

Fighting for Truth in a Postmodern Age (3)

Preservation of the Church in Truth:

The Comfort We Need in These Perilous Days

“The carnal mind is unable to comprehend this doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and the certainty thereof, which God hath most abundantly revealed in His Word, for the glory of His name and consolation of pious souls, and which He impresses upon the hearts of the faithful. Satan abhors it; the world ridicules it; the ignorant and hypocrite abuse, and heretics oppose it; but the spouse of Christ hath always most tenderly loved and constantly defended it, as an inestimable treasure; and God, against whom neither counsel nor strength can prevail, will dispose her to continue this conduct to the end. Now, to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be honor and glory forever. Amen” (Canons, Fifth Head of Doctrine, Article 15).

Fathers, mothers, grandparents, and young people, are you anxious about the future of the church? Read that first paragraph over again and meditate on it for a while. What a beautiful article in our confession! The first two articles in this series have examined postmodernism in the colleges, and also postmodernism in the Emergent churches of our day. The articles called us to be aware of the spirit of our age around us which despises the truth of God’s Word. When we think of the storms that are and will be sweeping upon the church with increasing intensity, we might become anxious, and even worry constantly about the future of Christ’s body on this earth. As God’s people, we always need to be warned about the error, but at the same time, we need to be reminded of our preservation in Jesus Christ. This, I believe, is a proper conclusion to this series.

Hear Scripture on the preservation of the saints. Jesus prayed for the preservation of his people to his Father: “And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are” (John 17:11). Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that their “whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thess. 5:23). Listen to the promise to Israel: “Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me” (Isa. 44:21). Jesus spoke of himself as our faithful shepherd: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never

perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27, 28). The preservation of the saints abounds in Scripture.

This doctrine is our rock-solid comfort in this world. In keeping with the theme of the past two articles, I speak now of our comfort in a world of postmodern ideas. Some Christians today are ruthlessly tortured, imprisoned, and even killed by intolerant governments and religious groups. But in the West, where postmodernism is embraced, persecution at the hands of tolerance-lovers is more subtle, but it exists, and it is paving the way for more severe persecution. How much longer will governments and liberal churches allow ministers to preach the pure Word of God which expresses God’s hatred for homosexuality? How much longer will Christians be able to find employment while holding to an uncompromising position on Sabbath observance? At bottom, how much longer will the world allow the church to stand for truth? Let us not deceive ourselves. The nice, tolerant, accepting world will not always be tolerant toward Christians. Young people, there will come a day, possibly during our lives, in which we will not be able to buy or sell, and when we will be imprisoned, tortured, and killed. In this world of increasing wickedness and intolerance toward God’s people, the bleeding and battered bride of Christ needs to have the comfort of her preservation.

Living as a Christian in this postmodern world is costly. Are you ready for such a life? Am I? We must have a love for the truth as a fire in our bones, the consuming desire of our whole life. Both church history and our daily experiences show the cost of living faithfully in a postmodern world. Christians in ancient Rome died at the mouths of lions and burned in the fiery flames because of their love for Christ and the truth which he revealed to them. In the years leading up to and during the Reformation, men translated the Bible into the tongue of the people, risked their very lives, and lived in constant fear of the Roman Catholic Church. Fast forward to today. What drives mothers to sacrifice so much for the instruction and godly upbringing of Covenant children? What motivates fathers to work tirelessly at their job to pay for the Christian schools and support the churches, many times at the expense of a nice house, truck, and luxurious vacation? Why do our ministers give of their lives in the service of Jesus Christ, even if it means long hours in the study and work which is many times marked with tears and sleepless nights? Love for the truth! Confidence in God’s preserving work in that truth! Because by God’s grace, and entirely by his work in their hearts, these people find it a privilege to work, to suffer, to even die, for the sake of God’s truth.

II Timothy 3 and 4 is a striking passage in regard to suffering and preservation. Paul tells young Timothy in the beginning of chapter 3, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.” Especially relevant to our topic is chapter 4, verses 3 and 4: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after

their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” This became very real in the Apostle’s life, for he says in verse 16, “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me...” But though we live in perilous times and the cost is great, even cutting into our relationships, Paul speaks confidently in verse 17, as we should, that “the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me...” Paul beautifully connects this to God’s preserving work in verse 18: “and the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

We know that God preserves his church, but this does not imply that God does not use means to preserve his church. He uses you and me. Never should we forget that we are all members in the body of Christ and that we all play vital roles. What work do you perform in the church? Perhaps you think that God would never or could never work through you for the good of his church. That could not be further from the truth. God uses many ways to keep the body of Christ strong; young people, in the strength of youth, contribute largely to this. When young people stand together, hands tightly clasped while standing on the firm foundation of truth, the postmodern winds cannot break their communion. In the college years, when the postmodern winds can be the strongest, it is important that we have very open lines of communication with our friends and with our parents. Are postmodern influences making you doubt some parts of God’s Word? Are you having second thoughts about biblical doctrine and life? Such thoughts are not uncommon to anyone, especially at an age of examination and questioning. Be open and communicate. Help others who you see struggling with this.

But especially pray to our Father in heaven. So often we hear this, but how important it is! Pray that, at those low points when you doubt, he would lift you up and strengthen your faith. Jesus did not pray that we would be out of this world, where wicked philosophies and worldviews constantly circulate, but that the Father should keep us from the evil (John 17:15).

God never changes. God’s truth never changes. God preserves his people in the truth of his Word. That is and must be our confidence in this world! As Protestant Reformed young people, we should, more than anyone, know in our heart and confess that preservation is all of God. Therefore, let us trust in him. He will never forsake those whom he has loved from all eternity. God preserves his church in truth! We respond to this the same way we started: “Now, to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be honor and glory forever. Amen” (Canons, Fifth Head of Doctrine, Article 15).