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FOR PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUTH

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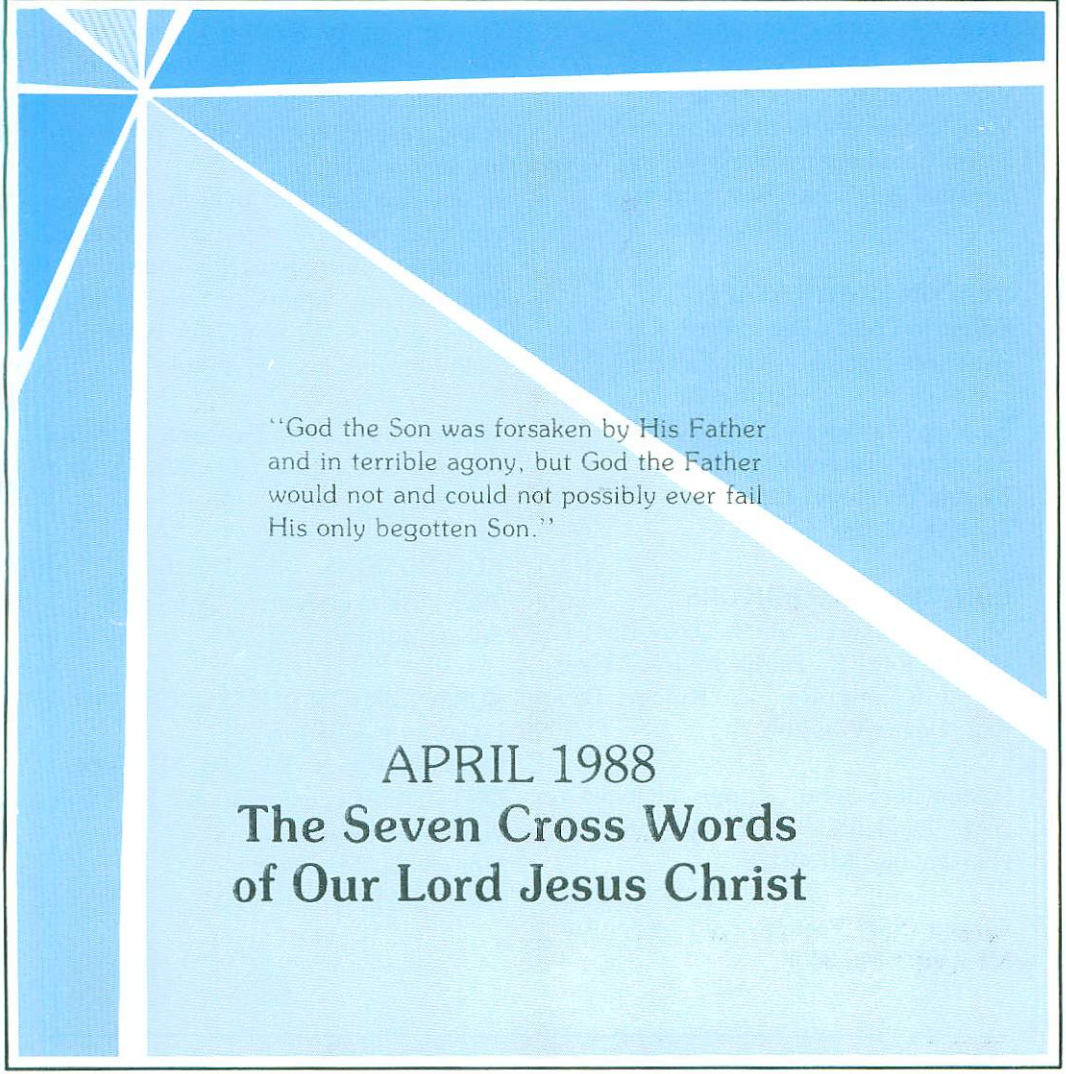

APRIL 1988

The Seven Cross Words of Our Lord Jesus Christ

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EDITORIAL COMMENTS

by David Harbach

As the inside cover states, our new secretary is Karen Vink. Karen has taken on her responsibilities with great enthusiasm. Her energetic style and useful ideas have already encouraged us in our meetings. We welcome her to the fellowship of the Beacon Lights staff.

We thought of working with a couple of teachers at Covenant High School again to produce several articles on the words of Jesus Christ our Lord that He spoke while hanging on the cross of Calvary. As part of a writing assignment in the English classes of Mr. Huizinga and Mr. Kalsbeek, the tenth grade picked one of the cross words of Jesus Christ, explained what those words meant and the importance of those words for our life as God's people. They wrote very well and produced some superb insights into each of the cross words. My only regret about all of this is only being able to print seven of these articles, one article for each cross word. Choosing those seven was a difficult task because many of the articles not chosen are worthy of being printed in this magazine. Thank you for your efforts and keep up the excellent work, tenth grade students at Covenant. May our God bless you as you finish up the school year.

There is that occasional bit of witty humor that comes my way at times. The notes that Mr. John Faber (Gramps) sends me are always a joy to read and I want to share part of one with you. Mr. Faber asks, "Do you think the type-setter can read my typewriting?" Then he adds, "What a combination! 1. OLD TYPEWRITER 2. OLD TYPE WRITER!" That combination has made for many an excellent

Beacon Lights article and we have been privileged to read them.

