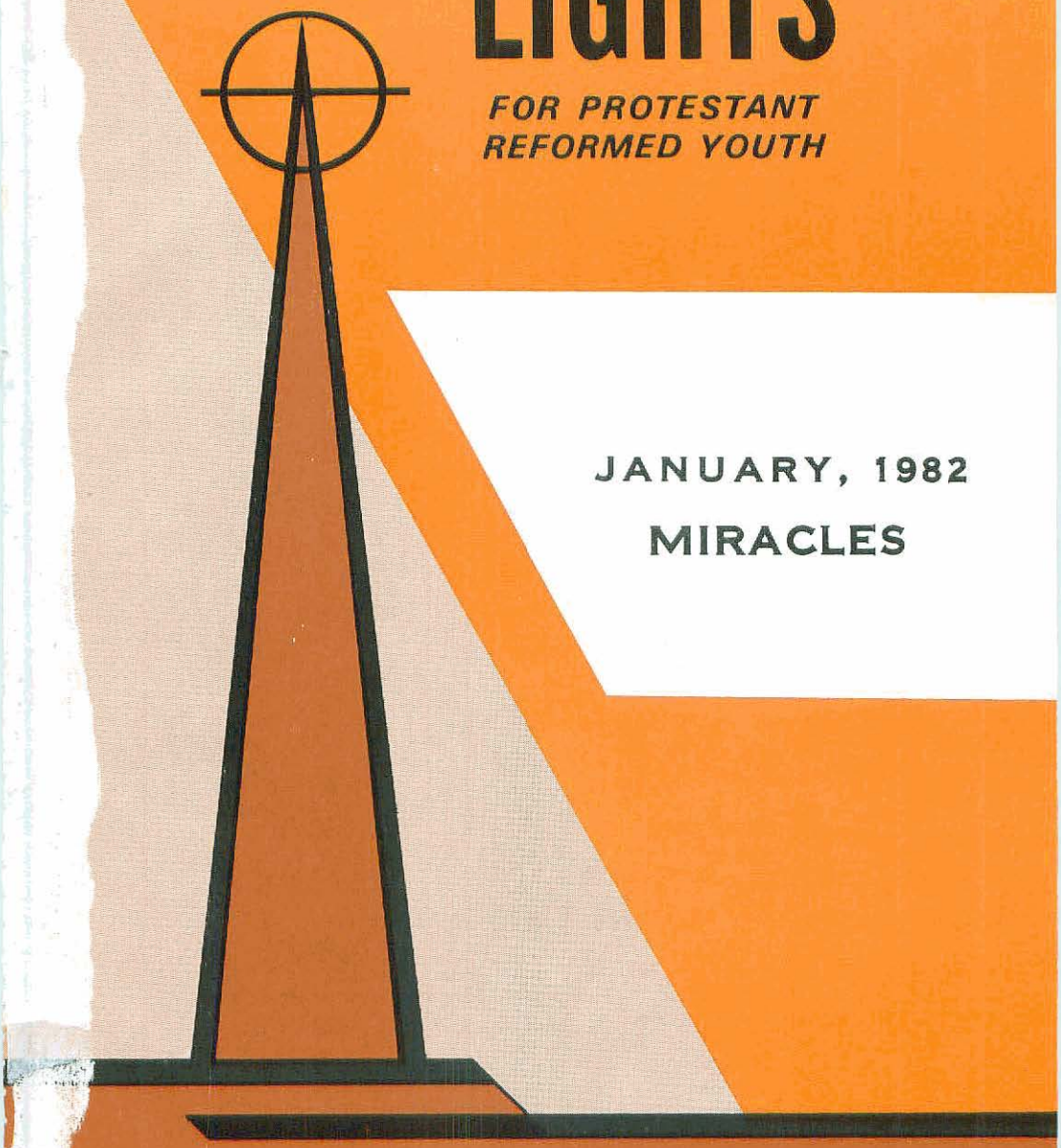
BEACON LIGHTS

FOR PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUTH



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MIRACLES

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PROVERBS FOR YOUNG PILGRIMS
Our Boast for the New Year

by Ed Lotterman

As another new year has begun, we reflect on the past year, and wonder about the new year ahead. For some, depending on their view of life, the past year was termed "progress." Others are happy to be rid of the old year because of past frustrations. We must understand that the new year will be more of the same old life: a struggle. Pilgrims and strangers we are, never feeling quite "at home" here — not too comfortable.

We look ahead into the year — the last seemed to slip away so rapidly, but this year has a promise of seeming longer, at least looking ahead it does. So we make our plans and maybe even make a "resolution." An uneasiness nags at us, however, for we question whether or not this is a proper thing for pilgrims to do. Should we not be optimistic about what the new year will bring? But should we be preachers of "gloom and doom?" This year has to be better than the last. (Last year was "the pits.")

There is a proverb that can guide us, as we continue life's pilgrim journey. A warning, although not negative: dare we call it Godly optimism?

"Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Proverbs 27:1

To boast is to express either by word or by deed, with pride and conceit, what one intends to accomplish either for himself or for another, apart from having any help.

We find in boasting the sin of covetousness. The boastful person covets certain power and authority which would enable him to determine the course of events for the future. Not necessarily a selfish person outwardly, the boastful attempts to deceive himself and others by applying his covetous ways toward "helping" his brother. With pride, he tells of how he did this or that in order to enhance the brothers position in life.

Listen, Young Pilgrim, to what the Scriptures have to say about boasting. The Apostle Paul teaches us that the law of faith excludes boasting. Romans 3:27. James teaches us what it is that we should speak concerning tomorrow. "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that." cf. James 4:13-15. Also our Lord taught that we should "take no thought" concerning food, drink, or raiment; rather "seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Matthew 6:27-34.

