BEACON LIGHTS

From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

Psalm 61:2

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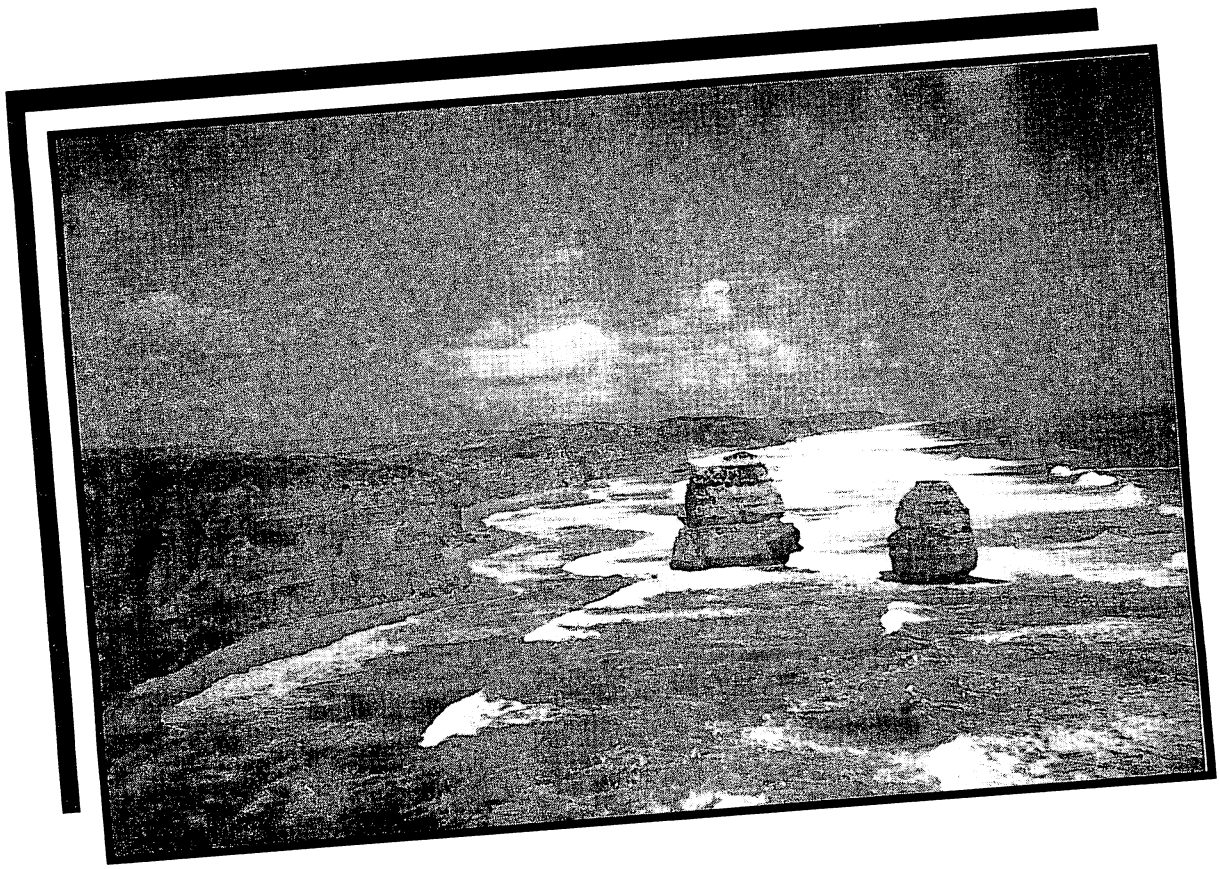

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Don't Blame Me

by Daniel Kleyn

Excuses!

Excuses certainly permeate our society. Everyone wants to blame someone or something else. Daily we hear: "Don't blame me!" "I couldn't help it!" "It's not my fault!" "I can't help it that I'm this way!" "I wasn't the only one who did it!"

Is our society really that bad? Indeed it is.

Look, for example, at the justice system. Look at lawyers. The aim of many, it seems, is not, as it should be, to reveal the truth or to defend the innocent. Rather, they seek to defend the criminal by finding excuses for the criminal's actions. Money, not justice, is often what motivates them.

Consider the excuses they come up with. The criminal is not guilty or responsible for what he has done. He has psychological problems or is psychologically unstable. He did not really know what he was doing. The environment or upbringing of the person is to blame. The result is that the criminal is not punished with the punishment that he deserves.

Excuses are often heard, also, in the practice of suing. One who injures himself never admits that his own carelessness or error led to that injury. It's his boss' fault. It's the equipment's fault. It's his fellow worker's fault. Even the notion of "no-fault" car insurance manifests this attitude.

Then you have excuses for immorality. The homosexual says he cannot help it, for he was born that way. It is (he claims) part of his makeup. And also abortion. People come up with hundreds of reasons for murdering a child through abortion. But really it all comes down to one thing—they refuse to bear the results and responsibilities for their actions. By having an abortion they are saying, in effect: "It's not my fault. Don't blame me for this."

Unbelievable!

Excuses!

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Does this leave us unaffected? Do we, as Christians, ever claim that we are not responsible for what we are, for what we do, for what we say, or for what we think? Do those common excuses that we hear from the world ever come from our lips?

Excuses! Yes, we too use them. And not just sometimes, but often.

When we are irritable or easily upset, we blame it on stress.

When angry, we feel justified because of the seriousness of what that person has done to us.

When we are frustrated because something simply will not go as we would like it to, we blame it on the object of our frustration. "The stupid thing!"

When we should help out someone but do not want to do so, our excuse is: "We're too busy."

When we do something that is wrong and forbidden, we, especially in our youth, blame it on peer pressure. "Everyone else was doing it." Or, "So and so made me do it."

Excuses!

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Why are we so intent on using excuses? Why are we so eager to blame others? The answer is in one word: SIN.

We are all familiar with the story of the fall of mankind into sin through Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit. But perhaps we are so familiar with the historical account of the fall, as recorded in Genesis 3, that we often fail to see the rich teaching of this chapter. Let us note a few things, then.

Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. *They* did it, not someone else. No one forced the fruit down their throats. Willingly and willfully they took and ate. But did they acknowledge this fact? No. For when God confronted them for their sin they were full of "excuses." Immediately after they fell into sin they were blaming others.

God came to Adam and Eve after the fall and confronted Adam directly concerning his sin: "Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" (Genesis 3:11). What was Adam's answer? He does not acknowledge, as he should have, that indeed he had eaten of the forbidden fruit. Instead, he has an excuse. "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Genesis 3:12). In other words: "It's not my fault. It's the woman's fault. She was the one who persuaded me to eat the fruit. I didn't do it. Don't blame me!"

But Adam does not blame only the woman. Far more serious was the fact that he blamed God. He said to God that it was the woman "*thou* gavest to be with me." Adam claimed that if God had not given him Eve to be his wife he would not have sinned.

Then God turns to Eve. She, too, did not admit that she had done wrong. She, too, did not say: "Yes, I have broken Thy command and have eaten the forbidden fruit." Rather she said: "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." It was the serpent's fault.

Excuses!

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We must take note, however, of how God dealt with these excuses. God did not put up with them. When He pronounced punishment on Adam and Eve for their sin He completely ignored their excuses. It was as if God never even heard them. God did not, as we sometimes do, weaken His punishment because He saw some validity in the excuses. There is simply no mention made of the excuses in the punishment pronounced in Genesis 3:16-19.

Consider, for example, what God said to Adam. "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee saying, Thou shalt not eat of it, cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life" (Genesis 3:17). God points out that Adam himself is to blame, for he hearkened unto the voice of his wife. Adam's excuses are simply not a factor that God takes into consideration.

We, too, should have the same approach as God toward excuses. We must view excuses as God does. We must not put up with them.

If you are a parent, do not allow children to make excuses. It is often easy (and even desirable) to make room for excuses. We all know that it is not pleasant or easy to give a child a spanking. An excuse from a child can therefore be the easy way out. But if you make room for excuses you are not correcting your child with his or her salvation in mind. We must recognize sin for what it is and punish it accordingly. Only then are we dealing with our children in love.