Mr. Ken Feenstra, another commendable writer, who wrote in the previous rubric, Current Events and Comments, has resigned. Ken and his wife Glenny and family are planning to move to Kalamazoo, where Ken has a job with the Upjohn Company. He will write articles from time to time when he is able to fit it in his schedule. We pray that God will continue to use him to benefit our young people and the church.

We have gained Mr. Pete Schipper as a new writer to the rubric, Issues In Our Lives. Plan to read some interesting articles from the pen of Mr. Schipper in the near future.

We are hoping to begin a series of articles every other month on the "Ten Commandments." We hope to follow the same three part format as we did with the series of articles on the "Fruit of the Spirit." Look for these articles in coming months, D.V.

Some of you may think that we are losing our marbles when it comes to your subscription renewal. What seems odd to you is the filled out receipt that is mailed back to you. Granted, all you need is your cancelled check to prove you subscribe to the **Beacon Lights**. But WE need proof to show to the United States Postal Service, when the postal service audits our accounts, that you paid your subscription and that a receipt was sent to you for your payment. We know you will understand.

The Staff thanks you for your generous support over the years and trusts that you will continue to pray for all of us that are a part of the magazine of the young people of our churches. In January of 1991, D.V., the **Beacon Lights** will celebrate its fiftieth birthday. We have much to thank our Covenant God for during all of these years.

TIME TO PRAY

I got up quite early one morning
And rushed right into the day;
I had so much to accomplish
I took no time out to pray.

The problems just tumbled about me,
And heavier came every task;
"Why doesn't God help me?"
I wondered;
He said, "But you didn't ask!"

I saw naught of joy or of beauty-
The day sped on, gray and bleak;
I asked, "Why won't the Lord
show me?"
He said, "But you didn't seek!"

I tried to come into God's presence;
I used all my keys at the lock;
God gently, lovingly chided,
"My child, why don't you knock!"

I woke up quite early this morning
And paused ere entering the day;
There was so much to accomplish,
I HAD TO TAKE TIME TO PRAY.

EDITORIAL
A LETTER TO MY GRANDCHILDREN

by John M. Faber

Dear Grandchildren;

You are grand in my opinion because you have grand abilities; you busy yourselves in grand activities, and are given a grand place in the Church of God. Do you realize how important you are in God's plan of salvation? Imagine for a minute: God chose you to be His child even before, yes, before He ever created the world!

I know, Grandpas often boast about their grandchildren, and I am boasting about you, not just my relationship to you. I am so highly delighted in you because your parents are bringing you up in the nurture of God's way. Even the fact that you are reading the **Beacon Lights** is one of the evidences. They send you to catechism class, to Sunday School, to Christian School. I know that in those classes you are taught that God is your Creator, your Redeemer, your Sanctifier. I am sure that you recognized those three virtues of the Triune God. But are you sure that you understand that last mentioned one? The Third Person of God **sanctifies** us, He **cleans** us. He makes us **holy**!

Remember that you were told that you were made "in the image of God". And that meant true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. And I like to think that that "likeness" includes the idea of alike-ness. We are like God in some ways; we "look" like Him in some respects. You ask, "How in the world is that possible?" When a boy looks like his father it might be in his dark eyebrows and blue eyes; and when a girl looks like her mother it might be that they both have blond wavy hair. So, in like manner our Heavenly Father gives us, His image bearers, certain virtues of His; albeit ours are but shadow-virtues. He loves, we love. Just think how Jonathan loved David, how we love our parents and friends. Got hates, we hate. Remember how God told us in the Bible that He hated Esau? and we, like Him, hate all workers of iniquity.

Reading Psalm 94, one is struck by the evident Creator-creature likeness That passage reads, "He that planted the ear, shall He not hear?" That is a broad hint that because He can hear, He gave us ears wherewith to hear. Because He sees, He wanted us, His image bearers, to see also. The Bible is very rich in presenting this Creator-creature imagery. In II Sam. 22:10 we read, "darkness was under His **feet**." Esau bemoans the fact, "from thy **face** I shall not be hid." In Ezekiel 31:19 something (look it up) was written by the **finger** of God. In Numbers 14:28 God said, "Ye have spoken in my **ears**, so I will do it." In Isaian 65:5 God complains, "These are smoke in my **nostrils**." In many passages God reminds us, "My **mouth** hath spoken it." Do you need any more? In Ruth 1:13, Naomi confesses

that the **hand** of the Lord had been against her. In Lam. 3:3 the Prophet Jeremiah complained, "He turneth His **hand** against me daily." And which of you, my grandchildren has not had your parent's hand turned against you in a well deserved spanking?

Oh, truly God has revealed many of His virtues in many of His creatures. These shadow-virtues we can see in the wisdom of squirrels, foxes, migrating birds; all of which are shadow-virtues of mankind whose display of wisdom is evident all about us. Indeed, in man these properties reach the highest. Animals can do very clever things with their paws, but they cannot fold their hands in prayer. Only man can do that!

All right you kids who are old enough to read this magazine are also old enough to understand what I am saying. God created things in an ascending order. First the inanimate things like rocks and rills; then in rising order: bugs, bees and birds; then beasts like the cute chipmunk, the clever squirrel, the wily fox, the raging bear, the roaring lion, the lumbering elephant. And don't forget the lowly, meek lamb which could be the type of Christ!