Now, each of these has this in common: the element of faith! We understand that "faith is the bond which unites the believer to Christ." In this established unity there is no room for boasting, apart from Christ! We have nothing whereof we can boast save in the cross of Christ. The covetousness, which is an element of human boasting, is the appropriation of power or authority which belongs to God alone! The boastful must remember that he is only creature and that the Creator, Sustainer, determines the events of life in creation. The boast of the creature is the Creator.

But, Young Pilgrim, the Proverb speaks of the "tomorrow." What is in a day? Consider such statements as "nothing went right today" or "everything I did went sour." This type of remark is common among us. Even if you yourself, Young Pilgrim, would not say such things, no doubt you hear such declarations through the course of a day or week. Plainly, such statements reveal dissatisfaction, discontentment, and frustration with the way in which God leads.

As we are led through our earthly pilgrimage, are we in a position to evaluate completly our situation? Israel did that. Israel had not yet reached the Red Sea after the exit from Egypt when the people (pilgrims) evaluated their situation. "For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness." Exodus 14:12.

Young Pilgrim, when we boast ourselves of tomorrow and events do not happen as we think they should, then let us understand that God's ways are higher than our ways! We are called to live in the service of our Lord. That is why we call Him "our Lord." He has redeemed us and made us His own so that we belong to Him and we are His possession!

We pray daily (we do, don't we?) "Thy will be done." By this prayer we understand that our own wills must be discarded and we must become submissive to our Lord's will. Without complaint we resolve to walk in His way as Young Pilgrims.

His way becomes our boast!

May God bless your pilgrimage tomorrow and in the year ahead.

SINGSPIRATION SCHEDULE

February 21 — First
April 18 — Hudsonville
May 16 — Hope
September 19 — Southwest
November 21 — Faith
December 19 — Hudsonville

FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY

REV. C. HANKO

Gems From the Mines of Scripture

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in his season; his leaf shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. Psalm 1:3.

Blessed is the man!

Yes, thrice blest is he who makes God's precepts his chief delight, in God's law, divinely perfect, meditating day and night.

A new figure is brought to our attention. It is the figure of a tree with its roots deeply embedded in the warm earth, fed by the rushing, foaming stream near by.

The tree stands tall and stately with its widely splayed branches, its leaves sparkling in the sunlight as the gentle breezes rustle them. Many years ago a little sprout stirred from the depths of the soil, from the decaying body of a forest patriarch. Protected in infancy by the leafy boughs of other trees, it soon

reached out toward the sky. Now it has become a part of the forest and serves as a protector, stabilizing the soil from which it grows.

A tree is a *word of God.*

We can say that it is an ever changing word of God. In the spring of the year the warm winds awaken the buds that have laid dormant during the winter months. The brown branches change to yellow and then into a verdant green. During the summer months the birds hide their nests in the thick foliage, while the animals seek their shelter in its shade. In the fall the tree drops its nutty nourishment to the forest floor to aid young animals to survive the cold winter. At the same time the leaves begin to die, yet they die triumphantly. Who does not marvel at the multi-colored trees before they drop their leaves? Rich auburns, fiery reds, bright yellows, rich browns, and a combination of all these are a delight to the eye, a promise of another springtime. For the tree that displays such dazzling splendor is a living tree, which soon produces new buds for another season. All winter long the tree stands waiting, groaning in hope, even as the believer groans in hope for the glorious resurrection still to come. (Romans 8:19-22).

A tree expresses the ever changing beauty of covenant youth.

Born and reared in a covenant home, instructed in a covenant school, and in the church of Jesus Christ, the covenant child develops in the grace, the beauty and knowledge of Christ. What a thrill it gives one to hear the strong convictions of faith from the lips of a small child! What a joy floods the soul when adolescent youth walks in God's fear, even though it means reproach from his peers. Young men, you are strong, for you have the Word of God abiding in you, whereby you are able to overcome the wicked one. (I John 2:14). Young women have the adornment of the Holy Spirit in love and devotion to God, evidencing itself in a meek and quiet spirit.

A tree also expresses strength and stability.

We speak of the mighty oak and the sturdy elm.

When that tree was a mere sapling it swayed and bent, creaking and groaning under the onslaughts of winds and storms. Instead of showing signs of weakness this young tree only pushed its roots deeper into the earth and spread them over a broader area.

The man that fears Jehovah is like that tree.

The marginal reference takes us to Jeremiah 17:7,8. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither cease from yielding fruit."

The child of God does not boast of his own strength, but is strong *in the Lord.* He is rooted in Christ by a living faith. From Christ he draws his life, in Him he grows and develops in strength, able to weather the storms of life.

Our life is not a playground. It is a battle field, a life-long struggle. No one of us rides to heaven on a 747, first class, leaving the responsibility and concern of the trip to the navigator and pilot. God makes us responsible

atures, that is, creatures who are able to respond to His law, able to choose good and to reject the evil. The storms of life that come to us in adversity and temptations, as well as the heat of persecution and the cutting cold of rejection by the world work together to make us strong in the Lord and able to stand firm in the power of His might. we are like a tree well planted.

Already as young people you face the onslaughts of Satan, the lure of a pleasure mad, treasure seeking world, the temptations round about you that appeal so strongly to our sinful flesh. Satan is rarely mentioned any more, is certainly ignored, and he greatly appreciates that. But he still is very active, busier than ever, especially out to destroy you because of your place in God's church and covenant. The world presents her sensual lusts in the rock and roll music of our day, in the soap operas and the movies on TV and on the screen, which leave nothing to the imagination. You know of those, who have chosen to play with temptation, to explore the pleasures of liquor and drugs, or to exploit the evils of Satan. Their outward appearance and actions show what they are. They are swallowed up and swept along like chaff in the wind from evil to evil, from sins to ever greater sins.

