BEACON LIGHTS

As much as the Word of God admonishes us against friendship with the children of this world, it calls us to friendship with God's people. The alternative to friendship with the world is not no friends at all. But the alternative is friendship with the children of God.

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It seems that everyone today has a different idea of what we may or may not do on Sunday. The fourth commandment tells us not to work and I understand this. But what, for example, is wrong with things we do the other days of the week that are really not work, but have no spiritual benefit? I am thinking here of reading, homework, or playing basketball.

-MICHIGAN

You are correct on the assumption of which your question is based. Everyone has a different idea what we may do on the Sabbath. Instead of looking at the fourth commandment and saying we may do this and we can not do that, I would refer you first to Isaiah 58:13-14. "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

Isaiah wrote this 2,800 years ago when the Jews were in captivity in Babylon. In many ways the situation for us today is the same as when Isaiah lived. God had commanded that Israel would keep the Sabbath holy, but this command took on extra significance in Babylon. Israel's observance of the Sabbath day was to show and witness to all in Babylon that Israel worshiped the God that created the heavens and earth in six days and rested the seventh. We must always remember that our actions reflect to others who we worship.

Isaiah says "If thou turn away from the sabbath" this means, our feet are quick to tread the steps taken the other six days of the week so we must turn away from our usual path on this special day. Isaiah follows this by saying that we are not to do our pleasure on His holy day but call this day a delight. Our pleasure is forbidden. Many times Christians must decide whether or not to do something on the Sabbath. One must stop before making a decision and ask, is this God's pleasure or my own pleasure?

Isaiah continues, "shalt honor him, not doing thy own ways, nor finding thine own words." We must do God's pleasure not even speaking our own words. We must always guard our tongues, but on the Sabbath Isaiah says we must put extra effort to speak God's word, not our own.

Understanding Isaiah's "commentary" on the fourth commandment, let it be understood that God calls us plainly to cease from all work and rest. Work is more than our job. Work must stop and a certain rest must be pursued. Rest here is not meant as doing nothing but the rest that must be pursued is a rest of our pleasure and the pursuit of God's pleasure.

If we do God's pleasure and make this our delight, then verse 14 of Isaiah 58 applies to us "Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Sin is in the low places. We will be on the high places. On the earth? Yes, but close to Him.

- Editor

Are we growing toward godly character or ungodly character? Are we growing in love or selfishness; in harshness or patience; in greed or generosity; in honesty or dishonesty; in purity or impurity? Every day we are training ourselves in one direction or the other by the thoughts we think, the words we say, the actions we take, the deeds we do.

-p. 83, "The Practice of Godliness" by Jerry Bridges, Navpress 1983

The Seventh Commandment Sexual Self-Control

by Rev. J. Kortering

Two things make this subject of great importance to you Christian young people. The first is that we are living in a world that is flaunting sexual license. This is true not only in sins between male and female, but the perversion of sex in every abominable form. Secondly, the sexual desires brought on by change of hormones in your bodies are at their peak. This makes for an explosive combination.

The Biblical answer for the Reformed young Christian is self-control.

"Young men, likewise exhort to be sober minded," Titus 2:6.

Sober minded can properly be translated, self-control.

To help you gain that kind of self-control, I would like to have you consider four things.

1. The horrible proliferation of sexual perversion and corruption is due to God's curse upon fallen man.

The fact that there is such an increase in sins against the seventh commandment in the world round about us, needs not be proven. The least contact (and I suggest for your soul's welfare that you do not satisfy your natural curiosity by plunging into the horrible abyss of sexual filth that is around us) indicates that this is true. One does not have to frequent the theater, purchase videos, listen to rock music, buy pornographic magazines in order to discern how bad things are. The public media gives us enough information. The public reviews and the world's own evaluation indicate that for the most part, what sells is sex, what is wanted by the public is more and more sex.

This leads us to conclude that there is a vicious relationship between entertainment and real life. What a tragedy that rape, fornication, homosexual acts, group sex, sexual abuse whether between consenting parties or by force, are the subjects of entertainment. These become the box office attractions. People want to see this and feel this and be entertained by this. No wonder then, that it has a direct affect upon society itself. People, young and old alike, cannot be exposed to this kind of material without it having a spiritual effect. It corrupts. It warps the mind and influences the inner psyche. It stimulates one in a way that one desires such an experience for self. Entertainment is passive, the entertained want to be active. It becomes a vicious cycle which leads mankind deeper and deeper into moral chaos.

This is what God says. No matter how the social moralists of our day may try to deny it, surely, we as Reformed Christians have the evaluation of God's Word to help us. Listen to Heb. 13:4, "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge," Notice that, GOD WILL JUDGE! God is judging the world by casting them into a bed of an insatiable appetite for sexual filth. With that is the disease factor. Even AIDS does not stop them. They are like the men of Sodom, after they were blind, they still fumbled around trying to find the door. So today, sexually transmitted disease does not stop them, they are groping around for "safe-sex". What proof of blind fools. Romans 1:32 accurately describes this generation, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."

Armed with this knowledge, my dear young Christian, you have information to help you exercise self-control over the sins of this age. Why would you want to be entertained or practice those deeds which openly display to us God's curse upon our neighbors. Oh, yes, God's judgment upon this generation accounts for the sexual evil abounding around us. When their cup of iniquity is full, it will be worse for them than Sodom and Gomorrah. Distance yourself from this corrupt generation for your soul's sake.

2. God is gracious to us by providing for us His holy law. On first reading this might turn you off. You might say, "Here we go again, a lecture on how to behave". Let me remind you that the law for us is gospel, it is good news.

How is that so?

In distinction from the old covenant, the law is now written in our hearts. The law of God is love, love of God, love of self, and love of the neighbor. Such love comes from God, He takes us into His covenant fellowship and make us His dear children. When God's love is in our hearts, it has a direct effect upon the whole of our life. Our entire being, body, soul, and spirit belong to Jesus. Gladly we give ourselves to Him.

This has a direct bearing upon our sexual nature and behavior. We realize that we have to exercise control over our sinful nature. The criteria for our moral behavior cannot be, "It must be right because it feels good". Yes, there is a pleasurable dimension to sin, but it still is sin. We learn to say no. We are warned, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of

Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid," I Cor. 6:15. In place of this sinful behavior, we recognize that God has established for our good and His glory a boundary upon sexual activity. God has instituted marriage as the proper sphere for sexual activity. Apart from that God calls upon everyone else to be virgins.

This law of God is our greatest freedom. What a gracious God we have who spells this out, not just for past generations, but for our generation as well. You, young people, have this knowledge to enjoy your liberty. By the keeping of this law, you will be delivered from the deep feelings of guilt and shame which always accompany perverse sex, by ruining your lives thru practicing immoral sex, and replace it with the true meaning of life, serving God whether married or single.

The energy for self-control is attained when God's law of love is within us and influencing us.

3. The ability to exercise self-control involves self-discipline. By this we mean that you have to realize that the fire that burns within, has to be controlled and will be controlled by the activities that take place in your lives.

