Beacon Lights

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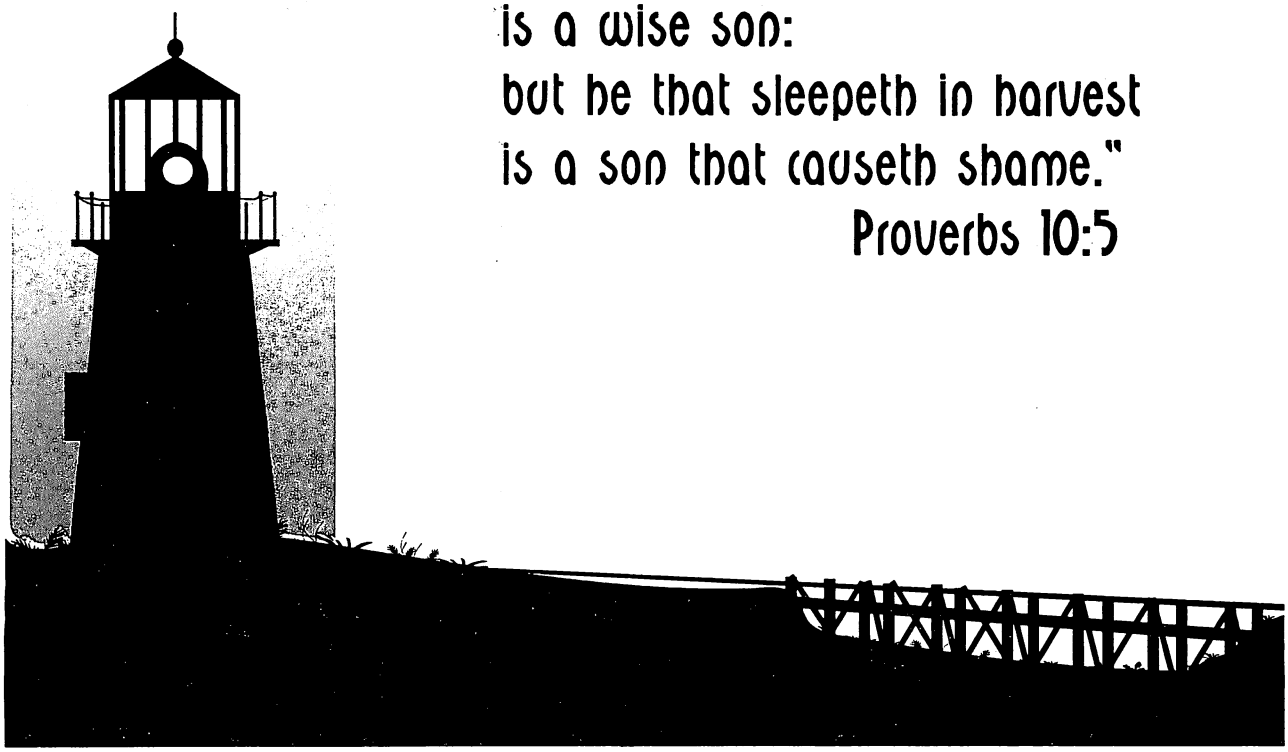
"He that gathereth in summer
is a wise son:
but he that sleepeth in harvest
is a son that causeth shame."
Proverbs 10:5



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Saint Augustine at the Movies

by John Huizenga

Most of our readers have heard of Augustine (354-430 AD) at some point in their lives. Perhaps your knowledge of him is rather scanty or dim. If you know anything at all about him, it is likely that you have read parts or the whole of his work *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. This work is a very interesting and powerful autobiography in which Augustine goes way back to his early childhood and describes his growing up, teenage struggles, his departure from the church, and eventually his conversion and work in the church.

In book 3 of the *Confessions*, Augustine gives a penetrating critique of the popular entertainment which he attended as a young man. Popular entertainment in Rome at this time included violent and bloody gladiator shows as well as comedy and tragedy plays. Having studied modern television production and some ancient Roman entertainment in college, it is quite clear to me that popular entertainment has changed very little over the ages. The producers at Hollywood still go back to the same basic themes and entertainment tactics used in Augustine's time. Thus what Augustine says about popular entertainment applies just as well today.

The pulpits, pamphlets, and convention speeches of the Protestant Reformed Churches make it clear that we have no business in the movie theater. Aware that young people are constantly tempted by the desire to go to the theater, we continue to hear condemnation of theater attendance. Augustine's basic message also is that the believer has no business at the theater. He is one with the position of the church of his day which refused baptism to adult converts who performed in the theater. His approach, however, is rather original and is useful for facing questions raised today.

I have found that some young people are very good at making arguments to justify attendance at movies. One argument that I find convincing is that there is no essential difference between renting a video and going to the theater. I think the argument is right. If we are going to condemn movies watched in a theater, we had better condemn rented movies as well. But how can we make a decisive biblical statement without using a whole list of legalistic do's and don'ts? In my judgment, Augustine gets to the heart of the matter by making some astute observations about sinful human nature and how popular entertainment is geared to feed the human funny-bone which has become corrupted by sin. His point is that entertainment which is tailored for a corrupt human nature should not be entertaining for a believer.

Augustine writes as follows:

> Theater spectacles also captured me, being full of the images of my miseries and fuel for my fire. Why is it that man has desires to be sad when he watches sorrowful and

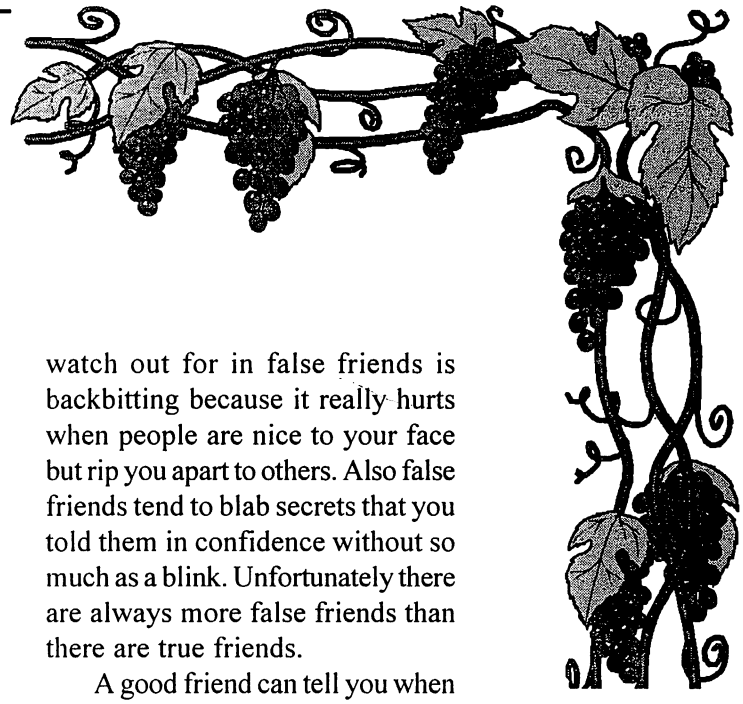
> tragic things which he himself does not want to suffer? And yet he desires as a spectator to suffer by these sad things and this sadness itself is his pleasure. What is this except miserable insanity? For the more one is moved by these [plays] the less he is free from such feelings, even though when he himself suffers, it is customary to say "misery," and when he sympathizes with others—"pity." But then what kind of pity is there in fictitious and staged [acts]? For the viewer is not provoked to help, but is invited to be sad and he applauds the author of these images more when he becomes more sad. And if the calamities of that man, whether based on fact or merely made up, are acted out in such a way that the spectator is not saddened, he gets up [from the theater] at that point full of disgust and critical. If, however, he is sad, he remains, attentive and content."

The point Augustine is making here is that popular entertainment brings about a sinful confusion of emotions. Entertainment no matter what form it may take has as its goal the arousing of the audiences deepest emotions. This in itself is not wrong. Emotions are human and a part of our life and redemption in Christ. Depraved man, however, has depraved emotions and desires. One aspect of that depravity upon which entertainers work is finding pleasure in sadness. Augustine is struck by the absurdity of people finding pleasure in sadness and becoming upset if a show was not sad enough. This observation is in harmony with the description of mans depravity found in Proverbs 8:36 where we read "all they that hate me love death." Finding pleasure in sadness is much like loving death. Mans love of death is a powerful force in his depraved human nature and the popularity of violence and death in entertainment seems to reveal that morbid love rather well. Death has been a popular theme throughout the whole history of entertainment.

The emotions are powerful and significant for the believer. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that body includes our emotions. If we set out to confuse our emotions, it is the same as distorting our judgment with alcohol and yielding our bodies to sex before marriage. The antithesis cuts right through the manner and motivation of our arousal of emotion just as it does through every other aspect of life. When we drain ourselves emotionally by reading novels hour after hour or watch TV, then what love for God or sorrow for sin do we have left when we come to God in prayer? Our desire for the joys of righteousness and peace with God in Christ must never be sold to entertainment. The child of God ought to seek out entertainment that brings joy and laughter and is yet free from the profanity that makes the depraved man laugh.

The desire to be entertained by entertainment designed to satisfy the sinful desires of fallen man is a sign of spiritual weakness. The world finds its entertainment to be something that makes life bearable. For many it is the only thing for which they live. The child of God, on the other hand, has all the hope and motivation he needs for living and working in this world in that great salvation given to us by God. If the unbeliever knows anything about the hope of a believer, he would say to the believer next to him in the theater "why do you seek entertainment here when you can begin in this life to enjoy the benefits of heaven?" Why eat at McDonalds when you have coupons for a free meal at Mountain Jacks?