The believer is not like that. He is like a tree planted by the rivers of waters.

Planted and rooted in Christ, he draws his life from Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart. That Spirit works through the means of the Scriptures. Christ becomes for us the Water of Life, quickening, refreshing our souls by the powerful, efficacious operation of the preaching of the Word.

We eat and drink Christ when we hear the Word preached and when the sacraments are administered to us by Christ through the minister. The Word is the chief means of grace, supplemented by the sacraments, whereby Christ nourishes our thirsty souls unto life eternal.

You know the difference. There are those who sit in church out of a sense of duty or custom. They allow their minds to wander off into realms of the imagination. They come out of church with the feeling, maybe even making the complaint, "The same old stuff in the same old way". Others come to church with a prayer in their hearts that the Lord will make them attentive, needy, desirous to hear Christ speak to them. They seek a blessing while they sing, while they pray along with the entire congregation, and when they listen to the sermon. They come out of church with a strong sense of satisfaction and joy, ready to face another week of trials and problems. They may even feel and say, "That sermon was just for me."

A good tree brings forth fruit in its season.

A bad tree produces shriveled, worm infested, rotted fruit. Unless a radical change is brought about in that tree it will only become more scrawny, leafless, fit only to be cut down and burned. There are young people who seemingly have everything going for them. They are attractive, pleasant, intelligent, revealing a wonderful personality. They sell themselves for a mess of pottage, for the pleasures and treasures of sin. They enjoy drinking parties, sexual indulgence, until suddenly they realize that they have brought

themselves into a bad situation. Often they marry, only to add misery upon misery. Their homes lack the proper Christian atmosphere, their children are not properly instructed in God's Word, just because the parents are too involved in the passing things of this world.

A good tree produces an abundant harvest of good fruit. The textual reference here is to Isaiah 47:12, "Say to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their going." You and I are men and women of God, each with our own place in life, each with our own gifts and talents, our own calling, which no one but you and I can fill. An orange tree brings forth oranges in its season. An apple tree cannot produce pears, but it does produce its own kind of apples. So also each of us is a "workmanship" of God, God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus unto those good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10).

Only when we walk in the fear of God, with God's law as our guide, can we have the assurance of God's approval and blessing. Only then can we enjoy God's covenant promise, "I will be thy God and the God of thy seed after thee forever." Only in that way can we experience a foretaste of that eternal blessedness of the saints described in Revelation 22:1,2: "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruit, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

OUR CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

by M. Bruinsma
Loveland, Colorado

Much is said in our day of "Christian Liberty". Just what is meant by this oft-used term? Does this mean that the Christian is at liberty to do as he pleases? Does it mean that he is set at liberty, set free? Does it mean that the Christian is a law unto himself? Does it mean that he can judge for himself what is good and what is evil?

To what does Romans 8:21 refer when it speaks of the "glorious liberty of the children of God"? The text speaks of being delivered from the bondage of corruption. Maybe we better first determine just what that bondage is of which the text speaks. The creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, says the 20th verse of Romans 8, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.

Genesis 3:10 sheds a little light on this subjection, this bondage, and we see it is the fall, the entry of sin into the world, to which this bondage is ascribed. All mankind in Adam became subject to the bondage of sin. What a

hopeless, desperate, woeful situation! Nor can we look at it objectively — oh no! — we must be very, very subjective! That is *you* and that is *I* in this desperate plight — as we are in Adam — without hope of salvation in ourselves — only the overwhelming burden of condemnation.

Our Christian Liberty is not here so readily apparent, is it? But Galations 5:1 tells us to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and admonishes us to not again be entangled with the yoke of bondage. Also II Corinthians 3:17 tells us that where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Whence this liberty? And why should I be so privileged to receive this precious gift of liberty? And having it, how must I use it — how may I use it?

First of all, whence that liberty? Where did it come from and to whom is it given? II Corinthians 3:17 says that where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. And verse 18 speaks of a change. We certainly must say that there is, there was, there continues to be a change in our condition as forlorn lost sinners hopelessly ensnarled in the yoke of bondage, to this glorious liberty of which we read. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But were we not forsaken of God as we were in Adam? What could we possibly have done to change our status? Or what do we even want to do? Nothing! That's what we can or want to do — nothing but sin against God! So it certainly cannot be *our* proud boast that Christ has set us free from this bondage of sin, for we have nought to boast. No, we can only say "We thank Thee, Father, that in Thy infinite love and mercy Thou hast chosen us, for we by nature are damn-worthy sinners."

How then must we, may we, employ this precious gift of God? James 1:25-27 reveals what our walk will be — we will not be forgetful hearers, but doers, of the work which this law of liberty requires. All of James will reveal our walk with one another — "So speak ye, and so do ye", says James 2:12, "As they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." And this beautiful chapter ends, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

This looks a little different than what is commonly referred to as "Christian Liberty", does it not? To a great extent "liberty" has been interpreted as "license". How can we tell the difference? For one thing, one must be prayerfully selective. Do our actions reflect that we choose to walk the ways of the world under the guise of liberty? Beware that liberty and license are not confused! Or do we sin that grace may abound? God forbid! Let us rather, as the Psalmist in Psalm 89, sing of the mercies of the Lord, making known His faithfulness to all generations.

One question comes to mind yet: May we enjoy any of the inventions and knowledge and pleasures with which our modern world abounds? Here the child of God has opportunity to employ the Christian Liberty with which Christ has set him free — for he is at liberty to do all things to the honor and glory of God. God's glory is the criterion! The child of God can do naught, when he uses his Christian Liberty properly, but to do what God requires of him in order that His name be praised.

