the millions and millions of newborns who are carried immediately from the cradle to the grave, who have never spoken a human language, have never participated in the visible world and who have never heard of our thought world. Have all of them entered heaven, knowing nothing and destined to persevere eternally in their complete lack of consciousness and ignorance? Do those who pass away during adulthood, when they open their eyes in heaven, stand on the same line with the know-nothing souls of these departed children?

Is life in heaven a life for blank minds? It has been referred to “soul sleep,” but that is too weak. There is still always a partial consciousness in our dreams during sleep. It cannot be a state of total blankness. Or could it be that the conscious life

on earth that goes away, is suddenly replaced by a totally different consciousness that has nothing in common with life here on earth? Should that be the case, then every connection or bond between earthly and heavenly life would all dissolve. We would not understand how our Mediator serves for us at the altar in the Holy Place in our flesh, and prays for us.

But now pay attention to a completely different line of thought and our eyes will suddenly open to a surprising light. Before it was created, the world was eternally in God, in His eternal decree, in the counsel of His will. It entered reality through creation, but it existed in the conscious life of God from the beginning. We are created in the image of God, also in our human consciousness. Thus there must be a connection, bond or relationship between the centre of our consciousness and the created world in which God realized His eternal thought. It is not a matter of “innate thoughts,” for thought originates from reflection. The background of our consciousness cannot be empty, but must be a creaturely reflection of God’s thought world, of the divine life of consciousness. Conceptions, images, and language taken from this visible world must fit our human consciousness, because God makes His own thoughts real in this visible world and has implanted an impression of His divine consciousness in us.

However, if, as happens at the time of death, the connection with the visible world is gone, you become a child again, then, what you bear of the image of God and thus also of the image of divine consciousness, re-emerges from the root of your own consciousness. That rich content develops itself then in consonance with that higher world in which you open your eyes. Thus those carried from cradle to grave are in the same condition as those who died at a later age. All the mystery lies in what Jesus taught, namely that we are to become like a child and then we will see the glory of God.

Chapter 12*

A Person’s Spirit Within

*For who among men knows the thoughts of a man
except the man’s spirit within him?*

*In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God
except the Spirit of God.
1 Corinthians 2:11*

When we return from the grave where we laid our departed to rest, it is normal to constantly think of our loved one. However, and this is noteworthy, we think of the departed not as he now is but as he was before passing away—not as spirit but in his visible, observable form. That is the reason we treasure an image or portrait of the deceased. There is no felt need for this right after her death. That is when the emotions are at their highest and just the memory suffices. But after months have passed and our busyness prevents us from sharply retaining that one single memory, the once clear picture becomes vague, so that we now welcome representations like portraits or photographs.

We then begin to cling to that image, to the portrait of the familiar observable form, even though we are fully aware that the departed no longer is like that, that he has laid aside the physical robe and now lives in one of the many houses of God without body and invisible to the eye. We try to ennoble and romanticize the image from memory as artists often do symbolically by encircling the head with a halo. However, even then it remains a visible appearance, for to think of our departed as spirit is almost impossible.

Even angels, though exclusively spiritual, appear in visible form when they reveal themselves, speaking like we speak. When superstition causes us to perceive shades of evil spirits, the confusing image always appears vague and grey, but still with definite forms and colours. Only the evil spirits in the Bible who held down their victims of possession “tore” their victims and threw them into the fire without the bystanders seeing any form or shape of these spirits. But in such incidents there *was* a visible effect on a visible person that resulted in tangible deeds. A spirit that does not take on any form, that acts without any shape and engages its power without visible effect, is beyond our normal comprehension. We can talk about it or develop an idea of it, but in reality it amounts to nothing for us.

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Let us not forget that the mode of existence of our departed is just like that. Our future is that after we shrug off our bodies at death, we exist only as spirits until the resurrection of the dead. If we nevertheless cling exclusively to the visible

appearance of our departed, there may be a continued memory but no interaction with them in the present. With every year the distance between us increases. The result is that in many families, who at first passionately hold on to the memory of their loved one, their memory fades away after a few years. Even insofar as it concerns the existence of our own soul, it is doubtful that the separation of body and soul will continue to puzzle us. The thought of dying remains too nebulous and imagining our future after death too scanty and meager.

The Lord God has created us spiritual and physical, soul and body. It is unnatural for us to discount the physical side of our being or to ignore it, but the root of our being must always be sought in the spirit, not in the flesh, in the soul and not in the body. The balance is disturbed as soon as we focus one-sidedly only on the visible, while the spirit, separated from the physical, ceases to be real for us.

This is where faith comes in, the faith that means “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). If things were as they should be, then, quite apart from the body, the actual existence of the spirit that is in us would speak to us so clearly that we would rather regard the visible as deceptive, than regard the spirit in us as unreal.

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This is no exaggeration. Is it not certain that the spirit created all that is visible and never that the visible created the spiritual? We are talking here of the deepest foundation of the faith that God is in heaven and created the earth and that God is a spirit, only spirit, nothing but spirit. In His spiritual self-sufficiency, He is independent of all that is visible. In His essence He is the eternal Being, the Being of all Being that gives being and life to all things.

In the eternal Object of our adoration we possess sufficient proof that a spirit, completely separated from all form and shape, has a real existence in the strictest sense of the word. To this real existence of the spirit nothing physical or form is ever added.

Angels are a good example. They also are spirits without visible appearance. This is regardless of the fact that for our sake they appear to us in a form for which God in His omnipotence enabled them. Even though they appear in the visions of Isaiah

and in John in symbolic forms, in their essence they are only spirits. Being without bodies belongs to their essence. Though they present a holy example of huge hosts of beings with their choirs that exist exclusively as spiritual, they serve God day and night by doing the most glorious tasks. Therefore, God is called the “Father of Spirits,” precisely to depict Him as the highest being of all that is spiritual above the visible.

God is the Creator of all the visible. That is the work of His hands. But of everything spiritual, He is called the “Father of Spirits,” thereby expressing the close bond that naturally ties Him as the Eternal Being to all that as spirit received its own being or essence.

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If you were to ask whether humans belong to the visible or the spiritual, you should without hesitation respond that we are spirits, just like angels, and that we as spirits call upon God as the “Father of Spirits.” To be sure, the completion of our being depends also partially on our interaction with the visible creation. After dying and at Jesus’ return, the bodily aspect reappears in order to be ours forever. But still, the ground of our being, the root of our existence, is not found in that body but in our spirit. The spirit has not been given to our body, but our body to the spirit. Therefore, if in death the body temporarily falls away, our being remains our being. Our identity remains the same; our spirit, now without the physical organs, continues its existence without interruption.

Our soul has an existence of its own. You cannot locate it whether here or there. Our restricted or limited physical location does not apply to the soul. After our death, our soul has a specific place where it resides, for otherwise it would be omnipresent. It is in the Father’s House. More precisely, it is in one of the many rooms in the Father’s House. However, we cannot imagine a connection between such a spirit and a specific location. But this we know: the soul of every departed is somewhere and has a specific place. That somewhere is in one of the many houses. In that space, the soul is placed in a relationship with the souls of other deceased. They do not exist passively in that relationship, but they serve; an energy goes out from them. That is the reason they are spirits, appear as spirits and fulfill their calling as spirits.

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How spirits work without the physical body is difficult to comprehend for us. But we can say this much: The activity of a spirit is less transparent for us, the lower our status as human being, but it becomes more transparent for us the higher the position or status we occupy.

As long as our labour is exclusively manual, it is almost impossible to imagine it in purely spiritual terms. But if our life's task calls for little muscular exertion and our work is almost exclusively mental or intellectual, so that our body gets in the way more than it helps, then you can begin to understand at least a little. An intellectual's spirit, exhausted from study and needing to quit because of tiredness in the depth of the night, could still continue in its reflections, if it could break the bond with its body.

This would even be stronger with one who is a genius in intellectual pursuits or in singing or art. In such a case, it emerges as from a fountain out of the spirit within. Such a fortunate one knows very well that it is the spirit within him that pushes and presses for power to be emitted. If, however, at another time that inspiration is blocked, nothing will come of it and she stands there helpless only because her spirit has stopped working at that moment. For the real genius, her external achievement is a peripheral issue. The main thing is the working of the spirit within.

One should not exaggerate. Even at the highest level of our work on earth, we remain tied to concepts, ideas and words that are connected to the visible world. Even our imagination is full of whatever enters from the outside.

Thus it is not the same as the work of the spirits in the Father's House, but it does help a bit to form an idea or image. At least, it demonstrates how the human spirit can awaken to high or prestigious work. In fact, it provides evidence that the less the work of our spirit calls for support from the visible, the more prestigious its work.

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Could it be that all the spirits of the redeemed become genii upon dying? Certainly not in the sense in which we normally think of it. But do note that it is not only in the higher region of thought that the spirit in us meditates and reflects without the

support of the body. There is in that spirit also the operation of the heart, of the emotions and of sensitive feelings. Also in that world our spirit works already here on earth. There are the inner struggles and the high tensions of our internal life. Intense suffering and deep joy exist without the support of the physical, especially the ecstasy of spiritual communion with the Eternal Being. There is the profound operation of the spirit in us even during a barely whispered prayer. Thus it is also from that side that we know of the operation of the spirit in us without interference of the physical already here on earth.

That is the reason that it is not too far sought that, after it awakes in eternity, the spirit does not descend into unconsciousness. Rather, it will be capable of very powerful resilience and industry. The human spirit does not depend on the body to act as spirit, to be able to feel and appreciate and, as spirit inspired by God, to serve Him forever.

Chapter 13* **Separation of Body and Soul**

*I am torn between the two:
I desire to depart and be with Christ,
which is better by far.
Philippians 1:23*

At the one death, we speak of the separation of body and soul in two ways. The soul is separated from the body, while the body proceeds to disband. This means that before dying, that is, during the strength of this life, the soul binds the body and the body the soul. Thus two bonds that are disbanded through death. The soul is released from its bonds to the body and the body from its bonds to the soul. During life they are bonded to each other; in death, there is a mutual release.

The disbanding that frees the body is the easiest to understand, because it takes place in the physical. The physicality of our body works with certain powers as in all other physical objects. In those physicalities there are chemical operations as well as vegetative and bestial phenomena. These various entities, affected by

external influences, automatically arrive at a point of separating these aspects of the body to dissolve it into its constituent parts.

During life this does not work, because the soul restrains all these powers and operations and forces them into supporting it. If that bond is seriously attacked or torn, we are sick. When death sets in, so that the soul dissolves that bond, release will immediately take place. That is to say that those powers and workings that so far were tied to the soul, are released. Once freed, these powers and operations dissolve the once beautiful body into its smallest constituencies. The body was originally constituted of dust and through this decomposition returns to dust.

That there is also a certain ordering to these physical entities is certainly true. The millions of atoms, molecules and smaller components give a wonderful shape to that body and perfect the organs within us, including that balance between both our eyes and ears etc. Even the smallest of plants is recognized to have such an ordering principle or regulatory regime.

Leaving all this aside for now, it is sufficiently clear that during our lives those manifold atoms and other components and operations in our bodies are bound, but after our passing, they are released in such a way that the entire visible part of us proceeds to be unbound, dissolved. It was the soul that kept the body bonded and it was the soul that released the body at the time of separation. The release that follows death is the direct result of that separation of soul and body.

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However, it is not that the Apostle speaks of wanting this release. This release has an element of aversion or repugnance that shocks and offends us. At the same time, this separation also has something desirable about it. Because of this ambiguity, not everyone desires it. Even most believers shrink back from it. In fact, by far most people are afraid of this release, though some actually desire it. This is what the Apostle wrote about in his letter to the Philippians.

What then is the nature of this release, this separation, this freeing of the soul? It is not the body releasing the soul, but the opposite, namely, the soul releasing the body. This is the same in Romans 7:24, where the Apostle writes, “Who will rescue me from this body of death,” release me, free me? The original Greek for

being unbound that is used here is derived from what happens when a person goes on a journey and leaves the place where she stayed until now. The Greek term is used in two senses. One is when a sailor goes to sea; the other refers to collapsing the tent to go on a journey.

Before the journey, the ship was anchored or moored at the pier. It was tied to the anchor by cable or chain. But now that bond is broken by reeling in the cable or chain along with the anchor. Thus the ship is unbound, freed and the journey begins. Or, taking the journey into the desert, this time it is not a ship but a tent. The tent was fastened to pegs in the ground, but these pegs are now pulled out, the tent is collapsed and loaded onto the camels. The desert journey commences.

These are two wonderful examples of our dying. Over there, far away, the haven of eternal rest. Between us and that haven lies the ocean of eternity. At death, the little ship of our lives is unmoored and the journey to the haven of eternal rest begins. In terms of the tent in which we lived here, there too, death brings change. That tent is collapsed. Our soul is freed from this earthly tabernacle and commences its final journey into the Fatherland.

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Putting these metaphors aside, at the bottom of this being unbound, is the thought that our soul was in bondage to the body and through that body was in bondage to this earth. At death this double bond is broken and the freed soul receives wings to rise unto the heights of God's holiness.

What do you now think of this bondage of the soul to the body? It has been proposed that the soul is locked up in the body as if in prison. The body is then thought of as something fearful, something apart, foreign to us, a place where the soul is imprisoned.

This is not the case in God's Word. If it were, there would be no resurrection of the glorified body. If you've ever been in prison, you will avoid it in the future. A glorified prison is a self-contradictory image, an oxymoron. No, the body is not a prison, but the organism, the instrument, the robe, the appearance of your soul in its visible and external format. Soul and body belong together. The soul is created in possession of the body. To be apart from the body is unnatural for the soul. Even

though it cannot avoid that separation, it dies in the hope of one day being reunited to the body, but then under better circumstances.

The Apostle regards it as a privilege for those still alive at Jesus' return, that they will be spared that separation and that their bodies will be glorified alive. This is something like what occurred on Mount Tabor, where Jesus was transfigured and shone with heavenly glory without death separating the two.

The fact is that, because of sin, neither our soul nor our body are as they are meant to be, and that as a result the relationship between soul and body is befuddled. This condition is unavoidable; the two must be separated from each other. Hence, the separation at the time of death. But those who die in Jesus, must hunger for this separation, for it is by way of that separation that the reunion will occur in glorified harmony.

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Following from the above, our bodies must be an impression or copy of our souls in their visible shape. All thought, all power, all operation and every inclination must reside in the soul and press to emerge from the soul to the outside world. Our bodies must then be offered to our souls to serve them as such an instrument, an organism our souls need to achieve their highest destination.

The soul must then touch our nervous system at its centre. By means of that nervous system, it is capable of becoming conscious of what is happening outside of itself. Via those nerves, the soul is to affect first the internal movement on the body and then on to the external world. Our eyes do not see and our ears do not hear, but it is our soul that sees and hears through the window of our eye and the telephone of our ear.

If someone becomes unconscious, then she is gone and needs to be resuscitated. But even though she is gone from the observable world, she still exists. It is only that her body no longer serves her at that moment. She is no longer aware and can no longer work through the body. However, she is still there, as will become clear when she regains consciousness. She revives with exactly the same soul; it is exactly as it was before with the same memories, thoughts, imagination, operations and powers.

Of course, the loss of consciousness that occurs at the time of death is not merely momentary but enduring and continuing till the resurrection. But the essence of it all is one and the same. The body no longer serves its purpose. Body and soul are now separated, so that the soul is now without body. But the soul remains the same in its consciousness, its imagination, its inner drive, operations and powers.

So, nothing has been taken away from the soul. It has not been reduced, except that it now stands before a door. It can no longer see anything in this visible world; it cannot hear its sounds anymore; it can no longer perform any functions there or exert its power. It is prevented from all of that. If similar instruments were needed for being conscious in the Father's House above or for expressing itself there, then the soul in heaven would know nothing, but that is not the case. In the celestial world, the soul observes immediately, that is, without the use of means, just as the angels do. It does not miss the body in this new world. It does not need it, for it is self-sufficient.

It is as with the eye and binoculars. In the past at least, a captain at sea could not see anything far away without his binoculars. Now imagine that he lost his binoculars, but his eyes were transformed into eagle eyes. He would still be able to see as far and as accurately but without needing that instrument. In other words, missing the body is no problem for the soul at the moment of separation. Except, the soul knows that God also has His visible world and that humanity is created and equipped for glorifying God there also.

That is the reason and the only reason that the soul continues to long for the resurrection of the body also in eternity. This is not because of its own will but according to the creation ordinance of God.

Chapter 14* **From This Body of Death**

What a wretched man I am!

*Who will rescue me
from this body of death?
Romans 7:24*

Do you believe in the *substitutionary* suffering and death of Christ? Do you thankfully confess that the suffering that, according to the righteous judgement of God, should have been yours, is shouldered for you by Christ, so that you will not forever carry it? And do you also confess that the death that you deserved, was undergone by Jesus in your place, so that He died for you and died the death that you should have died?

If so, then how does it come about that you also have to die? If the guarantor pays up, then the person on whose behalf the guarantor is appointed does not himself pay. The same punishment is not demanded twice. *By nature and according to God's creation ordinance, you would not have died, but, instead, you would have been glorified without death and dying.* It is because of sin that death entered the world as punishment. Only because of sin; only as punishment. If Jesus carried the punishment of death for you—that's what you confess—does it not follow that you are freed from death, that death has no further claim on you? When death knocks on your door, you can send it away with a letter of acquittance that will show that neither suffering nor death still has any further claim on you, since Jesus completely took your place, substituted for you.

According to Scripture, more than one of God's saints have not undergone death. It is written of Enoch that he did not die like the other patriarchs, but that God took him and then he was no more. Similarly, we read of Elijah that he ascended in fiery chariots with equally fiery horses. Jesus said to His disciple Peter about disciple John, "If I want him to remain alive till I return, what is that to you" (John 21:22)? This statement leaves open the possibility that one can transit into glory without dying. The Apostle Paul says very definitely that those who confess Jesus will not die at the hour of His return, but they *will* be changed. He also let it clearly be known that he would love to be awarded this high privilege .

Given the substitutionary death of Jesus, that's how it should be. According to the stories referred to above, it shows that it is possible. Thus we cannot avoid the

Heidelberg Catechism⁴ question, “Since, then, Christ died for us, why must we also die?” Till today the answer given in the Heidelberg itself has not been improved upon: “Our death is not a satisfaction for our sins, but only a dying to sin and entering into eternal life.”

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It is clear from the above that one who sleeps in Jesus does not die in the sense of Genesis 2:17, and thus will also not die the death that Jesus died on Golgotha. Nor will he die the death of those who die outside of Jesus. In Genesis 2:17, death is threatened as a punishment, as an actual payment for sin. On Golgotha, Jesus died as punishment, as payment for sin. Till today, for everyone else who dies outside of Jesus, dying is a punishment, a payment for their own sin.

In the one hospital ward, two patients can die simultaneously, but the death of the one is totally different from that of the other. For the one it is his punishment, a horrifying payment; for the other, a matter of glorious grace and entry into eternal life. It may appear to be the same, but it is not. Both go through the same portal, but they have barely gone through it, and immediately they face two completely diverging ways. The one goes downward into eternal death; the other takes the justified saint upwards to the holy Zion of God.

The reason we often go amiss here is only that we mistake the giving up of the spirit at actual death with real death. The actual death begins after death has set in. Death is not the end of dying, but for the lost one, giving up the spirit is only the first step that he takes on the path to eternal death. Death expands after the portal of dying endlessly into the eternal depth.

The difference is no less than that one who sleeps in the Lord and Saviour does go through the portal of dying, but never ends in death. On the other hand, one who dies outside of Jesus, immediately descends along the steep path of death to remain the victim of his death eternally without ever finding release from the bondage of death.

⁴ The Heidelberg Catechism is one of the Reformed doctrinal standards written by Professor Zacharias Ursinus and assigned to him by the German ruler Frederick III. Published in 1563. Because of its popularity, it received three more printings very soon and has been translated into many languages. It has been used as a guide for doctrinal preaching and teaching ever since in some Reformed churches. Its form takes that of question and answer.

That Jesus Himself broke through this bondage of eternal death is due to His divine nature. Human beings, once descended into death, will never be released from it. That is why the redeemed of the Lord do die, but without ever for a moment falling into the power of death. When they die, they do not veer leftward into the depth of death, but rightward onto the highway of life. Giving up the spirit, exhaling the last breath is for them nothing but going through the gate that leads from this world to the world where God is and thus is nothing but going through the door into eternal life.

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You may never compare Jesus' death with your own. For Jesus, dying was as terrifying as it is glorious for you. After having gone through the portal, Jesus had to take the path down into the below, into the depth of eternal death. If Jesus' death were no different from yours, his soul would not have shuddered as it did in Gethsemane, but He would have faced death jubilating, even more so than the most loved child of God on earth. The *via dolorosa* or the way of suffering would not have been a way of blood and tears, but rather one huge *tour de triumph*. It would simply be leaving this world for the world above. It would constitute a release from the restrictions of this life in order to enter into the freedom and glory of God's children.

But that's not how it was for Jesus. Jesus did not merely die, but He died to death. It was as it reads in Genesis 2:17, "...then you will surely die to death." That is what overtook your Saviour. He did not merely give up the spirit, but He underwent the punishment of death, in order that that punishment will never overcome you. He did not go through death into heaven, but He descended into the depth of eternal death. It was not until He had descended into the depth of eternal death that He, thanks to the unbeatable power of His divine nature, climbed back up to enter Paradise, in order through His resurrection to return to this world out of that Paradise and after forty days to enter heaven.

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That we still have to enter eternal life through the portal of dying is because we are not independent or isolated beings but live in community with the entire human race. It is not until the human race reaches its end and Jesus has returned that we can avoid that portal. Then God's saints will enter eternity without dying. But as long as there are still generations to be born, the history of the world will continue,

for life here on earth has not yet run its course. Much is yet to happen for those who will enter eternal life, for they are to be led out of this life, be separated from the living community, say a temporary farewell to this world, shake off the body and now, already released from the body of death and in participation of what comes next, to enter heaven. Otherwise, they would have to remain on earth and wait till the last child on earth would be born and history come to an end. They would have to remain on earth till the return of the Lord.

The Lord spares His saints all that. He knows that to remain on earth endlessly would be an unbearable burden. He knows that His saints here on earth are still tormented by all sorts of sin and misery. They carry in their souls a homesickness to be released from these unholy circumstances. He hears the deep calls that occasionally ascend from the souls of believers, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

That is why He makes an end to their circumstance for them. That is why He does not let them wait but already allows them to enter heaven so that there they can await the return of the Lord more gloriously than here on earth. Even though they still have to go through dying, He softens the blow of death. He protects them from being touched by the real death. His angels await them on the other side of the gate to carry them into the Father’s House. This is how He turns dying for them into grace, a grace for which they already called upon God while still here on earth. Yes, definitely a grace for which they profusely thank Him upon their entry into heaven.

Chapter 15* **Wiping Away the Tears**

*He will swallow up death forever.
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away
the tears from all faces;
He will remove the disgrace
of His people from all the earth.*

*The Lord has spoken.
Isaiah 25:8.*

In the land chosen by God for His holy revelation, there lives a non-Western Semitic people. In the East, people have a different soul that, like all others, is influenced by their climate, surroundings, orientation, ancestry and history. All these data have together brought it about that in the East people have much less of a phlegmatic or stolid temperament, while emotions play a much greater role, which in turn has resulted in much more vehement, violent emotions.

The Jews living in the West have, of course, become somewhat Westernized and have adopted a stiffer approach to life that is influenced by overly-rationalistic philosophy. Nevertheless, even though they left the East long ago, they are still often quick and nimble of tongue, more gestural in their movements, more expressive in their faces and so much more vehement in their emotions.

We need to pay attention to these characteristics to avoid missing the correct nuances. When we take their passionate expressions literally, our language will not fit their emotional life and the truth stumbles on the way. When we do so, we need to ask what artificial images these expressions evoke. Take for example soul expressions like “I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears” (Psalm 6:6). When reading Scripture, we need to pay attention to this feature. Otherwise, we will not follow the reasoning behind such statements. If we take such passionate expressions literally, they will not fit in our emotional life and the truth will trip on our path towards holiness. Ask yourself what artistic conclusions have been drawn from “From my youth I have been... close to death”? (Psalm 88:15).

This also generally holds for the term “weeping.” There are many examples here. “All night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears” (Psalm 6:6). These simply are not applicable to today’s Western Christians. Or take “Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people” (Jeremiah 9:1). This statement is much stronger than how we would put it. The statement “it is sown with tears” is literally unthinkable for us. “You flood the Lord’s altar with tears”

(Malachi 2:13) is a very strange passionate emotion for us. In the Eastern world, including Israel, all this was meant literally. Scripture employs exaggerated images by describing for us emotions stronger than those to which we, Westerners, are accustomed.

Laughing with sanctified and holy joy, belongs to our nature. We can see that about God Himself, “The One enthroned in heaven laughs” (Psalm 2:4). Weeping, on the other hand, is an emotional expression that is understood only in a sinful world. Of Jesus it is written that, living as He did in the midst of our misery, He wept. That is never said of God. It is possible to regard the tear as an expression of curse as well as the fruit of common grace. It is a curse expression insofar as it is a cry of suffering. It is the fruit of common grace insofar as it releases overwrought emotion. However you take it, weeping is always evidence that your misery went through the soul or that it surrounds you. There is a “weeping with joy,” but this is the result of sharp emotional movements that we cannot control. There is also laughing in suffering and the laughter of the demented.

Normally speaking, the laugh belongs to joy; the tear, to our misery. This can be a purely external tear as with a child that cries because a toy is taken away from her by a playmate. Then there is the misery that penetrates right into your bone and marrow, upsets your heart totally and makes you languish before God in soulful suffering. It can also be an expression of a fearful awareness that oppresses us but from which we try to free ourselves. It works itself up from the depth of our heart to the eyes, then leads to tearful eyes till it forms a teary pearl and runs down our cheeks.

If we are adult, we will wipe away that tear ourselves. Sometimes we are even embarrassed when someone notices that tear. But a child will allow someone to wipe that tear away. That’s when the mother comes to the rescue and wipes that tear away from the child’s face. She does this carefully, making sure the last tear is wiped away and the child has forgotten her misery.

So it is also written of the Lord God that He will wipe away the tears of His children. This is an example of when His redeemed children arrive at the gate to the Father’s House with tears in their eyes. Before they even enter into His glory,

He stands ready to wipe away the signs of their suffering. In the Father's House His saints laugh; they no longer weep. To enter His heaven while still weeping from suffering is a contradiction.

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It hardly needs saying that the above is all metaphorical language. Anyone called to eternal life has already shed her earthly tabernacle. When her bodily mortality has been devoured by life itself and the body has slid away, those eyes can no longer weep. When we understand that the ear does not hear by itself but it is the soul that hears through the ear, we also realize that it is not the eye that weeps but the soul through the eye. It is not the body that suffers pain but the soul through the body. That is the reason anesthesia during surgery makes us insensitive. When the soul is isolated from the body, even if only temporarily—and that is what we mean by insensitivity--, there is no pain or suffering. Even though a dying person sheds the mantle of the body, the soul can still suffer pain; even without the eye, the soul can still weep internally.

We hardly dare think, even though it is true, that the soul that dies outside of Jesus will truly feel pain only after dying. Did Jesus not say with respect to the lost that they will be weeping, indeed, gnashing their teeth? Thus is it not true that dying makes an end to suffering, to pain and to weeping. To the contrary, it is exactly by dying that pain and suffering become more fearful. It is only then that the weeping of the soul begins. That this does not hold for those who die in Jesus is not due to nature but is the fruit of the grace of God. It is the fruit of God's wiping the tears from the eye of the soul of all His beloved children after their passing.

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How is all this to be understood? We need to distinguish three deeds of God here. He replaces misery with joy; He spreads a mantle of forgetfulness over memories; He cuts sin, the source of our affliction, off from the soul. Please pay attention to all three acts.

Part of our misery comes from our interaction with this sinful and broken world. We are part of this world. In this world we entertain all sorts of expectations. That is why that world has repeatedly brought us sadness and disappointment. By separating the body, the Lord releases the elect soul from that part of our misery. There is no further sickness of the body and no more pain. Nor is there any biting

cold or fearful inclemency. Neither is there any further worry about our daily bread. There will be no people who cause us misery; no slander that haunts us; no further disappointments in our daily task or business; and no further injustices to oppress us all day long. All this falls away and the tear of weeping dries up accordingly.

But that is not enough. Our soul does not want only to be relieved of suffering, but it also wants positive joy. That's our natural inclination. We have an inner homesickness for joy and glory. As long as that homesickness is not satisfied, the soul continues to weep. But now the Lord comes to lead the soul into the Father's House with joy and, enjoying what no ear has ever heard or eye ever seen and what has never occurred to a human heart. We now laugh with joy and dry all our tears.

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This is the foremost, but by no means the entire situation. If the memories that we had should pursue us after death, then our suffering, at least partially, would follow us into eternity. A mother, herself a sanctified saint, who carries the sadness of soul for her deceased child into eternity, would never enjoy full salvation. Missing whatever the soul leaves behind on earth, the uncertainty about what lies ahead, recalling the painful misery of those still on earth, would for a large part deprive her of eternal joy. This will happen especially when you think about how much finer and greater tenderness the released soul must feel in eternity.

That oppression can follow the lost one into eternity can be seen in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Does he not request to have someone sent down to warn his brothers that they should avoid this place of misery? This is metaphoric language, but it contains a dreadful truth for the lost.

The wiping away of tears depends thus on a special deed of grace for the elect by God, consisting of His throwing a mantle of forgetfulness of the past over the soul just like the surgical narcosis throws the mantle of forgetfulness over the soul about what the surgeon is about to do to the body. The released soul becomes isolated from the life it left behind.

Just how this mantle of forgetfulness operates is a question that demands a separate answer. Be satisfied with knowing how the soul would keep on weeping, if it were

pursued by memories of the suffering on earth. It follows from this that God's wiping away all tears includes this merciful gift of forgetfulness.

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The third and last point touches the soul itself. If you live in deep awareness, you will certainly know that suffering about ourselves is the worst of all misery. That endless unsettledness; that sin in our past that reminds us; the unholy actions that continue to crop up in our sinful hearts and that estrange us from our God. This is a suffering that we may not suffer all the time, but is the most painful and is felt most acutely in our holiest moments. It speaks for itself therefore that, after death, the soul would be overcome the most by this misery and would shed the most bitter tears.

However, the Lord also wipes these tears from the faces of His beloved children and that in two ways. For one, through strengthening the faith in the peace that is there through the blood of the cross to its fullness, so that the soul has no further connection with earlier sin and that it sees how God has cast everything into the depth of the sea. Secondly, by bringing the soul to perfect sanctification by cutting it off from sin through the merciful act of dying. And that is exactly what brings the holiest of joy. Only when God wipes away those tears for eternity, the soul will laugh with a joy that totally ravishes and delights.

Chapter 16* **Being Like Him**

*In this way, love is made complete among us
so that we will have confidence on the day of judgement,
because in this world we are like Him.*

1 John 4:17

Your passing into death, if you die in Jesus, will be a "dying unto sin" for you. How this can be, how this works within you, is a mystery that will never be disclosed, but you believe it on basis of God's Word. You believe it, because it is unthinkable for a sinful life to be in heaven. You believe it so willingly and avidly,

because it is a thought that speaks to you, is so intimate and so delightful—to never, never sin again, not even in the blindest desire of your heart.

Now that “dying unto sin” does not mean that you separate from your body. If your body works evil, it is your soul, your “I,” your “you,” that uses your body to sin. Satan, who has never had a physical body, is the terrible “father of all sinners” who generates all sin purely from the spirit.

Therefore that “dying unto sin” must consist of something else. It is not something you do yourself, such as cursing the world or entertaining holy intentions or making solemn promises. Nor is it your loved ones surrounding your deathbed when you die. It must be something God perfects within you at the time of death. That is why “dying unto sin” is the completion of your sanctification. It is something that happens suddenly. After all, as long as there is consciousness and breath to speak, the prayer for mercy continues, something that would make no sense after you have died unto sin. Furthermore, death often strikes like lightning as in murder or a stroke. Once there is no more breath, the “dying unto sin” has reached its completion. We are speaking here of someone who goes to heaven, which no one does as a sinner.

There is a great difference between the elect who die. One dies old and stricken in years after having lived a sinful life before his conversion and with much residual sin in his life after his conversion. Another enters eternity just at the point the world is about to disclose itself and he is prepared for the world. A third person dies in his youth and a fourth even younger. Then there are those who already in the crib close their eyes forever or even before they are laid in the crib. This all makes a great difference. The one is conscious of sin, has knowledge and bitter memory of sin; the other, has never sinned and knows of no sin. So, though the process of “dying unto sin” may vary from person to person, in essence it must be the same for all, whether a day-old new-born or a greybeard in his eighties or nineties even.

