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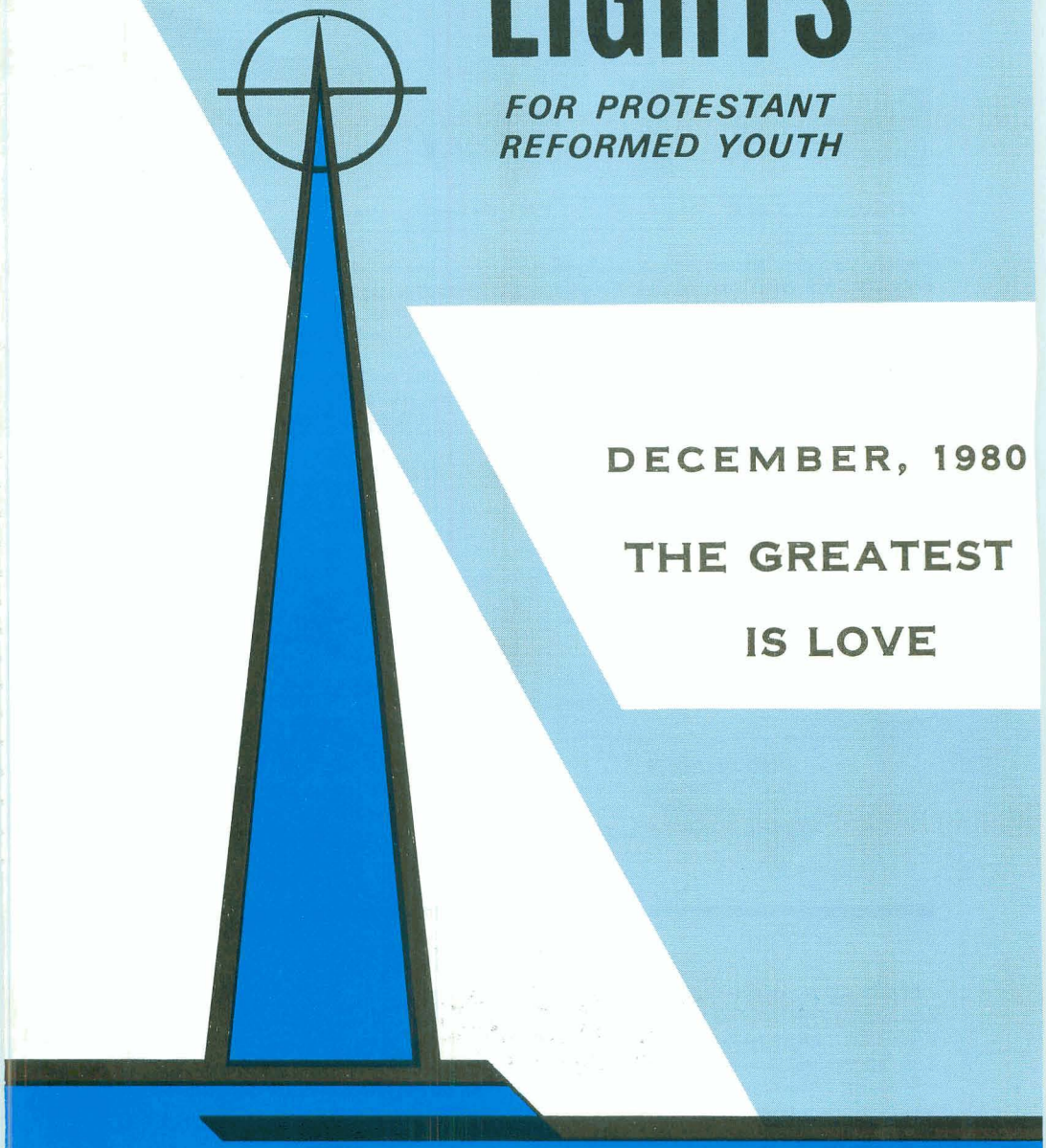

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Editorial

GOD WILL PROVIDE HIMSELF

by David Harbach

He looked out across the vast valley that lay below them. He could see the green land they had just travelled through stretching for miles and the small streams which ran through the land making the land even more full of life. They had travelled for three days bringing with them all that they needed for this very moment. He quickly thought about the events that had taken place: God calling him and telling him to take his only son Isaac, whom he loved, and offer him as a burnt offering; his rising the next day in the early morning, saddling the ass, getting two of his young men and Isaac, his son, cleaving the wood for the burnt offering, taking the coals for the fire and taking his knife; travelling two days to the land of Mt. Moriah; going on a day's journey with Isaac, his son, taking the wood, fire and the knife; his son asking him the question, "Behold the fire and wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"; and his answer, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." "That was it," Abraham thought to himself suddenly, "God will provide himself a lamb."

Abraham now stood over the altar which contained the carefully arranged wood and his only beloved son, Isaac, bound—helpless. He knew that even though he would kill his son, Isaac, God would still raise him from the dead, for Isaac was the promised seed. The promised seed God had given to himself and his wife, Sarah, in their old age. The promised seed through which Christ would come. Hebrews 11:17-19 tells us, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

Abraham reached for the knife, the blade of which reflected the light of the sun, grasped it with his two aged hands and was about to slay his only son, Isaac, when those beautiful words from the angel of the LORD came to him out of heaven, "Abraham, Abraham," and he said, "Here am I." And the angel said, "Let not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." Oh, how happy Abraham felt inside his soul. He looked up and saw a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. "The lamb. God provided the

lamb!'' he thought to himself. Abraham took the ram and offered it in place of his only son, Isaac.

* * * * * * * * * * *

Whenever I read this portion of the Bible found in Genesis 22, I am always reminded of the beautiful picture God shows us of His provision of His own Son. I know Abraham saw this picture in part too. God did provide a ram. A ram is a male sheep. The ram which only God could provide was a picture of God providing His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Only through the death of God's Son, Jesus Christ, could our sins be washed away. Our sins were washed away by the precious blood of the perfect lamb of God. This truth alone is sufficient to show God's sovereignty and yet there is more. Remember God's covenant, His covenant of grace?

