BEACON LIGHTS

If we think lightly of violence and murder, we will soon forget that God also forbids, in the sixth commandment, all "envy, hatred, anger and desire of revenge." Eventually we ourselves will resort to these sinful means in order to deal with our own problems.

Read the Editorial by Daniel Kleyn

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Violence Murder!

by Daniel Kleyn

Were you shocked when you heard that a gunman opened fire in a train and shot thirty three people, killing six of them? Did it disturb or upset you when two ten year old boys beat to death a two year old? Or are such murders not close enough to home to horrify and affect you?

What is your reaction, then, when you hear of violence right in the city in which you live? A young pregnant mother stops to help some youths — they shoot her down dead. A young girl walks from the living room into the kitchen to get a drink — a shot gun fired through the window kills her. A husband is unhappy with his wife and family — he shoots them all to death and then kills himself. An employee has recently lost his job — he returns to his work-place and murders his boss and a number of his fellow workers.

Violence is on the increase. Each day the Press and the News Broadcasts report shootings and killings such as those just mentioned. People think they can solve life's difficulties by murdering others, by "getting rid of" those who offend them. If they are upset with someone, they kill him.

As Christians, we too often respond to these murders by thinking or saying: "Yes, that's awful, but it's the world's problem, not mine," or even, "That's really bad, but at least it doesn't affect me." We see and hear of so many murders occurring every day that they no longer shock us — we become hardened to them. Thus we even lose sight of the serious sin of killing others, for every murderer breaks the sixth commandment of God's law and should be punished with death.

There is a grave danger in this kind of response on our part. Being hardened to violence and to murder in this way is the first step toward becoming involved in them. If we think lightly of violence and murder, we will soon forget that God also forbids, in the sixth commandment, all "envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 106). Eventually we ourselves will resort to these sinful means in order to deal with our own problems. It is important, therefore, that we guard against becoming hardened to this serious sin. We must respond with abhorrence to all violence and to every murder which we either see or about which we hear.

However, another question which is important to us is: What is the source of the problem of violence and murder? Why do people murder each other? Why, Why, Why? It is only in understanding the source of this problem that we are able properly to guard against it and to deal with it.

Many different answers have been given to this question. Some attribute it to childhood abuse. Some blame racism. Others believe that discrimination is the cause. Some find the fault in lack of education. But all of these answers are purely worldly, and not one of them even gets close to the real cause, the only cause.

The answer to the question is really very simple — SIN! Sin is the root cause of all violence, of all the killings and slayings that occur. It is because of man's sin that he is so quick to pull the trigger of a pistol or gun. It is because of sin that man turns to violence in order to try to solve his problems.

All men, because they have sinful natures, are naturally inclined to do wickedly, but our sinful natures are also fed, and therefore led into sin, by what we see and hear. Thus, a contributing factor in today's violence is that the use of guns is often portrayed as the acceptable means of dealing with those who upset you or whom you hate. Nearly every movie, both on television and at the theater, involves violence with guns. At first one is perhaps shocked to see fellow humans being shot. But this

soon wears off. After only a short period of time those who watch such movies grow accustomed to the shootings and expect violence to be a normal part of every movie. Parents and children alike, we have a powerful reason here to oppose movies and television, for the sins portrayed feed our sinful nature and lead us into sin.

However, it is not only television and movies that feed violence, but also many computer "games." Computers are capable of producing real to life graphics, and many games have been developed and are sold in which one is involved in shooting other people. The effect of this is worse than watching a movie, for the person playing the game is actively involved in shooting others. He not only watches others get shot, but he himself pulls the trigger that shoots the other person. One is also led to believe that shooting and getting shot isn't all that serious, for you have more than one life, right! These computer "games" undermine the seriousness of violence and murder.

I am reminded of a saying that a pastor of mine often quoted: "Given the right time, place and circumstances, there is no known sin which anyone would not commit." How true! Do not, therefore, feed your sinful inclinations so that you are hardened to the sin of violence and of breaking the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill."

The solutions of the world to the problem of violence and murder are and always will be useless, for the world never gets to the heart of the problem — Sin! Gun laws are the supposed solution. If we have a five day waiting period before anyone can purchase a firearm, this will enable us to do a check on criminals and also provide a "cooling down" period for would be murderers who are seeking immediate revenge.

The world also deals wrongly with offenders. Murderers are not called murderers, they are simply persons who have problems. With some treatment, usually psychological, these problems are ironed out and "murderers" are allowed back on the street. The world does not deal with the sin of killing and with the just punishment of it — death. Hence, all these and many other measures taken by the world are futile. For the facts stare us in the face, violence is still on the increase!

As Christians, we must realize that the solution to the problem of violence and murder is only to be found in treating the source of the problem — sin. This is something that man cannot do. Only God can enable man to control his sinful nature. Many are deterred from violence because of the consequences they might suffer. But it is only the work of God's grace in one's heart and life that keeps him from resorting to violence and murder (both externally in his actions and inwardly in his heart).

So how must we deal with this problem which is becoming worse in society, and which will no doubt affect even us in the future?

We must see that the existence of violence is part of God's curse on the world and upon all men. Sin develops and becomes worse and worse. As the Scripture teaches us in Matthew 24, violence is a sign of the times. As the end of the world draws nigh, we will see and hear wars and rumors of wars, nations rising up against nations, kingdoms against kingdoms. Violence is a sign that the end of the world is near.

Do we therefore despair at the hopeless plight of the world? No. We must seek comfort in the truth of God's sovereign control over all things. Even the violent events that occur are according to God's plan and purpose, though they may not seem to be and though we may not in this life see and understand God's purpose. Christ Himself told us: "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet" (Matthew 24:6). We have the promise that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8 : 28).

We are not here in this world in order to make it our home, for we seek a heavenly home. Our life here is a pilgrimage. We must seek the heavenly rest which God has prepared for us and which awaits us. This does not mean that we are not concerned by the problems of the world. We are. We should be. But we do not live in the false hope of the world becoming a better place. "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse" (II Timothy 3:13). Daily seek, therefore, and pray also, that Christ will come quickly so that we and our loved ones will be delivered from this wicked world.

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Preparing Yourself To Give An Answer (I)

A speech given at Hope PRC's Conference on Personal Witnessing - April 3, 1993

by Rev. Steven R. Key

This theme is taken from I Peter 3:15, where you read: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

I think this text has often instilled a certain feeling of discomfort in many of us. "Be ready always." Am I ready? How ready must I be? What kind of answer am I expected to give? Some of you, I am sure, have had the same experience as I, in failing to speak when I really knew I should have said something. I had a golden opportunity to witness of the hope that lives within me, but I didn't know quite what to say, or was afraid of getting questioned further. Or maybe you have found yourself in a heated debate, when what was really needed was careful listening to what was being said, and only then a careful answer from the Scriptures. I have kicked myself for my own failure in that regard too. Other times perhaps you have gotten involved in a discussion only to he embarrassed by your inability to demonstrate from the Bible the truth of your position. Several years ago I had that experience too. So, this text can certainly cause some discomfort.

But I would emphasize that no matter how uncomfortable you may be initially when this calling is set before you in Scripture, you cannot escape it. It is the God-ordained calling to all believers to defend the faith, to witness of the hope that is ours. You who are the children of God have the calling to bear witness and give answer concerning the hope that lives within you.