As with everything in the life of a Christian, we must be discerning in our enjoyment of entertainment. Our laughter and relaxation must be sanctified. If a certain activity of entertainment does not bring us to express our thankfulness for God's goodness then it may very well be leading us away from God and ought to be avoided. If our entertainment leaves us so tired and emotionally drained that prayer and reading Scripture is the last thing we want to do, then we better find some other entertainment. If we find ourselves enjoying violence, scenes of murder, and misery, then we had better consider whether or not we are feeding the lusts of our old man of sin. ❖



Friends

by Katie Knott

The first day of high school is always difficult. This is because you do not know that many people and those that were in your class before are probably not in all of your new classes. By the end of the first week you know the names of everyone in your classes and you have started to form a new group of friends.

I have always found it puzzling how people pick their friends. A lot of it has to do with having the same interests, hobbies, and having personalities that "click" together. Another way to pick a good friend is by the way they talk, act, and even in what they do.

There is a lot more to a good friendship than just having someone to talk to about what is going on at school or at home. Being a good friend means that you must be willing to give as well as receive. You have to be there with a strong shoulder to lean on whenever your friend needs it. You must take the time to really listen to them when they talk. Some of the not so pleasant aspects of being a good friend are also very important. Sticking up for a friend when others are cutting them down is a definite must. Also, we must always direct our friends in the proper paths of young Christians no matter how hard it may be or how much they do not want to listen.

There are may people out there who pretend that they are your friends to get things that you have or to hang around with the group that you do. Another thing to watch out for in false friends is backbitting because it really hurts when people are nice to your face but rip you apart to others. Also false friends tend to blab secrets that you told them in confidence without so much as a blink. Unfortunately there are always more false friends than there are true friends.

A good friend can tell you when to keep quiet, when your hair looks bad, or when your outfit does not match. A true friend can be honest with you and has the faith that you will always do the same.

Our lives would be very boring if we did not have any friends. What would we do on the weekends? Whom would you call or talk to or tell when the guy/girl you like asks you out? In whom would you confide in when something goes wrong? In the hustle of everyday life we tend to forget that there is more to having friends than sharing lockers. Friendship is a relationship built on trust and the faith that each one is always looking out for the others. Always remember that in order to have a good friend, you must be a good Christian friend. ❖

Kate is a student at Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Story Time

Anny Is Searching

by J.P. de Klerk

The math teacher was furious with Anny Stormer. With a head as red as a lobster he stood in the office of headmaster Martin Tadema to complain of his difficult pupil.

"I have lost all patience with her, and the whole teaching staff has had enough of her. As form-master I have taken the liberty to send Anny home on indefinite leave."

Mr. Tadema sighed and looked out of the open window. From some orange flowers came the sweet aroma of perfume. Yes, he knew about the problems with Anny Stormer, but to send her out of the door, at her age, no, that went too far...

"William, let us give everybody some time to think about this. We are at the beginning of the week. I think I will try to contact her mother again. William, you know her father died suddenly last year. That has been a big shock for this girl. Imagine she has no brothers or sisters, and her mother works all day and at night. She is only at home Sundays...Tell me, what subjects is Anny good at?"

"Well, languages, making drawings, gymnastics, shooting pallets, making chalk vanish. Often she is daydreaming; she does not hear my questions. In the corridors I hear her singing while she leaves the building...She does not understand a thing about math."

Mr. Tadema nodded and looked to the blue sky. "She is a teenager. Perhaps she needs more attention, a friendly word, a compliment for what she does well."

"She gets enough attention by the boys in the class. Those wild red hairs of her, her tight jerseys."

"Do you think she is intentionally like that?"

"Come to think of it, no, I cannot accuse her. She said once that her mother did not have the money to buy new clothes for her. She was talking with other girls, but two boys heard it and teased her, and then she became angry and ran away."

"So, we cannot say that she is defiant. Perhaps she is not yet able to put on a good countenance."

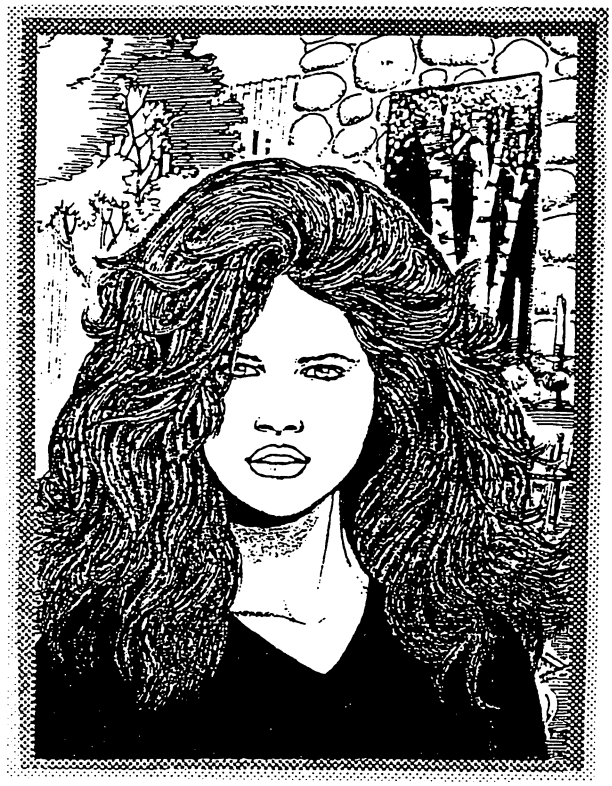
* * * * * *

Anny had left the school like a runaway horse. She did not care about her books and her pencil-case. She hopped down the sidewalk, effusive, liberated, now and then whistling or singing. A courier boy on a bike laughed at her and she stuck out her tongue at him.

Nice! No school anymore, no homework, no impositions, no alarm to be set, time to take a bath and bethink a new poem. Terrific!... She went from one street to another, and another again, but without noticing it straight away she reached the cemetery. She became very quiet and went slowly through the big gate. She stopped in front of the last tomb of the fourteenth row. There was the name: Albert Stormer...John 13:35...

She fell on her knees and cried.

"Oh, Lord Jesus, why did Daddy die? Life has become a burden to me. I wish I could feel his hands again,



and see his face! God, help me!"... Her body was shaking. Tears streamed over her cheeks. A frog sent ringlets swirling around him in the water of a small canal close by, but she did not notice him. The noises of the city were far away. Stately old trees overshadowed with their roof of foliage the graves; the willows and the poplars waving in the wind...

Almost inaudibly a shortish, thin old man came near and looked at her wild head of red hair. He was bald. He was wearing a dark blue suit and held his hands behind his back. He walked with a slight stoop, with a light careful step, not touching loose stones. When he had reached Anny, he shook his head, but he did not say anything. He saw that the girl stopped sobbing and blew her nose in a small handkerchief. She sighed, looked around, and suddenly she saw his shining black shoes. They looked at each other and he put his right hand out to her as to help her up, but she gripped that hand with both her hands and fell against him, while she stammered, "Oh, Reverend Leeman! Has God sent you?"

He looked at her with a friendly smile and said, "I don't know. Perhaps He wanted me to be here now. When I am in the area, I often make a walk over the cemetery and I see the names again of people I have known, chiseled on these stones....There are also the bodies of a son and a daughter of me buried here."

That gave Anny a shock. "Oh, I didn't know that... ut, you don't find it silly of me, that I am here?...I mean, you do also go to the cemetery..."

He shook his head.

"No, Anny, it is all right. Nothing strange about it... Don't think that I am a strong man, thick-skinned and with a heart of stone. When my children had died, I came here almost every day, and sometimes I have also cried. None of God's children has been made of armored concrete, believe me."

Anny stood up and still held his hand. Together they looked at the tombstone with the name of her father, and Rev. Leeman said, "It seems like it happened only yesterday, don't you think so?"

"Yes, it does," whispered Anny.

"I have an idea. Go with me. My wife will make a cup of tea, I think, or perhaps you want something else."

"Oh yes, I would like to have a talk with you, if you don't mind."

"Excellent, Anny. I have nothing else on my program today."

They went hand in hand, back to the city.

Rev. Leeman asked lightly: "And how are you getting on at school?"

"Badly...I have been sent home today."

"Well, that means that you have time for other things, haven't you?"

"Yes. I want to make more drawings, write stories and poems...Are you always wearing dark blue?"

"No, but today I went to see some very ill members of the church and a widow... Usually I wear a grey suit, or a brown jacket with beige trousers."

"Had Daddy too...You don't smoke, do you?"

"No, that did not attract me. When I was a child I had asthma."

"I wish Daddy had never started smoking."

"I know what you mean."

He stopped in front of an old-fashioned confectioner's shop and said, "Now you tell me what you prefer of these."

"What a feast for the eyes! Chocolate eclairs, and wedges of cakes, and there are custard squares!...No, don't spend money on me, no..."

"Anny, it is my pleasure if you choose something. Don't worry. Sometimes I buy some cakes for my wife. She loves them too."

All at once Anny saw herself and Rev. Leeman reflected by the shop window, hand in had, and she found herself childish. It gave her a shock and he noticed it, but he said nothing...

Later, when they entered the manse next to the church, Mrs. Leeman met them in the corridor. She knew Anny and gave her a kiss spontaneously. She walked with them to the door of the study and said, "I'll put the kettle on."

Rev. Leeman went to sit with Anny on a settee in a snug corner next to a bay window. Anny cast her eyes about and observed, "What a lovely masculine room, or is it strange to say that?"

"Come, come! Here you are allowed to wear your heart upon your sleeve. You know, my daughter went through this same phase as you do now."

Anny looked at him searchingly and asked, "What is a phase?"

"Well, a period, a part of your life, while you are growing up."

"Oh, I get sometimes the feeling that my head, my hands and my feet each want to go in another direction, and then I become so afraid that I lock myself up in my room. Then I don't trust myself and a number of other people. It is like there is something that is stronger than I am... I don't understand myself... Perhaps I could do something stupid."

"It is all right, Anny that you realize that there are things going on in yourself that you do not know yet, that there are dangers."