The negative side of this is that we must not allow ourselves to be sexually enticed. Stimulation excites sexual desire. God made us that way and that is part of the dynamics of sexual expression. When God says that such energy must be reserved for marriage, and within marriage only for the spouse that God has given to us, obviously self-discipline is important. "Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbors wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent," Prov. 6:27-29. If we are unmarried, the sexual drive must be allowed to remain inactive. If we entice ourselves thru visual images, suggestive music, and erotic novels, heavy petting, it will lead to immoral activity, masturbation, wrongful sexual intercourse or any other perversions. We must learn self-discipline, to know what we must do in order to keep our hearts, minds, and bodies pure.

The positive side of this is to exercise ourselves in godliness. This is literally the word of I Tim. 4:7, "exercise thyself rather unto godliness." Paul draws comparison between an athlete and the Christian. The word exercise in Greek is the root word for gymnasium, a place for exercise. To be a good athlete you need to train yourself, it takes self-discipline. You need to eat right, to sleep right, to train diligently. Let that be an example for our Christian training. If we are going to triumph over sexual perversion and do good, we need the same kind of exercise, only it is with a view to being godly. Yes, it means replacing wrong action with right action. Sports can play an important role in venting the energy of youth in a positive direction. You need time and opportunity for group activities, social interaction, and good Christian fun. But, you need more. You need to be close to God. More important than anything else for helping you develop self-control is your prayer life, your reading of God's Word and meditation, your quiet time with God, your attention to worship and praise. This becomes the means to energize you spiritually in the love of God and the desire to serve Him with body and soul.

4. Never forget that God's law of love also includes forgiveness. All of us fail in some area of this seventh commandment. When Jesus spelled out the meaning of this law, He reminded us that it is not limited to the outward acts alone. (the Pharisee's notion), but to the heart as well, "Whosoever looketh at a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart," Matthew 5:20. We mention this not to excuse sins against the seventh commandment. Our attitude is not, we all sin sexually, so what's the big deal. Such reasoning is of the devil and only deceives and destroys.

We must remember that when we fail, it is sin and we must deal with it as sin. It is not a sin greater than other sins, it is no less a sin. Whether we sin secretly by ourselves, whether we sin secretly with someone else, whether our sins become public, we must keep in mind that even in this, God calls to to repent. Heartfelt repentance includes going to God in the inner closet and pouring out our heart to Him, tell Him how sorry we are, and ask Him to forgive us for Jesus' sake. The gospel is that there is forgiveness, there is relief from the burden of guilt, God assures us that also these sins are washed in the blood of the Lamb. Such repentance includes a greater and daily struggle to cease from that sinful practice. We must diligently pray for grace and the Holy Spirit to overcome the temptation. Sexual sins can be just as addictive as alcohol, drugs, smoking, and any other addiction. Breaking bad habits can be done by the grace of God. This is true for homosexual practice as well. The God who said that the remarriage of divorced persons was forbidden added, "There be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake," Matthew 19:12. This is true for the unmarried virgin, for the divorced who live alone, for the widow or widower, they give up sexual activity in obedience to Christ for the sake of His kingdom.

Let me encourage all of us to develop the spirit of the Lord Jesus who said to the woman taken in adultery, "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone." Jesus did not abrogate the law, He taught us to administer the law mercifully. If you, young woman, should ever become pregnant out of marriage, be assured that you do not have to be tempted to get an abortion as the only way out. The same is true if you contract AIDS. We love you, we understand the nature of sin, for we know ourselves. There is the way of forgiveness and reconciliation.

May these words encourage each of us in our calling to exercise self-control in the midst of this sexually perverse generation.

Athens

by Susanna Inskeep

Athens is the capital of Greece. It is situated on the coast of the eastern peninsula. Throughout history it has been the center of Greek culture, art and philosophy and the center of western civilization. In this essay I'm going to explain more fully the significance of Greece through-out history, both in Bible times and today.

Modern archeologists say that the site of Athens may have been inhabited as long ago as 3000 B. C. This may or may not be true, as the scriptures do not speak of Athens until the time of Paul.

The earliest buildings in the area date back to around 1200 B. C. At this time the Acropolis was the citadel of Athens.

Around 1000 B. C. the city was expanded northwest.

In 530 B. C. a large temple was built to Athena Polias (guardian god of the city). Inside it had large marble sculptures representing battles between the gods and giants. Besides this temple there were many smaller ones and because of this the Acropolis became the sanctuary of many Greek gods.

In 480 B. C. the Persians captured and destroyed Athens. The Acropolis and many houses in the lower town were destroyed. Only a few houses were spared to house the Persian leaders.

The Athenians returned in 479 B. C. It was about this time that the Period of Greatness started. During this time Athens was at its greatest in regards to art, philosophy and literature. Some of the great people who lived during this period were Plato, Socrates, Xenophon, Demosthenes and Pericles. When Pericles was the head of state Athens reached its peak of economic and political power.

When the Athenians returned in 479 B. C. they immediately set about re-building the fortification walls. They not only made the previous walls bigger and thicker, but 20 yrs. later they completed the Long Wall. This wall connected Athens to its port, Piraeus, four miles away.

The Acropolis was not rebuilt because an oath was sworn before the Battle of Platea, in 479 B. C. This oath stated that the sanctuaries that were destroyed by the Barbarians would not be rebuilt but left as memorials of their lack of religiousness. However in 449 B. C. peace with Persia was officially established and the oath was done away with.

Thus, the Acropolis was entirely rebuilt over a period of 40 yrs. The first section to be rebuilt was the Parthenon (Home of the Virgin). It was built in gleaming white marble mined from Mt. Pentelicus, ten miles north of the city. The Parthenon was considerably larger than a normal temple having 8 columns across the ends and 17 columns on the side, compared to the average 6 by 13. Inside it was filled with sculptures made from gold and ivory, the largest sculpture being of Athena. The Propylea (entrance to the temple) was nearly complete when all work was stopped by the Peloponnesian Wars against Persia in 431-404 B. C.

After these wars the great age of Athens ended. Athens was slow in recovering from these wars but slowly the town and walls were rebuilt. They never regained political power but for some centuries it remained the intellectual and cultural center of Greece. Many Greeks and Romans still went to Athens to be educated. Then Athens, with the rest of Greece, became subject to the Romans and later to the successor of the Roman Empire, the Byzantines. After the time of the Byzantine Empire, Athens lost its importance. During the Middle Ages it was ruled by French, Italian and Spanish noblemen. The magnificent buildings of the Acropolis fell into ruin. Athens was then ruled by Turkey. Athens gained independence from Turkey in 1830 and it became the capital of Greece in 1833. In World War I it was the scene of the happenings that led to the desposition of King Constantine, by the allies. In World War II it was occupied by German troops but it wasn't bombed.

Although Athens is only mentioned 5 times in the Bible it is still of important significance. Paul visited Athens on his 2nd missionary journey. Paul describes Athens as being "wholly given to idolatry." Acts 17:16 His reason being that there were idols everywhere you looked. In fact, as one commentator says, "it was easier to find an idol than a person."

While in Athens Paul preached on Mars Hill. Mars Hill or the Areopagus was southwest of the Acropolis. It is a rock with a leveled top and it was used for senate meetings and criminal trials. Today it is known as Areos Pagos, after the Greek war god, Ares.