Always the early history of the church, especially during the life of Abraham shows us clearly that the Covenant of grace is God's covenant alone. God establishes His covenant alone. No man is a partner to God's covenant. The children of God are only part of God's covenant. Look at Isaac's birth. Isaac's birth was a miracle. God provided the promised seed, not man. Look at Abraham's obedience in preparing to kill his only son, Isaac. And yet, only God could provide the sacrifice, not man. God provided the ram which is a wonderful picture of God providing the Lamb, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Did not Abraham himself say in answer to his son's question, ''My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering''? Indeed, God did and God alone, for that which is impossible with man is always possible with God. Very clearly then, the covenant of God is fulfilled and kept by God alone.

Now, my friends, what has this got to do with Christmas? Everything!! Do not fall into the worldly thinking of today that portrays the birth of the Son of God as a nice story. A nice story brought out at Christmas time and then put back on the shelf until next year, with little or no thought to God's covenant. Understand well what God is saying in the birth of His Son. I alone bring forth the promised seed! I alone bring forth the Heir of the promise! I alone bring forth the Christ—the Messiah! I alone bring forth the Son of God! I alone provide Myself—Immanuel—God with us! I alone bring forth Jesus the Savior of His people! Read this quote from Professor Hanko's pamphlet, ''The Covenant with Abraham'', No. 13, pages 11-12: ''This was the wonder of the ages, the central miracle of all time, the pre-eminent wonder of grace. Christ was born. He was born not by the will of men—it was impossible for man to bring Him forth. He was born not in a natural and earthly way—this was outside the scope of human ability. He was born from a virgin, by a wonder of God. He was born through the power of the Most High without a human father, acting upon the womb of the virgin of David's royal line. It was the mystery of the incarnation, the wonder of Bethlehem, the power of Grace!''

What comfort this is to our souls. God provided Himself a lamb to take away all our sins. What a matchless gift God has provided for His people.

When we understand the birth of Christ let us see the wonder of it and look further to see the power of our deliverance from hell in the death of the Son of God on the cross and His ascension into heaven where He now rules victoriously over all things. To God alone be the glory!

CONCERNING FREE WILL

by Robert Vermeer

Hope P.R. Church, Walker

The idea of man's free will is a belief which is very popular in the world today. We hear of it often, either outwardly declared, or implied in such practices as altar calls. This doctrine of free will is a heresy which takes the honor due unto God, and ascribes it to man. The truth of man's total depravity has been taught against this heresy by many church fathers. Augustine, around 400 A.D., spent much of his life refuting free will as taught by the heretic Pelagius; in the sixteenth century, John Calvin rebuked many churchmen for holding to it; the fathers of our Protestant Reformed denomination fought against this idea in 1924; and we must continue to fight against this heresy. Let us take a look at where this terrible idea originated, how it has developed, and how we should view our will.

Four hundred years before the time of Christ, the early Greek philosophers developed and taught the freedom of man's will. These philosophers described it something like this: The two main parts of man's soul are reason and sense perception. The reason affects all of our decisions and governs our will. It always takes the most effective council. Sense perception is sluggish and dull and is always involved in baser things and never reaches true discernment. Our will is located between the reason and the sense perception and is free to choose whether to obey reason or the senses. If it obeys the reason and does not allow itself to be subjected to the senses, it will always seek virtue and enables us to lead a good and blessed life. But if it subjects itself to the senses, it will become corrupted and degenerate into lust. However, our senses can be overcome by the power of reason so that we can do good in spite of our senses.

These philosophers believed then that good as well as evil are in our power. Because we do what we do seemingly by our own free choice, they argued, we also have the ability not to do it. Thus if we choose to do evil, then we can also choose to do that which is right. And if we do good and gain virtue, it is because of our own doings and not of God. ("Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools", Romans 1:22.) We can easily see how this view of

man's will robs God of His honor. It gives man the ability to choose that which is right, not because of God's grace, but because of his natural ability to reason. However, the Bible teaches us differently when it tells us that "the imaginations of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:4). We cannot even imagine what is good, much less choose to do it.

Foolish though the philosophers' idea of free will may seem, it was the seed of the heritical doctrine of free will in the church. Early churchmen, fearing the ridicule of the philosophers, became guilty of ascribing free will to man. They did not want to teach anything that went against the common judgment of man, so they compromised the Scriptures with the beliefs of the philosophers. Chrysostom, a prominent father of the early Christian church about 400 A.D., once stated, "Since God has placed good and evil in our power, he has granted free decision of choice, and does not restrain the unwilling, but embraces the willing." It was also at this time that Pelagius brought his heretical teachings against Augustine's theology on original sin and total depravity. It is because of Pelagius' belief that man has a free will and that he can save himself by his own efforts, that the doctrine of free will is called Pelagianism.

Since this time, many views of free will have arisen, assigning various degrees of freedom to man's will. These views are still prevalent in many churches today. They attribute some good to man. These hold that man was created in the image of God and could thus will to do natural and spiritual good. When man fell, he lost the ability to seek heavenly things, but could still will to do good concerning earthly things. According to the theory of common grace, man also lost the ability to do natural good in the fall, but again received and maintains this ability through common grace.

All of these views, however, deny the total depravity of man and cannot be considered as anything but the lie. We may not compromise the Word of God for any reason. We must look only to the infallible Scriptures for the truth. It teaches that man became and remains totally depraved after the fall, and is so corrupt that he is unable to do any good except through regeneration by the Holy Spirit. This truth of Scripture is very clearly summed up in Article XIV of the Belgic Confession. Here we are taught:

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

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

Thus our will is free to do nothing but sin. It is a slave of sin. Our totally depraved nature seeks sin continually. In and of ourselves we have no hope, for the carnal mind is enmity against God (Romans 8:7). And thus natural man can do no good.