Furthermore, on a more positive note, with proper spiritual preparation there is no need to feel uncomfortable when you have an opportunity to speak concerning the hope that is in you. And I say that, because we of all people have reason to speak and to witness of the blessed hope that is ours!

That is a matter that deserves much emphasis among us. You and I must see, that our Christian faith - and that is our Protestant Reformed faith - affects every aspect of our lives. We have a hope that, when properly understood and believed, isn't just for Sunday and isn't just for when we are feeling spiritual; but our hope affects for good every aspect of our lives! In a world where there is such a vacuum, such emptiness, in the lives of so many, ours is a message that is truly good news. We have the gospel for our answer to others.

We have reason to prepare thoroughly to give answer for the hope that lives within us. And when we examine I Peter 3:15 for the purpose at hand, we will find that the inspired Apostle shows in some depth what is involved in preparing yourself to give an answer.

Prepared Spiritually

I call your attention, first of all, to the fact that you must be prepared spiritually. The Apostle writes to those who are being questioned. When you are questioned in such a way, there is also a reason for such questioning. That reason is the particular way in which you live, a way which sets you apart.

Preparedness for witnessing to the power of the gospel begins by knowing that hope yourself, and living under the power of the gospel yourself. That is something that we might take for granted; but it deserves emphasis nevertheless. An inescapable implication of this Word of God is that our conduct as Christians is called into question.

When the Apostle speaks here of an "answer" he speaks literally of an apology, an apologetic answer. We often use that word "apology" or "apologize" in the sense of being sorry for something we did wrong. Obviously, that is not the meaning of the word here. There is no need to be sorry, when you are living as a Christian. So what does the word apology mean, as interpreted here by the word "answer"? There is a course called "Apologetics" which is taught in many seminaries. It is a course in the defense of the faith. To give an apology for our hope means, then, to give a rational and intelligent defense of our conduct.

When our hope is mocked and rejected, when our conduct is called into question as being too prudish or too religious, then we are called to defend our hope with an appeal to an authority higher than ourselves. We defend our faith and lifestyle, by an appeal to the Scriptures which is the absolute authority for what we

believe and how we live.

The calling set before you here is not that you all must go up to strangers in the grocery store and on the streets and in shopping malls and the like, trying to persuade them of the truth of Scripture. That is not required of you here. Though it is evident from Scripture that the preaching of the Word may take place in peculiar places, that does not make it your calling to do so. And even in your daily contacts with people, you do not further the cause of Christ by repeatedly harping on religion, rebuking and trying to teach. Christian wisdom must be our teacher here; for Christ also teaches us that pearls are not to be cast before swine. But neither may we hide our candle under a bushel.

Our life must give reason for others to question us. And we are called here to answer every one that inquires for a reason, or an account, of that hope that lives within us. Obviously, such questioning will be made of us, only when we live in a way that will attract the notice of others, a way quite different from the norms of society in general. There is not much that we Christians do that is not watched by unbelievers. And when we are known not only as Christians, but Protestant Reformed Christians, then there is not much we do as Protestant Reformed Christians that is not watched by those around us.

In I Peter 2:11,12, the importance of a godly walk is emphasized. Our godly walk is crucial when it comes to maintaining our integrity among other Christians who may have a wrong understanding of what we "PRs" are all about. But the text here emphasizes the same point with respect to those who are unbelievers. If you do not walk godly, if your life is played out in the company of unbelievers and you live no different from them, then this text does not say much to you directly. Oh, it does - by implication. It calls you to repentance and true conversion. Do understand that. But the text speaks directly to you who are living in hope, who are striving to live in obedience to God, and who are bearing the consequences. For by such a life we make ourselves noticeable to the world.

The Apostle writes: "Sanctify the Lord God in your heart." Obviously, this means that you are yourself a true Christian, regenerated by the Spirit of Christ. This means that your religion is indeed real, that the life of Christ is your life. It means that your regenerated heart is the temple of the Holy Spirit. It means, too, that all the issues of your heart, everything that proceeds from your heart, is to be dedicated to Christ as He reveals Himself in the Scriptures as the Lord of your life. Because Christ lives in you, you also desire to devote yourself to doing what He wants you to do. That is what it means, in very general terms, to sanctify the Lord God in your heart.

But more specifically, this means that we must be ready from a spiritual point of view. We must have a focused awareness, let me say an experiential awareness, of the importance of the Christian faith. We ourselves must be spiritually confident in Christ Jesus.

The hostility of unbelief is not easy to face. For that very reason it is easy for us to be intimidated and afraid to give an answer. We easily become ashamed of the gospel, compromise our Christian walk, and hide our light under a bushel. It takes spiritual courage and spiritual strength to face the hostility of unbelief and to explain why we live in spiritual separation. That courage we must have, in order to be ready with an answer.

We must have the confidence of faith, knowing the fellowship of our Savior. There must be a living consciousness of the relationship, yes, the covenant relationship that is yours in Christ with the Triune God. There must be a living consciousness that God is your heavenly Father, your Redeemer, your Friend. Only with such a living, conscious relationship is there a spiritual preparedness for witnessing to that which is our hope.

There are many whose Christianity ends with pious talk. Pious talk and church-going is the end of their goodness. They will not sacrifice their pleasure-seeking, will not part with a penny for the cause of the kingdom of God, and their lives are unfruitful in the works to which Scripture calls them. They will be religious as far as the appearance of good works will go, which cost them nothing; but when James writes, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world," with such religion they want nothing to do.

There is hardly anything that brings more discredit to religion and the cause of Christ than those who profess to be Christians but whose passionate and zealous pursuit of earthly things puts God off into a little corner, attempting to appease Him with a little superficial service. How can unbelievers see that our happiness is in heaven, if our labor and focus is only for the earth? Can our treasure be in heaven, when our hearts and minds are laid up upon earth?

We must live our lives in the sight of men in such a way that they may see that we are more set on gaining heaven, than getting or keeping the world; that we believe a greater excellency in the things spiritual, than in the things earthly and temporal. In the midst of the hopelessness and despair that fills the hearts of many unbelievers, we live and speak from the principle of hope. In between both the sharp pessimism and the superficial happiness of pleasure-madness, we live in the balanced perspective of biblical realism knowing that Christ is coming. Though we face many of the same afflictions and sorrows as unbelievers, in the midst of them all we lay hold of the truth that our heavenly Father is working all things for our good, enabling us to be patient in adversity.

We are not those who cut ourselves off from the world, who live in communes and monasteries. We associate with unbelievers in so far as is necessary as neighbors and fellow workers - though never in violation of II Corinthians 6:14ff. We live in our neighborhoods and play and worship and buy and sell and do all else that is part of our daily existence in this world in which we sojourn. But we do all things in the service of God, living beneath the shadow of Calvary, as citizens of the kingdom of heaven and subjects of the exalted King Who is Christ. That is what I mean by being spiritually prepared to give answer as a Christian.

Now, let me stop a moment and ask: Do these things characterize you? To what degree do they? Think about it.

Peter is speaking here to those whose homes bear the influence of their fellowship with their covenant Friend-Sovereign. They bear that influence in godly conduct, in faithful instruction of children in the truth, in intimate family relationships as husbands and wives, parents and children, reflective of the love of Christ for His Church and the loving care and discipline of our heavenly Father for His children. He is speaking here to young people and adults who refuse to be swept along by the behavior and speech and dress and social standards of the ungodly, but whose lives are governed in doctrine and in practice by the truth of the Scriptures and love for God. They are noticed as people of God, spiritually different and distinct from the world.