If you yourself sin, do not make excuses. Never say, "I couldn't help it. Don't blame me." But say: "It is my fault. I did it. I'm to blame." Only then can you confess your sin and find forgiveness from God.

Remember, with God excuses are invalid. That must be our attitude, too. If we make room for excuses, and if we are persuaded by them, we allow the sinner to walk the way that leads to hell. Excuses are sin. The truly penitent child of God does not excuse himself but admits his sin and seeks forgiveness from his ever-forgiving God.

Do not be influenced, therefore, by the world and its thinking and practices. Never give an ear to excuses. Never allow excuses to have a place in your life as a child of God.

CHARLES FINNEY, 1792-1875

by Sharon Kleyn

1858 was the year of revivals. In that year alone, 50,000 converts were made. Charles Finney was the originator of and chief instrument in the revivals which swept like wild fire through the state of New York and which also reached Philadelphia and Boston. He was involved in revival preaching from 1824-1860. His efforts were so effective because of the teaching and methods which he embraced.

Finney was raised by non-Christian parents on the frontier in the state of New York where there were no churches. Because of this he had very little Christian influence for the first twenty years of his life. It was while he was getting his high school education in another city that he first began to attend church, but he considered the services monotonous and humdrum, and the preaching nothing more than a dry discussion of doctrine.

While studying law in Adams, New York, he had his curiosity aroused by references in his textbooks to the Old Testament law of Israel. He bought a Bible and began regularly to attend church. The preaching he heard was by a Presbyterian, Rev. G. Gale, and was Calvinistic. During this time he had many discussions with Rev. Gale about the doctrines he heard in the preaching. He had a dramatic conversion experience in 1821, and giving up his pursuit of a career in law, he began to be trained by Rev. Gale for the ministry.

While studying for the ministry he became more and more dissatisfied with the doctrines of Calvinism. He became convinced that the doctrines of total depravity and original sin were stifling and discouraged people from trying to live the Christian life. He was convinced that the inevitable result of teaching and believing these doctrines was dead orthodoxy.

In reaction, Finney began to teach that to be converted the sinner himself had to act. The Holy Spirit helped the sinner along by presenting the truth clearly and persuasively through the preaching, but it was the sinner himself who had to believe and, in Finney's own words, "make himself a new heart." He denied that regeneration is accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

Finney then, as a preacher, merely had to persuade the sinner to believe, and he resorted to almost any method to accomplish this end. Finney wanted immediate results to his preaching, and he wanted to see the results. He very seldom prepared a sermon, and often did not even have a text, but relied on the Spirit to "move" him once he was in the pulpit.

Finney also came up with the idea of the "anxious seat." In his preaching he would impress on the minds of his audience the urgency of making a decision for Christ. Then he would urge those who made the decision to show publicly that they had done so by standing or by coming to the front pew or "anxious seat." (As you probably have guessed, this practice has led to the modern day "altar call.")

In these practices Finney denied the nature of the Holy Spirit's work.

We know the Scriptures teach that the Spirit does not come to preachers in some mystical way in order to move them to speak the truth, but He works through them only in connection with their careful preparation and study of the Word. The Spirit does not announce His work with trumpets blaring and His work is not mighty as men define might. It is not seen in hundreds standing and proclaiming their decision for Christ. The Spirit's work, as Elijah had to learn, is not as an earthquake or fire. Rather, it is a still, small voice, qui-

etly (albeit powerfully and irresistibly) turning sinners to Jesus Christ (II Kings 19:11-13). And the Spirit continues to work in the hearts of God's people so that they more and more see the awfulness of their sin and the depth of their depravity. He causes them more and more to flee to the cross for strength and more and more to do works of thankfulness.

The denial of the true nature of the Spirit's work was seen in the months and years following the revivals. The leaders of the revivals claimed to have made many converts. But it should be noted that after the revival meetings were finished and the converts had been counted, there often was a general falling away again and a backsliding on the part of the people into their old ways of sin.

Finney himself saw this. As a result, and to try to counteract this problem, he developed and began to teach the idea of complete sanctification or perfectionism. He taught that all Christians, by using the right means, could attain to perfection and no longer commit any known sins in this life. Finney could hold to this belief only in the context of his denial of total depravity and original sin. Sin was merely in the deed and not rooted in a nature which is prone to hate God and the neighbor.

Many of the false practices and ideas of the charismatic movements of today reflect Finney's wrong ideas concerning the work of the Spirit. Like the charismatics today, Finney spoke of direct revelation through the Spirit. He records in his autobiography that he experienced several special baptisms by the Holy Spirit which took the form of visions and special revelation. Also, in one instance he claims that his intense prayer caused a woman near death to recover.

The nature of Christ's work was also denied by Finney. He denied that Christ died for a certain number of people chosen by God—the elect. And he denied that Christ's death actually accomplished their salvation. He taught, rather, that Christ's death merely made salvation available for all men. It is up to the sinner to decide for Christ and actually to apply His work to himself.

We can see, therefore, that Finney rejected the whole truth of the Reformed Faith, the truth which we hold dear. Finney developed most of his beliefs and methods of preaching in reaction to Calvinism and labelled Calvinism as hyper-Calvinism. He was not satisfied with God's means, but developed his own means to gain the results he wanted. He was a heretic indeed.

Sharon is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

My Lord

The Lord God is my Shepherd,
He meets my every need.
He leads me to still waters,
In green pastures He makes me feed.

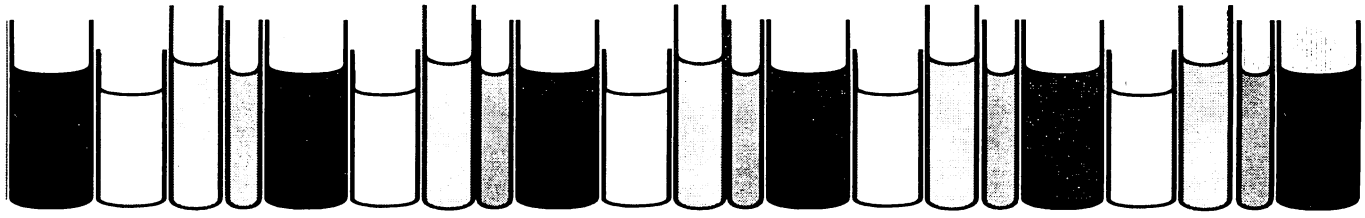
He knows about my sorrow,
He even knows my pain.
He stands by through all my trials,
He's with me in sunshine and in rain.

He's my friend and I can trust Him,
He never lets me down.
He walks with me and guides me,
His voice is like no other sound.

His voice controls the thunder,
The trees heed His command.
The birds fly as He wishes,
Even the waters know when to stand.

He's around me every moment,
Yet no one is able to see
This wonderful Lord my Shepherd.
I love the friendship between God and me.

by Angela Schipper



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That Amazingly Beautiful Rainbow

by Rev. John A. Heys

Clouds pile up on the horizon, billowing high. The sun slips behind and it grows darker. The birds are silent, the air is thick, the silence disrupted only by the deep rumbling of thunder in the distance. Lightning jabs at the earth as the low band of boiling black clouds advance steadily forward, enveloping everything in its path with a white curtain of rain and hail. The wind picks up, the overhead power-lines moan and whine. A few big drops of rain plop in the dust. Without warning a thick bolt of lightning cracks through the air and smashes a nearby tree into splinters and every living creature cowers and trembles in the darkness as the thunder rumbles and tumbles across the sky. The wind shrieks and the rain pours down in torrents. Soon, however, the rain slackens, the sky begins to lighten, the wind begins to die down, and everything is left dripping wet and little streams of water race down the hills. A crack appears in the clouds, a ray of sunlight pierces through, and a rainbow silently appears with a perfect graceful arc in pure colors against the black wall of clouds. But what do the raging black storm and the bright cheerful rainbow mean? Just a coincidence, a natural phenomena? By no means. God sends the storm and the rainbow as a picture of a heavenly reality which even the birds perceive. They are deathly silent in the storm, but begin to sing again when the rainbow appears. God reveals the heavenly reality of this picture to His people with His Word. Rev. Heys shows us how.

