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Lights



The Old Testament Portrait of the Messiah



by John Huizenga

We believe that every page of the Old Testament speaks essentially about Christ. The Old Testament is not merely the history of the world before Christ came. It is not even the history of God's people with some divine revelation of the promised Messiah sprinkled here and there. No, every word of the Old Testament reveals Christ. Every detail about ceremonial washings, every detail about the sacrifices, every detail about the construction of the tabernacle, every "woe" of the prophets, every war and arrow shot is a careful detail in God's portrait of Christ.

After Adam had plunged the world into sin, God promised to send a Savior to deliver His people. God then began to reveal that Savior so that His people would know and recognize Him when He came. When the Savior did finally come after thousands of years of preparation and instruction, only a few recognized Him: Joseph and Mary, Zacharias and Elizabeth, some shepherds, and wise men from the East. The lack of recognition was not a failure on God's part to prepare an accurate portrait, but rather it was because God determined to reveal Christ only to a few. The blindness of man at the time of Christ's birth was in fact the finishing touch to Christ's portrait; a finishing touch that reinforced the truth that God is sovereign in every part of salvation.

Though we now have Christ's own word along with the Old Testament portrait, we cling to that portrait because there are many in the world today who are painting their own portraits of their own Messiah and would have us believe that theirs is more accurate and up-to-date, and therefore better. Churches everywhere are promoting portraits of a Savior who will establish an earthly kingdom in opposition to the whole Old Testament revelation and especially Christ's own word. Churches everywhere are promoting portraits of a Savior who throws out the life line but leaves it up to the sinner to grab on to it and get saved in opposition to the Old Testament portrait and clear instruction in the New Testament of the Savior as a shepherd who knows His sheep and sovereignly delivers them. It is very important, therefore, that we know our Savior as He is revealed in the whole of Scripture, Old Testament and New so that we can discern the truth.

God began His portrait of the Messiah with the dramatic and amazing strokes of Genesis 3:15. Against the deathly blackness of Adam's fall God sliced the brilliant life white of the antithesis. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman." Brilliant and dazzling, the first stroke of the portrait revealed to Adam the wonder of God as Savior. What grace, what mercy, what love, what justice God revealed of Himself in this word!

Adam stood before God, his covenant Friend; the Friend against Whom he had just lifted himself in proud rebellion. Adam, created to live in covenant fellowship with his Creator, had laughed God to scorn, had turned his back, and had given his love and devotion to Satan instead. Now he stood before his God in naked shame and guilt, and God dashed against the blackness of his soul the glory of His mercy and righteousness. Adam had never before seen these depths of God before. The revelation of mercy for such a sinner could only intensify the dark background hues of shame and guilt. How could he ever lift up his eyes to Him and look Him in the eye as a covenant Friend? Only in Christ.

In one verse, God sketched out for Adam the essential features of the promised Messiah. He would be born of a woman. He would have power to crush the head of Satan. He would deliver man from the awful power of sin. In Him man would behold things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard. In Paradise Adam had been filled with praise for God as Creator, how much more now for God as Savior!

What joy filled the heart of Adam and Eve when God gave them their first son! "I have gotten a man from the LORD" Eve cried. Was he the one to deliver them from sin and death? Surly he was not guilty of their sin in the garden! ... but he was. Cain was born in sin. Sin was a power that had penetrated all creation. Cain's guilt was Adam's guilt, and Cain plunged Adam and Eve into new depths of sorrow by his demonstration of wickedness in murder. The horrible effects of sin rapidly spread even to their children's children until every imagination of the thought of man's heart was only evil continually. What sort of savior would God send to deliver from such total depravity? Was there a limit to the mercy and grace of God? God's brush of revelation made the background of sin and death even darker, and the portrait brighter and sharper than before.

More dramatic lines were soon sliced into the canvas. The flood stroke revealed a salvation both cosmic and particular. The portrait now revealed that every sort of creature God had created would be delivered from death, but only an elect remnant of man. God called every kind of creature into the ark and God chose Noah and his family to delivered them from the hands of wicked men with the flood of water. Salvation comes by judgment. God is merciful but also just. The sin and offense against God would be punished. God's wrath would be satisfied. God would wash sin away in His mercy and righteous judgment.