To what extent is this true of you? Again, to the extent it is not true, you are called to repentance and conversion by this text. For, after all, Peter is speaking to those who are willing to be different, even if their distinctness causes them to be persecuted. He is speaking to those whose lives stand out to such a degree, that they may have to die. He is speaking here to Christians who are willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their confession, to those who are so strong in their adherence of the truth and so jealous of their rich heritage in Christ Jesus, that they will sacrifice it for nothing. If they must go hungry for their refusal to work on the Lord's Day, if they must be ostracized for their refusal to participate in the sins of others, so be it. They will accept the suffering and entrust their lives and well-being to the hands of their faithful and almighty Father.

No wonder, then, that such conduct attracts attention. The world, which lives by the motives of lust for money, for pleasure, and such like fleeting things, cannot understand nor appreciate such self-sacrifice and self-denial. They cannot comprehend such devotion to things that cannot be seen nor proven by the standards of men. And seeing such devotion in us, our unbelieving neighbor or co-worker may demand an explanation.

So those who are unbelieving - and that is the perspective of the text - ask us why we live the way we do. Often those questions come in a spirit of hostility. Often, in fact, they do not even come in the form of questions; but in the form of charges, accusations that demand an answer. The world does not appreciate those who do not conform to their ways. They are especially intolerant of those who walk in strict obedience to the Bible, the authority of which they deny. And so they may ask us: Why won't you get involved with our social issues? Why won't you support this Sunday community affair? Why is Sunday so different at your house? Why won't you work with us to make this world a better place in which to live? They are full of "whys." Why shouldn't you go to movies? Why may not your children watch these television programs at our house? Why don't you go to our dances? Why won't you join our labor union? Why don't you support our public schools? Now, such questions are only a very small sampling of what might be asked us.

And understand as well, though the perspective of the text is that of questioning by unbelievers, the simple fact is, in our day it is often those who are religious, who are at-least-by-name Christian, who ask the same kinds of questions. There simply is not much living out of the Scriptures today, not much adherence to the truth. And even by church people sometimes, we are asked these same things with a degree of hostility.

But again, you see, all of these questions imply that we are living differently. If you join the world in their activities and their affairs, in all their customs and language and goals, etc., you certainly will not be questioned - except by God in the day of judgment.

So the first question we face from this text is this: Are your neighbors, those with whom you come into contact from day to day, able to see something different about the way you live? Does the world see anything strange about you? If not, there is a very simple reason, with very dreadful consequences. If you do not live differently, it is because you are not living in the power of the Christian hope as a spiritual citizen of the kingdom of heaven! And again, to you comes the powerfully inspired word of James, in James 4:4: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

But I speak now to those whose hope is in heaven, whose walk is that of pilgrims and strangers in the earth. Your life as Protestant Reformed Christians must be characterized, first and foremost, by a spiritual preparedness for witnessing to the power of God's grace. And in that way, when others question us, you and I must give an answer for the way we live.

Rev. Key is the pastor of Randolph Prot. Ref. Church.

Arius' Arianism

by Karen Hanko

Go back in time approximately two millennia, and in doing so, erase from your mind all the knowledge the church has gained as she has developed the faith once given by her Lord. Wipe from your memory all you know about eschatology (doctrine of last times), ecclesiology (doctrine of the church), soteriology (doctrine of salvation), and finally Christology. Then you will stand in the shoes of the early church and understand her consternation as she struggled to comprehend and express the great richness and complexity of Christianity.

The church of the 4th century embraced her risen and ascended Christ, and even bore His name, but as yet had not fully developed what she believed concerning her Savior, and thus had very little vocabulary to express her faith.

One of the first questions that faced the early church concerned the essence of Christ. To some of these early Christians, it seemed to be a reversion to the polytheism of paganism to call Christ God. And while Scripture clearly states that Jesus is God, it does not supply the specific terminology to express how Jesus is God and the Father is God, and yet these are only one God.

In the uncertainty of these times, a man named Arius began to teach that while Christ is divine, He is not eternal, and while He is the highest of all creatures, He nevertheless had been created. Thus, Christ is of a different substance and essence from God the Father. He supported his position by appealing to passages that emphasize the humanity of Christ such as Mark 13:32, "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."

The more perceptive in the church recognized Arius' denial of Christ's godhead as a denial of Christ's work of salvation. For how can a mere creature save the rest of creation from the curse of sin? To deny Christ's godhead was to destroy the heart of Christianity itself. Thus, these defenders of orthodoxy insisted that Christ is God, eternal not created, of the same substance and essence as the Father. The gospel of John, with such passages as "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," provided the basis for their defense of Christ's godhead.

Now the emperor Constantine, who had embraced Christianity as an alternative way to unify the rambling Roman empire, was dismayed by this dispute over "technicalities". In 325, therefore, he called delegates from all over the empire to Nicea, where he would preside over a discussion on the matter.

As in most disputes, there were three viewpoints: the liberal one of Arius and his followers, the orthodox one as presented by Bishop Alexander, and the position of compromise as supported by one Eusebius. Though there was a very bitter dispute that lasted many days, orthodoxy prevailed and provided some of the first vocabulary in explanation of the person of Christ:

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all the worlds, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, being of one essence with the Father.

The church continued to wrestle with the issue of Christ's person and nature. It was not until the 5th century when the Athanasian creed was written, that the profound truth of the trinity was expressed in its entirety — that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and yet not three gods, but one God.

You would think that the matter would rest there, but it arose again during the days of John Calvin with a certain Servetus who claimed Jesus was a son of God, but not the Son of God, thus putting Christ on a par with the rest of God's elect children. And there are those today yet, who fall into the same error as Arius, explicitly, by denying Christ's deity, or more implicitly, by denying the virgin birth.

While all around us we see the creeds reworded or discarded, they continue to provide us with a hard-won vocabulary that expresses the heart of the Christian faith. And yet with all our creeds and doctrines we still say with the old church father, "Man can perceive only the hem of the garment of the triune God: the cherubim cover the rest with their wings."

Karen Hanko, a member of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, teaches seventh grade at South Holland Protestant Reformed Christian School.

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Skip Hunter

February 1 — **I Timothy 6:1-5** What kind of worker are you? Are you a worker who counts his employer worthy of all honor? Or do you work thinking that you really know more than the boss does? The first two verses admonish us to honor our employer. This command has its basis in the fifth commandment. The first verse also gives the reason. It is not just because we will get further ahead if we esteem our boss highly. It is because when we honor the boss, we honor God and His name. When we do not honor those in authority over us, we bring discredit to God's very name. What a shame! Let us not walk in that way; let us walk in a way pleasing to God. Sing or read Psalter 26.

February 2 — **I Timothy 6:6-10** Are you content to be godly? That can be a hard thing sometimes. When we make decisions based on godliness, we do not always get to do what we wish. We are not always able to please ourselves. We must be content with the necessities of this life not the niceties. This can be hard in a world full of consumerism. This can be hard when others around us seem to have things much nicer than we do. We must just stop and say if I do such a thing it is not godly for me and therefore I must not do it. It's not easy, but there is the great gain we are promised by God. Sing or read Psalter 201 especially stanzas 1, and 5-7.