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From this perspective, “dying unto sin” can only mean that through death you have been released from the bond with this world. Think of what Scripture says about a born-again person. Such a person has received God’s seed. That seed remains in

him and can never be taken away again. This seed in him disables him from ever sinning again. Or think of Paul's testimony regarding himself. He himself no longer sinned, but sin still inhabited him as a foreign factor. In this context, it is remarkable what Jesus said to His disciples, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. A person who has had a bath, needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean."

Antinomians misuse the above by advocating freedom to sin; God will judge them. But when you take up the holy, you confess that in and by yourself you *can* no longer sin. The sin that still resides in you and that you frequently regret, is a sort of foreign element that entwines your soul like an invasive parasite that has its roots not in the heart but in the world.

Then you will know what sanctification is. It does not take place because of all the money in the world. The seed of God that enters you through regeneration (being born again) is completely holy. It never contained sin and sin can never mix with it. It always has two aspects. First, there is the germination of God's seed and, secondly, the release by God's seed from the entwining of that parasite of sin that engulfs you, out of the world.

Now that germination of God's seed is definitely not the "dying unto sin," for it is only completed in eternity. It is that one-time release from the entwinement of that parasite with which the world has engulfed you. It is an amputation with one single yank of that evil parasite that feeds on the life of your soul.

But what is that parasite? It is the same whether it clings to a little girl or to an aged man. With a man, it may have developed more broadly, but in its essence it is one and the same for both. Could it be that at first it was not there, but that it attacked you somewhere along the way? Absolutely not. You are born with that parasite entwining you. It was waiting for you from before you were born and it continues to feed on you after you are gone.

That parasite was not in Adam when God created him, but its seed was planted in Adam by satan. It germinated out of Adam's unbelief and unfaithfulness. From there it spread throughout the human race with increasingly broader effect. It is

woven into our human race, into our world, society, finance, consciousness—in short, everywhere. It is found in our entire human society and in the bond that unites us in one human race.

It is from there that, Jesus being the single exception, every child born from a woman is born entwined in the branches and twigs of that parasitic plant. Those branches and twigs engulf each child and each adult. Even when someone is born again, that parasite continues to engulf him. It generates seed, which in turn spreads through all human hearts. The difference is only that at regeneration the seed of the parasite leaves that heart in order to make room for God's seed. But those branches and twigs continue to entwine him. Sanctification means that God already during our lifetime gives us the billhook at hand to free us to some degree by cutting away the most oppressive ones. That's how we get room and air. God gives us His Church, the community of saints, in which much more room is created and in which those branches and twigs no longer have that oppressive and suffocating effect on us. But, nevertheless, we remain in this evil entwinement till our death.

The redemption that comes with death is that God lifts us out of this suffocating entwinement, frees us from it and sees to it that not a single branch or twig of this parasite can still touch us. This holds even for our consciousness, for God also cuts off the memory of our sins. They sink away into the depth of the sea, where no one, not even you yourself, can find them.

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This “dying unto sin” also has its positive side. You have come up out of the world; you belong to this world; as a human being, you are member of that one great human race. You do not stand on your own. You exist and live in a bond with that race and with that world. That is your community, the world where you are at home, that great body of which you are but one small member. In the context of that world community that includes you, that parasitic plant stealthily creeps in to sometimes oppress you to death. In your dying you are released from that world, that community and that bond.

But as your own lonely self you cannot float about without any bond. You belong to the human race; you need to stand in a community and live in relationship.

Being member of a body is a creation ordinance. And now, when you die, it is not only that the parasitic plant goes away and you are lifted out of the bond with that sinful world, but you are simultaneously transplanted into another race, another world, another context. You become member of another body that is called the “Body of the Son of God,” the new saved humanity, the congregation of the fully justified.

We already enjoyed the beginning of that here in the community of the saints, but that was on a very small scale. Over against that, there always stood that mighty community of the old sinful world that forced itself upon you. The grace that God shows you in your dying is first of all that He lifts you out of the bond to that old world. In the second place, it is that He knits you into the full congregation of that new humanity, into that holy world congregation of Christ. The result is that after your death, the world around you no longer resists God’s seed in your heart, but it fully agrees with the new life of the adopted child, germinates it more richly and supports it.

Chapter 17*

Eating from the Tree of Life

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life,
which is in the paradise of God.
Revelation 2:7*

Of the seven holy promises in Revelation that excite, encourage and inspire the victor in the struggle for God and His Christ, the first is that she who overcomes will eat again from the Tree of Life. It was the eating from that Tree of Life that brought about our break with Paradise. Though the language used in Genesis about that break is rather secretive, it states unequivocally that this break with God, that break with Paradise, would remain in effect. The reason is that whoever remained in Paradise would have access to that Tree. The very thought that a creature fallen away from God could eat from it would be abominable and monstrous.

To avoid this abomination, it was necessary that rebellious humanity be immediately removed from the Garden of Eden. A detachment of heavenly Cherubim was placed between Adam and Eve and the Paradise they lost. The Cherubim turned the loveliness of their heavenly appearance inward, to the side of Paradise, but to the earth with the curse and to the humans who brought the curse, the Cherubim's shocking, shining and flickering flame. The same angels who otherwise served God's people with salvation, now stand between humanity and eternal life. They close Paradise and therewith the entrance to God's blessed heaven. Here is the starting point of all the misery that has plagued sinners all along.

We feel that misery, because we have a memory of Paradise. It is a homesickness for that lost Paradise that in all its forms smarts the soul. The more powerfully that homesickness for that lost Paradise acts upon the soul, the deeper the razor of misery cuts into our souls. This is the reason that the suffering of the saints hurts so much deeper than it does those who are of the world. This also is the reason that God's prophets were affected much more deeply than the average worshippers of His holy Name. No one has succumbed more deeply to this suffering than the Son of Man, whose soul was so deeply saddened till death in Gethsemane, for only He carried in His heart the full and clear consciousness of that Paradise.

The first thing that the elevated King of God's Kingdom exclaims on Patmos to His faithful is that those who are victorious, that break with Paradise, will overcome. The same Cherubim that chased Adam and Eve out of Paradise will lead His saints back, and their right and power to eat of the Tree of Life will be restored to them. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the Tree of Life, which is in the paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7).

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Thus this is the first and the most glorious thing that is added to them who die in Christ. Here is the keynote of the salvation that is reserved for them. The Paradise of their God which was lost is returned to them. To receive something new is worth less than to have returned what was lost. You have only to think of Jesus' moving parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. When the lost coin was found, the woman who lost it called her neighbours for a party. When the lost sheep was

found, the faithful shepherd places it on his shoulders and, his heart gladdened, he calls his friends and neighbours, saying to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have found the lost sheep.” When the lost son has returned home, the happy father jubilates that they should be happy and joyful, for this son of his was like dead and has come back to life. All of Jesus’ public actions constituted a search for that which drifted away, finding that which was lost.

In this context, there is also His first promise to His saints that she who overcomes be not placed in a strange utopia, but that the homesickness in her heart receive eternal satisfaction and that she pull back into the once lost Paradise, the same Paradise out of which God’s angels once drove her and now, having overcome, she is led back into. That is, led into the very middle of the Garden, the centre of paradisaical glory, very near to the Tree of Life, in order that she eat from it and live eternally.

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The view of one who dies is not focused on a strange or puzzling future that does not make sense to her, but on the past, on what escaped her, on what she lost and turned into sin. In our dying, Jesus calls us back to the riches of God’s almighty loving kindness in our creation. Our state of sin and misery becomes a transitional affair, behind which is God and His omnipotence and His wonderful creation, when His children cheered and the morning stars sang joyfully. God created humans after His image, clean, holy and glorious; He prepared Paradise for the human race created in His image, baptized in a wealth of blessing, the memory of which continues to live in our hearts and wherein God’s goodness glorified Himself. Now all of that is gone. As far as our consciousness goes, it has been done away with as if it never existed. It is as if something new was to be built for us if there were ever to be a habitat in which to live with joy in our hearts.

But that is not how Jesus saw things. He shouts a “no,” a threefold “no” to us saints. Paradise is not gone; it was merely lost. And that lost entity returns. I have found that which you lost, like God preserved it for you. It is exactly this that will make your eternal joy so rich, so abundant, so overwhelming, that after your death, you call your friends and neighbours together in the hall of eternal lights, inviting them to be happy with you, for this My Paradise was lost, but has been found again. God has preserved it for Me.

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The Tree of Life in Paradise must remain a mystery, because it hides a blossoming fruit, the power of eternal life. One can understand something of this, if one recognizes that the more prepared and undisturbed the hidden power of the soul is as it emerges, the more the body serves the soul capably and does not resist anything in it. And so it is possible that the fruit of the Tree of Life is capable of giving such a complete condition to the body that it loses all its own urges and fully becomes a vehicle of the soul.

Spiritual power on its own cannot hide even in a chosen plant in Paradise. The physical can only directly affect the physical, including our body. That is the reason that the relation of the body to the soul can be controlled. The body can stop the soul, resist it, disturb it, but it can also serve the soul, provided it works in perfect harmony. It finally becomes nothing but its harmonious instrument. The wonderful power to have this come to realization can be laid by God in the fruit of the Tree of Life.

It now becomes clear how humans after the fall could still eat from the Tree of Life. The body would become a completely subservient instrument of the *evil* soul. The abominable and monstrous inherent in this had to be averted. Therefore all access to the Tree of Life had to be denied in the state of sin.

Even though the above sheds some light, a mystery will always remain. The essential nature and working of the Tree of Life continues to be a secret to us.

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Another mystery is being in Paradise right after our passing. By itself, the Kingdom of Glory awaits breaking out till Jesus' return. But still, we hear Jesus calling on the cross to His fellow crucified, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." This is more cogent, since Jesus ascended bodily on the Mount of Olives and is even now near God in His glorified body. Jesus also said that even before His resurrection—thus outside of the body—He would be in Paradise in his separated soul. The same held for the man who was declared blessed during his dying on Golgotha.

Though it is thus crystal clear that our departed who die in Jesus will not be clothed with their body until the resurrection, they are already in Paradise enjoying themselves there. If one were to ask whether “eating from the Tree of Life” would not happen after all that, the question would amount to mocking reality. But still, this glorious promise from Jesus has meaning already for them as well.

Or do you not understand that anyone who knows the struggles of the flesh here on earth and is now finally, finally, freed from the body of death, would almost fearfully see the moment approaching that the fetter of the body will return and pray it will not happen? That is why this glorious promise consoles her.

The return of the soul into the body will never again bring oppression to the soul. After all, you will eat from the Tree of Life. The fruit of that Tree will be a guarantee to you that the body that you receive back will always be in perfect harmony, a ready and willing instrument to eternally glorify your Father in heaven with both soul and body.

Chapter 18* **Not Hurt by the Second Death**

*He who has an ear, let him hear
what the Spirit says to the churches.
He who overcomes will not be hurt
at all by the second death.
Revelation 2:11*

The letter to the Smyrna church (Revelation 2:8-11) touches all churches and all the children of God. It touches every soul that died in Jesus and that is in a living relationship with the Saviour. Here, too, the point of departure is struggle. Nothing is gained by a weak peace. It is a fearful struggle with death. If you overcome, then let those who have ears, hear what the Holy Spirit says to the Church, “He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.”

There is a second death that comes after the first. Looking beyond the first death to the second is what makes a hero or heroine, who will have a sure knowledge that he will come through the second death unhurt. The first and second death each have their own issues. They are not alike: they are not of similar meaning, awfulness or deathly tightness. To the contrary, they move in different directions and are totally unlike each other. He who has safely passed away in Jesus and has understood the essence of the second death, will hardly see the first as a death and even laughs at it, saying, “Death, dead death, where is your sting?”

Then you will experience what Jesus predicted, when He said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy body and soul in hell” (Matthew 10:28). These are the two deaths, a form of presentation that is borrowed directly from Jesus’ own preaching. There is the first death when the soul is separated from the body either on the deathbed or on the scaffold. Then there is the second death, when the inveterate and hardened sinner finally, after the resurrection of the body, with body and soul, becomes the victim of that bitter perdition that Jesus Himself pictured as a fire that never is quenched and as a worm in the heart that never dies. He added, “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Completely in agreement with the above, you read in Revelation 21:8 that “the cowardly”—those who denied their Lord for fear of the world--, “the unbelieving”—those who did not convert--, and “the vile”—the reprobates who murder and fornicate, lie and deceive--, altogether have a share not in Paradise but in the pool that burns with fire and sulfur, to portray deathly oppression. This is then followed by “This is the second death.”

Now the promise to the church of Smyrna, to all churches in fact, and to every soul in Christ in those churches—says, “Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” A soul that overcomes “will not be hurt at all by the second death” (Revelation 2:11). That he does not become victim to the second death, does not need saying. But it also says something quite different, “Not a hair of your head will perish” (Luke 21:18) and “not a seam of your robe will be scorched.” This second death will not hurt him

In a spiritual sense, there are the individual and the community. It is here that the difference lies between the first and second death. You are something special, your own person, an individual, and as such you die to this world by the *first* death. But you are also a human among humans, a member of humanity, a leaf on the generational tree, a part of the whole, living in a human community. It is that human community that is hit by the *second* death.

That difference shows up. As an individual person, each one dies on his own occasion and on his own time. But the second death overcomes all of us at the same time, at the same moment, communally, all of us at one terrible hour. The first death is before the judgement; the second, after the judgement. The second death takes place after the judgement has been completed. At the first death, soul and body are torn apart. In the second death, they are reunited and perdition hits both together.

There is also an individual judgement, blow by blow, in our consciousness, after each sin. There is also an individual judgement over everyone who dies in the clear awareness that he is dying. However, this is not *the* judgement. *The* judgement affects everyone simultaneously; it hits the generations, the community. Thus there are two births and two reunions. The first was when God created and formed Adam. That was the birth of the human race. Humans were given life. The second birth took place when God formed us in our mother's womb. This was the life of our person, the emergence of our "I."

That is the source of two kinds of sin. There is the sin we all do together before God, how humanity wounded God. In addition, but rooted in that, there is our personal sin, the sin that our "I" consciously enacts.

And that is why, over against these two kinds of life we are born into and over against these two kinds of sin, there are also two types of death, but in reverse order. To begin with, there is our first death, when our "I" takes us out of this life. After that, the second death that takes us all at the same time, the community.

Over against the above there is a two-fold rescue, two-fold redemption. The Apostle John says, “Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, He is the atoning sacrifice (reconciler) for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2). He is reconciler of the sins of individuals as well as of the sins of the community that binds humanity and, indeed, the entire world.

That is also the reason there is a two-fold regeneration. First, there is the regeneration of the individual person, of you who was a child of the world, but now becomes a child of God. But in addition, there is the regeneration of the human race, the emergence of a new community—the Body of Christ, the congregation of the fully justified, the new humanity under Christ as its Head. So, there is this new person in Christ, while the old residual worldly community is still in place.

The first death puts an end to the above. Through the first death, in your personal death, you die to the sin of the old person and as a sanctified child of God, you enter heaven. With the second death, the new humanity is saved, while the old humanity goes into perdition for eternity.

And so you understand Jesus’ promise to the church at Smyrna and, through them, to all souls that overcome. There would be no strife or struggle and, thus, no overcoming, if the new human were suddenly freed from the old version through regeneration. There is struggle because this is not the case. You, as a born-again Christian, must continually overcome all the sinful residue of that old version.

Similarly, there would be no struggle if the Body of Christ were gathered together separately already here on earth, apart from the world. But, again, that is not the case either. The Body of Christ remains in contact with the unregenerated world. That is why that world opposes all that is of Christ. Thus the Christian community must continue to fight against that old community, the new humanity against the old. God’s children must overcome also in that struggle.

Overcoming refers to the new person overcoming in his heart the old person and, together with the Christian community, overcoming that old world in the life of

nation and society. If you have so struggled and overcome, you approach the second death when you come to the end of your earthly life. The death of the individual and the death of the community; the first and the second death.

Jesus turns the first death into a dying unto sin and entry into eternal life. But this dying and entering into life eternal amounts to merely provisional salvation. Also, when the departed jubilate before the throne, they continue to await that decisive moment at which Christ shall return to this world and the judgement take place. Then the second death enters and the Kingdom of Glory enfolds in its full glitter.

So they stand not only before Jesus' return and before the future glory, but also before the judgement and the second death. That is to say, before the death of their race and of the old world—that humanity, that world, that community to which they themselves belonged. All this does not occur apart from them.

Does not Scripture say it clearly that the redeemed will also appear before the judgement seat of Christ? Not in fear of judgement, to be sure. It is more to receive the crown. But they still come in touch with it. Then they will see the second death approach and enter the world of the fearful, the unbelievers, the terrible ones to which they themselves belonged at one time, sinned and lived with them.

With the eye focused on all that, Jesus frees all who died in Him from all uncertainty, fear and horror. They will see the retribution of the godless, but it will not touch them. When this second death comes over your old world before your very eyes, it will not harm you at all. It will take your tears away, and it will not even hurt you.

Chapter 19*

The Hidden Manna

*He who has an ear,
let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
To him who overcomes,
I will give some of the hidden manna.*

*I will also give him a white stone
with a new name written on it,
known only to him who receives it.*

This “hidden manna” is promised us not for this life, but for the life to come. It is given to those who have accepted Christ as their Mediator, but only after their death. That became clear at the eating of the Tree of Life. That could not be otherwise, if we are not to be hurt by the second death. This was also clear with the white stone and holds true as well for the hidden manna. This text also says that only those who overcome will receive this manna from Christ. This promise will also apply to you when the last battle is fought and the crown of life is handed to you by the righteous Judge.

We must avoid all spiritualizing of this promise. True, Jesus names Himself “the true bread that has come down from heaven.” Thus we cannot deny that the manna in the desert is a type of Christ and that even the Eucharist is somehow associated with this manna. However, the “hidden manna” here is not Christ, for He has said that He Himself will give it. Besides, that does not need to be promised. It speaks of itself that the redeemed in heaven enjoy it. No one could think otherwise, for there is no other promise. Furthermore, in heaven Christ is not a *hidden* manna. He shines in all His glory.

On the Isle of Patmos, the glorified Christ Himself shed new light on the struggling and church triumphant. Here it is suffering and struggling, but after, that the victory. However, that struggle and victory do not refer here in the first place to the individual believer, nor primarily to her personal suffering nor to her condition right after death. Certainly, all of the above is woven into it, but it is not the actual content of the revelation given here by Christ. The actual revelation refers to the church as a whole, to her entire history, to her struggle through the centuries till the very last. The triumph that is described for us does not go into effect directly after our death, but with and after the last judgement, when the new Jerusalem shall descend and the Kingdom of Glory begins.

All that is said here about dying in Jesus does not refer to the intermediate state in which, after our death, we exist only in spirit, but to our condition after the

resurrection of the body, when we will once again be both body *and* soul, with that body glorified. For that new condition that we receive here is this promise from Jesus that He will give us to eat from the “hidden manna.”

This all points back to Israel and to Christ in the desert. Israel’s condition in the desert was wholly wonderful. There was an interruption of the normal process of the wearing out of clothes and shoes or sandals. There was also a preservation of physical health while eating a different diet. The punishment, “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food” fell away. God fed His people with manna, something that was not spiritual but physical. They ate this manna and lived.

Fourteen centuries later, Christ was tempted by satan in the desert at the point of food. He fasted for forty days and forty nights. At that point, a visible manna descended from heaven as it did for Israel. God sustained Christ’s body in a wonderful, hidden and invisible manner. Then satan sought to utilize the lack of all visible food to tempt Christ and urged Him to make bread out of stones. Jesus answered that the secret to the key was the rule that our physical life does not fully depend on such bread, for God is able to send His Word down and only by that means to keep our physical life from decaying and wilting.

There are two aspects to this history. There is first of all the visible manna that supported Israel in the desert. The second is the invisible “hidden manna” wherewith the Father fed Christ in the desert. The deepest mystery is not found in this visible manna, for, said Jesus, their forefathers ate from this manna and they died. He Himself received the “hidden manna” and lived in both body and soul, for eternity. He was kept alive forty days and forty nights in the desert by that same “hidden manna.” By that “hidden manna” He was kept alive from His resurrection to His ascension and by that same manna He lives throughout all the ages in His glorified body at the right hand of the Father.

And now Jesus says to His redeemed that overcome, that they will not only receive back their body “so that they will be like His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21), but that they will also flourish in that glorified body, not through bread nor through any visible manna , like Israel that subsequently died, but through the same “hidden manna” whereby He Himself lives with the Father.

In all these promises, there rings that continuous refrain that His redeemed who overcame, will be like Christ. They will sit with Him on His throne. They will live, physically live, by the “hidden manna” as He Himself remains to live through that manna, first in the desert and now at the right hand of the Father.

In Paradise it was a case of sustaining the body without work or difficulty, for it offered them all the food they needed. Once this earth was under the curse, it became a matter of eating bread “by the sweat of your brow.” But in the Kingdom of Holiness it is not only that that punishment and curse are withdrawn, so that there is no further labour “in the sweat of your brow.” Even better, there will be an abundance of more riches, more glory than there ever was in Paradise. God Himself will maintain His saints, spiritually through His Spirit and bodily through the *hidden* manna.

It is the same thought that the Apostle Paul expressed, “‘Food for the stomach and the stomach for food,’ but God will destroy them both” (1 Corinthians 6:13). What Paul here expresses negatively, saying that the ordinary feeding in vogue here on earth by means of food that goes through the stomach, will no longer take place there, Jesus affirms more positively on Patmos. The earthly way of sustaining the body not only falls away, but it is replaced by a heavenly sustaining of the body. But this does not occur by means of manna as in the desert, but by a manna that shall not be visible and tangible, but invisible and hidden.

Anyone who is surrounded on earth by wealth and abundance, will not be that impressed with the glory of this consolation. But one who knows the worries, the difficulties and the struggle that innumerable people experience with respect to the question of food for themselves and their families every day—and sometimes even at night--, will recognize *Christus Consolitor*, who miraculously fed the five thousand with hidden manna and demonstrated how deeply He understood the care and worries of life.

If you want to spiritualize all this, you strike out an entire page of the history of compassionate acts of Christ; you forget all what He said about the rich man and the poor Lazarus. You also ignore the spiritual meaning that is hidden in the

worries about bread as punishment for sin. You recognize a redeemer of the soul in Jesus, but not a full redeemer nor one who plucks you out of your life of worry and need.

To the contrary, consider the pinching worries under which the large majority of humanity is burdened, along with the energy and time we waste just in putting food on the table. And then consider the endless sicknesses and diseases that emerge from the poor food without nutritional value as well as by overeating. When considering all of this, you will feel and touch how the maintenance of the body consumes your strength, puts stress on your heart and causes endless worry.

To be released from the body and finally to be only soul will then seem to be the only solution. That explains why the return of the body and the resurrection count for nothing with most people, does not excite or interest them and who would have peace if it should not happen.

But this is not the way of the Lord. When you die and lay your tired body aside, you know that you will receive a glorified body back for eternity. That is God's ordinance. He created you a human being whom God intended to exist as body and soul. That is why you *must* receive the body back.

We must exclude all fear from this expectation that the old needs and worries would return along with that body. To the contrary, we must accept with firm certainty that in the new body only salvation, eternal glory, endless joy and imperturbable enjoyment will reside. That's why Jesus gave to His people this promise that should ban all worry: He Himself will sustain our glorified bodies, not through bread or any other food, not even by manna like that which Israel ate in the desert, but by a "hidden manna" whereby God will glorify Himself.

Chapter 20*

A New Name on a White Stone

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna.

I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it,

*known only to him who receives it.
(Revelation 2:17)*

Here is the programme in seven phases that Christ Himself has announced to all the churches of Christ for those who overcome. Overcomers shall eat from the Tree of Life, but not until they are in God's Paradise, after they have gone through the first death. They shall not be hurt by the second death. So here in this text, he who overcomes receives the hidden manna and the white stone, but only after the last battle has been fought and only he who passes as overcomer and has entered the heavenly portal. Putting aside that "hidden manna" for now, let us focus on that white stone.

This stone has no value of its own. The word "stone" is not even mentioned in the original (Kuyper's original). The emphasis is on *what is written* on the stone. This already points to a higher state of the soul. A trader in jewelry will pay a huge amount for a large sapphire even if it is offered only on a simple brochure. However, the dealer will offer almost nothing for an agate stone, even if it has a royal inscription. One who owns an ancient authoritative signet from a nobility background will feel personally richer, even if the stone itself is of less value, than even the most precious stone without such an engraving.

That more noble tone is fulfilled in heaven. It is not the stone itself that has value, but the engraving on the stone gives it value in the Father's House. It is the same as what the foundations of the new Jerusalem mean to you. There are sapphire, topaz, and chalcedony, totally different on a commercial price list, but in the new Jerusalem, they are all the same. The value lies not in the stone but in the inscription on it. There are two things on that stone that give us a message, namely the white colour and the name on it.

The *white* stone, the colour fitting with the fine white robe of God's saints, symbolizes their being cut off from every form of sin. The inscription on the stone speaks through the name. Not the name by which you were called on earth or the one with which you were baptized, but the name that God will give you. That will be your name forever in heaven.

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That white stone with its mysterious name is a seal. It is not a mere ornament on a crown or necklace nor a piece of jewelry one saves in a hidden place. It is the stone that goes with the robe or mantle. When Pharaoh promoted Joseph, he ordered that he be dressed in fine white robes of linen and he “took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph’s finger” (Genesis 41:42). Similarly, Mordecai received “a purple robe of fine linen” from King Xerxes. “The King took off his signet ring... and presented it to Mordecai” (Esther 8:2, 15). Both the robe and the stone symbolized glory for anyone so honoured.

The believer who died in Christ and appears before his King as an overcomer, is also honoured in this fashion by having that fine linen robe hung on his shoulder and the ring with the inscribed stone put on his finger. For he who overcomes when entering glory, there is honour awaiting him. Same with Joseph, after he came out of prison, he received a promotion and honour. There is a contrast here: The degree of vilification here on earth determines the degree of glorification above. The more a spring is pressed down, the stronger it will straighten out. There is a causal relationship here. It is the deeper suffering that gives faith deeper roots and makes the fruit of faith in Paradise flourish more luxuriously.



The characteristic of this white stone is the name that is engraved on it, not one single name for all believers, but every child of God has his own name, a name that expresses his character. This name expresses that name so deeply and so fundamentally, that it is mysterious for everyone else, but is understood by the bearer.

We read about “a white stone with a new name written on it known only to him who receives it” (Revelation 2:17). Thus, not your name here on earth, for that would be your old name, which will fall away and is then replaced by a new name. You will not receive that name from human lips, for no one knows it. It will be received from God, who knows him, even in the depth of his heart. It remains an eternal secret between you and your God. That is the name inscribed on that white stone. This ensures that you will never forget it, for it is written on a stone that, just like that white robe, will be yours eternally. The Scripture says of God, “Your

name expresses Your being, Your essence” (Micah 6:9 according to Kuyper’s translation).

That is not so here on earth. Our names are little more than etiquette. They mean nothing. You carry the same names as numerous others. Perhaps you have your name because it was your mother’s or father’s name. With us a name may show family relationships, but nothing personal, nothing of your own. It does not express your nature or essence. It cannot be otherwise, for you received your name as a baby before anyone knew what would become of you. Even if later you want to change your name in order to have it express your nature, you will not succeed, for you do not know yourself. No one on earth has ever understood the depth of his being. Right up to our death, we remain the deepest mystery to ourselves!

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This is the wonderful thing that awaits us after our dying. The veil of ourselves will be taken off our face and God will display to us our own being as in a clear mirror. Only then; not before. This is a grace situation. Should we here on earth ever see our own deepest being as we actually are, we would be shocked and startled by ourselves. As an example, a loving wife hurries to the hospital to be reunited with her husband who returned wounded from the battlefield, is shocked as she sees him maimed and looks at his face all misformed and totally bandaged up. So would our soul recoil at ourselves if we clearly saw our wounded by-sin-damaged selfhood by grace.

That is why Jesus still holds off. He will not show you your true self until the last trace of sin has disappeared and the final bandage has been removed. You can now see yourself as a model of Christ’s saving love, totally cleaned and healed. That is when the mystery of your selfhood falls away. God is the only one who knows your inner being, because He Himself foreordained and created your essence, preserved and restored you. He will then reveal yourself to yourself, show you your inner self and in your inner being render you blessed *for God’s sake*.

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For God’s sake. That is where we find the majestic riches of God as Creator. He did not create millions of people like cookie cutters, all alike; not even *two* who are

alike. Every human being is unique, something new, the embodiment of God's divine thought. It is here that the endless riches of His manifold wisdom is glorified, that each child of God, every elect, is someone unique, is like no one else and therefore cannot be missed, for no one child of God can be replaced by another. Just imagine that one child of God falls away; it would leave an eternal emptiness. A diamond would be missed in God's realm. Thus that name of yours expresses a unique inner being and that inner being expresses God's own thought. That divine thought determines for you your own calling, your own task and place that you have to take in God's Kingdom.

And now, when you arrive at your King and He unveils your own name, you discover in that name your own inner self, your "I". Now you will perceive as cause for eternal thanksgiving that you have all your life misunderstood and neglected that inner being given by God, but how God in His perfect grace preserved your selfhood quite apart from your own efforts, against you even. He rescued you when you threatened to go under and displayed yourself not only as He created your deepest self, but also as He re-created you and uncovered you in full and wholesome glory. What you loved here in your egoism, turned out to be a false image of yourself. What you will then love in God's love is your real inner self for which you don't credit yourself but only your Creator, your Saviour, your Father and your God.

Chapter 21*

Power over the Nations

*To him who overcomes and does My will to the end,
I will give authority (power) over the nations (pagans).⁵
Revelation 2:26*

⁵I use the NIV for all translated Bible texts in Kuyper's Dutch original, but sometimes that gives the wrong impression. The NIV's "authority" in this verse is "macht," in Kuyper, meaning "power" or "might." Similarly, the NIV's "nations" is their translation of Kuyper's "heidenen," which means "heathens" or "pagans." It is difficult to know whether the NIV translation is linguistically motivated, anti-colonial or cultural. I have chosen to translate Kuyper's "*macht*" as "power" most of the time, and his "*heidenen*" frequently as "pagans", except when these terms do not fit our contemporary context.

The “power over the nations” that Christ promises the overcomer does not refer to this life, but to that glorious future of eternity. To avoid misunderstanding, it intentionally refers to she “that overcomes and does My will to the end.” “To the end” can only mean “to the end of her life” or “till My return on the clouds.” In both cases it puts closure to the struggle in this life, the struggle that is still continuing. There is no victor or overcomer without the struggle having been fought to the end and decided. This does not exclude that the Church, the Christian nations, already now, by way of prelude to the end of the final phase, have *partial* power over the nations. All the gleam and glory that will once come in eternity, sends its light ahead already in this life.⁶

Christians gained *partial* power over the Pagans when Emperor Constantine toppled the their idols and planted the cross in the imperial palace. The Church gained *partial* power over the Pagans when the peoples of Northern and Western Europe converted to Christ. Even now (in Kuyper’s day) the Christian nations have *partial* power over the colonized nations, especially in Asia and Africa, most of whom were either Muslims or Pagans then.

However, all this is not yet *the* power over the nations or over their Pagan citizens. After Constantine defeated the Pagans, a part of Pagan thought crept into Jesus’ Church. Christianized Europe began to pay tribute to Pagan attributes and incorporated them in Christian form. Even now it is not the Christian powers that won Asia and Africa for Christ, but those who in their colonies made Christian colonists absorb Pagan poison. They have allowed their politics to be governed totally by greed and Pagan ideas of power. From that perspective, the fulfillment of the promise that Jesus gave on Patmos cannot be found in that temporary arrangement. None of Jesus’ Patmos promises refer to our present here on earth but to the coming eternity and to the glory that will one day break through. It is with an eye to that future that Jesus foretells us, “He who overcomes and does *My* will to the end, I will give power over the nations. He will rule over them with an iron scepter; He will dash them to pieces like pottery just as I have received power from My Father.”

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⁶ The reader should understand the language here refers to “Christendom” and “colonialism,” terms that referred to widely approved concepts of Kuyper’s day.

In the church of Thyatira conditions were bewildering (Revelation 2:18-29). It was like the days of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel in Israel (1 Kings 16:23; 1 Kings 18:4, 13-14). Under the leadership of a respected and influential woman, a group introduced the abomination of Ba'al, a prominent Pagan god, under the pious veil of the most scandalous worship style. From the time of Phinehas with his spies, Zimri the fornicator and Kosbi the Midianite,⁷ real Paganism had penetrated the Church as well as during the days of the Apostles. And this was not a hidden evil; it was openly recommended, adopted as a part of the worship services themselves. It is hard to understand, but that's what happened. The most abominable service of the flesh mixed with the worship of God by those who had already committed adultery in their hearts just by desiring a woman.