CRITIQUE

WASTEFULNESS

by Ben Wigger

While standing in a Mc Donald's restaurant recently, waiting for a hamburger, I noticed that they had several of what I had ordered setting out in plain sight. The girl behind the counter said they couldn't be served, they had to throw away anything that had been there for more than 10 or 15 minutes. "In one day", she told me, "we will throw away maybe a dozen to fifteen". I couldn't believe it. This was a small resort community in Upper Michigan. What might the number be in a large city restaurant?

When people talk about the accomplishments that this great nation has seen in the past decades, they seldom mention, or perhaps fail to realize, that we are the most wasteful generation ever. There are starving people around this world; and our nation talks about its agriculture and its resources feeding them, when all we would really need to do to make a difference is just stop wasting what we have.

I am sure there are many other fast food restaurants that are faced with the problem of discarded food. I am not talking about wasting food that is spoiled or tainted; this is destroying food simply because it is no longer warm.

We would all readily agree that the utilization of our waste would be a good idea if we had the technology to do it. However, there is always someone who stands to lose. If we decided to recycle all glass and aluminum containers, then we could do that by putting a deposit on cans and bottles. But the people who make cans and bottles would oppose such measures because wasting such materials is economically good for them.

Aluminum cans and wasted food are insignificant, I guess, when we think of our other wastes. . . chemicals buried in rusting drums, poured into major rivers and streams, and dumped into our oceans. Now on top of these we have the problem of nuclear waste, radioactive materials that will be here for a amount of time no one can really be sure of.

What we waste we will have to account for. It really makes no difference whether we just toss a pop can out the car window, or whether we are faced with the disposal of chemical wastes. Each one of us as members of God's

creation are responsible before Him for all that He has entrusted to our care.

This world has in effect turned its back on the command of God that we read about in Genesis 1:28, where we read that God commanded Adam and therefore all of us to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it". Man by his very nature after the fall in paradise became so corrupt and self-centered that he no longer considered the creation as God's, but instead as his. And since it is now man's, not God's, he can do with it as he sees fit, and he does with no regard for God or His law.

All through history, man has done what he wants to with this creation. And the effect of his wastefulness has snow-balled to the point where man now finds himself faced with a world that seems just about as polluted as it can possibly get. And that is really not so surprising; for man hates God, and all of his thoughts and actions are only evil continually.

If you spend any time at all in front of the T.V. or behind the newspaper, you know that we are polluting ourselves to death. It is just as common to hear about chemical spills or dumpsites that have been suspected of leaking, as it is to hear about murder or robbery.

We constantly hear about serious health problems that have either developed in animals or humans, or both, and what we can do to help solve the problem, if indeed there is a solution to the problem.

It was just a few years ago that, here in Michigan, a fire retardant chemical known as P.B.B. was accidently mixed with livestock feed. The contamination of, first of all, dairy herds has developed and spread to the point where just recently it was announced that every person who lives in this state now has this chemical P.B.B. in his or her system. And this is only one example. You can no doubt think of a few yourself. Everyone of us is affected to some degree, whether it be through pollution caused by our wastefulness or some accidental means.

But we must not lose sight of one very important fact; God is still in complete control of this entire universe. We can read something about the problems facing us with regard to pollution in Revelation 8:7-12 where we have an account of the sounding of the first four trumpets. Aften reading these few verses one can not help but come away with a feeling that those verses are, in effect, a description of the conditions that we find the world in today. These verses speak very clearly of natural events that have occurred throughout all of history, that are occurring now, and which will continue even unto the end of time.

However, all of these forces at work in our creation are controlled from heaven. This is a comfort for us, for it shows us that Christ, who holds the book of the seven seals and opens it, determines all things this world will go through.

We must not be afraid or worry about what man has done to this world, for all of these signs point to the quick return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Even though we will all be affected by these events, the spiritual Kingdom of Christ will be safe and untouched.

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

by Rev. H. Veldman

We now turn our attention in this third article to the first letter of TULIP the letter which represents the truth of Total Depravity. Is it not unbelievable that our mother church, the Christian Reformed Church, could deny a truth so clearly scriptural and which is experienced by every child of God? In 1924 that church gave birth to what is known as the Three Points. Point III reads as follows: "Relative to the third point, which is concerned with the question of civil righteousness as performed by the unregenerate, synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confessions the unregenerate, though incapable of doing any saving good, can do civil good. This is evident from the quotations from Scripture and from the Canons of Dordrecht, III, IV, 4, and from the Netherland Confession, Art. 36, which teach that God without renewing the heart so influences man that he is able to perform civil good; while it also appears from the citations from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed Theology, that our Reformed Fathers from ancient times, were of the same opinion."

Let us understand the implication and thrust of this third point. The question is not wnether the unregenerate sinner can perform natural good. We mean the following. An unregenerate man can surely bake good, wholesome bread. A sinner can be a very able and proficient farmer, can learn all about farming at an agricultural college. There are surely wicked surgeons and dentists who do their work well. This, however, is the thrust of this third point: the unregenerate sinner can do what is good, in civil life, in the sight of God. He can, in things earthy, do spiritual good. He can do things in this civil life which meet with God's approval. It is not true of him that he always sins. Fact is, he does so much good that he often puts a child of God to shame. He often "out-goods" the child of God. This is the theory of Common Grace.