February 3 — **I Timothy 6:11-16** Are you fighting the fight of faith, young people? Every time you make a decision to do a certain thing you must fight the fight of faith. We must, you know. We cannot ignore the fight of faith when it is not convenient to battle. No soldier goes to war with that attitude. It is only when we are continually fighting that we can have the confidence of appearing before Christ unblamable. Like walking a godly walk, fighting the fight of faith is not easy but there is a great reward. Sing or read Psalter 202.

February 4 — **I Timothy 6:17-21** In the last verses of this chapter the Holy Spirit through Paul exhorts Timothy to keep that which is committed to his trust. What about us? Most of us have been brought up in the church and have been educated in covenant schools. Those of us who have been engrafted into the church later in life have also been entrusted with a great trust. What are we doing with it? What about tonight as we seek entertainment? Will it be entertainment that is worthy of those who have been committed with keeping a great inheritance? Will we disregard our birthright for a few hours of pleasure tonight? Keep that which is committed to you and receive the great gain that is promised by God. Sing or read Psalter 322.

February 5 — **Genesis 1:1-8** Genesis is the book of beginnings. Even the name indicates that truth. Throughout the book you find ideas such as creation, redemption, and the covenant to name a few. In these few verses we find that all things began with God. We read, "And God said..." Do you believe it? You had better because your salvation is based on that idea. Only by the almighty power of God are you saved. That is a truth that is begun in Genesis and finished in time. There is no other way for us. Sing or read Psalter 128.

February 6 — **Genesis 1:9-13** Have you ever considered how many types of plants there are in the world? Do you look for the parables found In them? Plants bring forth fruit. Some more than others, and some in different forms and amounts. But there is fruit there. Even thorns and thistles have their fruit. People bring forth fruit as well. Sometimes because of sin the fruit is not very abundant. The

reprobate brings forth his fruit. We read "by their fruit ye shall know them." Consider the plants and learn about the kingdom of heaven. Sing or read Psalter 220 especially stanzas 3-6.

February 7 — **Genesis 1:14-19; Psalm 8:3-4** When you look into the skies at night, can you not be impressed with the work of God's hand? Do you doubt His greatness and power? Do you still think that you need to help God with your salvation? The moon, stars, and planets speak volumes about God. Saturn's rings when viewed through a telescope leave me in awe about the majesty of our God. God's creation speaks; using God's word we must listen. We must also confess, "0 Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" Sing or read Psalter 15.

February 8 — **Genesis 1:20-26** God gave the same command to all living creatures. "Be fruitful and multiply." To the elect He gave this command because in that way He would be glorified by covenant seed being brought into this world and gathered into His kingdom. Are you considering that, young people? Do you date with a view to being married? Do you date with the view to being married to a godly spouse? Do you date with the view to dedicating your Life to the covenant seed with whom God is pleased to give you - be they one or a quiver full? Children are not a nuisance; they are a great reward to godly parents. How do you view God's command to "be fruitful and multiply"? Sing or read Psalter 359 especially stanzas 3 and 4.

February 9 — **Genesis 1:27-31** "It was good." Could it be any other way? God pronounced His creation good. This was not pride; it was a statement of fact. Who are we to say that God did not speak and things were made? Who are we to say it took millions of years for this earth to come to its present state? Why don't we want a God who is all powerful? If we don't, we don't want a God powerful enough to rescue us from our sins either. We must believe in creation to find any comfort in salvation. Why? Because God said it was good! Sing or read Psalter 287.

February 10 — **Matthew 6:1-4** Matthew 5-7 comprise the chapters which are often called the "Sermon on the Mount". We really should know them by the title "The Sermon about the Kingdom and Its Citizens" because these chapters give us instruction on how we must act because we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Today's verses give instruction on giving. You do give to kingdom's causes, do you not? Liberal giving is expected of all citizens. Why, you may ask? Not so men notice but we give as an expression of thankfulness for the gift of salvation. How thankful are we? Sing or read Psalter 137 especially stanzas 1, 2, and 6.

February 11 — **Matthew 6:5-13** Prayer is the beautiful way in which God has given to us opportunity to talk to Him. Do you do it? Do you do it often? When we pray, we must pray to our heavenly Father who knows all things and does all things. Prayers, like the incense of the Old Testament, smell sweet because they pass through Christ who makes intercession for us with the Father. We must pray, and as Paul writes we must "pray without ceasing." As citizens of God's kingdom let us take advantage of the means of communication we have with our King, and let us be thankful in and for all things. Sing or read Psalter 9.

February 12 — **Matthew 6:14-18** Forgiveness is a wonderful thing. It is wonderful because by it two friends can be reconciled with each other and find the joy that fellowship brings. We must be quick to forgive our Christian brothers and sisters. We also must be quick to seek forgiveness from them. "Why?" we might ask. We seek and give forgiveness because our Father, the King, has forgiven us. What further example do we need! Forgiveness brings the peace and unity which has been lost back into the church. Forgiveness is a true mark of true citizens of the heavenly kingdom. Sing or read Psalter 61.

February 13 — **Matthew 6:19-24** How healthy is your savings account? No, I do not mean the one that you have in the bank around the corner. How is your spiritual savings account? Do you have treasures in heaven? Are you seeking to live spiritually so that you can appear before God with these treasures? No, these treasures will not get you into heaven. Only Christ can do that. But yet we are commanded to lay up spiritual treasures in heaven. We can only do that by living a life that is committed to the King of the heavenly kingdom. We can only do that by serving God with our lives. We cannot serve Satan in this life and God in the one to come. Our spiritual treasures come with us either into heaven or into hell. Sing or read Psalter 69.

February 14 **Matthew 6:25-30** Girls and women, have you ever desired a dress the color of a certain flower, and then were unable to match that color exactly? You never will, you know. God colors the flowers, and His colors are unable to be matched. But that is a comfort as well. Even as God cares for every flower, He cares for every citizen in His kingdom. Sometimes as fathers we worry about how we are going to provide the necessities of life for our families. These verses tell us such worry is foolish. We have more important things to worry about. We need to be concerned about the spiritual welfare of our families. Food, shelter, and clothing will be provided for us by the King. Take thought about spiritual necessities and let the King provide for our physical lives. Sing or read Psalter 94 especially stanzas 1-4.

February 15 **Matthew 6:31-34** Are you seeking the kingdom of God first? The key word in that question is first, you know. It is not enough to seek God; we must seek Him first all of the time. When we make any decision in our lives, we must make sure that the decision is in harmony with the characteristics of true citizens of the kingdom. When we are given money from any source, we must first seek the needs of Kingdom causes. When we do this, we can be assured that we will receive the blessing of the King. Our use of our selves, our time, and our money must always be guided by the principle of seeking God's kingdom first. Sing or read Psalter 354 especially stanzas 1, 2, 4, and 6.

February 16 **Psalm 55:1-7** David is troubled because of enemies who bothered him during his life. We, too, have things that bother us. Do we cry unto God as David did? Do we stop and make it a point of prayer to ask for deliverance from the troublesome things of this life? Like us sometimes, David wanted to get away from it all. This is not always possible or profitable. All things in this life are for our good. We must go to our God in prayer and ask for grace to bear with our afflictions. He will answer because He is good. Sing or read Psalter 150.