Then He made man. A creature that would be able to be king of His whole creation. **A** creature that could reflect the image of His Maker. In fact we were made so nearly-alike that He could have His Son be born in our nature to be God-Man. In the "alikeness" we were made able to love our Creator, of serving our Redeemer, and of being regenerated by our Sanctifier.

Because your teachers have often told you how the first Adam fell into sin, and we with him; how that God sent the Second Adam to rescue us from the punishment of death; how He, in our manhood paid that punishment by dying for us to earn for us a new life; you know this. Oh, sure, we still must die, be buried, return to the dust from which we were made. And, glory be, we shall be raised from our graves, as our Lord did, and we shall also have such an un-earthly body as He did, which He showed to His disciples on Easter Day!

What a wonderful future to which we can look forward! The future life of look-a-likeness to our risen Lord!

And who are those who belong to the "we" I just mentioned? That is you, my grandson and granddaughter. That is why I am so proud of you; why I take so great delight in you. That's why I can sign off with,

Love, Gramps.

"Let us embrace the miseries common to the godly, and let it be more pleasant to us to be connected with the children of God in all their afflictions, than to be inebriated with the prosperity of those who only delight in the world, and are at the same time accursed by God."

-John Calvin (on Jer. 51)

"Were then God to take away the promise, all the miserable would inevitably perish, for they can never lay hold on His mercy except through His Word."

-John Calvin (on Lamentations 3)

The Seven Cross Words
Christ: The Perfect Example of Forgiveness

by Becky Kalsbeek

"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Such is the first cross word of our dying Lord and Savior. Though He is tormented by the nails driven into His hands and feet by the Roman soldiers, and taunted by the cries of the Jews, He, the perfect Lamb, has pity on His persecutors, intercedes, and asks for their and our forgiveness.

Christ's manner of forgiveness is also to be noted. Christ was meek and gentle toward His tormentors. He was an innocent man, He was the promised Messiah which was being crucified - and yet He utters this beautiful cry asking God to forgive "them for they know not what they do. . . ."

Christ is a fine example of forgiveness. Other examples are David's forgiveness of his son Absalom, the parable of the Prodigal Son, and the parable of the Two Debtors, which is as follows.

There was a servant who owed his lord ten thousand talents. But his lord had pity on him and forgave him the debt. Then the same servant went out and demanded of a fellow servant, which owed him 100 pence, to pay the debt, or else be cast into prison.

And so the parable goes.

Shouldn't we have pity on our fellow servants even as Christ had pity on us? "Forgive them," Christ said, "for they know not what they do."

It was necessary for Christ to utter this prayer. If Christ hadn't forgiven his persecutors—there would have been no deliverance, and Christ's crucifixion would have ended the world. If Christ hadn't said this prayer, "Christ would have died in vain, and no one would be saved." (Rev. M. Schipper in his article "A Prayer For Forgiveness")

Christ prayed not only for those who had a part in His crucifixion, but for all His sons in Adam. He prayed for you and me. Christ prayed and we are forgiven. This doesn't mean that punishment for this sin of crucifying Jesus is delayed, but it is blotted out, wiped away.

We should forgive our brethren for their trespasses against us. Instead of "rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing. . ." (I Peter 3:9). We should patiently forgive even our enemies, for it could have been just as easy for God to look down on us guilty, ignorant, unworthy people and despise us. Let us then be thankful for this prayer and unlike the unjust servant, forgive our neighbor even as Christ forgave us.

The Promise of Paradise

by Alison Huisken

While on the cross Jesus spoke words which are both comforting and reassuring to the believer. As we know, Jesus was crucified between two malefactors. One of the malefactors railed on Jesus and mocked Him. But the other rebuked the malefactor and told him that they were getting what they deserved but Jesus was innocent. He believed that Christ could save him and would bring him to heaven after he died. He then said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom." And Jesus answered this penitent malefactor's plea, "**Today** shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

What did Jesus mean when He said these words? First of all, the Paradise referred to here is the Paradise of God or in other words, Heaven. Rev. M. Schipper has a nice definition of Paradise in his article in the **Standard Bearer**. He says, "Paradise is the spiritual condition of glory into which the souls of the redeemed enter **immediately** upon their departure from the body of this flesh and in which they consciously abide in the house of mansions to await the day of resurrection." There was another paradise mentioned in the Bible. That Paradise was the Paradise of Eden, on this earth, in the days of Adam and Eve. That Paradise was created perfect by God but through the sin of Adam and Eve, man was removed from the perfect Paradise. But through Christ's death on the cross that Paradise was restored. The Bible says this very thing in I Cor. 15:22. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

Even though at the time Jesus answered the malefactor, "he has not yet triumphed over death openly, He demonstrates in His very exhaustion, the effect and fruits of it." (Calvin's Commentary).

Secondly, the first word in the cross word, the word "today", shows that immediately after his death the malefactor would go into Paradise. Immediately. He would not stay in purgatory for a few years until his indulgences were paid, as the Roman Catholics believe. But he would immediately after death go to be with Christ in Paradise.

