

# THE HERESIES AND BLASPHEMIES OF STEPHEN PERKS

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We previously pointed out some of the heresies of Stephen Perks and his supporters in the area of ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church.<sup>1</sup> These errors include a downgrading of the institutional church and its calling to preach the gospel.

In this same area of ecclesiology Perks also teaches such aberrations as paedocommunion and considers baptism a secondary denominational difference, contrary to all Reformation theology which consider the sacraments marks of the true church. Thus Perks either corrupts the sacraments or relegates them to the theological dustbin. This, of course, follows from his very low view of the institutional church and its calling.<sup>2</sup> These errors are, to our mind, sufficient cause in themselves to rule out any sympathy for the views of Perks.

We are especially concerned in this article, however, with the heresies of Perks in the area of eschatology, the doctrine of the last things. We know there are many differences of belief among Christians in this area, but Perks' errors strike at those things that are universally confessed by the people of God and are essentials of the Christian faith, the denial of which involves the preaching of "another gospel which is no gospel" and turns Christianity into a false religion.

These errors are (1) a denial of heaven as the eternal home of believers; (2) the subsequent denial of a literal ascension of Christ to heaven, and of (3) the intermediate state, that is, the conscious glory that believers have with Christ immediately after death. (4) Finally, a form of the old heresy of soul sleep is also taught by Perks, another consequence of his denial of heaven, for if there is no heaven, there is no place for believers to go after death and before the resurrection.

His religion is, therefore, a form of religion that "minds earthly things" (Phil. 3:18, 19), denies the eternal hope of believers, casts doubt on the resurrection and atoning work of Christ, and blasphemes Him as the Saviour of His people. Such are the false teachers we are called to shun (I Tim. 6:20; II Tim. 2:16).

Regarding heaven, it is not clear whether Perks believes in such a place or not. His denial of the ascension of Christ would lead us to think he does not. Nevertheless, there are passages in his works that suggest he does believe in such a place. He bluntly denies, however, that heaven is the everlasting home and hope of believers, condemning this belief as a hold-over from Greek philosophy. He says for example: "According to popular teaching, or perhaps I should say tradition, that place (heaven) is the goal of the redeemed. I would submit it is not."<sup>3</sup>

It should be added that Perks believes that the earth is the only home believers will ever have, even after the resurrection of the body. This, we believe calls into question the necessity of Christ's work as the Lord from heaven. One reason He had to come from heaven was that we might, from Him as our *heavenly* Lord, receive heavenly righteousness, heavenly life, and a place in heaven in

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<sup>1</sup>See the *British Reformed Journal*, No. 25, January - March, 1999, pp. 44-48, "Book Review," and the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, Vol. XXXII, Nos. 1 and 2, November, 1998 and April, 1999, "Kingdom and Church in Christian Reconstruction."

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Andrew Sandlin, *Christianity & Society*, Jan., 1996, p. 2, Stephen Perks, *C&S*, Jan., 1996, p.3, Sandlin, *C&S*, Apr., 1996, pp. 21-24; Perks, *C&S*, Oct., 1999, pp. 30-32.

<sup>3</sup>Perks, *C&S*, Jul., 1999, pp. 5, 6; Jim Faulds, *C&S*, Oct. 1999, pp. 29, 30.

God's presence.

Some quotes in which these views of Perks come out are found in his book, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*:

From the way some Christians talk it seems they expect to inherit 'heaven.' They will be sorely disappointed. It's all going to be down here in the nitty-gritty of physical life. So you had better get used to it down here where for mankind life is lived.<sup>4</sup>

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The Christian's inheritance is usually seen, if it is considered at all, as some kind of nebulous ethereal place where the believers goes when he dies ("heaven," the "Christian" version of the pagan concept of the Elysian Fields). Not so! The believer's inheritance is the earth. It is the kingdoms of this world that are to become the kingdoms of God and over which Christ will rule forever (Rev. 11:15).<sup>5</sup>

One wonders whether Perks disbelieves hell as well. It is difficult to see how hell can be a real place, and there be any conscious suffering in hell either immediately after death or for all eternity in light of what Perks says about heaven. Nevertheless, Perks has not seen fit to enlighten us on that account. Perhaps at some later date he will inform us that one turns right at Pluto to get there (see below)!

Since Perks does not believe that believers go to heaven he also denies the intermediate state, the state of the soul after death. Over against the errors of Rome, as well as against the pagan notion of soul sleep, the church has confessed from the very beginning that all who are in Christ enjoy conscious glory with Him immediately following death. Here, too, he is as plain and blunt as he can possibly be: "I reject the intermediate state and assert instead, therefore, the resurrection of the body as the Christian hope of life eternal in the world to come" (C&S, Jul., 1999, pp. 2-10).

In connection with his denial of the intermediate state, Perks also teaches something like soul sleep, an error that was roundly condemned at the time of the Reformation. Actually, Perks goes even farther than soul sleep, teaching that soul passes out of existence altogether at death, which means, we suppose, that it must be recreated at the time of the resurrection. Perks says:

All the physical elements of a man's being remain initially, but eventually by some means or other they are scattered to the four winds. What we can say is that at death man ceases to exist *as a living soul*. At death the breath of life departs from him. The intermediate state assumes that only his body dies, that as a living soul he continues in a state of either blessedness or misery. My denial of the intermediate state is not, therefore, a form of soul sleep, which I reject, since this presupposes just such a state of existence apart from the breath of life, i.e., that man has a soul that exist independently of the body after the breath of life has departed from him. It is this idea of the bipartite nature of man that I deny. When the breath of life departs from man he ceases to exist as a living soul" (C&S, Jul., 1999, p 10).