February 17 **Psalm 55:8-16** As we read further in this Psalm we discover that the incident that prompts it was David fleeing from his own son Absalom. In verses 12-14 he mourns the fact that Ahithophel had betrayed the trust that they had together. Once again we see that man's wishes are not always God's. David would have preferred that the friendship continue. God determined that it would not. Are we willing to accept God's determination for incidents in our lives? Are we willing to confess that "all things work together for the good of them that love God"? David did. Read verse 16 again and see for yourself. Sing or read Psalter 260 especially stanzas 1-4.

February 18 **Psalm 55:17-23** David found answer to his troubles. Once again he thanks God for the answer to his many prayers. He prayed and God answered. We must pray, and God will answer. Let's look at the answer in verse 22. The answer is a command to us. We must cast all our cares upon Jehovah. We do it with the confidence that He will hear and help us. What a comfort that is! This life is full of trouble and afflictions, but yet our God is able to care for us. We do not need to fear destruction when we have the promise that He will never suffer the righteous to be moved. What a blessing that only the child of God has! Are you casting your cares on Him? Are you really doing it, or do you think you must share the load? Sing or read Psalter 329.

February 19 **James 2:1-9** How do you treat your brothers and sisters in the faith? Do you treat them all the same, or do you play favorites? James gives to us instruction in this matter. The instruction of the Holy Spirit is to show partiality to no one. The basis for such instruction is that God shows no partiality, and we shouldn't either. God has taken us - poor wretched sinners - and has given us all the benefits of the kingdom. What kind of gratitude do we show when we scorn our brothers and sisters in Christ? We do not keep God's law when we ignore anyone whom God has gathered into His church. Sing or read Psalter 370.

February 20 **James 2:10-13** Do you pick which of God's commandments you wish to keep? Are some easier to keep than others? Do you keep some of the commandments some of the time? James tells us that this is impossible. When we break one of the commandments, we break them all. The number 10 is the number of completeness. When we break one of the commandments, we destroy the completeness of God's law. We must be holy because God who gave us the commandments is holy. Sing or read Psalter 40 especially stanzas 1, 2, 5, and 6.

February 21 — **James 2:14-26** Is being a Christian enough? Will you get to heaven just because you attend church most of the time or were born into a family that believes in God? No, it takes more than that. First of all there is the matter of faith. Faith is that gift of God which He gives to the elect. But then He commands that faith to be active. Why? That faith must be active in order to show gratitude for salvation. That faith is active as it works out salvation. Gratitude comes from the heart. It is not legislated or forced from the child of God. You are either thankful for salvation and show it, or you are not thankful and show that. When you have a lively faith, then you will receive the same assurance of Abraham or Rahab. Anything else only shows a dead person. Sing or read Psalter 79.

February 22 — **Amos 3:1-3** Who are your friends? Look at verse three. Verse three states most assuredly that the child of God can have no friendships outside of those in the covenant. Anything else will lead to disaster. Young people, as you look for your mates in this world, are you looking for some one who agrees with you in faith? Don't be sidetracked by someone who shares your worldly interests or desires. You have to walk through life with your spouse; make sure that he or she is someone who agrees with you in faith. Your rewards and joys will be plenty. Sing or read Psalter 156.

February 23 — **Amos 3:4-8** Reread verse 8. What do you think of those words? They give to us much responsibility. We have been blessed with the word of God. What are we doing with it? Are we telling it to the nations? Are we telling it to our neighbors? We must not hide the word of God from those around us. We must use it even if it means our discomfort. God has given us a tremendous treasure, but He has also given us a tremendous responsibility. Sing or read Psalter 175.

February 24 — **Amos 3:9-15** God had made the ten tribes of Israel his chosen people. They had rebelled against Him and had walked in their own way. Amos was called to preach judgment against these rebels. Their punishment was sure. They were going to be cut off in their generations. Their land was to be desolate, and their children were going to be taken captive, God will do the same to us if we rebel. When we deliberately walk in ways other than His, He will bring judgment upon us. That judgment will be both In this life and the life to come. Walk, people of God, in His ways and be blessed. Sing or read Psalter 166 especially stanzas 1-3.

February 25 — **I John 1:1-4** Is your joy full, young people? It will be if you do the things of these verses. The main impact of these verses is that we have fellowship with the Father and the Son. This can only be when we hear and see and follow the Word of life. It is a Word that is far better than anything in the world. No word of man can compare with its greatness. Walk in and by that Word, and your lives will be full of joy! This is not my word or even John's word. This is the word and promise of the Holy Spirit! Sing or read Psalter 270.

February 26 — **I John 1:5-10** Walking in the Light! What a Joy! Are you walking in that light and experiencing the joy? How is that done? These six verses give a very clear picture of the antithesis - that doctrine in which we say yes to the things of God and no to the things of Satan. We see the two opposites - light and darkness. We need no clearer picture of the antithesis. God is light. We must walk in that light all of the time. It is that simple. Are we doing it? Sing or read Psalter 71 especially stanzas 1 and 3.

February 27 — **Psalm 4** Will you sleep in peace tonight? Will you lie down and close your eyes without a care for danger? David could. David knew danger. He knew what it was like to have enemies chase him. He knew what it was like to be bothered by sin. But yet he could confess that he could sleep. He could do this because he had confidence that Jehovah was watching over him. Do we have that confidence? We should. If we do not, we must pray and ask Jehovah to show us that he makes us to dwell in safety. Sing or read Psalter 5.

February 28 — **Psalm 15** How do we measure up with the man of verses 2-5? These verses give a description of a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. As we read through them, we see areas in which we fall short. What are we going to do about those areas? Notice the assurance in the last sentence. He that is the man who dwells in the courts of the Lord will never be moved. He who walks in evil has no such assurance. We must pray unceasingly that the Spirit will work in our hearts so that we can dwell in Zion. Sing or read Psalter 415 especially stanzas 2 and 6.

Shining Lights In a Dark World

by Rev. John A. Heys

Your neighbors, Young People, know your last name, and very often also know your first name. Likewise they know whether you are a young man or a young woman.

However, from a spiritual point of view, the important question is whether you are a citizen in the Kingdom of Heaven, of which Christ Jesus is the King; or whether you are a citizen of the Kingdom of Darkness, whose king is Satan. The question also therefore is whether you are a child of God, or a child of the devil, who got man to turn away from God and unto himself. For in John 8:12 we find Christ Jesus, God's Son and our Savior, declare that He is the Light of the World, and that those who follow Him shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life and walk in that light.

You were born of believing parents, who have the light of life; but does your life reveal that our God also caused you to be born again with a new spiritual life, that manifests your love for God? Those who are born again by God's grace find the truth which Jesus presented in His sermon on the mount. Therein we, according to Matthew 5:14 are called to be "The light of the world". Then in verse 16 we find the awesome truth and important command: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." If you are such a born-again child of God, you will let your light shine before men in your walk of life.

The awesome truth here is that not only is it always very difficult for those who are born again to let their light shine; but we do in the Heidelberg Catechism find the truth that we all in this life have "only a small beginning of this obedience". And today it is so extremely difficult for us to manifest ourselves as having that beginning as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

It was impossible for Adam and Eve to do that after their first sin. They died spiritually that day, as God had warned them. And in John 3:3 we read, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." But when God came to them, and caused them to be born again, they did begin to walk in obedience to Him. That means that they were enabled to let their light shine before men. In His grace our God enables those whom He chose in Christ to begin to fight their old man of sin, and reveal themselves to be children of light.