And this promise of Christ is not only for the penitent malefactor. This promise is for you and me too. Matthew Henry's commentary says, "Christ lets all penitent believers know that when they die they shall also go to be with him there." I think this promise gives us the reassurance of our salvation. Those who will believe will go to Paradise. For very really Christ is saying, "I have paid, I am now paying for your entrance into the same Kingdom to which I journey." John Calvin puts it just right when he says, "So we as believers have the assurance that we after death enjoy peace, blessing, happiness, until total revelation at the coming of Christ, of the perfect glory of the life of heaven." And yes it will be glorious to be with Christ. Be thankful that we are given this promise of Paradise. Christ gave

His life to save us from our sins and thus we have the great reward of the believer - heaven.

Our Earthly Responsibility
The care Christ took of His dear mother

by Mark Vanden Berg

Christ sets a shining example for us in a few simple words while He was dying on the cross, "Son, behold thy mother. Woman, behold thy son" is the 3rd cross word, but it probably is the most important. It shows Christ not only as a spiritual being but also as an earthly being.

Since Joseph had most likely been dead for a few years and Christ had accepted the responsibility of providing for his poor mother, Christ takes further responsibility to find someone to take care of her. Seeing His beloved disciple standing near His cross He appoints John as the provider. After the other disciple had forsaken Christ and fled, John did not. Christ knew that he would be faithful to Mary even as he had been to Christ. And notice John does not forsake his calling. He takes Mary home - to his house - and provided for her. Even though he probably had a family of his own.

Another aspect of this cross word is Christ's physical state. While he was working on the cross, and he was working - tremendously hard - He never was taken up in so much pain as to forget His mother. In other words, He never disregarded His earthly calling. If He would have, Christ would have sinned.

Besides what would His mother do? Become a beggar? Mary could not get a job, being the mother of this Jesus, who called Himself God. The one who could not even save Himself off the cross, yet He saved others. Christ had no estate. He owned no silver or gold, and His clothes, had been seized by the soldiers.

Still another aspect is when Christ calls Mary His mother, woman. Not out of disrespect but out of compassion. Mary had seen how Christ was the Son of God and not truly her son. By calling her woman He only proved the fact that His kingdom is not of this earth, but an heavenly kingdom.

Proverbs 23:22 sums up what I am trying to say very nicely. "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old."

In conclusion I would like to say that we should not shove off our earthly duties as if we don't care. We must take responsibility in whatever circumstances God has placed us - no matter what the suffering will be.

In Agony, But Not Lost

by Tom Bergman

Although Jesus was suffering each time He uttered a cross word, no other one depicts His pain and anguish more than the fourth cross word: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Both physically and spiritually, Jesus experienced a fierce tormenting. **God the Son was forsaken by His Father and in terrible agony, but God the Father would not and could not possibly ever fail His only begotten Son.**

At the end of the three hours of darkness, Jesus' agony came to a climax at the ninth hour. God the Father brought all His wrath on Jesus as He was "made sin" for us. According to William Hendriksen, the author of **The Gospel of Matthew**,, "The link between the cry and the darkness is very close: the first is a symbol of the agonizing content of the second." At the ninth hour, Christ, in all His pain, cried out from the depths of hell, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

For a time, God the Father forsook His Son's human nature. But, "His God and Father would not have abandoned Him to His tormentors if it had not been necessary. But it was necessary, in order that He might fully undergo the punishment due to His people's sins" (Hendriksen). Jehovah forsook Him temporarily then brought Him out of the depths of hell. If God had forever forsaken Christ, salvation would have completely failed and Christ would be lost in hell. That is an important connection since the Lord said in Josh. 1:5, "I will never fail thee." Therefore, we, as members of the covenant will always be safe in our Father's hands.

Not only is this a great comfort to us, but when we see the intense suffering of our Savior, we gain a better knowledge of our salvation. We can learn to feel truly sorry for our sins.

So as you look into this fourth cross word, you see that Christ was not lost in hell because salvation had to be accomplished. Christ, in the depths of hell, was in agony, but not lost.

Part God, Part Man

by Shari Bouma

"I thirst" are two everyday words that we use off and on all the time. But when Christ said these words they meant so much more than what they mean when we say this. Christ said these words on the cross on the hill of Golgatha when He was crucified. He uttered them right before He gave up the ghost. He was then given a spongeful of vinegar to drink.

On this earth Christ had a human nature. He looked like and did the same things people do. But with one big difference. He was God, making Him perfect. Getting thirsty is normal to people. And Christ shows His human

nature when He says "I thirst". It is also shown in John 11:35 Jesus wept. This was at the death of Lazarus. Christ had to have this human nature because it was man who sinned so it is man who has to pay for those sins. This is exactly what Christ did. God's glory, power and guidance over His people is also shown.

Not only was Christ very human but He was also very God. We see this in Mark 1:1. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and in Matthew 1:23 "Behold a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."

Christ also had to be very God because He had to endure the death and pain of the cross. And He had to bear His people's sins. No other ordinary person could bear this burden of God's wrath. Also, Christ had to be free from sin in order to pay for us.

It is hard to understand how Christ could have had a human nature and be God at the same time. But if He hadn't, we would've all died.

Christ's Cry of Victory

by Gwennan Kalsbeek

"When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar he said, It is finished, and bowed his head and gave up the ghost." John 19:30.