The flood of water, however, did not and could not wash away sin, only the blood of the Savior could do that. No physical cleansing, no act of man or earthly power could wash away sin. After the flood there was still much more to be learned about the Savior before He could come.

Next God began to develop more fully the spiritual dimension of the portrait. God called Abraham and taught His people that the Savior would lead them in a walk of holiness separate from the world. They would be pilgrims and strangers in this world as they waited for a new heavens and earth. This earth would not be the home of those who are washed of sin. The plan of God for his redeemed people included a new life so wonderful that earthly life could only begin to perceive it. Only a new heavens and new earth could sustain the new heavenly life. The radical transformation of the earth brought by the flood was a picture of the transformation that will occur. Salvation was a spiritual matter and would bring man from this earth to a heavenly realm. Man must understand that everything earthly, though it be very dear to him, is but a picture of the heavenly. Those chosen by God must not cling to any hopes of a perfect fellowship with God in this earth, but to the heavenly.

Having defined the basic features of His Salvation, God began to fill in more details. The Savior would be like Moses: a mediator between God and men. He would be meek and compassionate. He would not seek earthly fame or glory. The Savior would be like Joshua: a mighty leader in the battles and through the depths of the Jordan. He would be as king David sang, like a shepherd leading his people beside the still waters, into green pastures, through dark valleys, revealing the goodness and mercy of God.

He would be like king Solomon: a king who rules His heavenly kingdom in peace and great prosperity. Yet, He would not be an earthly king. No matter how glorious and powerful an earthly kingdom may be, there can never be true peace as long as the sin cursed earth remains. Solomon's earthly power soon crumbled. Israel was dragged captive to Babylon to erase every idea of a kingdom on this earth. Only when all hope in an earthly savior was exhausted, did the Savior come.

Finally with the prophets God detailed with careful strokes the mouth of the Savior. The mouth of the Savior would speak words of comfort and draw his people into the new and living bond of covenant fellowship. The Savior would speak the word of God. The word was at the heart of the salvation prepared for His people. When the Savior would begin to speak, He would confirm that the portrait was His. From then on, the Savior Himself by means of His word would be the chief source of hope in God's people.

The prophets proclaimed that “his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). In Him God will cover sins and forgive iniquity. The covenant will not be a matter of external obedience, but will arise out of hearts that have been made new by the power of God. Love for God will be written on the heart (Jeremiah 31:33-34). Sin will be destroyed, and the people of God prepared for a new heavenly life in a new heavens and a new earth with resurrected bodies. His kingdom would be heavenly.

Though the prophets proclaimed His nearness, most had lost interest in the portrait. Then, when most had abandoned the true word of the promise, the angel Gabriel announced to a poor virgin, espoused to a man named Joseph, that she would be the mother of the promised Savior. She pondered these wonderful truths in her heart while the people of the world wandered blindly in sin. She told her cousin Elizabeth and praised God with her. Then He was born, a small helpless babe. He was born in a stable! A choir of angels sang! Shepherds came! An earthly king raged! An old man and woman in the temple glorified God. And then it was quiet again while Mary continued to ponder these wonders in her heart. The wondrous glories of salvation and the new life of heaven realized in the birth of the Savior were revealed only to a few pilgrims. Thousands of years of promise, instruction, and preparation had been fulfilled. Only a few of the millions of people on the earth pondered this wonder in their hearts.

Let us continue to cling to the Word of our Lord and Savior though we be small in this world. The God we know and love is pleased to glorify Himself in the humble and lowly. God has revealed Himself and His salvation in the Word alone. We must devote our energy to the teaching of our children and the preaching of the Word so that we continue to sing praise to our God and tell His Name abroad. ❖