Consider then, Young People, that this comes to us today as we live in a world of tremendous spiritual wickedness. Adam committed one sin that caused him to die spiritually. That means that he could not now do one good thing, and that sin would develop, as it surely did. Adam and Eve after that first sin committed the next sin of trying to run away from God. They did not run to Him in sorrow for their sin. As God had told Adam, the first sin would cause him to die the day he committed it. He did live physically for many years; but he died spiritually that day. And he became incapable of bringing any child forth that was spiritually alive.

Today, therefore, every child is born spiritually dead, until God is sovereignly willing to cause that child to be born spiritually. What is more, Satan is using those not born again to make increasingly clever sins, in order to get those born again with a spiritual life, to cover their spiritual life and do what the spiritually dead do in thought, word and deed. In fact what the true church correctly judges to be a sin, Satan often gets those born again to commit..

Satan got Adam and Eve to believe that sin would improve their lives and make them to be gods. And that Satan is doing so cleverly today. Even in our homes Satan, by means of television uses those who are spiritually dead, and have not been born again, to get those born again to turn away from God, and live like those spiritually dead! Does the spiritually dead world entertain you, Young People? Take heed to what Christ Jesus commands us. We are called to let our light shine before men.

Likewise Satan has tempted and succeeded in getting some churches to eat, and take into their souls false doctrines, and to bring them to those of other churches by paper, radio and television. There is that false doctrine of Arminianism, which teaches that spiritually dead men can do the spiritually good work of accepting Christ as their Savior.

Arminianism, which is so widely proclaimed and published, teaches the lie that those spiritually dead can accept an offer of salvation, which God in His con-

cern for them brings to them with the offer to save them, if they will let Him. No, they do not teach it that way literally. But when they do teach that God offers salvation to all who hear the gospel preached, they do teach that those whom God has not yet caused to be born again are not spiritually dead. They go directly against what Christ Jesus stated, and what we read in John 3:3. There we read, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." Likewise our Savior says in verse 5, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Those who have not already had salvation begun in them, by God in His grace, cannot desire the salvation which Christ earned for us. O, yes, they want to escape the punishment of everlasting torment in hell. But God Himself, the day Adam and Eve sinned and deserved hell's everlasting punishment, presented salvation's basic element which God had written in Genesis 3:15, as enmity in the hearts of His elect against Satan, and thus against sin. If we only want escape from punishment, so do all those who are unbelievers. Besides, as already pointed out, how can those who are spiritually dead want spiritual life? That Arminian doctrine denies God's word, when He told Adam that one sin would make him spiritually dead. it teaches that we earn salvation by accepting Christ. God gives it to us because of what we did. It teaches that God depends upon us. No, Young People, God commands! He does not offer salvation! God NEVER asks any creature to do something, so that He can do what He would like to do.

When Christ Jesus commands us to let our light shine before men, He does so because there are those who, although they have been born again, do not yet believe that Christ died for them, will see how those for whom He died, and caused to be born again, do live. By your walk of life teach them how God's born again children live and enjoy living. A little baby, on the day it is born, does not know the name of its parents, or that he owes them thanks for bringing him forth. Likewise we need to learn many truths about what God does for us as His elect children. And as that babe grows older and sees what his brothers and sisters say and do, it will learn the things which it can and will do. And Christ Jesus tells us to let our light shine before men. Then by our good works we reveal what God enabled us to do.

Your calling, Young People, here in this verse is for you, in this very dark world, in which we live, to let your light shine before other young people and younger children, so that God may be glorified. Take hold of this important truth which our Savior brings to you in this verse. Strive daily, and in all things that you do, to let your light shine before men, so that you may glorify God as your God and Savior.

Let all other young people, with whom you come in contact, see the light which you let shine, because God has caused you to be born again, and for the glory of God, who freely brought you out of the darkness of unbelief, and into the blessedness of being in and by Christ on the way to being brought into heavenly glory.

Dear Readers:

The staff at the Beacon Lights would like to continue to provide its readers with the church news. We have received many comments that most of you have missed it in the past few months. At this time we are currently looking at a new format that would rely on individual participation over against bulletin clerks providing the information. At this time it would be up to you the reader to mail us the information. This way the news printed would be as up-to-date as possible, based on the information you have supplied to us.

We at the Beacon Lights look forward to your eager participation and prompt response so that a long anticipated rubric will quickly reappear.

For example:

Birth:	Engagement:
Name of child	Bride's name
Parents name	Groom's name
Birthdate	Parents' names
Appropriate Scripture text	Wedding date/site
Sibling's names	Newlywed's future address
Grandparent's name	

Yours, in Christ,

The Beacon Lights staff

Send all information to:
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Total Depravity

by Peter Hoekstra

Total Depravity is the first in the tulip acrostic of Calvinism, which by the way, was not developed by John Calvin.

Total depravity is one subject that one does not have too look far and wide for, to find evidence of its existence. Tangible evidences abound all around us.

Total depravity is misunderstood by many, in fact, some believe it is sent by Satan.

Total depravity is denied by many, in fact, it is called a disease, it is not called by its proper name, sin.

Total depravity is denied by others who try to confuse and deceive by saying it is not absolute. Their reasoning is: All parts of all men's natures demonstrate some good. And since all parts demonstrate some sin then we are able to say that man is totally depraved. But, man is not absolutely, thoroughly depraved, and is able to feel good about his ability to do some good works. My question to this reasoning is: "What part of 'total depravity' do you not understand?"

Depravity means corruption, wickedness, innate evil of unregenerate man! To add the adjective total should leave no doubt as to the truth that there is no good whatsoever in the unregenerate. On the basis of the clear teaching of Scripture in Jer. 17:9, Ps. 14, Romans 3:10-18 and Romans 7:18, our Heidelberg Catechism asks: "Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?" and answers: "Indeed we are, except we are regenerated."

Total depravity is denied by those who speak of "innocent" babies; much like the ancient Pelagians, who insisted that men learn to sin by seeing others sin. They do not reckon with Ps. 51:5. These believe that if we change the social conditions via housing, medical care, soup kitchens, education, etc.; people would have good examples to imitate and as a result would be and do good. It is true, that a baby does not sin in as many ways as an adult does since sin is performed according to degrees of self esteem, sin is regulated to a degree by circumstances dictated by environment and availability of many modern inventions. Nevertheless the unregenerate, sins in everything he does. Some simply do more than others.

Total depravity is also denied by those who believe that God makes it possible for unregenerate persons to do some good. He can, as the Arminian teaches, accept Christ as his Savior, for example. He can also maybe do some good for others by use of his talents and/or other tangible materials.

All of this necessity leads us to ask "What of a good work?" Our Heidelberg Catechism is quite clear when it states in question and answer 91 that a work is good only if it 1. proceeds "from a true faith (which you recall is a "certain Knowledge" that holds God's word to be true, and an "assured confidence" that the Holy Spirit works by the gospel in man's heart); 2. is "performed according to the law of God"; and 3. is done to "His Glory" and not "founded on our imagination or the institutions of men".

> Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.
> Psalm 51:5

Total depravity is an important doctrine for God's people. If we do not believe it, we can not believe the truth of the sovereignty of God. We then could also have no comfort in or assurance of our salvation. Hold fast to this doctrine of Total Depravity, understand that you have been delivered from that total depravity by your Savior's death, and by grace live a life of gratitude to Him for that deliverance from total depravity.

Peter Hoekstra is the principal of Adams Street. Chr. School and is a member of Hudsonville Prot. Ref. Church.