There Christ hung, in pain and agony on the cross, dying the death of the damned, seemingly defeated. His enemies surrounded him, laughing, spitting, jeering, mocking. Yet, in a sense, his whole life led up to this moment on the cross when He cried out "It is finished."

The New Bible Commentary states here, "The words 'It is finished', are really a shout of victory." Christ had finished His work on earth, suffered the torments of hell for the whole purpose of redeeming His people. He was ready now to go to His Father.

We must remember, that in all His sufferings, Jesus knew this was the plan God had laid out for Him. We see reflections of this suffering throughout all of the Old Testament. Adam, trembling, had been calmed with the prospect in Gen. 3:15. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed and it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

David also went through sufferings as a reflection of the sufferings of Christ's. In Psalm 22:14-20 we read, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. . .for dogs have compassed me; the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me; they pierced my hands and me feet. . .but be thou not far from me, O Lord, O my strength, haste thee to help me."

As Rev. Kortering states in his article in the **Standard Bearer** (Vol. 43, p. 266) "What God had said of the suffering Christ throughout the whole of Scripture was now fulfilled, it was completed, and Christ was conscious of this, "Finished".

Another quote, from the New

Testament Commentary states, "As Jesus saw it, the entire work of redemption (both active and passive obedience fulfilling the law and bearing its curse) had been brought to completion."

Christ's work on earth, His suffering and pain were finished. He had fulfilled the prophecies of Scripture, suffered the torments of hell and died on the cross and was ready to be with God.

As we read in Rev. Veldman's article in the **Standard Bearer** (Vol. 56, p. 266). "The entire program of suffering has been fulfilled. All the righteousness of God has been satisfied. Our righteousness has been accomplished, all our debt paid and everlasting life merited."

Now then, how does this apply to our life today? First of all, we must busy ourselves in the Lord's work throughout our whole life. We also must honor and glorify His name in all that we do. Our lives must lead up to that day when in death, we can say that our work on this earth is completed. When **we** can truthfully say "It is finished."

Examine yourselves. If you died tomorrow, would **you** be able to say, "It is finished"?

A Content Savior

by Brian Kuiper

"And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus he gave up the ghost." (Luke 23:46)

With these words, Christ's earthly life ended. He had endured the mockery and ridicule of men for many years and now Christ was going to heaven. Even as He commended His spirit into the safety of the Father's hand, so we must put our trust in the Father.

This cross word of contentment is the final of seven cross words spoken by Christ on the cross at Golgotha. Immediately following these words Christ gave up the ghost. Also at this time the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom and the graves of many saints were opened. These miracles were so great that even the wicked confessed the greatness of Christ.

What is the meaning of these words? They mean that Christ has fulfilled His earthly labors and is ready to go to the Father. For us they mean that our sins are forgiven and we are saved.

"I hear in these words an exuberant gladness; it sounds to me like a shout of victory." (Rev. Vos in the **Standard Bearer**, Vol. 38, #12) The heart of our Savior was filled with joy about the work He had done for His people.

In his book, **The Seven Sayings of the Savior on the Cross**, Arthur Pink gives these words a meaning of confidence. "These words set before us the last act of the Savior ere He expired. It was an act of contentment, of faith, of confidence, and of love. . . well may a son submit any concern, however dear, into the hands of a father, especially such a Son into hands of such a Father."

This confidence is also displayed in a quote from the Keil-Delitzsch Commentary, ". . .he gives it over into his hand as a trust or deposit; for whatever is deposited there is safely kept, and freed from all danger and distress."

In Psalm 31 King David is found in danger and he puts his trust in God by prophesying almost the exact words of this cross word. In Psalm 31:5 David says, "Into thy hands I commit by spirit: thou has redeemed me O Lord God of truth."

This quote from Matthew Henry Commentary also shows us the contentment of Christ. "Christ has hereby left us an example, has fitted those words of David to the purpose of dying saints, and hath, as it were, sanctified them for their use. In death our great care should be about our souls, and we cannot more effectually provide for their welfare, than by committing them into the hands of God, as a father, to be sanctified and governed by his spirit and grace. . . ."

So, if we commend our souls to God we will find contentment, even in death.

Critique

WATCH

by David A. Rau

We are in the last days. I know, you have heard that many times: your parents, teachers, and ministers are continually telling you that. Why are they trying to instill that thought into the forefront of your mind? Because the last days **are** upon us, and we are called to watch, to be vigilant, sober and on the alert. The reason that it is so imperative for us to be on our guard is this: the devil is working right now, harder than ever before, trying to destroy the church of Jesus Christ. How is he doing that? The devil is far wiser than to attack us where we are on guard. He attacks us wherever and whenever we let our guard down. He lures us into a false sense of security. He lulls us to sleep.