Fruitful Branches

Confronting a Sinning Friend

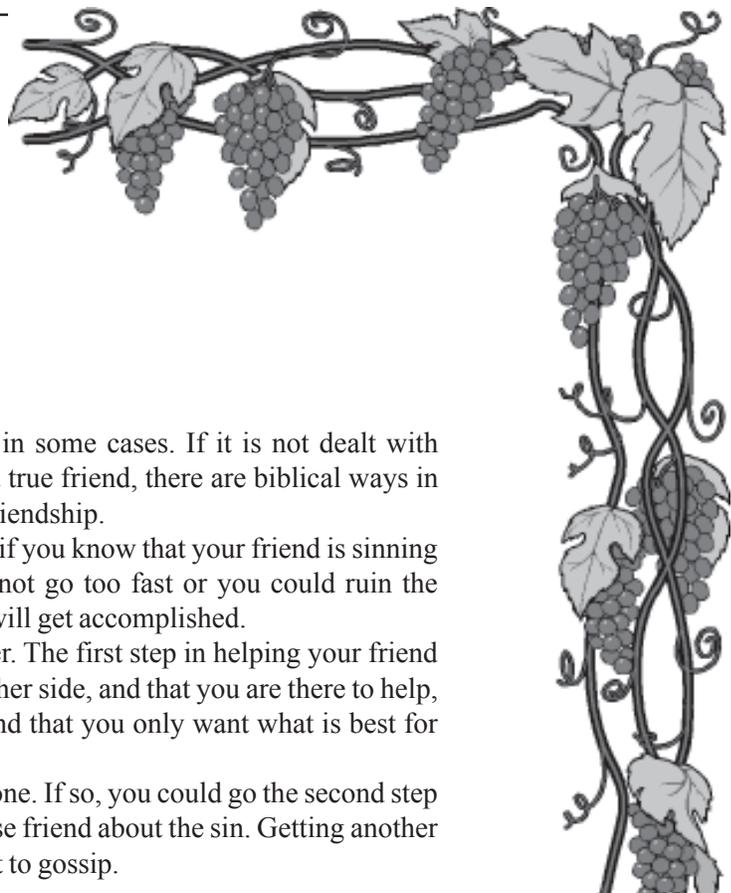
by Mike Noorman

Confronting a sinning friend can be very tough in some cases. If it is not dealt with properly, you risk losing that friend. If you are a true friend, there are biblical ways in which you can solve the problem and save the friendship.

There are two things which should be pointed out. First, if you know that your friend is sinning you must try to keep it between you and your friend. Do not go too fast or you could ruin the friendship, but also don't go too slow because then nothing will get accomplished.

No matter what the problem, true friends help each other. The first step in helping your friend is to talk to him one on one. Show him that you are on his or her side, and that you are there to help, no matter what the cost. Doing this will convince your friend that you only want what is best for him and he will be more open to listen to what you say.

Often times a problem is too big to be solved by you alone. If so, you could go the second step in helping your friend. This step involves telling another close friend about the sin. Getting another friend involved will help only if that friend can be trusted not to gossip.



In some cases, the situation will get too complicated and you will need to consult someone who knows your friend even better than you, like his or her parents. Usually parents will have more influence on their child than you do, and the process of trying to help your friend will be easier.

If parents are unable or perhaps unwilling to help, and the friend continues in his sin, then it is time to bring the matter to the consistory. This is especially true if the sin is affecting the church life of your friend.

In all such trials and difficulties you must always remember to pray to God. Pray for your sinning friend. Pray that God will be with him, and help him to abstain from and overcome his sin. Pray also that God will help you as you help your friend. ❖

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

Open Forum

Tongues and Prophecies

by Rev. Richard Moore

The following is a question from a reader of Rev. Moore's Web page and Rev. Moore's answer.

Question: "As you know, Pentecostal believers have stories to tell that sound amazing (and somewhat convincing) concerning these issues. For instance, how would you respond to a Pentecostal who says that he heard a message in tongues and an interpretation in a worship service, and that someone else who was in the meeting happened to know the language being spoken and verified that the interpretation was correct? My reaction to this is that I'm not going to base my beliefs on stories I've heard, rather, my beliefs are based on what the Word of God teaches. But this probably not a satisfying answer for Pentecostals. Is there an explanation for these claims?"