Early Life in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church

by Philip Greatbatch

From almost as far back as I can recall, my spiritual influence has been Reformed. I say almost, because as a child, my early memories begin in the Baptist church.

My parents were young Christians. My father's parents were and his mother still is, devout and sincere. We moved into the Baptist church as it was the only conservative church in the small country town where we lived and I was born. We later moved to the large city of Rockhampton and joined the local Baptist congregation.

The days with those people are marked by the Sunday School picnics and the moments outside the church after the services. The highlight of one picnic, was a trip to the coast on a train pulled by a steam locomotive. It was a wonderful adventure. I hung out the windows and could see the train snaking its way around the many curves and bends in the track. Dozens of other children had their heads out of the windows too and by the smiles on their faces, it was obvious they were enjoying the sensations of soot and smoke and wind in the hair, as much as I was.

During a church service, I whispered to my mother that I thought it unusual that a man should be playing the piano to accompany the hymns. At five or six years old, the only other person I knew who played the piano was my own mother.

After the services, in the right season, most of the young lads picked seed pods from the Tamarind tree growing in the church yard. Inside the large pods, are seeds the size of a marble coated in a sticky paste, which has a bitter-sweet flavor and quite refreshing in the hot tropical climate.

In the same period, two men, a minister and a student were on a teaching mission. They traveled the state of Queensland where we lived, speaking to the Brethren (or Congregational) churches. My father, who heard through friends in that church, went to listen. We heard nothing odd. It was only later after speaking to one of the men, he was told that the doctrine of Free Will was not Scriptural. He went home after hearing the preacher and began looking in a concordance for verses that could prove the truth of Free Will. To his surprise, he couldn't find any such proof and began to doubt, but not enough to move him away from the belief that Christ had died for everyone.

At my young age, I knew nothing of most of these incidences of course, but depend very much on my father for the story.

Later, while listening to a radio broadcast, he heard the speaker talking about Election and was impressed enough to send away for a booklet that was advertised. The booklet titled "The Fundamentals of the Faith", was on the five points of Calvinism.

It didn't answer all his questions and so he began to speak with others in the congregation about these "revolutionary" ideas. Including the minister, some scoffed and said that Calvinists were trouble makers and church splitters. They accused my parents of trying to seduce the people into false belief and of wanting to start a new church.

At this time in God's providence, someone gave my father a book by Arthur Pink called the "Sovereignty of God". After a short section, he would have nothing to do with the book but for some reason did read it, and became a convinced Calvinist.

One day he introduced the subject of Election into a Bible study class and caused quite a stir. Next Sunday, the minister preached against Calvinism and wolves in sheep's clothing and of Satan's messengers coming as angels of light. He spoke once on "two walking together in agreement". My father rang the preacher to point out that Spurgeon taught Calvinism, which the preacher denied. The Baptist church had a picture of Spurgeon hanging in their hall. It was removed soon after. With further talks, the minister suggested that to leave would be the best thing to do.

A split in the Brethren Church at the same time, caused by a long standing dispute, forced a small group to begin worship in a family home. We began

worshiping with them. One young man who left with the group, attended the Baptist church for a short time and was asked to stop handing out Spurgeon's sermons on "Sovereignty", to the people of the church. So he also left and joined the group. There was no organization; each had a say and articles were read from Banner of Truth books for a kind of worship service. The two ministers spoken of earlier, had returned to Tasmania from where they had come. The name of one was Mr. Philip Burley.

A minister from the Christian Reformed Church in Brisbane heard of us and came to spend a week instructing the group further in the Reformed truth. He had been trained under Prof. Berkoff at Calvin College in the United States and his visit was enjoyed very much.

In Tasmania, the constitution of the Reformed Evangelical Presbyterian Church had been formed, ministers inducted, and a Rev. Turnbull was called to Rockhampton. The most notable part of his visit for me, were his identical twin boys. Identical twins were a new and fascinating interest. By drawing a question mark with a pen on one boy's forehead, Rev. Turnbull helped us distinguish between them.

But for the newly formed congregation, a dizzying regime of learning began. We had sermons and meetings four times a week. Rev. Turnbull introduced us to Psalm singing without piano or organ. From the Reformed churches of Scotland (whose origin dates to the sixteenth century), the doctrine of the Church, Presbyterian church government and other things were taught. As for our little Sunday school, it became the Catechism Class and the childish choruses became the Psalms. Suddenly, my brothers and sister and I were taught the Shorter Catechism from the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The process of change caused us no trauma or stress and we simply accepted it as part of "life with Mum and Dad". Even though the chore of learning the Catechism was tedious, it became routine enough to be like washing the dishes or chopping sticks for our wood stove.

We moved into a rented dance hall for the worship services. Our first Psalm book was a thin paperback edition with a few selected verses lifted from the Scottish Psalter. The hall soon became unsuitable because it was located on the corner of a busy intersection. The traffic noise was very loud and down-pours of rain drummed on the iron roof and drowned out the minister's preaching.

We later relocated to a YMCA hall which was a real hoot for my brothers and me. A climbing rope hung invitingly from the rafters and the sports store room was filled with all kinds of exciting treasures. The hall was located on the steep bank of a river and provided a rich source of new territory to explore. The main bridge across the river was nearby and green park land stretched away on each side of the hall. We were severely warned to observe the Sabbath but often the temptation to wander was more than active boys could cope with.

Under the hall held us in fascination too. It was a gymnasium for the YMCA rowing team. But it proved to be a nuisance as well. Even though we had been promised an uninterrupted hour for the service, the team would do weight training and boat repairs during the service. The sounds of grunting men, dropped weights and hammering, came up through the wooden floor.

During the monsoon season, tropical rains flooded the river and overflowed the banks. You could stand on the verandah of the hall looking out over the water, and see the flood waters rushing only a hand breadth under the floor. At least the rowers kept away.

My brothers and sister were baptized in that hall into the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (as it was now called), Rockhampton.

I was now about eight years old and thirty years later, thank God for His faithfulness and His wonderful covenant mercy. We hadn't heard of the Covenant of Grace then nor did we really understand the doctrine of Baptism. All this was ahead of us and there would be much more yet and still is much to learn. Indeed, the denomination had yet to learn how to govern as a Presbyterian church. A Presbytery in Tasmania was a far away mystery and about as well understood as the orbit of the moon.

The congregation in Rockhampton began small and slowly grew with the addition of a few folk. We were the oldest children and felt the need for friends of our own age. My parents were very aware of this need and took every opportunity to provide family outings and holidays away together.

We lived then, on the edge of the built up part of town. A creek was close by our home. I made a small dinghy of a sheet of tin, and daubed it with pitch to stop the leaks. It floated well and with a paddle, it was easy to get around. The boat was only good for one boy. My brother and I tested it together once and found water rushing into our pants and soon we were sitting on the creek bottom in the dingy, with water up under our armpits.

The creek flowed down from the mountain and more than once we explored the stream to its source. The mountain had steep sides and large boulders could be dislodged by scraping the dirt from under the bottom side. Once set rolling, fair sized trees were reduced to match wood as the tumbling boulder smashed into them. It was very exciting to see a tree explode into a cloud of leaves and bark. But now I won't allow my young son to hit a tree with a stick for fear of damage to the tree.

We enjoyed many such adventures and cycled hundreds of miles on our bikes in search of something

different to do. The climate allowed us to be active all year. Even the winter days were warm and clear.