We must not rely on our own strength but humble ourselves before God Who gives grace to the meek (I Peter 5:5). For it is only through God's grace that we can will to do good and seek his righteousness (II Corinthians 3:5). Through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, our will is freed from the bonds of sin. However, we must not think that once we are regenerated we can will what is good of ourselves. It is only because of God's grace that we can will aright. The apostle Paul clearly states this when he says, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). Again, in II Corinthians 3:3, Paul writes, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God."

But even though we are never left without God's grace, we still carry within us our old man of sin, and are still tempted by him. Because of our old nature, we would try to give ourselves the credit for doing good. But we must remember always to humble ourselves before God and not claim anything good of ourselves, for only true humility gives God the honor which is His. We must continue to ask for God's grace and pray that His will be done, for "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy" (Psalms 147:11).

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FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

BY REV. G. LUBBERS

THE SPIRITUAL FERVANCY OF LOVE

"....see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervantly, being born again...of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever." I Peter 1:22, 23.

My dear youthful readers, spiritual children and grandchildren. It's ever a great joy to write from my "study" to you. You must know that this ever requires a bit of study of the Scriptures—otherwise "Pastor's Study" has nothing to write to you. His writing will not be seasoned with salt to give grace to you the readers. No, I must impart some benefit of Christ to you. These articles must not be like the salt that has lost its savor and therefore must be cast out and be trodden under the foot of men.

Now I have a request of you, dear young people. I ask you to take your Bible and read the verses 13-25 of this beautiful chapter from Peter, who was made fisher of men. Don't just read it once hurriedly, but read it thoughtfully, and then look at every word in the verses 22 and 23. Let these words sink deep into your heart, as a lamp unto your feet and as a light upon your pathway.

You will have noticed that this portion of Scripture comes to the Church

with a very beautiful Gospel-exhortation. It comes as the Gospel which tells you and me that we have not been bought with corruptible things as silver and gold, but that we have been bought and cleansed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot. This means that you too as members of God's Church are Christ's precious possession. We belong to Him in life and death, for time and eternity. Yes, in that context and setting this beautiful exhortation comes to us, to you and me! And it is a very serious and meaningful exhortation.

There is one other thing that you ought to notice in the text. If you overlook this you will not listen well to this exhortation. It is that the text says that something wonderful has happened to you. You have been born again. What Jesus told Nicodemus must happen to a man to see the kingdom of heaven, has happened to you. You have been born again, born from above by the Spirit of God, who blows where God sends Him in sovereign love. Born out of God.

Now this is not simply told as a startling piece of news, a sensational fact, a mere topic of conversation, subject for an essay in your society, a little news from "Pastor's Study", but it is told you as an incentive to love your fellow young people. You are exhorted to do something which the unregenerated world *cannot* do, *may* not do, *desires* not to will to do. The feet of the world are swift to shed blood, the poison of asps is under their lips. But you are come to a "state of being" of newborn children who *may* and who *can* love. As children of God's reborn family, you are told to do *what you can and may do!* You are told to do that which is comely for God's children, His disciples. You are to love one another. It is *the earmark* of being Christ's disciples. (John 13:35) Incidently, have you ever read that passage carefully and prayerfully!?

Incentive to love one another....

Yes, it is an incentive to *fervant* love. Love must boil a bit; it must not be tepid and lukewarm love. And above all it must not be made cold by the lack of love of others. It never acts on the principle: do unto others as they do unto you, but rather, "do unto your neighbor, as you would have him do to you." Yes, it is that simple, but also that impelling. For all love is from the *heart*! No, this is not a love from what the world calls "bleeding-hearts" from a rejecting lover. It is from a heart which is *made* pure. Basically this heart is made pure when God *gives* us a new heart, a circumcised heart, when He *pours* His love in our hearts. Yes, this is a love which has been manifested in the Cross of Christ. This love of God is back of this love. That is the "heavenly side" of salvation, and the "earthly side" is that we are born anew by this love, and our hearts are made pure, so that one day we shall see God! This prospect is the only incentive to purify ourselves, to *walk* in love from a pure heart. And now let this not slip through your fingers: *Everyone* that has this hope of seeing God as He is and to be like him: *purifies* (present indicative tense and mood—the *fact* MOOD in present time) himself as He is pure." (I John 3:3).

Now a *fervant* love is one that is really stretched out to reach the brother, sister, friend, yes even "*my* enemy" who has crossed me up here and there;

yes, possibly seventy-seven times a day. A fervant love is a seeking love, a forgiving love, a love which prays for those who despitefully use us. Then we become perfect children of our heavenly father, and we walk in love which is perfected. Fervant love is love which will not grow cold because of iniquity perpetrated to us. We don't have any wounds and scars in our conscience then; we don't nurse our hurts and grudges; we don't get the most out of every seeming offense, which effort would only hurt us more than the original offense. Love suffers long and is kind; love thinketh no evil; love rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices *together with* your friends in Christ, and *in* the truth.

Such fervant love presupposes that we "have purified our souls in obeying the truth"! With our souls we rejoice and have sorrow, we think and will, we plan and purpose. With the souls we suffer and rejoice. Our souls are contaminated with much sin and guilt, with much hatred and strife, which is all rooted in disobedience to the truth. A rebellious soul against father, mother, teacher, ministers, elders and your bosom friends is a soul which is foul and defiled. Sometimes they are filled with lusts of the flesh, pleasures of life, and sinful pride of life. But only when our souls are purified in actually obeying the truth can we love fervantly. Yes, that is repentance, that is daily conversion. This must be the true sorrow before God which makes us cry for God's mercy. That takes care of "emotional" problems, which are, at bottom, sin problems of a defiled soul and conscience. When our souls have learned to "honor father and mother" in the Lord, then our souls are joyful in the Lord. Only then!