A rainbow, Young People, being very colorful and beautiful in man's eyes, is for the child of God a very comforting manifestation of God's grace, and of the richness of the salvation which He realizes for us.

We find that so clearly presented in Genesis 9:13-17, where we read the following:

> I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature that is upon the earth. And God said to Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all the flesh that is upon the earth.

First of all then, bear in mind the fact that God spoke here of setting a rainbow in a cloud. This rainbow is a token of His covenant, and He reveals to Noah and his sons three basic things. He presents a very dark cloud, which has a bow in front of it, and the sun which causes that rainbow to appear on that dark cloud.

What we have presented here by that dreadful storm is God's holy wrath upon those who did not enter into that ark, which Noah had been called to build. Outside of that ark there were the unbelievers, whom God did not want in that ark, and upon whom He sent that terrible storm to bring them down into hell, to suffer His wrath against them. For they hated Him and manifested this by their sinful walk of life. We are by nature as spiritually dead as the seed of Satan, who brought spiritual death through the fall of Adam and Eve.

Now what is presented in the front part of a dreadfully dark cloud is a beautiful rainbow. And it is caused by the sun shining upon that cloud. There simply cannot be a rainbow in the front part of a cloud unless the sun shines upon it with its bright light.

In this passage is a very rich and comforting truth concerning our salvation, which God realized through His Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Take note of the fact that in the passage quoted above, God declares, "I will remember my covenant which

is between me and you, and every living creature." Take note then of the fact that the bow is *in* that dark cloud, not simply in front of it. That dark cloud represents the whole human race, as it is spiritually. And that rainbow represents a part of that cloud, that is eternally chosen by God in Christ to become a beautiful people, shining with the glory that Christ earned for them. And what we must hold on to tightly is the truth which God presented to Noah, namely, that this bow (which later on in the Book of Revelation, is called a rainbow) is part of that dark cloud on which the sun shines and realizes this beautiful rainbow.

Take note also of the fact that God says that He will set that rainbow *in* the cloud, not simply in front of that dark cloud. That storm refers to God's holy wrath upon the human race; but it does not fall on those whom He in His grace forms as a rainbow.

That rainbow, presented here in Genesis 9, represents God's eternally chosen church, which is freed from the terrible punishment, which comes upon the human race, ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin and guilt and could not bring forth any children who were not guilty. By nature, and thus by our natural birth, we come into this world as those who deserve God's terrible wrath. But the rainbow is a part of that dark cloud, which God in His grace changed into a beautiful rainbow. Just take hold then, Young People, on how beautiful God makes His church, that by nature belongs to that terribly dark cloud.

Satan had caused the whole human race to become spiritually dead, lacking all the love of God. The whole human race became filled with hatred toward God. And being spiritually dead, as Adam and Eve became, all those represented by that dark cloud cannot even want to be saved from their spiritual death. Foolishly enough, some of them commit suicide, trying to get away from their physical pain. They actually add to their pains, falling into the torment of hell. While all those chosen in Christ will surely through death go into that everlasting heavenly glory, which is pictured in this passage of Scripture, as becoming a beautiful rainbow.

That rainbow, however, is beautiful, for it, as a rainbow, has the red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet colors. That word rainbow here pictures to us what a tremendous change will by God's grace be ours, compared with the unbelievers, who are rushing toward everlasting woe and pain, which they cannot stop or lessen.

Still more, a rainbow, as you know, is in the shape of an arc, which has a bowlike curvature, with one part running down on one side, and the other part running down on the other side. This presents the truth that God's glorious people are Jews and Gentiles. All of these elect Jews and Gentiles will have that same rainbow beauty.

Take note of that which we find in Ezekiel 1:28. There we find two basic elements. We read that there is a bow in the cloud, in a day when it is raining in a terrible storm. But we also read that this bow represents "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God." Yes, that rainbow, the church of God, will enjoy with body and soul the heavenly glory which Christ earned for us.

We, today, very seldom see a rainbow. During our labor in Jamaica we did once see a beautiful rainbow. But what we must bear in mind is that we have God's Word from Genesis through Revelation, and in this our God brings us the blessed and comforting truth of what Christ Jesus, His Son in our flesh, did for us, and is pictured in that rainbow.

Now in Revelation 10:1 we find a very beautiful and striking truth. In this verse we are taught that a mighty angel will "come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire." Here we again find three basic elements, namely the sun, a cloud and a rainbow. And this verse presents to us a picture of the coming of Christ down to this earth. He is the "mighty angel." And with Him are those elect, presented as a cloud wherewith He is clothed. These elect definitely are with Him, when He returns.

The beautiful and comforting truth that we have here is Christ's return to this earth, to bring those, who were chosen in Him, into the glory of the coming New Jerusalem, which is coming at a divinely appointed time. And now that He is clothed with a cloud means that all the elect, who had been with Him in heaven with their souls, return to receive their glorified bodies. That divinely presented rainbow, as we noted, is also presented here. For a rainbow is part of a cloud upon which the sun shines.

Be sure then, Young People, that we are going to enjoy all the spiritual glory pictured by a rainbow. We belong to that cloud with which Christ is clothed in this vision. But we, by God's grace, can see this cloud changed into a beautiful rainbow, even as today we see such beauty of a rainbow in a diamond or piece of glass, when the sun shines on it.

Yes, that promise which God gave to Noah and his sons will soon be fulfilled for all of those chosen

in Christ, and redeemed by His cross, namely, all those redeemed by Christ through His cross.

Look than for the day when Christ shall come back, and bring to every one of the elect, the glory, pictured in a rainbow. Do not let the pain, and losses which you may suffer in this life, take away from you that hope and desire to be with Christ, in all the blessedness of that New Jerusalem. Be sure that the almighty God set a rainbow in a cloud during a flood, that killed all the citizens of Satan's Kingdom of Sin. Be sure that the beauty of the salvation, which Christ earned for us, is coming. We have a rainbow promised to us. Let that strengthen your faith, and give you absolute confidence, when, in the day of the coming antichrist, we will be persecuted.

We have a divinely presented rainbow, which will cause us to have all the beauty of the salvation which God realized through His Son in our flesh, and for our everlasting glory.

Rev. Heys is a retired minister of the Protestant Reformed Churches. He is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church.

Gem of the Month

Mother's Day

by Thelma Westra

Why do you honor Mom today?
Because she gave you birth,
Because she fed and clothed you,
Does that comprise her worth?

Your Heavenly Father chose her
To fill this special place,
That you might be instructed
In His ways and by His grace.

Her labors are not easy,
Her griefs, oft hard to bear,
Yet strengthened in her duty
She continues in her care.

Do not begrudge, but thank her
For correction that she gave,
For God so uses mothers
That their children He may save.

Yes, show your mother honor,
Rise up and call her blest;
For she's the instrument God gave
That He might be confessed.

Watching Daily At My Gates

by M. Ophoff

May 1

Read Genesis 1:26-31

What a joy it is to be a part of a Christian family where husband, wife, and children live together in the Lord. A home filled with harmony and peace is a home where Christ is the center. So many homes today are broken by sin, quarreling, and separation. An ungodly home is the closest thing to hell on earth. It is dark and poor therein. But a home is truly blessed where Jesus Christ dwells. Dwell together as a family that put its trust in God and that serves Him wholeheartedly.

May 2

Read Psalm 121

The Lord is our keeper. He guards us on all sides. He leads us (Isaiah 48:17); He is at the right of us (Psalm 16:8); He is at the left of us (Job 23:9); He is behind us (Isaiah 30:21); He is underneath us (Deuteronomy 33:27); He is above us (Psalm 36:7). And His Holy Spirit dwells within us (I Corinthians 3:16). So wherever we are, whether at work, school, play, home or church, we are always surrounded by our Lord. We never have reason to be afraid. Wherever we are, let us always walk and talk as children of His for He is watching us and guarding us at all times.