Calvin calls the notion of soul sleep "an extravagance," "absurd," "vanity," "folly" and "insanity," and identifies those who teach such things as "babblers," "triflers," and "enemies." He says that their error is "not to be borne" ("Psychopannychia," *Tracts and Treatises*, vol. III, p. 414).

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<sup>4</sup>Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup>Perks, *The Nature, Government and Function of the Church*, p. 70.

What he would have thought of Perks' notions we can only guess. Certainly his sharp condemnation of soul sleep suggests that he would not have been easy on Perks:

Do not attempt here to introduce your fictitious comments concerning The Last Day. He promises us two things - Eternal life, and the Resurrection. Though you are told of two you admit only one! Another expression of Christ is still more decisive. He says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believeth on me shall live though he were dead. And whoso liveth and believeth in me shall not die for ever." (John 11:25, 26.)

It will not do to say, that those who are raised do not die for ever. Our Lord meant not only this, but that it is impossible they can ever die. This meaning is better expressed by the Greek words ... equivalent in Latin to *in seculum*: for when we say that a thing will not be *in seculum*, we affirm that it will never be at all. Thus in another passage, "Whoso will keep my word shall not see death for ever. (John 8:51.) This invincibly proves, that he who will keep the word of the Lord shall not see death; and it should be sufficient to arm the faith of Christians against the perverseness of these men. This is our belief, this our expectation (p. 440).

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When the Apostle longs to depart and to be with Christ, (Philippians 1:23,) do they think he wishes to fall asleep so as no longer to feel any desire of Christ? Was this all he was longing for when he said he knew he had a building of God, an house not made with hands, as soon as the earthly house of his tabernacle should be dissolved? (2 Corinthians 5:1.) Where were the benefit of being with Christ were he to cease to live the life of Christ? What! are they not overawed by the words of the Lord when, calling himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he says, he "God not of the dead but of the living?" (Matthew 22:32.) Is He, then, neither to be to them a God, nor are they to be to him a people? (Mark 12:27.) But they say that these things will be realized when the dead shall be raised to life (p. 444).

We concur, therefore, with what Calvin says concerning those who raised such errors in his day: "Well may we suspect anything that proceeds from such a forge - a forge which has already fabricated, and is daily fabricating, so many monsters" (p. 490). Such errors are indeed not to be borne by God's people.

Most serious of all, however, is Perks' blasphemous denial of the literal ascension of Christ. Surely this follows from his denial of heaven, for if there is no place for believers to go after death, neither is there any place for our risen Lord. Where Christ is until His return Perks never tells us and seems to have no answer. Yet he says, for example, in denying a literal ascension: "But can Steve tell me where Jesus is? Turn left just after Jupiter do we? Maybe he's in the cafe at the end of the universe" (C&S, Jul., 1999, p. 9).

This is a denial of a cardinal and fundamental truth of the Christian faith. From the earliest times the church has confessed her belief in the ascension of Christ. The *Heidelberg Catechism*, one of the Reformation creeds, explains why:

Q. 49. Of what advantage to us is Christ's ascension into heaven?

A. First, that he is our advocate in the presence of His Father in heaven; secondly, that we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, as the Head, will also take up to Himself, us, His members; thirdly, that He sends us His Spirit as an earnest, by whose power we *seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on*

*the right hand of God*, and not things on the earth.

The *Westminster Larger Catechism* also emphasizes the reality and importance of Christ's ascension, reflecting the belief of the church in all ages:

Q. 53. How was Christ exalted in his ascension?

A. Christ was exalted in his ascension, in that having after his resurrection often appeared unto and conversed with his apostles, speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and giving them commission to preach the gospel to all nations, forty days after his resurrection, he, in our nature, and as our head, triumphing over enemies, visibly went up into the highest heaven, there to receive gifts for men, to raise up our affections thither, and to prepare a place for us, where himself is, and shall continue till his second coming at the end of the world.

With this we agree and not with the blasphemous nonsense of Stephen Perks. Heaven and the ascension of Christ to that place are the hope of believers, not the barking of this dog. We ought have nothing to do with such teaching.

Not only does Perks deny the ascension of Christ, however, but his denial of it calls the resurrection of Christ into question, as well. Scripture views them often as one event. His resurrection is, in other words, a resurrection to heaven, and his ascension the culmination of His resurrection. There can no more be a resurrection without an ascension, than there can be a cross without a resurrection.

That the resurrection and ascension are essentially one event is clear from Revelation 12:5. Indeed, not only the resurrection, but the whole work of Christ are viewed as one in this verse, the "catching up to God and to his throne" being the culmination of Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection, and none of them complete without it.

Ephesians 2:6 likewise does not distinguish resurrection and ascension, but simply says that He has "raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places" in Himself. Worth noting here also is the fact that our resurrection and ascension are inseparably bound up with Christ's. As Paul shows in I Corinthians 15, no resurrection for believers means no resurrection for Christ, so here, no ascension for believers means no ascension for Christ.

In the book review mentioned earlier, we pointed out in a footnote that Perks's denial of heaven was but a step away from a denial of the resurrection. This produced a furious re-assertion of the resurrection on his part. Nevertheless, the latest material he has published shows that our fears were well-grounded. While not in fact denying the resurrection, Perks is playing with fire, hell-fire, by his denial of the ascension and of heaven. No heaven, no intermediate state, no ascension, no heavenly life equals no resurrection in the Biblical sense and no Christianity.