If God's incorruptible seed is in you, you will as a born-again sinful saint see that the great incentive for a fervant love is that in God's love you are born again from incorruptible seed. Yes, and by the word of God which is preached this seed is brought to fruition in you. You will be as those of whom Jesus spoke in John 15:3, "Now are ye clean through the word which I have spoken unto you". Did not Jesus pray in His highpriestly intercession, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth"? (John 17:17).

Now we must not overlook that Peter is here exhorting the churches in Asia Minor, the spiritual strangers and pilgrims in the world. That is their status in the world since they are born again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (I Peter 1:3b). This exhortation belongs to the warnings, threatenings, admonitions and the precepts of the gospel, by which we are kept in the exercise of the word, sacraments and discipline! This is not always understood. Sometimes these admonitions are degenerated into a sort of new-law which we must keep to be saved, and sometimes they are so neglected and denied and glossed over that God is tempted in the church, by separating what He has most intimately conjoined: admonitions and grace which *impowers* unto fervant love. Yes, then love wanes in the church. The preaching of law-principle cannot revive fervant love; it is the *power* of sin. The neglect of preaching these precepts, as firmly anchored in God's saving grace, is tempting God in the church. Peter comes here with the great gospel-precept to fervant love as being rooted in the saving word of God *for* us on the Cross, and *in* us by regeneration, and *through* us in good

works of fervant love. Only when the latter is present will love not wane in its fervancy.

The soul of us is purified by these gospel-exhortations. That is what the Psalmist says in Psalm 19:7-14. Hear the poet jubilate in these precepts of the LORD. Does your heart burn in you too, young people, when the law is thus taught, "the Law of the LORD is perfect converting the soul"? Are the sermons for you "sweeter than honey and the honeycomb", and have you found them a pearl of great price, a great reward in keeping them?

Let not your faith grow dim!

Let not your love wax cold because of the abounding of lawlessness in the world....

He that endures to the end shall be saved!

Blessed fervancy of love, like the dew of Hermon descending upon Jerusalem....when brethren dwell together in love.

Yes, all flesh and human effort is like grass, but the mighty power of God's Word, the preached word, endures forever!

THE ONE BIBLICAL GROUND FOR DIVORCE

by Rev. C. Hanko
Pastor Emeritus of Hudsonville P.R. Church

From time to time the question is raised whether there is only one possible ground for divorce. Especially in our day when so many couples are unhappily married and seek a divorce, and the courts are so ready to grant legal separation on various grounds, rather than on the ground of fornication, the question asserts itself, Is there only one Biblical ground for divorce?

In speaking of this one ground we obviously have in mind the sin of adultery, or fornication, as it is called in Matthew 5:31, 32, and in Matthew 19:9. In both of these passages Jesus stresses that when God instituted marriage in paradise He made this a bond that cannot be broken, except by death. Yet the sin of unfaithfulness is such a horrible sin, that plays such havoc upon the intimacy of the marital union, that the guilty party often wants no reconciliation, and the offended party finds it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to forgive and forget. The hardness of our human heart disrupts and often refuses to restore the marital harmony. Therefore Jesus speaks of one sin that *can* be reason for a man to put away his wife, or for a wife to put away her husband. In Matthew 5 our Lord teaches us, "that every one that putteth away his wife, *saving for the cause of fornication,* maketh her an

adulteress." And in Matthew 19:9 He tells us that, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery."

Even though this should be conclusive, often another ground is sought, and that on the basis of Scripture. Thus, for example, the Westminster Confession of Faith states in chapter 24, article 6, that there is also another possible ground for divorce. There we read:

> "Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage; yet, nothing but adultery, or such wilful desertion as can in no way be remedied by the Church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage; wherein a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case."

We notice in this article, first, that two causes are mentioned as sufficient reason for divorce, adultery and willful desertion. Second, that these two causes are referred to as cause sufficient of dissolving the marriage bond, as if that bond no longer exists. I intend to refer to this again later.

Willful desertion is considered to be a sufficient cause for dissolving the marriage bond on the basis of I Corinthians 7:15, where we read, "Yet if the unbelieving departeth, let him depart: the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace."

It should be evident to the discerning reader that no mention whatever is made in the text of divorce or of dissolving the marriage bond. The text speaks only of *separation*. Anything else is only a conclusion drawn from the text. And let me add that the bondage mentioned in the text cannot refer to the bond of marriage, for marriage is never a bondage.

In the context Paul is speaking of the sanctity and permanence of the unbreakable marriage bond.

He refers, first of all, to what the Lord said about marriage and divorce in Matthew 5:31, 32.* The law of Moses is very severe, demanding that an adulterer should be put to death, so that the marriage bond was broken by the death of the guilty party. But the Jews had found a loophole in the passage of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. A man could put away his wife for any unjust or silly reason, so they taught, as long as he gave her a bill of divorcement. This Jesus condemns in no uncertain terms, demanding that a man must not put away his wife, but live with her in the fear of the Lord. Jesus allows for only one possible reason for putting away a wife or leaving a husband, and that is if the mate is guilty of adultery, or, as it is called here, fornication.

Paul refers, secondly, to Matthew 19:9, where the matter of divorce is once more brought up by the Lord. Again the Lord condemns the ruthless attitude of the Pharisees that allowed a man to put away his wife for any reason he might invent. Jesus points out that when God instituted marriage in paradise no allowance was made for separation. God brings two individuals

together, binds them in the holy bond of marriage and thus they are no more two individuals, but they are one, both physically and psychologically. As believers they are even one spiritually in the Lord. Now Moses did not change that original institution of marriage, as Christ makes clear. It was only because of the hardness of the human heart, the refusal to forgive the unfaithful mate who sought to return, or the refusal to repent and forsake one's sin, that Moses *allowed* a divorcement. But from the beginning it was not so. Thereupon Jesus adds that the only possible reason for divorce is the terrible, faithless sin of adultery, and the refusal to put away that sin.