May 3

Read Ecclesiastes 12

Aging is a natural process of life. We will all grow old if that is in the Lord's plan. But what comes to mind when we think of the aged? Retirement? Sickness? Gray hair? Visitation at the Rest Home? How about knowledge, or faithfulness, or spiritual strength? When we are younger, and busy with the demands of life, we tend to forget about the immense treasure of knowledge that the aged in our churches possess. We often put off visiting with our aged, thinking tomorrow will be a better, less busy day. But tomorrow could be too late. That knowledge and insight could have passed in the night. How our lives could be all the more joyful by taking the time to listen to our dear older fellow saints. They know so much and see so much. We can learn so much from them. "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shown thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come" (Psalm 71:17-18).

May 4

Read I Timothy 6:6-21

What does the little word "money" mean to you? Riches? Valuable possessions? For the Christian, money is a *blessing* from God. We must use it wisely, not for our own personal gain or to seek the approval of our neighbor. How we use it can either be a blessing or a curse to us as Christians. We must be satisfied and content if only our daily supply of food and shelter is provided. But if the Lord blesses us with riches, we must use this blessing as a blessing to others. We must also give back to the Lord what He has seen fit to give us. Let us never glory in our riches, but let us glory in knowing that He is the Lord which doth "exercise lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness, in the earth" (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

May 5

Read Romans 5:3-5

If you have been plagued by sickness, trials, and sufferings, faith sometimes becomes weak to the point of crying out, "Why, why me, Lord?" All that we have we receive from the Lord. That includes trials and tribulations. He gives these trials to us not out of hatred or punishment, but out of love for us. It is for our good, and for that we must thank Him. The comforting words of Job 23:10 read, "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." The Lord knoweth what we can take. We must rejoice in our sufferings.

May 6

Read II Corinthians 5:7

"For we walk by faith, not by sight." Walking is an exercise. When we walk, we go forward. Forward means "to push ahead." If we just stand still, we are not going anywhere.

We become weak from lack of exercise. We must never be careless in our walk. But we must walk by faith. If we do not have faith to lead us, how could we dare to take one step? If we could see what lay before us, it would look hopeless to us to press on. But as a Christian, we walk by faith in God to lead us through all that stands in our way.

May 7

Read Psalm 118:22-24

What a beautiful day that the Lord hath made. This is a day of rejoicing, because we have the privilege to go up to His house. We have the privilege to hear His Word preached *two* times today. We have the privilege to sing praises to Him from our hearts. Let us go up to His house hungry for the Word. We will go home full of the wonders of His grace. But without attentive hearts we will go home empty, with nothing to carry us through the week. Let us listen; let us praise Him through song; let us rejoice and be glad, for "this is the day that the Lord hath made."

May 8

Read Ephesians 6:11-18

As a Christian we must never "give place to the devil" (Ephesians 4:27). We must be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Today there are so many temptations. The devil is working hard to make wickedness attractive to us. He works very hard to tempt us to sin. We must not give in to these temptations. But we use our time to fill ourselves with His Word and prayer. We must put on the whole armour of God, taking the shield of faith for then we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. There will be no time or place for the devil in our lives if we are busy living our lives for our Lord.

May 9

Read Romans 14:10-13

Who is there among us that doesn't condemn the brother when he stumbles? We all fall into the sin of judging one another. It is so easy to be critical of someone else's doings. But we must remember that every one of us must give account for our own actions when we stand before the judgement seat of Christ. Only God can judge righteously for only He knows our weaknesses, temptations and struggles. Let us look at our own actions before we condemn the brother for his.

May 10

Read I Samuel 12:20-25

When we live a life full of pain, or trouble, it is so easy to turn aside from following the Lord. It is so easy to be filled with despair, so that we rebel against our lot in life. But we must remember that Jesus does not turn away from *us*. He goes with us wherever we go, whether it be on the bed of affliction, or in a troubled marriage, or in our despair of a rebellious child; He does not forsake *us*. We must not ever turn aside from following our Lord, but serve Him with all our heart.

May 11

Read Ephesians 6:1-3

Children, in what way do you see your parents? Are they too strict? Too old-fashioned? Perhaps they "just aren't with it?" The fifth commandment should be a vital part of your lives, for you are called to "honour thy father and thy mother." When you were baptized in front of the congregation, your parents took a vow before God promising to bring you up in the fear of His name. When your parents must admonish you for any reason, they do it out of love for you and for their God. It is so important that you, as a child of God, "obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right." Children, be thankful for God-fearing parents who discipline you in love!

May 12

Read I Thessalonians 4:6-12

Children, do you shun a fellow student in any way because he/she is different? Maybe that student doesn't have the latest hair style, or the Nike Air tennis shoes. Or he/she wears glasses, or isn't allowed to have video's in the home. Does it really matter? Is that really what counts? Put yourself in their place. Go to school today and seek out the student who stands quietly on the outskirts of the "in" crowd. Include them in your activity, whether it be a game at recess, or a project in school. For we ourselves "are taught of God to love one another."

May 13

Read I Thessalonians 5:1-10

The world loves progress. They think that the more technology, the better the earth will be. They constantly come up with new-fangled ways to make buildings and roads safe and indestructible. God gives them these means to make them feel safe and secure, but He also will come with sudden destruction, and they will not escape. Therefore we must not sleep, but we must watch, and "be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the hope of salvation." We, as Christians, know that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night. Let us ever be ready for Him.

May 14

Read Proverbs 31:10-31

A mother is a special person. She is a wife, a mother, sometimes a grandmother, possibly an aunt. The list goes on and on. That is how the world perceives a mother to be. But a true mother in Israel is a virtuous woman, who willingly works with her hands, and whose strength and honour are her clothing. She speaks with wisdom, and with kindness. She keeps her house well. She is not idle; she is not vain; she fears the Lord in all that she does and says. This is a true mother, and one that we, her children can rejoice in. Be thankful for such a mother!

May 15

Read Proverbs 23:1-8

The food of the wicked always looks so appetizing that it is hard to resist. But we must not desire the food of this world.

We are here on earth to work, not to gain the meat of this world. We must not desire to associate with those of this world to gain meat for ourselves. The man of this world thinks only of his own belly. His kind of food cannot satisfy us; it will only make us sick. We can only be satisfied when we work a work that is pleasing to our God. Labor not to be rich; but labor to the glory of God.

May 16

Read Psalm 116:1-19

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" (Psalm 116:12). David wants to show his gratitude to the Lord for all the blessings he has received from Him. What can he possibly render unto the Lord that the Lord does not already have? David's answer is in verses 13 and 14. First David will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord. Then he will keep his vows by "walking before the Lord in the land of the living." First David praises the Lord with *talk* and then he keeps his vows with his *walk*. We too, must show our gratitude to the Lord every day for all He has given unto us by our talk and our walk, just as David did.

May 17

Read Proverbs 15:1-4

How many times have you heard someone make an unkind remark to somebody, only to have an unkind remark thrown back in their face? How many times have you done that? We all are inclined to meet insult with insult. Friendships and even family ties have been broken over one small remark. But in Proverbs 15:1 we read, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." No matter how cutting the remark; no matter how hurtful, we must always answer it with a kind word. We must follow Jesus' example, Who, "when He was reviled, reviled not again." Always meet unkind acts and words with kindness.

May 18

Read Isaiah 39:1-8

When Hezekiah was taken deathly sick, in earnest supplication he came to the Lord to heal him. The Lord sent Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that He would add fifteen years to his life. The king of Babylon, upon hearing of his recovery, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah. Instead of proclaiming his thanks to his God for His healing mercies, Hezekiah showed them all his precious things of gold, and silver, spices, and ointment. All that he had he showed them. "What have they seen in thine house?" (Isaiah 39:4). What do people see in your house when they come to visit? What do they find you listening to on the radio, or watching on your TV? Do they leave your home with the feeling that indeed, they have visited a Christian home?