Paganism attacked the Christian religion from two sides, from the outside and in the inside. From the inside, it was accomplished by oppression, persecution and attempts to eradicate; from the outside, by poisoning worship services with Pagan evils. The executioner raged with the sword commissioned by Paganism. The woman as bearer of the Pagan poison, flung around with her enticements. It was always like Ahab who murdered the prophets and Jezebel who lead the people into sin.

Paganism, sensing it would perish if Christ should triumph, applies all its power and illusions to destroy Christianity. Circumstances often give the impression that Christ will be overcome and Paganism triumph. Therefore, on Patmos Christ encouragingly calls upon His churches: provided you persevere and overcome, there awaits you a full victory over Paganism.

95xx This promise also flows forth out of fellowship with Christ. It is the keynote of the High Priestly Prayer: "I have given them the glory that You gave me..." (Revelation 17:22). Again, provided they suffer with Me, in order that they be glorified with Me. As is Christ, so those who are in His will, will also be in His glory.

It was prophesied about Him as Messiah in Psalm 2 that He would control the Pagans with an iron scepter and break them up as one breaks pottery with a club. Jesus takes over this promise and applies it to His saints. As long as we live here on earth as pilgrims, there is this danger of Paganism oppressing and poisoning us,

⁷ Confer < Biblegateway.com > for their stories.

but this spells glory for oppression and disdain in the Lord's future. They will then reign with Christ over the Pagans and see Paganism fleeing from their scepter and be crushed under their feet.

The meaning leaves no doubt. The Psalm says that the nations rage against God's anointed king, boasting, "Let us break their chain... and throw off their fetters." It also tells of a future wherein God's anointed King will dash this Paganism to pieces like pottery under His feet.

In the church of Thyatira Paganism sneaked its way into the worship service with deadly poison. Even today, Jesus generates resistance by repeating the same promise to His saints. If they persevere, Paganism will one day be destroyed. While presently they suffer under it, in the future those who hold fast to Jesus will triumph.



This promise means nothing to those who think of the Pagans only as the tribes of Africa or Asia, and who flatter themselves when they give a few Euros to missions and thus shake off any further responsibility for the Pagan world. Jesus did not address people of such superficial nature and piety on Patmos. What Jesus says there is for those who have ears to hear what the Spirit says to the Church. They are promises for His prophets, for His intimate believers, for those who find the task of their lives in the Lord's battle.

The situation naturally looked totally different in Kuyper's day. Paganism had not left Europe nor was it exiled to Asia and Africa, but it remained in Christianized Europe, in various ways undermining Christianity, threatening it, oppressing, poisoning and focusing on its demise.

The call to fight the power of the Church, that considers the Church as the enemy as was the case with the French Revolution and some other nations in Kuyper's days, that wants to free the nations from the Church, is nothing other than the old emancipation fever of Psalm 2 that is still promoted by Pagans among our Christian nations. All this "modern Christianity"—one part faith and nine parts of it mixed with false philosophy—is nothing other than that old Paganism that is brought into the Church in Christ's Name to destroy her.

There is so much that poisons our Christian society and it's all just the same old Paganism. Some examples are:

- promoting the victory of the physical over the spiritual
- easing up on strict morality
- introduction of lack of discipline
- weakening of marriage and family
- promotion of free love
- reducing responsibility for debt

None of this bothers those at ease in Zion, but the faithful witnesses to the Lord suffer from all this. God's prophets fend off the poisonous arrows of this evil with the shield of faith. It oppresses their lives and their souls. They are the ones who struggle in their sighing hearts with the deadly danger of poisoning from this Paganism. For them it is on the one hand a steady push to believe in Jesus with all their heart, and on the other hand, a constant feeling of being threatened without ceasing by the turbulence of Paganism that pushes back the Christian element, wins victory upon victory, and with bursts of demonic laughter enjoys the Christian humiliation and fears.

All of the above is enough for the elect to succumb. It was to prevent this that Jesus explained to them on Patmos that it cannot be otherwise, that Paganism must continue to torture them till the end. But, also, that this is but a temporary situation. One day, the triumph over Paganism will be complete. On that day, God's anointed King will not be the only one to tread the winepress, but He will give His redeemed full partnership in that glorious outcome. Jesus does not say how all this will happen, but guarantees His promise to us: If we overcome to the end, we will participate in the full subjection of Paganism. We will do it together with Christ, not just He alone.

Sometimes it looks as if seeking honour is sin. Being accustomed to being oppressed and subjected, it is sometimes imagined that being willing to suffer, being oppressed, bowing our heads in subjection is the highest of virtues. That is not acceptable. Casting our status and our saintly character aside amounts to empowering our old nature. That is why Jesus stimulates the opposite feeling in us.

He promises us the crown, the power to reign, sitting on the throne and triumph over our enemies.

Jesus stimulates and sharpens the consciousness of our high status, but not in order for us to puff up our breasts or to emphasize our lowly status. No, it is to make us understand that a child of the King in a state of oppression does not dishonor herself, as long as she relentlessly protests against her oppression and posits the certainty of her future elevation.

Chapter 22*

Receiving the Morning Star

*I will also give him the morning star.
(Revelation 2:28)*

There is still an additional promise for the church of Thyatira, for the overcomer in this spiritual struggle, namely that he will receive from Christ the Morning Star. Let's begin by interpreting this literally. The overcomer will receive an immaculately white robe (Revelation 3:5) and a white stone (Revelation 2:17). Similarly, he will also receive "the Morning Star."

Especially under the eastern sky, the Morning Star gives the impression of a sparkling diamond. When one gave a prestigious symbol of honour, whether a gold necklace or a sparkling gemstone to a victor, no higher honour could be imagined than one glittering like the Morning Star. In due time, among Western Christian nations, such a high honour would often be represented by a cross, but among easterners this was still a star in Kuyper's days. In 1861, Queen Victoria of England founded the Order of the Star of India. In 1888, the King of Belgium founded the Order of the African Star for the Congo. In 1875, the Sultan of Zanzibar, now an archipelago of Tanzania, founded the Order of the Radiant Star. One finds both cross and star together in the Austrian *sternkreuzorden* or Order of the Star Cross, founded in 1688 as a symbol of the victory over Islam.

98xx Thus, when Christ uses a symbol of an overcomer on earth for a saint who enters glory, it is only natural that here too the symbol of the star is invoked. Just prior to this verse, the overcomer received power over the Pagans and as symbol of this prestigious distinction, at least in holy metaphor, the Morning Star is attached to the chest of the hero.

This metaphorical language does not mean that the overcomer will receive the actual Morning Star itself. This is clear from the language used. It does not say “*a* Morning Star” but “*the* Morning Star.” After all, the saints who enter heaven as overcomers are in the ten thousands and more, while there is only one actual morning star. Thus this is not about the Morning Star itself, but it is a metaphorical symbol of honour equal in glitter to the actual Morning Star. As the Morning Star was thought to surpass all other stars in glow and glitter, so the display of honour reserved for the overcomer shall supersede all symbols of honour and victory here on earth.

Nor is the Morning Star here Christ Himself as it says in Revelation 22:16, “I am...the bright Morning Star.” It is Christ Himself who awards the Morning Star on Patmos. Neither is it the glow of the Gospel as in 2 Peter 1:19, where we read of the Morning Star rising in the hearts of the saints. After all, one who enters heaven cannot have received the Gospel until that moment. The metaphor here of Christ giving the Morning Star to the overcomer points to the honour and glory attributed to the overcomer that is equal in prestige with the white robe of triumph hung on his shoulder and with the white stone in the imperial seal.



The symbolism that is expressed in the above, though mystical, is totally clear as long as you remember that this display of honour is a symbol of the power over Paganism, The Scripture constantly and invariably presents Paganism with the metaphor of light and darkness. When you are united with Christ, you have transitioned from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son. The Prophet Isaiah already said it, “The people that sat in darkness shall see a great light.” The Apostle Paul said that God has ordered that with the coming of the Gospel the light shall shine out of the darkness. Even earlier, ancient Simeon exclaimed that Christ would be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32).

The demons are “the powers of this dark world” (Ephesians 6:12). Peter says that God has called us out of the darkness into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9). “For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son” (Colossians 1:13). “For you were once darkness, but now that the Morning Star has risen in your hearts, you are light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8). It is the light that triumphs over the darkness as the child of God who overcomes and gains the victory over the Pagan abomination. The day comes when the night is past and it is the Morning Star that symbolizes the transition from darkness into the light, announces it and makes it concrete.

Paganism has distorted the meaning of that glorious Morning Star. That Star is one and the same as the evening star. Pagans clung to this evening star and identified it with Venus as well as with satanic power. These are represented in Isaiah by King Nebuchadnezzar (Isaiah 14:12). Elsewhere also by Lucifer.

But in God’s rich and wonderful creation, understood in its original meaning, the Morning Star is and remains the metaphor of the light that triumphs over the darkness as in nature the night recedes at the breaking of the dawn. Similarly, in the Gospel and in Christ Himself, as the Pagan darkness is pushed back, the clarity of the divine light of truth shines in the human heart.

After all this, now that the redeemed who enters heaven and who has fought along in the battle between the light and the darkness and has emerged from it as overcomer, he receives both power over Paganism and over the Morning Star as symbol of this victory.

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The above symbolism is not something in vain: It contains a promise about reality. If you receive the white triumphal robe, you possess in that robe a guarantee of holiness that can no longer be contaminated. If you receive the white stone in the signet seal, you possess a guarantee of thoroughgoing self-knowledge. Similarly, if you receive the sign of the Morning Star, you possess a guarantee of permanent power over the kingdom of darkness. Power over the Pagans is the power to resist Paganism that comes from the outside. The Morning Star that is carried on the chest, is the sign of reign over Paganism that at one time penetrated your own heart.

The sign of the Morning Star is a guarantee that renders the soul invulnerable internally to all temptations that creep into your heart from Paganism. The Morning Star is not merely an external power; you receive it and then possess it. By means of its shining glow, that Star resists the return of the darkness of the night. With the radiation of the Star on your chest, it remains an eternal morning in your heart. The darkness has no more power over you; the night cannot come near you anymore. The Morning Star never leaves you and wards off all return of darkness to the soul.



So, here then is the contrast in sharp outline. Here on earth there is the Church Militant that struggles under the sign of the cross. Up there above, there is the Church Triumphant that gains the victory under the sign of the Morning Star, understood both spiritually and externally. Here on earth, the sweet light of the sun goes back daily into darkness of the night, but in the future, in the Kingdom of Glory, there will never be twilight or night. The Lamb will be your candle; the glow of the eternal morning will endlessly shine upon you. Does Revelation 22:5 not tell us that there shall be no night there?

And so it is also spiritually. Here on earth, it is a matter of believing, living and struggling under the sign of the cross, with the darkness of pain and the night of suffering constantly coming upon us. We fall; we rise... We walk through the darkness and then we are again refreshed by the light of God's amicle face.

But tomorrow, once the struggle is complete and the victory gained, all this comes to an end. It will never again be night for the overcomer and never again will the darkness of the night creep into your heart. Then the Morning Star and along with it the certainty of never failing will be guaranteed to your soul. Our God, eternally the Father of lights, and we as children of light surrounding His throne. Christ is our Morning Star and each of us is carrying a heart eternally redeemed from the power of sin.

Chapter 23*
Being Dressed in White

*He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white.
I will never blot out his name from the Book of Life,
but will acknowledge his name
before my Father and His angels.
Revelation 3:5*

Having “the white robe” slung around your shoulder is to be honoured in the dress of the overcomer, in the robe of honour of the victor, in the robe of splendour of her who overcomes. Here also high metaphorical language is used. All nations in those days were familiar with honour displays shown to those who defeated the enemy and returned home from the front victoriously. The general would enter the city triumphantly at the head of his army. It was the highest glory a military hero would receive to thus enter triumphantly in the public eye and to be hauled into the gate. He would be decorated and dressed in a shining robe with his captives chained to his chariot.

Now all struggle and strife on earth as well as all victory are a mere weakened shadow of the great war between the Kingdom of Christ and that of satan. Similarly, all earthly triumphs are merely a weakened image of the far more glorious triumph of those who enter the gates of the new Jerusalem. The image is not far sought; it offers itself. And so Christ continues to sketch on Patmos the entrance of His redeemed into the Kingdom of Glory by means of the metaphor of an earthly victor.

Returning exhausted from the struggle of life on earth, the tired hero is first refreshed by the Tree of Life and strengthened with the hidden manna. Then the white stone in the signet seal is put on his finger. The defeated Pagan is chained to the victory chariot. The victor receives power over the Pagans and the sign of honour, the Morning Star, is hung around his neck. And finally the robe of honour is placed over him, the robe that Christ Himself will give him. “He who overcomes will be dressed with white clothes.”

We face a wordplay here that will lead to confusion for anyone reading superficially. We read, “Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with Me, dressed in white, for (Kuyper: “provided”)

they are worthy” (Revelation 3:4). It looks as if there is twice mention here of the same clothes, but that is not the case.

The clothes that have not been soiled refer to the clothes that are worn during the battle. The white robe of triumph is put on after the battle is over and the victory celebrations have ended.

The clothes that are worn during the battle are not white but coloured—red, yellow or gray, but never white. There are stains seen on the white robe as well as on the red battle mantle that was worn those days. The stain soils and dirties, same with the red mantle.

But the white robe is something totally different. It is the robe of light; it is the robe that shows no colour of its own but reflects the full light glow. It is similar as the robe in which the angel appeared. It is the robe of light as the one in which Jesus shone on Mount Tabor; it is the robe of heaven. The robe that is washed in the blood of the lamb is the earthly robe, the dress in which battles were fought and which was soiled in the heat of the battle. The metaphor for this was the scarlet battle robe of the soldier, like the one hung on Jesus at the courthouse. It is only such a robe of which it can be said that it is washed in blood. Revelation 7:14 adds that “they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” That refers to the replacement of the earthly robe with the white robe of heaven at their entry into the Kingdom of Glory.

The distinction between the earthly and the heavenly robe goes further. The heavenly robe has no colour of its own but only reflects the glow of light from another source; it *cannot* be soiled. The earthly robe has its own colour and is washed because it is soiled.

Neither white nor black are colours. Black is the darkness that does not emit even the least of tints in the pale grey of the world. And white is no colour, because it encompasses all colours. White reflects the highest glow; iron on the anvil can be glowing white. It is only when the light beam refracts that the blue, red and yellow, the core colours, release all the other colours.

The Scripture tells us that God wraps Himself in the light as a robe. Of the angels it is written that they shone at Jesus’ open grave like lightning and wearing a robe as

white as snow. The story about Jesus' glorification on Mount Tabor in Matthew 17:2 reads, "His clothes became as white as the light."

We hear the same refrain in the promises to the church of Sardis: Jesus promises the overcomer the same glory He Himself possesses—power over the Pagans as He Himself received from the Father. Also, "Sitting on the throne with Him as He is seated with the Father on His throne." And again, "They will walk with Me dressed in white" (Revelation 3:4).

God Himself is shown surrounded by the light as a robe. The Mediator in His glory is also dressed in a robe that is white like light. So also the redeemed who overcome are, dressed in a robe of light that, like snow, is not only without colour in its whiteness but in its whiteness makes all colours shine. That robe is the transition mantle.

All of this is like the hero who triumphantly climbed in his victory chariot, took off his battle dress with which he had fought and exchanged it with the white robe of the *triumphator*. So also the robe that we wear here on earth is exchanged with the heavenly white robe in a real and literal sense at the time of our death.

The body is changed. It is the same body that at first dies and then is made immortal in glory. But that is not the case with the robe; it is taken off, but it is not changed. The shining heavenly robe of light replaces the now useless robe. Our earthly dress is a cover over our shame, which is why in Paradise God Himself covered fallen humans with a lambskin. The *heavenly* robe represents an increase of glitter and glory that is put over us when we enter the Kingdom of Glory.

The hero, when he climbs into his victory chariot, takes off his battle dress and dons the white robe of honour, thereby saying that the battle is over, that no enemy will challenge him to fight anymore. The bloody task is completed and he no longer fears being spattered by blood. He now dons a robe that will not be soiled by blot or wrinkle.

Therefore, when our Saviour makes this promise of glory to those who enter heaven as overcomers that He will cover them with the white robe of lights, this does not refer to reconciliation, which refers to the washed robe, a very different image. No, it refers to the consummation of the difficulty of the battle, to the entry

into the eternal Sabbath, to the eternal celebration of freedom from all evil works. It refers to no longer being able to be tempted by satan or wounded, lifted above all further struggle, becoming immune to all temptations to sin, because sin, the world and satan have been defeated.

Here below we are mocked by satan and his demons every time we slip and soil our robe. But up there above it is *we* who laugh at satan and his demons in holy triumph with the holy robe of light as our armour, which not a single arrow from the evil one can penetrate. This robe of light is safe.

Chapter 24*

A Pillar in the Temple

*Him who overcomes I will make
pillar in the temple of my God.
Never again will he leave it.
I will write on him the Name of my God
and the name of the city of my God,
the new Jerusalem, which is coming down
out of heaven from my God,
and I will also write on him my new name.
Revelation 3:12*

At the first sound of it, the promise to the overcomer that the victor will one day become a pillar does not appeal to our soul. Scripture tells us of only one single person who became a pillar and she was the wife of Lot (Genesis 19:26). This was a case of punishment because of unbelief and disobedience. Jesus reminded His disciples of this woman's terrible lot to serve as deterrence (Luke 17:32).

We must therefore immediately emphasize that the subject here is a *pillar in the temple of God*. In order to bring this kind of strange comparison of a human to a pillar closer to us, we cannot do better than to think in terms of a support pillar. This term would be used of someone who has died but was an especially respected and wealthy member of the church, who has been very generous with his gifts and often, without being asked, gave to the church, to its poor and to its preachers money and much of it. However, this term is not all that popular in its spiritual

sense. The metaphor of support pillar is useful, but the promise of Jesus here had a directly opposite meaning. It is not that the supportive dead person *was* a pillar of God's church, but that Jesus Himself *will* make the one who has overcome a pillar in the temple of God. This does not refer to the church militant on earth, but to the church triumphant above. The very idea of church falls away; it is to be absorbed into the temple of God. It is in that temple of God that, according to Jesus' rich promise on Patmos, every Christian hero who has overcome and triumphantly enters eternal life, will be appointed by Christ Himself as one of the pillars of the completed building.



In a related metaphor, the Apostle Peter declared something similar regarding the church on earth. The redeemed form "a spiritual house" together. Of this house, Christ is the cornerstone. Each believer has to be a stone in that house, a *living* stone, in order to raise the walls of that spiritual house higher and higher by constantly gathering new believers (1 Peter 2:4-5).

But there is something even more glorious in Jesus' promise. Peter compared the church on earth to a house with walls of stone, but on Patmos the Lord chose the much richer image of a temple with halls lined with pillars. Athens, along with other Asia Minor cities, was a shining example, including the cities of the seven churches in Revelation, especially Philadelphia, to which church the letter that concluded with the pillar was sent. These structures aroused admiration because of their beauty. The Pagans there made the eyes of Jew and Christian green with jealousy with their beautiful and luxurious temples. The Jewish synagogue was nothing by comparison, while Christians held their meetings merely in the upper rooms of their friends.

So, there was the church on earth, oppressed, small, insignificant and bearing the sign of the cross in all her doings, but this would be changed on that great and illustrious day. Then all that Pagan splendour would implode into ruins, and the glorious new Jerusalem would descend from heaven. The temple of God would be contained in that city, not an imitation of what Moses saw on the mountain, but the rich original itself that was displayed to Moses in heavenly glitter. That temple would be built not with dead stones, but with spirit and life. The heroes who had overcome would bear the holy pillars in the temple, that would by far outshine with

clearer harmony than what Athens had ever symbolized with her hallways of pillars

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On earth, the temple stands next to or separate from the culture. Zion comes in Jerusalem. It cannot be otherwise, because the temple encompasses the holy, the sacred, and isolates itself from the unholy life of the world. In the Kingdom of Glory this contrast falls away. There everything is sacred; life itself is holy. That is why a temple next to or separate from life in the Lord's future is unthinkable. John writes, "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Revelation 21:22). In a place where everything is temple, there is no room for a separate temple. There life itself has become a temple-life. There the temple-life does not rest on pillars of granite but on the heroes of faith who have conquered the temple of satan and the world in Jesus' Name. In that temple there are no more stones hidden by plaster as here on earth, but columns or pillars that in their full length from top to bottom are lean and slim and sparkle in all their fullness. They sparkle and glitter as Jesus cut them, as He made them rest on their pedestal, as He adorned them with the crown of victory, as He will place them in perfect rows and order, and as He will join them together in mutual bonds into one unified whole.

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Herein lies the blessedness of its indispensability. You can carve one stone out of the wall of a stone house, but the house does not collapse. But one cannot miss even one pillar from a building made up of pillars. It will destroy its beauty and the carrying capacity of the whole will be seriously reduced. The pillars have been counted. Everyone is needed; you cannot think even one away without losing the magical beauty of its harmony. Hence the promise of Jesus that those who overcome will become a pillar, is so warm and significant. The temple of God is not complete without you. It is only when you are placed in it that its heavenly beauty is complete. Indeed, because God has chosen you, you also are indispensable for the complete building.

This indispensability is not only to retain its beautiful harmony. Because life on earth is at such a low level, artificial beauty must rise above life in every manner, but in the Kingdom of Glory there is no need for such artificiality, because life itself is perfect in its beauty. Those pillars in God's temple will not only be

beautiful; they will also bear that beauty. Thus you will understand its meaning and be a part of it. The whole of it, with however wonderful it may sound in your ears, will also rest on you.

Jesus shall make this come true not only for Pauls or Peters or whoever becomes leader in Jesus' church after the apostles. He will make this come true for every overcomer, including the silent majority, for those forgotten and who hardly amounted to anything here on earth. It will be as with God's stars in space. You see the sun and moon and even know a few star constellations, but who counts the thousand and ten thousand suns with their satellites hiding in the Milky Way, let alone in the larger universe? Every one of them declares the glory of God and He knows all by name. He calls them as well and sees to it that not a single one is missed.

And so every elect of God will glitter along with Him in that serene row of pillars in the eternal temple, co-carry it, make up part of that one huge whole as Jesus wants it. You will not be standing there on your own; Jesus will place you there. He wants to see the gloss of His glory shine, radiating and sparkling through the endless pillar hallways of God's temple. Here, too, not a single one can be missed.

Except—you must have overcome till the end. The heart that allowed satan to overcome it, goes into the grave dull and lusterless like a brick and will never glow in that row of heavenly pillars.

Chapter 25*

Never Leaving the Temple

*Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God.
Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of My God
and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem,
which is coming down out of heaven from My God,
and I will also write on him My new name.*

Revelation 3:12

In the seven letters that Christ inspired John to write on Patmos to the seven churches, he wove seven heavenly wreaths for those who would enter heaven as overcomers.

I shall give the overcomer to eat from the tree of life that stands in the middle of the Paradise of God (Revelation 2:7).

The overcomer will not be hurt by the second death (Revelation 2:11).

I shall give the overcomer to eat of the hidden manna and I will give her a white stone with a new name written on it that no one knows except the recipient (Revelation 2:17).

I will give the overcomer and those who do My will to the end, power over the nations as I have also received it from My Father, and I will give her the Morning Star (Revelations 2:26-28).

The overcomer will be dressed in white clothes and I will never delete her name from the Book of Life. I will confess her name before My Father and the angels (Revelation 3:5).

I will appoint the overcomer as pillar in the temple of My God and she will never leave that temple. I will write on her the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, that will come down from heaven, as well as My new name (Revelation 3:12).

And finally, I will empower the overcomer to sit with Me on My throne as I have overcome and am now seated with My God on His throne (Revelation 3:21).

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To each of these gold-covered victory wreaths the call is attached, “He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches. It does not say, “the Church” in the singular, but in the plural, “the Churches.” It is not the victory wreath for just Ephesus, but as well for all the others—Smyrna, Pergamus, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. It is one single spiritual rainbow with its seven hues that arch over all Christ’s Churches. But in different shades, for each of these wreaths were woven with various types of palm branches that were

related to the character of each congregation. Yes, we have first been given the fullness of the promises by Christ to “whoever overcomes in the faith.” Herein we can analyze more carefully the incentive and the force behind these seven promises, so that they in their cohesion may offer us the richest depiction of the bliss of the overcomers in the eternal light.

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For now we pay special attention to one of the seven victory wreaths: The overcomer will stand in the temple of our God and she will never leave that place. It is this promise that is directly connected to dying unto sin and carries with it the promise of perseverance of the saints, not as it is known here on earth, but as it is known and tasted in the Father’s House above. Here on earth, perseverance of the saints only means that one implanted into Christ can still fall away, but not for eternity.

Our forefathers confessed the following in the Canons of Dort:⁸

Article 4: The Danger of True Believers’ Falling into Serious Sins

The power of God strengthening and preserving true believers in grace is more than a match for the flesh. Yet those converted are not always so activated and motivated by God that in certain specific actions they cannot by their own fault depart from the leading of grace, be led astray by the desires of the flesh, and give in to them. For this reason they must constantly watch and pray that they may not be led into temptations. When they fail to do this, not only can they be carried away by the flesh, the world, and Satan into sins, even serious and outrageous ones, but also by God’s just permission they sometimes are so carried away—witness the sad cases, described in Scripture, of David, Peter, and other saints falling into sins. (Canons of Dort, The Perseverance of the Saints, Article 4. < [CanonsofDordt.pdf \(crena.org\)](#) >.

The Canons says more:

Article 15: Contrasting Reactions to the Teaching of Perseverance

This teaching about the perseverance of true believers and saints, and about their assurance of it—a teaching which God has very richly revealed in the Word for the glory

⁸ The Canons of Dort constitute one of the three main statements of faith of the Reformed tradition adopted by the famous international Synod of Dort held from 1618-1619 to counteract the teachings of Arminius, a professor at the University of Leyden. The document is among the official standards of a number of Reformed denominations and can be found at < [CanonsofDordt.pdf \(crena.org\)](#) >.

of his name and for the comfort of the godly, and which God impresses on the hearts of believers—is something which the flesh does not understand, Satan hates, the world ridicules, the ignorant and the hypocrites abuse, and the spirits of error attack. The bride of Christ, on the other hand, has always loved this teaching very tenderly and defended it steadfastly as a priceless treasure; and God, against whom no plan can avail and no strength can prevail, will ensure that the church will continue to do this. To this God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen. (Canons of Dort, The Perseverance of the Saints, Article 15. < [CanonsofDordt.pdf\(crcna.org\)](#) >.

Since already now here on earth the doctrine of perseverance gives such an unforgettable consolation to the believer, how much more glorious will this teaching feel in heaven since there will never be a falling away into sin again, never again a single case of backsliding, let alone a complete falling away. This is precisely what is expressed in the sealed promise of the Lord, the overcomer will enter the temple and will never again leave it. No, it is much more glorious and certain than that: our feet will never again be found outside the holy temple.

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Sin creates fear. It is a power over and around us, not a power as if we are its slaves or that, when it attacks us, we cannot struggle ourselves free from its tyranny. However, it is and remains a power that constantly attacks us. We have to fight it day and night—a fight in which we often suffer defeat. We do gain victories, but unfortunately after the victory there often is another defeat. Sometimes it appears as if the defeat is the result of the victory when, basking in our victory, we fail to watch, pray and fight.

This is what gives us constant fear in our lives, tension and worry in the soul. This tension often decreases when we sink and increases in our best moments. “Father, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” is then prayed at its most fiery and intimate when our heart once again comes near to God. That fear glides off our soul forever when we enter heaven, never to return.

Our dying unto sin with our last breath is a complete break with sin forever. It is a letter of divorce that will never be recalled. It is a snatching out of sin’s grip without the danger of ever being gripped again. It goes around like a roaring lion, seeking whom she will devour, but will find the entrance to this holy place above

blocked forever. Here on earth the only victory is that sin no longer reigns over the believer. Up there above it cannot even come near us.



Jesus expresses this even stronger. He does not merely say that sin can no longer come near you, but that you will never again leave God's temple. Even the temptation to sin no longer exists for you. Sin has lost all its grip on your heart and the desire to leave God's temple for even a split second will never again enter your heart.

The emphasis of Jesus' promise is not that sin can no longer come near you, but, even if it does still show up at the door of the temple, you will never experience the temptation enough to give in. That is salvation; that is heavenly purity; that is the holiness of the perfectly justified redeemed.

Sin no longer charms, tempts and attracts us anymore. There is no more room for sin in the heart. There is not a single fiber left in the soul that would make it move towards sin. All sin has become dissonance to it. No echo of any kind of whispering sin can any longer well up into the soul. Sin has become totally hideous, absolute evil, and completely abhorrent. It has become like the breath of satan. The redeemed thank God eternally that the poisonous breath of satan can never penetrate the Father's House.

When Asaph in Psalm 73 wandered around outside of God's temple, flaming sinful thought welled up in his heart. That lasted till he re-entered the temple when all sinful thought was extinguished in him. This is the constant condition of the saints above. They are in the sanctuary, which they will never leave. That is why the thought of sin never wells up in them.



Here is a question, not for the superficial ones who are always playing loose with their souls, but for those seriously trying to live pious and godly lives: Is it possible for more glorious, richer, more blissful thought to well up in them than that they are forever freed from sin and its temptations?

This is amazing! No longer *compelled* to overcome but *having* overcome; enjoying the love of and fellowship with God; knowing you no longer have an enemy; being done with guarding and fighting, with struggle and pain—it is all finished eternally. This constitutes an eternal celebration of freedom from your evil works; a resting of the soul in the peace of God, and a life in the eternal Sabbath. It constitutes no longer having the spirit of satan working in you, but only and always the Holy Spirit. It is no longer my ego, but to eternally bathe in nothing but uninterrupted love in which to be blessed and redeemed.

All of the above is in the temple of God. Not in the symbolized temple as on Mount Zion, but in the actual holy temple of God above where you are feeling right at home, because everything within you is in perfect and holy harmony with the glory of God's temple. It is not even thinkable for you to ever leave this temple throughout all eternity. Is that not complete bliss?

Chapter 26*

The Name of God Written on Him

Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from My God, and I will also write on him My new name.

Revelation 3:12

Burning a brand on certain people as was done in the past is no longer done. This was common practice we still do to animals. When three shepherds were sharing a common pasture with each having a hundred sheep, there was endless struggle over which sheep was whose if every sheep were not branded with the name of its owner. Same went for horses and cattle.

This was carried over onto people in slavery. Various forms of branding humans became practice—sailors with an anchor, prisoners to avoid escape--, but the purpose was the same for everyone: to be branded on the person himself, not on his

clothes or paper documents, but on the person himself. Clothes can be discarded and papers counterfeited, but a brand mark on the person was permanent.

Scripture talks of similar marks. The Lord put a mark on Cain to prevent people from murdering him (Genesis 4:15). A released slave who chose to stay in his master's service would have his ears pierced. More importantly, the male descendants of Abraham were circumcised with their foreskin. Circumcision was the sign of the person's belonging to the people of God.

Symbolically this mark is placed on the forehead by baptism by which the name of the Triune God is spiritually engraved on us. This symbol will become reality on the illustrious day of the Lord, when Christ will write the name of God on the forehead of the overcomer, as well as the name of the city of God and his own new name. Aaron wore a "golden plate, the crown of holiness" on his forehead, on which "the holiness of Jehovah" was engraved. The overcomer, a pillar in the temple of God, is connected to this symbolism in his priestly honour, but no longer by a golden plate with an engraving, but an engraving in his very being: "This one belongs to Jehovah, a fellow citizen in the new Jerusalem, the property of Christ."

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However, the above does not refer to any external headings. All symbolism is meant for this earthly dispensation. Here, where the holy is lacking, symbolism serves to lift us up and to remind us. But up there above, where holiness is the full reality, the symbolism falls away. But be on your guard that with the end of symbolism, you do not let go of the actual thing. The essence here is that, not now but in the day of His glory, Christ will write this triple name on the forehead of the overcomer. This mark also belongs to distinctions of honour that will be the heavenly reward for the child of God who triumphs in the struggle against satan, sin and the world. *He* receives this; no one else. But he receives what he did not previously have and now possesses without ever losing it again.

Even the most godly still lacks this; he receives it not even right after death but on the day of Jesus' glory. It is then, but not earlier, that the Tree of Life appears on the scene along with the hidden manna, the white stone, the fine white linen robe, the sign of the Morning Star as well as bearing Jehovah's holy name without any engraving. It is the reward, the crown; It is the splendour that will beam out from

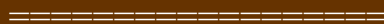
the overcomer. The realization of the symbol of baptism that all God's angels and the saints read the Name of the Lord on us is part of that splendour.