"The girls at school say that I am backward and behind the times...They talk in a half-whisper and if I want to join them they shoo me away. I said once that they were a strange sort of birds. They took fire!"

"Now, Anny, I'll tell you what. Forget them!"

Mrs. Leeman entered the room with tea. She had put the cakes of the confectioner on beautiful small glass plates.

"Pleasant, eh?" said Rev. Leeman. "Come join us, dear. I want to suggest something."...

* * * * * *

"Yes, Mrs. Stormer, I am glad I find you in. Your daughter Anny gave me your telephone number. You do remember Rev. Leeman, don't you? I would like to tell you that my wife and I would find it a privilege if you would allow Anny to stay a couple of weeks with us. I believe it will do us all the good in the world... Yes, a change for the better... Anny as well as we will appreciate that. We have also had once children of Anny's age... Yes, I wanted to make sure that you would not have objections."

Anny was delighted. She had expected a lot of trouble with her mother, but everything was okay. Apart from

that, Anny had never before been anywhere as a guest. She asked a bit confusedly, "Mrs. Leeman, what do I have to take with me from home?"

* * * * * *

"Mr. Bergen, you are speaking with Reverend Leeman. I have here Anny Stormer with me and I have had a long talk with her in the afternoon... No, she did not come here, but I invited her... I respect your viewpoint, but I don't think that the other pupils are angels of mercy, Mr. Bergen. I think that they are simply less outspoken than Anny... Yes, I know all those stereotyped expressions about children of a particular age nowadays, but this case is different. How much attention, love, friendship, appreciation and so on does she get?... Yes, I understand what you mean, Mr. Bergen, and I don't blame you, but don't you know that there are still Christian children who search desperately for the good way, while they are growing up? They are conservative at heart... Anny needs the personal touch, or else her world falls apart, in a manner of speaking. I won't waste more of your time... Yes, God bless you, Mr. Bergen."

It had become nine o'clock that night and Rev. Leeman went to the living-room, where his wife and Anny talked cheerfully with each other.

"Time for a cup of coffee," he said. "And there are also yet some tasty things left. Lend me a helping hand, Anny."

The girl looked at him rapturously. Suddenly she fell on her knees next to her chair, folded her hands, and prayed, "God, I thank Thee, that Thou hast made everything wonderful. I am so happy. I thank Thee, I thank Thee. Amen."

Mrs. Leeman reached for her handkerchief, her husband wiped quickly past his eyes. Yes, they were reminded of the past, when their children were still alive...

Anny went with Rev. Leeman to the kitchen, and he told her, "You have a fortnight off from school and I suggest that we go early tomorrow morning to the beach. I'll take my easel with me. Perhaps you are willing to carry my little suitcase with painter's tools."

"Yes, of course. Do you often make paintings?"

"Yes, all that you see hanging on the walls of this house. Did you notice the one with the birches in the living room?"

"Oh, but that is beautiful... Do you mind if I take my sketchbook with me? I have never tried before to draw those rollers of the sea."

"Sure. Excellent idea."

"Did your daughter also make paintings?"

"No, but she liked making photographs."

* * * * * *

They sat on folding chairs. A lonely turbit walked along the beach, searching for something eatable. The sun had not yet arrived above the horizon. In the distance a couple of luggers passed by on their way to the harbor, where they would unload the draught of fishes they got during the night. At the end of a breakwater there were three boys at work on collecting mussels from between the big cobblestones.

Anny had a glance at Rev. Leeman, who painted quietly, with precise motions of his right hand. The sea was quiet. There was not much wind. Anny was not as talkative as she usually was. She was good with drawing from nature, but every now and again her thoughts were wandering away, because the past day had been so full of questions and answers she had been waiting for for a long time.

"Reverend Leeman, do you think that I must continue at school, really?"

"Well, that depends...Perhaps it would be better to go to another school. Give me a fortnight to think about it. I have to talk with your mother, of course."

A covey of partridges described a curve through the air and settled somewhere in the range of dunes. A curious wood-pigeon tripped around the feet of the minister.

"God's creation is certainly beautiful," he said. "Do you see, that there comes now more color in the sky further on? I'll try to get that in my painting."

"Yes, it is all so beautiful," affirmed Anny.

"But do you know, that every night people of the public cleansing department come here to pick up the rubbish other people have thrown overboard?"

"Oh, that is terrible."

"Yes, many people don't care anymore. They hate rules. Like they hate also the Ten Commandments. It makes them unhappy to live that way. They have nothing to hold on to, nothing to look forward to, nothing to appreciate. Often they hate themselves and they don't know why."

"But then... how much we have to be thankful for."

"Yes, Anny. You are on the right track." ❖

J.P. de Klerk is an author and journalist from the Protestant Reformed Church of New Zealand.

[M] - Mercy

What The Lord of Trees Has Meant Me to Be

by Tom Bergman

Maple—The maple tree is a common species, numbering about 120 varieties. Maples grow almost exclusively in the Northern Hemisphere. In fact, you would be hard pressed to find a maple in the "bottom" half of our planet. Locating a bottle of maple syrup would be easier, since it is part of a multimillion dollar industry.

Most maple species are found in China. But, for those of us familiar with the sugar, red, silver, and bigleaf (you're welcome, Lynden), the uses are no surprise. Maples are an important source of lumber. Furniture makers like the wood of the red maple. The wood of the sugar maple is the sturdiest, and its unusual grain and fine, polished look make it suitable for everything from violins to bowling alleys. The most fascinating thing about maples might be the most annoying as well. Ask anyone with an old maple in the front yard. Maple seeds are all over the place! Sometimes called "keys" in reference to their shape, these seeds are more commonly known as "helicopters" for the way they whirl and float to the ground in their spiralling descent. Keys litter the ground by the thousands. A soft breeze might carry them into an eaves trough or open car window. An unstoppable force!

A lesson in mercy can be derived from the maple tree. Your own acts of mercy should be as abundant and unstoppable as the winged maple seed. In church life, you should not be able to move without encountering love and mercy from a brother or sister. Mercy should be spilled all over the church body, like helicopters on a grassy lawn. Show that you have a deep concern for Christ's sake. Do this all the time, all over the place.

Elm—Widespread in North America, the elm family is a treasured resource. The common American elm reaches as high as 80 to 100 feet. With gray bark and saw-toothed leaves, this beautiful tree is valued for its lumber and its shade.

Elm wood is resilient and hardy. Since it does not split easily, it is good for fence posts which have to brave the elements of weather. In addition to its reputation as a sturdy hardwood, the elms caramel color adds a nice touch to furniture.

Good wood or not, the elm will always be a shade tree. Branching out from the trunk, its far-reaching limbs provide shelter for creatures below. Can you hang a rope from its branches and dangle on a makeshift swing? Yes. Can you take a cool afternoon break underneath an elm on a sticky summer day? Yes. Can you do these activities on any one of the millions of elm trees scattered across North America? Of course, you can.

You can also take a valuable lesson from the elm. Besides the fact that its presence has inspired a street name in many communities, the elm makes a powerful statement in the Christian life. You need to provide shade for your friends. The day is hot. The battle is long. Kind, friendly words provide shade from the trials in life. In times of affliction, mercy is cool and soothing like a restful nap under an elms shady boughs. Be merciful. Be shade for somebody.

Red Pine—Another Northern Hemisphere family is the pine. These are the evergreen trees that bear seeds in cones and have needlelike leaves. Although these tall, straight trees are

listed as the worlds greatest lumber source, you will find pine products ranging from paint to paper.

One particular pine found in the Great Lakes region, New England, and southeastern Canada has a distinct, reddish-brown bark. The red pine is not as large as its elegant cousin, the eastern white pine, but it is a handsome tree nevertheless. Its needles are long and sharp. Bunched in pairs, these clusters of needles are part of the red pines charm.

When a needle cluster filters down to the forest floor, its glory is gone. No longer is it part of a majestic standing timber. No longer is it green and lush. The cluster is reduced to the thankless job of being a floor mat. You might have felt this way before. When no one is looking, you go ahead and perform the duty assigned to you. When no reward is offered, you give up your own precious time. Perhaps you feel it would only be right to visit an elderly, sick person. Maybe you need to confront a friend in mercy for something he did. You don't want to. You know you have to. So, you go. There are no open rewards for these good deeds and they are seldom "fun." But, God is merciful, and when He gives you the strength to act in mercy, He rewards you with unbelievable heavenly blessings for being the thankless floor mat.

Try it. Be the soft cushion of pine needles for a friend. Be merciful all the time, not just when fame and glory are on the line.

Chestnut—From North America, Asia, Africa, and Europe hails the mighty chestnut. Make that the once mighty chestnut. The most important forest tree at one time, the chestnut (beech family) was prized for its decay-resistant wood. Then around 1905, a savage killing spree began. For 35 years, a fungal disease consumed most of the North American chestnuts. Chestnut blight, as it was called, decimated a huge population of that great tree with the spreading branches and the starchy nuts.

Such a contagious disease is scary. But what if a good thing was just as infectious? What if acts of mercy were so rampant that their spread in the church was unavoidable? Cool, huh?

Maybe that is an exaggeration, but it is true that if you treat anyone with care and mercy, they are more likely, by God's grace, to treat you in the same manner. If you are merciful to 10 friends, and each of them is merciful to 10 other friends, and each of those 100 are merciful to 10 friends...

...The point is pretty obvious. You need to make mercy as contagious as the chestnut blight. You can't get too much of this good thing.

Yew—The name "yew" refers to a group of evergreen trees and shrubs. With a deep, enchanting color, yew wood is nearly as splendid as mahogany. However, the yews beauty is deceiving. Besides kitchen cabinets or coffee tables, uses of the yew include more formidable tools. Back in 1415, this was painfully evident to the French hotshots at Agincourt (ah- zhin - coor).

