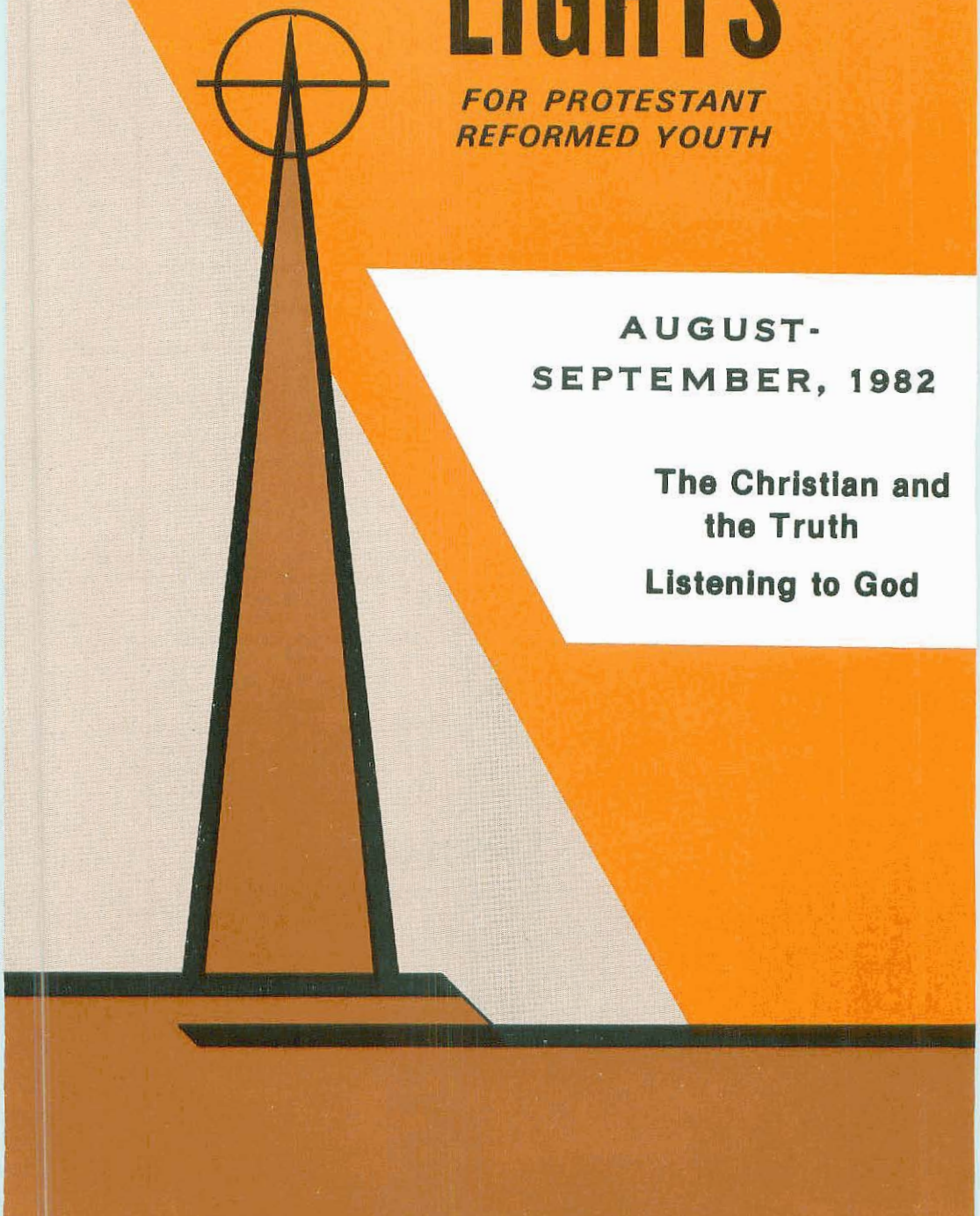
BEACON LIGHTS

FOR PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUTH



AUGUST-
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The Christian and the Truth

Listening to God

BEACON LIGHTS

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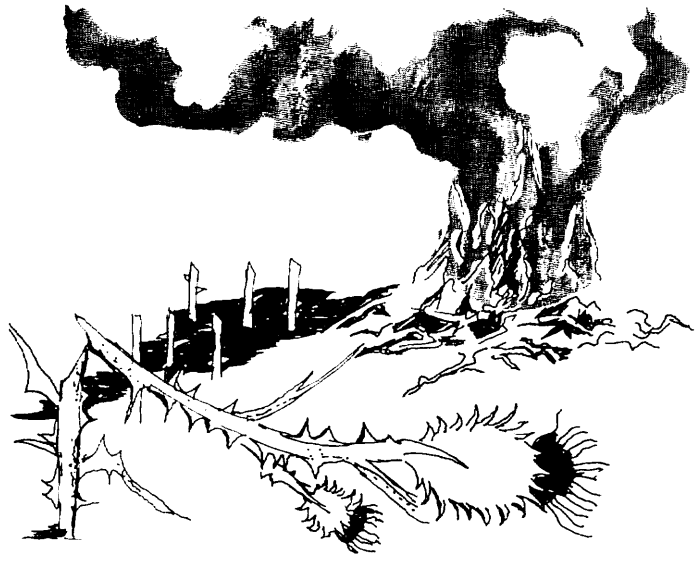
FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY



REV. C. HANKO

SO SHALL THE WICKED PERISH

"Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." Psalm 1:5

Antithesis.

This is an important word to remember.

The dictionary defines antithesis as 'a contrast', 'an opposition'; 'the very opposite!'. There is a thesis, the positive, and there is an anti- thesis, the negative.

For in the beginning God created light, and also darkness. He created the day, and also the night. He created white as a combination of colors, and black as the absence of color. God created heat, and also the absence of heat, cold.

In the same way the Lord placed two trees in paradise, the tree of life, and, so to speak, the tree of death. Adam was to say "Yes" to the tree of life, but "No" to the tree of evil.

When Adam fell God brought about another antithesis, the antithesis between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, between Christ and Belial, between spiritual light and spiritual darkness, between believers and infidels, between God and idols. II Cor. 6:14-16.