May 19

Read Psalm 73

Sometimes looking at the prosperity of the world, we stand in awe. It seems as though the rich just get richer, those in power just gain more power. It looks as though nothing can stop them from becoming more wealthy and more powerful. They have really got it made! And sometimes envy gets the better of us and we wish for a little of the great prosperity that the men of the world possess. How foolish our envy. God despises those that boast with pride, but He never forsaketh the good and the pure. God quiets our doubts and shows us that the ungodly man cannot stand. They cannot see that with sudden destruction they will fall. "As when one awaking forgetteth his dream, So God will despise them, though great they may seem; My envy was senseless, my grief was for nought, Because I was faithless, and foolish my thought" (Psalter #201:7).

May 20

Read Psalm 12

When we sincerely praise or compliment someone, that is a wonderful thing. But when we praise or compliment someone to draw attention to ourselves, that is called flattery. Flattery is defined as insincere complimentary speech. Flattery is associated with the lowest type of person and with the most evil of sins. It is used to promote oneself in the good graces of another to win friends and to influence people for our own self-worth. God does not look with favor on those who flatter with their tongue. We read in Psalm 12:3, "The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things." Let us always speak with sincere praise to those about us.

May 21

Read Genesis 2:1-3

In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and every living thing therein. "And He rested on the seventh day from all his work which He had made." But that is not all! God *blessed* the seventh day. And God *sanctified* the seventh day. Sanctified means He set this day aside and made it holy. He rested from all His work. God gave us this day to rest from our daily work also. That doesn't mean go to church twice, but get some things done around the house that we have no time for during the week. We must set this day aside only to worship God with holiness and with the reverence due Him. Keep His whole day holy.

May 22

Read Psalm 128

A happy family is one who dwells together in the Lord. The husband and father, who walks in the ways of the Lord will be happy all of his days. The wife and mother must fill her home with good, by being happy in her service and joyful in being a mother. Sons and daughters will be nurtured and trained in the fear of the Lord in this home. The Lord will surely bless this family all the days of their lives. "Thou shalt see God's kingdom prosper all thy days, till life shall cease, Thou shalt see thy children's children; on thy people, Lord be peace" (Psalter #360:5). Dwell together as a family that fears the Lord.

May 23

Read I Peter 5:5-7

It is very hard not to be proud and conceited. We like to puff ourselves up in the eyes of those around us. We like to be first; and we like to be best; and we like to have the best. But "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the

humble." We must not let pride enter our hearts, for then we cannot expect God's blessing. We must learn by Jesus' own words about himself; "for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 12:29b). Only by being humble ourselves will we receive His grace and then we shall find rest unto our soul. Let us always bow our heads in meek humility "under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."

May 24

Read Matthew 7:3-5, Luke 6:41-43

We all love to be the picture of piety, and find fault with the brother and the way he lives. Yet when it comes to our lives, we overlook and find excuses for things that are much worse than the things the brother dies. We must first examine ourselves and remove the beams from our own eyes before we go looking for the motes in our brother's eyes.

May 25

Read I Timothy 5:13

It's wonderful to spend a few hours a week having coffee with friends while the little ones enjoy playing together. It's fun to catch up on the lives of friends, but a lot of times we catch ourselves telling things to each other that are better left unsaid. Sometimes we say things that we heard just in passing, and really don't know if there is any truth to them; but it feels good to be able to share this knowledge with our friends. And being friends, we are sure that it won't go any further. It is difficult to keep our mouths shut when we do not use our time wisely. Gossiping can be so damaging and hurtful. Our prayer must always be: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).

May 26

Read Luke 16:10-13

"No servant can serve two masters." Teenagers and young adults, what are you going to be doing with your time tonight? Are you going to take your car, pick up a friend or two and party? Are you going to go shoot pool at the local pool hall, smoking cigarettes and listening to loud, heavy music? Is that the master you care to serve? The Lord tells us that we cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve God at home with our families, and serve mammon when we are out with our friends. As a Christian you must choose to serve God always, even, and especially, when you are out with your friends. You cannot serve God and mammon.

May 27

Read Psalm 56:3-13

We all have times in our lives when we are afraid of something. It could be a fear of darkness, or sickness, or death. The fear is very real, and sometimes we shake with such fear. But a Christian is always comforted by putting his faith in God. The Lord always hearkens to our cries for He is our Comforter and Deliverer. "In God I put my trust, I neither doubt nor fear, for man can never harm with God my helper near" (Psalter #152:2). Let us always turn to Him in faith, for He will surely give us rest from our fears.

May 28

Read II Corinthians 8:1-15

We have a dear professor of our seminary who, when preaching for one of our churches always states that "God loveth a cheerful giver" before the offering is held. We hear that, but do we really know what that means, and do we really do what that says? Cheerful means happy. A cheerful giver gives willingly and joyfully. He doesn't give because he has to; and he doesn't give only enough so that he will have plenty left over for other things. Christ gave us all that we have and we must give back to Him according to each one's ability. We must remember above all, that He gave Himself for us. Let us be cheerful givers.

May 29

Read John 15:1-5

How many of us have looked at a tree in the spring just as it is beginning to bud? First we notice the tree itself, standing tall. When we look closer, we notice all the branches springing from this tree. And when we get right up to the tree, we see the first buds of spring. But the branches and all the new buds would not be able to live by themselves without the tree to give it nourishment. Jesus is the vine (tree), and we are His branches. We draw our life from Him. He nurtures us and we continually grow through Him.

May 30

Read Psalm 139:14-18

The human body was created by our God. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." (Genesis 1:27) We must never forget how we came to be. We must never abuse our bodies either. Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Corinthians 6:19-20). We must always glorify God with our bodies, and praise Him, "for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14).

May 31

Read Luke 18:15-17

It is that time of year once again when the school year comes to a close. The children rejoice in the fact that a long summer break looms ahead of them. A mother sometimes dreads looking at a long, hot summer with all the children underfoot begging to do this or that, or go here or there because they are bored. A child is so impressionable. Even though they won't be in school being taught by a teacher, they will be at home with their main teachers—their parents. This is the time to encourage their minds spiritually, to educate them in the ways of the Lord not only by your words, but by your examples. "But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me" (Matthew 19:14). Use these few months to guide them in their spiritual lives. They are never too young to be taught about the wonders of their God.

The Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

by Rev. C. Hanko

In the Gospel that bears his name John refers to himself at least five times as "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

Some think that Jesus chose His disciples from those whom He regarded as good kingdom material. Was that why He chose John? Did John's appealing nature draw him to Jesus? Is there some natural attraction in us as young members of His church that makes us worthy and fit to be His disciples? Our covenant home? Our natural qualities?

Did John himself think that Jesus loved him for what he was, or loved him more than He loved the other disciples? Or was the fact that Jesus loved him such a marvel to him that he considered it a special privilege to refer to himself in that way?

It is true that there was a strong bond of attachment between Jesus and this disciple, and that he did indeed love his Lord very dearly. Jesus sometimes called him aside, with Peter and his brother James, as a special eye witness of some significant event in His ministry. These three were present on the Mount of Transfiguration and saw Moses and Elijah conversing with the Lord. At the Last Supper John sat to the right of Jesus and conversed freely with Him. On the night of the betrayal Jesus requested him, and also Peter and James, to accompany Him into the garden of Gethsemane and to watch while He prayed.

His strong attachment to his Lord became evident especially when he followed at a distance as Jesus was led away as a prisoner. He stood with the soldiers during the trial before Annas, anxiously awaiting the outcome. He was the only disciple present at the cross. He was there with Jesus' mother, and was given charge of Mary by Jesus before He died. John accompanied Peter to the open tomb on the morning of the resurrection, and was the first one to believe that the Lord was risen from the dead. He experienced the martyrdom of his brother James by Herod for the sake of the gospel. He wrote the fourth Gospel and also three epistles that bear his name. He was banished to the island of Patmos where he saw the wonderful revelations of the future as they are recorded in the Book of Revelation. Because of his emphasis on love in his epistles he is often referred to as "the apostle of love."