Paul, now in I Corinthians 7, verse 11, goes on to say that if a wife deserts her husband, she is obligated before the Lord to remain unmarried, or return to her husband. Under any and all circumstances a wife is subject to her husband as long as he lives. This is corroborated in Romans 7:2, 3. Therefore the husband may in no instance put away his wife. If she is guilty of unfaithfulness, he must be ready and willing to be reconciled with her. Since marriage is a picture of the eternal union between Christ and His church, which cannot be broken, marriage is an indissoluble bond, which can only be dissolved by the death of one of the parties.

In verse 12 Paul introduces another related subject. There were instances in the early church, where the one life-mate came to conversion and faith in Jesus Christ, while the other remained an unbeliever. Through no fault of theirs a barrier had arisen between them. Paul urges the believing husband to continue to live with his unbelieving wife, if she is content to dwell with him. On the other hand, the believing wife should also remain with her husband as long as he is content to live with her. This undoubtedly created all kinds of difficulties, since their language, their ambitions and goals, their friends and associates, their very walk of life would be quite different, yet as long as they could peaceably live together they should do so. Later, in verse 16, Paul adds, "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" Peter also urges godfearing wives to be subject to their own husbands, that "they also without the word be won by the conversation of the wives." (I Peter 3:1). The believing husband or wife need not be concerned that the unbelief of the partner will prevent the believing mate from being in the line of the covenant. The covenant line will continue through the believer, for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by his wife, and vice versa, "else were your children unclean, but now they are holy." (verse 15).

In verse 16 Paul faces the possibility that the unbeliever will not want to continue to live with the believing mate because of the radical change that has come between them. In that case, Scripture teaches us, "If the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace."

That the brother or sister is not *under bondage* cannot and must not be taken to mean that the marriage bond is broken. The marriage bond is not a bondage. The bondage that is meant here is the bondage of sin and guilt that

might deprive the believer of a good conscience and peace with God. The believing wife might feel that she is to blame for the division between them. She might be tempted to leave the church or compromise on her principles, in order to keep her mate from leaving her. This she must not do at any cost. The unbelieving husband who forsakes her on account of her faith is guilty of desertion. But this cannot be considered a ground for divorce. Let him depart, Scripture admonishes the believing wife, but let her always keep the way open for his return and a reconciliation.

There is but one ground for divorce, and that is fornication. Yet even so this must not be considered a breaking of the marriage bond. The guilty party may be prevented from returning to the home of his spouse as long as he continues in sin, but that which God has joined together let not man put asunder. The way of reconciliation must always be left open as long as both parties live. Therefore marital separation and divorce must always be considered a very serious matter, because marriage is a holy, divine institution. Disrupting the harmony of that marital bond bears its bitter consequences for the husband and the wife who are separated, but far worse consequences for the children that are deprived of father or mother, and the love and care they so sorely need. The original cause for the very thought of separation lies in sin that destroys the harmony. This sin must be discovered and rooted out. That is the only real solution to any marital problem. The solution certainly does not lie in the direction of heaping one sin upon another—first disharmony, then separation, then a legal divorce, then a desire to marry some one else, while the first sin lies unconfessed upon the conscience and untold misery has arisen out of it. How wonderful that husband and wife, who are both sinners, may meet at the foot of the cross to show mercy and forgiveness, even as God in Christ has forgiven them.

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FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

by Ben Wigger

"For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" Psalm 139:13-17a.

Doesn't it give you a great deal of comfort to realize that it is God who formed you? That it is God who knows your future and that He does have a plan for your life.

As believers, we also know that every unborn child is not only a person, but also an immortal soul, a person created by God to serve His purpose. And even before birth, the human fetus is precious to us, for a human being has been made, a self, a someone who will live on into eternity.

Jesus Christ recognized the child as an important person. He paid attention to children, blessed them and often used them as object lessons for adults. It seems to us that the importance of bringing into the world such an important being as a human child is staggering.

Unfortunately, today's world does not see the coming of a child as a blessed event; in fact just the opposite seems to be true. There seems to be no place in today's society for children, or the responsibility that they bring. People today want all they can get of the "good life"; children just get in the

way. They fully choose to live in moral corruption, and they do *all* they can to escape the consequences. And if by some chance they make a mistake and the woman becomes pregnant, there is always abortion.

It is always interesting to read just why some women choose to have abortions. Their reasons can be as varied as the women themselves. But there does seem to be one underlying motive which seems to run through all their reasoning—selfishness. The would-be-mother of the unborn child always says, whether directly or indirectly, I did it for me.

It wasn't too long ago that a local television station, here in the Grand Rapids area, did a series of special news reports on abortion. They looked at different women who had had an abortion; their reasons for doing so were gone over, and some time was spent on how they had adjusted to the fact afterwards. I remember one woman in particular who responded when asked by the woman reporter why she had chosen abortion. Without any hesitation, she responded that she decided to do something for herself for a change.

Abortion is not only a crime against the unborn, it is also a crime against God and His law. Man has in effect made murder legal. And since he has legalized it, it has opened the flood-gates so that estimates of the number of abortions performed in this country now range into the millions.

However, I do feel that there may be a time when abortion could be considered. But only if it can be determined that the continued development of the unborn child will eventually lead to the death of the mother. But I can also feel in my own heart that any decision dealing with this factor would be a terribly difficult one to make.

But obviously what we have today is the abortion of millions of unborn children for no real reason. You can quite honestly ask yourself, how many horrors are we just going to ignore? Abortion seems to be accepted as almost commonplace today.

We are all quite familiar with the history of the Jews during the second world war. It is such a terrible part of world history that we must constantly remind ourselves that it really did happen. What it takes us back to is the total depravity of man's nature. His sinful nature was allowed to completely expose itself. And even though the evidence was there for the entire world to see, the facts were largely ignored. Our ability to reject unwelcomed facts is one of the most interesting facets of our human nature.