The rulers and philosophers took Paul to the Areopagus and demanded that he tell them about the doctrine he brought. Then he preached to them. The people listened interestedly until he spoke about this. Then they began to mock him with contemptuous

words. Despite this, a few believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris.

Dionysius was a former archon, which means he was one of the 9 chief magistrates of Athens. He was also a member of the supreme court. He is said to have followed Paul to Rome. By tradition, he is said to be the first bishop of Athens. A set of mystical writings, found later in history, were said to have been written by him and they had a strong influence in the Middle Ages. Dionysius is now the Roman patron saint of Athens. The little Christian community established by Paul remained small, surrounded by the wickedness of Athens. However Christianity was officially established in the 5th and 6th centuries. After pagan worship was abolished, churches were built. Approximately 22 churches were known to have been built during this period.

Today Athens is the capital of Greece. More than four million people (40% of the national population) cram into the noisy, crowded metropolitan area. Athens is the business, trading and shipping center of Greece. Its main resources are textiles, soap, clothing, chemicals and tourism. Away from the bustle of the city areas are some fascinating tourist sites, which include the ruins of the Acropolis, the ancient ruins of the Agora and many other ruins and temple.

It is clear that even in this worldly city God brought a man to bring the gospel.

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KNOWING WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED

That Godly Handclapping

by Rev. John A. Heys

Very correctly, Young People, when we begin, or bring to a close our Sabbath Day's service, we sing: "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below, Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts, Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost." And then not only do we sing a beautiful truth concerning our God; we also praise Him for what He does for us in His sovereign grace. All blessings flow from Him.

So sinful and incorrect, however, is what the world so often does around Christmas Day; or when God's church celebrates Christ's death and resurrection. A choir may have sung Handel's Messiah, or hymns about Jesus' death and resurrection; and then, not because of the truth that was sung, but to praise and thank those who sang, and because of what they did, there will be hand clapping.

It is interesting, therefore, but by all means informative, to note that Scripture presents the proper hand clapping. In II Kings 11:12 we read that after the son of the king who had died was anointed as king, and had a kingly crown placed on his head, the people clapped their hands and said: "God save the king." That was an explanation of what their hands did. It was not because of what this new king had done, or was done by man's work. It was in connection with, and a manifestation of, their praise to God; and in connection with the fact that He had given them this gift. In Psalm 47:1 we read: "O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph." Then, too, in Isaiah 55:12 we read: "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." Here, likewise, clapping is presented as a reaction to what God did, not to what man performed.

Thus, Young People, well nigh at the beginning of our existence as a Protestant Reformed denomination, we were by our pastors warned not to clap our hands to express appreciation of what people did, and fail to show appreciation for what our God did, and was presented to us in song. If in our hearts and minds what man did, rather that what God did, moves us to clap our hands, we are overlooking a blessed truth presented in song. But by all means we must thank God, and not leave Him out of the picture. Not for one minute will I judge your hearts, Young People, when you clap your hands after a song presents God, and His work in song. But let it be born in mind that we may not push God out of the picture, when what He has done is presented in song. And all sacred songs and anthems are for God's praise. He does give men and women beautiful and talented voices but that He does for His own praise. And He does this for us to appreciate what He has done, and does in His almighty power and grace.

Scripture shows that we may clap our hands, as the Israelites correctly did. But nowhere does Scripture teach us to thank and praise men instead of God Himself, when He has been presented in song in His divinity and grace. In Deuteronomy 10:21 Moses declares: "He is thy praise, and He is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen." And when psalms and hymns are sung, it is about the great and wonderful things which God has performed in His power and grace. THAT must be on the foreground of our hearts and minds when God, through man and/or woman, brings to our attention what He in His power and grace has done. We may and must enjoy, and be pleased and thankful, when God in His works of grace and wisdom has been praised in song.

Go back again to Psalm 47, whose first verse was quoted. Look now at what we find in verses 6 and 7, namely, "Sing praises to God; sing praises unto our king of all the earth; sing ye praises with understanding." Note then that the psalmist refers to singing unto God, not simply about Him. And our joy should be because of the truth that is sung, not merely because of the singing. We must not reveal that we are forgetting the truth concerning God, and are thrilled by man's singing.

Once, while laboring in our mission field in Jamaica, I had a striking experience. During the preaching of a sermon a man, who was a believing child of God, stood up, and began to sing that which stood in connection with the truth just presented in the sermon. The preaching had to stop for a moment, and yet praise to God was being presented for what He reveals and declares in His word. And so often in Jamaica it is gratifying to hear men and women, during the sermon, cry out Amen or Hallelujah, and that because of glorious truths that were presented. That was not the "clapping of hands" because of what was done by men, but was an expression of appreciation of what our God has revealed to us in His word.

Consider also then what the holy angels did when Christ was born. They did not praise Mary for bringing forth such a beautiful child. A multitude of the heavenly host praised God; and they to the shepherds said, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." They glorified God and praised Him for sending His Son for our salvation. They sang of God's good will, not of Mary's painful but fruitful work, nor of her body's activity by which our Savior came into our flesh.

If there is clapping of our hands when Christ returns, and we receive our new spiritual bodies, we will do so because of what our God has done through His Son. This, too, by the way, we do already sing, when with our mouths and hearts we sing, as presented in Psalter # 383:1: "All that I am I owe to thee, Thy wisdom, Lord, hath fashioned me; I give my Maker thankful praise, Whose wondrous works my soul amaze."

Look also at I Corinthians 1:4. For there we find our calling displayed by Paul. He wrote: "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ." Figuratively, not literally, Paul claps his hands because of what God does. Always our praise for spiritual blessings calls for praise to God, Who realized it all, and in His grace bestows it upon us. He uses men and women, fathers and mothers, in presenting to children what God has wrought. To them we must be thankful; but we must not lift them above God, and thank them while remaining silent about what God does through them.

Be sure then, that when your hands are clapping, because of our wonderful salvation, it is because of what God has done for us in His grace. We should never turn man's attention away from God, when He is the one Who is presented in song. For, men are God's tools. They are creatures whom He uses for His own glory. And we must look beyond God's tools; and must see and be reminded of our God and His work.

When the angels sang before the shepherds, the day Jesus was born, they sang not of Mary and Joseph, but of God, as pointed out a moment ago, and in love of God. And those shepherds did not clap their hands because the angels spoke so beautifully. They went to see what God had done. And in Luke 2:17 we read that these shepherds "make known abroad the saying, which was told them concerning this child." They praised - and in that sense thanked - God, and not His angels who did sing a wonderful and comforting message.

Finally, Young People, look at what we read in Revelation 22:8 and 9. John had been shown what Christ is preparing for us, and the blessedness into which He will bring us. And we read that John, who wrote this Book of Revelation, fell at the feet of the angel which showed him these things. BUT that angel said to him, "See thou do it not; for I am a fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the saying of this book: worship God." Note that last element: Worship God. Falling at the feet of this angel was worshiping a creature.

Here Scripture closes and reveals to us our calling. Praise God from Whom all blessings flow. Praise Him for the truth that is sung, and praise not those who provide the music, and sing God's praises.

What men do must not turn us away from God. What God does through men calls us to praise God. Our God we should thank, for bringing us the truth, and for bringing it so beautifully through songs and the voices that are His gifts to mankind. Let me put it this way:

When truths concerning God and His work is sung,
We ought not turn our thoughts from what He now has done.
Nor must we turn away men's thoughts to those who sang,
And thus away from God, Whose praise so richly rang.