Secondly, how would you respond to the claims of Pentecostals regarding prophecies they have received from others? For instance, a missionary-to-be walks past a man he doesn't know, and the man tells him that God revealed to him that this person will be a missionary to France, let's say, and then it actually happens. Is this a spiritual gift other than prophecy? As you know, Pentecostals readily believe stories like this and it helps confirm in their minds that these gifts haven't ceased. Basically, the question is: what do you do with stories about

people telling other people what's going to happen in their future? Is this valid?

Answer: I appreciate your comment in your questions, that as for you that you are not going to base your beliefs on stories, but upon what the Word of God teaches. This does form the basis for much of our answer to the Pentecostal. But let us attempt to answer concisely your questions.

In the first place, with respect to the speaking in tongues it must be remembered that the disciples upon the pouring out of the Spirit were given to speak in the tongues of the nations round about. They spoke in known tongues to expound the gospel unto the nations in a way that the gospel would clearly be understood. It was no different in the days of Paul and so Paul says it is better not to speak in tongues but that if one does it must be with an interpreter so that the majority in the congregation may understand that being spoken. Cf. I Corinthians 13-14. Now understand the tongues were used only to reveal God's revealed Word to others that could not understand their native tongue, or could not understand as well the tongue of the disciples. This speaking was all in known languages for instruction in God's Word. Now that the Scripture is made full and is to be found in all tongues basically tongue speaking has ceased. With the exception of an instance that I experienced in Ghana when I was asked to speak to a group gathered

together in a village, the native minister had to interpret my English into the native language as I spoke, many understood the English, but some could only understand the native language, so to them I spoke in a tongue and it was interpreted. This is the only real tongue speaking of the apostle's day or of ours. And in all cases it is only the Word of God revealed that can be spoken God has given us a complete Scripture to which He does not add, it is sufficient for all we need.

There are many that tell what is going to happen in the future, and from time to time their so called prophecies come to pass in some general way so that they can claim to have told the future. Many are they that in our day turn to the astrologer to find out what shall be and go to perdition in the way of unbelief. God has given us a complete prophecy in His written Word, the apostle says that one must bring no other gospel in Galatians 1:6ff. or we may indeed take the words of Christ through His servant in Revelation 22:18 as being true of the whole of the Scripture. The true prophet speaks the word of God, that is He expounds the Scripture. But there has always

been false prophets, and some have had great powers to deceive and they shall show signs and wonders says Christ of such a nature as to almost deceive the elect, see Matthew 24. We know that the magicians were even able to duplicate the miracles of the rod of Moses and Aaron for a while before they reached the limits that God intended them to go. God gave them this power that Pharaoh would harden his heart unto destruction. When prophecy is used today with a free-will gospel we may say just as really, that it is a false prophecy used in the service of Satan to destroy if it were possible the very elect. It is not possible of course to so destroy the faith of the elect, but as they attempt this they can only add to their own condemnation.

Feel free to follow this up, with further discussion. It is very difficult to answer such questions in all their aspects with few words. ❖

Rev. Moore is Pastor of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.

Creation through the Spectacles of Scripture

A Critique of Environmentalism and Its Place in Christianity

by Connie De Vries

The world's environmentalism has its roots in years past, although it is only in the more recent years that it has become almost a god. Darwin's Theory of Evolution supported environmentalism by portraying all of the earth's creatures as products of the cultural environment. Humans too, are the results of struggle and progress. All survivors are improvements because of natural selection, and so the creature becomes an object of worship.

Many environmentalists view humans as equal to the rest of creation. Each creature has a common need for every other creature. If a certain species is harmed or

not cared for, it will eventually affect all existing species because everything is interconnected. The idea is that unless we spend our lives in service to all aspects of the world, our planet is doomed.

So the environmentalists of the world become tree huggers and recycling freaks. They become terrified when they hear of ozone depletion, and they err not only in seeing themselves as in control of their own destiny, but also as controllers of the entire world's destiny. Environmentally safe products become popularized, and resources are used more carefully. The earth is served and

everything must be redeemed (redeemed can often be interpreted as re-given its original good state).