It shocked many people years ago that a woman could be killed at leisure on New York's streets while dozens of people systematically closed their ears to her screams for help. But the evidence is that at times we all tune out the cries of help from someone.

Ask yourselves, are we doing that with abortion? Remember, we can never compromise our Christian principles no matter what the cost. We can rest assured that soon there will come a time when just what we believe will be required of us. We dare not call ourselves Christians and not speak out against the sin of this world.

THE GREATEST IS LOVE

by Rev. J. Kortering
Pastor of Loveland P.R. Church

One thing we surely can use more of is love.

It makes such a difference.

The tender hand of a mother as she washes the bloodied wound and gently bandages is love in action.

Giggling children sitting on grandpa's lap and cheering his aged soul is a personification of love.

Ah, yes, it's soon that time of the year when the sanctuary will be filled with the swelling notes of..."Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels and have not love...it profiteth me nothing!" while the bride and groom swell with emotions as they anticipate marriage.

It ends with the stirring words, "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love," I Corinthians 13:13.

I'm afraid that many couples never look beyond the word love. We tend to be so emotion orientated today that we fail to see more than the earthly and sensual. Love is the tender embrace, the palpitating heart, the exhilaration of sharing a tender moment. Now, it is that to be sure. If that is lacking in our relationship, something is surely wrong. When, however, God's Word speaks of love as the greatest, we must at least ask, greater than what? The answer is greater than faith and hope. That means that if we are going to use I Corinthians 13:13 as part of our wedding celebration, we have to be honest enough with God's Word to view love on the high plane that God requires.

Love is greater than faith and hope!

Faith is our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Through the means of faith we embrace with a believing heart all the promises of the gospel, centrally that Christ has died for our sins and arose again for our justification. We know God through Jesus Christ and trust in Him for our full salvation.

Hope is our future glory. Deeply within us there is a longing for the realization of all the promises of God that extends far beyond this earthly life and sweep us into our heavenly home. We are certain that this is our portion because Christ hath begun this work in us and He will perform it unto the end.

Obviously, faith and hope are pretty big numbers in the repertoire of the redeemed.

Still, love is greater than both; it is the greatest!

How can that be?

Love is the heart reaching for God. It is the response of God's reaching down to us and drawing us close to Himself. The Greek word that is translated "love" in this verse emphasizes this divine character. There are words in Greek that speak of the physical, "eros", and the aspect of friendship, "philos" as we have it in Philadelphia, city of brotherly love. Here, however, it is "agape", divine love. It begins in God, enters into our hearts, and returns to God once again. It is the heartbeat of the covenant of friendship which God has with us and we have with Him.

How is that love greater than faith and hope?

The answer is not that love is more important to God; this would place the three in a false antithesis. All three are significant fruits of Christ's work on the cross. Rather, love is the fountain from which flows faith and hope. God made man in such a way that his heart is the spiritual source of his life. Solomon says, "out of the heart are the issues of life," Proverbs 4:23. Jesus said, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart," Matthew 15:16. The spiritual direction of our whole life is determined by the spiritual condition of the heart. We may say then, if there is no love in the heart, there cannot be faith or hope, if there is love in the heart, faith and hope flow forth from it.

This principle must be applied in two ways.

First, in our personal relationship with God. Without love, we cannot have true faith. This can be seen all around us. We ask, why is it that so many in our day boldly take God's Word and find fault with it? They claim they have to demythologize the Word and discern what is a story and what is fact. The creation account is not history, the fall is not history, the virgin birth is not history, only stories to tell us truths of origin, etc. The question we face is this, why do they deal so wickedly with God's Word? The answer is that they do not love God. Their "faith" is false, because they have not the love of God in their hearts. The same thing is true concerning future hope. The apostate church has discarded the hope of heaven or hell. Death is simply a ceasing to exist. The Scriptural idea of hope is taken away because they do not have God's love. The greatest of these three is love. Love causes the child of God to accept God's Word and believe His promises. It is the spiritual moving power that directs us to accept by faith God's Word and live in the hope of glory.

Secondly, we must apply this principle to our dealings with each other. The early part of this chapter tells us that if we should speak in tongues, have the gift of prophecy, understand mysteries, have faith to remove mountains, bestow our goods to feed the poor, give our body to be burned and have not love it would be nothing more than a show of piety, an external act of kindness without any heart, a tinkling cymbal which is profitless. This reminds us of the truth that man looks at the outward appearance, but Jehovah looks upon the heart. The heart deals with motivation, if we love God we will do it for God's sake and for His glory and not our own.

True love manifests itself in a wonderful way. It puts faith into practice and causes us to live with an eye upon the heavenly glory.

Hence we read, love suffers long and is kind, does not envy, does not lift itself up and is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, does not seek her own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity, but in truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. Love never fails.

Such love surely affects human relationships. It alone possesses divine qualities for it has its source in God alone. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins," I John 4:10. When two believers enter into marriage with that love of God in their hearts, they can say it is the greatest! That love gives them faith and hope for the future. With such love, their marriage is on a good foundation. They will be a source of strength to each other, their marriage will be a lifelong expression of love for each other as they together have faith in God and look forward to a blessed future.

Such love abides.

Well may a young couples' heart pulsate with expectation as the church is filled with the words, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, it profiteth me nothing...now abideth faith, hope, love, these three and the greatest of these is love."

Love is indeed the greatest.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

by Gary Van Der Schaaf

This article by Gary Vander Schaaf is the first in a seris dealing with how Protestant Reformed Teachers present their subjects from a distinctive point of view. This series was introduced in the November issue.

The foundation for science education in Protestant Reformed schools is found in Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." In this "Genesis Mandate" we are told, in effect, that the world is created for our care. If we are to "tend the garden" for God's sake, we must know about that garden. Science can help us know and help us tend.