The arminian, emphasizing the universal love of God and the general atonement of Christ, must, we should understand, deny total depravity and maintain that the sinner, without the renewing of the heart, can do good before God. The Five Points of Calvinism, represented by TULIP, are inseparably connected and related to each other. They either stand or fall together. This is also true of the Five Points of the Remonstrants. The arminians, in 1610, drew up their own five points of doctrine. This explains why we have five heads of doctrine in our Canons, our fathers' answer to the five points of the remonstrants or arminians. We repeat: the arminians must deny the doctrine of Total Depravity. If we believe in the universal love of God and in conditional predestination, then we must believe in universal atonement, that Christ died for all men, head for head. Then we must believe that God gives all men whom He desires to save) the opportunity to be saved. Then we must believe in a general well-meaning offer of salvation. However, if we believe this, then we must deny man's total or absolute depravity. It surely does not make sense to offer salvation to a dead sinner. One may just as well go to a cemetery and offer life to the dead buried there. We must command the sinner to repent. But an offer of salvation implies a general love of God and a salvation dependent upon the will of a sinner. And it is simply folly to offer salvation to a dead sinner. This explains why the arminian must teach that the sinner is able to accept the offer of salvation. So, he must deny the doctrine of absolute depravity.

Total or absolute depravity — is it scriptural? It surely is! We refer, first of all, to Matt. 6:17-18 and James 3:11-12. Please look up these passages and others to which we will refer. We understand that this corrupt tree surely refers to the natural, unregenerate man. Notice that Jesus teaches here, not only that a corrupt tree does not bring forth good fruit, but that it *cannot* bring forth good fruit. For a corrupt tree to bring forth good fruit is impossible. And James tells us the same thing in the passage mentioned above. He asks the question: "Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" And then he writes: "Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries, either a vine figs? So can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh." Notice: it is impossible for a fountain to send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter. It is impossible for the fig tree to bear olive berries and for a vine to bear figs. No fountain *can* yield both salt water and fresh. It is either-or.

I now refer to Matt. 7:21-23. The Common Grace theorists love to speak of the unregenerate sinner who performs much good in the sight of God, and that the Lord approves of these works. Now notice what we read in these verses. Would you not expect the Lord to speak approvingly of these people mentioned here? Jesus here is surely not speaking of the scum and offscouring of society, but of the elite. He is speaking here of those who have prophesied in Christ's Name, who have cast out devils in His Name (the devils of drunkenness, debauchery and immorality) and who have done many wonderful works in His Name. These are surely society's elite who have done all within their power to make this world a better place in which to live. These are the noble in society,

the people to whom others look up, of whom they speak with respect. These are surely the people who, according to the theory of Common Grace, perform much good in the midst of the world. But what does Jesus say to them? This: I never knew you. And this implies that they never knew Him. And notice, too, that He calls them workers of iniquity. Did they do good? No! They only performed iniquity. A very devastating passage as far as they are concerned who deny man's total depravity and speak of his goodness before the Lord.

Another passage to which we now call attention is Romans 8:6-8. Read very carefully also this Word of God. The carnally minded here is the natural man, man without God's regenerating grace and the Holy Spirit. Notice the following: to be carnally minded is death; the natural man is dead. Then, the carnal mind is enmity against God. Paul does not simply say that the sinner hates God. But he writes that the carnal mind, what we are of ourselves, *is* enmity against God. That is his being. And then he writes: "for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." And he concludes: "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Can you conceive of a more devastating scripture than this Word of God? Is it, therefore, not amazing that a church, such as our mother church, can teach the very opposite, deny this Word of God, and teach that a sinner, without the renewing of the heart, is able to perform what is good in the sight of God?

Many more passages can be quoted. Notice what we read in Eph. 2:1-5. Here the apostle teaches us that we were dead in trespasses and sins, that we all had our conversation (walk) in the lusts of the mind, that we were by nature the children of wrath, even as others, that we were quickened when we were dead in sin." And we can also refer to Ps. 14:1-3 and Ps. 53:1-3.

Yes, many more passages can be quoted. Read, too, what we read in Rom. 3:10-19 and Rom. 5: 12, 17. By one man sin entered the world and death by sin. This also includes spiritual death. We are dead, wholly devoid of all life. Even the holiest Christian here has but the smallest principle of the new obedience. John writes in the first of his epistles (I John 1:8) that if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If the holiest Christian has but the smallest principle of the new obedience, what can we say of that sinner who is without the regenerating grace and Spirit of God and of Christ Jesus? What can we say? Surely this: he does not have even that smallest principle.

Is this truth important, this truth of our absolute depravity? Indeed! It is important, first of all, because it is the teaching of Holy Writ. That means that it is important because it comes to us from the living God Himself. And, secondly, it is also important for us from a personal, subjective point of view. The righteous need not a physician. He that is whole does not go to a doctor. But, if we are conceived and born dead in sins and in trespasses, then we are hopelessly lost in ourselves and whatever we are as children of God we are by the grace of God alone. Then all our salvation is from God alone, through Jesus Christ, His Son our Lord. Then He is worthy of all praise and adoration. To Him, then, be all the glory and praise, even forever.

MIRACLES

by Marcia Lotterman

Healing comes from God and is related to a trust in Him. Today, when people are sick, they pray to God and expect to be made whole. These people go directly to God or expect a miracle to be performed through a faith-healer. They believe that going to a doctor shows a lack of faith. Actually, suffering's purpose is to turn us from our sin and give us a greater faith in God. Although at one time God did perform miracles, and though He is still capable of doing so today, He no longer uses miracles to reveal Himself.

A miracle could be defined as an extraordinary event wrought by the immediate, divine power of God for a divine purpose. "A miracle usually constitutes evidence of implications much wider than the event itself."1 There are many purposes of miracles in general. Jesus told a nobleman, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."(John 4:48). The Apostles went forth and confirmed by miracles that what they were preaching was the true Word of God. (Mark 16:20). Other miracles were performed so that the Israelite might know that the earth is the Lord's and that He was their God (Exodus 9:29; 16:12).