In striving to understand the environment, humans must study its origins. Christians must go back to the story of creation. Genesis 1 reveals that God created man in His own image and that all of the creation was good. But what most humans fail to account for is sin. Humans recognize that their current view of nature is distorted, but in vanity the struggle to find the “perfect solution” often exists. Romans 1:25 shows the vanity of this when it says that God gives them over to their own iniquity because they “changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever.” However, Christians see that they are distorted image bearers of God, and that because of the Fall, everything they look at will always be distorted. The Third and Fourth Heads of the Canons of Dordt manifest this in Article Four when they state: “There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things... But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God, and to a true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil.” So the Christian environmentalist recognizes his weakness and frailty. Although many recognize that humans have a wrong view of the creation, they fall into A.L. Booth’s error revealed in the following statement: “We must recognize other species as beings who could shed their fur mask and look human, as beings who once shared a common language with humans, and who continued to understand humans after the humans had lost their ability to understand them” (Booth & Jacobs 552). That statement omits the concept of dominionship which God requires us to exhibit over creation.

The word dominion is often misinterpreted. When the Bible relates that man is to have dominion over the creation, it does not mean that because he has the strength, all weaker creatures can be manipulated. Rather, man has dominion because he is capable of seeing the difference between right and wrong. Man’s dominion is a derived authority from God who ultimately controls all of creation. This concept is backed up by Article Two of the First Head of the Belgic Confession which says that we know God “by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes a most excellent book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, his power and divinity.”

Christians dealing with environmentalism have to properly apply the concept of dominion to the creation, keeping in balance the calling of providing stewardship. The word dominion does not imply man as a slave master, but as a steward of creation. Christians must learn to love and care for the environment because they feel the same way for the Creator. Article Seven of the Confessions manifests this clearly by saying that everything is created by God and that He still upholds and governs them for the service of mankind, so man may serve his God. A certain accountability is required in our acting as stewards. Humans become accountable to God for their conduct because they are the chosen ones to care for creation. Humility is required in all actions affecting the environment. Man should strive to remember John 3:16a, “For God so loved the world (cosmos).” The stewardship ethic cautions him to shun greed and human triumphalism, and to care for the environment and insure it remains fruitful. Christian teachers, also, along with all other Christians, must be environmentalists in a certain sense of the word. They must teach their students the truths beginning already in the first book of the Bible—the truths of dominion and stewardship and also of their sin. What has to follow the teaching of stewardship, though, is the teaching that we will always fall short and that striving to “redeem” the creation is pointless because there will be a new one someday. We have no control over either our own destiny nor that of the entire world. Yes, it is true we have to be stewards, but we must recognize our limitations and also that there are things in this life that are more important than “saving the earth.” Thus, we can and maybe should recycle and not waste what God has provided us. However, this is not our highest calling. We must live our lives sharing the gospel and fellowshiping with other Christians, striving to learn more of God and to grow spiritually. The growing technology should remind us of the further actions of men to control and misuse the environment. But we should not fear. God is in control of the environment. ❖

Work Cited

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Digging for a Treasure

by J.P. de Klerk

Janet Smoot was married to a pilot of a well-known airline, who had to travel to cities in many countries. So, often he was not at home and when Janet had no other obligations she sat at night alone in the livingroom and often her thoughts wandered away to pleasant memories of the days that she was a child.

Then she knew already the boy who would become her husband, together with other children of farmers and fishermen in the region where she lived.

It was excellent for children to play outside there especially during the summer months. They could live out their fantasies, play all kind of games, in those days when there was no television and they were not much interested in the radio either. There was so much to enjoy in nature all around them. In fact, at their age, they saw more in it than there was, and it was all exciting, spellbinding, new.

Their parents often looked at them with a smile and enjoyed their stories about their youthful adventures, in the wood, at the beach, in the bushes, and there was a lagoon surrounded by lush plants, flowers, berries, sometimes a rabbit, a hare or a squirrel, a wild goat or a lost lamb. A lonely mill stood like a sentry, surveying their playground. They had formed a club of seven; four boys and three girls. Nevil, the boy she liked best, was the leader.

They built a secret hidingplace with observation post against “enemies.” Janet remembered yet a clear blue sky reflected on the glassy water of the lagoon, where they had their “pirate-boat,” a raft made of old boards and tree trunks, picked up at the beach. They moved the raft with punting poles. They had to be careful not to stand all together on one side, because the raft could capsize.