Preparing for yet another round of the One Hundred Years War, the French knights were quite snazzy with their expensive gear and well-groomed horses. The English soldiers had no horses, only longbows made of yew wood. Knights against footsoldiers. Armor versus arrows. Suffice it to say that the English were the underdogs.

The result of the battle was not as the French had hoped. History records a blowout in favor of the visitors. The knights were defeated by the now-famous English archers and their longbows.

You can use the longbow, too. Let mercy "fight" your battles. Rather than employing the heavy artillery of harsh words and verbal darts, all you need is the longbow of mercy. What is mercy? See Matthew 5:7 or James 2 The Word of God insists that mercy is compassion that causes one to help the weak and afflicted- a cardinal Christian virtue. From the "tree" perspective, it may be difficult to carefully define an act of mercy. Don't worry. Simply think about yourself today. Did you exhibit Christian compassion or were you more into injury, disturbance, and violence? Remember the song from grade school?

I have roots growing down to the water.
I have leaves growing up to the sunshine,
And the fruit that I bear is a sign
Of the life in me.

I am shade from the hot summer sundown.
I am nest for the birds of the heaven.
I'm becoming what the Lord of trees
Has meant me to be—
A strong, young tree. ❖

Tom is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Watching Daily At My Gates

We need writers if this devotional is to continue. If you contribute even one month, you will recieve our writers newsletter.

by Skip Hunter
Reprinted from August 1994 Beacon Lights

October 1

Read Romans 1:1-15.

Young people, is your faith spoken of throughout all the world? For some of you that world is bigger than others. But each of you has a world of existence. What do those about you know about your faith? Do they know anything? Do you hide the fact that you believe in Jesus Christ crucified, resurrected, and ascended? Do they know that you believe in salvation by grace alone? Do they see your Biblical knowledge as it is manifested in your lives? If the answer to the above questions is no, then why not! Are you ashamed of the power of God? Paul was not, as he makes abundantly clear in this letter to the Romans. We must not either be if we desire Christ to confess our names before God the Father. Sing or read Psalter 50.

October 2

Read Romans 1:16-32.

In verse sixteen we have the essence of evangelism, that is, not being ashamed of the gospel of Christ. I wrote of this in yesterday's reading when I spoke of not hiding the faith. The reason for this is elementary. The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation. Each of us in the office of believer is a prophet. God may use any one of us to proclaim the good news to an elect person and bring them to salvation. This should help us see the importance of showing our faith. Not for our glory is this done but rather for the glory and honor of God's name. True, we believe that it is by the word officially preached that a person receives grace, but yet God uses the means of our showing the power of salvation to bring His people under the preaching. May He grant us the grace never to be ashamed of the gospel. Sing or Read Psalter 176

October 3

Read Romans 3:1-18.

Do you think that verse 10 leaves us with no hope? Does this verse say to you that I may as well sow many wild oats since we are all unrighteous? It better not. The Holy Spirit did not mean it that way when he inspired Paul to write those words. Rather these words should show to us the necessity of a Savior, since, of ourselves, we can do nothing good and certainly can do nothing to merit eternal life. No, this verse and the ones around it should drive us to Christ and cause us to ask Him to make intercession with the Father on our behalf. We need the Savior as He is portrayed in the Gospel, and we need Him because of our wretched condition. Let us make this part of every prayer we make, knowing that He will make all of our prayers acceptable to the Father. Sing or read Psalter 140.

October 4

Read Romans 3:19-31.

Verse 23 is a reiteration of yesterday's verse. Verse 24 is the glorious hope that we have in Christ Jesus. Do you know what it means to be justified? Do you understand that this is a legal concept in which we are declared righteous before God? This is necessary for the child of God since this is one of the steps of the order of salvation. Take a minute and think about this concept. Justified-found with out guilt. What a tremendous thing that is when we have just said that we are completely unrighteous. We are not left without hope, people of God. We have been justified through the blood of Christ. Do our lives show the gratitude expected because of such justification? Sing or read Psalter 168.

October 5

Read Romans 2:1-16.

Do we sometimes go through life thinking that God ignores some of our actions? Do we think that we hide some of our deeds from the all-knowing God? If we do, we are fooling ourselves. Not only does God know all things and see all things, at the last day He will judge all things and will, as verse 6 states "render to every man according to his deeds." For the unbeliever this does not bother them because they are unbelievers. But for the elect child of God it should cause him daily to go to his knees and confess his sins. This verse should help us in our practical lives. We should live holy lives not just in fear of judgment but because we should desire to bring honor upon God's holy name. Sing or read Psalter 162.

October 6

Read Romans 2:17-29.

Paul continues on his theme of showing the faith to those around us. Today is the Lord's Day. How did we keep it? Could our next door neighbors tell at every moment of the day that it was Sunday from our actions? Did we confess the truths of the fourth commandment with our actions as well as with our mouths? The old saying "actions speak louder than words" is definitely true here. God is not pleased when we desecrate His day. Our desecrating of the Sabbath will not be a way for us to show our faith to those around us. Let us be busy in using the whole day to His honor and His glory. Sing or read Psalter 320.

October 7

Read Romans 4:1-12.

This chapter continues speaking about the idea of justification. Paul uses familiar Old Testament examples to speak of this principle of

salvation. David felt the power of justification even as he was forgiven of his grievous sin with Bathsheba. Is this our experience? Do we feel the power of justification and then show it in our lives? The book of Romans is very doctrinal, but it is also very practical. We must live the principle of salvation, and as we stated in the beginning of the month, cause our faith to be seen by the world. Justified by grace-what a wonderful concept! Let us pray for the grace to live it throughout our lives. Sing or read Psalter 83.

October 8

Read Romans 4:13-25.

Paul continues to use the lives of Old Testament saints to drive home the point of justification. Here Abraham is held up as an example of one who walked by faith not by sight. Abraham by faith waited for the birth of the promised son who would make him father of nations. True, his faith was weak at times, but yet the Holy Spirit testifies of the strength of his faith as he gave glory to God. There is not much that we must add to verse 20. It testifies of the fact that our salvation is of God alone. It also points to the life of sanctification that we must live on this earth. Young people, do you live your catechism lessons? Or, are they forgotten as you walk out the door? Sing or read Psalter 407.

October 9

Read Romans 5:1-11.

Peace with God. What a beautiful thought! Do you have that peace, young people, fathers, mothers, elderly saints? That peace is a special grace given only to the elect. As we observe the world around us, and even our own lives at times, it may be hard to grasp this concept. The Holy Spirit promises that peace is a fruit of our justification. This peace is only obtained by living lives of those who believe in justification. This peace will take us through those hard and difficult times that God uses to try our faith. That peace will enable us to sleep even when it seems that all is against us. That peace will give us the comfort to confess Lord's Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Enjoy that peace, people of God, it is not for everyone. Sing or read Psalter 152.

October 10

Read Romans 5:12-21.

In this chapter Paul lays out the truth that salvation is only by the blood of Christ. It was necessary for the Christians in Paul's day to believe that truth. It is just as necessary for the church of the twentieth century to believe and confess that truth. Verse 17 shows the beauty of that truth. It shows that through more grace than we deserve, we receive the gift of righteousness. If you struggle with the truth that salvation comes without any effort on our part, study these chapters of Romans. Read them often and let the truth soak into your every spiritual fiber. It is a beautiful truth and one which can only be understood by the help of the Holy Spirit. Pray for that help daily. Sing or read Psalter 5

October 11

Read Romans 7:1-11.

In verses 2 and 3 Paul speaks the serious truths of marriage. He tells us that marriage is for life. It is not to be broken by man. It is a law of God. This truth is played with in the world today and sadly in the church world as well. Young people, as you date, do you think about how serious marriage is? Are you aware that it is a God-given picture of the relationship of Christ and His Church? Young married couples, are your marriages pictures of that relationship? Older married couples, are your marriages shining examples to the young? God has given us this very beautiful picture. Let us pray for the grace to let our married lives be masterpieces to His honor and glory. Sing or read Psalter 360.

October 12

Read Romans 7:12-25.

People of God, is the cry of verse 19 your cry? Do we confess our depravity daily as we look back on our deeds and realize what we have done? After we realize our weaknesses, what is our response? Do we shrug our shoulders and say we can do no better? Or, do we bow the knee in prayer and ask for the forgiveness for our sins of omission and commission? Paul in ending this section of this epistle wants to make it abundantly clear that we can do nothing for our salvation of ourselves. In verse 24 he call himself a wretched man with no hope. In the final verse of this chapter he portrays the beauty of grace. May this be our confession as we live in this sinful world. May our God give to us the grace to delight in the law of God and walk in His ways. Sing or read Psalter 42.

October 13

Read Romans 6:1-11.

The words of verse 5 give us great comfort. Christ took our sins to the grave, and then through His resurrection He gave us the victory over sin and death. Christ's resurrection was full of power and glory as He burst through the grave in triumph. We, too, share that triumph because we are engrafted into Him. As we "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy", let us enjoy the glory bestowed upon us by Christ's resurrection. Sing or read Psalter 318

October 14

Read Romans 6:12-23.

After justification in the order of salvation comes sanctification. Sanctification concerns our walk in this life. Sanctification means that we must live a life of holiness to the Lord. This is shown in verse 12. We must not let the old man of sin rule our lives. As we start our work week, are we conscious of this as we carry out the work God has set before us? As we play and entertain ourselves this week and all of our lives, do we do so in holiness? Walking a walk of the sanctified child of God means that we will walk holily every day of our lives. Let us resolve to do this, not by our strength of course, but through the power of the Spirit. Sing or read Psalter 271.

October 15

Read Romans 8:1-23.