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Skip Hunter

February 1

Isaiah 1:11-20 We went to God's house yesterday. We participated in the service. How did we do? The portion of Scripture you read talks about participating without participating. It is possible to go to church and not go to church. But our gracious God makes it possible for us to repent of such sins. In fact He has given us the beautiful sign of new fallen snow to show us the power of the blood of the Lamb. Pray that we may always be conscious of that power in our lives. Sing or read Psalter 140 especially verse 3.

February 2

Ephesians 4:7-16 Is it always good to tell the truth? My answer to this question is a surprising "not always". If you are scratching your head over that, check the Heidelberg Catechism on the eighth and ninth commandments. There we see that if the truth is not spoken in love or is spoken so that our neighbor's advantage Is not sought, we should be silent. Notice I said be silent, not lie. Love your neighbor as yourself and you will have no problem with Ephesians 4:15. Sing or read Psalter 26 especially verse 3.

February 3

Psalm 19:1-6 Do you take time to look at creation? Do you consider the lily of the valley, or the butterfly, or the stars? God speaks to us through His creation. Using His written word, the Bible, as our guide we can understand these expressions of God's speech to us. It takes time. It takes study of both creation and the Bible. But there is a huge benefit in it all. Biology class seems to make more sense when it is viewed through the microscope of faith. Enjoy God's creation daily and pray that He will speak to you through it. Sing or read Psalter 285.

February 4

John 14:22-27 Are you having a hard week? Is winter becoming long? Do you long for the return of Christ to deliver you from this valley of the shadow of death? Pray for the Holy Spirit to come to you as the Comforter promised in John 14:26. We cannot face anything alone. We can face anything with the help of the Holy Spirit who makes "Intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Then we will have the peace of verse 27. Then we can patiently endure all that God places before us. Sing or read Psalter 287.

February 5

Mark 16:14-20 Do you believe in the risen Christ? If you do, are you carrying out verse 15? No, most of you cannot be missionaries now. Some of you might wish to consider if that is your calling. All of you can pray for mission work. All of you can support mission work financially. This is our calling if we believe that Christ is risen and ascended into heaven. Become familiar with proper mission work and pray for it. In doing so you will be praying that Christ will return and take us to heaven. Sing or read Psalter 176.

February 6

Exodus 32:1-8 In verse 6 we read that the people of Israel "rose up to play." When we rise up to play, do we invoke the same response from God as the Israelites did? Today is Saturday. It is the traditional day of play among Americans. What kinds of recreations are we enjoying? Play is not wrong in itself. But certain kinds of play will cause God to become extremely angry at us. These kinds do not even have to be the vilest sort in which Israel participated. We must watch our play and pray that it is only God-glorifying. Sing or read Psalter 402 especially verses 1, 4, and 6.

February 7

Deuteronomy 16:13-17 As the offering is being taken, what is our reaction? *Is it joy?* Is it resignation? Is it indifference? What about you, young people? What is your reaction? Has God blessed you materially at all? Has God given you any thing? If He has, and I think He has; you have a duty to give. Some of you have few obligations as yet. Now is the time in which you have been greatly blessed. Give as you have been blessed. Sing or read Psalter 305 especially verses 3 and 5.

February 8

Titus 2:1-8, 12-14 How are you planning to live, young men and women? Are you preparing yourself to be like the men and women of Titus 2:4-8? Marriage does not make it possible to practice these admonitions of Paul. God's grace alone does it. Pray for that grace, and then practice being the sober adults of Titus 2. The blessings of such actions are found in verses 12-14 of the chapter. Read this part of Scripture, ponder this part of Scripture, and live this part of Scripture. Sing or read Psalter 24.

February 9

Amos 4 Who is your God? Many people claim to worship a god. Some worship heathen gods like Bhudda or Allah. Some claim the God of Scripture. Amos speaks of Israel's God. In the last verses of this chapter, he gives us a summary of this God. Is this the God we worship? Sing or read Psalter 162.

February 10

Philemon 1-9 When we pray, do we remember others? Or are our prayers so full of petitions about ourselves that we forget other people of God. Paul tells Philemon that he daily prays for him. If we would examine other of Paul's epistles, we would discover that other fellow believers are in Paul's prayers. We, too, should remember other saints in our prayers. It is not hard. Think of elders, deacons, ministers, missionaries, parents, friends, teachers... The list Is endless. Sing or read Psalter 75 especially verses 2 and 6.

February 11

I Chronicles 29:10-19 For what do we pray when we pray for others? Sometimes our prayers can be specific when we know other's specific needs. I am sure that you all know of something that others need. Other times our prayers can be general. All of God's people need to be remembered In prayer. We as believers can do this. We as believers must do this. I think that by remembering others in our prayers, our praying will become more meaningful but also more pleasing to God. Sing or read Psalter 426 especially verses 8 and 10.

February 12

Matthew 5:1-12 The passage which you read is part of Jesus's well-known sermon about the kingdom of heaven. The passage is often called the beatitudes. That word simply means blessed or happy. Notice the first beatitude. Those who are poor in spirit shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. Poor in spirit means that we realize that we are sinners and have need of forgiveness and grace. Do we exhibit this characteristic of a kingdom person, or do we walk around proclaiming "we're number one"? The reward is great; do you want it? Sing or read Psalter 82.

February 13

Psalm 38:15-22 The second beatitude speaks of mourning. This mourning is not the mourning because of the death of a dear one. This is the mourning that God's people make because of their sins. Do you mourn your sins, young people? When we make confession of faith, that is the part of the second question of our form. Kingdom people mourn their sins because they know that they shall be comforted by God. They know that His comfort is perfect and brings peace. Sing or read Psalter 103.

February 14

Numbers 12:1-8 Can we be like Moses? Moses had one of the hardest callings in the world. Yet it is God's word about Moses that he was the meekest man in the world. If Moses had to be meek in his task, what about us? The third beatitude calls us to be meek in this world. We must ignore the taunts of those round about us. We must forget those who would do us harm. Our reward is that we will inherit the earth. That new heaven and earth will be ours. Pray for patience to inherit the great reward. Sing or read Psalter 96.

February 15

Phllippians 1:1-11 Have you ever stood at the refrigerator, peering in, but not knowing what you want? This cannot be the plight of the citizen of the kingdom of heaven. We must know for what we are hungry. We must know about the righteousness after which we hunger. By studying God's word and by prayer that righteousness will become very evident. By this knowledge we will know of our hunger and thirst. We will also be filled because of this knowledge. Sing or read Psalter 100.

February 16

Luke 10:25-37 Mercy is an attribute of God. His greatest act of mercy was that he sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins. We also must show mercy to those around us. We can be merciful to family members, school friends, and to others around us. Being merciful is not easy because it takes away from our own self-enjoyment. But being merciful has the reward of God's mercy. For what else can we wish? Sing or read Psalter 101 especially verses 3 and 5.