I Thes. 5:2 & 3a puts it this way, "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them." The devil wants nothing more than for us to let down our guard and to quit watching

The Bible, in many places, speaks of watchmen on the walls. In that day they built huge walls around their cities. These walls kept the roving bands of the enemy away from the people. They kept the people safe. In order to insure the enemy did not climb or break down the walls, watchmen, or guards, were placed on the top of the

wall. It was their duty to insure the residents of the city that they dwelt in peace and safety, and to warn the people when danger approached. The very same thing is true today in a spiritual sense. The elders of our churches represent those watchmen. They watch over the church, to insure that no false doctrine creeps in among the congregation. This is not, however, exclusively the elders' calling. Each and every one of God's people must be a watchman. We are watchmen over our lives. We are responsible for seeing that the enemy doesn't creep into our own lives. The enemy is the devil and our own sinful flesh. The enemy uses many different forms. He is very tricky, or deceitful. Sometimes he comes to us through our friends, or through peer pressure, urging us to compromise the principles we believe in. If that is the case, part of our job as watchman is to warn our friends that they have let the enemy in their city. A watchman must speak out when he sees something wrong. He must not keep silence when he sees the enemy within the city. He must warn the residents, lest they be caught unawares. Even so, we must urge our friends to watch.

What are we looking for when we watch? We are looking for warning signs that the devil is creeping into our lives. the devil is continually tempting us. Sometime he is open, and we know it is he. This may come in the form of having your friends ask you to go to a movie or a bar with them. Don't forget, that is Satan working on you. He is trying to make you forget that these are the last days and that we are to watch. The devil takes whatever our sinful nature wants to do and attacks us there again and again.

Usually the devil will not attack where we are watching. He knows that where we are watching and on guard, he will have difficulty entering our lives. The problem is, that when we watch one area in our lives, he attacks us somewhere else. The devil usually attacks where we are weakest. If we desire friends, he may attack through our friends. If we can be made to sin in our pursuit of material possessions, he will see to it that we have these items readily available. An impossible enemy to battle with? Sometimes it seems that way. Our sins overwhelm us and our souls are troubled. Are we really watching and guarding against the devil?

How should we be watching? In two words: THE BIBLE. God's Word as He has revealed it to us through the preaching, through catechism, through our education, and even through the world around us. Bring your thoughts and questions to the Lord in prayer continually. God will surely reveal to us what is of Him and what is of the devil. God, through the blood of Christ will forgive us when we stumble. In Him we have the assurance of victory. In this lifetime we have that victory only in a very small way; but in the glory to come, how great and final that victory will be!

Sometimes the devil chips away at our defenses little by little; so slowly and subtly that we can scarcely recognize it as such. He creeps into our lives, through our sinful flesh, almost unawares. He attacks us where and when we are weakest. Sharpen your watch! Stand fast against this wily adversary. Watch with all your heart and soul. Through our Lord Jesus Christ we will have the victory. He is our strength and fortress. In Him we trust. WATCH.

Truth Vs. Error

APOSTASY IN THE LAST DAYS

20. Keep Yourselves in God's Love

by Rev. Robert C. Harbach

"But ye, Beloved, building up yourselves in [by means of] your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for [expecting] the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

—Jude 20, 21

Since mockers (v. 19) endeavor to corrupt and destroy the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints, we must not only earnestly contend for it (v. 3), but be building ourselves up in it. They operate in ungodliness, schisms, super-arrogant speeches and in foxy flattery, admiring men's persons for their own advantage. We live out of faith, in connection with covenant love and in hope of mercy. They are mere natural, prayerless men, not having spirit. We are praying in the Holy Spirit and our lives are spiritual, dominated by the blessed holy Trinity. (v. 20, 21).

The text in the introductory "but" more specifically underscores a contrast: there are the apostates creeping into the churches, arid clouds, dead, uprooted trees, ungodly sinners, men of Belial, denizens from Sodom and Egypt, corrupters, mockers; "but **you**, Beloved," **you** are a new creation, an **apartheid** (segregated) people, separated **from** the wicked world, separated **unto** God, the Holy One!

The theme of the text is **love**, not the libidinous love of the Libertines, nor that of the Baal-Peor sex-societies, nor the shallow veneer of humanistic "Peace-Corps" love, nor the misty, mythical love of "the universal brotherhood of man," but that Christian fellowship existing between those perfectly suited to one another as united in mutual response to God's Law.

The main clause of the text is a divine imperative to "keep yourselves in the love of God." This is a command imposed on us from the sovereign throne above. This is utterly necessary because everywhere today there is a decay and erosion of faith, love and dedication to godliness. Some leave their first faith: "having damnation because they cast off their first faith" (I Tim. 5:12); others leave their first love (Rev. 2:4). Then we read of "the first ways of. . .David" in which we must walk, for in his later ways he strayed off into gross sin (II Chron. 17:3). In this connection we put forward the theme, "Keep Yourselves in God's Love," considering, first, "The Charge to be Kept," and, second, "The Means For Performing It."

1. **The Charge**. This is introduced antithetically: "But, Beloved," you are the very reverse of these apostates. The apostate angels "**kept not** their principality," so they are "**kept** in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." "But ye. . .**keep** yourselves in God's love."

Now, you must **be** in God's love in order to **keep** yourselves in it. One must be **in** the vine to remain in the vine. **Are** you **in** the love of God? Those **in** the love of God are the Beloved; they are, literally, God's much loved ones. He charges them, Keep yourselves in My love! How can one keep himself in God's love? If one is already **in** his bark so small and frail, how, when waves are high, can he **keep** himself in it? If the Marines must serve in Lebanon, how can they **keep** themselves in safety? How long would you remain in God's love if **you** must keep yourself in it? If left to ourselves we would quickly fall away from the graces of faith, love and hope. "Keep yourselves"? From our side this is surely impossible, for we are sinful, weak and outnumbered by many adversaries.