God also made antithesis between heaven and hell, eternal life in covenant fellowship with Him, and everlasting torment under His consuming condemnation: "Depart from me, thou worker of iniquity!"

It is this antithesis that appears in the text at the heading of this article. It is the antithesis between the righteous, on the one hand, and the unrighteous, on the other.

The key word is *stand.*

The righteous shall stand, the unrighteous shall not stand.

The righteous shall stand in judgment. They will also stand where the saints are gathered together.

The unrighteous will be driven away in the judgment. Therefore there will be no place for them in the congregation of the righteous.

This means that there are two kinds of people in this world, and only two. You and I belong to the one or the other. No one can straddle the fence. No one can be a two-timer, not really. How important it is that we know whether we belong to the righteous or to the unrighteous, and that this becomes evident in our lives!

For the righteous are and forever will be the blessed ones. (verse 1) The unrighteous are and forever will be the most miserable of all creatures. (verse 5)

The figure that is brought to mind is of a judgment seat and a judge. The Judge is God, the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, who judges every man, woman and child upon the earth. You and I stand daily on trial before Him. He sees our actions, hears what we say, reads our thoughts and knows the deepest desires of our souls. He puts one question to each of us: Do you love ME with your whole heart, with your every desire, with all your thoughts, with every word you utter and with your whole life every moment of every day?

There are two kinds of people in this world. Thus there are, as it were, two defendants that stand before God's tribunal.

Turning to the one defendant the Judge asks: Do you love Me?

This person thinks a moment, feels that this Judge is demanding too much of him (her). He answers: I am not bad. I certainly am far better than many people I know, also church members. I go to church. I work hard to be a success in the world. I try to please my fellow man and to gain his approval.

The Judge stares at the defendant and asks critically, You say that you are not bad, in fact, pretty good?

The defendant answers curtly, Surely I have a right to live my own life as I please. I am young only once. No one should object if I give in to my inner feelings, maybe by watching TV, maybe by attending a movie, or maybe by reading an off-color novel or magazine in private. Why cannot I join my peers in a drinking party or in a dance? Sooner or later I'll settle down to be a good parent and a good member of the church.

The Judge turns to the second defendant and asks: Do you love Me when you eat, and when you drink, and in whatever you do?

This person hangs his head in shame and answers: No, I have not loved Thee, the living God, with my whole being.

The question is put to him: Have you loved me much? Or maybe a little?

To which he answers: According to the flesh, No! I am the chief of sinners, for I have grossly transgressed all Thy commandments and have kept none of them. *

Do you promise to keep my law perfectly from now on?

I cannot promise that, for by nature I am prone to all evil and incapable of any good. Lord, have mercy upon me, the sinner. Give me grace to know Thee, to love and to serve Thee only as my God. Work in me always both to will and to do according to Thy good pleasure!

To the first defendant the righteous Judge declares: Depart from Me, thou worker of iniquity. For the unrighteous shall not stand in judgment.

That is evident already now. Already in this life the sinner is plagued with a guilty conscience. What a price he pays for the insatiable cravings of the flesh. The power of sin is like the strong arms of an octopus wrapping itself about him, crushing, destroying him. He already experiences the bitter consequences of a sinful walk and fears even worse to follow. No one knows how miserable he is. He cannot pray. Heaven is closed to him. God's hand is heavy on him with a condemning: "I know thee not!" He can only drown his sorrow in still deeper sins.

The second defendant hears the Judge say to him: My verdict is that you are not guilty! You are free from condemnation, righteous, worthy to stand in my presence.

He asks: How is that possible? How can a guilty sinner be righteous before God?

The answer is: Go in peace, thy sins, though they be ever so many are forgiven thee. My sovereign love forgives.

That brings us back to eternity. God sees us eternally in Christ. There is no reason in us, mere creatures of the dust, much less in us who are sinful creatures, that God should love us. But He has chosen us in Christ. God has reason in *Himself* to love us.

But is not God just? God's love for us required the sacrifice of His only begotten Son on the cross. God gave His Son to die for such sinners as we are. And the Son gave His all, His very life in the flesh. At the early age of 33 years, when He stood in the prime of His life, He gave Himself unto death, the accursed death of the cross to save us from our sins.

How do we know that Christ died for us? We have the assurance that he who confesses and forsakes his sins finds mercy. The Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Word and through the sacraments assures us, "Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee."

How true it is, the sinner shall not stand in the congregation of the righteous.

He already excludes himself by his sinful walk of life. The expression on his face, his dress, his actions all betray his attitude toward church and the people of God. He sits in the congregation on Sunday, attends catechism or society, but finds it all very boring. His thoughts are everywhere but where they should be. In one word, the sinner isolates himself from the congregation and from the communion of saints. Unless he repents with a sincere, heart-felt conversion, that person finds himself outside of the church, either by his own personal choice or by the keys of the kingdom.

He is like the chaff that is blown away by the wind of God's holy anger. Now and eternally he experiences, "Depart from Me, thou worker of iniquity. I know thee not!"

But the righteous person finds a permanent place in the assembly of the saints, where his heart is. He experiences that he is one with the family of God, the household of faith. He is like a tree planted by the stream of the waters of life that flow to us from Christ through His Word and by His Spirit. With the saints of all ages He gives praise to the God of His salvation.

In that great Day of days he will hear the righteous Judge, His Savior and Lord declare, "Come, thou blessed, and inherit the kingdom that is prepared for you."

There is always the antithesis. For it is always either. . .or. He who is not for Christ is against Him, and he who is for Him cannot be against Him!

* Heilelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 23.

Alas, Master! For It Was Borrowed

by William C. Stursma
Pella Prot. Ref. Church

Most of us know where the above title originated. If we have had catechetical instruction or Sunday school along with home training we know about the young prophet who joined a group of the other prophets and went to the Jordan River to cut timber for a new building. While felling a beam this man's ax head slipped from the handle and fell in the water, and when he made known his plight, the prophet Elisha took a stick and cast it into the water and the iron swam. A miracle, you say, which indeed it was. Years ago a professor from the Netherlands preached a sermon about this incident. I was still quite young at the time, and not too deeply interested in a Dutch sermon on a warm Sunday afternoon. Nevertheless, one of the points of his sermon

impressed me enough to remember it—"Pat God Zich Imlaat Met Het Kleine." which loosely translated means—God is concerned with the seemingly insignificant. I am not able to translate this without losing some of the meaning. We would come close by saying, with God no issues or even details are unimportant.

