

Obituary of Mr Gerrit Schuit

By Rev. K. Watkins

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It was 2005. A young professing man from the United States of America was visiting Chesley in Canada. There he met a wise old Christian, who was not as sure of the young man's salvation as he was himself. The young man soon got the message. "Don't worry, I do love the Lord," he insisted. The older man replied, "But does the Lord love you?" It was a wake-up call. The young man returned home, questioning the truth of his hope. Not long after, he came to a true and saving acquaintance with Christ. It was something new, something he did not have before. And he needed it, for although young, he died within a year. He testified that he had "lived proudly on faith and works for salvation until 2005", but "fled to Jesus alone for refuge, January 2006".

The older man died a month later. We believe that they are both in glory now, enjoying the Saviour in whom they trusted with "like precious faith". The older man was Gerrit Schuit, longtime elder of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in Chesley. His faithful dealing with the young man was typical. Christianity was a serious matter to Gerrit Schuit. He spent a lifetime making his own calling and election sure, and in these days of shallow religion, he was determined to help others do the same. We can still hear his voice as we write, saying: "If the beginning is wrong, everything will be wrong". How true! Start a journey in the wrong direction, and you will just get farther and farther away from your intended destination. The start must be right. That meant real regeneration by the Holy Spirit producing true faith in Christ and repentance towards God. This is how the Saviour dealt with Nicodemus when He insisted, "Ye must be born again".

Saving grace came early to young Gerrit. Conviction of sin began at four years old. He was often seen weeping at night, troubled more by his original sin – the imputed guilt of Adam's first sin and the corruption of his whole nature – than by his actual transgressions. In The Netherlands of those days, it was his rare privilege to hear only the true gospel, as expounded by Ds Paauwe and a layman called Melisen, along with read sermons from the old English and Scottish divines.

Not for him the delusion preached and accepted by so many, that mere conviction was salvation. Like all the elect, he was better taught. Nothing but faith in Christ could bring rest, for only then would he be justified. But finding Christ came neither quickly nor easily, so his mother's conversion when he was eight years old came as a great encouragement.

A year later, he was alone, walking home from school, and had reached a clearing in the woods. Spiritual and saving light was conveyed into his soul as the Holy Spirit enlightened his mind in the knowledge of Christ, especially focusing on the name *Jesus*. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). Thus, the nine-year-old boy was persuaded and enabled to embrace the Redeemer. The date was 26 May 1932. So Gerrit Schuit's Christianity began with an effectual call of the clearest kind. However, there was much to learn, and he was to be no stranger to the struggles common to the Lord's people during their earthly pilgrimage. Great joy had filled his soul when he met the Lord, but this gradually departed, and after six months he felt spiritually empty. His comfort was gone. What did it mean? He had to learn the hard way that Christians do not live on their experiences, not even on their joy in Christ, but on Christ Himself. Speaking of this near the end of his life, he said that it was like being in a sinking boat, where he had to throw out all his experiences one by one, until only Christ was left in the boat. "But I could not throw Him overboard", he said.

Passing through the deprivations of the Second World War in Holland, he became somewhat reticent to speak of the things of God, yet inwardly the work of grace progressed. At the end of the war, he emigrated to North America. Another victory was attained. His reserve had departed, for there he was instrumental in the conversion of his aunt and cousin.

His grasp on gospel doctrine was sorely tested when he joined a group who met to discuss spiritual experience. As they gloried in the so-called "steps of grace" in their own hearts, he felt his soul come into bondage. And no wonder, for these people thought one could be regenerated and not know Christ, and born again but not justified. He was liberated from these heresies when the words of Galatians 5:1 directed him back to Christ alone for the whole of salvation: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not

entangled again with the yoke of bondage". Another triumph in the life of grace! In later years, he had many copies of Robert Traill's distinctions between justification and sanctification printed and distributed. Right doctrine mattered to Gerrit Schuit. It was the difference between life and death.

After marrying Grace, his faithful helpmeet until the end, he moved to Canada, eventually settling in Chesley, where he was ordained a ruling elder of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in 1966. After a while, he began to look into the congregation's history, prompted by people telling him that he was talking like a Free Presbyterian. The congregation in Chesley had left the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1930, when its minister, William Matheson, refused to comply with the Synod's stand that the Sabbath use of public transport run in systematic disregard of the Lord's Day is sinful, even if used only to attend public worship. Always a contender for Biblical principles to be applied in practice, whatever the cost, Gerrit Schuit saw that the Synod had been right. In 1974 he, with others, was the means of reestablishing the Free Presbyterian Church in Chesley. Many years before, when he had sailed past Scotland for America, he had looked longingly at her coast, remembering the godly stand of the Lord's people there over the centuries. Now he had entered that heritage himself, and would often be in Scotland, at Synods and communion seasons.

He was a Free Presbyterian by conviction and earnestly maintained the denomination's Reformed doctrine, worship and government, particularly in times of trouble. In 1989, when many in Canada were carried away by the promises of a specious liberty held out by the Associated Presbyterian Churches, Gerrit Schuit and almost the whole Chesley congregation remained faithful to the old paths.

A felt Christ was essential to our late friend. Once, after hearing an action sermon on the Rose of Sharon and partaking of the symbols of the Saviour's body and blood at His Table, he felt his heart to be cold and unmoved. When complaining of this after the service, he was asked, "What is wrong with the Rose of Sharon?" The effect was immediate. He broke down in tears and hastened to his room, pierced anew with an arrow of love from the crucified Redeemer.

In latter years he was sorely assailed by the evil one, who would suggest blasphemous and atheistic thoughts. These greatly troubled him, but he found

consolation in the testimony of his conscience: that he did not agree with these thoughts. Indeed, he recoiled from them. He hated them. They were the fiery darts of the adversary, not the outworkings of his own soul.

He loved the fellowship of the saints. Rarely would conversation degenerate into a mere recounting of names or past events. Christ Himself, His cross, His preciousness to the soul, the warfare with sin, the corruptions of the heart, the allurements of the world, the assaults of Satan, and deliverances from all by the grace of God – these were the themes he loved to discuss. “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul” (Ps 66:16). A favourite text was Psalm 119:49, which he loved to quote in the metrical version.

Remember, Lord, Thy gracious word Thou to Thy servant spake, Which, for a ground of my sure hope, Thou causedst me to take.

On 11 December 2006 his sure hope was realised. Christ took him to be with Himself, which is far better. No doubt his heart leapt for joy, as faith turned to sight and he beheld his altogether-lovely Saviour. Now he is free of the sin he hated, free from the devil who buffeted him, and free from the world which grieved him.

Gerrit Schuit was not perfect. Only Christ is perfect. But he was an eminent believer, with a balanced Christianity clearly manifested in biblical doctrine, practice and experience. For 74 years on the side of Christ, 40 of them as an elder, the world saw in him “the true grace of God”. Let all who knew him, and in particular his surviving relations, settle for nothing less than the same saving relationship with Christ that he had. Let them not be drawn away to the diluted travesties that go up and down in the name of Christ today. May many follow in his steps, so that “instead of thy fathers shall be thy children” (Ps 45:16).

(Rev) K M Watkins