But this is our part in God's covenant: Keep yourselves in God's love. Our part can be performed because God's part is first to undergird and guarantee the realization of our part. Being kept, you shall keep yourselves. We are "kept for Jesus Christ" (v. 1, Gk.). Because we are so "kept by the power of God" (I Pet. 1:5), we are to keep ourselves in the heart-felt consciousness of God's love.

You see, then, how you "keep yourselves **in** the love of God." First, it is **on** the ground of the promise: Kept! Second, it is **in**, in connection with, His love! But where and how is that connection made? At the Cross, with the connection sealed by the weld of the Resurrection. God's love is in a connection God Himself has made, and is therefore a solid, unbreakable connection. (Rom. 8:38, 39). God's love is, therefore, in a Gospel connection. We cannot keep ourselves in God's love apart from the Gospel as it is intertwined with the means of grace (the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments) and the grace of the means. The means of grace take us into the sphere in which the love of God blesses us.

"Keep yourselves in God's love" does not mean, Keep yourselves in your love to God. It is not, Keep loving God. It is not our love for Him, but His love for us, as in John 15:9, "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you; continue ye in My love." Our Part in God's covenant is to continue in the sphere where the love of God blesses. His love is an unchanging, everlasting love. Therefore He loved the lost son even when he had gone away to a far country, far from where he could be conscious of and enjoy the blessings of the father's love. We do as commanded in the text when we keep walking in the sunshine of **His** love. John 15:10. Keep yourself in **God's** love and then **your** love for God will be in conscious exercise.

2. **The Means** is by "building yourselves up." With one hand we take the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, to earnestly contend for the faith (v. 3), while with the other we work with the trowel (Neh. 4:17, 18) to build. Here are two Christian activities, contending and building. We are to do the one and not leave the other undone. But how can it be "building up **yourselves**"? Not without first there being the reality that "except the **Lord** build the house, they labor in vain who build it." The Builder and Maker of that house and city is **God!** So "building up yourselves" is equivalent to "work out your own salvation," which can only be done when and because "God worketh in you to will and to do."

"Building up yourselves in," or **by means of** "your most holy faith." **Your** most holy faith means that you have and hold the faith, which you must do in order to build by means of it. This most holy faith is also known as the Reformed Faith. We build by means of that faith. Without the Reformed Faith there is absolutely no way to build up either ourselves or the church.

The participles show **how** to keep yourselves in God's love, namely, by **building**, **praying** and **looking**. Consider now "praying in the Holy Spirit." This is praying in God. How do we accomplish this? It is first something which God accomplishes in us with the Spirit praying **in us** (Rom. 8:26, 27), so that then we may pray in the Spirit. True prayer is not only impossible for the natural man, but even for the regenerate. Prayer is a spiritual struggle which can only be begun, continued and ended by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is expressed by **striving** and **laboring** (Rom. 15:30; Col. 4:12) with God Himself. But there is no setting out upon God but by His own strength. Jacob's wrestling with God (Gen. 32:25ff) is explained in Hosea 12:4, "Yea, he had power over the angel and prevailed; yea, he wept and made supplication." Reading these two passages we learn that Jacob wrestled with a **man**, an **angel** and **God**; **man** indicating the form and shape God assumed; **angel** denoting the second Person, the Messenger of the covenant; **God** (Gen 32:30), the One Jacob wrestled. What sort of angel blessed Jacob? Not a created angel, for only God sent to bless can bless. But how can it be said that this divine angel could not prevail against Jacob? He could have annihilated Jacob by a breath of His mouth! But He could not because He would not. The Lord both wrestled **in** and **against** Jacob. So with us, God wrestles against us with His left hand and strengthens us with His right. It is then God's own power which prevails over Himself. You see, then what need we have of God's gracious power when we strive with Him in prayer. This strength we need to keep ourselves in the love of God.

How else we do this is in "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." This **looking** is **expecting**, which implies patience and hope. This is the looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. This hope, this looking for, is a living hope (I Pet. 1:3) because it quickens with a sense of comfort and joy (Rom. 5:2) at the thought of what we look for - mercy unto eternal life! From heaven we look for the actual, visible, bodily presence of our Savior (Phil. 3:20). We also look for the heavenly city of the New Jerusalem (Heb. 11:9, 10).

"The mercy of our Lord" is, objectively, first of all, the attribute of God according to which He is eternally the most blessed God for ever, the eternally happy God. Then mercy is that attitude of God in which He makes His people to share in His blessedness and be themselves eternally happy. This mercy we look for is the possession of Jesus Christ. He purchased it with the price of His precious blood. He has it; He has the dispensing of it. He bestows it on the vessels of mercy (not on the vessels of wrath). This is mercy unto eternal life, that is, the eschatological form of eternal life, which we receive at the second coming of the Lord in glory. At His coming there will be judgment on the apostates, but mercy on the beloved saints.