February 17

Job 1:6-11, 20-22 What an example we have in Job. Here is a man who was pure in heart. God through Satan brought grievous trials of his faith. What do we read? "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." From our hearts come forth our spiritual actions. We must pray that God will give us a pure heart. By nature our hearts are completely corrupt. By grace they are cleansed and made pure. Since they are cleansed, we must live lives of thankfulness marked by deeds which come from a purified heart. Only through Christ can we see God. Sing or read Psalter 204.

February 18

II Samuel 20:16-22 If you read all of II Samuel 20, you will find that there was trouble in Israel. Further study will show that Joab was no peacemaker. But God had provided a peacemaker for His people. Peacemakers are needed in the church today. Are you one of them? This, too, is a characteristic of a citizen of God's kingdom. Some citizens have this talent more than others, but all are called to be peacemakers. Christ is the Prince of Peace. We must be peacemakers in His kingdom. Be a peacemaker at home, in school, or in the church. Sing or read Psalter 350 especially verses 4 and 5.

February 19

Revelation 11:3-12 God's people must live a life of persecution. It is true that there are some whom God has delivered from persecution. It is also true that there were certain periods in which the church was protected from persecution. But throughout history God's people have and will suffer persecution. This should be a joy for us. We should be happy in persecution because God has said that His people must be persecuted. We must live lives that warrant persecution. We will not be persecuted if we live like the world. Rejoice in persecution as a citizen of the kingdom. Rejoice and remember the reward. Sing or read Psalter 300 especially verses 11-13.

February 20

Lamentations 1:12-16 Do we weep over trouble in the church or among God's people? Do you young people cry when you see sin in your fellow young people? Are you concerned enough about God's church even as it is manifest among you to become sorrowful because of the trouble sin brings? Jeremiah was exceedingly sorrowful because of the sins of God's people. He was not sorrowful just because they were going into captivity. He was sorrowful because of the sins for which God was chastising them. Weep over sin; do not just cry over chastisement. Sing or read Psalter 379.

February 21

Galatians 1:6-12 Did you hear Christ today? What a blessing the child of God has when he can hear the words of Christ from the pulpit! Notice how I put that-the words of Christ. If we heard the words of a man, then we were cheated. Not only were we cheated, but also we were not fed the pure milk of the Word. The minister's words should not please us because he did a good job; they should please us because Christ spoke to us through those words. When we ponder the words of a sermon, Christ should be our measuring stick. If the sermon does not measure up, then it can only be because we did not hear Christ. Could the fault be with the sermon? Maybe. Could it have been with us? Probably. Sing or read Psalter 337.

February 22

II Kings 5:1-8 Covenant education is a great joy to the church of Christ. The Bible portrays this truth in many places. In these verses we read of a captive girl who was able because of covenant instruction to bring the truth of the sovereignty of God to a heathen man. By means of her witness, Naaman was converted by the grace of God. Many of you have known nothing but covenant instruction. It is my prayer for you that you can use it like this captive child. Some of you have either never known covenant instruction or have not had its benefits all your life. It is my prayer for you that God will allow you in some way to receive the benefits of covenant instruction soon. Sing or read Psalter 215.

February 23

John 9:1-7 God gave to us in His Word accounts of miracles. How must we receive these accounts? What instruction must we gain from them? In this passage we learn that miracles were used to glorify God. They were used so that we could see something of His power. When ever we ponder a miracle, we must look for grace in those miracles. We must see that the miracle is a small picture of the miracle Christ performed when He came to this earth, lived on this earth, and died for our sins. That is the greatest of all miracles. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift. Sing or read Psalter 427 especially verse 5.

February 24

Leviticus 19:1-10 Do we know what it means to be holy? Do we know why we must be holy? Do we know when we must be holy? Being holy means we must appear before God spotless and without sin. We must appear before God holy because He is holy. The well-known hymn "Take Time to Be Holy" does not go far enough. We must always be holy. If we think we must take time for it, we will fall. If we would stop here, we would despair because we would say it is impossible to be holy. We might say that God is not fair in requiring us to be holy. We do not have to despair; God is extremely fair. He has given us His Son through whom we are made holy. Sing or read Psalter 143 especially verses 2 and 3.

February 25

James 4:11-17 Youth is full of exuberance about the future. Many of you have plans about what you are going to do. You have marriage plans, occupational plans, recreational plans, and many other kinds of plans. Are your plans God's plans? We do not know what God has planned for us. We do not even know if we will be living tomorrow. Therefore as we plan we must always say, "If the Lord will, I will do. . . ." Then we must pray that God's will be made known to us so that we can carry it out as He wishes. Sing or read Psalter 98.

February 26

Nahum 1:1-8 Jehovah is good. Such a truth may never be overlooked. As we live our life in this world among much trouble, we can always confess Jehovah Is good. What does that mean? First of all it means He is good in Himself. Nothing of God is evil. It also means that whatever He sends upon us is good for us. That is the testimony of Romans 8:28. We can be glad that Jehovah is good and only gives us good things. This allows us to make some sense out of the happening in this life. As long as we have the confession that Jehovah is good, we can go on in confidence and trust in Him. Sing or read Psalter 268.

February 27

I John 4:6-13 Love is an attribute that is powerful. Love has the power to join two into one. Love has the power to bring peace into the church of God. Love has the power to bring unity into a family. Love is only powerful because God is love. God has love in Himself. God has shown his love for the elect by sending His only begotten son to die for their sins. Are we participating in the power of love. Do we love one another because God loved us? Let us show forth the love of God even as we show our love for one another. Sing or read Psalter 370.

February 28

II Peter 3:1-12 Another month is drawing to a close. We are that much closer to the end of the world. As we look back over February, do we see the signs of the times? Can we see them as we look through the glasses of faith? If we cannot, we better stop a minute this Sabbath day and pray for the ability to see and want Christ's return. That is the admonition of our reading for today. God gives us signs; we must heed them. Sundays are good for this because we put away our earthly labors and concentrate on things of heaven. If we do not concentrate, we will miss the signs, and worse than that, we will miss Christ's return. Let us pray that that is not our plight in this life! Sing or read Psalter 139.

Living The Antithesis In Our Personal Relationships

by Rev. Ron Cammenga

The relationships of the young people ought to be a great concern to the church. Certainly Christian parents ought to be deeply concerned with whom their young people associate. This ought also to be a matter of concern to the officebearers of the church. And it ought to be a matter of concern to the young people themselves.

The relationships of the young people ought to be a matter of concern to the church because God Himself is concerned about the friendships of Christian young people. This belongs to the antithetical life to which God calls every young person.

Again and again the Bible warns against relationships with unbelievers and admonishes the believing young person not to make friends with the young people of this world. James writes in James 4:4 that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." In II Cor. 6:14, 15 the Apostle Paul exhorts believers, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord (that is, 'friendship') hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?"

In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon gives various warnings against friendship with unbelievers. In Prov. 13:20 he warns that ". . . a companion of fools shall be destroyed." And in Prov. 28:7 he says that ". . . he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father." One very strong warning on this subject is found in Proverbs 1:10-19. I would suggest that you take the time to read this passage. This is a significant passage because it stands at the head of the whole rest of the Book of Proverbs. That indicates certainly the importance of this matter of the relationships of the young people. This is the first thing the wise father discusses with his son. But this also indicates the connection between the friendships of the young people and every other aspect of the holy, obedient life to which they are called. From a certain point of view, everything else that the father will teach his son depends on his first of all heeding the warning not to be friends with the world. All the good instruction of a faithful father will fall to the ground if his son (daughter) becomes a companion of the fools of this world.