Verse 18 states a truth which should bring extreme comfort to every child of God. All of us have sufferings in this life. For some it seems that those sufferings never end. Deaths of loved ones, financial worries, family troubles, and many more seem to afflict the people of God. Sometimes when we are at the end of our rope, so to speak, we cry out, "Why? God!" We must then be drawn to the cross. We must ponder the anguish of our beloved Savior as he cried out, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Then we see the glory which became His in heaven and we must consider the truth found in verse 18. Our sufferings in this life are but a small picture of the glory that will be ours in heaven as we sit before the Lamb's throne. Let us hold on to this truth as we walk through this valley of the shadow of death. Sing or read Psalter 53.

October 16

Read Romans 8:24-39.

Yesterday we spoke of suffering and looked at the Word of God as it related to that topic. Today we see another verse which can provide us with much comfort and hope in times of suffering and affliction. Verse 28 is that verse. Can you confess that, people of God? Do you try to confess that, young people? Has this been your experience, older saints? Do all things work for our good? The answer, of course is yes. How do we know that truth? How can we confess that truth when things look the darkest? We can only do that by faith. We can only do it because we are those who love God because we have been called. Study this verse, inscribe it upon your hearts, and learn to confess it daily. Sing or read Psalter 172.

October 17

Read Romans 10:1-10.

Young people, do you believe that Jesus is your Savior and has given to you the righteousness which is yours by faith? If you do, have you made public confession of your faith, and have you taken your place among the ranks of the church militant? This is necessary in the lives of all believers. We must say what we believe. We must wish to join the church where the marks are most purely manifested. We must wish to join with that church and partake in the fellowship of the Lord's supper. Young people is that your desire? Are you willing to be counted among the followers of Christ? That should be the desire of every child of God as he matures unto a man or woman of faith. Make it your desire and pray to God that He will give to you the grace to make it come to pass. Sing or read Psalter 27.

October 18

Read Romans 10:11-21.

In these verses Paul explains that the way of salvation is by means of the preaching of the word. What about that preaching, people of God. Can you remember the texts of both of Sunday's sermons? Do you remember the themes? Is the preaching of the Word of God dear to your hearts, or are you quick to find fault with the preacher forgetting that he is the ambassador of Christ. God's Word must be precious to us, and we must desire to hear and remember it. Young men, have you examined your heart to see if God is calling you to bring the good news of the gospel? This must be done as well. The preaching is precious to us in these last days. Let us cleave to it and let us ask God to give to us shepherds to lead us into the green pastures of the Word. Read or Sing Psalter 334.

October 19

Read Romans 9:1-17.

Election, reprobation, predestination. Are you familiar with these doctrines? Do you love these doctrines? You should, you know because they are very basic to your salvation. That's what we find in today's reading. Sometimes we ask the question why did God ordain such doctrines? The answer is found in verse 17. Even though only Pharaoh is used as an example here, every person who ever lived or was conceived, was for the glory of God. Pharaoh in the extreme hardness of his heart, like all wicked, was used by God to show his power and glory. As we study the history of the world, we must realize that this is always true. Sing or read Psalter 223.

October 20

Read Romans 9:18-33.

The truths of yesterday's reading are completed in section of Romans 9 especially as they are evident in our lives. God not only uses the wicked to show forth his glory, but He also uses us. From eternity those who by grace were elected to everlasting life were fitted for lives which showed forth the glory of God. In these verses the illustration of a potter and his clay are used to show this truth. God, the supreme potter, takes each lump of clay and fits it for the purpose He has sovereignly determined. In gratitude we must live lives which reflect that glory. Are you doing that young people. Did you do that Friday night? Did you do that in your play yesterday? Did you do that as you worshipped today? Is that your resolve throughout this week? May God give us the grace to walk in this way. Sing or read Psalter 408.

October 21

Read Romans 11:1-17.

Branches of wild olives, did you pay attention to verse 17? In today's church of Christ we are all wild olive branches. We were not originally the chosen branches, but by God's grace we were taken from corrupt root stock and engrafted into the line of covenant. This is a glorious idea, and just as no wild branch can of itself become engrafted into a good tree so can no corrupt seed be engrafted in of itself. It must be the work of another, and that other is the husbandman who takes care of the holy root. But just because we are joined to that holy root, let us not become lax in our lives, but rather let us live them to bring forth fruits of thankfulness. Sing or read Psalter 220.

October 22

Read Romans 11:18-36.

Read verse 33 again to yourselves. Are the truths found in it something which can be understood in a matter of minutes? The answer, of course, is no. God's wisdom and knowledge are deeper than anything that we can imagine. We must never be guilty of bringing God down to our level or try to raise ourselves up to His. We must confess God as God and realize that we are nothing in comparison. Being that incomprehensible gives us great comfort because we know out of the depths of His wisdom He does all things good for us. We never need to fear about the future because He holds it in the palms of His hands and will never let it go. Let us confess this God as our God and give to Him the glory due to His name. Sing or read Psalter 352

October 23

Read Romans 12:1-8.

In this chapter Paul presents truths concerning the church on earth. We are one body which must work together for the good of all. But each of us has different gifts to use in the church. Some are to be ministers. They must use this calling well. Some are elders and deacons. They, too, must use the offices for the good of Christ's church and for His glory. Each of us is required to give to the poor. This must be done without fanfare, without boasting, but with simplicity. Giving must be done in love. Have we prepared ourselves throughout the week to give to God what is due Him? Are we ready to show the love of the saints who are in need? This, too, must be done by grace and by grace alone. Sing or read Psalter 24.

October 24

Read Romans 12:9-21.

Paul continues in his exhortation to proper life in the church. Verse 12 tells us to love one another even as they are our brothers in the faith. We must prefer another's honor before our own. Practically this is very hard. By nature we refuse to love the brother and put his welfare before our own. But yet the Holy Spirit call us to that very act. By grace He equips us to do this tremendous task. Let us walk out of this confession. First let us love the Lord our God with all our hearts and then let us love our neighbor as ourselves. By doing these things we keep the whole law. Pray for that grace, people of God, and pray for that grace for each other as well. Sing or read Psalter 371.

October 25

Read Romans 14:13-23.

Verse 17 continues to speak of things we do on this earth. Paul speaks of such mundane things as eating and drinking. They by themselves are not part of our salvation. But yet according to verse 18 they must be done to the honor and glory of God. We must serve Christ in every part of our daily lives. There is nothing to which that we can say, "O, that does not matter how I do it." We must consciously try to do all things with the honor of God's name in mind. We see that if we serve Christ in our daily affairs, we will be acceptable to God. Another fruit of serving Christ is that we will be approved of men. We do not look just for that approval, but rather we look for that approval so that God's name will be magnified. Let us pray for the grace to live our daily lives with a goal to serving Christ. Sing or read Psalter 325.

October 26

Read Romans 13.

In this chapter our relationship to authority is examined. The principals are simple. First of all God is the supreme authority. Secondly, all authority is given its power by God. Thirdly, our obedience to authority is obedience to God. People of God, what is your relationship to all authority? Children and young people do you obey your parents and teachers at all times. Older people of God, do you obey the law enforcement that God has placed over you at all times. Members of God's church, do you obey the elders that have been ordained by God? If we answer no to any of these questions, we are disobeying God. In verse 12 we see that we must put off disobedience and walk in obedience. Verse 13 practically tells us how that is possible. Let us honor those in authority and therefore let us honor God. Sing or read Psalter 109.

October 27

Read Romans 14:1-12.

What a beautiful confession of faith is made in verse 8. Living or dying to the Lord! Is that how we live our lives? As we go about our daily lives are we living with our Lord in the forefront of our hearts and minds. School is or will be starting soon. Students are you preparing yourselves to work to the honor and glory of God. We must, you know. He has given to us that duty. It is an awesome responsibility. Only the elect child of God can carry it out. He can only do it by grace. Pray for that grace, young people and parents. Dying in the Lord. Are any of us ready to die? Are we ready to die in the Lord? This, too, takes grace. Let us pray for that as well as we live on this earth waiting to be taken to our eternal home in heaven. Sing or read Psalter 236.

October 28

Read Romans 15:1-16.

Children, young people, adults, do you study your Bibles faithfully? Do you know the stories of the people of God? Do you know the Psalms of comfort? Can you find proof for major points of doctrine? Each of us, no matter what our age, has that responsibility. Verse 4 makes that abundantly clear. What has been written was written for our learning. Now of course this must be more than mere head knowledge, though that is important as well. This knowledge must be with the heart as well. The Bible has been given to us for our use by God. He commands us to know it and to know it well. A person never becomes proficient at a task unless he works at it often. Let us in the school year, catechism year, society season, as well as in our homes spend much time with God's word and learn it to His satisfaction. Sing or read Psalter 322.

October 29

Read Romans 15:17-33.

Striving together in prayers to God is what verse 30 instructs us to do. As part of the family of God we should know each other's needs, and we should bring those needs to God in prayers both publicly and privately. Scripture demonstrates the power of prayer. We must pray often or as Scripture puts it unceasingly. We must pray for others. Sometimes it is easy to pray for our own needs and desires, but we must not forget about our neighbor whom we are to love as ourselves. Learn each others burdens-this does not mean to be nosy— but rather in love use the communion of saints to become close to the brothers and sisters of the faith. Then bring those needs to God in prayer. God will bless those prayers with the answer that is good for His elect people. Sing or read Psalter 187.

October 30

Read Romans 16:1-16.

Could we be called "succourer of many"? Succourer means helper. Do people hear your name and say that you are willing to help? If not, why not? Helping others should be an integral part of the life of the child of God. Christ helped us by dying for our sins. In gratitude we should always be willing to help others. Reread the parable of the good Samaritan. He was praised for being a neighbor and showing his love for God. Each of us can do this in our own ways. Each of us has a great opportunity to show our love to the neighbor. True some are better at it, but yet each of us has that calling. Let us do that in obedience to the commandment to help the neighbor knowing that God will bless us in this way. Sing or read Psalter 26.

October 31

Read Roman 16:17-27.