The "Name of the Lord" is the revelation of His divine being. The title emerges from the creation just like the beauty of colours emerges from the objects on which the sun shines her beams. The sun sheds white light. It is not till the beam breaks through the clouds that the colours and tints of the rainbow show up. God is such a light, but it is not until this light shines on His creation that it shows that creation His holy Name. A name comes together with the one who gives the name and it is the creation that calls the Name of the Lord here. Not every creation, but that which is created in the image of God. It is the human being who must make the name of his God greater. He calls and praises that name; he echoes that name in His glory, not out of himself but insofar God reveals it in and to him. God beams the light of His being in and before us. Once the light beam breaks in us, the tints and colours glow. When we express this believingly, the Name of the Lord echoes throughout His creation-- from Him, but it has become a name in and through us.

Thus it is that God writes His reflection in His creation through His revelation, but not until the expression of our creaturely being does this reflection become a name. David sings it out this way in Psalm 8:1, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the earth." This is true even on uninhabited islands, but that Name does not come to expression until a human sets foot on the island. That's how God's name is already in and among His saints here on earth—in their heart, in their consciousness, their prayer, their self-sacrifice, and in their homesickness for the fatherland above.

But all of this is deformed, impure in sound and imperfect. The sinful steam of our heart always produces a mist. And even though we sink deeply in that Name with utter spiritual bliss, our ego hides the Name more than it expresses itself in that holy Name. Sapphire radiates the sky's blue by the light of the sun back to heaven gloriously, provided it is sharpened, but not otherwise. An unsharpened sapphire does not radiate but hides the blue of the sky in floating dullness



One day the state of glory will also come for us, as when the fullness of the radiating grace that has been pressed into us, will be expressed by us in perfect purity. But that awaits our second incarnation, our new incorporation, when the separated and bodiless soul receives the body back—not the caterpillar that went into the grave, but the butterfly with its splendour of colours and lines. It will be as our deceased and we ourselves will one day appear as Jesus appears already now and as John beheld Him on Patmos. At that time what is in us will be expressed in our eyes, in our face, in our speech, in our wholly pure and clean appearance. Then we will be not, as now, sometimes blank, and then again with full expression without interruption. Our expression will not be pious and godly at one time and then again common, normal, but it will *always* be holy and sanctified. Nothing will radiate from our heart except light from God, nothing but the Name of the Lord with all its tints, colours and lines. Then, finally, what God had in mind with creating us will have been achieved and completed. Every redeemed will radiate nothing but His glory, but each in his own way. Every redeemed will be an enrichment of the revelation of God's holy name. This will not happen on its own; it will be by the artistry of Jesus. It is He who will make our body like His glorified body. He is the divine sculptor who molds us finer and finer until more and more of God is expressed in our being. When finally that expression becomes complete and heavenly pure, then the promise will have been fulfilled that He had written on us the Name of our God.

Chapter 27*

To Sit with Me on My Throne

*To him who overcomes, I will give the right
to sit with Me on the throne,
just as I overcame and sat down
with My Father on His throne.*

Revelation 3:21

The crown symbolizes reign and so the last and highest honour is promised to them who overcome in this spiritual warfare, is that they will sit with Christ on His throne once they enter the Kingdom of Glory. That this highest honour is promised to the church of Laodicea does not mean that it is restricted to the

Laodiceans. This, the richest of the promises, also applies to the redeemed in general. It is immediately followed by “He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church.”

But there is a connection between this highest honour and the lukewarm attitude of the Laodiceans. The struggle is never more difficult and the victory more questionable than when you live in the midst of those with lukewarm hearts and the halfhearted. The cross of persecution oppresses, but it simultaneously excites resistance. A raw revelation of sin as under Queen Jezebel is dangerous, but it encourages a reaction of a quiet and holy life. But what exhausts without stimulation is like a spring that is never pressed down; lukewarm becomes the dominant tone. Then there is nothing that supports or carries you; then all stimulation has to emerge from your own faith. That is the reason that those who persevered, pushed on and overcame till the end, have fought the toughest battle, and have been tortured the most, will precede others as heroes of the faith.

Now obtaining part of royal honour and part of royal reign is difficult to imagine among us. Did Pharaoh not have Joseph dressed in the royal robe and did he not give Joseph power over all Egypt? Do we not read in Esther that the king’s royal robe would be put on the king’s favourite and that the royal crown would be put on her head (Esther 6:8)? Are we not told of Daniel how King Belshazar awarded him with equal royal honour? Did not David sing of the Messiah of whom God declared, “Sit at my right hand (that is on the throne) until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (Psalm 110:1)? In short, was the Prime Minister, who actually was given all the power and honour enjoyed by the king himself not highly respected as the ruler throughout the East? This is the reason that Jesus’ sitting as King at God’s right hand did not seem strange in the days of the apostles. The question as to what would then happen to the kingship of God Himself did not seem to have occurred to anyone.

Except, the honour Christ received superseded that of all other honours in the East. Pharaoh gave Joseph all the power over the land and the people and even over the royal palace, but added, “Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you” (Genesis 41:40). But God gave even His throne to His Anointed. The elevated Mediator sits with the Father on His throne. While sitting on the throne, His constant prayer is, “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I

am” (John 17:24). It is to this prayer, in which the included promise evokes the “Amen” on Patmos, that it is declared to her who overcomes, “As I have overcome and now sit upon the throne with My Father, so you will sit on My throne on the day of glory.”



To all this is added the granting of power and rule. This does not refer to a visible throne. And don’t forget that this honour is reserved for all the redeemed. Those who do not overcome but succumb do not enter salvation. What an inspiring parade it will be, when you think of Jesus sitting on a throne that offers room for all God’s elect, innumerable as the stars in the heavens and as the sand on the seashore. The throne here is symbolic of power, rule and majesty.

However, this does not refer to power over the Pagans; that was already promised earlier. Neither does this refer to the power of judging, of which Jesus said to the apostles that they would sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28), and about which Paul declared that the faithful of the world and the angels would judge (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). All the Patmos promises to the overcomer assume that the judgment is over; they point to the glory that comes afterward.

But, then, what *is* this honour and luster of the promised reign? The key to this secret lies in Paradise. That is where humans were created after the image of God, which is why it was said to them there, “Rule!” That would have amounted to sitting with God on His throne, dressed with kingly power over all creation. By the grace of God, humans were created in the image of God not only as priest and prophet, but also as king.

It is *that* rule that the first humans rejected, did not want, trampled on with their feet, and listened to satan’s whispers about another kind of reign, a power against and above that of God. Thus the king became slave, slave of sin and of satan, slave of the world and of her own senses and travels. That is the reason that in this dispensation, to its very end, it is and remains not reigning but serving. Christ Himself who went before us did not come to reign, but to give his life as a ransom. The unconverted remains a slave; only the converted to God willingly wants to

serve. This situation will hold until the image of God is completely restored in both soul and body.

That's when things will turn around. Then the slave becomes ruler; she who willingly served is now called to rule and then the redeemed will wear the crown of life and sit with the Mediator on His throne. Then the choir of the redeemed will sing a new song with golden ceter before the Lamb, singing, "You have made us priests and kings and as kings we will reign on earth." Just think, that endless creation with all of its elements, its powers, its amazing wealth, subjected to God's elect, bearing the image of God in His majesty. All that is in heaven and earth restored to its organic unity in its original cohesion under spiritual *force majeure*!

God eternally glorifying Himself in His creation along two ways. First *immediately* or directly insofar as He bears all things through the word of His power. But also *mediately* or indirectly through people, through the creature with His image and that creature reigning the entire creation, not with difficulty but naturally through his spiritual highness and thus dedicating to God His creation in gratitude and worship as an offering.

In Christ, everything is again gathered together or, as it literally says, everything again placed organically under one head. And so we have the redeemed literally sitting with Christ on His throne. But it is one power, one reign, that immediate omnipotence wherewith God Himself bears all things and into which is woven the mediate rule in and through humans, by which the entire creation becomes an offering to God.

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That the redeemed will also have power over satan is not denied here, but it is not our subject right now. The discussion about that power here refers to power over the nations, over Paganism. That the redeemed also have power of grace over one another speaks for itself. In each organism the finer organ exercises power over the weaker. But that is not our subject either. That power is expressed in the special position of the apostles and of the twenty-four elders. But even that is not our subject right now, since the power referred to here applies to all the redeemed, while that other power is given to one over the other.

That sitting with Jesus on the throne means being King with Jesus. Scripture itself likens this to being king on earth, over the creation, a return of the glory of Paradise, but even higher than it was in Paradise.

A question: Does this reigning by the overcomers not reduce God's reign? Certainly not, for theirs is a reign that is based on being remade into the image of the Son, that is, the image of God. Thus, it is not humans in themselves, but the reflection of God that radiates out of the redeemed to whom this royal power and reign is granted.

Chapter 28*

Dressed in Bright and Clean Fine Linen

*Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.
(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)
Revelation 19:8*

“Bright and clean fine linen” in the mysteries of Patmos is meant as a symbol taken from physical life to shine on a spiritual reality. That clean fine linen refers to a fine clean robe of the soul. It even says so, for this is what immediately follows our text in parentheses, “(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints),” “righteous acts” referring to justification. The emphasis here is not on the fact of justification so much as on the fruit or outcome, namely being free from all guilt and sin for eternity.

The fallen angels are not receptive to justification, while the faithful angels have no need for justification.⁹ But in Revelation 15:6 we read not about seven redeemed sinners, but of seven angels before God's throne, “Out of the temple came seven angels.... They were dressed in clean shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests.” As Jesus Himself declared of those who died in Him, “They are as God's angels in heaven.” So they also are as God's angels in their shining linen, which symbolizes our deceased leaving us and entering heaven through the gate of death, leaving behind in this world everything that is sinful, in

⁹ For details on Kuyper's writings on both faithful and fallen angels see his *From the Realms of Glory* about the faithful angels and his *For Still Our Ancient Foe* about Satan and his cohort, both to be found on the < [kuyperiana](http://www.kuyperiana.com) > page of < www.SocialTheology.com >.

order from now on to be inaccessible to all sin and to complete their blissful entrance into the Father's House.

It is here that the mystery lies. How does this shaking out of sin work? How can this "dying to sin" be explained? It is a cutting through of the tie, the fibers that held our heart in bondage to sin. Still, how is the cutting of that tie and fibers to be understood? This issue is mostly avoided. Most people feel that with the mere observation of this fact, they have done enough.

For a short time this appeared to be true. Many did not doubt that the soul was tied to those fibers of sin till the last breath. Nor did many doubt that such ties to sin in heaven were unthinkable. They realized that dying unto sin had to occur at the moment of death. However, at this point widespread doubt arose from the ethical perspective. People began to talk of repentance even after death. Some voices raised the idea of using the sacraments even after death. This in turn made people accept that sin would go with us even through death. Over against this, perfectionists claimed that one could die unto sin before being called home. Thus the idea of "dying unto sin" came under pressure. The question what this "dying unto sin" actually is in death forced itself upon us with greater emphasis.

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The most obvious and most popular answer to the above question, places "dying unto sin" in the separation of the body from the soul. It cannot be denied that Paul's exclamation, "Who shall deliver this body of death?" seems to favour that short and simple answer. The seat of sin seeks such sayings in the flesh, and since death separates the soul from the flesh and turns the body, once so stimulated by sin, into a helpless corpse, it seems self-explanatory that the separated soul, which is now only spirit, has died to sin for evermore.

Especially those whose heart was open the most to sensual sin, would say to this with their whole heart "Yes and amen." Their body, their flesh and blood, has fulfilled the role of tempter their entire lives. Satan constantly crept into their soul through those sins. In their best moments they have hated and cursed their own flesh and blood. And now forever to be rid of that body and only to be spirit with God, that had to separate sin from them and them from sin. That is the reason this short saying is enough for them; they don't think any further. And yet, it *cannot* be

true. Does the source of sin not lie in satan? Did it not come to us from satan? Is satan not created only as spirit in order never to be anything but spirit? And does this not suggest that you also, soon to become only spirit, on your own could very well still be open to sin in your heart? And what is more, you are certainly not destined as a person to remain without body forever after your death.

After all, there is the promise that “a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice...(and they) will rise to live” (John 5:28-29). Also that Christ “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control” (Philippians 3:21).

If the body were your enemy, what fears would not fill your imagination about the return of that body? Would not all within you strongly desire that you could remain only spirit, pure and clean spirit forever? In that case, evil would not hide in your body as such, but in your *sinful* body. But what is a sinful body other than the body brought back into that bond with your sinful soul?

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There is something else. Those who participate in the conversation about this deep mystery of death are adults, mostly people of advanced age, but dying is the same for all and many die before they reach that advanced age. Thousands upon thousands die in the crib or even before they are laid in the crib. What kind of sensual temptation has an infant of a few days or weeks experienced? What kind of sin has such a languishing infant done in flesh and blood? What difference does it make for a dying infant whether its soul is separated from its undeveloped little body? To what extent can that be a “dying unto sin” for an infant?

With such questions you come to feel that this “dying unto sin” is something deeper. It cannot be a dying unto conscious, committed, or actual daily sins that hold us captive, for then dying unto sin would apply only to older folk. It must be a dying not to these sins, but to sin as power, as poison, soul poison even. It has to be a lifting up of our entire being out of the sphere of sin. It cannot be the breaking of the bond between soul and body, for that will again be restored later on.

It has to be grace, a deed of almighty grace, a grace that completes our sanctification and redemption.

Chapter 29*

The Overcomer to Inherit All

*He who overcomes will inherit all this,
and I will be his God and he will be My son.
Revelation 21:7*

What Jesus proclaimed to John on Patmos was a war cry. It had to remain war and struggle to the end. Only then would peace come, definitely, but not till then, not before the end had come. The overcomer will be honoured with pomp and be given all the blessings of salvation. Whether one overcomes or succumbs is decided for each of us at death. The symbols of victory will be handed to us not right upon our death but on that special day when Christ returns on the clouds, when this world passes away and the new earth under the new heaven shall praise God eternally.

That is what the entire revelation on Patmos imprints in us so deeply. The world as it is now is besmudged with sin and as we personally will die, so the world will one day also die with all its natural splendour, its glittering development, with all it has achieved over the ages. “The world and its desires pass away” (1 John 2:17). As for us who are of Christ, even in and through death we remain ourselves, our essential being, but that hidden being will one day rise from the dead. So there will be re-birth and resurrection also for this world. It will die; everything will die, but one day Christ will make all things new.

This world will pass away, and the new world will come. It all hangs on Jesus. Were he to let it go, it would sink in death for eternity and remain dead. It will one day emerge as new, completely clean, with the glow of eternal youth on its face and then shine with immortality and glory. This is because God’s only Son became human, and was appointed head over our human race by the Father and in His holiness personally bonded with our race.

So this world will die, but Jesus holds onto it by his incarnation, in His saints. And this will be the eventual triumph, when Christ, along with His saints, shall reign in glory in that reborn world. This, of course, holds only for those who belong to Jesus, are incorporated in Him, and share His destiny.

The terrible mission of the ruler of this world is to draw us away from Christ. For you to cling to Christ is the mission and service of God's angels. Being separated from Christ or to be tied to Him eternally, that is the battle, the life struggle. The person who in her dying is so bonded to Jesus that she cannot break loose from Him, is the overcomer. Jesus whispers to her during her dying, "You who have overcome shall inherit all."

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Does it not seem strange to you that throughout His revelations on Patmos, Jesus presses the thoroughgoing seriousness of the battle and struggle throughout the entire life of His saints on earth? The danger to choose peace above struggle is very threatening to God's children. The spirit from the abyss misuses this thirst for peace in order to unnoticeably unravel the bond of their heart to Jesus and thus to have them miss out on the prize of the overcomer and the crown of life. The struggle is a hard necessity, a homesickness of our soul for peace continues to reach out to peace. One day all strife will cease and it will be peace, rest, Sabbath in God eternally.

But woe to them who grab peace before the strife is finished. And yet the saintly soul reaches for it so easily, to withdraw from the battle and from the world into a sacred Patmos place, to remain indifferent with respect to the honour of the overcomer and along a quiet detour away from the spiritual warfare to enter heaven. But that would be the same as if Jesus had stayed in Nazareth and had avoided the deathly struggle. That would be a Bethlehem without Golgotha. That would amount to playing loose with a holy ideal and avoid what that ideal was to accomplish.

That is why Jesus beseeched His disciples already before His death with such strong emphasis, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). This was the reason that the same Jesus once again warned all His saints on Patmos against a premature

call for peace and called them to a battle that would not cease till the end. He imprinted it on them seven times that one day peace would descend from heaven. However, that peace would only be for those who have overcome, that is, for those who have persevered in the struggle till their last breath at death.

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The church militant on earth seeks the spiritual battleground out of duty, out of force of conviction, because the battle is imposed on her, because not to struggle would amount to betrayal and denial of Jesus. Jesus is aware that duty and conviction, if they are to have continued effect, call for inspiration and can do miracles only through enthusiasm. She who runs in a race feels her exhausted strength animates her anew to push ahead as she thinks of the crown of glory that awaits the winner. Because of this, Jesus, even in the Sermon on the Mount, constantly points to the reward that is coming, that God will reward publicly every alm and every prayer.

In His humanness Jesus Himself is borne up in his deadly struggle by looking at the crown that awaits him as overcomer. It was already prophesied about the Messiah in Isaiah, "...as though the Lord makes His life a guilt offering, He will see His offspring and prolong His days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in His hands" (Isaiah 53:10). Do understand that Jesus' struggle was human. It echoed on Patmos, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on the throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21). Think about these deep words, "...unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies,... it produces many seeds" (John 12:24).

In order to inspire His saints, to speak to them about the courage to persevere, to arouse their enthusiasm, Jesus drew for them the symbol of the overcomer and promised them a sevenfold prize and honour. All symbolism. All borrowed from earthly forms of victory and crowning, but symbolism full of ravishing reality. The angels will see to it that the least of His brothers or sisters will one day be honoured, celebrated, decorated and crowned before the face of God. No honour with which Christ Himself is crowned will fail to radiate from them. Nothing will be withheld from them. The overcomer will inherit everything.

If you were to ask whether all that cannot be reserved for God’s chosen without struggle and victory, remember that no one can tear them out of the Father’s hand—that is the answer. It is all predestined for God’s chosen, including their perseverance in the struggle to the end and their victory at the end. That is why the reward and the crown with which Jesus entices His saints is the God-ordained means to encourage them to struggle, to make them persistent in the battle and then to crown them with victory and triumph.

Chapter 30*

The Riches of His Glorious Inheritance

*I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened
in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you,
the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints.*

Ephesians 1:18

Scripture tells of “the coming age” that commences upon Jesus’ return, “this age” referring to the time *preceding* Jesus’ return. You find both of them in the statement of our Saviour that the sin against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, neither in this age nor in the coming age. These two ages form two spheres: the world around us, and, far above it, there is the world that is with God and that will one day replace this old passing world.

For unbelievers this is no problem; for them there is only “this world” and “this age,” but the children of God live simultaneously in both worlds and in both ages. They are enabled to be living in and thinking about both simultaneously only by grace. It is only through special grace that these two come to them in pure balance. Unfortunately many lack this grace.

And so, on the one hand, you find among God’s children those who live fully in this world, not in sin but in a noble sense, but who basically don’t know how to live in the “coming age” and in “the coming world of glory.” They know that that age and that world are coming, but they postpone living in them till later. On the other hand, there are those children of God who fall into the opposite one-

sidedness. As much as possible, they close their eyes to this world in order to concentrate solely on the “coming age.” This finds its completion in the monastery that completely isolates itself from this world.¹⁰ Neither side is in balance. In both cases, the balance is either twisted or collapsed. With the first—those who live fully in this world—this age has the highest priority, while that of the coming age the least, if at all. With the others, this world is completely out of view; only the coming world is in view for them.

That’s how it is with so many and so it already threatened to become in the church of Ephesus when Paul was still alive. That is why Paul wrote to them that he prays for them day after day that they may be granted special grace to live not only in this world according to God’s holy will, but also to receive such “an enlightened mind’s eye” that they may receive a clear insight into “the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18). That prayer of the Apostle was to rise up from the congregation without ceasing. It is to be our own prayer. All of us need that special grace, something that God gives only to His saints, provided they pray it constantly with sighs from the heart.

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“The hope to which He has called you” does not refer to the call to believe and repent. God responded to this prayer when you repented and believed. The calling under consideration here goes much farther. He, your God, is in glory; you are on earth. He calls you out of this world into His world, out of your sunken world into His glory, out of this age with its misery into the coming age with its riches and glory.

There is a prospect associated with this calling, the prospect of a perfect state of happiness. That calling of your God gives hope for the acquisition of that state. This is not an uncertain hope that may or may not be fulfilled, but a sure, undoubted, certain hope that guarantees perfect fulfillment. “The hope to which He has called you” means the perfect, unshakable certainty of the state of happiness awaiting you.

¹⁰ As translator, I am not sure of the accuracy of this negative statement about monasteries. They did a lot of rural development as well as translation of ancient manuscripts.

However, that state of happiness is not yours in this dispensation. You may enjoy its foretaste, but the coming blessing is still like an inheritance that is awaiting you, but an inheritance that will come into your possession later, not now. Here on earth it is something totally different. You may only be informed that an inheritance is awaiting you or how great that inheritance is and what it consists of. It is that last knowledge that, at least if it is a rich inheritance, gives you a feeling of already being rich.

The Apostle wants you to know that, as a child of God, you not only are an heir and that this inheritance is certain, but also of what it consists. Therefore, he also wants you to know the richness of the glory of this inheritance, how overwhelmingly large it is, surpassing all expectation, so that the knowledge of the riches of this coming inheritance already now gives you a feeling of hopeful happiness. And of this hopeful happiness and this knowledge of riches in the coming inheritance, he says to the Church that they must live and only live as holy saints. The inheritance is only for them. Only they receive the promise and only they can form the correct image. But the foretaste of this hope must live in all God's saints. A child of God who does not have this foretaste lives beneath his stature as child of God. He underestimates the work of God's grace and sins against the compassion and love of God, who has planned all this out of pure grace.



When we die in Jesus, we do not suddenly transition from the darkness here below into the eternal light. There will be a gradual transition. Initially, we know only *this* world in which, by God's common grace, there is still so much beauty, so much that is attractive and noble, but that, for all its beauty, remains fogged over by an atmosphere of sin and suffering. Then, in the hour of repentance, a window was pushed open through which we suddenly saw a very different world, incomparably richer and more beautiful.¹¹ It was so glorious especially because there was no sin that darkened the new vista and no suffering or flowers that withered on their stems.

¹¹ Kuyper himself experienced this at the time of his own radical conversion.

However, left to ourselves after our conversion, we could not comprise both sides simultaneously. We would either stand in front of that open window, neglecting this world and staring constantly into the glow of the eternal, or we would, returning to our world, neglect that other world which could only be viewed through the open window. It was at that time that that special grace happened in which the Lord God united both of them and opened our eyes in order to temporarily admire in *this* world God's majesty. This was for us to serve our God under that impression and in order no longer to merely *see*, but also to *live* in it and already here to *feel* rich in the wealth of the inheritance awaiting us.

The above process continues on and on with ever purer balance and clearer impression, with continually more deeply rooted expectations—powerful in this world and simultaneously inspired and delighted by the world that is to come. All this till finally the hour arrives that God calls us totally out of this world and revealed to us the glory of the coming age.

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Even now we are offered a new and last transition. Dying is not yet the climax. That does not come before the consummation of the ages when all contrasts fall away and “this age” and “this world” pass in order to be absorbed in glory. Then John saw “the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Revelation 21:2). This, of course, does not mean that a city with streets, walls and gates will come down out of heaven and the clouds. It means that the chaos that will arise after the world fire, will be recreated and reformed anew to become a more glorious and holier world, far above all the forms and splendour of this present world. This splendour will not come out of the earth itself, but from above; it will be pressed on her by God, equal to the heavenly forms. At that time, the external will completely respond to the internal, the external glory to the internal glory. The glory that will surround God's saints will be one with and according to the standard of that internal bliss. God will be seen face to face with the eye of the soul and the full, pure glow of God's majesty will be admired with the physical eye. It will be a matter of pure radiation to the outside from what radiates in the soul with gleaming gold.

The riches of glory will then no longer be an inheritance, but an owned possession enjoyed freely and fully. This will not only be glory, but the freedom of this glory of God's children. Already now do those who have already died in Jesus bear the prophecy of that glory, while they are in the house of the Father. They can already see it. The only thing they still lack is the rising of this sun of the coming age above the horizon.¹² That will not happen till Christ comes and triumphs, and all the redeemed with Him.

Chapter 31*

A Sabbath-Rest for the People of God

*There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest
for the people of God.
Hebrews 4:9*

How do you understand the term “rest” in the above verse? What does it mean to you that after your death a rest awaits you? What does it mean to you that when a loved one dies, she has entered eternal rest? What are your impressions when a newly born baby passes away, one who knew nothing of the world apart from the crib and mother's breast? Even when an older child passes away that was already acquainted with the world of play and school, does the concept of rest say anything to you? For a child, rest means sleep; provided it is strong and healthy. It never rests otherwise but is always moving, always busy, tingling with bulging life.

You probably don't know anyone who has always lived a prosperous life, knew neither worry nor grief, had a calm disposition and who, after a rich and joyful life, silently slept in her Saviour at an advanced age.

On the other hand, imagine if a struggler in your midst passes away, one who throughout her life was haunted by worry and disaster, who constantly succumbed to grief and difficulty. At her graveside you feel relieved and have the glorious thought that finally her life of worry and suffering is over and that the hour of eternal rest has begun. But even at such a grave side, the rest that remains for the

¹² Of course, at this stage, according to Kuyper himself, they are still awaiting the reunification of body and soul.

people of God is not understood at its core and depth. For, yes, in that rest, the drive and hurry of life cease, the burden of life slides off the shoulders, grief and difficulty have come to an end, and God Himself wipes away the last tears from her eyes. But that is not all. God also considers the exhaustion of the heart. Jesus expressed this so touchingly, “Now Lazarus is comforted here and you are in agony” (Luke 16:25). But that rest for the people of God comprises still a great deal more.

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Anyone familiar with the struggle against sin, knows all about that, though that struggle is not equally fearful for everyone. In this struggle there is a deadly fearful centre-point with both a wide and an external circumference. Depending on the place to which God appointed you in the heat of the battle, whether further from there or at the outside circumference, you have known satan, sin and world, the struggle for life and death, or you have heard little more than rumour from afar. But whether sharp, average or tepid, the struggle against sin exhausts everyone’s soul. There is the drive that does not let go; the after-effects of past slavery that always keep the emotions going; the disappointments from your ongoing attempts to get rid of your bosom sin; that unceasing unrest in your conscience; that ever continuing dissatisfaction about yourself every evening when you’re on your knees before God.

The Heidelberg Catechism associates especially the Sabbath commandment to this exhaustion of the soul. Your spiritual Sabbath here below is already the start of the eternal Sabbath, that is, of the eternal rest.

The blood of the cross brings one who believes, during and after conversion, the peace. “...since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1), but not yet *the* peace. The battle and troubles continue also after conversion. Who overcomes, which she does in the struggle after her conversion, will inherit everything. For her who has overcome till the end there is the eternal rest. Then never again that drive and never again that temptation. The sin that haunts here and lures us into its traps, will be forever disarmed up there above.

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However, all this still gives us no clear view of this rest that remains for the people of God. In God’s holy Word, that eternal rest is depicted in sharp outline. It is

always Israel in the desert that is promised rest in the land of milk and honey, the same Israel, that because of its grumbling and wandering, is held up in the wilderness and does not enter the rest. It is Israel that, after forty years of penance, is renewed and led into the rest that was meant to be Canaan by Joshua. Of this Israel, it is said that it enjoyed the rest only in the *shadows* of the symbol. The true Joshua is our Jesus, who leads all those who believe and die in communion with Him through the valley of the shadow of death into eternal rest.

On what is all this based? Surely not on the worries and difficulties of life, for Israel was blessed and ate “the bread of the mighty” in the desert and drank from the rock. Its clothes did not wear out nor its sandals. If ever a people has lived a carefree life, surely it was Israel in the desert. Neither can it be said that in the desert temptation was the most fierce, for in the desert Israel roamed around outside the world, aggravated by no other temptation except that of her own heart. Thus the rest for the people of God that is described for us in the story of Israel’s wandering in the desert, has a very different meaning. It is the rest of the pilgrim, who finally has reached the destination of her long pilgrim journey and has thrown away the cane. Israel has arrived in the Father’s House. The ideal has become reality for them. It has achieved what it desired and prayed for deeply in its heart.

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Do you understand this transition? It is about the journey and home, between desire and possession, forever becoming and now being it for eternity. God has never become, never did and never will. He is Jehovah, “I will be whom I will be.” He is who He is. But we are subject to development, opening up, becoming. Our existence, our life on earth is one process. We are infant, child, young girl or boy, teenager, young man or woman, mature person, greybeard. This is a whole ladder with rungs without end that we have to climb. There is never any rest, always on and on. It is a matter of constantly dragging on, journeying on, leaving behind what we have already achieved, forever moving. We have hardly reached the top of the mountain before us or another even higher shows up that also needs to be climbed. From there the need for education, always learning, always driven after more knowledge, more light, higher power and richer, deeper comprehension.

Here, resting is sin; it is wasting life; it is standing still, while the way beckons us further and higher. That’s how it was in Paradise, Adam was clean and holy, right

before God and wise, but that was not how it was to remain. No, he was to develop himself, to grow spiritually, to make progress, and then, finally, once the loop was completed, to enter into eternal rest.

Here, it was a restless wandering in the desert. The little girl wants to become a young girl and, once there, all her desire is to become an adult girl, and, once there, then what? For boys and men, longing to become a greybeard? No, not really. Aging means going down, while the way beckons higher. Pilgrims to the eternal Fatherland, your Canaan, is above. That is where your eternal rest awaits you once you have finally achieved that situation. Once the *becoming* is finished, the eternal *being* will enter; as you will be, so you must remain eternally. There will be no homesickness for the higher, for your tabernacle is already prepared for you by God at the highest level; your indestructible being that has become unchangeable. No more climbing, but no descending either. The pilgrim's cane has been discarded and all your soul is now eternally enjoying the rest prepared by God for His people.

Chapter 32*

The Things that Cannot Be Shaken

The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.
Hebrews 12:27

Here below it is *becoming*; once above, it is *being*! Have you ever experienced the glory of anticipation with a powerful premonition, so that this “no longer *becoming*” ends up as “eternal *being*?” Our “becoming” here is our constant “change.” Along the way that we follow, not a single footstep sticks or endures. The entire present becomes past history, as long as it remains allocated to us.

Note well: that restless “becoming” is not punishment for sin. To be sure, sin has *aggravated* that “becoming” into degeneration and change in a shocking manner. Death and the grave show what finally *becomes* of the bitter fruit of sin, of our

person, life and our status, our happiness and our earthly ideals. If it were not for sin, it would not have gone that way. Sin has come into the world through one person, and through sin, death. But even without and outside of sin, the constant change, that restless “becoming” would have belonged to our nature in this dispensation.

Undoubtedly, God created us in original sinlessness or purity. In that condition Adam possessed justice, holiness and wisdom, but he did not possess these spiritual qualities to remain as and where he was. He was called to something much higher and more glorious. It was that transition from the state of Paradise into the heavenly state that constituted the mystery of the Covenant of Works. Adam had that command before him. By accomplishing that command, he would grasp for what he did not yet have, namely, the eternal and unchangeable life. The stamp which God Himself has imprinted on the things here below, is what the Psalmist describes in these words in Kuyper’s translation, “You will change them, and they will be changed.” It is always *becoming* here, never just *being*. There is no permanent city here, only a seeking after a future one.

Our eyes open at our mother’s breast. A child becomes a boy and a young man. A young man is in a hurry to become a mature man. Though we want to remain a mature man, we become greybeards. Soon we become very old and descend into the grave. This “becoming” through the years is a main characteristic of this restless change through which we rush throughout our life. Our nurturing is one of “becoming.” All our life experience is one of “becoming” and “maturing.” Every morning when we wake up we are different from when we went to sleep. We grow and from small we become large; hardly a facial feature remains the same. Constantly there are other sensations, feelings, and longings, Restless changes in our external and internal life. Sometimes, that change goes so fast in and around us, almost violently sometimes, that we become estranged to ourselves and feel ceaselessly driven.

Now all that fear of change is the result of sin, but even if you try to push away that fear, this never “being” and restlessly “changing” would be your part on earth. There is something natural in you, your ego, your “I,” your hidden being. The man who dies of old age is the same person who once was received as child by his

mother. But throughout his mode of life and existence, it is all change upon change. Just compare the portrait of the infant at her mother's breast with a picture of the greybeard just before he died. It *was* that child and it *was* that greybeard, but worn out like a robe. Over against that, Scripture places "the things that are not movable," the life above that is not changeable, not in flux, the divine-heavenly that no longer "becomes," but eternally is "is" and therefore is called "eternal life."