We are now building, praying and looking. We ar doing these things for eternity. Already we have the right and title to eternal life. The full possession of it will be enjoyed in the redemption of our bodies, in the resurrection at the last day. There is mercy multiplied to us now (v. 2), but the consummation of mercy is reached when Christ appears "the second time without sin unto (the glorious ultimate manifestation of) salvation" (Heb. 9:28).

Building up yourselves by means of your most holy faith, **praying** in the Holy Spirit, **looking** for the mercy unto eternal life in glory, are all the ways we keep ourselves in God's love. Then let us always be at it until that final state of blessedness comes about.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

by Nancy Van Baren

THE LORD BLESSED:

-Mr. and Mrs. James Regnerus of South Holland with a daughter, Karyn.

-Mr. and Mrs. Steve Van Dyke of Randolph with a daughter, Jeanette Renae.

-Mr. and Mrs. Homer DeJong of South Holland with a daughter, Courtney Jae.

-Mr. and Mrs. Dan Schipper of Southwest with a son, Nicholas Alan.

-Mr. and Mrs. Ken Feenstra of Southwest with a son, John Allen.

-Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Hoving of Southwest with a daughter, Stephanie.

-Mr. and Mrs. Jim Berger of Hope with a son, David Josiah.

-Mr. and Mrs. Scott Boer of Hudsonville with a son, Ryan Scott.

-Mr. and Mrs. Dale Kraker of the Northwest Mission with a daughter, Lauren Marie.

-Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Klamer of Hope with a daughter, Alyssa Joy.

-Mr. and Mrs. Steve Holthouser of Loveland with a daughter, Vanessa Lynn.

-Mr. and Mrs. John Haveman of Holland with a son, Mitchell John.

-Mr. and Mrs. Todd Timmerman of Southwest with a son, Benjamin Evans.

-Mr. and Mrs. Kurt Kaptein of Faith with a daughter, Laura Joy.

-Mr. and Mrs. Arlen Ter Avest of Faith with a daughter, Emily Ann.

-Mr. and Mrs. Jan tenHaaf of Grandville with a son, Gary Martin.

-Mr. and Mrs. Wes Koops of Holland with a daughter.

-Mr. and Mrs. Deanne Wassink of Holland with a son.

-Mr. and Mrs. Gene van Bemmel of Doon with a daughter, Rachel Dawn.

-Rev. and Mrs. Ron Cammenga of Loveland with a son, Daniel Edward.

-Mr. and Mrs. Peter Kamps of Grandville with a son, Jonathon Thomas.

-Mr. and Mrs. Craig Boogaard of Grandville with a daughter, Laurah Lynn.

-Mr. and Mrs. Mike Kooienga of Faith with a son, James Michael.

-Mr. and Mrs. Doug Griffioen of Faith with a daughter, Esther Lynn.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH:

-Michael King, Brenda Klamer, and Kathy Van Dyke of Hope (Walker) made public confession of faith on Nov. 8.

-Bruce Boer, Lara Lubbers and Robin Maatman of South Holland made public confession of faith on October 18.

-Janice Goetz of South Holland made confession of faith on December 27.

Rodger Maatman of South Holland made public confession of faith on December 27.

-Lenora Kalsbeek of Hope (Walker) made confession of faith on January 24.

-Nancy Blaskowski of Southwest made confession of faith on January 31.

MEMBERSHIP TRANSFERS:

-The membership papers of Gloria Mantel were transferred from Doon to Southwest.

-The membership papers of Lois Inskeep were transferred from South Holland to New Zealand.

-The membership papers of Mr. and Mrs. Art Bleyenberg and five children were transferred from Doon to Hope (Walker).

-The membership papers of Mr. and Mrs. Chester Hunter were transferred from Hope (Walker) to Trinity P.R.C. in Houston.

-The papers of Mrs. Everett Buiters were transferred from Phoenix Chr. Ref. to South Holland.

-The papers of Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Burgers (nee Van Engen) were transferred from Doon to Hope (Walker).

-The papers of Mr. and Mrs. David Looyenga and family were transferred from First Church to South Holland.

-The papers of Mr. and Mrs. Melvin DeBoer were transferred from the Bethany C.R.C. to South Holland.

-The papers of Todd Terpstra were transferred to South Holland from Hope (Walker).

-The membership papers of Mr. and Mrs. Steve Van Dyke were transferred from Hope (Walker) to Randolph.

-The papers of Mr and Mrs. Todd DeMeester were transferred from Hope to South Holland.

-The papers of Steve Van Drunen were accepted by South Holland from First C.R.C.

-The papers of Mrs. Marsha Huber and three children were accepted by Faith.

-The papers of Andrew Birkett were accepted by South Holland.

A GARDEN FOR THE NEW YEAR. . .

"In my good garden I would first

"In my good garden I would first plant five rows of peas: Preparedness, promptness, perseverance, politeness and prayer.

"Next to them I plant three rows of squash: Squash gossip, squash criticism, squash indifference.

"Then I put in five rows of lettuce: Let us be faithful; let us be unselfish, let us be loyal; let us love one another; let us be truthful.

"No garden is complete without turnips and mine would have: Turn up for church; turn up with a smile; turn up with a new idea; turn up with real determination."

Singspirations for 1988:

June 19	Hope
August 7	First Jenison CRC
September 18	Southeast
October 16	Southwest
November 20	Faith
December 18	Hudsonville