Think also of the two sparrows that sold for a farthing, yet not one would fall to the ground without the will of the Father. And again, think of the poor widow who cast two mites into the treasury, yet in the eyes of the Lord she cast in more than all.

Now back to the young prophet, apparently he was more concerned about reporting the missing ax to its owner, than he was about not cutting the lumber. He could take his ax handle and wait by the fire until it was time to go home, but the Lord interfered and the prophet put him back to work.

About the sparrow? No young lad appeared with his sling shot to knock down at least one to the ground. God interfered for it was not the will of the Father that one should be killed.

The Bible does not tell us any more about these particular birds but that they built their nests in the outer court of the temple and we can readily understand why, for here was food and water and much activity.

These sparrows were obeying the mandate to be fruitful and multiply. They watched as the merchants (both honest and otherwise) brought in the sheep, cattle, and doves which they sold to the Israelites that came to sacrifice at the temple. They also watched when doves were sold, but were not aware that it was the will of the Father that these doves must die upon the altar while they, the sparrows, would live.

They might have noticed the rich rabbi as he came in with his retinue carrying a bag of money as he swaggered toward the treasure chest. A brief prayer followed by a noisy deposit of coins. Surely he had his reward. Next an aged widow approached the chest and without giving one thought as to where her next meal was coming from dropped two mites into the chest.

Jesus was there also and watched the entire procedure. He spake neither to the rabbi nor to the widow, but told his disciples that she had cast in more than all the money placed by the rest. Jesus knew that she had cast in her entire living. No doubt the Lord provided for this widow's supper that evening. So we ask, "Is God interested in what we call insignificant?" Shall we take another look at those sparrows? When their brood was grown, they kicked them out of the nest. The parent birds did not flutter beneath them but neither did the young birds get hurt. They landed on the temple floor but our Heavenly Father taught them to flutter so that they landed safely. God is indeed concerned with the insignificant. Every thought to the smallest detail is known and controlled by Him.

Do not hesitate, therefore, to make your cares and problems known to Him for He takes pleasure in listening to our petitions which we pray in Christ's name in order that He may grant them. For in our prayers we acknowledge Him as the fount of all good.

PROPER ENTHUSIASM FOR OUR SCHOOLS

by Rev. Bruinsma

Rev. Bruinsma is pastor of the Faith Prot. Ref. Church, Jenison, Michigan.

It is good when young people are interested in our own christian schools. It is good not only because many of them attend our own schools now, but also because the future of our schools will soon be in their hands when they in turn marry and have children. For this reason, a proper enthusiasm for christian education in our own Protestant Reformed schools must be cultivated in our hearts even while we are yet young. Such christian instruction has always been the concern of Reformed believers who take seriously the doctrine of the covenant. In fact, it was exactly that concern which led our Reformed fathers to include in our "venerable and historic Church Order" Article 21, which deals with establishing good christian schools. That article reads as follows: "The Consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian Schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant."

From this article of our Church Order we find that all of our enthusiasm for christian education is based upon our love of the covenant which God has established with his people. If our understanding and love for God's covenant is weak, then our love for our own schools will also be found wanting. How often it is true that when one resists and opposes our own schools it is exactly because there is a lack of appreciation for God's covenant with us. The covenant of grace is that relationship which God by His grace establishes between Himself and His people in Christ. That relationship is one of fellowship and friendship, wherein God becomes our heavenly Father and we his children, from whom he will withhold no good thing. Because God is our Father, He grants us all the privileges and blessings of salvation as they are found in our Savior.

Now, we confess with our "Baptism Form" that these privileges and blessings of the covenant are not restricted only to adult believers, but that they also belong to the children of believers (not that *every* child born of believing parents will share in the blessings of the covenant; but then, neither can we nor may we attempt to distinguish until they have shown us in word or deed that they do not care about these blessings). Because children of believers are included in the covenant, the Scripture emphasizes that parents instruct

them in the fear and knowledge of God. Surely we can never overlook a passage such as Deuteronomy 6:5-7, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Parents are called upon by God to train their children in such a way that these children are able to recognize the might and wisdom of God in all things, as well as the fact, that righteousness must have no fellowship with unrighteousness nor the light with the darkness. This duty of believing parents is what Article 21 of our Church Order designates as "the demands of the covenant." Those who love the covenant of God, therefore, also love those covenant obligations which He place upon them and in joy they will see to it that their children are instructed to the utmost of their power in the fear and knowledge of God.

It can be added here in passing, it is exactly because *parents* are called upon to see to it that their children are instructed that we establish parentally - controlled christian schools. The public schools militate against such a principle for they are state controlled and nowhere does the Scripture charge the state to instruct our children. Also the establishment of parochial (church - run) schools stands contrary to Scripture which speaks of the Church's task as preaching the gospel. Neither does our Church Order maintain that these "good christian schools", which the consistories must see to it are established, be parochial schools.

How do we arrive from the demand of the covenant to instruct our children in the Word of God, to the establishment of our own Protestant Reformed Christian schools? Perhaps we can best find an answer to this question by asking our parents who have had us baptized. At that time, our parents answered in the affirmative to this question, "Whether you promise and intend to see these children when come to years of discretion. . .instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power?" By answering "yes" to this question our parents vowed before God and His church that they were going to use every way possible, that they were going to use all of their strength, that they were going to use whatever they had to see to it that their children were raised as children of God who must love God, His Word, and His Church! They swore that before God! It was a solemn promise which they made to God! Out of their enthusiasm to keep that promise they established our own Protestant Reformed Christian schools.