Before Paul ends this epistle with greeting to various members of the church at Rome as well as to the entire church, he warns the church about fellowshipping with those who oppose the faith. This are pertinent words of admonition for us as well. In this day and age in which we are to love everybody, these words of Scripture are very applicable. First we have to mark those who go contrary to God's law. This means we must know that law well ourselves. Then we must avoid them. This means actively staying out of their paths. We do not have coffee with them, and we do not invite them to our houses. We must keep our houses pure and unspotted from evil doctrines. Let us do this, so that we are ready for the return of Christ. Sing or read Psalter 69.

Rome's Demise

by Beth De Vries

The city of Rome was a great city, but like all great cities on this earth, it too fell from prominence. In its day, Rome was a thriving metropolis of wealth, politics and culture. The city was attacked in the year 410 AD, however it had been on the decline for many years. There are many theories about the fall of Rome, but one fact remains the same—along with the fall came the eventual end of the great Roman Empire. This fall is another example of the truth that God does not allow a single world power on this earth until the time of the anti-Christian kingdom which too will see its end. Only the heavenly kingdom of God will stand eternally.

In the year AD 410, Aleric, a barbarian from the Germanic tribes, led an attack on the city of Rome. Two years earlier, Aleric had besieged the city, but had to settle for payment of tribute monies. This time, he was successful in overcoming the city.

Aleric led a tribe of barbarians known as the Visigoths which left their homeland near the Rhine River to search for food. Already in 376 AD, the Visigoths had begged to be admitted to the Roman Empire due to a lack of food. However, they rebelled after being mistreated by the Roman officials. This tension was due to a number of things. In the first place there were differences of blood and language that separated these people. The greatest difference, however, appears to be that the Visigoths were Arians. Arians were followers of Arius who taught the heresy that the Son was not part of the Godhead, thus denying the Trinity that was at the heart of the Western church and Christianity. The Romans did not want to lose their property to these heretics. These differences as well as the need for food led to the tensions between these two races.

The attack and sack of Rome lasted only three days and left the city basically intact, though many movable treasures were taken. The Visigoths were more interested in food and material goods than the destruction of a city and empire. Their greatest disappointment was that great quantities of food were not found in the city.

The city did not fall on account of one great attack but rather due to many years of decline in the Roman Empire. The Empire had been split into an east and west faction, individually ruled by sons of the former emperor. This meant that the west no longer had the financial support of the east. Roman government also did not include the common people enough; therefore, after many centuries the people lost loyalty to an empire that always wanted more tax money.

Slaves had been a vital part of sustaining the empire, and when the Romans quit conquering and bringing back slaves their physical help decreased. As a result of decreasing slaves more men were needed to stay on the farms. There also were plagues in the second and third centuries which decreased the population.

Some have blamed Christianity for the fall of Rome. Rome had been a very pagan culture and as Christianity rose to be the state religion the people became disinterested in the worldly goods. Thus, some conclude that Christianity was the reason for the fall of Rome. Augustine, in his book *The City of God*, refuted this idea claiming that the pagans who encouraged immorality and the love of riches were the cause of the fall of Rome. These selfish values were at the root of Rome's problems. Augustine also demonstrates that Rome was being punished for its former sins of paganism and persecution of Christians. He also discourses about the fact that God is sovereignly in control of history and that earthly kingdoms and cities will fall. God has not allowed a complete world kingdom but has thwarted all man's attempts since the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

Man continually tries to be wiser than God. The great earthly wisdom of the Roman scholars led them to idols rather than the true God. The men who influence the great earthly powers put their trust likewise in earthly wisdom. They may not worship pagan idols today, yet anything worshipped beside the true God is idolatry. God will punish all who depart from His ways and put their trust in earthly things.

We must remember to seek wisdom and understanding through God and His written Word. This is illustrated in Hosea 14:9 which reads "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein." This wisdom shall be seen in how our lives are lived.

As we see the rise of many earthly powers and know that the anti-Christian kingdom has yet to be established may we find comfort and strength in the fact that God is faithful and will thwart all these efforts at an earthly kingdom. For we shall see only the eternal kingdom in the new heavens and earth after Christ's return. ❖

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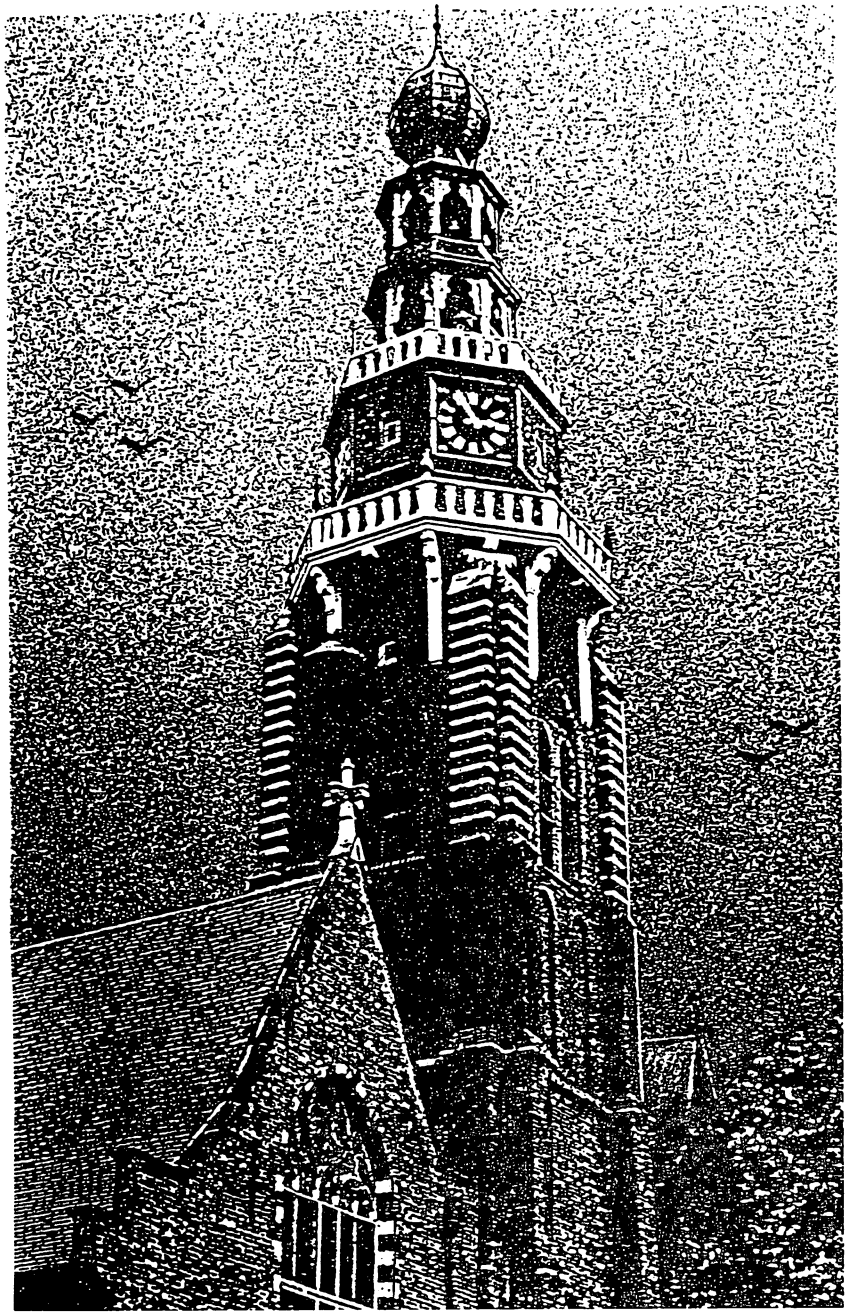
The Jacob Church of Flushing

by J.P. de Klerk



The fishing town of Vlissingen (Flushing) has a rich history, and the Jacob-Church "survived" it. The tower is famous for its beautiful carillon, that can be played by experts on this instrument, and every day the well-known traditional melodies can be heard. It took twenty years to build this Jacob Church (1308-1328). It was enlarged in 1500, and again in 1558; there were many Reformed people in those days. Flushing became in 1489 the property of Maximiliaan I of Bourgondia, a noble and courageous knight, who fought many times against French armies, occupied the whole of The Netherlands, but lost it later. In 1493 he became emperor of Germany. His son fortified Flushing. It became later a protectorate of Prince William I of Orange-Nassau, who welcomed there Calvinists from France and England. In the 17th century trade and industry blossomed. Flushing was destroyed in 1809 by fighting between armies and navy of France and England, who both wanted to use the harbor. The church was burnt down in 1911 but quickly restored in 1915 (State-Reformed). A great attraction for tourists from all over the world. ❖

J.P. de Klerk is an author and journalist from the Protestant Reformed Church of New Zealand.

The Walburg Church of Zutphen

by J.P. de Klerk

The Dutch architect, Dr. H.P. Berlage, made often in his spare time drawings in old cities and so in the summer of 1920 he went early in the morning to the center of Zutphen, in the Eastern part of The Netherlands. There he found the Walburg Church surrounded by white plastered houses that obstructed his view.

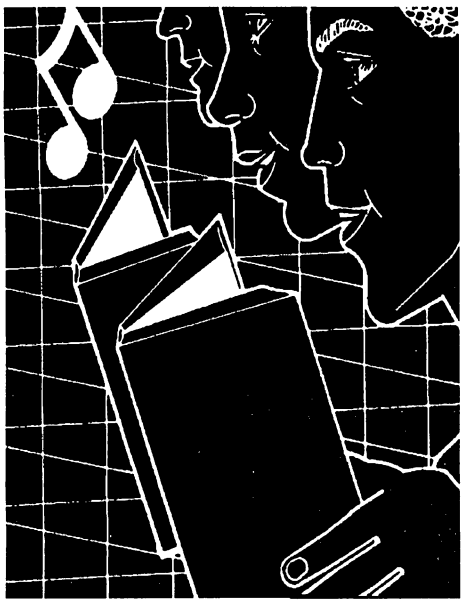
This State Reformed Church was built in 1200, ten years after that the city was officially recognized, named after the British missionary Walburg from Wessex, who came with Bonifacius to the Low Countries (in the eighth century). In 1430 the church was enlarged and a chapel was added in 1563 followed by a "librije" (a library with handmade books, chained on special tables).