There is no denying the fact that at one time, God did choose to reveal Himself in miraculous ways. We read of many miracles in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testament. The Old Testament miracles proved that God is the only true living God, and that the gods of the heathen were dead. There are many examples of the Old Testament miracles. The ten plagues of Egypt proved that the Lord is God (Exodus 7-11). God led His people on dry land by the division of the Red Sea and Jordan (Exodus 14:15-30; Joshua 3:13-4:18). Even in the Old Testament, people were raised from the dead (I Kings 17:19-23; II Kings 4:32-37).

We also read of miracles in the New Testament. Miracles performed by Christ proved that He was the Son of God, the Messiah. There are forty or more miracles recorded in the Gospels that were performed by Christ. The resurrection of Christ is truly a miracle. If this miracle did not happen, our faith would be in vain.

In the book of Acts, we read of the miracles performed by the Apostles. ey had to prove they were sent by God. The people never heard of missionaries before, so miracles helped them believe. The Apostles had to

guard the church from error. Miracles were needed to strengthen the faith o the infant Church.

One thing should be made plain, and that is that Satan and his forces also perform miracles, or better called, "works of magic."2 In Matthew 24:24, Jesus warns us that false prophets would come and show great signs and wonders, to the extent that even the elect would be deceived. Many of the so-called faith-healers of today are sent by Satan and have their origin in him, rather than in God.

Miracles stopped when the Christian Church had a firm, solid beginning. Once the Apostles had spread the Word of God over the then-known world, the purpose of the Apostolic miracles had been accomplished. Miracles died with the Apostles or shortly afterwards.

If a gift of healing existed today, in order to be Scriptural, it would have to conform to these distinctive features:

1) "Sufferers would be healed immediately."3 When Jesus and the Apostles healed people of their diseases, they were immediately made whole Lame men did not slowly sit up, but immediately ran and leaped (Acts 3:7,8; Mark 2:12). The blind immediately received sight (Luke 18:32). Fever immediately left those who touched Jesus (Mark 1:31). Today, the supposed miracles are slow and gradual which shows that they are not miracles at all.

2) "All would be healed perfectly — no trace of disease remaining."4

3) "Permanency would characterize all cures — no recurrence following elation over cure."5

4) "No payment for attempts at healing. Many modern professed faith-healers are extremely wealthy."6 Not once did Christ of the Apostles accept money for healing someone of a disease.

God did not reveal Himself by miracles throughout the whole Bible history. Or, as T. Alton Bryant, *Editor of the New Compact Bible Dictionary,* puts it, "From Bible history, and history since Bible times, the fact stands out that God does not reveal Himself by demonstrative miracles at all times. On the contrary, there have been long periods of history, even in Bible times when God has not used miracles in dealings with His people."

There are many reasons people give, why (they believe) God should and does reveal Himself in miraculous ways today. Joni Eareckson summarizes a few of them.

1) "Sickness and death are the works of Satan and his forces (Luke 13:16; Acts 10:38). Since the whole purpose of Jesus' coming was to destroy the works of the devil (I John 3:8), those who believe in Jesus can expect freedom from disease."

2) "Jesus healed people during His lifetime. Verses like Hebrews 13:8 tell us that God never changes, that Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, today, and forever." Therefore, He must still be healing people today as He did centuries ago."

3) "We have promises in Scripture that whatever we ask in Jesus' name will be done for us (John 14:14; Mark 11:22-24; I John 3:22). These promises

would seem to include prayers for healing.

4) "There are a number of Scripture passages which specifically guarantee the health and healing of believers. The most well known is Isaiah 53:5 "...and with His stripes we are healed." Also, Psalm 103:3; I Peter 2:24; James 5:15."

5) "The most obvious way God uses suffering to glorify Himself is to miraculously remove that suffering."

There are many arguments that are used to contradict the above statements.

It is true that Satan often sends diseases, but God rules over Satan. Satan can only do what God permits (Job 1:12; 2:6). "God actually uses Satan's deeds to serve His own ends and accomplish His own purposes."7 Many times Satan meant to do harm to God's people, but his evil-doings only served God's purposes. An example of this is in the crucifixion of Christ. Satan was behind this evil deed. He was the one who made the people shout, "Crucify Him!" He was the one who made Pilot condemn Jesus to death. But yet, God saved His people from their sins by the death of His Son. When Joseph's brothers did evil unto him, they meant harm, but God meant good (Genesis 50:20).

As for the second argument, it is true, God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. His character and attributes remain the same. God could never become more holy (because that means He isn't God now) or less holy (because that means He wouldn't be God later). If God changes, He wouldn't be God. But what God does, or, how He works, often does change. During different times of history, He worked in different ways. Deuteronomy 29:5 tells us that God preserved the clothes and shoes of the Israelites when they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. God does not preserve our clothes that long today. At one time, God worked through a nation, Israel. Now He works through a Church. Jesus once submitted to those who mocked, ridiculed, smote, and spit upon Him. When He comes again, He will send them to hell. It is the same with miracles. At one time, God did reveal Himself in miracles, but He no longer does so today.

Jesus tells us that whatever we ask in His name, He will do it (John 14:14). First of all, God always answers our prayers, unless we have wickedness in our hearts (Psalm 66:18). He knows what is best for us. But He will grant us our request only if it is in accordance with His will. Scripture passages to prove this are Matthew 8:2,3; Mark 1:40,41; James 4:15; I John 5:14,15; and many more. Every thing that happens, whether sickness or healing from sickness is in accordance with God's will. We must learn to accept God's will. If it is His will that we are sick, then we must pray, "Let Thy will be done." Christ did in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39,42; Mark 14:36). Secondly, true Christians will not ask for things that they do not really need, such as earthly things. But those who are elect, who have Christ in their heart, will only ask for spiritual things that will truly help them as Christians. Thirdly, we must live in close fellowship with God, keeping His commandments, and then He will hear our prayers (I John 3:22). Finally, many people use James 5:14,15 as a proof text that God still heals people in

miraculous ways today. "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up;" This sickness does not refer to physical sickness. If we look at the context, we see that it refers to spiritual weakness. The elders pray for the weak in faith because he cannot pray for himself. The words "shall heal" are not mentioned, but "shall save" are.