When they vowed to instruct their children to the utmost of their power, they understood that this meant, first of all, in their own home. In fact, proper enthusiasm for our schools will never be present in those homes where the parents are gone so much that there is no instruction in the home either. The enthusiastic parent, however, is always busy in the home diligently and joyously laboring with his children. The mother is in the home all the day, the

father at nighttime constantly, to the utmost of their power, leading their children to God. But this instruction in the home is not enough and our parents realized that. When their children reached school age, our parents found that their children were in school just as much as they were at home. This meant that their children were under the influence of worldly teachers and worldly classmates just as much as, if not more than, they were under the influence of their parents. By allowing this to take place, when they could do something about it, our parents realized that they were not fulfilling the vow which they had made to God. If they would establish their own schools and hire teachers that believed the same way they did to instruct their children, then they could rest easy that they were trying their utmost, using every means available, to instruct their children in the fear of God. So our parents grouped together, out of love for the covenant, to establish schools. That was enthusiasm, and that enthusiasm must be ours!

One more point of importance must not be overlooked if we are to be enthusiastic about *our own* christian schools: we are interested in schools which teach our children from a Protestant Reformed perspective. We are not satisfied with anything less, if we at all can avoid it. Such too is the emphasis of our Church Order when it speaks of establishing *good* christian schools. We can let Monsma and Van Dellen in their commentary on Article 21 of the Church Order speak on our behalf in this respect. They write,

> "Why does the Church Order speak of **Good** Christian schools? Because not all schools which are Christian day schools are necessarily good. The ideals after which our Christian schools must strive lie very high, indeed, that we shall never reach them. And yet we must bring our schools as near to those ideals as we possibly can.
>
> Not that only. There is always the danger of retrogression. Eternal vigilance is also the price of genuine Christian instruction. Good buildings, and good educational facilities and thoroughly trained teachers who profess the Christian religion, do not necessarily make good Christian schools. Good equipment, etc., are very desirable. But love for, and a grasp on the implications of the covenant, and ability to teach these implications are indispensible for good Christian schools, worthy of that name and designation. Therefore, Article 21 stipulates that Consistories whall promote 'good' Christian schools."

We really need write nothing more about this. How sufficient is this explanation with respect to establishing our own Protestant Reformed schools! How needful to know this if we as young people are to appreciate what God by his grace has given us!

All of this must be our guide in how we show that enthusiasm too. We certainly do not show it when all we can do is gripe and groan about our teachers and their weaknesses; nor do we show it when all we do is complain about the way the School Board is handling the matters of our school. Proper enthusiasm is shown and can be shown only by means of prayer for and positive support of our teachers and our School Boards. How often do we pray for them? How often do we shake their hand and tell them that we really

appreciate what they do for the children of the covenant? It is easy to complain when we are not in their position. But it is blessed when we bow humbly before God and thank Him for what He in His grace has given us.

Perhaps the true test of our enthusiasm is that which affects our pocketbooks. Proper enthusiasm is also shown when financial support of our schools is given. It is shown by parents who, remembering that they seek the kingdom of heaven first, faithfully pay their tuition. It is shown by others, who although not having children in our schools nevertheless understand their covenant obligations and in joy donate as much as possible for the care and maintenance of our schools. When this enthusiasm is shown God will bless our schools and our labors therein. If there is no enthusiasm our schools may continue, but only as a gourd whose shell is beautiful on the outside but whose interior is dried and filled only with hardened seed. How important it is that we as young people be properly motivated in christian education! The future of our schools depends upon it!

TAKE A LOOK AT ART

by Connie L. DeVries

Connie DeVries is a member of Hope Prot. Ref. Church, Walker, Michigan and a recent college graduate with a major in art.

Paintings of landscapes, fruit, and portraits—bronze or stone sculptures of people and shapes—is this what you think of when you hear the word "art"? Or maybe you think of the crayon drawings you did when you were in grade school? These things do come to mind when we mention art, but if that is all, then we are being deceived. If we stop there, then art seems like something that doesn't really concern us anymore, unless we study it in school or visit are museums. But we *must* consider art because when we understand what it is and involves, then we will also see the implications and calling this has for us as Christians. Let us consider art then.

To begin with, the landscapes and portraits we know to be art are indeed that, but art is much more than something that's pleasing to look at or an attempt to reproduce nature. It is first of all, and most importantly, a means to glorify our Creator. We may do that by painting God's creation, thereby appreciating and rejoicing in His work, or by making art out of gratitude for what God has done for us, etc. Then we must learn also how exactly to glorify God in making art. Part of this involves using certain rules or principles of design such as unity, balance, and center of interest. For instance, a work of

art that has a center of interest is not busy or chaotic. But art has to do with more than just principles of design.

That art must praise our Lord leads us to another consideration—art is a means of communication. An artwork must not only please the eye, but it also must say that God is God. Art says something just like the words on this page are telling you something. When you see the letters C-A-T, those letters look nothing like a real cat, but you know that C-A-T is a symbol for cat. Often art is simpler than that, for a picture of a tree could be meant to be exactly that—a tree, but maybe not. In a painting, a flourishing tree could mean life, and a dead tree could mean death. But art can communicate in even less obvious ways than that. For instance, a color such as red can symbolize war or anger for us consciously, but it also can do that without us having to think about it. If we would walk into a room that was completely painted blood red, we would immediately feel a certain atmosphere, and we probably wouldn't feel very comfortable there. You see, art, in its use of color, size, and subject, can communicate a feeling, atmosphere, or mood which sometimes we can't even put into words. The point of all of this is that art communicates in various ways, and in whatever way it does this, it should be doing so according to Scripture and the glory of God.

Now that we've seen how art must obey the principles of design and how it communicates, let us also see the implications of this. We know that we must live separately from the world, and this applies to us in art too, for we must make and view art to the glory of God, whereas the world does it to the glory of man. In fact, some secular art is so evil it actually glorifies the devil. We must know this when we see it so that we can turn and flee from it. And more can be said about this too, but now let us look at it, not so much from the point of view of fine art, but popular art as well.

By popular art I mean things like popular music, the art used in advertising, and even the design of your furniture and dishes. We're in contact with this kind of art every day, and not only should the principles of design be applied to this art too, but also we had better be aware of what it's communicating to us. Take for example advertisements. So many bombard us (this itself shows how materialistic our age is), and advertisers use *any* means they can to get our attention, especially playing on our lustful flesh. We must be aware of this and pray to be kept from those subtle attacks of the devil.