As I see it, God demands that His children occupy two roles when they study science. The first role is passive; the child of God must learn about

creation. I know that those of you who have studied science think that there is nothing passive about it. It is often hard work. But I mean "passive" in that, through science studies, our God is revealed to us. We learn that our Father is omnipotent. Especially, we learn through science that our Lord is a Lord of structure, a God of order. Whether God deals with His people or with His dumb creation, He is never an arbitrary or capricious God.

Nowhere is God's mighty and ordering power more visible than in the evening sky. The myriad stars seem randomly scattered, the only order that by which man places them in constellations. Yet you and I know that God's structuring power is operating even in the empty cold of space. The planets move in orderly, elleptical orbits; the sun circles daily in its course. Our solar system turns around the hub of the Milky Way, which in turn revolves around a point thousands of light-years away. So our universe is not chaotic, as men label it today. Instead, as medieval man saw more clearly, the heavens are part of the "Great Dance", moving, turning, spinning in precise and orderly movement in tune to the celestial music of God's almighty power.

The second role the child of God must fulfill is an active one. We must do something: we must subdue the earth; we must tend the garden. In order for science to help us do this, the science taught in Protestant Reformed schools must be thorough, rigorous, and accurate. Let me explain these standards.

Novelist Fredrick Manfred likes to tell the story of the time his mother visited him at Calvin College when he was a student there in the early 1930's. Manfred wanted to show his mother the college's collection of fossils, dinosaur bones, and other "prehistoric" artifacts. His mother declined. Manfred insisted. She declined again. Finally, Manfred asked her why she refused to have a look at the "old bones." His mother replied, "Och, Feike, I'm scared to go in there. I don't think my faith can stand it."

We can understand the mother's fears; we can even sympathize with them. But we cannot encourage them in ourselves or in others. Our science must be thorough and rigorous. It must deal with what is. I have encountered parents and students who think that we have to stay away from certain areas of study because "it's all evolution stuff." Fossils, old bones, geological deposits, the differentation of species: these are not "all evolution stuff." We should not fear and avoid them just because false science has misinterpreted this data. Rather, we must study these things thoroughly, scientifically, that we might discover the truth about them and their purpose here. What is God trying to tell us about Himself and His creation through these things? All creation is a book; we sin if we refuse to read it.

But we sin even more if we read the book of creation inaccurately. This is why our science must be accurate. This means, first of all, that our science realizes its limitations. It deals with *what is,* with what it can see, handle, and analyze in the laboratory. Those of you who attend secular high schools or colleges and take science courses at those places must remember that Science is not Philosophy. It is not Metaphysics. It is certainly not Theology. Science has no business passing definitive judgments concerning the existence or

nature of God, man's relationship with Him, or man's relationship with his fellow men.

Secondly, if our science is to be accurate, it must be truthful. Our scientific theories must fit the evidence found in nature and, above all, in Scripture. Protestant Reformed schools do not teach the theory of evolution because this theory does not fit the facts of creation or Scripture. Rather, we seek to learn the truth about creation and fight those who elevate lies to positions of scientific canon. Fighting scientific untruth is one way the child of God can be active. To fight effectively, however, we must have thorough and rigorous training.

If, for instance, you want to protest evolutionary theory in one of your science classes, it does little good to stand up and announce, "I don't believe that," and then have the professor cut you to ribbons before the class because you do not know enough about evolutionary theory to debate with him. Neither is it sufficient to simply drop the class in protest. Such action is a poor gesture, at best, and poor witnessing at worst. Instead, do this: learn the facts, study the information, familiarize yourself with evolutionary theory, know it cold, discover its many weaknesses. The Institute for Creation Research publishes over twenty books criticizing evolutionary theory from a scriptural point of view. (A partial list of ICR publications is given at the end of this article.) Read these books, study them; do not be destroyed for lack of knowledge.

Science is knowledge, knowledge of the creation: what it's like, what it does, how it does it. We need this knowledge if we are to be effective stewards of God's great garden. We have been, I fear, ineffective gardeners. We have a sorry history of "let somebody else do it" attitudes. Scientific matters are not our concern. Not our concern, that is, until *our* cattle are contaminated with PBB, *our* wells are polluted by chemical run-off, *our* children are born deformed or dead in a Love Canal-type tragedy, *our* neighborhoods are evacuated due to nuclear-reactor leaks. Where have we been? What have we been doing? Satan's children have been tending the garden long enough. We must take our tools—science and the scriptures—and get to work.

These and other books can be ordered from the Institute for Creation Research, 2716 Madison Avenue, San Diego, California 92116.

The Genesis Flood
The Twilight of Evolution
Biblical Cosmology and Modern Science
Evolution and the Modern Christian
The Remarkable Birth of Planet Earth
Speculations and Experiments Related to the Origin of Life: A Critque
Scientific Studies in Special Creation
The Early Earth

The Origin of the Solar System
The World that Perished

OUR MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST

by Phil Dykstra

At this time of the year, the people of the world, and the people of the church are celebrating the festivity called Christmas. Believer and unbeliever alike have trees put in their homes, put colored lights on them (some flickering), spend large amounts of money for gifts, sing the same songs, and by all outward appearance have all things in common. At this time of the year the distinction between church and world, is all but extinguished. The average church-goer puts his light under a bushel, and the worldly individual puts his 'best' foot forward. Indeed, very strange practices at this time of the year, with the Christ supposedly in mind. Let the serious minded child of God consider a few ideas from Scripture on the glorious event of the birth of Christ.

Hebrews 2:17 and 18, "Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted." Young people, yes, fathers and mothers too, all of us, let's go back and read those two verses again! What a wealth of treasure in God's Word! Christ Jesus was born. Why? In order to suffer and die, for you and me, and all of God's children.