By the time that John wrote his three epistles he had learned a very important lesson that was engraved upon his soul and he desired to impress upon us, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John 4:10).

John was not naturally such a gentle and lovable person. The gospel accounts give us an entirely different picture of him. When Jesus called him and his brother away from the fish nets and ordained them to be included with the twelve disciples to be taught and sent out to preach, we read in Mark 3:17: "And He (Jesus) surnamed them Boanerges, which is, 'The sons of Thunder.'" This can only mean that these rugged fishermen had

volatile temperament, which they had to learn to control.

On one occasion his mistaken zeal brought him into trouble with his Lord. John was deeply offended when he saw a man who was not one of the twelve casting out devils in Jesus' name. Without further investigation and in no uncertain terms he commanded the man to cease. When he reported this to Jesus, the Lord rebuked him, saying, "Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9:49,50).

On another occasion Jesus rebuked both John and James for wanting to call fire down from heaven upon the Samaritans who refused to give Jesus and His disciples lodging. They fumed with rage. That was no way to treat their Master, Whose mighty works were known far and wide, refusing Him lodging because He was going to Jerusalem. They felt themselves justified in wanting to destroy these offenders, even as Elijah had done. But Jesus looked squarely at them and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." They still had much to learn.

It must have grieved our Lord that they still did not understand that He was the Man of sorrows, the suffering Servant, appointed to suffer and to die to atone for the sins of His people. Whatever He did, He never used His divine power for His personal advantage or vengeance (Luke 9:51-56). (How often we make ourselves guilty of grieving Him!)

These brothers also had some strong personal ambitions for their future. They shared these with their mother Salome, who was a devoted follower of Jesus, even accompanying Him at times to serve Him. She might have been with them when they asked for positions of honor in Jesus' future kingdom, one on each side of His throne. This request was made, mind you, at a time when Jesus was telling them of His approaching death and the accompanying suffering as the way into His kingdom.

James and John were thinking of an earthly kingdom and desired the foremost places of honor on an earthly throne. Jesus could have sighed, "O fools and slow of heart to understand!" Yet He patiently (what a patience!) asked them whether they were able to drink the cup and undergo the baptism of suffering that awaited Him? They confidently confessed: "We are able."

Likely they were pledging loyalty to their King. On the day when He would exercise His divine authority, relieve the Roman authorities of their power and drive the scribes and Pharisees out of the temple, in order to set up His rightful throne in Jerusalem, they with drawn swords would stand with Him in the front line of battle. Jesus makes no comment on their mistaken notion, but does assure them that they will indeed undergo suffering for His sake. Yet the prerogative to give them a place of honor in His kingdom was not His to give, but belongs to the Father (Mark 10:35-39).

We see that John was a man of like passions as we are. He also was by nature depraved, inclined to all evil and incapable of any good. Yet Jesus performed on him the wonder of grace whereby he later confesses: "We love Him, because He first loved us" (I John 4:19). That motivated the apostle to refer to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." He marveled that he should be the object of a love that was so great that Christ would lay down His life for him and bring him into, not a mere earthly, but His heavenly kingdom. He did not lose his fiery zeal and determination, but these were directed into the channel of an eternal love and devotion to his Lord. He was made the apostle of love by the grace of God.

We can be so obsessed with our mistaken notions. Christ does not choose likely candidates for His kingdom, but rather the most unlikely, the most unworthy and unfit, to transform them into His likeness, that they may be fit instruments in His hands to His glory!

This can only humble us before Him. We recognize our own weaknesses and sins. Of ourselves we are not, and never can be worthy nor fit instruments of God in His kingdom. Only grace, merited through the death of His only begotten Son on the cross, can fit us for our own unique place in His church and kingdom. And that place we need not choose, for God has determined it for us from eternity. Christ is now preparing us for that place, and that place for us. When it is ready He will take us unto Himself that we may be where He is (John 14:1-3).

Mindful of our human frailty
is the Lord in Whom we trust;
He Whose years are everlasting,
He remembers we are dust.

Our daily prayer must always be: "Wash me, make me pure within; cleanse, o cleanse me from my sin. Use me now as a fit instrument in Thy hand for the coming of Thy kingdom and thus prepare me for my own place to Thy glory."

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Christian Fathers

by Bernie Kamps

One of the goals of Christian fathers is to rear their children to the point of maturity, when he no longer is the controlling and ruling factor in their lives, but they control and rule their own lives through their own new man and the grace of God. In the book titled *The Family* by Palmer and Alexander, on page 94 and 95, they write:

> Last of all among parental provocations is the unwise retention of authority when it should gradually give way to persuasion. The youth of sixteen cannot be ruled as a boy of six years and the parent has missed his chance who is not able, quietly and by degrees, to substitute influence in the place of authority. Of course, wisdom and tact are required in effecting the change.

Being an example is the key for a Christian father. Loud words, threats, strong verbal instruction reaching demolition decibel levels only serve to drive your lovely children away.

As we get started in this article discussing Christian fathers I will be directing my comments only to the father. I have been asked to keep my article narrow in scope. Much can and should be said of godly mothers, but we will leave that field for someone else to cultivate and sow.

God has been pleased to place the fathers as the head of the home. God in so doing, has placed a staggering responsibility upon us, as well as a sacred trust. He has also given us a truly rich calling and equipped us with His Word and Spirit. Being a Christian father is a pleasure. The requisite of a godly example is a motivation to a sanctified walk. The Lord in His wisdom uses this walk as a pathway to help enter in at the strait gate.

In order to teach, you must be taught. In order to demand obedience, one must obey his own Lord. We who are or will be fathers, contemplate for a moment our calling. We must guard God's sons and daughters from the enemy. Let us make sure we do not invite him into the home. Do not allow Satan to influence your offspring, but guard them with a vengeance! The temptations of the world are great. Equip them to do battle. Do not become unfocused and weak in your home, and do not allow the world to entice with its music or fornication on the television. Put away your music of ten or twenty years ago and demand a life of sanctification for yourself and your children. Live a life of living sacrifice even as Job, who prayed daily for his children. Jehovah will protect His teens from godlessness through quiet conversation, rules, discipline and discussions of why some temptations are just too great even to get close to them. Godly fathers put their arms around their children and explain why the sensitivity to even the appearance of evil is so important. (I Thessalonians 5:22)

The value and importance of praise and encouragement by a father must be recognized and exercised. Fathers must actively build a close and sweet relationship with their children. They should enjoy one another's company. If children only hear commands and reprimands similar to the military, a father fails. If he gives his children firm direction in love, as well as encouraging words with frequency, God blesses. Scripture warns fathers of provoking their children to wrath. A father can be guilty in two ways. First, as a tyrant, and second, being inconsistent. Abraham Kuyper writes in his book, *When Thou Sittest in Thine House*, page 120:

> You can mirror God's fatherhood in our own fatherhood before your children in a beautiful and striking way, but you can also do it in an unsightly and false way. Then arise those bitter conditions that you do not entice honor and love from your children, but rouse antagonism in them, strife between dislike of your person and the honor which they owe you as their father. The Holy Apostle calls this provoking one's children. To demand you must honor me and meanwhile give them occasion to despise you, or at least have no respect for you.

Christian fathers cannot be selfish or walk in spiritual laziness without reaping grief and pain on himself and his children. Yet God is good to those who are faithful in His vineyard. The reward of a covenantal walk is a home filled with godly children and grandchildren united in one hope. Sons and daughters who communicate freely with their father, who respect and honor him, who love him, who forgive him of his faults do so because they know that their father desires to walk a sanctified life, and he had taught them to forgive by example. Fathers and would be fathers pray for the grace to be faithful examples.

Bernie is a father of 6 children and a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church.