But now apply this to yourself too. What do the clothes you wear tell other people? Does the way your room is decorated communicate anything? You see, in a broad sense this all has to do with art, because art has to do with what we perceive. Look around you—does what you see tell others you are a pilgrim? Also, in the area of art do you use all the means you have to praise God? Painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry—all of these things provide excellent means to glorify God. Art is a gift of God, and we must not neglect it, but use it wisely and beautifully in praise of Him. Consider art then, understand that it is used to communicate, and in that be ye separate and serve the Lord.

LISTENING TO GOD

by Ben Wigger

If you are an average person, and for the sake of this article, let's just suppose that you are, then according to information which I found, you spend about 10 percent of your communication time in writing, 15 percent on reading, 30 percent on speaking, and 45 percent on listening. And according to what was stated, we perform the part of listening the worst of any of the above means of communication.

Communication between each of us is an important part of our lives. So much depends on it; and our lives would be incomplete, even impossible, without it.

However, it is this last means of communication which I would like to take a look at with you in this article. If we believe what is stated above, then just about half of our communication is spent listening, and we do this worse than any other form of communication.

We are all too well acquainted with our own sinful natures to know that it is not easy to be a good listener. We are always facing the temptations of this life which tell us not to listen.

All young people seem to go through a time in their lives when they will listen to no one but themselves. No parent, teacher, minister, or even friend has any effect on them. They simply refuse to listen.

If you stop and consider with me all of the examples of this very sin which are presented in the pages of the Bible, we quickly come to the conclusion that this sin has been with us from the very beginning of time.

Think of the example of Adam and Eve in the Garden. They refused to listen to the direct command of God and instead turned to the lie of the devil and ate of the forbidden fruit.

Or still, who doesn't know of the history of Pharaoh and his refusal to let the people of God go. The evidence before him was plain. God was in complete control and yet Pharaoh refused to acknowledge that fact and submit to God's

will.

Think also of the testimony of Christ Himself which He gave to His disciples when He told them that He must suffer and die. The disciples refused to hear what Christ said. Peter even went so far as to rebuke Christ for what He had said.

It is a constant struggle for all of us to take the time required to be a good listener. It takes work and self-discipline to be a hearing listener. We could say that listening to God is as important to us as breathing. It is the oxygen that keeps us spiritually alive and well.

Perhaps there is no greater importance that we can put on being a good listener than the importance of listening in church. The success or failure of the church as the body of believers depends, to a large part, on our listening to what is spoken by means of the preaching. We consider preaching to be the most important part of our church life. It is special because it is a means of Grace and as such is a mark of the true Church.

Besides the preaching of the Word, there is the listening that we experience between members. Here there are so many different ways that we can improve our relationships. We all fall so far short of what we should do.

How many of us really take advantage of the means given to us in our churches. Do we always come to our society meeting prepared to hear the testimony of God's Word, or of fellow saints?

Are we always sensitive to the spiritual and physical needs of other church members? We must use more than our ears to hear with. All of our senses must be receptive to the needs of others. We must be what has been described as a gut-level listener.

But perhaps of even more importance for us than listening to members of our churches, we must be receptive to the cry for help as it is heard from outside our churches.

As churches we are called to go forth to preach the glad tidings about Jesus Christ. We have a God-given responsibility to tell others of the benefits of the glorious truth preached in our churches and the benefits of the communion of saints among us.

But just because the church is officially called to tell the wonderful truth of God's Salvation, that doesn't mean that we are excused from doing anything. Quite the opposite is true. Others must be able to see in our walk on this earth that being a Christian does make a difference. Our listening to God will fill our lives with a Christian witness that will not quit. We will be more than ready to tell others about what we believe and why. So that if it pleases God, He will use us as instruments to bring His own to Salvation. They will hear God speak in their hearts through what we say. They will see our walk and glorify God for it.

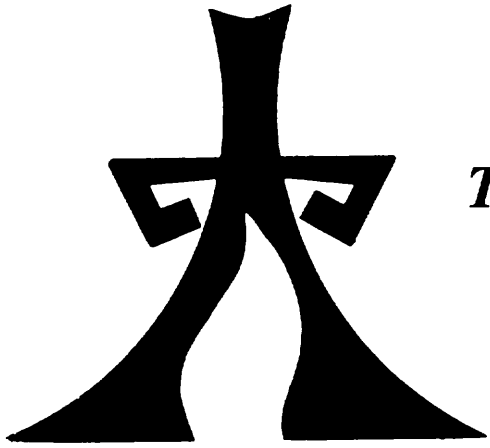
What we are really saying is that our whole life must be a reflection of the joy of Salvation in our lives.

Our ability to listen to God is God-given. We can not listen to His Word by ourselves. Natural man wants no part of what God has to say; and by his very

nature, he is unable to even begin to understand anything of God. The Lord gives true wisdom, and out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. Prov. 2:6.

And I am convinced that if we put a real effort in listening to God - first by reading His Word, then by hearing that Word preached from Sunday to Sunday, and then by hearing the Christian witness from member to member - we will be headed in the right direction.

You can be assured that the devil wants nothing more than to turn your hearing ear away from God and follow him. But God gives us strength from day to day, and He guards us in our pilgrimage on this earth. We can be confident that He who has started a good work in us will see it finished. And we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.



Truth vs. Error

The Christian in This Age of Error

"Some ... have *erred* concerning the faith" (I. Tim. 6:21).

"Ye (Sadduccees) do *err*, not knowing the scriptures" (Matt. 22:29).

"He that refuseth reproof *erreth*" (Prov. 10:17).

Idols "are vanity and the work of *errors*" (Jer. 10:15).

"He that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth us not. By this know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of *error*" (I John 4:6).

Error, according to *Webster's Dictionary*, First Edition, 1828, is defined as follows: "L. *erro*, 'to wander,' A wandering or deviation from the truth; a mistake in judgment by which men assent to or believe what is not true. *Error* may be *voluntary* or *involuntary*. *Voluntary,* when men neglect or pervert the proper means to inform the mind; *involuntary,* when the means of judging correctly are not in their power. An error committed through carelessness or haste is a *blunder*.