In 1572 the city was claimed by Duke van den Bergh on behalf of the Prince of Orange. The church became Reformed. But on November 17 of the same year the son of the Spanish Duke of Alva came with his army (his name was Don Frederick) and murdered the whole population. In 1591 Prince Maurits (son of Prince William I of Orange-Nassau) came with his well-trained soldiers and forced the Spanish to surrender.

The Reformed Professor Johannes Fontanus organized a Synod in the Walburg Church in 1580. The Reformed minister Wilhelmus Baudartius (1565-1640) lived 42 years in Zutphen and helped with the translation of the Bible (Old Testament) in Dutch. In 1604 he was assisted by the Reformed theologian Sebastiaan Damman (1578-1640). In 1618 he was sent to the national Synod of Dordrecht where he was "scriba."

In 1672 the Reformed believers had to fight with a battalion of French soldiers who wanted to return of the Roman Catholic faith in the Walburg Church. It took quite a while to get them away. ❖

J.P. de Klerk is an author and journalist from the Protestant Reformed Church of New Zealand.



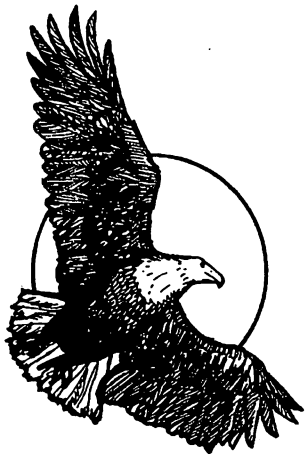
SING PRAISE

Lift up your voice to praise the Lord;
His name alone must be adored;
He showers blessings day by day
And leads us in His chosen way.
Let songs of praise fill heart and tongue,
Revere His name, both old and young.

He is the mighty King of kings
Whose arm to us salvation brings;
Though trials threaten, He will guide,
We're not alone—He's by our side;
His tender mercy to us shows,
He all our cares and sorrow knows.

Sing praise; He is the Lord of all—
Let us, His children, prostrate fall.
O come, His holiness proclaim
And magnify His glorious name.
With adoration bend the knee,
Exalt His name eternally.

THELMA WESTRA



Short Story Writing Contest

A sparce response to the writing contest introduced in June has re-opened the doors for your opportunity to win a few bucks. Just write a short story that reflects everyday Christian experience, put it in the mailbox or electronic mail by December 2, 1996, and you will be eligable to win a $100, $50, or $25 prize. Work together with someone, modify a school paper, or create your own work. Parents, encourage your children to stretch their literary wings.

Isaiah 58: 13-14— Joy in Sabbath Observance

If on the Sabbath you will turn
From doing your own pleasure
And keep it holy to the Lord
Your joy will know no measure.
Sabbath you'll call a great delight;
You'll honor God the Lord,
Not seeking ways or words of self
But ever looking toward
The Holy One of Israel—
And He'll cause you to ride
Upon the lofty places of
The earth—and there abide
With Jacob, as your heritage.
For lo, His mouth has spoken
And it shall surely come to pass;
His word cannot be broken.

THELMA WESTRA

A distinguishing mark of the child of God in the times in which we live, is the rejection of the evermore popular gambling casinos, as being incompatible with the Christian life. As men become increasingly lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, this distinct view will become more evident.

The Metamorphosis of Gambling

by Becky Kalsbeek

Gambling. This word would not raise an eyebrow in many conversations in the world to day. Many people talk of a dream vacation in Las Vegas, which is the gamblers paradise. Almost every state in the U.S. has legalized gambling, except Utah and Hawaii. The lottery abounds. Indian casinos are mushrooming (most casinos have been built in the last five years). There is no lack of things to bet on, the list is long: horse races, dog races, sporting events.

With gambling so close and so prevalent, one can get hardened to it and even a Christian can start to think that gambling isn't such a bad activity. Why is gambling becoming so accepted? Wasn't gambling once associated with organized crime? Wasn't it once considered as bad as heroine dealing? How did gambling's image change from being a vice to being harmless entertainment?

There are many factors that have contributed to this change. Some say one way gambling's image was changed was through the stance of the Roman Catholic Church on gambling. Throughout the depression the church used bingo, raffles and Monte Carlo casino nights as fund raisers. The Pennsylvania Catholic Conference (which is the official public affairs agency of the Catholic dioceses of Pennsylvania) in a statement written September 1, 1994 states: "the Catholic Church, according to its traditional theology, does not consider gambling to be intrinsically evil."

Others consider WWII instrumental in changing a mass audiences' opinion about gambling. With the stress and worry of war, many soldiers found gambling a relaxing recreation. In the military, the soldiers where sheltered from any ill effects of losing all their money, as the U.S. government was feeding, clothing and sheltering them and any immoral associations were reduced.

The most obvious way gambling's image was changed was through a deliberate attempt in the early 1980's by leaders in corporate gambling enterprises. They used mass marketing techniques to transform gambling's image. Gambling used to be associated with the mob and its seedy underworld, and maybe gambling still conjures up that image in your mind; but, today gambling (especially casinos) are being heralded as family entertainment. Casinos are being built to which parents can take their children. The gambling industry knows if they can get the kids hooked early, they will be back as adults.

The U.S. government has also helped paint gambling's mask of goodness by allowing the lottery, Indian casinos and riverboat gambling. Politicians cannot be impartial judges of gambling when lobbyists for gambling corporations finance many politicians re-election campaigns. This was evident from a January 15, 1996 U.S. News and World Report article entitled "Gambling Fever, Our Red-Hot Passion: are We Addicted?" The article showed that between Jan. 1993 and Oct. 1995, the Republican party was given $2 million dollars and the Democratic

party $1.1 million from the gambling industry. If leaders in government are taking gambling enterprises' money we should not be surprised when new casinos multiply.

And we do see gambling starting to take a strong foothold. Through these various means, Roman Catholic Church, mass media and even our own government, gambling has metamorphosed into an activity which is seemingly good and harmless.

As Christian young people we need to be aware of these types of transformations so that we aren't deceived into thinking, "Gambling isn't really that bad. Some people like to shop and spend money that way, I like to spend a few bucks at a casino." Or: "Those poor people who get caught up in gambling and become compulsive gamblers. They have a disease." Maybe we would become like so many Americans who say, "Gambling might not be O.K. for me, but I don't care if my neighbor gambles." A Christian will not be lured by these types of thoughts if he remembers that gambling is a sin because God calls gambling a sin.

The reformed position against gambling is that gambling violates the principles of Christian stewardship. We believe that nothing in this life is our own. Everything we have has been given to us by God. We must always ask ourselves how God would have us to use our houses, cars, food, clothing, money, and even our life so that we can better serve Him.

Many in the world do not have this view of life. They think that everything that they have belongs to them. To deny that all things belong to God is the root of covetousness.

God calls covetousness a sin and commands against this in the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet . . ." Motivating most gamblers is the lust for money, which is covetousness. Since covetousness is sin, gambling must be a sin also.

Gambling also violates the first commandment "Thou shalt have none other gods before me." When one gambles, with every throw of the dice or flip of the cards, he is trusting in a false god, the god of "luck" or "chance". Gambling is idolatry. The gambler, trusting in "chance", is no different than Israel of old, which worshipped the golden calves.

Even worse than worshipping a false god is the idea that one is a god. Richard Rosenthal, professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine, considers omnipotence (to feel all-powerful) the central concept for an understanding of (compulsive) gambling. This means that a person caught up in gambling is trusting in himself. He thinks he is controlling his own destiny. To trust in ones self, to be omnipotent -- isn't that making yourself a god?

All that a Christian does can be evaluated with the instruction of the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 33, which reads: good works are "only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory." Put gambling through this threefold test. Does a gambler have a true faith in God or does he trust "chance"? Is gambling an activity which is in accordance with God's law? We have seen that it is not in accordance with God's commands as gambling violates the first and tenth commandments. Is a gambling done for God's glory?

Gambling is a sin and like every sin there are effects. Even the world acknowledges this. They can see that gambling hurts the U.S. economy as gambling revenue is money that otherwise would have been spent on cars, clothes, food, lodging, restaurants, services, home sales, etc., and would have produced sales tax, business taxes, property taxes, etc. Gambling also produces social problems such as: compulsive gambling, increase in crime, impoverished people that the state will have to support through welfare. There are Americans which disapprove of gambling in our country because of these effects. As Christians we can agree with them, but ultimately we disapprove of gambling because it is an activity which God disapproves of in His Word.

Because Christians believe the Bible, we are distinct. *The Bible establishes the rule for our lives.* And although gambling might have seemed to transform itself from a maggot into a butterfly, we know that it does not fit in the mold which the Bible has for our lives. The world is constantly attacking our distinctive Christian lifestyle. We must be aware of the events and ungodly philosophies swirling around us. The image of sin might change, gambling might appear to be harmless, but we will not be deceived if we study God's Word and believe it. ❖

Becky is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Convention Memories

by Tamara DeMeester

Not only were a lot of friends made, but a lot of good memories were made at the 1996 Young People's Convention! This year's convention, as you may well know, was geared toward the making of godly friendships—an incredibly important activity of the Church. This year's convention not only allowed us to *make* friendships within the realms of the Church, but it also *instructed* us in the making and on the basis of them.