THE WARNING AGAINST FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD

Proverbs 1:10-19 deals with friendship. In verses 10, 11 we read, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, "Come with us . . ." In verse 14 these sinners say, "Cast in thy lot among us: let us all have one purse." And in verse 15 the wise father warns, "My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path." Going with sinners, walking with them in the way is being friends with them.

The passage is a warning against friendship with unbelievers. In the passage these unbelievers are described as murderers and robbers. They lay wait for blood, vs. 11. They fill their houses with spoil that they have violently taken, vs. 13. They are greedy for gain, vs. 19.

We ought not to misunderstand the application of the passage. We ought not to suppose that this believing father is ONLY forbidding friendship on the part of his son with out-and-out murderers and thieves. This passage, in fact, applies to ALL friendship with unbelievers, unbelievers of every stripe and description. For when it comes down to it, every unbeliever is a thief and a murderer. The lust that drives the thief and the murderer is essentially the same lust that burns in the heart of every wicked man. It is the lust that puts self and self's interests at the center of one's life. It is the lust that is ready to destroy anyone and anything that gets in the way of self. It is the lust for the pleasures and treasures of this life that gratify self. It is the lust for the glorification of self, and a refusal to live for the glory of God.

With unbelievers, now, ALL unbelievers' fellowship is forbidden: "My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path," vs. 15.

This is a timely warning. For the danger is real that young people do this. This is always a temptation to the young people. This danger arises from the unavoidable contact that the young people of the church have with the young people of this world. The unbeliever may be a close relative. Or he may be a neighbor. Or he may be a fellow-worker.

There is a danger here for the young people who go off to college. There is not only the danger of imbibing bad instruction, but there is also the danger of the influence of bad acquaintances. For this reason the young people who go to college ought to go to a college located in the vicinity of one of our churches.

There is a danger of friendships with unbelievers

to those young people who leave home to live in some apartment by themselves or with other young people. In many instances this leads to the establishment of undesirable relationships and to the influence of evil friends. Outside of the parental home and away from the parental influence, they fall victim to the influence of the children of this world.

Included in the warning against friendship with unbelievers is the warning that the young people stay clear of the places where the young people of this world 'hang out': the bars, the pool halls, the dance floors, the movie theaters, the wild parties.

Certainly included in this warning - so obvious it ought not even be needed to be stated - is the prohibition of dating the young people of this world. Dating is friendship, and the young people of the church may not be friends with the world. Dating is also preliminary to marriage, and no Christian young person may marry an unbeliever.

THE REASONS WHY FRIENDSHIP WITH UNBELIEVERS IS FORBIDDEN

There are good, solid reasons why the young people of the church are to be warned against friendship with unbelievers. There are reasons why every Christian young person ought to be concerned about his personal relationships. What are these reasons?

First, the consequences of friendship with unbelievers are disastrous for the Christian young person, disastrous in nearly every instance. Inevitably there is a corrupting of the believer, the influence over him of the bad example of the unbeliever. The believer doesn't influence the unbeliever, but the unbeliever invariably influences the believer. By the unbeliever he is led away from the Word of God, the commandments of God, and the church of God. This is the goal of the unbeliever. This is certainly the goal of the Devil who stands behind the unbeliever.

History and experience bear out the truth of this. Think of the consequences for the children of Israel on account of their making friendships with the ungodly Canaanites. Think of the result in the life of a believer like Samson of his establishing friendship with an ungodly Philistine woman. Think of the result for Solomon of his marrying heathen wives: they led him away from the true worship of God.

Secondly, the young people of the church are warned against friendships with unbelievers because such friendship expose them to the Judgment of God. God forbids friendship with unbelievers, and God punishes those who establish friendship with unbelievers. It is not just your parents, your pastor, and the church who forbid such friendships. But it is God *Himself* Who forbids friendship with unbelievers.

Those who make friends with unbelievers expose themselves to the same judgment as those unbelievers with whom they make friends. Solomon says in Prov. 1:18, "And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives." James says in James 4:4 that whoever makes himself a friend of the world by that very fact shows himself to be an enemy of God. Woe to that man who is God's enemy!

Thirdly, the believer is warned against friendship with unbelievers because when he does this he compromises his witness to the unbeliever. That the believer is not to make friends with the unbeliever does not mean that he has no calling with respect to the unbeliever. He does. That calling is to witness to him, which witness God may use to bring the unbeliever to repentance and faith.

But by making friends with the unbeliever, the child of God compromises his witness. How can he witness against murder when he is a companion of murderers? How can he witness against worldliness when he is a companion of thieves? How can he witness against drunkenness when he is a companion of drunkards? How can he witness against fornication when he is a companion of fornicators?

THE POSITIVE CALLING

In this warning against friendship with unbelievers there is an implied calling. If the young people are to avoid friendship with unbelievers, the calling is implied: "Be friends and make friends with fellow believers!"

As much as the Word of God admonishes us against friendship with the children of this world, it calls us to friendship with God's people. The alternative to friendship with the world is not no friends at all. But the alternative is friendship with the children of God.

The Scriptures lay this calling before us both by example and express commandment. Think of the friendship between David and Jonathan. In one place David describes his love for his friend Jonathan as a love surpassing even the love of a woman. Think of the friendship between Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. To what an extent did God use that friendship to sustain these young men in the midst of the temptations of Babylon. Solomon writes in Prov. 18:24, there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. The Psalmist writes in Ps. 119:63, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts."

This is a practical calling for the young people of the church. The young people of the church must seek one another's friendship. They ought to establish and cultivate mutual friendship.

FRIENDSHIP AT WHAT COST?

Although friendship is good and even necessary, it may come to it that for God's sake the believer must forego friendship, or even experience rejection at the hands of his friends. This was David's experience. He laments in Ps. 38:11, "My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off." In Ps. 80:18 he writes, "Lover and friend hath Thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness."

Think of Job's rejection at the hands of his friends. Or think of our Lord's treatment at the hands of His friends: one betrayed Him, another denied Him, and the rest forsook Him and fled.

It may come to it that for the sake of the kingdom of God, you are required to give up certain friendships. Then, for the sake of friendship with God, which is dearer than life itself, you must let go the friendship of men.

The believing child of God heeds this warning against friendship with unbelievers. Solomon writes in Prov. 1:17, "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird." Even in an animal the sight of danger leads to the avoiding of it. Instinct directs the bird to avoid the net that has been spread in her sight. The Christian young person ought to be as ready to avoid the dangers of friendship with unbelievers.

There is a saying that goes like this: "Tell me who your friends are, and I'll tell you who you are." That is a true saying. The prophet asks the rhetorical question in Amos 3:3, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed? That is what friends do, friends walk together. We could paraphrase the word of the prophet, "Can two two people be friends, if they are not agreed?" The obvious answer is: "No!"

The foundation on which true friendship is built is the foundation of agreement, agreement in belief of God, agreement in obedience to God, agreement in the worship of God. May this be the foundation of the friendships of our young people!