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We cannot form a clear concept of what "being" eternally and never again to "become" means. The language we speak, the ideas we form, the concepts we put together, are all borrowed from this dispensation where everything is subject to the law of change. The Lord is my Rock, but at the side of the rock the waters of life splash and swish restlessly at its base. Nature changes; the appearance of the heavens changes. History tells us that there are always other things coming. Therefore, we understand "becoming," but not "being."

In the burning bush, God showed it to Moses by a miracle. What burns, is digested. But see how the bush burned but was not digested. It glistened in a bright glow, but it did not waste or perish. That was its "being," and therefore it was a symbol of the Lord's holy Name: "I am who I am," Jehovah, the God who never "becomes" but always "is."

So also the Mediator spoke. It was not "before Abraham was, I was," but "before Abraham, I *am*." It was given to Him to have life in itself. Therefore there was also no "becoming" in Him, at least not in His divine nature, though there was in His human nature. In Him, too, there was that eternal "being." Once the world was created and prepared, there was no more "becoming," for the world "was." That is why the Sabbath entered the picture, for the Sabbath of God is that "being:" it was the end of the work of creation, of "becoming." That is the reason that the Sabbath is a foreshadowing of heavenly rest from the exhaustion of this endless "becoming" here on earth. A person who knows this, already starts his eternal Sabbath here on earth.

But that is only by anticipation, by foretaste. The *eternal* Sabbath, the rest from endlessly "becoming," the bliss of eternally "being" and "remaining," belongs to

the Kingdom of Glory, when nothing will change anymore, when the “becoming” will cease and we have entered into the eternal “Being.”

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A good understanding of the above is associated with salvation through faith and the riches of enjoying what Scripture calls grace. That glory is often ignored, which renders the Gospel powerless. O, that grace were once again understood as Scripture testifies and church goers grasped it!

“We know that we have passed from death to life” (1 John 3:14). “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1). It is not “you become,” but “You *are already clean* because of the word that I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). “And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified” (Romans 8:30). “... an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade” (1 Peter 1:4). “No one who is born of God continues to sin, because God’s seed remains in him” (1 John 3:9). “In Him we have redemption through His blood” (Ephesians 1:7). Our life is not still to come, but it already *is*: “Your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). “...you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). We are not still to receive it, but we already have it; it is not still to come, but it already *is*. *That* is the Gospel.

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Keep your soul far from corrupting the Gospel. Both the here and the hereafter are controlled by that absolute contrast: on earth things are *becoming*; in heaven they *are*, they are *being*. This holds for you as well as those who already have fallen asleep in Jesus and left you behind. Here it is a matter of change, always *becoming* something else, but that is finished up there. There the pilgrim’s journey has been completed. The ship has entered into the haven of eternal rest. It will not again lift the anchor to be beaten and driven by storm and wind on the angry waves. It will never leave harbor again, but eternally stay in its place.

But still, you have not yet arrived. It is not only that you will be transitioned from a changing or becoming world into an unchanging one, but you yourself, your person, your heart, the deepest of your inner being, will cease *becoming*, never

again do anything but knowing that eternal rest, an eternal *being* in and with the Mediator.

Chapter 33* Made Perfect Forever

*...by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever
those who are being made holy.
Hebrews 10:14*

I advise you not to bring in your imagination the restlessness of this dispensation into the Father's house. This world passes with all that is desirable in it. There is no other or better world ahead, one populated by people other than those who died in Jesus. The "law of life" does not transfer from this dispensation into that new world. In this present world, restless change or "becoming" is a major condition of existence, but in the new world the law of unchangeableness, of *being*, rules. Here, everything is *becoming*; there, nothing *becomes*, develops or degenerates. Instead, there the majesty of eternal rest reigns, the perfection of eternal unchanging *being*.

We cannot really imagine this, because our imagination and thinking is bound by this endless flux. This could leave us with the impression of something stuffy and constricted, a deadly boredom even. That is the source of all those attempts to make heavenly life look attractive by imagining that our forming and development will continue endlessly in heaven and that in the new life we will forever climb from glory to greater glory. That endless striving for an ideal perfection that is never reached, that endless becoming happier and happier without ever achieving that perfect bliss, is thought to be delightful.

Unfortunately, this would amount to turning life in the Father's House into a mere extension of life on earth. It is all in direct contradiction to what Scripture reveals, namely, that everything is subject to death, but in eternity it will be knowing as we are known, that is, perfectly. It is also in contrast with the glorious fruit of the suffering and dying of the Lord, that is, with His one sacrifice.

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The *eternal* lies in this lack of change, of *becoming*. Eternal life is life without change, without *becoming*. The eternal stands in contrast to the temporal. And what is time but a pulsating of constant change, of movement, of becoming? Hours, days, weeks, months and years come and fly by; after each evening there is the morning; after the day, the night. But this is not the way in the Father's House. "There will be no more night" (Revelation 22:5) nor morning. The sun and moon will no longer serve as symbols, for God and the Lamb will radiate eternal light that knows of no change or darkening.

On this earth, change, becoming is the highest and constant rule of life. If you do not make progress each year and climb higher, you have wasted that year. The pilot ploughs the skies in order to reach the destination airport, but she has hardly unloaded and she again takes to the sky for the next airport. That's how it goes with all of us. We crave alternation and change. What always remains the same, stifles us because of its monotony. Is not our entire life a pilgrim's journey, forever moving on and on? It is always hurrying on to the next milestone, to which, when we reach it, we turn our backs and speed on to the next. In the morning we press on to midday and from there on to the evening. And then we have the night that takes us to the new morning.

None of the above fits eternity. There will be no more pilgrims, but we will have arrived in the Father's House to remain there eternally without ever again longing for something else that may well up in us. Jesus says, I will make overcomers "pillars in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it" (Revelation 3:12).

Could it possibly be otherwise? Striving, trying, or longing after more cannot continue endlessly; the goal being pursued will never be reached. It would remain in heaven as it was on earth for so long—never perfect; never the eternal rest for the heart, which is after all the highest good for the people of God.

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No, life in the Father's House *cannot* be a continuation of earthly development. In dying the gracious miracle of perfection comes in between both, the sudden full sprouting of the bud of a flower and the fruit of the sacrifice of Christ ripening without ladder or transition. The latter is the dying unto sin, release from the body

of this death, and the transition from time into eternity. That is why those who are in Christ Jesus already here are called saints and redeemed.

Or would you prefer that all the inequality here be transferred to the Father's House? Think about how many millions die in the crib. They would have to begin their development, both intellectually and spiritually, after they enter that House. And what of those millions upon millions, whose development remains at the lowest level, thanks to their social status? Would you lead them into the Father's House in all their imperfection, in order there for the first time to own what a small circle of highly privileged already enjoy here below? And so you would also have in the Father's House those who were more highly and more richly developed here as a kind of celestial nobility, surrounded by the great innumerable semi-developed crowds? Would that be your consolation, your comfort for those thousands and millions in both life and death?

“No” and again “No” says the Word of God. *This* is the source of endless comfort and spiritual rest, namely, that our glorious High Priest has with one single sacrifice made perfect all who go to God through Him.

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The intense and inner longing to be redeemed from the here and now and to enter the Father's House, has increasingly been cooling off even among believers. Hear this cry from Paul's soul, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” “I desire to depart¹³ “and be with Christ” (Romans 7:24; Philippians 1:23). This cry no longer appeals to the broad congregation of believers. Except for a very old man, a tired patient on the hospital bed, or one who has suffered adversity upon adversity who has put all these aside, this view of heaven hardly is exhilarating for many.

Still, is it not natural that thirsting after heavenly joy would burn less in the soul when you imagine that it is there only an extension of what we left here below? It would be merely a higher class of people, all graduates of the same school. Why not continue our development task there? Then we at least would avoid the fear of death and we would make progress at the same time.

¹³ Kuyper here uses “*ontbonden*,” literally meaning “being untied.”

You must do away with this false image. Understand what dying unto sin is, what it means to become perfect and what it is to be transferred from that endless chase after the eternal rest of *Being*, to be torn out of time and be placed in the middle of eternity, regardless of whether you die as a child, an adult or as a greybeard. How suddenly you see that glorious Father's House with the eye of your soul in a totally different light. The circumstance in that Father's House is one of perfection. When you enter there, you will be perfect among the redeemed.

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The saints that preceded us, including those whom the Lord God called from our own heart, appear in that same light in a form very different from us. You lost a child, but now in the Father's House, that child is suddenly perfect eternally through the miracle of grace. She now surpasses the most holy saint on earth by far in perfection. What was a rough diamond here, is a sparkling precious stone there, shining as a star in the firmament.

And also, when God calls someone from your house to his Father's House who had reached a higher development here on earth, you may have a memory of the fall still cleaving to her earthly form. Then, when we think of the departed in the Father's House, with all that earthly pain and sad sinfulness gone, there she stands before you as a holy and glorious image of one perfected in Christ, not only without blot or wrinkle, but in heavenly perfection.

Chapter 34* **Knowing in Part**

*Now we see but a pure reflection as in a mirror;
then we shall see face to face.*

*Now I know in part; then I shall know fully,
even as I am fully known.*

1 Corinthians 13:12

Those who fall asleep in Jesus while the history of the world is still ongoing, have not yet arrived at their destination and are still awaiting things to come. The entry into complete rest is still before them.

When the fifth seal was opened as in Revelation 6, the Apostle John saw the souls of those who had been slain under the altar because of the Word of God. They called with a loud voice, “How long... until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood? They were told to wait a little longer till they were avenged” (Revelation 6:9-11). Those who went in peace are indeed in heaven, but not all bonds with this world are broken for them. It holds here as well, “So that only together with us would they be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:40). Everything awaits the revelation of the glory of God’s children and that will not happen before the history of the world has reached its final goal. In this respect, the church triumphant above shares a common lot with the church militant on earth.

There is no continuation of earthly relations with our departed. Those relations are for here, while the departed are in heaven as angels of God. What remains is a spiritual relationship, a “siblinghood” in Christ. There are no more relationships like “our child,” “our father,” “my husband,” “my wife,” but there *will* be “co-child with God” and “our brother or sister in Christ.” If you take the redemption of those who have died in Christ in its full and final sense, the prayer remains of “*Maranatha*. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.” Although in this intermediate time you need to consider this great fact that here it is still a matter of *becoming*, while up there it is *being* that reigns. Up there the law excludes all change and rests in a perfection that neither increases nor decreases but lacks nothing. Jesus said to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). The end goal of the Gospel is to make the sinner perfect in Christ Jesus. Already here they are called “perfect” and “holy,” in both their core and being. Through the one sacrifice we are all together perfect in eternity. That perfection will not only be the hallmark of our being and one day also of our life style, but it will also be the stamp on our consciousness, our knowledge, and our imagination.

Here on earth, even the most congenial saint knows only in part, but those who sleep in Jesus, regardless of what they were lacking in their knowledge, possess perfect knowledge; their knowledge is no longer earthly but Godly. Here they only look at the image in a mirror, but there they will see face to face. Here, it is a knowing in part; there, a knowing as God knows us.

It is clear what this mirror is of which the Apostle speaks. We never see God Himself here, but He, the Eternal One, reflects Himself for us in His creation. Both “His eternal power and His divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made” (Romans 1:20). He reflects Himself for us in His governance of the course of this world. It is “the works of God” that we must notice. He reflects Himself for us in our own rationality, in His common grace, in the revelation of His holy Word, in what He has done in our soul. That is the knowledge about God that is granted us here, and that knowledge always remains, no matter how derivative and incomplete, knowing in part. Even if we, like Paul, were given visions and prophecies, for all of that the rule remains that it will come to nothing.

The lack that marks all our knowledge about God is not merely its incompleteness. It is also lacking in its type. That is why it is not supplemented, but, rather, is done away with and then is replaced by a totally different type of knowledge, direct knowledge, immediate knowledge, knowledge that is not learned, but that speaks to our deepest being, one that is always and in every aspect complete.

This, however, does not exclude the connection with what we know here. It is and remains knowledge of the same entity or being, but the *kind* of knowledge will be very different. It is as different as staring at the portrait, that is, the mirror image, or indulging in watching the living subject of your love in full reality. The Apostle contrasts it with what a man remembers about his childhood imagination. That was then true for him; he could not think otherwise, but now he is a man and laughs about that childish imagination. “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me” (1 Corinthians 13:11). So it also goes with one who falls asleep in Jesus. For him the perfect has arrived and all that was only in part has vanished .

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This shows anew that for those who have fallen asleep in Jesus there is no further *becoming*, only *being*. Here it is growth and increase; there, an eternal *being* in perfection. You cannot grow and increase without increasing your knowledge. If you increase in knowledge today, then your knowledge of yesterday was only in part. If you assume that there is an increase in development among our departed,

an increase in holiness, and a growth in grace, you would thereby carry our partial knowledge into eternity, something that the Apostolic word forbids. Is it not true that knowledge that gradually increases and continues to increase, carries the mark of the incomplete and can never be complete or perfect?

All of this amounts to—and this is something that cannot be emphasized sufficiently—a carrying of earthly relationships into the eternal, as if the other side of the grave is merely an extension of our life here, a school at the other side of the grave. You meditate here; you meditate there; you research and study both here and there. Same thing in heaven with the wise man and the innocent child, even the arrogance and pride of the academic carried into eternity. Especially the pride of our knowledge, even of the most congenial thinker, must be buried in the grave. When the most knowledgeable loses a young child that belongs to the redeemed of the Lord, all the knowledge and learning of this wise father means nothing compared to the perfect knowledge the child is entering. The grave suddenly turns the relationship between father and child upside down. Before that death, the father was the wise man and the child an innocent little boy. After the death, the father is the dull viewer in the mirror, while his little boy knows God perfectly.

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The proverb “As the tree falls, so it lies” is a meaningful expression of the all-controlling, deadly serious and soul-penetrating thought that there is no conversion after death. Here, too, the same thing is said again: There is no *becoming* or development after death, but only an entry into the *eternal being*, with this *being* remaining unchangeable. That’s the Sabbath, the eternal rest.

John Calvin insisted that at the moment of death something can still happen in the soul that no one standing at the bedside notices, but when the moment has come, a certain and definite eternal decision has been made. At that point, no greater or better knowledge of the Gospel, of your own sin, or of the fruit of Christ’s sacrifice, can still be added to the old knowledge. The preaching of salvation is done in part and thus belongs to this dispensation. Once perfect salvation has been reached, it is a matter of fathoming the eternal work of redemption with the clarity of the open eye of the soul, but it is exactly this opening of the soul’s eye that must take place prior to dying. Those who die with closed spiritual eyes will be

mourning throughout eternity. You can no longer *become* what you *are* not; what you *are*, you will *remain* forever.

However, there is one great change, not *after* dying, but in dying itself: The mercy of God is moved from the temporal into the eternal. Then the nettle that here still is entangled with the heart of God's child and that so often causes pain, is plucked away forever by God's grace and the soul is fully sanctified. This is when the still closed flower buds sprout and open up. They could not sprout in our cold air, but now they smell fragrantly eternally before God. Then, suddenly, the soul's view of that dull image in the mirror is dimmed and now focuses on the centre of God's holiness itself.

The Psalmist of old already sang it, "And I—in righteousness I will see Your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing Your likeness." (Psalm 17:15).

Chapter 35* **Hidden with Christ in God**

*For you died, and your life is
now hidden with Christ in God.
Colossians 3:3*

Once upon a time an evil voice whispered in the Garden of Eden, "You can be like God." Listening to that temptation was the wellspring of all abomination and woe ever since. But how will you maintain that they who went to sleep in Jesus and entered God's rest, want to apply an idea to the saints above that already on earth disturbed their peace?

God is above time and change; He knows neither becoming nor unbecoming, and expresses the secret of His eternal *being* in His saying, "I will be whom I will be." Is it not exactly this that distinguishes the Creator from the creature, God in His majesty from us, children of dust? If this is so, how will or can you transfer this godly characteristic to the diminutive creature, even if that creature is an elect, one who received grace, who is in Zion above and is an adopted child of God already

introduced into the Father's House? Is this not to confuse the human with the divine? Is this not to reach for the highest heaven through what satan lied to us and what God cursed?

We are drawing attention to the consummation, when God is surrounded by His saints and the last enemy has been overcome. We will pay attention to those who died in Christ and are now in the new Jerusalem, on the new earth, after Christ has given over the Kingdom to God the Father and God is all in all. Then finally it will be full bliss. In that bliss, we proposed, there is no more time, only eternity; no change but eternally being the same without change, in order to to enjoy eternal rest. There will be no more striving after goals, but only being submerged in the one final goal. No more chasing after an ideal, but possessing the highest good. No more *becoming* what has not yet been achieved, but remaining as we are forever. No longer one of God's children sanctifying herself or climbing into higher sanctity, but enjoying the already received holiness for eternity.

But does all this not transgress the border that separates human life from that of our God? Does this not amount to transferring to mankind what belongs only to God and Christ?

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May God's revelation be our exclusive guide in all the above. "...what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). "We are His offspring" (Acts 17:28). Our Mediator prayed for the saints He left behind, "Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me where I am" (John 17:24). "Then I shall see face to face. ...Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Our name shall be "the perfectly justified." There will be no more chasing, driving, striving, but an eternal rest, a never-ending Sabbath for God's people. God will be all in all. There will be neither night nor time nor movement, but an eternal morning. Neither blot nor wrinkle shall disfigure the Bride of Christ. The robe of our holiness shall be immaculate. As the fruit of His eternal sacrifice, Christ shall bring all before God in perfection. Our life that now is hidden with Christ in God, will then be revealed with Him in uninterrupted bliss.

Tell me, where would there remain room for change, for renewal, for higher development, for transition from bad to better circumstances, for an as yet *becoming* of what is not already included in our perfection?

Since God Himself introduces us in His Word to eternal life, who will dare to say that looking for such a glorious situation amounts to reaching for something that God never promised us, but that satan held before us? You don't understand it. It is the mystery of eternity. It cannot be otherwise, for you have died here, and that eternal life you already have received in principle, is with Christ hidden in God. It is therefore much more real than if you actually had it in your hands. And that is why you are told that you will still wait a short time, "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will appear with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:4).

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We are not at all talking about "being like God." Here is the border: God possesses eternal life *from* Himself and *in* Himself, while we who fall asleep in Christ receive this only as a gift of grace from God. It is neither you nor your departed in Christ to whom it is given to have life in yourself, but only the Son. This is the unchanging mark of all genuine piety: we do not seek our life *in* ourselves, but *outside* of ourselves in Christ.

If we have drunk from the water that the Mediator offers as in John 4:13-14, it will become a fountain of eternal life to us, but always derived, always flowing towards us from the outside, always a *received* treasure. The glory is not ours, only God's; for us it is never-ending gratitude, praise and worship. The Father of our ancestors is also our Father, while we are nothing but His children. He is our God, that is, the original Majesty and we are never more but the bearers of His image, ornamented with His holy likeness. From eternity to eternity He is always the *Eternal Being*. We who at one time were not, on the other hand, emerge, arise. We *became* out of nothing in order to climb up into eternal life, led into a glory that never finds its foundation and resting point in ourselves, but only in God.

It is thus not true that the border is erased; it remains and is even sharpened. Not now, but eventually we will understand how the cup is very different from the fountain, for in that cup there is not a single drop other than that sourced from the fountain.

It is only the false, the artificial border that disappears, the border that does not separate God from His child, the earthly from the heavenly, that which you are not allowed to carry over into heaven. It is through this that the true, the non-erasable border will appear in full clarity. We are only the worshippers of His Majesty; He alone is worshipped by all and in all.

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That's how it would have been if there were no sin, and if our first parents had transferred from Paradise into eternal life by obeying the commandment. That would have drawn us into holiness and glory, But as it is, it is in a much clearer and sharper sense that it is divine compassion now that it is out of sin and misery. Now the Mediator intervenes. Now there is for us, miserable ones, no eternal life unless we have become one with Christ. Now we don't have eternal life each one from herself nor mutually from each other, but only from *His* life, if we are incorporated into Him as members of His holy Body. It is always *in* Christ, *through* Christ, *with* Christ. You have died and your life is hidden in God *with* Christ.

Chapter 36*

Always Being with the Lord

*We believe that Jesus died and rose again
and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus
those who have fallen asleep in Him.*

1 Thessalonians 4:14

What repeatedly strikes us when we think of the Fatherland above, is the definite assurance that, also on the other side of the grave, till the end, yes, into all eternity, Jesus will continue to hold a special meaning for those who have been redeemed. It would strike us more natural if, after Christ had completed the work of reconciliation on earth, and after that had introduced the Kingdom of Glory at His return, He would have lost His central significance for our hearts.

When you read 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 by itself, you might gain the impression that this were indeed the point of revelation. We read there that Christ, when the end has come, “hands over the kingdom to God the Father in order for then Himself to be subjected to God and God be all in all.” This gives us the impression that Christ had disappeared as Mediator and left a direct connection with God Himself as the overflowing fountain of our salvation.

This does not appear to be the case. John saw the new Jerusalem come down out of heaven. That was the Kingdom of Glory. And yes, of that new Jerusalem in its consummation, he says, “The Lord God almighty is its temple and *the Lamb*. The city does not need the sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of the Lord gives it light, *and the Lamb is its lamp*” (Revelation 21:22-23). Herewith the Lamb is recognized as having lasting significance in the future world.

There is thus something in the role of the Mediator that does not disappear or fall away. The Apostle Paul places much emphasis on this point in his writing to the saints at Thessalonica, “And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). All commentators agree that this clause means that we must think here in terms of always being with Jesus.

The Apostle makes a distinction here between those who fall asleep in Christ, who have preceded us, and those who leave this life later. Those who now fall asleep in Christ, when they enter the Kingdom of glory, are and become “returned with Him.” At that time the entire church, the entire legion of the elect, will become united. It will be one mighty, endless, all-encompassing congregation of the redeemed. The witness declares of Jesus and all the others, “And thus we will always, that is, into eternity, *be with the Lord.*”

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However, circumstances will not be as they are now. Right now, the work of redemption is still ongoing. The cry on Golgotha “It is finished” does not refer to the entire work of the Mediator, but exclusively to the offering of “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

In the meantime, the great work of redemption continues, and that in three respects. First, there is the gathering and sanctification of the elect who still are

afar and those still to be born. Secondly, there is the overcoming of the evil powers. Thirdly, there is the preparation of a place, of the Kingdom of Glory. That triple work began only after the Ascension. It is the second act in the holy drama. It is the return of Jesus on the clouds that closes the final act.

The second task that Jesus currently is fulfilling since twenty centuries plus is that all power is given Him in heaven and on earth, and He is seated at the right hand of the Father, where He practices the highest sovereignty, that is, ruling over all created things mediately or indirectly, not directly, through the Eternal Being.

What is and remains meanwhile is the Supreme Sovereignty and the Highest Authority over God's heaven and earth. But so long as sin has not yet been erased, satan has not yet been chained eternally, and the last enemy, that is, death, not yet vanquished, the fellowship of the Triune Holy One with His creation is not yet happening, so that sovereignty is still exercised by the Mediator.

Not until the work of redemption, the second act, is completed and all the mist of sin dissipated forever, never to return, it is only then that all barriers between the Holy One and His by then sanctified creation will have fallen away. There will no longer be an enemy that can still prowl about. It is when God Himself will again directly be the all in all of His saints, that the kingship of the Mediator shall end and the Mediator lay aside this intermediate kingship to turn the Kingdom again directly to God.

It's not as if the second person of the Trinity is excluded from it all. That is not possible. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are indivisible, one in power and being. The distinction is that it is no longer Jesus Christ as *God-human*, but the Son together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, as *God*, shall exercise that royal reign over heaven and earth.

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Also in the new circumstance that will commence at that time, and that will conclude the history of the world, the God-man, the incarnated Word, the Head of the Body, our Saviour, remains the point of unity for all God's saints. The Son will not lay down His human nature; He shall keep it. Glorified, He will be glory

among His glorified. It will be jubilation forever, because they will always be with the Lord.

Those who have already slept in Jesus already enjoy this salvation now, but in a different way. The Apostle Paul says himself of his death before Christ's return on the clouds, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, for this is far better" (Philippians 1:23). But during this intermediate stage, Jesus still bears up His redeemed through His redemption power. If the Mediator were to abandon them for just one moment, they would sink. They are still under the reign of their glorified Head, not yet in the direct Kingdom of the Father. Their bond with the Eternal Being is still through the Mediator. They still await the glory that is coming. They still know the homesickness for the consummation. Like God's angels, they are still participating in the fight against satan, which is the power they are given over the heathens. For them also the great change will not come till the day the Mediator will again appear on this earth and the end will commence. Then for them also dawns the resurrection of the flesh. Their redemption shall be perfect and consummated; God will be their all in all. For them also the new and lasting circumstance that will remain forever, will now finally commence. But whatever may change above, their bond to Jesus will not be loosened; it will remain their blissful delight *that they will always be with the Lord*.

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But this being in the presence of Jesus will be different from what it has been so far. He will no longer pray for them, for if the eternal salvation has been sealed by the amen of consummation, what would there still be to pray for? He will no longer protect them, for against whom or what power would this protection be needed, since the last enemy has been conquered and brought down? Nor will He any longer rule them as Mediator, for the Kingdom will be God's. However, the feeling of eternal gratitude to the Lamb of God who has redeemed them through His blood, does not disappear. Rather, once salvation is consummated, gratitude will rise to its highest level.

Nevertheless, forever being with the Lord does have another significance at this stage. Being present with Jesus will then be completely absorbed in membership in His holy Body of which He is the blessed Head. The redeemed elect will rejoice eternally in the majesty of their God, but not as a group of individuals with each

one being on his own. They will form a race, a family of the re-born children of mankind. They will constitute the community and congregation. They will stand before God as a renewed humanity, organically one. One body. In that mystical and holy body, they will be united member to member, and all members united together through their unity under the eternal blessed Head. According to God's holy ordinance, each member is bonded with that Head, never again to be separated from Him. They will be in an inspired life bond with that blessed Head from eternity to eternity. Only in that Head they will truly feel themselves redeemed. *And thus they will always be with the Lord.*

Chapter 37*

United with Him in One Plant

*If we have been united with Him in His death,
we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection.*

Romans 6:5

There is much conversation in both pious discussion and in Scripture about the "other side of the grave," a subject also occasionally mentioned in these meditations, but the contents of the two differ widely. In the discussions, all too often the topic is about the deceased or one about to de cease; in Scripture it is all about the central point of Christ. This is not an absolute distinction. The Mediator is definitely mentioned in the discussions, while Scripture definitely deals with those who passed away or are struggling with passing. Nevertheless, the general rule holds, with discussions mostly referring to people and Scripture placing Christ more in the foreground.

Perhaps the distinction can be expressed even sharper: Even gravestone inscriptions can differ from Scripture. Reformed gravestones tend to be sober and in general the texts of true believers in the Saviour more scriptural. But when you move over to wider circles and study the inscriptions on gravestones in church cemeteries in large cities, then it is remarkable how little one reads of the "victory over the death and grave," and almost only of the person who remained behind.

In the discussions and on the gravestones, it can safely be said that the emotional issue of seeing the departed again strongly treads to the foreground, while, to the contrary, Scripture hardly talks of seeing each other again. The idea of seeing the departed again raises all kinds of other questions. Will our departed know about us? Are they still praying for us? Would they notice at all that we here on earth are preoccupied with them? Can they still do anything for us or we for them? Or is the bond that used to unite us cut and we have nothing further to do with each other?

Anyone touching upon this subject may be sure that the departed listens to her. This issue is largely the source of the cult of Spiritism. Even though a very influential person may heartlessly mock such questions, it remains true that we find it difficult to avoid such inscriptions on our gravestones. It is so human!

Still, Holy Scripture does not encourage this practice and does not feed into this tendency, certainly not in the New Testament and only vaguely in the Old. This was remarkable with Israel, because it developed as a nation in Egypt, where the culture of the grave, more than among any other people, played a rich role. Caring for the grave in Egypt was more important than caring for the house they lived in during their lifetime.

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Only once did Jesus touch upon a question related to the “seeing again” issue. It was about the woman who in a levirate situation married seven brothers successively. Jesus was asked to whom this woman will be married at the resurrection of the dead. He gave little support to the hope of “seeing again.” Rather, He summarily cut off all thought that such earthly relations would continue after death. True, the parable of “Lazarus and the rich man” speaks of an immediate recognition of each other after both had died, but here also that bond in the past had fallen away and their relationship inverted.

In Apostolic writings you literally find no word on the subject, in spite of the fact that Paul deals repeatedly and expansively with what we can expect after death. What is most striking is that even in Revelation, where the full joy of eternal life is painted in vivid colours, not a single mention is made about “seeing again.” You find nothing about “seeing again” taken in its natural and tender sense of

continuing the intimate love relationship on earth that ties a man to a woman, mother to child, sister to brother, and friend to friend.

There is a gap from which you cannot deduce that there will be no recognition or meeting up again. You will find this nowhere. There is a remarkable silence that cannot be explained as an error or forgetfulness, but is astonishing that when thinking about the other side of the grave, to move our beloved departed is moved to second place. We need to follow what Scripture places at the forefront, namely, your bond not to your deceased but to Jesus.

Think of the man who first wanted to bury his father before following Christ. Jesus responded, “Let the dead bury their dead; you proclaim the Kingdom of God.” Not just here but even over the grave, it is, “If you love your father or mother more than Me, you are not worthy of Me.”

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For the holy Apostle all concepts of heavenly joy are summarized as this, “And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). However, this must not be understood too physically. It will not be in the form of large groups like the five thousand who were fed bread on the shore of the Lake of Galilee. Nor will it be like an intimate togetherness like that of the disciples with Jesus in the upper room. This “always being with Jesus” is said of all the redeemed. How can that multitude of millions upon millions of the elect that no one can count be with Jesus in that way, not just for one hour, but always, from eternity to eternity? The innumerability of the multitude and the endlessness of being together, exclude that.

We do not deny the personal relationship, for it reads emphatically “to be with Jesus” as well as “that we will see Him as He is.” However, there is no doubt that we must backtrack here to the organic relationship between Jesus and those who belong to Him, to being incorporated in His mystical Body, to being one plant with Him in the root of life. The Scripture is actually full of this.

He is the Vine and we, the branches. He is the Head and we the members of His Body. He is the good Shepherd and we the sheep in his pasture. He is the Groom and His entire congregation together, the bride. He is the spirit of the Resurrection that triumphed in Him, pulling the entire body of His believers along. He is our

King and we, His people. He is our High Priest and we the tribes who march onto Zion. He is our heavenly commander and we his soldiers who gather under His holy banner. He is the second Adam and we the family of His holy generation. To fully express this all in its deep organic meaning: “We are all one plant with Him who on Patmos called Himself ‘the root of David.’”

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Behind and under this personal relationship with Christ as the central focus of our desires and the best friend of our heart, there lies that life bond, that organic life unity with the Son of Man. The vine, the plant has a root and out of that root emerge the stem and branches from which the twigs bud forth. From those twigs the foliage comes forth and finally the ripe fruit. Though there is a long distance between the upper twigs and the roots, all the nutritious sap always comes from those roots far below. Should the root die, all branches and twigs, all leaves and blossom shrivel. And that’s how our lives hang on the life of Jesus.

The finest fibers of our being connect us to Jesus. When we separate from Him even for a moment, our lives shrivel as well. Our entire life comes from Him and we can never keep our lives except in Him. That is already the case here, but it proceeds even stronger in eternity. To think of ourselves in eternity for even one moment as separate from Him is absurd. We will be like a beautiful cedar of Lebanon, with each redeemed one of the ten thousand leaves on its branches. That entire cedar stands on its roots and, sucking its life from that root, every fiber holds fast to that root. That is how we will always be with Jesus.

That holds for the image of the plant as well as for the image of the one Body. The life of the Body and every member of that Body hangs on the life of the Head, is led, governed, protected and moved by the Head. Every member feels its own life only through its consciousness of the Head. It is the richest, the most absolute unity that can be thought of. Only in, around and through the head each member of the body has its reason for being, for existing.

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Already at baptism we talk of being incorporated in Christ. Later, out of that comes our personal, our conscious, our Jesus-knowing faith, through which faith we give ourselves and others account of our personal conversion to Jesus. Our relationship with Jesus comes out of that root unity, but it becomes personal. That is how our

love for Jesus sprouts up and the mysticism of our intimate communion with Jesus in our soul comes about.

There you have it again: “always being with Jesus,” but now in another mystical consciousness and at a higher level. That mystical relationship shall continue into eternity. We shall see Him as He is and our joy will be in the Lamb. Here on earth everyone can only guess the means of communion to which the findings of science can point us from afar, but that will finally be revealed in eternity.

As long as you keep this at the forefront, then you can talk about “seeing again.” For all the parts of the plant have mutual relationships and all the parts that belong to one single body stand in mutual relationship with each other. But now it is seeing each other again, not on the lapping waters of sentimentality, but much higher, much more serious, in the communion of saints!