Even though God hates disease, He wills it to exist (Exodus 4:11; Isaiah 45:7; Lamentations 3:38). "Sometimes sickness serves as God's chastiser to wake us from our sin."8 (I Corinthians 11:29,30; I Peter 4:1). Sickness is God's proof that He loves us. Sickness is God's discipline for His children. God uses our suffering so that we may comfort others with the comfort He gives us. (II Corinthians 1:4).

It is true that God was glorified when Jesus and other servants of God performed miracles to heal people of their sicknesses. But God is also glorified by sending sicknesses to His people. God maintains the loyalty of His people even when they face difficult trials. God's strength is most obvious when sickness and suffering "drive us to our knees in weakness and frailty."9

There are many reasons why God allows sickness. (Of course, we cannot completely understand God, so there might be more or different reasons than these given.) One reason is to mold a Christian character. God uses sickness to remove personal sin. Another reason is that if God stops sickness, He must stop the cause of sickness, which is sin. Sinners would then be destroyed, and the world would come to an end. But the unconverted elect would perish along with the reprobate. Christ cannot come again until the last elect person is converted. If we had a perfect life, a life without pain, suffering, and trials, we would soon become proud, and think that we do not need God. But sickness leads us to God. It sets our minds on heavenly things. It teaches us to depend on God alone, and not on human strength. And finally, suffering prepares us for heaven. It makes us want to go to heaven, where there will be no more suffering and sickness.

Thus, you can see that although God is capable of performing miracles today, He no longer uses miraculous means to reveal Himself. "There is no evidence in Scripture that God meant the gift of healing to continue in the church."10 The Apostle Paul, even though he healed many people, left a person sick while he went on to Rome (II Timothy 4:20). He told Timothy to take "medicine" for his infirmities (I Timothy 5:23). So even at the time of Paul, God was revealing Himself in other ways.

Sin has many results. Why should we single our disease and say we want to be rid of it? We deserve hell, and many times we as Christians admit that, too. But yet we complain when we get the slightest taste of it here on earth.[1] Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who committed no sins, suffered greatly w on this earth. His whole life was full of suffering. We, who are mere spec dust, who sin against God continually, should suffer more than Chris because of Christ's death on the cross, we are made righteous before Gc

ɔk forward to the time when Christ will come again and bring us to heaven, nere there will be no more suffering or sickness.

1. "Miracles" *The New Compact Bible Dictionary* (1967), 368.
2 Ibid., p. 368.
3 Herbert Lockyer, *All the Miracles of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p. 154.
4 Ibid., p. 154.
5 Ibid., p. 154.
6 Ibid., p. 154.
7 Joni Eareckson and Steve Estes, *A Step Further* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 137.
8 Ibid., p. 154.
9 Ibid., p. 48.
10 Herbert Lockyer, *All The Miracles of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), p. 154.
11 Eareckson and Estes, op. cit., p. 190.

THE SORROWS OF CONCEPTION:

How the World Would Void Them!

by Mrs. Harold Brands

We are reading it more and more these days. What the May, 1981, *TS* magazine did was to put it all into one concise article, entitled is Science Doing to the Human Race?" or "Embryo Technology". To

most readers the article was just what *PARENTS'* editor called it, "shock

What this article basically reported is that scientists have been seeki tamper with the development of human babies at every step of their pren life. Here is a summary of the article's report on scientists' endeavo rearranged under my headings along lines of fetal development:

I. A human baby by God's design is the result of an egg and sperm uniting
   A. Scientists are attempting — and succeeding — to produce offsprir from females only, that is, uniting two eggs and eliminating the nee for male sperm. (Motives: in animals, to have cows produce onl females for greater milk production; in people, to permit lesbians or single women to raise their own offspring.)
   B. Scientists are trying to produce offspring from four parents instead of only two; they've succeeded with mice. (Motive: stronger offspring.)
   C. Scientists want to replace genes with substitute genes. (Motive: to prevent illnesses such as hemophilia by inserting nondefective genes.)
   D. Beyond replacing defective genes, scientists want actually to *CODE* the genes in order to control the resultant individuals. (Motive: why not create animal-humans, i.e., chimeras, to do our menial work? Or plant-humans to create their own chlorophyll and thus eliminate the need for food?!! Or super-humans for superior survival?)

II. A human baby by God's design is conceived by the love of his two parents.
   A. Does a husband have sperm problems? Scientists have been practicing "AID" (artificial insemination by a donor) for a hundred years already (and then the father is not the wife's husband).
   B. Does a wife have egg trouble? Well, let's borrow another woman's eggs! How?
      1. Ovary transplant: by operation, receive half of another woman's eggs.
      2. Artificial embryonation: first artificially inseminate another woman with the husband's sperm, then flush out the fertilized egg and replant it into the wife, who can then carry it to term.
   C. Does a wife have damaged Fallopian tubes? Well, operate to remove an egg, put it into a petri dish, add the husband's sperm, replace the fertilized egg into her uterus. (Problem: only 3 fertilizations in 20,000 tries yet.)

III. A human baby by God's design develops within his mother's womb.
   A. Does a woman have trouble carrying a baby to term? Scientists are considering various "surrogate wombs", that is, flushing out an egg already fertilized and planting it into another womb, this womb being either artificial, of another woman, or even of an animal such as a cow.
   B. Does the woman have both egg and womb trouble, or else is she just too busy to carry a baby she wants to have? Well, practice full surrogate mothering, letting another woman both conceive and carry her child. (Historical appeal for justification is made to Abraham and

Hagar!)