Say not, it was an error. Eccles. 5.

In *scripture* and *theology*, sin, iniquity, transgression.

Who can understand his errors? Psalm 19.

To *err* is to miss the right way, in morals or religion...

We have erred and strayed like lost sheep. Book of Common Prayer."

This word *error* is rendered *delusion* in II Thes. 2:11, and *deceit* in I Thes. 2:3. The verb root of the word, occurring in the New Testament 39 times, means "to go astray," as in Matt. 18:12, "one of them be gone astray"; as in 22:29, "ye do err (or, do go astray), not knowing the scriptures"; in 24:5,11, "and shall deceive many" (cause many to go astray); as in Heb. 11:28, "they *wandered* in deserts"; and in Rev. 2:20, "a prophetess to teach and *seduce* my servants." An adjectival form appears in Jude 13, "*wandering* stars ..." A nounal form in II John 7 appears: "This is a *deceiver* and an antichrist." From these dictionary definitions and scripture usages we can detect that Noah Webster was a godly man with a scripture-saturated mind. His aim was to define words in our language according to the standard of scripture. That to a considerable degree he attained this goal, the first edition of his work reveals.

Now let us consider in more detail this evil of error to see something of its trend, and that not so much in the world, but of error as it creeps into the church. It is bad enough that there is error in the wicked world, but error in the church is much worse. We are sometimes misled, in that, though we expect to find error in the ungodly world, yet with respect to the church we have a tendency to let down our guard. But we must not be deceived in this regard, for, as we have seen, deception is a form of error. Therefore, it should be recognized that error always unrelentingly works at creeping in wherever it can. It does not necessarily come at first with a placard whereby it advertizes itself. No, error is more subtly spread by first slipping in unobtrusively and then just sitting there quietly holding a place where it would just as soon remain unnoticed and undisturbed. If this does not work, or does not last, then error will always fight to be tolerated. Of course, it does so, not in an offensive, but in a cultured, sophisticated, socially acceptable manner. But it will persist, like the "Big Lie" tactic, until it is tolerated. Once it is put up with, its aim will be to gain respect, as many religions and cults in their beliefs and practices gain status without any widespread sharing of them. When this is accomplished, it will demand equal rights and equal time. This is true right now with respect to the error of *feminism* (see dictionary for meaning of the term) and homosexual sin. These errors battle for recognition and acceptance

everywhere, and now, especially, in the church. Next, once error secures equal rights and equal time, it will insist on wielding controlling power. This means that it will not abate its insidious exertions until it ushers in the reign of Baal-Peorism and Jezebelism in the church. To illustrate on a purely natural level, let the voice of communism (or socialism) once be tolerated in the land, and it will demand equal rights with the legitimate political parties. Before you know it, communism will demand controlling power. A similar illustration we have in the error of individualism which arose before, during and after the French Revolution. This reign of error resulted in the Reign of Terror. Individualism results in anarchy, which, in turn, results in chaos. Error will never be satisfied until the light of truth is blotted out of state and church and the whole world is plunged into darkness. We could say for all persistent, incurable errorists and their dupes that things get the darkest just before they go completely black! (Cp. Jude 11 and 13).

We understand, don't we?, that the church from its beginning to end had and has incessant difficulties with the intermingling of truth and error. The church always has had, beside its faithful suffering ones, those wicked blasphemers who really belong to the synagogue of Satan. The church always had saints whose zeal for God's house consumed them, yet at the same time there always were disgusting Laodiceans with their empty profession, nauseating lukewarmness, base conceit and inimical exclusion of Christ. Wherever sowers of the kingdom go forth, bearing precious seed, Satan will see that the field is oversown with a deleterious seed. God sowed the good seed in Paradise, but Satan crept in to there sow tares. In the harvest, before the altar just outside the gate of Paradise, there appeared both saint and murderer. Before the Flood, the sons of God were everywhere opposed by the children of the wicked one. Among the apostles, there was a Judas. Among the first converts of the early church, an Ananias and Sapphira plus a Simon Magus. Among the first public servants of the church, a Deman and a Diotrophes. In every age, Christ was opposed by Antichrist. If I look for an absolutely perfect church, think I have found it, then join it, no longer is it perfect, because I am not perfect. (In myself, I'm a dirty, rotten sinner!) Always there are tares growing with the wheat. You do find pure preaching, and strict though prudent discipline, yet these will never make it any different from that already described and self-evident throughout the church-world. Before the return of the Lord the apostasy must first come (II Thes. 2), and that great falling away will develop and work on until the Lord does come and destroys it all with the glory of His presence and power.

Think of it: the first of the seven churches in Asia left its first love! Soon this church was troubled with those who had left the simple gospel to take to a heresy partly pagan, partly Jewish — a Jewish ritualism and a pagan philosophy. This was *Nicolaitanism* (from nike, victory and laos, people, laity), which put forth the ministry as a priestly caste, the clergy, which pushed aside the laity and set up a hierarchy over the people. The second church there suffered the reproach and slander of those who could only be characterized as a

"synagogue of Satan." In the third church, what were only "deeds" (of the Nicolaitans) had developed into "doctrine." Bad talk leads to wrong conduct; then the two become molded into an article of faith (though it may be unwritten). What began as mere talk became act, then emerged as heresy. So we have the doctrine of *Balaam*. The word means "a swallowing up (and thus destroying) of the people." After error has conquered the people, it goes on to destroy them.