I am sure that when I say that the South Holland, Peace, and Bethel congregations did an excellent job in putting this convention together, I speak for all the conventioneers. We had a great time—the entire week! Monday was registration and a tour of Chicago. (Great place!) At night we had our first speech, given by Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma of our Holland, MI church. In his speech he stressed the importance of making friendships within the Church.

After the allotted six and one half hours of sleep (some of us receiving a significantly smaller amount), we were roused and sent on our way to Rev. Ron VanOverloop's speech on "Personal Friendships." (Rev. V.O. is pastor at Georgetown, MI PRC.) Later in the morning, we were divided into groups and were given the opportunity to discuss the Christian responsibility of choosing a career. The afternoon was reserved for what was called a "Team Building Course," a list of activities designed to show the importance of team interdependence, participation, and support. That night was "Twirp Night" and a chance for the guys to be "taken out to the ball game." ...The Cubs won.

Wednesday was one long thrill (for most) with "just a couple" hour-long waits during the course of the day. Great America was great fun for everyone, I am sure!

But for some Thursday poised an even bigger thrill, the banquet! The morning was filled with discussion groups (subject: Sunday observance) and free time, the afternoon with swimming, volleyball, and lazing in the sun. Then we had our last speech, during which Rev. Barry Gritters (pastor of Hudsonville, MI PRC) used a telephone receiver from his dorm room to introduce the topic of "Friendships in Dating and Marriage." ...and then it was time for the banquet. And despite a few shed tears and dashed hopes, the banquet was a success as was the lock-in that night.

And all too soon it was Friday and time to say goodbye to all the new friends. Many addresses were exchanged, hugs were given, and pictures taken. Many wonderful memories were made, but most importantly, the friendships that were made were godly friendships! ❖

Tamara is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Let Me Be a Woman

by Elisabeth Elliot
Review by Erin Kortering

Elisabeth Elliot's book, *Let Me Be a Woman*, deals with an issue which every young woman inevitably faces—womanhood.

Mrs. Elliot wrote this book to her daughter Valerie as a wedding gift. In it, she deals with many thoughts and questions young women have. Who am I? What does it mean to be a woman? She starts out in the first chapter telling woman that in order to understand *who* they are, they must understand *whose* they are. They must start with the One who made them. God has ordained each woman's womanhood from before the foundation of the earth.

But what is my role in life? Where do I stand? Mrs. Elliot states in chapter five that because all things are created by God, they were made for something. This includes women. We have a purpose and a divine design. Woman was made to serve man and be a help meet unto him from the very creation of the world. In Psalm 144:12, the psalmist says, "May our daughters be like corner pillars cut for the structure of a palace." A woman is like a pillar. The Lord cuts and shapes her to fit into a certain place in order to be upholding and supportive. Each woman is molded and shaped differently, thus causing limitations. Yet when she accepts the limitations God has given her, she finds her calling, and ultimately, her freedom in life.

She deals extensively with the issue of marriage and what a woman must understand before she is married in order to have a long and happy union with the man she loves. Some of the questions she answers are, Whom is it you marry? What is marriage? What makes a marriage work?

Each woman must understand that when she marries, she marries a sinner. A sinner, by virtue of the name, has sins and a woman must accept these sins. She must love, accept, and forgive just as she would like to be loved, accepted and forgiven. Second, a woman marries a man. He will be masculine in every way she is feminine. In understanding his masculinity, she can learn to understand the man she loves better. Third, a woman marries a husband. She should not expect him to fulfill all the roles in her life that may have been incomplete. He is her husband; he cannot be father, brother, mother, sister. When a woman marries she must remember that she is to forsake all others and cleave to him. Mrs. Elliot strongly upholds the principle of "leaving and cleaving."

Now that each woman understands whom she marries, Mrs. Elliot goes on to state what marriage is. It is a relationship that gets either better or worse. To make certain their marriage gets better, they must form a triangle with the Lord, with Him at the head. As they both move toward Christ, they subsequently move closer to each other. Secondly, marriage is a union of two. The two become one, and if they are Christians, one in the Lord. Thirdly, marriage is a mirror. It reflects the other which can sometimes be painful. Each woman should come to realize that her attitude is reflected to her spouse and can set his entire mood. If she is happy, he is happy. If she is sad, he is sad. If she is depressed, he becomes depressed, too. With this in mind, each woman should try to create an environment at home that reflects peace and beauty. Last of all, marriage is a vocation. Each member is called to this task. Every married woman reading this will agree. A man is a woman's life. She gives herself to him day after day for her entire lifetime. This is the way God made it.

We finally come to the question, "What makes a marriage work?" I have spoken about this earlier in this book review. A woman must accept her God-ordained position. She will find peace when she realizes that her submission to her spouse is according to the will of God.

These are just a few of the things that Mrs. Elliot writes about in this book. She shares her wisdom and thoughts gathered through life on many, many things. The book is full of "gems" and "jewels." It was quite a blessing to read. ❖

Erin is a member of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Bauer, Michigan.

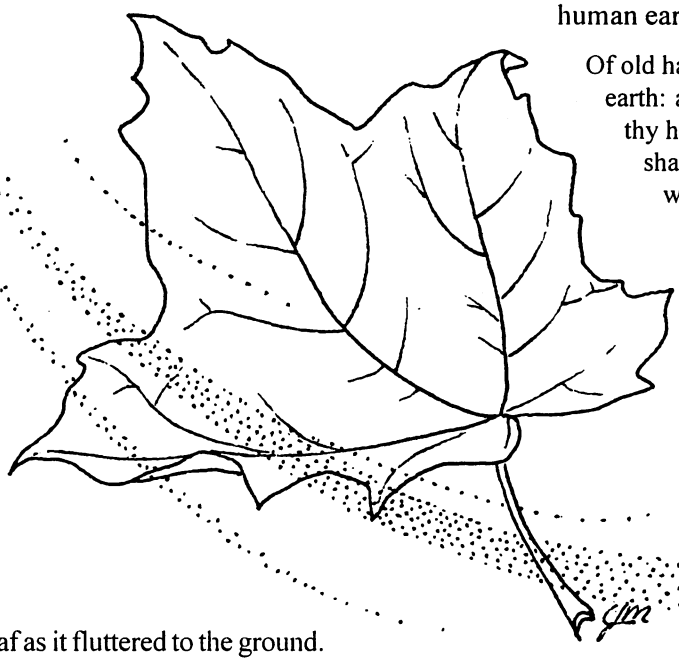
"LITTLE LIGHTS"

. . . let it shine!

Autumn Walk

by Connie Meyer

The air was fresh and the sky was a clear, deep blue that it so often is in autumn. Its blueness was made even deeper by the flame-colored leaves against it. Emily looked up and could see the golds, rusts, and reds of the towering oaks and maples around her. She wondered about it all. From the green grass she was standing upon, to the blue heavens she was standing below, there was nothing but bright colors. How pretty!—yet the leaves were pretty only because they were dying. Soon they would fall and become brown beneath the snow of winter. How sad!—until the bud and blossom of spring would start everything growing anew again.



Emily caught a maple leaf as it fluttered to the ground. This one was particularly beautiful—a blended yellow and orange. She smiled as she turned it around and examined it more closely. *Maple trees could be called "Joseph trees" for their coat of many colors,* she thought. Then that reminded her of something else. *Coat...vesture...garment...my memory verse!*

She quoted Psalm 102:25-27 aloud, though no other human ears received the sound:

> Of old has thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.

Emily knew the verses probably meant much more than she could understand now, but she thought she had at least a small beginning. She shuffled through some fallen leaves and started to walk home, glad that through all changes and seasons, God is always the same. ❖

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

Use the clues to guess each word. What do the vertical letters in the middle spell?

_ _ _ _ _ _ : *Buds and bloom, new shoots make room.*
_ _ _ _ _ _ : *Cool and clear, the colors are here.*
_ _ _ _ _ _ : *Rain or dry, "It's hot!" they cry.*
_ _ _ _ _ _ : *Cold and snow, the temp is low.*

BEACON LIGHTS

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Church News

BAPTISMS *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."* *Mark 16:16*

HOPE, MI

Holy baptism was administered to Emily Jean, daughter of Jon & Cori Hop and to Jesse David, son of Jonathan & Tricia Kamps.

The sacrament of adult baptism was administered to Jim Geerlings.

HULL, IA

Dalton Dean, son of Mr. & Mrs. Veryl Heynen, was presented for baptism.

PEACE, IL

Peter & Karen Medema presented their daughter, Sarah Lynn, for baptism.

Presented for baptism were Charity Sarah, daughter of Clyde & Mary Brown and Richard Grant, son of Dave & Kim Moore.

RANDOLPH, WI

The sacrament of baptism was administered to Jarod Mitchell, son of Dan & Andra Hanko.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH *"...and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."* *Romans 10:10*

EDGERTON, MN

Confession of faith in our Saviour was made by Jill Gunnink, Tiffany Brummel, Jonathan Brands, & Kristin Brands.

HOPE, MI

Public confession of faith was made by Sara Langerak and Jim Geerlings.

GRANDVILLE, MI

Shanon Engelsma has publicly confessed her faith in Jesus Christ.

FAITH, MI

Deborah Bruckbauer, Ted Brummel, Daran Deemter, Tomm Heyboer, Michelle Kaptein, Jason Scholton, and Sarah Velthouse made public their confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

PEACE, IL

Public confession of faith in the Lord Jesus was made by Karen Medema and Beth Eriks.

MARRIAGES *"...and they twain shall be one flesh."* *Matthew 19:5*

HOPE, MI

Rick DeVries and Mari Meulenberg were united in holy matrimony.

FAITH, MI

United in holy matrimony were Joel Engelsma and Kristi Brummel.

HOLLAND, MI

United in the bonds of matrimony were Peter Rizk and Chera Koops.

LYNDEN, WA

Jerry Vogel and Tami Wolters were united in marraige.