Rev. Turnbull returned to Tasmania, and my father was appointed as an "interim" elder. Six months later, the student minister spoken of previously, Mr. Burley, came to preach to us. After his studies were completed, two ministers from Tasmania came and ordained him into the ministry. He remained for fifteen years before being called back to Tasmania.

During those years, Christian education was never a subject that came into mind. All the children of the congregation, went to the state schools. If you were a child who attended a church school, you were considered to be "upper crust", even a snob.

It was not until I had children, that we were led to see the need for God-centered education. By then, the state education system was openly hostile to Christian values.

The state primary schools in the 1960s', at least in the state of Queensland, were very sympathetic to Christian standards. Every morning we had to recite the Lord's prayer and the teacher would read a chosen passage from the King James version of the Bible. For some children, it was probably the only time they ever heard the Bible read. The classes assembled outside in the yard, stood to attention while the national anthem played over the public address system and the Australian flag was raised. Then we'd all march into school to the time of a march tune played on the PA.

We didn't wear shoes to primary school and stood in the dusty school yard with the tropical sun beating down on us.

Bare feet are very convenient for exploring the creek after school. We caught "crawchies" (like a small lobster) and fished for eels. It was painful to put on our shiny stiff shoes for church on Sunday. The hours we spent after school were filled with fun and adventure.

Swearing was punishable by caning and smoking a cigarette put you dangerously close to expulsion. Running in the hall made you an outlaw. We had "Copy Books" for exercises in neat handwriting and were drilled in the rules of Grammar, sentence construction and spelling. As part of the curriculum, many stories of classical time were given to us in "Readers". These have now fallen out of favor but are still famous in Australia for their literary quality. Their moral base was very often Biblical.

By the time I entered High school, the remains of Christian sympathy were barely evident. We had RI (or Religious Instruction) every Thursday morning. Our instructor was a godly old Presbyterian minister, who had the good of every child's soul at heart. The children for the most part, aimed to see the end of the minister. When the class got too hard to control, he would close his eyes tightly, sweep back a few gray hairs across his bald head in a gesture of desperation, and press on with his lesson, despite the noise and disorder. When the bell rang, he scooped up his papers and scurried from the room. I still feel very sad when I remember that lovely man being treated so disrespectfully.

From there, we might go to our Biology class and receive a dose of evolutionary theory. I could raise objections about the absurdity of the idea, but it was a voice lost to careless thought. It must have been a fairly recent teaching in the system, because there was not much literature available in defense of Creation at the time. Evolution was not strongly promoted but it gained momentum. The theory was readily accepted and I had some very lively arguments with the other students.

I used to think that if I could counter their stand on Evolution with arguments based on scientific evidence, I could win them over to Christianity. Such is foolish pride. I didn't know then, that belief in a Creator God, was a work of His spirit.

During the years, the church in Queensland would come together at a site on the beautiful coast near Rockhampton to hold Family Camps. They were wonderful times of fellowship and fun and a great encouragement to a small and self-conscious church. Families from other Reformed churches would sometimes visit and provided the opportunity to meet other young people.

On our first camp, the men and boys slept in a large tent while the women and girls slept in dormitories. A late season cyclone came near the coastline that year and nearly blew the tents away. The rain swept in, driven by powerful winds and tore at the tent ropes and dumped buckets of water over everything. We spent the night in the dining hall of the camp. The next year, a second dormitory was built and the male members enjoyed the relative luxury of a bed with a mattress. Now the camps have become almost a tradition and every year, a family camp is held around Easter time near to several congregations, to hear a series of studies by a guest minister over the four day period. We have enjoyed visiting ministers from many Reformed churches, including the Protestant Reformed.

The Evangelical Church has grown slowly and seen many changes both in the folk who have become members and in our understanding of Reformed doctrines. In all its varied and short history, God has been with us and ever faithful in providing ministers to bring to us His word. We can only marvel and give Him all the glory for His mercy to us.

Philip Greatbatch is a member of the Launceston, Tasmania Congregation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Putting on the New Man

by Daniel De Meester

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,
I have agreed to write an article for you on the topic of conversion. The possibility exists that the reason I was asked to write on this topic was that there is a marked difference between the conversion that we knew at Netherlands Reformed, and the process of conversion as we now know and believe as Protestant Reformed. The conversion that we used to speak of is a turning to God that He may save us, but to illustrate all of that would only increase your knowledge of their doctrine, and not be for your personal edification and growth, which should be our primary purpose.

Conversion then, is a work that you and I are to be busy about every day and moment of our life. It is the turning from our wicked ways, thoughts and desires of the old man of sin, and putting on the good works of the new man in Jesus Christ. This is not an easy task, in fact we cannot do it of ourselves, but need the strength of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in us to accomplish this good work.

Many times during any given day you and I do wrong, and then think lightly of it. We really don't think the evil that we do is so wrong that we can't put off the consequences of it if we want to. We, by nature, love to pamper ourselves and fulfill the lusts of the flesh and fortify ourselves with the pride of life, but do not stop to realize that by doing so we are living spiritually slothful lives. We are young, self confident and feel independent, and for the moment or next couple of hours our destiny is our own. So yes, let's go to a movie against our parents wishes. And when in our car, let's listen to the music we want to with its seductive lyrics and rhymes and forget for the moment that we were warned that we should not listen to the world's music. While we know we shouldn't partake of these things, we will anyway because it appeals to our flesh.

Young people, we must flee from our sin. Our sins are many are varied, and no age group is exempt from sinning. What is our incentive to flee from sin? Why must we turn from the evil and do the good? I'll tell you.

We are children of God, and as such we are incorporated into His covenant of grace; we are friend servants of Jehovah, and He is our Friend Sovereign. Because He has chosen us as His own, we had and have no choice for we are His by grace, and therefore it is our privilege and responsibility to live our lives to His honor and glory. This much is sure, it is impossible to live to His honor and glory while we are walking in the ways of the world, partaking of the sinful words, actions, and ways of the ungodly, for they are motivated by enmity to live ungodly, while our motivation to live godly is love.

This is what conversion is about; a turning from the old ways of sin, and a turning to the new ways of living in Christ. When we repent of and forsake the old way of sin, and turn to Christ, we can rejoice for it is only His work in us that gives us the desire and ability to do so. Our Heidelberg Catechism (LD 33 Q & A 88) tells us the two parts of true conversion to God are 1.) a mortifying of the old man of sin, which is to manfully determine to put off our sinfulness, and 2.) a quickening of the new man, which is a yielding of our members as instruments of righteousness to God.

To do these things we need to pray to our covenant God for the strength and ability to carry out that which we must do. Thus, believing we have this strength we must take positive action to forsake our sins. You that are infatuated with the world's music, go out to your car and change the preset button on your radio to a station which plays music which is not destructive to your soul's welfare. Throw out those wicked tapes, and buy God glorifying, soul edifying tapes. Resolve to forsake the movies and VCR parties. Resolve to find good activities to take your dates to, and furthermore resolve to be an influence for good on your friends and advise them to do the same things. Then you can rejoice to see God's work in yourselves, and be thrilled that He has chosen you unto Himself for it is He that is working in you to do His will and good pleasure.

Carry on, fellow saints, for the victory is ours in Jesus Christ! Then we shall grow in grace and the knowledge of Him, our Covenant God, which is our calling and reasonable service.

Daniel De Meester is a member and elder of Hope Prot. Ref. Church.

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