Chapter 38* **Following the Lamb**

*These are those who did not defile themselves
with women, for they kept themselves pure.
They follow the Lamb wherever He goes.
They were purchased from among men
and offered as first fruits to God.
Revelation 14:4*

The Apostle Paul talks of a holy blessedness that all who die in Jesus experience in “always being with the Lord.” In the visions on Patmos great emphasis is placed on close communion with the Mediator. It is said of the most glorified, “They follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Revelation 14:4). It cannot be denied that this introduces a distinction between two groups of redeemed. The 144,000 referred to in this chapter are the “first fruits” who receive a richer reward and, therefore, receive an unusual glory. It is they who with purity and depth robustly sing the song of the Lamb like no one else can sing it. Does it not say of the 12X12,000 that they sing as with the voice of many waters as well as the voice of players of the cither who sing a new song before the Throne? Then there is added, “No one

could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth” (Revelation 14:3). Are they not called the redeemed out of the first fruits of God and the Lamb? It is declared of them that they have not defiled themselves sexually or with lies. These are they who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.

Attempts to do away with all distinctions in glory and to suggest that all departed enjoy equal levels of glory do not hold water in Scripture. Jesus Himself expressed the basic principle that His Father would reward publicly what was done and thought in godly manner in the quiet hidden places of life. He repeatedly made mention of a great reward in heaven. And the Apostle Paul declared that the righteous Judge would reward everyone according to what they have done in the body. He who has forsaken much for Jesus’ sake, shall he not receive more in eternity?

Salvation is for all, but the degree of glory depends on who demonstrated stronger faith; his reward will be higher. One of the signs of this higher degree is reserved for those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. All redeemed will always be with the Lord, but there will nevertheless be, as among the disciples, a broader and a narrower circle of communion with the Lord. The nearest to Jesus in glory will be those who have lived the closest to the Saviour here on earth in faith, love and life.



Your relationship to Jesus on earth is thus the measure for your relationship with Him up there above. It is only in that relationship with Jesus that the departed can find each other. So, there will be a “seeing again” and finding each other, but in a totally different relationship. We already know that transition here on earth. Classmates at school can find each other later as draftees in the army or as sailors on the same ship or as members on the same board. Even then the old camaraderie is still there but on a very different footing and relationship. Now the new circumstance sets the tone in different relationships.

We experience that even when we move from town to town. You may have lived in a town for three years and associated regularly on a friendly basis with those of your own social class. But if you move a few times and twenty years later you meet one of your old friends, you will recognize each other, but your relationship

is new and different. In the meantime, you have become more mature and he has also developed further, but in different ways. The new relationship between you two will show traces of that change.

So it is also with “seeing again” in heaven. How you have lived together in Jesus on earth remains, but everything else falls away. You can only find each other again in a new relationship of communion, if you both are rich in Jesus.

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Thus the earthly bond is replaced by a heavenly spiritual bond, and that bond can only be Jesus. Two who see each other again are both members of the Body of Christ, and the place they occupy in that Body determines the relationship they now have with each other.

Here on earth, there are many other factors that influence your relationship with people, such as family bonds, place of residence and employment, material interest, similarity of character, and so much more, but definitely not *only* your bond with Jesus. Often within the family, the bond with Jesus can be very loose or even missing altogether. It is even possible that two who both died in Jesus, but never had fellowship with each other in Jesus, even though they had much contact with each other as, for example, at work.

We do not claim that the bond we will have in heaven with Jesus is totally outside of the natural bond of soul to soul or of character to character. The difference and similarity of character and of sense flows forth from God’s creation system and thus has permanent value. Certainly, it will remain in effect in heaven. But even that connection can exist in the Kingdom of Glory only in Jesus, while here on earth it so often comes out in things other than faith fellowship.

It can be that this natural relationship between two persons can lead to marriage, but it is also possible that the bond of blood between parents and children turns into a spiritual bond. Should it be that this marriage bond based on spiritual sympathy, or the bond between parents and children was weaved in Jesus, then, of course, this bond will remain effective also in eternity. However, this is never possible because of marriage or blood only, but in Jesus and only under the

influence of their personal relationship that existed according to creation ordinances.

What we must guard against is thus not homesickness for that “seeing again,” but against that desire to see each other again *because of* and *in* earthly bonds. Every desire to see each other again other than in Jesus goes against the demand of faith.

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Pay attention also to the fact that your social circle in the Kingdom of Glory is so much more and greater than that here below. Here you have socialized with the saints of one generation, but there you will be in the general congregation of the redeemed, in the broad circle of the generations who were before you and those still to come after you. Here you have lived with the saints of a single town, city or country. There it will be a society of all those purchased by the blood of the Lamb from all nations, tribes and tongues. Here, according to the limitations of this dispensation, you have lived in one city with thousands of those purchased by the Lord, but your more intimate fellowship was only with a few, say a dozen, twenty, hardly ever exceeding a hundred. There it will be a perfect community, a crowd, a host that no one can count.

Is it so unthinkable that among those saints of all ages and all nations up in the Father’s House you find people who are closer to you spiritually, with whom you have a more intimate relationship than the few with whom you socialized here on earth? And is it then not obvious that this “seeing again” of a few individuals recedes to the background compared to that much richer choice?

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Following the Lamb wherever He goes remains the highest, the most important. Therefore, every relationship with your fellow redeemed must remain subordinate to your relationship with the Lamb of God. That’s why the death of a child of God is called in Scripture “dying in Jesus.” That means to be found in Jesus at the moment of death. It is dying as a member of the Body of Christ. It is to enter death as one incorporated in Him; as one who cannot be thought of outside of Christ; as one who is inseparable from Jesus forever. So, naturally there exists a fellowship between all who ever died in Jesus, for it is and remains one Body, one Head eternally. But also in that Body, the mutual relationship among the members is not determined by the relationship they had on earth, but primarily by the place they

occupy in the Body of Jesus. Now this *could* coincide with your earthly relationships, but it could also be totally different. That is the reason Scripture points us not to seeing each other again, but always to seeing Jesus, for all “seeing again” must remain subordinate to seeing Jesus.

Chapter 39* **Baptized for the Dead**

*What will those do who are baptised for the dead?
If the dead are not raised at all,
why are people baptised for them?
Why do we endanger ourselves every hour?
1 Corinthians 15:29-30*

After the earthly remains of your departed has been buried, can you still do anything for her? Especially during the first days of mourning, the pressure to do something is strong. It is so strong that we often create the impression that more love is shown to the deceased than to the living.

The focus here is not first of all on the grave cult. That is something that has little to do with the deceased, but is much more an attempt to seek satisfaction and quietness for our own grief. That various incentives can spur us on is demonstrated by the “building of the graves of the prophets.” That grave cult has its origin primarily in sentiment. Having to separate but not being able, often expresses itself in emotionally clinging to the grave.

A strong contrast to the above is the inclination to love in one who still wants to do something beneficial for the departed. Especially in certain Reformed circles this impulse to express love is often judged too harshly. May those outside that community not in turn judge this Reformed coldness too harshly! Everything here depends on the serious question whether we can still add anything to the eternal bliss of our deceased after their death.

People have suffered delusions here in two directions. On the one hand, there is the belief in purgatory; on the other hand, there is the belief in the possibility of conversion after death. The purgatory doctrine rests on the belief that the believer desires forgiveness, and feels the obligation to do temporal penance, which if she did not do so during her life, has to be done after death. In addition, it is believed that the prayers and good works of the living can benefit those who are in purgatory. Also, the sacrifice of the Mass possesses reconciling power not only for the living but also for the dead.

This is not according to the Reformed creeds. We confess that Christ's sacrifice is a complete and final sacrifice. Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Justified by faith, we have peace with God. In dying, the Holy Spirit affects the grace of complete sanctification. Thus the afore-mentioned incentive must not motivate us. But can we not understand that those who so think and believe are driven by love for their departed in order to shorten and mitigate their suffering on the other side of the grave?

The same holds for those who think conversion after death possible. Take a child, a much loved woman, or a friend to whom one clings, who dies without Jesus. Imagine that such a one can still convert after her death in eternity. Believe that God's grace must help her in this situation. You further confess that your prayer can move the heart of the Compassionate One towards that end. In such a situation, of course, believers, the mother for her child, the wife for her husband, the friend for her friend—all of them will make every sacrifice to ensure deceased's conversion and therewith promote her eternal salvation.

We may not go along with all this. The die is cast *here*, not on the other side of the grave. What you are at your latest breath, you remain for eternity. But were it otherwise, that we *could* still help the departed who died outside of Jesus, there would be no love in us if we did not act upon it. The Apostle Paul acknowledges this so fully that he does not come down hard on those who had themselves baptized on behalf of the dead. Rather, he appeals to their sure faith in the resurrection of the dead.

We do not stop to explain this passage. Delaying baptism till one's death was a commonplace custom for a long time. The reason for this delay was the thought that in baptism all prior sins would be forgiven. The delay often led to skipping baptism altogether in case of sudden unexpected death. Hence, another person would be baptized on behalf of the departed, expecting it to be valid for the latter. We do not judge this. Our only purpose is to point out that Paul, referring to this custom, restricted himself to drawing attention to the motive that drove this practice.¹⁴ Should we call it a lack that, because of our official creed(s), this demonstration of love is foreign to us? There is no need for that. Less so if you notice how this demonstration of love for the deceased often leads to failure of love for the living. If you are deluded into thinking that, after your child dies, you can still promote her conversion, it often leads to failure to encourage conversion of the child during her lifetime. Furthermore, when you think that one can complete sanctification after death, it can easily lead to reduce the seriousness of sanctification during this life.

The more absolute one draws the borderline between this life and eternal life, the more the decision that takes place at death becomes unchangeable and the more serious this side of the grave becomes. We won't even deal with the abuse to which that principle has led. Money has also played its evil role here. It allegedly will gain you a Mass, a means of redeeming our departed. We are familiar with the materialism that has crept into this custom, but won't go into details here. We only pay attention to the more noble side associated with it, namely the desire to do something beneficial for the salvation of our deceased.

The concept above is totally meaningless for us, because the decision at death is irrevocable and the process of sanctification at the death of those who fall asleep in Jesus is completed. Still, the question remains: Can we not do something for our departed, if not for their salvation, then perhaps something else that might benefit them. We never seem to sufficiently linger on this question.

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We will not forget our deceased. They will continue to live in our memory. The place they occupy in our heart must not be replaced too soon by all sorts of other

¹⁴ This paragraph is a footnote on p. 164 of the original.

issues. A poet sang about “The Empty Chair.” Why not about the empty spot in our hearts?

And yet, in our day forgetting sometimes comes all too fast. The apostle speaks of widows, who suffer from a condition of deep widowhood that in our twenty-first century (unlike in Kuyper’s day), is becoming more rampant. We talk of orphans, but mostly in the sense of their bereavement, their loneliness and helplessness, but all too seldom of their orphaned heart. Many orphans do not even know about mourning.

In a translation of the versified Psalm 103, the Psalmist sings of the dead, “We no longer even know and find their place .” With him this refers to a much later time long after dying, but it grabs us frequently within a year after death. This tendency to forget goes contrary to the love, the dependence, and the tenderness of our emotions. True, we know nothing about “all souls,” but there are those for whom a tender reminder of their departed would not be a superfluous luxury.

Not forgetting is not enough. We can still often do so much for our dead. We can defend their honour and good reputation over against misunderstanding and slander, or complete an unfinished work left behind so that the influence they enjoyed, continues. Post-mortem debt can be paid off and alms they used to give can be continued as if they still lived. Attempts can be made to reduce the bitterness that may have shot up between them and their community. Their name and memory needs to be held in honour. We might desire that after our death people would do all these things for us. Thus, in life and in death, according to the rule of holy love, “What you want others to do to you, so you do also.”

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There is also a thinking about our deceased that is different from not forgetting. Not forgetting refers to their past life here. It is like missing them anew in our earthly life, thinking how it would be if they were still here. But thinking about our departed means exercising sympathy and living along in the circumstance wherein they now find themselves. It means to think of them no longer as persons who were there once, but as anointed ones as they live now up there, above, with the Saviour. This is not to lure an appearance or to imagine visions or faces. The

community life in that sense can no longer be continued after death. But we *can* engage with them by imagining them in their current redeemed condition, such as enjoying the joy they taste or sensing the high status to which they have risen. This does not mean suppression of our grief but, for their sake, lifting yourself up into the joy of their salvation.

This is not to pray for them. There is nothing left for which to pray. They lack nothing. Praying for them would make it appear they lacked something that could come to them through our prayers. But something very different would be that they might and must live in our prayers.

Your prayer is not merely asking or supplication. It is also a lifting up of the soul in worship, lifting your heart up to the above, out of the mist of this somber life to the sunshine of God's Father's House. As Scripture puts it, it is also walking or standing among those who are standing near God (Zechariah 3:7). In our prayer we are not looking up to an empty heaven, but a heaven with all the thousands of God's angels, full with Seraphim and Cherubim, where there is a meeting of all the redeemed, the Zion that is above, where God appears in His blinding beauty.

It is there that our sanctified imagination finds them back, those who once served the Lord with us here, and who have now fallen asleep in Jesus. That's how we think of them before the Throne of Glory. That is how their image appears in and for us, as the eye of our soul opens to the spiritual contemplation of heaven. That is where the continuation of the soul's communal life takes place, but a communal life from which all the earthly trappings have fallen away.

Chapter 40*

Unknown to Abraham and Israel

*But You are our Father,
though Abraham does not know us
or Israel acknowledge us;
You, O Lord, are our Father,
our Redeemer from of old is Your Name.*

Take note of the discussion in the former meditation about someone having died. We asked whether we who are still here, can do anything for our departed as well as whether the departed can do anything for us here. This depends largely on the possibility of whether they can know anything about our lot and about what is going on in our heart. It is especially Spiritism cult that has brought these sensitive questions to the fore. But also in past ages the spirit of the bereaved and the mourners have sought for answers to these questions. In some Reformed circles, people have clamped on to the prayer in Isaiah 63:16, where we find this decisive statement, “Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; You, O Lord, are our Father; our Redeemer from of old is Your Name.”

We have to be careful not to deduce more from this than it means. When Isaiah prayed this prayer, Abraham and Jacob, another name for Israel, had already died centuries ago. Here on earth, neither Abraham nor Jacob ever knew Isaiah or any of his contemporaries. Thus there was no knowledge based on memories. It is decisively declared here that the deceased do not know anything about the circumstances of persons whom they had not known on earth. However, it by no means follows from this that they cannot share their life with the community on earth that did know them, with their contemporaries.

It would be possible to say that in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus attributed knowledge on the part of Abraham about the lot of persons on earth who lived much later. In that parable, Abraham shows he knows how totally different the lives of the rich man and of Lazarus were here on earth. It is sometimes argued that Isaiah’s text is not a word from God, but a complaint from a human being, who could have made a mistake. Whatever, the word of Jesus must weigh much heavier with us. According to Isaiah’s complaint, Abraham knows nothing about us, but in that parable Abraham knows our entire life story. The truth here is not in Isaiah’s complaint but in what Jesus taught.

But this goes too far. Jesus is speaking here in parables. That parable, according to what we read about Abraham’s lap, was borrowed from the image the Jews had at the time. No one would go so far as to expect that Lazarus after his death would sit

on Abraham's lap. The expectation after death by the Jews of that time would be directed to Abraham. Ours would not go to the old Patriarch, but to "being with Jesus." We only know that Isaiah's complaint refers only to not knowing about those we have not known on earth. It has nothing to do with observing after our death, what their life was like or about those with whom we shared our love and weal on earth.

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Scripture provides no light on this question. We cannot deduce anything from the story about the witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:4-25), since this is about treachery and superstition. Same with the story about the recognition of King Nebuchadnezzar by his defeated enemies in the vision of Isaiah 14:12, "How you have fallen, Oh morning star." It gives no conclusive answer, for the meaning of such a vision may never be placed on par with history.

It is difficult to accept that such questions were not raised in the time of Jesus and the apostles, but no revelation is given us in this regard in any of the epistles, not even in the Revelation of John. We may deduce from this that the Lord does not want us to spend too much time on these stories, reveries and musings.

All we are left with is making deductions from the facts at hand. We can definitely conclude that knowledge about what happens to us on earth is highly unlikely for those asleep in Jesus. After dying, our deceased remain limited creatures with restricted horizons. They are not omniscient. Even our Saviour would not have omniscient knowledge about us, if it were not for His divine nature. Question 47 in the Heidelberg Catechism makes this sharp distinction as well, "With respect to His human nature, He is no more on earth; but with respect to His Godhead, majesty, grace and Spirit, He is at no time absent from us." The second part of this quotation cannot be said of those who died in Jesus and can thus not be applied to them. Since knowledge about what happens to us and in us would require omniscience. There is a border here that we may not weaken.

There is still something else. Even though our departed miss the full glory till Jesus' return, they have entered salvation immediately. We have only to think of Jesus' "Today, you shall be with me in Paradise."

Would it be consistent with the above to think that our departed would know about our suffering and our sin? If they constantly struggle along with our fears and their hearts shrink when we fall into sin, and with their hearts being attuned to finer and more intimate love, would they still experience celestial bliss? Do remember that that black spot in our soul appears not only during our coarser sins, but it affects us daily throughout our sinful life. With the finer consciousness of holiness on the part of our departed, it would be a steady fountain of pity and annoyance.

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On the grounds of the above, it must be seriously doubted that our departed have knowledge of what occurs to and in us on earth after their death. Another question is whether the life of memory continues in them. When you travel to far countries and in remote areas, you may feel cut off from all the fellowship you had at home, but the life of imagination and memory of your loved ones at home, continues. In that sense it might be possible that our departed in their redeemed life above, carry us with them in their memories.

But this should not be considered in an earthly sense. A separation has taken place for them, the degree of which they had not known on earth. Their entire life there is governed by Christ as their centre. What is opposed to Christ is cut off from their love; only what belongs to Christ enthralls them. Thus there must also have been a separation in the consciousness of their memory life. Those they left behind and are in Christ, or who have been drawn to Him through the bond of election, their love for those left behind continues and it increases in intimacy. But the reverse is also true. For those who lack that bond in Christ, the love of the departed for them would go against Christ's grain. And so it may be suspected that where there is that bond with Christ, the continuation in the memory of those they left behind on earth, is there, but it is cut off for all others. That is the only way that their memories will not bring disturbance in their redeemed life. It *might* increase their bliss, if they hear jubilation among God's angels over converted sinners, especially if they are told that this sinner was their child or someone else close to them.

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If, apart from that distinction, there were a continuation in the memory, then there would not be a single ground why those who died in Jesus would not pray for those they left behind. Jesus prays for us; He lives to pray for us. The certainty of our

salvation does not exclude that prayer above. His prayer in heaven is nothing else than to express His love for His redeemed, in His fellowship with the Father.

However, it appears that Scripture does not want that we seek a fulcrum in our heart in the prayers of our redeemed. We would have more revealed about it. The fulcrum of our heart, the anchor of our hope, lies only in Jesus' prayer, and not in the prayer of angels or of the redeemed who have preceded us.

But if our heart is shielded against the above and it continues to base its hope only on the Redeemer, then the thought is sweet that, as the angels are sent out to serve us, carrying us into heaven when we pass away, so also our departed who have preceded us, keep thinking about us with full holy love, as their souls pour themselves out to the God of all mercy.

Chapter 41* **Nobody Praising You from the Grave**

*No one remembers You when he is dead.
Who praises You from the grave?
Psalm 6:5*

The tumultuous nineteenth century ignored what happens to us after we die. The thinking during that century about what follows death started with doubt, then moved on to unbelief and ended at an increasingly decisive denial.¹⁵ A broad circle of scholars decided that dying is nothing but sinking back into the void from which we came. As far as the broad multitude of brave good citizens who are horrified by everything that smells of piety is concerned, even they would shrink back if there were no longer anything said about God and immortality. When there was a death, they still wanted to hear about God at the cemetery. However, neither clarification of concepts or other related developments could take place, because neither their thinking nor their speaking about eternal things belonged to their culture.

¹⁵ Kuyper was part of that process as an avowed liberal until his conversion, after which his theological world turned upside down to decisively affirm what he previously decisively denied.

Only among confessing Christians in that same century there was further development of *our* concepts. Especially those espousing millennialism gave this a push. Even though it by no means affected *all* confessing Christians, we may gratefully acknowledge that there was a revival of a silent consciousness of what was to come after dying. This held not only for the judgement, but also for the Kingdom of Glory that would only break through after the Judgement Day.

And so a distinction is made again between the circumstances of those who fall asleep in Jesus from the hour of their dying till Jesus' return, and that wholly other circumstance that will come when the dead shall rise from their graves, the judgment commences and after that the full development of glory.

For years, people had been weaned from all this. After dying, it was thought that the soul has reached full bliss and if there was bliss, what more could one want? It was understood that somewhere along the line the world would end. Then there would be a judgement, but that was only for the godless, not for the souls already redeemed. After the judgment, the life of bliss in the Father's House would continue in heaven as it had begun right after dying. All that Scripture reveals about the return of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, the Judgement Day and what follows, all of it had lost its hold on the heart. All of that would indeed take place, but for those not asleep in Jesus, it did not have any special meaning. For those in Christ it would be eternal and full bliss of the life of the soul. This was all contradictory, but that's how it was. In exaggerated spirituality, they would only think about the soul and what would happen to it. Yes, that soul remained blissfully in the Father's House, but forever separated from the body.

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You may know what the doctrine of "soul sleep" involved in the past, a teaching against which Calvin wrote one of his first books. According to the popular idea, the time would come in which all in their graves would hear the voice of Jesus and be resurrected; those who had done well, to the resurrection of life, and those who did evil, to the resurrection of damnation.

That's how allegedly all those who had died rest in their graves till the day of resurrection and then wake up from the grave at the end of the world. The soul, so it was thought, could until that day exist in no other circumstance than we could

imagine by thinking of our state of sleeping. The body no longer counts. We hear nothing; we see nothing; we hardly move about; the soul has withdrawn into itself. O, the soul is engaged alright, but only in dreams. All clear consciousness is lacking and no action flows out of it. It does not labour and does not exert itself. It knows nothing, wills nothing and does nothing. That's what was called "soul sleep," an unconscious and blank condition that would allegedly last into eternity, but that, according to some, would break off when the voice of Jesus was heard over the graves.

This conception of "soul sleep," was supported by appeals to Scripture. The Psalmist would constantly urge prayer for rescue from death. In death there would be no memory. To name but one example, David exclaimed in Psalm 6:4-5, "Turn, O Lord, and deliver me; save me because of Your unfailing love. No one remembers You when he is dead. Who praises You from the grave?" These are statements that are unthinkingly ignored, but they are there and even frequently repeated.

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That such statements in the Bible do not refer to doubting immortality, as some pretend, is sufficiently shown by what the same David sang in Psalm 16:10-11, "You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will You let Your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand." He further confesses in Psalm 17:14-15 that "the men of this world have their reward in this life," but that he knew he would awaken and then see God's face in righteousness, satisfied with seeing His likeness. In Psalm 73:23-24 Asaph sang, "I am always with You; You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will take me into glory."

But this is also written, "No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave?" (Psalm 6:5). What does this mean? Insight into this passage depends fully on the acknowledgement of God's ordinance in creation. Those who have peace with the idea of a bare "soul life" after death and have no homesickness for something else or more, go against that ordinance.

That ordinance about humans is not that, like angels, we exist only spiritually, but that we, having a status above angels, have a dual existence; on the one hand spiritual and hidden; on the other, physical and external. It is only when we live according to that ordinance that we live as full human beings. A person who exists only as soul but lacks body and thus has no visible world around her, is halved and as such maimed. From a duality she has become unitary; she misses her other part. This is what brings death. This is the reason that death is totally overcome through the resurrection of the body. This is also the reason that for angels, whether fallen or not, there *can* be no death or dying.

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If all of the above is so, then you can understand that you stand before your God in a dual service as a person. On the one hand, you are to love God, honour and serve Him in the spiritual hiddenness of your soul. On the other hand, you are to confess, to love and serve Him so that others can hear and see it, that is, in your external. It is not as if your body is doing this, but the soul cannot miss the instrument of the body. The mute, blind and deaf already experience this extremely painful condition in this life. The mute lacks the voice to confess and praise; the deaf does not hear the jubilation of the saints.

In this sense, those who go down into the grave are mutilated. They temporarily separate from their body. Thus they become mute, blind and deaf. They live in a spiritual world like the angels, but they lack their human instrument. They have descended into the grave, have lost their external world and can no longer confess, praise and serve God according to their full humanity with both soul and body.

The children of this age as well as most believers have little feeling for all this. The full experience of our humanity is too weakened for this. We have sunk too deeply into a one-sided spiritualism. God's creation ordinance about our humanity does not speak strongly enough to us. But someone like psalmist David, who possessed this consciousness fully, clearly and powerfully, was consumed by homesickness and therefore complained, "Who, O Lord, will praise You in the grave?"

All of this is also meaningful for us. If you remain hung up in a one-sided soul life, then, once you have deceased, all this will be meaningless for you—the return of Jesus, the resurrection of the body, and the new world that is to come. This will

be immaterial to you. Neither will you experience homesickness in your heart. Then you don't realize how only through all of this your salvation as human being will be completed.

However, if that homesickness revives again in your heart, the knowledge of finding your place in the Father's House prepared will console you, but that is not the end of it for you. Then the eye of your soul peers further and further to the last day that is coming, to that illustrious day, when you will love, honour, praise and serve God as a full human being with both soul and body. You will do that spiritually in the secret of your soul as well as in the external new world that will then finally unlock itself for you.

Chapter 42* **Like His Glorious Body**

*Who, by the power that enables Him
to bring everything under His control,
will transform our lowly bodies
so that they will be like His glorious body.
Philippians 3:21*

“For a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28-29). So, there is not only a continuation of our soul's existence after death, but one day there will also be a resurrection of the flesh or body. A complete person requires the existence of both soul and body. For that last occurrence we have the most sure promise given by Christ Himself and from Christ through His apostles: The resurrection of the flesh will come; the grave shall be overcome.

All those who died in Jesus will receive their body back, but not as it was taken from them by death, but much richer, more beautiful and glorious; it will be a body that fits the soul of the redeemed. The Apostle Paul declared the following to the church at Philippi: “But our citizenship (“*wandel*” in Kuyper or “walk”) is in

heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body” through the working of which He can subject all things to Himself (Philippians 3:20-21).

It is not as if the resurrection applies only to those who died in Jesus. All who are in the grave will one day hear the voice of Jesus and will arise out of the grave. There is a resurrection to life, but also—O, how terrible a thought—to condemnation. However, for now we may leave those who died without being incorporated in Christ aside. They do not belong when we contemplate the resurrection in the *glorified* body. That will only be for those who died in Jesus. It is for the greybeard who found that justification through faith and peace with his God, but also for the just opening flower that died in the crib without ever having stammered the “loving Name of Jesus.”

The physical remains of all of us will one day become victim to the grave, regardless of whether it is buried in the ground or cremated or even if engulfed by the depth of the sea or devoured in the mouth of a lion. Only those who will experience the return of Christ here on earth will enter eternity without descending into the grave. But however our dying or different our grave, for all those incorporated in Jesus, there is that unshakable promise that one day the Lord Jesus Christ will do a miracle with our bodies. That will be a miracle through the divine energy wherewith God subjects all things to Himself. The miracle is that their humiliated body shall be made like the glorified body with which Christ Himself is sitting at the right hand of God.

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The mystery of the resurrection of the body has from the days of St. Augustine elicited little excitement in the Church of Christ. It has been confessed throughout the ages, also in our official creedal documents, but it has not always grabbed us, was not further developed and filled neither heart nor head. The Belgic Confession devotes only the following words to it in (the last) Article 37: “For all the dead shall be raised out of the earth and their souls joined and united with their proper bodies in which they formerly lived.” Not even a single word is spilled about the glorification of the body. The Heidelberg Catechism gives more in answers 45 and

57, but even there it is only a simple explanation. All proportion with Scripture here is totally lacking.

In Scripture this mystery of the glorification of the body is given broader treatment than many other mysteries. The Apostle Paul especially gives a broad treatment at the forefront in his writings to the churches of Corinth, Philippi and Thessalonica. That miracle is presented to us in the story of glorification on Mount Tabor. It is also shown to us in the appearances of Christ to Paul on the Damascus Road and on the Isle of Patmos.

It would profit the Church to occupy itself more than the Church of the Reformation did with this wonderful mystery. It is a sign of the times that as the unbelieving world condemned with increasing recklessness all concepts regarding life after death as mere pious fabrication, believing Christianity has done little to defend the immortality of the soul or the resurrection of the body. In the past, people had made a kind of peace with the immortality of half the person, but currently, on basis of the Scripture, faith demands the same for the *complete* person for eternity, both soul and body.

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But even so, it remains a mystery. It is not the vision of the Valley of the Dead in Ezekiel 37 that may guide us in our thoughts on the subject, but only the apostolic revelation of 1 Corinthians 15. Flesh and blood, that is to say, the earthly materials that compose our body here, will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Those materials are actually not our real body. You can deduce that from the fact that from crib to grave our bodies remain the same, while the materials that compose our flesh and blood change restlessly without ceasing. Every so many years it is a complete change so that in the body of a mature person there is not a single drop of blood and not a single fleshly fiber left of what back then was laid in the crib. Thus, resurrection of “the flesh” cannot mean the same as what is called “flesh and blood” elsewhere. Rather, it is the visible form of our human being in contrast to the spiritual existence of the soul.

A plant gives us the clearest idea here. When the winter cold arrives, many plants completely die above ground, so that only a bulb stays in the ground. But when in the spring the sun sends its nurturing beams, out of that same hidden bulb a new

form sprouts up. You can observe this with each tulip, fern crop, or hyacinth. The caterpillar stays the same being even if it loses its caterpillar form and comes out in a more glorious form as butterfly.

That we have good reason to pay attention to those signs in nature is shown by Paul himself in his writing to the Corinthians. He points us to the grain that falls into the earth and then dies. After death, it receives a new body from God, but it comes out of that earlier grain kernel.

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Similarly, there was a germ in the seed of your body. Your body grew up out of that germ, from material that first came out of the mother's blood, then from the mother's milk and after that from absorbing air, drink and food. At death, all that had flourished out of that germ must again wither, but the germ itself remains. No one can find or point to that germ of your body in your grave, but God saves it until the hour of Jesus' return on the clouds. Once that hour comes upon us, then Jesus sanctifies and changes the germ of our body and causes it to shoot out and blossom anew as the hyacinth shoots out and blossoms again once the winter sleep is past. Thus there develops a much more glorious body in which soul and body are reunited.

Thus the same body, but different. It flourished out of that one and the same body germ that you received from God at your conception, but this time out of purer material and in more glorious form. If you read what John saw in that glorified body of Jesus on Patmos, you can imagine the glorified body in which the resurrection from the dead will take place. Your body will become like that glorified body of Jesus.

The mystery does not lie in all of the above, for it all has already been clearly revealed to us. There is nothing dark or mysterious left over. The mystery is this that we cannot conjure up a picture of that germ of our body, not in our conception, nor during our earthly life and even less after death, when all the remains decay and decompose, when only that germ of the body remains and is preserved through the ages by God till Jesus' return.

That germ does not belong to the spiritual, but to the visible things, even though we lack the ability to observe it. It does not hide in the soul, which is now with God, but must hide here on earth in such a way that even the most precise of microscopes cannot find it.

Resurrection is not a descent from heaven, but a resurrection out of the earth in order then to enter a heavenly life. The wonderful Word of Jesus will do its work in the grave. The germ out of which the glorified body develops, is thus to be found on earth. It is upon this that our silent respect for the garden of the dead rests. The material remains of our departed is not only the flesh and blood that becomes the prey of worms and decays, but it is *us*, it is that mysterious germ of our body out of which one day, by the mighty Word of Jesus, that same body shall arise, but in a glorified form.

Chapter 43*

Before the Judgement Seat of Christ

*For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ,
that each one may receive that which is due him
for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.
2 Corinthians 5:10*

Those who sleep in Jesus will also come to the Last Judgement and experience it. Shortly before His suffering in Gethsemane, before He subjected Himself to the human judge and “suffered under Pontius Pilate,” Jesus drew in broad strokes before the eyes of His disciples how “All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” And then, Jesus continues, “He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on the right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world’” (Matthew 25:32-34).

All doubt or uncertainty is hereby excluded. With the entire Church on earth we also confess that Jesus “will come again to judge the living and *the dead*,” doing

that without distinction, those who died to life as well as those who died into eternal death. Article 37 of the Belgic Confession expresses this in a beautifully moving tone:

The Last Judgement

Finally, we believe, according to the Word of God, when the time appointed by the Lord (which is unknown to all creatures) is come and the number of the elect complete, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, corporally and visibly, as He ascended, with great glory and majesty to declare Himself Judge of the living and the dead, burning this old world with fire and flame to cleanse it.