WRITING CONTEST

Sheep

by Sarah Van Egdom

We have sheep. Every year in January we have to shear them. The sheep do not like it, but I do. This makes me think of what the Bible tells us about sheep. At sheep shearing when the sheep is flipped down it is under control of the man who is shearing and does not make any noises. In Isaiah 53:7b it says, "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb." This is a picture of how Jesus acted at His death. Jesus did not speak or try to run away. He went willingly and did what His Father told Him to do.

Sheep are usually greedy when they are hungry. Then they overeat and get sick or die. This is a picture of us. Because we are greedy we are pictures of sheep and Jesus is our shepherd. In Isaiah 53:6 it says "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way." In Matthew 18:12 it says "If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains and seeketh that which is gone astray?" This is a picture of us going away from the church and Christ the good shepherd leads us back. In John 10:11 Jesus says "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his live for the sheep." This is a picture of Jesus the good Shepherd who died on the cross for us. Part of Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

I feel safe with Jesus as my shepherd.

The sabbath is strictly a spiritual idea. The keeping of the sabbath is a high spiritual act, the expression of hope and faith on the part of the Christian sojourner in the midst of this present world. It is for this reason a very evil omen, a sign of apostasy, of a lack of spiritual life, or a sick faith and a waning hope, when they that call themselves Christians, that outwardly join the band of Christian pilgrims in the world, evince no longing to keep the sabbath properly, desecrate it, and more and more join the world, to follow after their own desires, speak their own words, and do their own evil works.

-The Triple Knowledge, Volume 3, page 269, Herman Hoeksema

". . . And We Shall Be Saved"

by Mark Vanden Berg

The topic of "The New Heavens and The New Earth" appealed to me mainly because we are living in the last times. Many of the signs of the times which are recorded for us in Matthew 4, have been fulfilled. Today with our modern technology, the vast majority of the world has been exposed to scripture by which God has revealed Himself to us. Truly the world is becoming ripe for the coming of the antichrist, and the persecution that he will bring with his kingdom. The stage is being set for our Lord to appear for a second time. Then that awesome day will be upon us and Christ will bring with Him the glorious heaven and earth of the new dispensation. Our Saviour will come to take us to our eternal home, riding on the very clouds of heaven. Only the elect will return with Him to the new heaven, and the wicked will remain.

In Revelation, we read this current earth will be destroyed with fire and brimstone and a new form of "city" will be established. The heavens will be held back no longer, and they will rain fire to devastate this moral earth and all the sin which abides in it.

Then every man shall be judged according to his works. Every sin which you and I have committed will be exposed, and it will be proven that our God alone is Just and Holy. Everyone will stand in awe at the perfectness of our Lord. No man will dare to argue with his judgment, for each of us apart from Christ is worthy only of eternal damnation and everlasting destruction. BUT those who have been washed in the blood of their Saviour, will forever join in singing praises to His most Holy Name. Although there are choirs here on earth that are beautiful, there is no comparison to the choir of the new heaven, for we together with the angels will be praising God continually.

Little is explained to us concerning the world to come. Our Bible only gives us descriptions in our earthly language, which cannot even come close to describing the real heaven in which the children of Christ will dwell for an eternity. Still the earthly picture is astounding.

John tells us (Rev. 21) that a beautiful city, likened to a bride waiting for her groom, will enwrap us, and we shall be saved. The city is also described. It is pictured as having the glory of God, and the light like unto a jasper stone, clear as crystal. We are told the "streets" are made of pure gold, and precious stones of pearls, emeralds, jasper, chalcedony, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolyte, beryl, topaz, chrysoprasus, jacinth, and amethyst will be seen decorating this gorgeous dwelling place. The curse which surrounds us today will be lifted. For we are told that only purely perfect things and creatures will dwell here. It will not be a Detroit or New York, where sin and corruption runs wild, but it will be perfect.

There will be no sun there. Think about that. Our sun gives every form of life here on this corruptible earth. We depend on the sun for everything that we have been blessed with. Nothing can live, move, or have any being without it, yet in the new earth there will be no sun. We will have no need of a physical sun, for Christ will be our light. The complete trinity of our Most High God will lighten the entire city, reassuring us that there will be no darkness there at all.

No darkness of any kind will be present. The adultery, fornication, murder, drugs, and profanity that we deal with everyday with the world will be gone!! There will be no peer-pressure in our new home. We will not be tempted to drink, or defile the name of our Holy God when we are among our friends. Imagine that!! We will obey God perfectly not because we have to, but because our hearts will want to! We will overflow with praise and adoration for the Maker of heaven and earth. Earnestly we pray, Lord, tarry no longer, but come quickly for we long to be in that eternal dwelling place.

Satan will have no control over anyone any longer. Today he is alive and the temptations that he gives to the child of God are great. The fiery darts that he pierces us with every day will be quenched. Revelation 20 explains that God will cast him into the bottomless pit, and he will suffer for an eternity. He shall be tormented night and day for ever and ever, and we will have no foe. Our battle against darkness that we fight each day will be victorious, and then we shall be saved. We will live in this glorious place forever, in perfect communion with our God. No longer will we give heed to the devil, and we will be rewarded for walking the straight and narrow road.

We must also be warned because that day will come as a thief in the night for those who are not ready and waiting. Earnestly wait and be assured that even at this very moment, our Saviour is preparing a place for each one of His beloved children. Those who have not been washed in the blood of the Lamb, and therefore are not saved, will spend an eternity in utter

destruction. Where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth which will show the pain and horror of God's just wrath.

We as God's children know that we will have to endure the last days in order to experience this glorious kingdom which is to come. It is my prayer that we as churches will stand fast and not give heed to the devil, who will try to pluck us from the palm of our Almighty God. It is also my prayer that we suffer not long, but that the Lord hastily returns, for truly that day will be triumphant! !

Worship Services - A Reminder

by Rev. C. Hanko

Worship services are fellowship, communion with the living God. In that sense the sanctuary is God's House, a House of prayer.

What we often lose from sight is that we obtain a blessing only when we consciously, actively participate in this communion with God.

We do not come together to enjoy an hour of relaxation, to sit back and do nothing. But we worship, and worshiping, we prepare ourselves to hear what God will say to us from His Word.

This preparation should begin on Saturday, lest our day of rest is ruined already before it dawns.

We do well to remind ourselves that the minister has spent a big part of the week in preparation for this day.

Although no two ministers will agree as to how long it takes to make a sermon, I have figured that it takes a minister with experience about ten hours.

Making a sermon can well be compared to a mother making home made bread. She gathers, measures and carefully mixes the ingredients. Then she adds the most important ingredient of all, the yeast, without which the bread will never be good. The minister translates his text from the Hebrew or the Greek. Checks the various concepts in the text; words like `righteousness', `godliness', `truth' must be considered in their context. At this point he is ready to add the yeast, that is, he is ready to ask prayerfully for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead him into the truth of this Word of God.

Now the bread must rise. Very few ministers have ten consecutive hours that they can devote to a sermon. Their busy schedule may require that they take their text with them as they walk to the hospital or make their rounds at the shut-ins. They turn it over in their minds along the way. Even when they visit the sick or shut-ins they are thinking of the text. Little do these sick or shut-ins realize that they are being given a preview of some part of the sermon, or that they are being used to bring out some practical application of the text.