This article doesn't make one merely shiver or even shudder; it makes one tremble. Anyone who has read the article will remember it for years. In fact, it will be forgotten only when the embryo technology it describes has become commonplace. And it will! Some of these things are already becoming common. The sordid is becoming everyday occurrence.

This first article on "Embryo Technology" was in the May, 1981, *PARENTS* magazine. Two months later, the July, 1981, *PARENTS* contained an article entitled "Contraceptives: A Medical Guide." This article contained no new or shocking material but was a concise guide with pictures of the basic methods of avoiding conception along with the success levels and problems attending each method.

I would expect that even in the world some people would observe the irony of these two articles but I have never met the unbeliever who sees anything strange in advocating both sets of ideas. The world calls both of these forms of control of birth humanistic and kind, failing to see how these controls contradict each other in essence. On the one hand men try to control birth so as to create human life or create improved human life (using their own Godless methods), while on the other hand men seek to prevent human life from being created (by equally Godless methods of their own).

But these two articles with their contradictory birth controls do illustrate for us exactly what is the world's response to the sorrows of conception. The world chaffs and kicks and tries to deny or obliterate the curse on childbearing. It tries to control conception at every phase, from choosing whether or not to conceive to choosing what to conceive at what time. It pretends it actually possesses the power eventually to get rid of all pain, all abnormalities, all problems in the areas of conception and childbearing.

We know better, though. While it may have a few small successes in a few minor areas, on the whole the world only sees its problems accelerating. Even the two articles I have referred to serve to illustrate the futility of the world's efforts. In the article on contraceptives, we find that each contraceptive has not only its degree of failure but also its attendant difficulties and dangers. In the article on genetic coding, we find that the scientists' greatest fear is that as they attempt to improve human offspring they may instead produce creatures with gross abnormalities and/or gross psychological problems. The world shall never succeed in its attempts to play God and create human life for eternity.

Young Christian woman, how do *YOU* respond to all of this? Whatever you do, *DON'T EVER, EVER IGNORE THESE ISSUES!* Remember, while your parents may read these developments and may help you form your ideas by discussing them with you, it is still you ... and, if Christ tarries that long, your children, too ... who will have to confront these issues in real life. The scientific control which seems so remote now may pop up before you very suddenly as an unexpected choice — or, maybe, as an unexpected *DEMAND* even — and you must, must, must have your ideas formed *before* that situation confronts you. Are you prepared? How do *you* respond to the sorrows of conception?

NEWS from, for and about our churches

by Marcia Hanko

BIRTHS

—Rev. & Mrs. Ron Van Overloop were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Katie Jean.

—Mr. & Mrs. Eugene DeBoer of Hull were blessed with the birth of a son, Marc Alan, July 28.

—Mr. & Mrs. Herm DeVries of Hope were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Sarah Ann, October 27.

—Mr. & Mrs. Dale Miedema, of Faith rejoice in the birth of a son Douglas Alan on October 13.

—Mr. & Mrs. Dave Dykstra of Faith were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Lori Joy on October 6.

—Mr. & Mrs. Larry Meyer, of Faith, rejoice in the birth of a daughter, Randi Lynn, on October 8.

Mr. & Mrs. Rob Veldman, of Faith, rejoice in the birth of a daughter, Sarah Elizabeth on October 23.

—Mr. & Mrs. Ron Koole of Hull were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Kristin Grace on October 23.

—Mr. & Mrs. Evert Hoekstra of Hull, were blessed with the birth of a daughter Katie Sue.

—Mr. & Mrs. Steve Bultema, of South Holland, rejoice in the birth of a daughter, Megan Lynn.

—Mr. & Mrs. Bob Brands of Loveland rejoice in the birth of a daughter, Linda Jolene, on October 6.

Mr. & Mrs. M. Zuireunk of Holland were blessed with the birth of a son Mitchell Lee, on September 30.

—Mr. & Mrs. Brent Overway of Holland were blessed with the birth of a son, Matthew Charles on October 6.

MEMBERSHIP TRANSFERS

—The membership papers of Sandy Besselsen were transfered from Hope to Redlands.

—Hull church received the membership papers of Mr. & Mrs. Doug Boone from southwest, Melanie Ver Hey from Edgerton, & Brian Kroese from First C.R.C. of Hull.

—The membership papers of Anita DeJong were transfered from South Holland to Houston.

MARRIAGES

—Doug Griffioen of Faith and June Veldman of First were united in marriage on October 16 at First Church.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

—Lora Ondersma & Jane Veenstra, members of Hope, made public confession of their faith on November 8.

–Fred Hanko, member of Faith, made public confession of faith on November 1.

—Beth Boer, member of South Holland, made public confession of faith on November 15.

CHURCH ACTIVITIES

—A Reformation Lecture was held in South Holland on October 30. Rev. Bekkering spoke on "Upholding The Truth: The Task of the Church".

—Rev. Engelsma lectured on "Christian Piety and The Reformation" in Kalamazoo church on November 5.

—A Reformation Day Lecture was held on October 29 at Hope College Chapel Rev. Miersma spoke on "Reformation, A Declaration of Freedom".

—A concert was given by the Covenant Band and Choir on November 13, at First Church.

–A public lecture was given by Rev. Lubbers on Wednesday, September 30, in Loveland. He spoke on "The Glory of Jerusalem in the Light of Prophecy".

–The Ladies Circle of Loveland sponsored a hot-dog roast on Saturday, October 24.

–The Young People of Loveland sponsored a singspiration on October 25.

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