Then all men will personally appear before this great Judge, whether men, women or children, that have been from the beginning of the world to the end thereof, being summoned by the voice of the archangel, and by the sound of the trump of God. For all the dead shall be raised out of the earth, and their souls joined and united with their proper bodies in which they formerly lived. As for those who shall then be living, they shall not die as the others, but be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and from corruptible become incorruptible. Then the books (that is to say, their conscience) shall be opened and the dead judged according to what they have done in this world, whether it be good or evil. Nay, all men shall give account of every idle word they have spoken, which the world only counts amusement and jest; and then the secrets and hypocrisy of men shall be disclosed and laid open before all.

And therefore the consideration of this judgement is justly terrible and dreadful to the wicked and ungodly, but most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and elect, because then their full deliverance shall be perfected, and there they shall receive the fruits of their labour and trouble which they have borne. Their innocence shall be known to all, and they shall see the terrible vengeance which God shall execute on the wicked, who most cruelly persecuted, oppressed, and tormented them in this world, and who shall be convicted by the testimony of their own conscience, and shall become immortal, but only to be tormented in the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.

But on the contrary, the faithful and elect shall be crowned with glory and honour, and the Son of God will confess their names before God His Father and His elect angels; all tears shall be wiped from their eyes; and their cause which is now condemned by many judges and magistrates as heretical and impious will then be known to the cause of the Son of God. And for the gracious reward, the Lord will cause them to possess such a glory as never entered into the heart of man to conceive.

Therefore we expect that great day with a most ardent desire, to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen, come, Lord Jesus.—Revelation 22:20.

Even young children who die early are not excluded from this. Do we not confess at the baptism of our children “that we with our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath?” How do those who talk about “innocent children,” square that with the fact that even these little children experience death? Did death not originate in sin?

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We must constantly be reminded that there is a Last Judgement on the way and that everyone of us shall appear before Christ. Therefore, it must be emphasized time and again in catechism classes, in preaching, during admonition and in meditation. This is important especially in a time when all thought of judgement, let alone the Last Judgement, dissolves it all in mist and in vague, mystical platitudes. There is no longer any serious talk of judgement or of retribution. Instead, we have various authorities to detour around it all—we seek to reform those who have made missteps; we have commissions to protect the economy; we try to render criminals harmless, and on it goes.

Is it then surprising that only a few still believe in a final judgement? Not among the deep thinkers and, of course, not among those who deny Christ; and, what’s worse, not even among many Christians. The latter spiritualize and think of the Last Judgement as giving an account in one’s own conscience. A similar thing is taking place with the doctrine of reconciliation itself. There is still talk of a

summary judgement over the catastrophic, but the judgement will allegedly not touch those reconciled in Christ.

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However, our entire Reformed confession hangs on the fact of the Judgement. If we were living a purely natural kind of life like a plant, there would be no judgement. What Jesus said of the tree without fruit that was to be eradicated was a figurative metaphor. If, in addition to that natural life, there is also a *moral* life, then it follows directly that there is also a degree of responsibility and liability. Responsibility always assumes a judge to whom you owe accountability. This accountability amounts to nothing and becomes a sham, unless it is followed by approval or disapproval.

Thus our entire condition as humans hangs on the existence or nonexistence of a judgement. It hangs or depends on the entire moral world order and on the right of God. There stands or falls the Majesty of the Lord of Lords, who both orders and judges us.

The indispensability of the judgement is so deeply graven in our heart that we ourselves restlessly judge each other's coming and going. No family has ever grown up without punishment, and we constantly judge ourselves in our conscience. And what is this judgement of ourselves other than to be judged in our conscience by God?

But even on earth this particular and personal judgement is not enough. As soon as it is about defamation or some other evil deed of a more serious nature and publicly known, we are no longer satisfied until the judgement has been announced by an authority in public. The moral world order and its inseparable justice, are not mere private hobbies, but touch everyone including the public conscience and the fundamentals of human society. When justice mishaps, so sings the psalmist, all fundamentals are overthrown. When the guilty one is acquitted, he says elsewhere, the fundamentals of the earth waver.

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When we speak of the *Last* Judgement, it is assumed that there are all kinds of prior judgements. Jesus said, "Do not judge, lest you be judged." You have not been appointed judge by God. You lack the means that the judge possesses to

investigate the misdeed. When you pretend to be a judge, you take what you do not deserve. Furthermore, because someone else fell into sin, you, who have been kept standing by grace, are not to hypocritically elevate yourself above the guilty one. He who searches the heart may well judge you more severely than you judge. If you are robed in humility, you will keep such haughtiness at a far distance.

“You who pass judgement on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgement do the same things. Now we know that God’s judgement against those who do such things is based on truth” (Romans 2:1-2). With this proviso, dutiful human judgement is manifold and takes many forms: a father’s judgement over his family, the housewife’s over her maid, the employer’s over his employee. Then there is the judgement of the public conscience over public persons, even over nations and their powerful authorities. Above all there is the judgement of the legally appointed judge, who sits on the bench to maintain justice on earth.

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All human judgement remains imperfect. We cannot fully satisfy our thirst for justice. We know that a multitude of crimes and other misdeeds are carried out in secret however cunning and smart. Should injustice go free eternally? Is it right that a person who steals a robe goes to prison, while a money wolf who robs goldmines is overloaded with honours? Furthermore, an earthly judge is fallible. Guilty ones are acquitted; the innocent are condemned, sentenced even and electrocuted. And then do not forget the martyrs who meet death on pyre or scaffold.

Must all this injustice not be avenged? Must there be no correction when a judge lets a cunning criminal free? Does not everything within you revolt against all false assertions as if all this is to continue into eternity? Does not every offended conscience scream for a sense of justice among the nations for higher and better divine institutions that one day will correct everything according to the standard of holy justice? If so, is there not a scream from the human heart for the coming of the *Last* Judgement, the judgement of God Himself, that judgment of incorruptible *Right* that cannot be squashed?

Chapter 44*

Before the Judgement Seat of Christ

*For we will all stand before God's¹⁶ judgement seat.
Romans 14:10*

The presentation of the Last Judgement with respect to those who fall asleep in Christ is not totally clear. Certain it is that the redeemed shall appear before Christ the Judge. Jesus' own depiction demonstrates it and His Apostle expresses it in so many words in Roman 14:10, when He admonishes the Christians in Rome to be tender in their relationship with their brothers and sisters and spurs them on with this motive: We will all be placed before the Judgement Seat of Christ.

It must thus not be thought as if the redeemed will act only as spectators or witnesses in the Last Judgement. Standing "before God's judgement seat" means definitely that they themselves will be subject to the judgement. In Jesus's speech about sheep and goats, there is a dual sort of sentence: acquittal for the redeemed and condemnation for those who did not seek peace in the blood of the cross.

Another opinion that seems to deviate somewhat from the above but is found just as much in Scripture, is that those who belong to Jesus shall themselves sit with Jesus as judges. Jesus proclaimed that those who followed Him will sit with Him on the throne once the hour for the regeneration of the entire world takes place, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The holy Apostle declares that we will judge the angels. On Patmos, John sees how those who were beheaded sit on thrones and how they were given to judge.

These two positions stand next to each other in Scripture. On the one hand, both unbelievers *and* believers will appear before the judgement seat of Christ as accused but will receive their sentence of acquittal and their glorious reward. On the other hand, the believers will sit with Christ as judges and take part in pronouncing the sentence.

¹⁶The NIV here names "God," but in Kuyper's version it is "Christ."

These two opinions can be reconciled only by Jesus' emphatic teaching that the sentence of acquittal of the believers shall be pronounced first and, after their acquittal is pronounced, shall sit with Him as judges to pronounce the verdict of those who died outside of Jesus.

It has been said that all this should not be taken literally. It is enough if you only understand from this that whoever falls asleep in Christ, as child of God, in union with Christ, judges the sinner, but also himself as former sinner is in need of a public acquittal. We doubt that Scripture allows this. It is in relation to the Last Judgement that the prophetic description in Holy Scripture is so sharply outlined that all figurative opinion is excluded. There will be a Last Judgement and judgement shall be held. If you weaken all this and drowse your way through it, you definitely shortchange the revelation of Scripture.

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We must be on our guard against not going too far in working this all out in our imagination. Singers and artists may have tried this, but our faith needs to keep us far from that. It is not ours to ask questions like the following. How will those innumerable millions even find a place before the tribunal? How is it possible for everyone's entire life to be revealed? How long will each court case last? How would it be possible for a sentence to be heard publicly for all? Guessing will not help us here. All that is good and useful for us to know has already been revealed, so that we must not exceed the limits of revelation. In such circumstances every relationship would be very different from the present. Every idea about what it will be then would escape us. Jesus' saying that we will give account of every idle word that we have uttered is far beyond our comprehension. And yet there is the question: Would Jesus have made such a firm declaration when in fact it would all end up in nothing?

It is the spiritualization of everything connected to the Last Judgement that is the reason many have quit regarding it as a genuine and real event, though Jesus and the Apostles applied every means to persuade us to think of it as real as we can possibly imagine.

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Are those who slept in Jesus not already justified? How then can it be that those who are exonerated are still to be judged? The answer to this objection is readily

available. The acquittal undergoes a number of stages. First, there is the acquittal in the mind of the Judge. That is the *intention* to acquit them. It is what has been called justification for eternity. It is not that later, God concludes that you must be acquitted. Neither is it that the facts on which the acquittal is to rest are known to Him later. To the contrary, all the reasons for your acquittal were already present in His eternal counsel. From eternity you are among those who will be acquitted, known to God.

Another phase in your justification is when the sentence of damnation casts you down, but now in faith declares to your soul the sentence of exoneration and is accepted by you in eternal jubilation. That is the subjective justification through faith.

Then both God and you know it, but that does not yet make it a public acquittal, which is mandatory with all sentencing. A secret sentencing of either acquittal or guilty can only be provisional. That is the reason that the *final* judgement takes place at the highest level. It does not take place in the hidden knowledge of God, nor in the hidden knowledge of faith, but within everyone's hearing, publicly, in the view of the entire world and of all angels. So, first the acquittal and then the justification through the Last Judgement decides and closes the procedure.

When God justified you in His eternal plan, over against that stood the fact that you would be conceived and born in sin. When you were justified through your faith, over against that stood the fact that the resident sin in you was not yet taken from you. It is only at the Last Judgement that you will be declared justified publicly, for all to hear, after it has cogently become clear to all that you are justified. Justified because there will be no more sin in you and because the ransom of your soul for your original sin and your actual sins will have been completed in the work of Christ as well as in the perfect fulfillment of the law by Christ that will be credited to you. So, first declared justified in God's plan and after that declared justified through faith. It is then that you will finally be recognized as justified in full view.

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And what else will be glorified in this process, but the work of God's eternal mercies in your soul and your entire being? Satan accuses you; the world accuses

you; your own conscience accuses you. How can you then be justified and expect acquittal, without God closing his eyes to your sin, thus really acquitting you against the standard of justice?

The answer to this is found in the Last Judgement. At that time it will be shown that neither satan's nor the world's accusation can be heard and that God's mercies have worked such wonderful grace that, according to the most punctual degree of justice you *can* no longer be condemned. Your acquittal does not obscure God's justice, but allows it to shine in the clearest of lights.

If you were to ask whether the public revelation of our life will not give us pain, the answer would be that it would if it were to take place here on earth. But the definite answer is "No" if the amazing power of God's mercy *in heaven* becomes public in that every sinful person, including us, is not only forgiven and reconciled, but also has the strongest right to finally be declared holy and totally justified in His judgement.

Those who die in Jesus long for the Judgment and do not fear it. After all, the Last Judgement will be the full triumph of God's mercy as well as of our own war against satan, sin and the world.

Chapter 45*

Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth

*They will throw them into the fiery furnace,
where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Matthew 13:42

No one knows from experience what comes when death extinguishes the light in a person's eye; nor can anyone deduce it from the nature of the event. We can deduce a strong suspicion that death is not the end of things from nature, from history or conscience, but even this suspicion does not yield anything like certainty. Certainty about what awaits us after death can only be revealed to us by God Himself. We have access to such revelation in overabundance, not the least

through God's only Son, who first descended from heaven, then Himself experienced death, arose from the dead and ascended back up to heaven.

The only Son of God who came to us from heaven and then returned there, has assured us not once but repeatedly that whoever dies outside of faith and thus dies in sin, is thrown out into the farthest darkness. Nevertheless, the liberal scholars, among whom Kuyper counted himself prior to his conversion and who know nothing about this subject, assert that it isn't so. They contradict Jesus to His face. They have also convinced the great mass of people not to believe this anymore. Many Christ confessors among them, both here and abroad, make haste to underwrite this denial by unbelieving scholars, though some perhaps only provisionally.

That is how some delude themselves into getting rid of hell. Even in sermons, hell is barely whispered. The result is that thousands upon thousands pass away indifferently, thoughtlessly or with a false hope. The poignant warnings by Jesus no longer have a hold in their hearts.

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What is the ground of the denial of this eternal catastrophe? For those who still believe in an all-governing God, the God idea itself and especially His love cannot be squared with the course of this world ending in such an appalling way.

The above is self-contradictory. If you were to ask those same scholars what constituted Jesus's preeminent excellence, they would answer: His pure knowledge of God. They critique His moral pronouncement. But they grant Him this one thing: His communion with God was so pious, so intimate and tender that at this front He still serves as revelation and guide. So, while they granted that the same Jesus had the most perfect knowledge of God, they stubbornly insist that the idea of an eternal chaos cannot be squared with the God idea and His love; it is impossible, unthinkable and a total absurdity.

They spin all kinds of theories. The one holds that the development, the becoming that has taken place on earth continues after death. Another affirms that there is an opportunity to convert after death. A third insists that after temporary but bitter suffering is the means with which those who died godlessly can still be reconciled

to God. A fourth teaches that some never arrive; they are destroyed and no longer exist, a condition they call “conditional immortality.” Immortality awaits those who repent either here or after death, but destruction and ceasing existence awaits those who continue to harden themselves against God without conscience, whether now or afterwards.

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The question is whether we don’t feel attracted to such views or whether we, for the sake of love or sympathy, would not accept them. Or does the idea of eternal chaos and bedlam not freeze us with consternation? And does it not cost us great difficulty to square the never ending contrast of thousands upon thousands lost ones with God’s endless mercy? Our answer to all those questions is a frank “Yes!” We prefer to cling to what John Calvin wrote that we never know what God will do at the last breath of them who appear to us to have died outside of Christ and far away from God. We can and may not go beyond this.

Only Jesus has the full authority to speak here. We know nothing about this on our own. We need to avoid imagining that we hold higher and purer thoughts about God and His love than Jesus does. It is possible to maintain “conditional immortality” *against* Scripture, but *never* on basis of what Scripture teaches. Those who do, show they know nothing about what Scripture teaches about death and dying.

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We need to stick to Jesus and go by His sayings. Otherwise, we know nothing and cannot even stammer. Jesus addressed this subject time and again with strong conviction. Those who die apart from God will go into eternal suffering; they will be cast out; a worm will gnaw in them that will never die. They will suffer pain by a fire that will never be extinguished. This never-ending horror will be so appalling that Jesus likens it to weeping and gnashing of teeth. He has repeated these fearful signs three times.

In describing the Last Judgement Jesus confirmed that at that hour He will say to the lost, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). His Apostle repeats it saying that Christians know that those who disobey the truth will be repaid with wrath, oppression, and fear over all souls. We are told how John saw a vision on Patmos given him by

Jesus, “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelations 20:15).

Is it then not clear as day that whoever in our day still denies it will be so, shows faith in neither Scripture nor Christ? Even clearer than the day, if you get your knowledge about eternal things from Scripture and consider that Jesus cannot lie, you can only propose that there indeed is a hell with its eternal wretchedness.

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To say it is not true piety if you seek God and believe in Jesus in order to avoid hell is also to be wiser than Scripture. To be sure, Scripture teaches us that our highest desire must not be not to safeguard our own future but to be eternally satisfied with seeing His likeness (Psalm 17:15). But this kind of longing of the soul has no hold on sinners. Therefore Jesus comes to sinners to rescue them from perdition. “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

This is the effect that certainty of eternal damnation needs to have. It must urge parents not to leave their loved child victim of eternal perdition by neglecting their Christian nurture. It must urge believers of every social status and age, all friends to whose heart you have access, not to perish outside of Jesus. So the Church of Christ must urgently rescue people from perdition through preaching and missions and to urge them to repent. The same love of God that drove Him to send His Son to keep sinners from perdition and to inherit eternal life, must also excite, drive, motivate us. The love of Christ must motivate us.

Does it not testify in an appalling way against the coolness of your love when you allow a child, a brother, a friend, someone you can reach, to calmly die in eternal damnation, because you do not believe that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, that there will be a fire that is never quenched? Nothing testifies stronger against the seriousness of many Christians than the cool indifference with which they stand at the deathbed of an unbelieving family member or friend, even when the latter did not display a single sign of faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord, before their death.

Chapter 46*

The Earth Laid Bare by Fire

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.
The heavens will disappear with a roar;
the elements will be destroyed by fire
and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.
2 Peter 3:10*

However gigantic the measurements of all land and sea, still the earth is infinitesimally small in contrast to the sun. And as the sun is, there are thousands upon thousands more fixed stars and however far the human eye has probed those fixed stars, the limits of the universe(s) has never yet been discovered. God's majesty is so endless and so unspeakably great, while we on this small earth lose all significance. Of what significance are we before Him who called that entire universe into being with one word of power and who also will turn it upside down and change its form and mode of existence by one word from the same omnipotence?

Already the Psalmist was affected by this overwhelming thought when he sang, "In the beginning You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; they will wear out like a garment. Like clothing You will change them and they will be discarded" (Psalm 102:25-26). Isaiah expresses it as well; "All the stars of the heavens shall be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry hosts will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree" (Isaiah 34:4).

Jehovah triumphs over that "change" of heaven and earth, as He Himself testifies to His servant, "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But My salvation will last forever, My righteousness will never fail" (Isaiah 51:6).

That is also how the Apostle of the Lord calls unto us, "The world and its desires pass away, but the person who lives for God lives forever" (1 John 2:17). Even though we don't have the space to broadly reproduce the vision on Patmos, another

apostle also testifies in clear details about those who belong to Jesus: “But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” “By the same word the present heaven and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly persons.” “The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare” (2 Peter 3:13, 7, 10). It has been called “world conflagration” or “world fire” and that’s what it will be. The new creation will emerge from that world conflagration, after which the Kingdom of Glory will glitter and shine always and for eternity.

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This should no longer seem strange to our ears, for already in the past there are stories of such appalling changes that took place on this earth that none of us would recognize the present form of the world nor could our eye behold what this world was like.

Geologists who do research of the earth’s crust and astronomers who peer into space admit that most likely a general change took place in the form of the earth, though they differ in interpretation. Some foresee a cooling off and even a deathly frost of the earth, while others, with Scripture at hand, think in terms of final destruction by fire.

Already now we are walking on fire. Volcanic mountains, hot water geysers and ascending smoke columns all confirm that a glowing mass is hidden under the thin earth crust on which we live. It would require only a wide tear in the crust for oxygen to enter and cause a huge conflagration over the entire world.

But what Scripture foretells us about the future is even more majestic. It is not only a huge fire on this little earth, but one great and mighty turning upside down of the entire universe(s); an interruption of all the constellations of stars together with a mixing of all dust and gases. What will emerge out of this massive jumble of all that exists is a totally new order, a much more glorious world and a thousand fold more beautiful universe.

Scripture prophecies all this not merely to satisfy our curiosity nor just to prepare us for such appalling events, but to break our affection for the current ugly form of

the world and to direct our eyes to the much greater glory that awaits all those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

Our ideal and hope is so much higher than the highest the world offers us. Those not incorporated in Christ stare themselves blind on the beauty of *this* world as if there is nothing greater beyond it. For the holy Apostle, to the contrary, this world is a place of sighing for all creatures, because it is subject to nothing but vanity. He expects a much richer glory will come when the children of God are redeemed. This is the reason that throughout Scripture there is one call, one warning: Do not give your heart to this world, but focus on that much more glorious heritage that is awaiting you and preserved in heaven for you. This world will pass with all the desirables it offers us, but then comes the *new* heaven and the *new* earth. How then ought we children of God walk in heavenly holiness?

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Such a change of the existing order is not incomprehensible for us. Scripture itself compares it with a change in a robe that, worn out, dirty and seemingly discardable, but that at the hands of the tailor was so well cleaned and repaired that it came back to you like new in all its original splendour. We are also familiar with the cleansing and renewal of metal objects. Rusty and ugly ironwork regains its newness and shine through fire. Once it has been melted in fire and poured into a new form, it again glitters like new metal in its original form. Why then would God not be able to do with His world what the tailor does to the robe and the blacksmith with his metal?

True, the huge size, the comprehensiveness of the measurements, the hugeness of the firmament, all make us dizzy. But does God Almighty not stand much higher above His work in creation than the tailor above his washtub and the blacksmith in front of his oven? If you can make something, you can also remake or change it. A creator can also recreate. However the majesty of the firmament may blind us to its greatness, it is as nothing before God. Are not the nations like a drop of water to Him or dust on a weigh scale?

Once you've given this its due consideration, however wide the world, God Himself is infinitely greater than the entire world. Indeed, if you have merely stammered about the greatness of God, what will be so miraculous for your God if

He melts the whole firmament into one mighty instrument and then rejuvenates, renews it all and finally pours it into an even more glorious format for Himself and His saints?

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The fault for all this is ours, because we generally think too much of the world, while we think of the Lord our God in perspectives much too small. This is true not so only of worldly people, but also of Christians, who are of too small spirit to think of the glory of their inheritance and to live into what Scripture prophecies to us in such clear details. Certainly, you may not denigrate your calling in the things of this world, let alone ignore. As long as God keeps you in this dispensation, you are to serve God here with all your energy and faithfulness. But as you do, you must constantly and clearly remember that not only the earth but also the works performed in it will perish. The most beautiful palaces, the most majestic cathedral, the miracles of technology, the greatest creation of artists, every house, village and city and all that human hands have wrought, it is all only temporary and, like Babylon and Nineveh, will all come to nothing. That's how it will be with all the wonders we have created in our current age.

So, you are to energetically and faithfully engage in the work you have been offered, but you will not cling to it in the long run. You are not to attach yourself to it nor your heart. You will understand and see that which now appeals to us as glitter, is merely the flickering of a feeble candle flame in contrast to the sunshine of glory with which one day all God's creation will be baptized. *Here* it will be a temporary minor glory; *there*, a full glory and that for eternity. That's the choice before you.

Why do God's saints still hesitate? Your ideal and hope *cannot* depend on what ages and changes, on what God will one day melt down. It *must* depend on what will be destroyed and begin anew, when God has completed His new creation.

Chapter 47*

Burying My Dead

If you are willing to let me bury my dead,

*then listen to me and intercede with Ephron,
son of Zohar on my behalf.
Genesis 23:8*

Death is the most shocking and unnatural phenomenon in our human life. There is a meaningful dying in nature when the cold flower and leaf die off, but that yellow leaf has its own beauty and the autumn colours of the foliage bespeak riches.

196xx But that is not the death that occurs in human life. A human corpse can be beautiful for one day and express an increased purity, because the tension of nerves and muscles no longer tire the face, but this condition is very short lived. Decomposition begins its destructive work almost immediately. Now the corpse no longer attracts but repels. Still, human sympathy for the decomposing body, regardless of its uncleanness that even the high priest was forbidden to touch, surrounds it with tender care and wistful love.

Among a number of nations the tendency developed to cremate the body and store the ashes in an urn that they hold on to. However, from the time of Israel, the people of God tenaciously held on to the honour of burial. Burial fits nature and nature fits the burial, for the science of soil teaches us that nothing is so suitable as the earth to absorb the corpse. God has prepared the wonderful soil under us to receive our body. The judgement that overcame us is that we are dust and to dust we shall return. The earth has been assigned the task to complete the process of decomposition and is designed for that.

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It was in Egypt where the burial ritual and culture was developed most richly, almost too richly. In addition to cities for the living, they also built necropoles, cities for the dead. In those necropoles there were streets and along those streets each clan had their own house in which their dead were embalmed, encased in woodwork and put away in marble or bluestone coffins. Even today we can find such mummies in our museums, not infrequently in a state of wholeness after more than three thousand years, as if they were buried yesterday. This represented belief in resurrection of the dead but without an awareness of sin. It was a foolish attempt to avoid the appalling judgment of decomposition and lack of faith in the omnipotence of God, who is capable of restoring what was destroyed and to

resurrect the dead. He can call things that no longer exist back into being. But this tender, though excessive, care for the body also had its good side. It spoke of honouring the human and of reconciliation with death.

God arranged it that Abraham, the spiritual father of us all who believe, spent time among the Egyptians and that the ancient people of God lived among Egyptians for centuries. It is certain that it is thanks to God that, under these circumstances willed by Him, burial of our dead remained an honourable practice among Christians.

The first time Scripture speaks of care for our departed we hear how the old Patriarch pleaded for a grave for his wife Sarah. God had blessed Abraham richly. He had a wife he loved till she reached her 127th year. Then the old greybeard came to weep and mourn her death, after which he bought the cave of Machpelah for her lone grave. That grave remained in honour among Israel through the ages, until Jesus came who would free us from our sin and guilt and suffered a cruel death. After that, Christians were also buried in graves that were similarly honoured by His redeemed.

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Those graves in Egypt, the cave of Machpelah and that grave of Jesus always bore the stamp of quiet, holy seriousness; every attempt to mask them was resisted. We read of no festoons or flowery wreaths. The somber, grey atmosphere was to speak powerfully to the bitterness of death. Death was not to be unrecognized or blurred at the graveside. A visitor to the grave was to know, experience and feel that she was treading on a grave of death, so as to allow the seriousness echoing out of the grave to penetrate deeply into the soul. The grave was to be a messenger of God and thereby serve as a call in our midst to life.

There *can* be jubilation at the grave for the holy joy of the certainty of life eternal. The palm branch, graven in stone, can be a symbol of victory; the corn ear a symbol of resurrection, but a wedding party where death is forgotten, has no place at the grave. In our age the world sins in its inner cowardice, because it does not dare to look death in the face. Our fathers have never lost their grip on this. Silent simplicity and sober seriousness was the robe that covered their graves. Those who

do not wish to participate in the game of the world must hold on to the seriousness of the fathers.

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It is for this reason that establishing statues, engraving of laudatory inscriptions and even delivering exaggerated speeches have since ancient times been avoided at our gravesides. The grave says it so eloquently how small and void is the helpless person and how exceedingly great in His omnipotence is the Lord our God. Our departed died helplessly, but we stood at the bedside in even more painful helplessness. We are never so deeply humiliated in our powerlessness as when death approaches us. The energy of the departing one is of no use here, nor the passion of helping love and not even the skill of the most capable medic. All human ability succumbs and collapses; God only is great in His awesome majesty. It is exactly this that is expressed by the grave.

At first there is still care to be devoted tenderly to our departed. Some might like to keep the corpse close to them for a while and do something beneficial to it, but this leads to disappointment. The moment has hardly arrived for us to carry our departed away and, as symbol of our humiliation, have the corpse descend deeply into the grave, cover it with earth, and we return homeward without the bond of love that was woven into our heart. And then we would burn incense? Raise up a monument of human grandeur at such a holy place? That would be abhorrent and raise resistance by the faith. Let us kneel at the grave and freely express the grief in our hearts, but let God Almighty, the Lord of life and death, be acknowledged for His greatness at the open grave, *and He alone*.

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The grave puts even more pressure on us, because beyond it things are even more serious than what the grave itself throws at our heart. The grave is not the end post. One day it will be opened. It serves only as an entryway that will lead us to the judgement seat that will be held over all. The grave does shut off life, but it does not exclude accountability that one day we will have to give at the judgement seat of Christ. Yes, dying means our exit from this life, but the record of that entire life comes with us, from our earliest days till our day of death.

It is this character of the grave, the entry way to the judgement seat of Christ, that portrays its inexorable seriousness in full. So long as the grave speaks only about

dying, it awakes the despondence and mollifies it through grief. However, as entry to the judgement seat of Christ, it troubles our conscience through which the Word of God causes a break with sin and brings renewed repentance. After that, in the days that God still grants us, we may finally push away the foolishness in our heart to receive a wise heart, a wise heart for God.

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Nevertheless, these speeches at the graveside are not something horrific, provided you do not superficially glide over the sinfulness of the beloved departed you are burying. Even the most sanctified among us who passed away, reached only a small beginning of God-approved obedience. The best of us plead the most stirringly for mercy on our deathbed. It is through this that the Lord God is so wonderfully magnified at the grave of our loved one in the sanctifying work of His reconciliation. There is nothing in either us or in our beloved departed, but in her heart at the point of death as well as in our heart as we stand weeping at the graveside, there is a spark of glory in the love of Christ, from Him who died for us, was resurrected and now sits at the right hand of God and prays for us.

At that point the coming judgement no longer terrifies. For who is it in that judgement seat? It is Christ, the Christ whose love lights a spark in our heart, however small it may be. And then we raise the praises for our departed as well as for ourselves: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” The heart triumphs over our grave, because it is assured with intimate certainty. *“Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:38-39).

Chapter 48*

The Sustaining Lord

*Surely God is my help;
the Lord is the one who sustains me.
Psalm 54:4*

When it is said of the Lord that He *supports* our suffering soul so full of sadness, this must not be understood in terms of general omnipotence with which He bears

up our spiritual life, even in days of heightened joy. This is about *supporting*, a counterbalance against the power of suffering that oppresses our soul and threatens to collapse and suffocate it.

To be sure, God *does* bear up all thing by the word of His power, but in nature plant and tree are so designed that they do not need external support. In the jungle no one places supports under the growing tree, while the chick walks away on its own feet as it breaks out of its shell. An animal cannot leash its young nor hold it by its hand and teach it to walk.

It is only with humans that the possibility of giving support is founded in our nature. A child does not learn to walk on its own, but learns it because of its mother's support. This is much finer than what we observe among plant and animal. It betrays a much richer life, a life of all sorts of oscillation and changes, intended to go through many different stages.

You notice the same thing with accidents and wounds. The horse stands helplessly by when its foal breaks a leg, but when people are wounded and down, we lift them up under the arm and help them with our support. True, there are some animals that, when their young have an accident, pick it up with the mouth by its neck and drag it away, but that can hardly be called support in all its rich and finer sense the word implies; it is something that occurs only among humans.

It is precisely this supportive function that assumes that, under normal conditions, you stand on your own feet, keep yourself upright and wave off all offers of support. This is not of your own of course but always through God's power in the sense that it is God's power that works through your energy. It is thanks to that energy that you keep yourself upright and continue your way without support. That is the normal in our life. If that's how we are, then we are normal. And when you are truly pious, you thank God every morning and evening, if you are perpetually granted that normal strength to stand on your own without support.

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But change can enter in that desirable state. It can happen that we injure our foot or a broken bone makes walking impossible; a sickness attacks us and reduces our strength; our knees can no longer carry our body. At advanced age, this weakened

condition can even become the normal. According to the Preacher, even the grasshopper can become a burden to itself. One can return to childhood conditions when the cane replaces the stroller. At that time one depended on mother's hand, but now it is the shoulder of son or daughter on which one leans. There is always that real human need for support so helpful to a child and at old age so meaningful. It happens constantly between crib and grave when suffering or accident breaks our normal strength.

Scripture applies this also to the spiritual life of the soul. Our soul is embedded in our body and it is only in images borrowed from the body that we can give account of our spiritual life. It is the goal of the human soul to retain control of ourselves, to be master over ourselves and to direct ourselves. Of course, this is through the strength that God gives us. Yes, but it *is* to stand on our own and to go about life on basis of our own internal strength as the trunk of an oak stands because of the hardness of its wood and the lion prowls around with its strong muscles.

The same difference exists between the human and the animal soul. There is no support for the animal just born, but with a young child support through rearing and education are indispensable. The spider and the bee are as good as born with their web or honeycomb. The young person is the only creature who needs support from others to eventually achieve his diploma. With the animal it is instinct without needing support; with the human it is a matter of laborious learning that is unthinkable without support. At the advanced grey stage it is like that with a child, equally dependent on support.

During the years in between there are constantly events that fill the soul with fear and shock it so badly that we beg for support. That is like seeking consolation or sympathy, leaning on one another that keeps us from collapsing.

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In Psalm 42:4, the Psalmist anxiously asks, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" That is the anguished call of the soul when the hour comes and we call for human and divine support. It was your faith and peace with God that kept you going. But now satan entangles you and you fall into sin. In place of support, remorse overtakes you and the burden of your sin presses you

down. But what kept you going was your conviction of being in God's way and of struggling for Him.