By this time the bread has risen to the top of the pan. It needs to be kneaded down. The text needs a theme and division, and the materia. of the text must be put in proper order.

Once more the yeast must do its work. Rev. Herman Hoeksema, when he taught in the seminary, liked to stress to the students, "The text must speak to you. You must listen. You can never preach unless the text has spoken to you. It must speak to you first, before it can speak to the congregation."

When the dough has reached the top of the pan for the second time it may be ready for the oven. The minister may be ready to write out his sermon. The more extensively he does that, the better.

After that, there is the final preparation. Maybe he has to commit the sermon to memory. Maybe he can rely on his notes. In any case, an hour or so before the service is a necessary, final, prayerful preparation to meet the congregation.

We do well to consider that in our prayer before the service we seek a blessing, not only for ourselves, but also for the minister and the congregation.

For ourselves we ask that our heavenly Father will take away every hindrance, that He will fill us with His grace and Spirit, so that we may actively participate in the worship.

Our services generally begin with the doxology, in which the congregation unitedly gives expression to our praise to God.

This is followed by the votum and the benediction. The votum is an expression of our trust, our confidence, that in this worship service our God will sustain and bless us. Our help is in His Name.

The benediction is the bestowal of the blessing of God, pronounced on us by His servant, applied to our hearts by His Spirit.

In some churches the votum and the benediction precede the doxology, that is, God first speaks His blessing, and then the congregation responds in praise to our God.

Now follows a Psalter number. Usually there are four in a service. In any case, at least one number should be a song of praise and adoration. Another, usually following the reading of the law, should be an expression of penitence and a plea for pardon. No worship service is complete without this confession and appeal to the mercies of God revealed in the cross, either in song, or in the congregational prayer, or in both.

Allow me to add that it is our privilege, but also our duty to sing. We must sing with the mind, considering what we sing. (For that reason the specific Psalter numbers were chosen for this service). We must also sing from the heart, giving expression to the confessions, the joys, the hope, the praises, that have filled the hearts of the saints throughout the ages. And we must also sing out with the lips. I have been in congregations where people were slumped in their seats while they sang. I felt that the angels listening, who sing so fervently, must have wept. We must sing with the mind, and also from the heart, and also with our lips!

After the first Psalter is sung, our churches differ in practice: either the chapter that is connected with the sermon is read, followed by the reading of the law; or else only the law is read.

There are advantages to reading the chapter early in the service to prepare us for the sermon that will follow. There are also advantages in reading the chapter just before the sermon to bring the passage clearly before our minds during the sermon.

Personally, I like the idea of reading a comparable portion of Scripture at the beginning of the service. If the text is taken from the Old Testament, then a comparable passage could be read from the New. If the text is taken from the New Testament a comparable portion could be read from the Old. For example, if the text deals with Jesus' birth. A comparable passage would be a few verses from Isaiah 9. Or if the text deals with the trial in which Jesus is condemned to die, a comparable passage would be Isaiah 53. If the text is taken from Joel 2, the passage to read could be a portion of Acts 2.

During the reading of the infallible Scriptures God speaks to us, as well as in the reading of the law. Now it is our turn to respond to God in song.

In the evening service the twelve articles of our faith are either read or recited in unison. It is understood, that the law should be read, *but that it is proper* for the Confession of our faith to be recited in unison. This is followed by another number from the Psalter.

Here upon follows the congregational prayer. This is our prayer, spoken through the minister. Our needs are presented before the throne of grace. Therefore we must actively participate in this prayer.

Now follows our further participation in a two-fold way. The offering, which is an essential part of the service, gives us an opportunity to pay our obligation to the church and its ministry, but also to give our gifts of thanksgiving to God. In the meantime. we are active in singing another Psalter.

Now comes the moment for which we were waiting and preparing ourselves. Now follows the main part of the service, which must always remain the main part. Now God speaks to us through His ambassador, the ordained minister of the Word, and by His Spirit in our hearts.

Now it is our turn to lift up the prayer: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

God speaks through His infallible Word. God also speaks through His servant when the Scriptures are unfolded. The sermon is not a mere discourse. It is not a lecture on some popular subject. It is the unfolding of the Word of the living God.

And the wonder of it all is, that God uses His servants, the ministers of the Word, to speak to us. We are not merely listening to a man, whom we may criticize at will. We are listening to Christ, speaking through His servant. That makes the preaching and the worship service unique. There is nothing like it in the whole world, for the preaching of the Word is God's power unto our salvation.

A fitting close is a prayer, and our response in song.

And then the benediction, God's final word to us. This is one of the most solemn moments of the entire service, when God lays His blessing upon us, both at the beginning and at the end of the service.

The service is not ended until the benediction has been spoken.

We must be able to say as we leave the sanctuary, "It was good for me to be there, for the Lord was in our midst."

Listening to such things as gossip, slander, or criticism about others needs to be rejected just as strongly as the tendency to pass them over our tongues.

It is impossible to listen in a condoning manner to gossip or criticism about someone else and then think only thoughts that are true and noble about that person. And if we guard our thoughts we will more easily guard our tongues, for Jesus said, "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." (Matthew 12:34).

-p. 171, "The Practice of Godliness" by Jerry Bridges, Navpress 1983

by Brian Kuiper

Consistent Christianity, by Michael C. Griffiths; Inter-Varsity Press; 126 pp; price?; paperback.

There are many in the world today who are called Christians. The world watches these people very closely. The way in which a Christian conducts himself, therefore, is very important. In this book, Griffiths writes about the walk of the Christian. He shows how our walk can be more God glorifying and more consistent with the word "Christian".

What are Christians for? This is the basic question that Griffiths asks. He says that we have to begin by wondering why God created us. Most would answer that Christians were made to go to heaven. This doesn't tell what we are to do while we are on the earth. Our earthly walk is significant as well. Far too often, the emphasis is put on where Christians will spend eternity, and not enough time is spent on how we must spend this life. From this basis, the author begins to show us how we are to walk on earth. We must walk in love for the Lord. This love must be so great that, in comparison, our earthly love does not begin to measure up with our love for God. Therefore this life must be spent showing this love for God in all things. We must not be pious on Sunday and forget about God the rest of the week.

Part of showing our love for God on this earth requires love for our neighbors. Griffiths develops this point by looking at the positive requirements of the last six commandments. These deal with the attitudes of Christians towards their neighbors.

The author explains that honoring father and mother can lead to better family life (5th commandment). He says we must build up and strengthen our neighbors. We must also help and assist the needy (6). We are encouraged to think clean thoughts and to keep our minds from straying to lustful thoughts (7). Griffiths says that if we trust God to supply our needs, we will not steal. Rather, we must give to those who need (8). He says that if we keep our promises, be truthful, and watch what we say, we will be good witnesses to our neighbor (9). Finally, the author exhorts us to be humble and content with what we have (10). He ends by saying that we must live our lives to "bear fruit to the praise of Christ."

The reason that I strongly recommend this book is because of the positive view of the author. He tells Christians what they must do, he doesn't use the "don't" method to teach us what to do. As Christians we must do the work of God. We must accept His will for us. Christians, live for Him!

Hebrews 13:20-21. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

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