Teaching Bible in the Home: Not Supplemental But Fundamental

By Mrs. G. Hoeksema

This speech was given at the gathering of the Grand Rapids area Sunday School teachers at Hudsonville Church in the summer of 1993.

Why is teaching our children so important and *enjoyable*? Primarily because God *gave* these children to us their parents and told us to teach and nurture them. Already in Genesis 18:9 God said about Abraham: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and shall keep the way of the Lord...?" And in Deuteronomy 6:7 God said to us parents: "And thou shalt talk of them (God's Words) when thou sittest in thine house and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

Why does God emphasize this? Because in this way God has directed the lives of His children—from Paradise until now in the twentieth century. God planned that His covenant promises to His people would go through the *organic* lines of their children: Adam, Seth, Enoch, Abraham. To Abraham He said, "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee *and thy seed after thee*, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy *seed after thee*," Genesis 17:7. And we know that God stressed the organic line of His people through all of the Scriptures. In our situation God also has chosen to give *His* babes to *us*—parents in the covenant line—for their nurture. That does not mean that we may not *delegate* some of their training to the Christian schools if we are not capable or circumstances do not allow us to teach them, especially in these days of technology. Nor should our Sunday School classes be disbanded. And we must stress the importance of attending church services and catechism classes.

However, as *parents* we are still responsible for *all* of their instruction, delegated or in the home, with an emphasis on *godliness* as we walk together toward our eternal home. And as parents we must be aware of and utilize a few basic truths that apply to the instruction of our children. (1.) Teaching and learning in school, and in catechism and Sunday School, must in the nature of the case be more formal. I know this from 30 years of teaching in a Christian school. Children need structure and some degree of formality to learn. (2.) Teaching in the home is more relaxed but *never* haphazard or careless. (3.) Teaching Bible truths in our homes requires thought, planning, and *atmosphere*—calm, loving, firm, godly, and eager. Parents furnish the atmosphere in their homes. That's a rather awesome task, isn't it? (4.) But remember that *children* furnish the home, and, all other things being equal,

our children will more easily express the questions nd feelings deep down in their hearts about God's wonders along with their indignation against evildoers *in the home.*

What methods should parents use? Each home is different, of course, and methods will vary. Teaching Bible and applying biblical truths in the home tends to be more spontaneous and informal. And naturally, structure differs with five-year-olds and teenagers. Each family will find what fits in their lives.

Whatever time frames parents choose should be regular and systematic. The obvious time is Bible reading after the evening meal, often a rather relaxed time. Other times can be Saturday nights as preparation for Sunday services, Sunday afternoons, or on boring trips—*our* family specialty!

Parents should carefully set an atmosphere for teaching Bible. The atmosphere should be regular, orderly, consistent, but not rigid and dull. It could be as simple as "Let's play a Bible game now." or "Time to learn your catechism." or "Find a quiet place to go over your Sunday School verse." Or it may be a lesson for which both parents and children prepare. In reading the Scriptures at mealtime or bedtime, parents and children can take a w minutes to prepare—to read the passage and et in the mood for study. If we parents set an atmosphere of joy, enthusiasm, and interest, our children are likely to respond in kind. And if we read short passages, we are more likely to hold the attention of our children.

Reading short passages has several advantages. Study can be thorough. In a family setting we have the opportunity not only to study portions of God's Word but to discuss them intimately—without having Johnny at school turning around and staring at you. And there isn't so much peer pressure—there shouldn't be, anyway—in the comfortable atmosphere of the home. In studying a short passage, parents can encourage their children to interrupt to ask questions, right away before he forgets the question. Parents can also encourage children to make observations during Scripture reading—"I never thought about it this way." This, of course, can be carried too far and become counterproductive and irreverent. Common sense must prevail.

A couple examples will illustrate how studying a text can generate questions and discussion. In reading Matthew 22:41-46 (use your Bible to read it now), a child may ask, "How *could* Jesus be avid's Son and His Lord?" By discussing this question, parents encourage children not only to try to understand the question but also to delve into the spiritual depths of this wonder. And in studying John 6:66-71, children usually respond from their hearts and ponder how Jesus could *endure* having the devil with Him for three years, especially with Judas present as a constant reminder. Our children—God's children—respond not only to the facts of biblical history but also to the spiritual pathos that such a text evokes.

How can parents and children prepare for instruction at home? Preparation is not always easy, and for that reason it is good to have some references and resources available when there are hard questions. Three references are basic: a Bible dictionary for explanations, a concordance as a textual guide, and a Bible atlas for help with times and places. Parents can use these helps when children ask hard questions, but more importantly they can study to gain a clearer outlook, an over-all view of the Scriptures, before they teach the children. If parents teach their children at an early age how to use these helps, the children will be comfortable using them and will reap a large harvest of knowledge, which will be of benefit for the rest of their lives. But big books and difficult study are not always necessary to teach. Especially for younger children, when parents read a Scripture passage or Bible story, the children will *live* the story. An example from my days of teaching first grade will illustrate this reaction of young children.

The Bible lesson that morning had been about Rachel and Leah, the quarrelling wives of Jacob. We learned that Rachel was godless and self-centered and that Leah was God-centered. Then at recess time as the children were putting on coats and mittens, they were interested in something else and making a commotion. I asked what all the noise meant, and they told me "Oh, don't worry! We were just voting, and we all voted for Leah." What a beautiful response from our children!

Finally, as far as methods are concerned, parents must always teach the *antithesis*—something crucially important in these times. Not only must parents teach their children to recognize the antithesis in Bible stories, but they must also live the antithesis and teach their children to live it as well.

So far the focus has been on *teaching* the stories and concepts that children need to learn. Another aspect of instruction is *memorization.* Memorizing should not be a severe burden and not usually a punishment; rather it should be viewed as a crucial part of a godly upbringing. It can be a beautiful alternative to watching TV, even though at first children may resist. Parents need to draw a con-

trast between the jewels of God's Word and the trash on television.

How do parents teach their children to memorize? Start when they are young. Start slowly and with short, easy passages. Recite together. Try some classics: Psalm 19—God's care—"The heavens declare the glory of God..." and for older children Proverbs 15—about ethics—"A soft answer turneth away wrath...." Learn Psalm 23, Romans 9, and Hebrews 11. To avoid a negative attitude with longer passages, start with 2 or 3 verses, and children may soon begin to enjoy memorizing. Offer an incentive—a new Bible or a worthwhile book—for memorization of a long passage. Make it a family project on Saturday nights or Sunday afternoons, especially in summertime. Experience has taught me that children don't memorize only words, but *God's* Words.

Another way, very enjoyable and very instructive, to teach in the home is with Bible games. Most children enjoy the "Who am I?" games—"I'm thinking of a man in the Old Testament." Several commercial games are also available, and all serve to increase and sharpen knowledge of biblical history, geography, time settings, sequence, and characters. I once had a child ask me if it was right to say who we would like to see first when we get to heaven. And could I guess who he would like to see first? If done in reverence, a game of this sort can open up the Scriptures. More importantly, it serves to make children identify the admirable characteristics of the saints of ages past. Such a game can spark a discussion that draws the whole family closer to heaven.

Finally, parents can teach the Bible by having their children sing the Psalms in the *Psalter* and learn their riches by memorizing and carrying them in their hearts. This can be done at dinnertime devotions, on Sunday afternoons or evenings, or on long trips. Here again, no two families will teach their children alike, but all homes must be one in their goals.

To conclude, let me tell you about the custom of a family in another country. After the evening meal and reading of a Scripture passage, the family goes to the livingroom. There the father asks some review questions to reinforce the Scripture reading. Then they stand in a circle, holding hands, and sing a psalm or two and close with a prayer. Though it may take a little extra time, their devotions tie together all the aspects of teaching the Bible to our children and praising our God.

Mrs. Hoeksema (the widow of the late Prof. H. Hoeksema) has brought up 4 children and has spent many years teaching in our schools and leading Bible studies.