But now it seems God is not on your side. Your opponent overcomes and tramples on you. Doubt enters your soul; you threaten to collapse in discouragement. Your work is your joy; working hard for your family is the joy of your life. But mishaps hit you. Your labour seems to have been in vain. Financial despair hits your heart; you lose your spiritual strength as if paralyzed.

But, there is still your family that gives you refreshment, a tent of light around you. That's what keeps you going; it serves as a drop of oil poured on the fibers of your internal being. That's when the destruction of your sickness knocks at your door. You can't help but allow it in and as death climbs in through your window, sadness and grief takes over your heart.

Ah, that's when your strength fails you. A tremor overtakes your soul so that you lose control. The fundamentals of your spiritual life are broken down. It is as if an abyss opens under you wherein you fear to sink. Even the light on your path has become dark and all within you bows down. You cry and that crying does give you oxygen, but waves of despondency make you even more afraid. You feel as if you have been handed over to a power of despair in the heart against which you have no resistance. No matter how hard you try to rise again, you fall down again every time.

But you belong to the nobility of creation! It is only as a human, as a finely-tuned sensitive human being, that you can be so down cast. You are ennobled, because you are object of God's compassion as human being and because of that your God glorifies Himself in you.

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Under such circumstances God sends you brothers and sisters to support your soul, among them being He Himself, but always as a human being. 203xx There are three things that must support you and prevent you from collapse: your own engagement; human sympathy and divine compassion.

First, we look at your own engagement or involvement. You should not swoon for the wounds of your heart. You must *want* to rise up again; never may a sentimental

joy sneak into your heart over your pain. That would be contrary to God's purposes. That's why God's Word begins by saying to you, "Be strong, take heart and wait for the Lord" (Psalm 27:4). It asks in a punishing sort of way, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God!" (Psalm 42:11). It is said to the sick who will be carried, "You should help along," and that by itself makes carrying that much easier. It is an honourable part of a human being that in faith he continues to struggle to rise up again, even though the foot keeps slipping. He does not want to just be dragged along without willing to be helped, but as a struggling person he wants to be supported. Being supported assumes that you yourself pitch in so that through that support you try to put both of your feet forward. A living human receives support; a dead one is not supported, but is just carried away.

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But then the support comes. God sends people who will support your soul. Some do that from afar, some from close up, a few from very near. Then you detect how everyone in your social circle gives a hand to stand by you and even considers himself fortunate for this opportunity to serve. This is the participation of humans: to suffer along with your relatives and friends. This amounts to taking over from you part of your suffering by one dear to you.

One person needs this more than another, for pain is different for each person. Sometimes it makes one tremble; for others it is little more than being upset. It depends on one's temperament and emotions. Those who come to support you do notice that to the extent you are in danger of collapse they will increase the support offered. At first, they may almost carry you, but when they see improvement on the way, they will let off somewhat. A true friend will be happy when the need for support is tapering off. He may then begin to withdraw unnoticeably. Imposing friendship or offering exaggerated support does not comfort but becomes a hindrance.

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In the third place, the Lord Himself comes among those offering support. Not immediately; He wants us first to give it a try. But then He sends us human participants, but also Himself. "Surely God is my help; the Lord is the One who sustains me" (Psalm 54:4). Then our best friends stand by us. Love pours itself out to find the words that will penetrate the deepest into our soul. At the same time,

they can feel in the depth of *their* heart as well that their word cannot enter into the centre of the real wound. Human supporters cannot reach there.

It is there that God, who created the heart and wounded it, *can* approach it. He then as it were forces Himself into that place with a special work of the grace of the Holy Spirit. And then something glorious happens. An almost blissful feeling arises in the wound in the heart, for in that wound the glorious redemption of God's love is felt deeper than ever before. There is thus a place within where we feel that this is where God receives my suffering in His own hand.

That's when you thank your friends, for their support refreshed you so delightfully. But you thank the God of all compassion with even greater enthusiasm, for His compassion was more than mere balm; it was the manna that enlivens the soul.

Chapter 49*

A Stronghold for the Oppressed

*The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed,
a stronghold in times of trouble.
Psalm 9:9*

“The Lord is a refuge (stronghold)¹⁷ ... in times of trouble.” What is the meaning of “refuge,” a word that is repeated throughout the Psalm? In general a refuge or stronghold is a place to which one withdraws, where one may stay, where it is safe from attack. David waged war with the troops of King Saul for years. His was a small band of supporters over against a reckless and powerful enemy. He waged this war in the mountainous region of Judah and was able to continue this unequal battle for as long as he did, because he was intimately acquainted with that high mountainous area and its steep trails. When he was not able to maintain his position in the valley, he would withdraw into the steep heights where Saul's soldiers could not find him. There, in those heights he could enjoy a quiet and

¹⁷The Dutch terminology for “refuge” or “stronghold” in Kuyper's version is “*hoog vertrek*,” an upstairs room, thus a high place that was safe from intruders. This particular term is used throughout this chapter and influences the language to such an extent that a translator needs to take some detours to get at the intention.

pleasant feeling of safety. No one could approach or follow him there. Safe from all attack. That was his stronghold.

The synonomous term “high place” is the highest place on top of the wall of a fortress as well as the highest place in a house, the attic if you like. But in its original sense, it was on the top of a mountain, an inaccessible place.

In order to express that the strength of his spiritual rest at its deepest was never found in the creature, but always in his God, David frequently resorted to the language of “high place,” “refuge” and “stronghold,” which was the Lord God. In order to express that the strength of his spiritual rest in its deepest sense was never based on the creature, David would repeatedly use the term “high place,” and its synonyms, which always was found in the Lord his God.

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Sometimes the Psalms put it differently. It isn't God who is that high place, but “the God of Jacob may put you in a high place.” Or as in a prayer, “May Your salvation, O God, protect me” (Psalm 69:29) or, translated from Kuyper's original, “...put me in a high place.” Or it is used as a confession, “Whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe” (Proverbs 29:25) or another of Kuyper's originals, “The just shall be put in a high place.”

But the deepest thought here is that when a pious person no longer jubilates in a “high place in which God places her,” she has found her highest place in God Himself. Now, resting in this safe place of glory, she looks down quietly from her God upon what her soul attempted to storm before.

The earlier thought means merely that when God puts you in a high place, the unrest in your heart retreats to make place for safe restfulness, for which you give thanks to God. But when God Himself has become a high place for you, you have retreated from the turbulence and struggle into the tent, under the wings of the Lord. Now the blessed enjoyment of communion with the Eternal Being has been restored. It is then that you become aware that God's help and support are only a part of salvation. It does not come to its fulfillment until you climb from help from God to your climbing up to God Himself and you feel yourself safe in His bosom.

So, then, it has come to an intimate deepening in two ways. On the external side of your suffering you have descended into the depth of your soul. But simultaneously you have climbed up from the external side of God's love to the well of your comfort and consolation found in the Almighty Himself.

This is not a case of false mysticism as if our soul can penetrate God's Being. A creature can never do that. To imagine that you can is sinful and the height of audacity. To be safe in God is to be safe in the *revelation* of God's Being, in what Scripture calls "*His Name.*" As it says, "The Name of the Lord is a strong Tower." It is also to withdraw oneself into the attributes, mercies and appearances of God. When the lily in the field blossoms in the sun, it is not therewith placed in the being of the sun, but it is placed in the nurturing beams of the sun. It is in that sense that she who has been fully taken up into the glorious fullness of the beams of God's attributes and consolations, has found in God her high place, her refuge. This is not reserved for those who have sought to penetrate into the very Being of the Eternal, something that no creature can or may try.

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But the image retains its full rich meaning. In times of fear, the soul feels attacked; it has the painful and fearful sensation of being pursued. It feels like it is facing restless fights. It feels hunted, powerless, refuted and dislocated. It wavers and cannot go on. Darkness dims her vision. This is not ordinary angst she can counter with courage, nor common fear she can counter with brave fearlessness. It *is* possible if it is a struggle with people, with enemies of flesh and blood. It's a very different scenario if the fear emerges out of one's grieving soul, out of a bitter or sorrowing soul, out of a wound in the heart that keeps bleeding, out of what shocks our entire inner being and bereaves it from constancy.

Under such circumstance we feel as if attacked by a hidden power of homesickness and sadness. It turns into inner languishing. At this point one cannot go on because it overpowers us and there is no resistance left. Then it is as if the powers of hell or the demonic persecute our soul. That makes us stumble and fills us with deadly fear.

Please do not think of this as mystical imaginings. God Himself calls death an enemy. Jesus overcame sickness and the Apostle testified that our battle is *not*

with flesh and blood, that is, not with what people do to us, but, rather, with secret destructive power that comes to us out of the spiritual evil powers “in the air.”

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It would not be this way if we were without sin, for then we could raise up an impenetrable shield against these demons. But that is not the case, not with anyone. When during epidemics or bloodshed people go back to church, that is only because our angst and fears awaken us again to our sin. At that time, the deep painful experience and acknowledgement of our sin calls loudly in our heart and reminds us of the bond that in the past tied us so bitterly to the demonic powers and made us tremble. That is the root fear that obsesses, that fearful feeling of being secretly persecuted, hunted and attacked.

Of course, this varies in grade with different people. Some are able to account for this, while others have no clue as to what hit them. In the latter case, the pain is due to catastrophe in our life, a suffering or accident that develops into the awareness that the suffering of the world that comes out of the curse and the storm of human misery that imposes itself on us, upset our soul.

This produces in us fears and woes for which there is no name and that comes upon us like a flood that lifts us up from the ground of our life and hands us over as mere playthings to the sharpest sensations, sensations you cannot set aside and over which you have no control. Over against those gulfs of pain and waves of woes that come over our soul, comes this glorious recognition out of our heart consoled by God, that God is our “high place,” our refuge in times of such fearful experiences.

To be sure, the Lord gives support and He softens the suffering in a very tender manner and with deep merciful compassion. Suddenly a rose blooms before you in the desert or a lily in an arid place. But that is support against the external side of suffering and directly against your personal pain. What is actually meant in the text for this meditation is something very different. It addresses you the moment that this secretive wave of demonic power pounds on your exhausted chest. No comfort, help or support can then hold you up. Then there is only one solution. Over against that wave of curse and death, only God Himself, as the source of life and the explosive vein of eternal joy, is the only one to then lift up your soul.

That is exactly what David along with everyone else experienced when they can say, “*God is my high place and stronghold.*”

Chapter 50*

Taking It in Your Hand

*But you, O God, do see trouble and grief;
You consider it to take it in hand.
The victim commits himself to You;
You are the helper of the fatherless.
Psalm 10:14*

Staring at something so strongly that you cannot take your eye off it, makes it clear that, using a language without words, you desire to have it. This can be observed in animals, including our dogs and other pets. When you want a dog to fetch a ball or a piece of wood, you hold it and lift your hand, the fast dog will not take its eyes off your hand. As you turn your hand, so the dog turns its head. All its restless staring has no meaning other than to indicate that if you throw the ball, it will run and fetch it.

So it is with a child on the morning of his birthday. He will have no eye other than for the toy in your hand. He will not hear your words of congratulations, but only stares at the gift promised him, eager to see it transferred from your hand to his. Or if at moments of high tension you await a letter via your national post, you see the carrier coming, you don't see the man or hear his words but you only look at his hand holding your document as if to pull it with your eyes towards you,

The careless traveler who lost his moneybag along the way, sees an innocent child bringing it back to him, but afterwards he likely will not know what the child looked like or how he was dressed. The lost bag is what took all the traveler's attention away from the child. The traveler saw the bag, and stared at it till it was safely back in his hand. So it happens under many circumstances. Living beings

stare excitedly at what another person carries; it's a natural expression of the strong desire to have it transferred to their own hand and possess it.

That is the bold image that the Psalmist applies to our Father in heaven in Psalm 10. When one of His servants on earth is bent down with burdens and grief, the Psalmist says, God turns His eye to that burden and grief so intently that at the end the bearer lets it go and gives it over in God's hand. The translation "But You, O God, do see trouble and grief" is far too weak. It should rather be, "You have an eye for our burdens and grief; You stare restlessly at it in order to show that we are to give it into Your hands." Your Father eye pulls it away, as it were, like a magnet in order to have it transferred into His hand. Only then is justice served by that glorious end, "You...take it in hand."

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Trouble or burden are not the same as grief. They do associate with the same angst of soul, but they express it in two different directions. Trouble is the *active* part of the suffering that afflicts us; grief is its *passive* side. We usually say that a part of our suffering is that with which we struggle; that is the active part, the burden or trouble, if you will. But there is another side to suffering under which our soul is totally bowed down in suffering. That is the passive side, referred to here as "grief."

Deeply touching suffering has two results. The one comes out of God's incomprehensible decree; the other is the point where it penetrates into our human heart. It is a dark stream that we feel streaming over us, as if coming from God. We do not resist it; we take it and experience it totally passively. The Psalmist refers to this as our grief. We feel that dark stream rippling against our human heart and penetrate it. From that side the waters of our soul struggle, turn and toss against it. That is what the Psalmist dubs as "trouble" or "burden."

We cannot be spared from either one. Grief without trouble leads to collapse; trouble without grief leads to rebellion. It is only when the one same suffering is struggled through simultaneously in the trouble of our heart and experienced in the grief of our souls, that there is this holy balance in our pain that brings us rest and comforts us.

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When that balance does not come immediately or, after having been found, gets lost again, it cuts and wounds the soul. Then the Spirit sings in us through our believing “I” or “me,” “O my soul, why are you grieving? Why disquieted in me? Hope in God, your faith retrieving; seek in praising the Highest your joy.¹⁸” Then, led and driven by the Spirit, faith comes to restore the balance, something that always comes out of seeking communion with God. “I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken” (Psalm 16:8).

Not that God was away. He is never away, but a mist inserted itself between Him and our soul. Now the vision of faith breaks through this mist. The eye of our soul discovers He is near us. We experience, we sense His holy presence like He is at our right hand. It is once again real what we used to often sing thoughtlessly, “Yet in my care, my grief, my pain, I ever, Lord, with you remain”¹⁹. We come again near to Him and He again near to us. No more separation. Here we have communion flowing and streaming towards us from under the eternal arms of the Compassionate One; God’s care floating in and over our tents.

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In this soul condition you perceive how the eye of your God stares straight at the burden of your difficulty and grief that you have borne so bitterly and under which your soul collapsed. It is as if the Lord does not fix His Fatherly eye on either you or your somber contemplation, but only on your burden and grief. God will not relent until He has reached His goal and you finally understand that *you are to hand over to Him* that pressing burden of your difficulties and grief.

The Lord does not come to you to just observe your suffering or to complain about your deep emotions. He comes to take your difficulties and grief on Himself, but not by force; you have to hand it to Him voluntarily. That is the reason He stares so long and restlessly at the burden that presses you down, until you finally understand the meaning of that divine staring and you, with a final exertion of faith, lift up that burden and lay it down before the face of God on His altar. And then it is as if that divine eye wants to say, “Now you have once again become a child of your Father.” Then your heart comes to feel how rich it is to possess such a compassionate God as our Father. It is as if for a moment God leaves the stars be

¹⁸ Versification of Ps. 42 loosely adapted.

¹⁹ Versification of Psalm 73.

stars and withdraws all His care from the entire world in order to be preoccupied with us and to worry only about *our* difficulties and grief.

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And please do not ask whether from the above moment you will be without burden and grief. This would amount to breaking the relationship with your God and failing to understand what God has done for you. The trouble and grief that He took in His hand is *not neutral*. *Your* name is on it. It contains *your* heartfelt despondency. The blood of *your* soul clings to it. It is *your trouble and your grief*. This burden of suffering is *yours*; it has an effect in *your* own past, where the cords of *your own inner being* lie entwined. Though it all rests in God's hand now, it is still tied to your own inner soul life with a thousand invisible fibres.

It was not an external suffering that was laid on you as if loose and outside of your heart and that could be taken from you as easily as you disrobe. In this trouble and grief your own life and soul are involved, along with the stream of experiences of your own heart. That God even *could* take it into His hand is only because He put His eternal arms of compassion under that life of your heart. It is thus that He established communion with your suffering from the inside out through His fellowship with your spiritual life.

It is not possible for you to cut off this fellowship through unbelief, for your soul will again be cast down. You will experience blessed consolation only if your God, from out of the depth of your own soul, *from the inside out*, with divine compassion picks up that trouble and grief, lest it crush you.

For this reason there can never be true comfort in your suffering *apart from Jesus*, simply because such an inner soul communion with the God of Compassion *cannot exist* without reconciliation through the blood of the cross. We must rest in God's Father heart as saints and beloved in order to be covered with His consolation. We cannot be sanctified without Jesus. Without Him we are nothing but sinful creatures, ripe for damnation but not for consolation. We will only attract God's anger, not His compassion.

What's more, when God consoles us by asking us to give our trouble and grief over into His hand, we get a repeat of our own spiritual struggle that is not much

different from what made the suffering of the Man of Sorrows so unusually great on Golgotha. With Him it played out in large dimension what with us was rather minor in its effect, but always the same impenetrable mystery. God Himself takes upon Him the burden of our sin and suffering in order that our lost soul not collapse under our trouble and grief.

Chapter 51*

Remembering All His Benefits

*Praise the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all His benefits.
Psalm 103:2*

By forgetting all the benefits of our God we defile our soul, but the temptation for this sin is never closer to the door of our heart than during the days of mourning and bereavement. God's benefits are never mechanical or for formality sake, but always deeply meant. As to the benefits we share with other people, we often share no deeper than with the hand with which we pay for it. So often we would prefer not to give gifts or other benefits, but we do it for other reasons. Egoism is often part of the motivation. We give in the hope of a return benefit. Though many do give gifts generously because of the urge to do well and the pleasure of blessing someone, *even our best deeds are still always stained with sin*. The love in what we do for others is never fully sanctified.

But God's benefits to us are always totally perfect. The Lord always lives fully into every benefit He gives us. They are always mixed and tingled through and through with His divine love. They are thought through to their deepest. They are associated with our entire lives and being in beauty and proportion. They all hang together mutually and together form one wonderful whole chain link of love. Every benefit of God is a pearl, chosen with paternal care, and with godly decision strung along the chain of love with which He adorns us.

God's benefits, one by one, are placed in our lives by the hand of His compassion as sparkling stars to symbolize His faithfulness and love. Therefore, it is sinful on our part, not to have eyes for it and when we go our way under the sparkles of His

faithfulness with our eyes cast to the ground. That insults His Fatherly heart and hurts His divine compassion. That amounts to reciprocating love with ingratitude. It is wrong to be thoughtless about the multiplicity of God's benefits. Piece by piece, one by one, in the mirror of our hearts we are to beam back or reflect the sparkling love and praise to our Father in heaven. Do not forget a single one of His benefits!

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But often, before we are aware of it, grief and bereavement in our heart resists all that. The tempter of our heart does not leave us alone even at the graveside. Even in the holiest pain of the soul, he seeks to bend our soul away from praising the Lord. He whispers that it is asking too much of our faith not to grumble; that to resign ourselves in God's will is excessive piety.

But that's not the way it is. You are resigned; you cover your mouth, you submit, and you are facing a power over against which you are helpless and a majesty that commands your respect and obedience. But that is not the way a child of God may stand before her Father in heaven.

When we find ourselves in dire danger or discomfort, no matter for how short a time, we can temporarily give up our faith in God's faithfulness and love, God is gone for us. Thus, He is no longer *our* God and the sparkle of His benefits goes into hiding behind a cloud of mist. The world does not understand this. God cannot expect honour from its children. It cannot address His Fatherly heart with genuine understanding of His love.

But now God is checking out whether His child, that child of His love, stands strong enough in the faith even at the most painful moment to look up to Him with thanks and praise. It is only when it has reached the point where faith triumphs over the despondence of the heart, that the eternal faithfulness of our Father is no longer mistrusted, that there is jubilation among the angels above and a human heart on earth gives an echo of their long song of praise before the Throne.

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God's children strengthen each other. When the tempter constantly seeks to divert the eye to make it stare hopelessly at the dark places that take away the sweet life, then brothers and sisters help each other to resist the temptation and to turn the eye

back to God's benefits. One single individual cannot always accomplish this, but then the community of saints comes to help. It pulls the heart away from grief and makes the eye of the soul again excited at God's benefits. Thus victory is achieved. At the end, the laughter of love breaks through the tears again. Praise and thanksgiving out of the wound itself climbs up again from the heart to our Father in heaven. And that is precisely what God seeks at that hour from His child.

This is not to accept the pain nor a masking of sadness. To the contrary, the Lord God is more glorified the deeper we sink away in our pain. Reality must survive and be experienced with a clear and deep consciousness. When the despondence and grief in a heart wounded to the depth of its being finally raises the tone of praise and love, and thanksgiving and worship climb up, then, finally, the Fatherly heart above enjoys what He asks from the heart of His child and what He fully deserves.

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A deeper insight into all this depends totally on the perspective with which we see ourselves in God's eye. Do you want to air the complaint at the graveside that God has taken your loved one away? Or would you prefer an attitude of thanksgiving that God gave her to us and we had her for so long? Are *we* the main focus and did we enrich ourselves by the possession of our dear deceased and now God comes in between in a cruel manner to bereave us from that delightful possession? Or was the departed, that man, woman or child created by God *His* possession and brought to us because of His love and to enjoy her for the time He apportioned?

There is no doubt or hesitation as to the answer to that question. God created our beloved departed for Himself in order for her to love, serve and glorify Him both here below and, later, above. Even when He brought her to us, He did not concede her to us. Neither was she even on loan to us. But in the meantime, entwining our most tender bonds with her, He intended only that we would walk together with her to the end of the road in order to serve and glorify Him together. Our possession of our beloved departed was after all only a short period in her existence, a minimal part of an eternal life, and thus only a short fragment in her eternal calling. As the famous hymn "Amazing Grace" puts it, "We have no less days to sing God's praise than when we first began!"

And now in God's ordination the hour has come that the earthly part of her calling is fulfilled and the place where she is to complete her new calling is there waiting for her. What else can occupy the soul of God's child but thanksgiving that the new calling that is about to begin is so much more glorious than her richest achievement so far?

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The value of what we so sadly lost now for the first time comes to our heart under God's perspective. If your heart keeps leaning towards the side of mourning and grief, you become poorer and more bereft whenever you think about what it was you carried to the grave. But when you see God in His deceased children to which they and our Father have the first rights, you deepen your released emotions in this wonderful treasure that God had hidden in the deceased. Every time you notice a new gift that was hidden in her heart only renders you more grateful that so many riches surrounded her that you enjoyed during your journey together.

By now it is no longer the greatness of the person or her rich talents that we reflect on, but as you measure those riches to their full extent, you turn to glorifying the Name of the Lord Who has so formed, so developed and so spiritually adorned the deceased with the best of His heavenly adornments. All competition and struggle between God and that initially so cruel grave falls away. Almost nowhere can the tone of thanksgiving, praise and worship to our God in heaven ascend more profoundly than at that graveside or during a God-soaked memorial.

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O, we would wish with all our soul to have known our dear departed without sin. Even better, to have possessed and enjoyed her without our own sin. Alas, it was not to be. At the point of separation, the soul complains about its own guilt and shortcomings. O, how badly we would like to pray all this away or do that social life all over again. How much more glorious it could have been!

The Lord is aware of that and that's why our text "And forget not all His benefits" is followed by these touching words, "who forgives all your sins..." Added to the benefits of the past, of which we are not to forget even one, is that new and most glorious benefit of our God, taking away from our beloved departed all the mist of sin and showing us the clean white robe. He sprinkles the grave of our loved

one with the blood of the holy Lamb of God. As far as the East is from the West so far does He remove our sins.

Thus everything from God's side now becomes love, faithfulness and all the benefits of God we possessed, all the benefits that God gave to our departed as well as benefits to our own soul through the wonderful reconciliation of Christ.

Praise the Lord, you angels. Praise the Lord, you who left us for the congregation of the fully redeemed. Praise the Lord, O, my soul!

Chapter 52* **To the Praise of His Glory**

*Who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance
until the redemption of those who are
God's possession—to the praise of His Glory.
Ephesians 1:14*

In every century and sometimes more often, a new school of thought emerges in the thinking or disposition that dominates the spirit of the period. That is then taken to be the "spirit of the century." When you want to become someone in the world, you adopt that spirit to show yourself "a man of the times" or a contemporary who is "with it." In the desire to represent the "spirit of the day" something good may emerge, but a dubious evil as well.

Something good. In those various schools or philosophies of the age, God's work that He fulfills in the world of humans, meets its consummation. There is no stopping in that work of God. Restlessly like the waters of a river, it moves forward towards the ocean of consummation. This is what causes the steady development and enrichment of society. If you want to stay aloof of these developments, you impoverish yourself. We Christians must know how to participate in these new thought forms that God keeps creating.

If you don't want to exist as a mere plant or chair, but live as a human being, you must be a "child of the times." Just look at the Apostle Paul. He copies neither the

prophet Isaiah nor King David. He does not speak the language of a Moses. Everything he writes is poured into the forms, thoughts and language of the Jewish, Greek and Roman world of his day. He wrote for the benefit of his contemporaries in such a way that they could understand him.

But going along with the times can also become a dubious evil, if it means participating in the negative side of that spirit and accepting that spirit without critique. Scripture repeatedly impresses on our heart the duty to “test the spirits,” that is, to see whether the spirits of the age is of God. If you find that it is, then you are to follow that spirit in its mighty track. But if not, then resist that spirit and refuse to have your heart, your house and your family infected by it. Oppose it with the Spirit of God. Both parties in the Church of God are in error, the person who sticks to the forms of a previous age that are no longer contemporary as well as the one who, in order to participate in the present age, carelessly follows it in an ungodly spirit.



This is also applicable to the praise that we are to bring to the glory of God. When Paul wrote his prison letter to the highly influential church of Ephesus, he touched on this topic three times in his prologue. All the work of God for His Church and for the souls in Christ’s Church had only one target, namely, that we are to be *to the praise of His glory*. He wrote, “He predestined us to be adopted as His children...to the praise of His glorious grace.” Later, he tells us that we also are to “become an inheritance...to the praise of His glory.” The third time, he was praising “that we were marked in Him a seal, the promised Holy Spirit...to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:5-6, 14, 12-14). The praise of God’s glory is not a marginal issue for the Apostle; it is his main target with everything pointing to it.

It is that praise of His glory that God seeks *in and through* His anointed saints. It is always a matter of praising God, making the Name of the Lord great, singing Psalms to Him, giving Him honour. It is a never-ending refrain on which all Scripture rests. It is the one single mighty *Selah* in all of God’s holy Revelation.

It is exactly that praise issue that is resisted by the spirit of our age. Religion—ah, it renders you holy. Piety—o, it is an adornment to you. Except—strictly speaking, you don’t need it. Those thousands upon thousands who live without

religion and are just as good as you are, in no way inferior to you, provided they are decent citizens. Certainly, piety improves your social status, but you are nevertheless told to keep your religion to yourself. You should not sing publicly but, rather, you must hide your religion in the cracks in walls where no one hears or sees you. Your religion must be kept in your heart, at most in your house. Beyond that, no one should notice it. Your public singing will disturb wayfarers and hinder them in the market of life. Piety is an adornment, but one that must be kept hidden mysteriously. The world will praise it to the skies, provided it notices nothing of it!

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Alas, there are those who confess Christ but who go along only halfway with the above. One can hardly call these halfhearted ones confessors of Christ. Confessing is not merely coming out for Him among like-minded people, but to come out for the Name of the Lord in the world, among opponents, those who reject Jesus. That is precisely what these Christians seek to avoid. Their watchword is “silent preaching.” A silent majority from whom a witness to Jesus has never been heard. Pious in their heart and in their home, but in the world they act like a dog that never barks.

The excuse for this is that the noblest witness to Christ is not our word but our walk, provided we treat people honestly, walk in peace with everyone and are proud to be loving. This “silent preaching” hopes that people may be won to Christ without a word. This is diametrically opposed to Scripture, which tells us that faith comes from hearing and hearing comes from preaching God’s Word. It is against the testament of Jesus to His apostles that they were to be His witnesses, restless witnesses, witnesses to the whole world. It is no less against the elevated tone that echoes throughout the Psalms: Praise the Lord, for our singing of Psalms is good and the praise is sweet. It is also against the blood of the martyrs!

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Have you never noticed how painfully the complaint of the saints echoes throughout the Scripture that no one can praise the Lord in the grave? Take, for example, the conclusion of Psalm 115, “It is not the dead who praise the Lord, those who go down to silence; it is we who extol the Lord, both now and forever more. Hallelujah!” It is not the dead who praise the Lord, but we who are still alive, we still have a voice with which to praise.

Is this saying that our departed have no insight in the glory of the Lord? That they mysteriously in their hidden spiritual life have no impulse to worship God's glory? To the contrary, in all of this they are very far above us. The veil fell away from them and they know what has never climbed up in our heart. Furthermore, nothing diverts them. They represent one single devotion and adoration of God and His Christ.

But one thing they miss: they lack the bodily revelation. They know the spiritual praise of God as the angels know them, but they are incapable of expressing praise to the Lord in human language. That comes back to them after the resurrection, but then with a glory such as we have never known on earth.

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Thus, never say that it is the same for the Lord our God whether we only give praise to His holy Name in the stillness of our heart or praise and witness to Him with a loud voice. There is a singing without the input of the soul as one often hears in oratorios. Then there is also the word of praise that does not come from the heart as we sometimes hear from the painfully hollow sounds from certain arid conservatives (of Kuyper's day). That is the sung and spokein lie with which they defile the most holy. Then it is a thousand times better to whisper the praise of God silently in the soul than to hear the loud shrill of hollow metal.

The human tribute of praise to the Lord is not complete until first the soul enables the lips to speak and loosens the tongue, until the heart pours out the voice of praise and until in the internal movement of emotion the word of adoration and the sound of praise come together.

In the beginning was the Word. All things visible and invisible are created by that Word. In the Word the Father generates the only Son of His pleasure. That is why that wonderful word, the word of psalm singing and of witnessing, is given to us to tell all the wonders of the Lord and to speak His praise, provided we have been created after God's image.

In the seed hides the lily that will soon sprout, but only after the bud has developed and the flower has sprouted does the greatness of the Creator become accessible in its scented and pure white blossom. So life is in-germ, inside our heart, our soul,

our emotion. And therefore the praise of the Lord that goes forth from the human voice, is the consummation, the fulfillment of all praise that God expects from His creatures.

The angels have an advantage over us in that in their spiritual being they adore God purely, adoring Him with a perfect movement of the spirit. God's children on earth still lack at that front. Impurity is and remains with us till our death even in the purest moment of love that ascends to God from our innermost. Even our prayers call for reconciliation if we are to exist before the Holy One.

That impurity falls away with death as the body of sin is shed by death. The provisional glory of God's departed children is that they now know the movement of adoration purely, in the holiness of the soul no longer soiled by sin.

However high its status, it is still not the highest. That highest climax comes not before all those in the grave hear the voice of the Son of God. They will come out if they died in Jesus, in order not to simply sing from the purity of their souls, but also with a perfectly pure voice, "Holy, Holy, Holy" before the Throne of God.

Hallelujah. Amen and Amen!

Postscript Meditation by Henry Nouwen

God's Faithfulness

The resurrection does not solve our problems about dying and death. It is not the happy ending to our life's struggle, nor is it the big surprise that God has kept in store for us. No, the resurrection is the expression of God's faithfulness to Jesus and to all God's children. Through the resurrection, God has said to Jesus, "You are indeed my beloved Son, and my love is everlasting," and to us God has said, "You indeed are my beloved children, and my love is everlasting." The resurrection is God's way of revealing to us that nothing that belongs to God will ever go to waste. What belongs to God will never get lost — not even our mortal bodies. The resurrection doesn't answer any of our curious questions about life after death, such as: How will it be? How will it look? But it does reveal to us that, indeed, love is stronger than death. After that revelation, we must remain silent, leave the whys, wheres, hows, and whens behind, and simply trust.

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Other Boer Translations of Kuyperiana

The list below contains other Boer translations of Kuyper's own writings as well as some of Boer's writings about Kuyper. They are all found on the KUYPERIANA page on < www.SocialTheology.com >. There are many more translations by others also listed on that same page.

Abraham Kuyper, *You Can Do Greater Things than Christ: Demons, Miracles, Healing and Science.*

-----, *The Ascent of the Son—The Descent of the Spirit: 26 Meditations on Ascension and Pentecost.*

-----, *From the Realms of Glory: Contours of the Angelic World.*

-----, *For still Our Ancient Foe: Contours of Satan's World.*

-----, "The Mystery of Islam."

-----, "History and Nature of Kuyper Meditations."

-----, "The Cross Versus the Tree of Liberty."

Jan H. Boer, "Kuyper the Evangelical."

-----, “The International Kuyper.”

-----, “International Popularity—Local Unpopularity.”

-----, Eight Social Kuyperian Summary Points.”

-----, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Structural Transformation according to Abraham Kuyper.”