We see, then, that the history of the church moves in a downward course of deterioration. Errors of every sort have continuously attacked the church. Out of these errors emerges the false church, the destiny of which is never to recover from these errors. Are we to conclude from this that *the* church must be considered a failure and that the gospel never realizes its purpose? Not at all; for the very creeds of the church are so many protestations against and victories over the errors which assailed and invaded it. The purpose of the gospel according to Paul is to "save some," or, in other words, to take out of the gentiles a people for His name. This purpose is always realized. God always has a people — an Enoch and a Noah in the prediluvian generations, a Lot in Sodom itself. There is always a "little flock," a "church in the wilderness," though it be a despised shack in a cucumber patch. There are, indeed, tares, but the Lord is cultivating not them but His wheat field. Pruned branches are thrown away to be burned, yet God's purpose to preserve the Vine and the fruitful branches persists evermore. Natural branches are cut out of the Olive Tree, but wild branches are grafted in, and it endures a fruitful tree throughout the ages and to eternity. Tares and chaff serve the purpose of the wheat. (The counterfeit is evidence of the existence of the genuine.) The scaffold serves the purpose of the completed building. The nation serves the purpose of the remnant. Reprobation serves the purpose of election. Romans 9:18, 11. Wrath and judgment serve the purpose of mercy. Psalm 136. History serves the purpose of the church. In all history, our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Help, mighty God!
  The strong man bows himself,
  The good and wise are few,
    The standard-bearers faint,
    The enemy prevails.
Help, God of might,
In this Thy Church's night!

Help, mighty God!
  The world is waxing gray,
  And charity grow chill,
    And faith is at its ebb,
    And hope is withering
Help, God of might!
Appear in glory bright!

FOCUS ON CHRISTIAN WOMEN

The Sorrows of Conception: IV. WE DESERVE THEM!

by Mrs. Harold Brands

Let's face it: each one of us likes to take the truths of Scripture, mouth them in a general way so that they apply to everyone, and then ignore them when it comes to personal application in personal situations. Surely, everyone is a sinner deserving only the wrath of God, we smugly say; but then when we experience a bit of suffering ourselves we forget all about this statement and we wrathfully exclaim, "Why *me*? How come *I* have to suffer? Am I so bad, worse than others?" The truth of *my* total depravity, of *my* deserving of hell, has then obviously never struck home.

This is also the case in our response as women to the sorrows of conception. In a general way, we acknowledge the fall of the woman first into sin. In a general way, we acknowledge that God was just in His pronouncement of the resultant curse upon the woman in her relation to her husband and in her child-bearing experiences. But when it becomes *my* suffering, then we rebel; then God seems unfair and arbitrary; then we feel no guilt causing us to admit the justice of our suffering.

This separation between the Scriptural doctrine of suffering and our personal application to that doctrine has roots. It is rooted to some extent in a faulty conception of the doctrine of the fall into sin (the doctrine itself is correct but we fail to understand it correctly). It is rooted further in our proud and sinful hearts that refuse to accept the doctrine in daily life even when we understand it.

But a proper understanding of our own sinfulness is necessary if we shall respond properly to the suffering which God places on us. And so we shall respond properly to the suffering which God places on us. And so we are going to return to this old, old doctrine of the woman's fall into sin and review it. Please don't say disgustedly, "*This* won't help! I don't want *this*!" Rather, read thoughtfully and apply it to yourself. God's Word leads us to begin here.

A. Just what did Eve do?

We all know the story. I'm going to quote it again for our review. But first, a thought to keep in mind as we read it.

Too often we read this account with a faulty concept of Eve in our minds. We think of her as a gullible, inexperienced, and therefore easily misled simpleton. She is to us the picture of the primitive woman of the evolutionist, who really understood too little to sin in earnest. Her *real* sin, we think, was simply gullibility.

Erase this picture of Eve! It is false completely.

The real, Biblical picture is that Eve was the most beautiful, most intelligent, most capable of any woman ever born. More than that, she was the only woman who ever lived with a perfect moral consciousness. Take the best qualities you see in every woman you know, combine them all in one woman, and you will still fall short of Eve.

The reason for this is simple. When God creates, He creates the *best*. Coupled with this, what sin does is *destroy*, not improve. So no woman to come forth from sinful Eve could even consider comparing to sinless, God-created Eve.

And so, the woman who fell into sin was a supremely intelligent and perfectly moral person. She lacked only one thing: experience with sin. She had never disobeyed God and known its results. And her sin was that she chose to learn sin by experience rather than to believe God.

Keep this in mind as you read again the Genesis 3:1-6 account.

> "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?
>
> "And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.
>
> "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.
>
> "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat."

Now then, just what did Eve do?

Before going further, we must say that Eve *was* deceived. We as women should find it quite humbling that the most perfect, most intelligent, most outstanding woman who ever lived could so easily be deceived. Scripture uses this fact to humble us and teach us submission (see I Timothy 2:14).

But Eve's deception was not her sin. She was deceived as to the nature and purpose of Satan. She did not recognize his evil motives and the falsity of his promises to her. That was a female characteristic which we inherit, too. Yet this deception was not itself sin.

Her sin was that she disobeyed God. She disobeyed God as God had spoken to her through her husband. Her husband as her head had relayed to her God's command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Though she knew the command, she ate anyway.

Her sin was that she coveted. She coveted a vision Satan gave her of an unknown wisdom and greatness and glory. She coveted getting rid of her simple, submissive state and having a power like God of knowing good and evil.

And since covetousness is the root of all sin, in coveting and taking what God had forbidden Eve broke all the commandments in their moral essence. At that moment, with her heart coveting to be like God, she would have committed any sin to meet her desire. Her whole nature at that moment turned from love and service of God to love and service of herself.

B. Why do *I* deserve Eve's punishment?

Once we see the totality and greatness of Eve's sin, we can easily see how *she* deserved punishment. God was just, we can see, in afflicting *her* with suffering as the logical promised result of death.

But "Why *me*?" we still ask, "Eve sinned, not *me*. Why should I suffer for what *she* did?"

The answer is familiar but takes thought to understand and apply. We were taught it in catechism, but unless we think about it and pray about it, we won't understand it.

We suffer in Eve's suffering because we were in the garden in Eve. Eve was our mother. As our mother, she was our biological source. Biologically, through birth, we come from her, inheriting her flesh, her genes and chromosomes. And since her flesh sinned, we inherit a sinful flesh.

Being our mother, Eve also represented us. Now the fact is, had Adam exercised his role as authority over the woman, he as ultimate representative of mankind would have covered and removed the woman's sin. But nonetheless, Eve represented all women in her role.