Our merciful High Priest. This means that it is the will of Christ to make us perfect, to experience the covenant life with God as He does. And He works this desire, or will, out in our life upon this earth already, even though we are yet in our sinful natures. This is why we can sing Psalter #163, stanza 2,

The loving kindness of my God
Is more than life to me;
So I will bless Thee while I live
And lift my prayer to Thee.
In Thee my soul is satisfied,
My darkness turns to light,
And joyful meditations fill
The watches of the night.

It's that lovingkindness of God, that caused Him to send His Son to be born and to die for His people. Is this then your song and confession, child of God? Can you really sing this? If you can and do, then you have a most beautiful confession and evidence that you are a child of God, and most blessed! Then we, "see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor". Hebrews 2:9a.

To know and experience this blessedness, we must know and be assured that Jesus (Saviour) removed all our sins. Then the full meaning of the birth of Jesus fills our hearts. If we have this assurance, then we will be comforted in anything and everything that comes our way in this life. Then we know that, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8:31. This knowledge and assurance comes to the child of God through the Scriptures. We must know what the Word of God says about Himself and about how we, as His people, must walk in the midst of this life as pilgrims and strangers. If we are not faithful in Bible study, and if we neglect the preaching of the Gospel on the Sabbath day, then it will surely follow, that our spiritual life will suffer. We all must confess daily that we fall far short of living in obedience to our Lord and Saviour. What then is our hope in this life, dear reader? Surely it is not the customs or the 'joy' this world tries to tempt us with. Let's look at the beauty of Hebrews 2:17 and 18 again. Jesus, the One born to be our faithful and merciful high priest. We need that knowledge, child of God! Remember that He was born for the purpose of saving us from our sins. When we are faithless, He is faithful! He knows all our weaknesses and frailties, therefore He is continually interceding for us to the Father.

Do these truths, of the coming of Christ into our flesh go with us every day of our life? They should! The world, and much of what is called Christianity today, certainly do not even know what we are talking about, especially at this time of the year. Their kind of Jesus remains in the manger, and excites them to give all kinds of gifts (not to Him, but to each other), and to have so called Christ-mas parties, and the list of things they do could go on.

"But we see Jesus" (Hebrews 2:9), not staying a babe; but shedding His blood for the sins of His people, and now seated at the right hand of God, interceding for us. And His promise to us is, that He shall come with a shout, not in the stillness of Bethlehem's manger; but as Lord of lords, and King of kings, to save His Church and to execute judgment upon all the ungodly.

Let us all then examine why and how we remember and meditate on our Lord Jesus Christ, even in His lowly birth. Is it in harmony with the Word of God? Remember Hebrews 2:17 and 18. When we think of the great wonder of Bethlehem, do we do this in all seriousness as Scripture would have us do it? Or do we add many of the customs of the world to our remembering? We remember Him as our Saviour. His birth cannot even enter our minds, without remembering His finishing sacrifice on the cross. Our faithful and merciful high priest! From God's Word we will have and experience the assurance that He is our only comfort in life and in death. And also, we will not be caught up with the empty customs of this world, as we remember our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us, as members of the Body of Christ, look to Him, and for Him, as the Author and Finisher of our faith, and give God the praise and glory for all that He has done for us, in and through Christ.

NEWS From, For, and About Our Churches

by Linda Zandstra

BIRTHS

—Mr. & Mrs. George De Jong of South Holland, son, Matthew Paul.
—Mr. & Mrs. Gary Eriks of South Holland, daughter, Nicole Marie.
—Mr. & Mrs. George Tolsma of Edmonton, daughter, Lisa Lynn.
—Mr. & Mrs. Jim Rau of Faith, son, Rodney Alan.
—Mr. & Mrs. Roger Brands of Southwest, daughter, Carolyn Jeanette, on April 21.
—Mr. & Mrs. Herman Klaassens of Edmonton, son, Michael Jon, on May 4.
—Mr. & Mrs. Tom Faber of Southeast, son on June 11.
—Mr. & Mrs. Ken Kuiper of Faith, son, David Seth, on August 21.
—Mr. & Mrs. Harry Rutgers of First, daughter, Sarah Renae, on September 2.
—Mr. & Mrs. Henry Zandstra of Randolph, daughter, Amber Joy, on September 5.
—Mr. & Mrs. P. Mac Graw of First, son on September 28.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

—Jim Wierenga of Edmonton on April 27.
—Mr. Timothy Rus and Mrs. Diana Meyer of First on August 17.
—Harlan Van Maanan of Hull on August 31.
—Mr. Dan Schipper of Holland on September 28.
—Doug Bruinsma, Barb Haak, Doris Haak, Pete Medema, Ed Wories, and Jeanne Zandstra of South Holland on September 28.

MARRIAGES

—James Koole & Gladys Hoekstra on August 1 in Hull.
—Pete Westra & Jan Hanko on August 6 in Faith.
—Rev. Carl Haak & Mary Pastoor on August 12.
—Dennis Griess & Sharon Kortering on August 21 in the First Baptist Church of Loveland.
—James Mol & Amy Mensch on August 22 at Faith.

—Bern Zandstra & Linda Kaiser on September 12 in First.
—Mike Zeverink & Linda Vander Kolk on September 26 in Hudsonville.
—Rich Regnerus & Jan Goodsma on September 26 in Randolph.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

—Miss Mary Key from Grace Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo to First.
—Mr. & Mrs. John Wierenga & 2 baptized sons from Bethel Christian Reformed Church of Lacombe to Edmonton.
—Baptism membership of Carlyle Dale Miersma from Doon to Pella.
—Judith Lynn Voss from First to Hope.
—Mr. & Mrs. Russ Dykstra from Hull to Hope.
—Mr. Dave Orzechowski to Southwest
—Mr. Gary Noorman from Faith to Southwest.
—Jeanne Lanting and Mary Lanting from Loveland to South Holland.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACTIVITIES

—Hope Convention Picture Party on August 29 in Hope School.
—Singspiration on September 21 in Hudsonville led by Jim Vander Kolk. Saxophone solo & special children's number.

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