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A Christian Perspective on Play and Sports

by Rev. Bruce Davis

This is the third part of a four-article series. The full title which the author gave to his articles was: "On Developing and Implementing a Christian Perspective on Play and Sports." In his previous article Rev. Davis discussed the Essence of, Purpose of, and Key to, Christian play and sports. In this article he applies these principles to actual competition.

Understanding Christian Competition

In light of all that has been previously stated, Christian competition is not all about beating another person or team. It is not concerned with establishing the superiority of one over another. Its focus is not winning at someone else's expense. Its goal is not to be admired for one's skills and to be considered better that others. It is not even about play *against* someone.

Considering the divinely ordained purpose for and essence of play along with the biblical key that enables Christians to play in a Christian way, Christian competition is all about playing *with* someone to the glory of God. It is concerned with having holy and God-centered fun with others of like mind; therefore it should be different from the perverse competition of the world both in its structure and in its implementation. Living antithetically, in spiritual opposition to the world and its wicked ways, should be evident as Christians compete in various games and contests.

Christian competition is an issue of cooperating with others, not playing against them. Individuals or teams agree to play together in order to fulfill God's purpose for their play. The participants must agree to "cooperatively oppose" one another. Even the obstacles and hindrances (i.e. outstretched hands, defensive positions, screens, fakes, interceptions, etc.) players put in the way of "opponents" are necessary for everyone's creative and imaginative expression in the game. Each team cooperates with the other to give one another opportunities joyfully and thankfully to give expression to their physical and mental gifts and abilities from the Lord. Each team should strive to give players on the other team opportunities to be imaginative and creative within the rules and structure of the game. The players sharpen each other as iron sharpens iron when they play like this.

Given that Christian competition is a celebrative and thankful experience, players should be thankful to the Lord for their "opponents" accomplishments as well as for their own. To admire the gifts and talents of people from other teams is not incompatible with playing hard and using one's own gifts and talents as a faithful steward. To compete in a thoroughly Christian way is not in opposition to a godly desire to pursue excellence and to work hard to realize one's potential in a game. Players from one team should strive to play well in order to help the other team play well. The "one another's" from the New Testament (help one another, love one another, edify one another, submit to one another, forgive one another, encourage one another, bear with one another, etc.) are to be expressed in all play and games.

Christian participants in competition should give heed to the whole counsel of God as it bears upon this area of the Christian life. They should strive by God's grace to show themselves meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers (Matthew 5:5-9). Christian players should view competition as an opportunity to let their light shine before men that they may see their good works and glorify their Father Who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16). Christian

competition should demonstrate the biblical definition of love:

> Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (I Corinthians 13:4-7).

Christian competitors should pray that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work (Colossians 1:9-10). Those players who want to be considered great among those playing should be the servants of others, even those players on the other team (Matthew 20:26-28). The humility of the citizens of God's kingdom should be evident in all play (Matthew 18:34). Christians at play with others should take to heart the following apostolic commands: "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another" (Romans 12:9-10). Christians should live out the following verses in their play and games: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:3-4). Obviously these verses and others like them mean that all forms of worldliness (i.e. bad mouthing the other team, arguing with officials, slamming the ball down in anger, losing self-control, pouting at the outcome of the game, viewing the other team as the enemy, yelling at teammates that make mistakes, laughing at others, etc.) are prohibited in Christian competition.

What about winning and losing? Winning and losing are not the main issues when it comes to play and sports. Both winning and losing should be taken in stride by Christians participating in games. Neither should make a very deep impression on the Christian competitor, for competition from a Christian perspective should be positive and satisfying whether one wins or loses. Playing in a competitive way is still to be fun in the Lord, and if it is not fun to His glory (and the world tells us that losing is certainly not fun) then it is not pleasing to the Lord. Winning or losing should be viewed as incidental by the Christian involved in a game. To play hard and to strive to realize one's potential in a game is not incompatible with viewing winning or losing in a detached way.

After all, is not a fervent and all-consuming quest for victory or first place or the biggest trophy a form of covetousness and a violation of several of the Ten Commandments? Is not having as one's purpose for competing "going for the gold" and finding one's chief satisfaction in winning (and thus one's chief disappointment in losing) an exalting and promoting of oneself at the expense of others and a form of selfish ambition? Is it not wrong to view the ones with more points or runs as "winners" and ones with the fewer points or runs as "losers"? Should not Christian competition mean that everybody wins because everybody had playful fun to the glory of God?

Rev. Bruce Davis is the minister of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church of Standale, Michigan.

From the Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee:

Prospective teachers and ministers seeking scholarship money please call Sarah Ondersma at (616)669-0966 for an application and essay topics. Deadline for applications is June 15.

"LITTLE LIGHTS" . . . LET IT SHINE!

The following story was written by 11-year-old Ashley Ferguson of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. She hopes that the story might help other children cope with their day to day problems, and we hope it will too. Thanks for sending it in, Ashley!

In the story Alex and Christine learn what they should not *find enjoyment in, as well as what they* should *delight in. See if you can learn what these things are too:*

by Connie Meyer

Man or God?

As Alex and Christine walked home from school with their friends, they began to talk about movies. Alex and Christine had seen some videos, but not like what their friends were talking about. They were talking about movies which are actually adult movies, like love and murder stories, and they didn't even seem to care about what they were actually saying. These friends noticed that Alex and Christine weren't saying much, and they began to tease them for not going to theaters and watching adult movies.

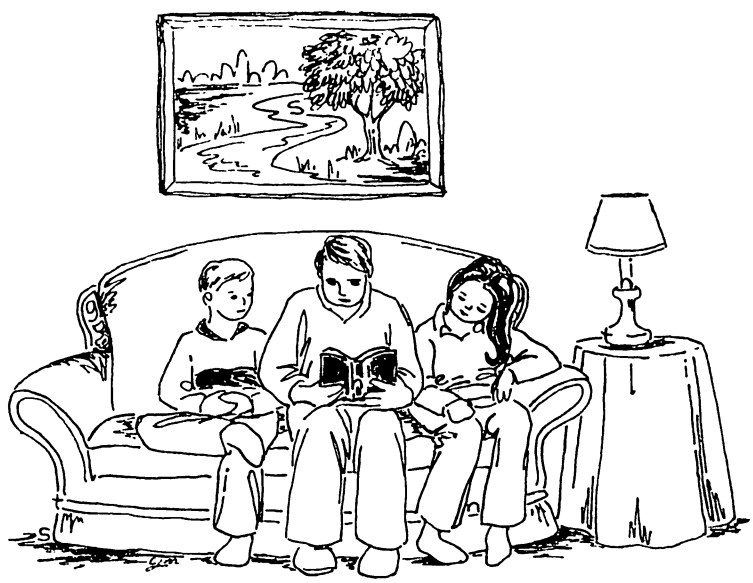
When Alex and Christine got home, they asked their dad and mom why they couldn't go to movie theaters and watch adult movies. First of all, their dad went and got the Bible, then he sat down and told them to sit down beside him. Next he opened the Bible to Psalm 1:1-2, and he then read, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night."

"Now," said their dad, "what do you think of those children and what they watch?"

They both answered, "We think that the people who go to watch movies like that are people who have been tempted by Satan to worship man and the things of the earth instead of worshipping God, and they will be judged, but that those who do not go to those movies will be rewarded for their faith."

"Good," said their dad, "now we know that we can say 'no' to Satan and the things of this life, and say 'yes' with God's grace, not caring what the wicked think of us, because God loves us a whole lot!"

Connie Meyer is the mother of 5 children and attends Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.



"...his delight is in the law..."

Find each letter of these words from Psalm 1:2 in the picture above.

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hosted by
Grandville Protestant Reformed Church
August 7-11
at
Hope College
Holland, Michigan

Convention Theme:

Courageous Christian Youth

Speakers:

Rev. Mahtani	*"Daniel—A Faithful Prayer Life"*
Rev. Terpstra	*"Daniel—A Bold Witness"*
Mr. Kalsbeek	*"Daniel—Godly Choices"*

Discussion Group Topics:
Devotions—Private and Public
Respecting Authority
Choosing Friends