And so we inherit Eve's sin from two viewpoints: (1) biologically as we receive her corrupted flesh and (2) representatively as she, our mother, represented us in her actions.

And further, without forgetting that Eve was our female representative as well as our biological source, we must keep straight this corollary to squelch all further rebellion. Had I. . .or you. . .or *any* other woman. . .been there in Eve's place, we would have done the same thing. That's what it *means* that we sinned in her. Our nature is not less sinful but more, more easily deceived and more easily yielding. We inherit in all points the sin of Eve.

Proof? Ultimately, the abundant testimony of Scripture is the proof for us as believers. But in accordance with Scripture, the proof is in our hearts. When we kneel before God in honest confession, then our hearts condemn us. We know—yes, we do!—our total sinfulness. We know we are no better than Eve. We know we deserve her suffering every bit as much as she, our mother,

deserved it. Scripture and the Holy Spirit in our hearts confirm this.

For those who would demur, there is an alternative to accepting our deserving of our suffering. The alternative has two parts. First, the alternative blames God for our suffering. We are righteous while He is evil and unjust in His dealings with us. This is the response which the world gives and which we also by nature want to give.

But second, this alternative eliminates all possibility of comfort. For if we are to find comfort, it must come from God. . .and, obviously, an unjust God can hold no comfort for us. And that, after all, is our goal in discussing these sorrows of conception, to find comfort in them.

Now, confession that we deserve our suffering, while it is our first and basic response to these sorrows of conception, is not yet comfort. This confession is the necessary first step in seeing our sorrows realistically. When we do accept our sin and suffering as just, we do also have the mind which is ready to look to God and to find the comfort which He alone can give and which He gives only to those who seek Him in contrition of spirit.

God willing, in our next articles we shall try to see how, right in the midst of her deserved suffering, the submissive Christian woman receives *comfort*, the comfort of a God Who is just and holy but also Who loves her as her Father.

NEWS from, for and about our churches

by Marcia Hanko

BIRTHS

Mr. & Mrs. Brian Kroese, members of Hull, were blessed with the birth of a daughter on April 9.

Mr. & Mrs. Randy Kamminga, of Hudsonville, were blessed with the birth of a son, Chad Alan, on April 21.

Mr. & Mrs. Brian Dykstra, of Hope, rejoice in the birth of a daughter, Carrie An, on May 5.

Mr. & Mrs. Joe Dykstra, of First, were blessed with the birth of a son, Marinus Josef.

Mr. & Mrs. Tim Rus, of First, rejoice in the birth of a daughter, Kelly Renae, on May 8.

Mr. & Mrs. Jon ten Haaf, of First, were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Carolyn Joy, on May 13.

Mr. & Mrs. Mark Hoeksema, of Southwest, were blessed with the birth of a son, Philip James, on May 9.

Mr. & Mrs. David Hawkins, of the Birmingham mission field, were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Brooke Rochelle.

Mr. & Mrs. Bernard Ten Broeke, of Holland, adopted a son, Kyle Dale, who was born on March 26, 1982.

Mr. & Mrs. Randy Stuit, of Lynden, were blessed with the birth of a daughter, April 16.

Mr. & Mrs. Peter Vander Schaaf, of Faith, were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Audrey Leigh.

Mr. & Mrs. Bruce Lubbers, of Hudsonville, rejoice in the birth of a son, Joseph Calvin, on May 6.

Mr. & Mrs. Tim Wilson, of the Birmingham mission field, were blessed with the birth of a daughter.

MARRIAGES

Scott Boer and Deb Butterworth of Hudsonville were united in marriage on April 30.

Tim Oudman and Lillian Lubbers of Hudsonville were united in marriage on May 1.

Dennis Dykstra and Deb DeYoung of Hope were united in marriage on April 23.

Ed Stouwie and Mary Lanting of South Holland were united in marriage on June 5.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

Sid Miedema and Todd Miedema, members of Hudsonville, made public confession of their faith on April 18.

Dennis Dykstra and Deb DeYoung of Hope made public confession of their faith on April 18.

Bruce Klamer, Andy Peterson, and Mike Rau, members of Hope, made public confession of their faith on May 30.

Brenda Gritters, Dennis Hoksbergen, Lorna Hoksbergen, LaDonna Hoksbergen, Nick Kooiker, and Janice Westra, of Hull, made confession of their faith on May 30.

Roger Gritters and Hilda Meelker, of Redlands, made public confession of their faith on April 25.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The membership papers of Gary Nienhuis were received from Borculo Christian Reformed Church by our Holland congregation.

The papers of William Buiter were transferred from our Loveland congregation to Redlands.

The papers of Mrs. Oscar Faber were transferred from First to Southwest.

Hull received the papers of Mrs. Pam Kooiker from the First Christian

Reformed Church of Rock Valley.

ACTIVITIES

An Easter Singspiration was held on April 11, in Doon.

A Young Peoples' Banquet was held in Doon on May 4.

On April 22, a Mission Conference was held in Kalamazoo.

On April 29, an Art Exhibit, sponsored by the Hope Mothers' Circle, was held in Hope School.

Faith Choral Society gave a program on April 25.

On Sunday, May 2, the Reformed Witness Radio Choir gave a program on the Psalms.

An Easter Singspiration was held on April 18 in Hudsonville.

A Young Peoples' Spring Banquet was held in Hudsonville Church on April 23. Rev. Engelsma spoke on "Sharing One Another's Burdens".

On May 6 a Spring Lecture was given by Prof. Decker in South Christian High School. He spoke on "The Believer and his Bible".

A Young Peoples' Singspiration was held May 16 at Hope Church.

A Pancake Breakfast - Carwash was sponsored by the Hudsonville Young Peoples' Society on May 22.

The Choral Society of Loveland presented an Easter cantata on April 11.

A Potluck Picnic - Appreciation Dinner was sponsored by the school board of Loveland.

On May 12, a Rollerskating Party was held at Terry Hall for the young people.

On May 10, a Rollerskating Party, sponsored by the young people, was held at Skateland in Redlands.

The young people of South Holland sponsored a Pancake Breakfast Carwash on May 22.

The young people of Holland sponsored a Carwash and Bake Sale in May.