Sometimes they made voyages of discovery “in the jungle.” But the most fun they had with “*digging for a treasure*.” It was hidden somewhere under the blackberry bushes, said Nevil. Sometimes there was a “promising” trace and the boys were soon absorbed in their



game, digging busily, while the girls were guarding with wooden rifles, protecting them against competitors.

When it rained they all sat in the hay above the cow shed of Janet’s Father and they chatted about possibilities where the “treasure” could be, and what exactly it would look like. And what would they do with it? There were so many possibilities. Nevil often came up with some quite new ideas; he had been reading a lot. He kept them in suspense. Sometimes they were there when it became dark outside and they had a stable lantern hanging on a nail above them. That was a bit creepy. Till father called that it was time to go home.

It was a wonderful time. Of course, they never found that treasure, but that did not matter. It was only a game. Janet was always reminded of it when she was reading in her Bible that Christ said, that where your *treasure* is, there will be your *heart*. Over the years she had often found treasures in the Scriptures, to encourage her and to give her strength for any situation, every day of her life; they enriched her very existence in fact. When pilot Nevil was home, they enjoyed them together. ❖

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



The “Pepper-Box” Church

by J.P. de Klerk

In the Dutch town of Leidschendam (province South-Holland) exist a State-Reformed Church named the “Pepper-box.” That name is given by the population because of the shape of the building.

This was the last of a series of ten Churches which were built in The Netherlands after the Reformation. It was ready in 1653. A small Church because there were not many Reformed people in Leidschendam (close to the city of Leiden which had a majority of them).

There are farmers, growers of vegetables and three factories. Most inhabitants work in the daytime in a city, so Leidschendam is mainly forensic.

In 1693 fire destroyed the Church. Rev. Cornelius van der Linden wrote in the “Book of the Session” that only some pieces of stone were left But soon a start was made to rebuild it; the drawings of the original were in the files of the minister. It was quite a job for the volunteers, but in 1697 the Church was ready for use again. The date is carved in the oak pew of the four majors of the city of Leiden who used to go to the Church in Leidschendam with their families.

However, the next generation had other ideas and they took the beautiful stained glass windows away and

replaced them with ordinary glass in an arched shape, the sculptured entrance was replaced by a simple porch, instead of a domeshaped roof came a pavillion-roof (eight-sided). Later, in 1968, under the supervision of the foundation for “Care for Monuments” the whole building was restored.

The best known minister in the history of the “Pepper-box” is Rev. Petrus van der Hagen (1641-1671), who was born in Amsterdam. He was in Leidschendam only from 25 February 1663 till 6 January 1664, but they never saw a Reformed minister who was so active. He wrote five books in that time. Some in Dutch as well as in German. He explained in detail the letter of Paul to the Philippians, and made explanatory notes to go with the Reformed Catechism. Most famous became “De Verborgentheyd der Godsaligheyt” (“The Mystery of the Godliness”) that was printed six years after his death, straight away reprinted eight times. ❖

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Watching Daily At My Gates

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

Reprinted from
Daily Meditations for Spiritual Comfort
by Rev. John A. Heys, minister emeritus from the
Protestant Reformed Churches

December 1

THAT MOST PRECIOUS GIFT Although the world is full of people who look forward to celebrating Christmas, that does not mean that they all are Christians. For many it is not Christ's coming into our flesh that interests them. They are interested in one whom they call Santa Claus, or Saint Nicholas, or merely in worldly gifts. It is not the gift that Christ brought us that interests them. Rather, it is the lust of the flesh, of the eyes, and of the pride of life that fills them with joy on Christmas Day.

As Christians, however, we should, from now until the day the believers celebrate Christmas, consider more deeply what He earned for us and presents to us in God's grace. To prepare us for that day, and to deepen our appreciation of what He did and does for us, we should listen to what our God gave us through Isaiah and the other Old Testament prophets.

Today let us note this glorious truth: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:1, 2).

Let us note first of all that Christmas is a day of blessedness only for God's children, for believers to whom He gives a new spiritual life. Let us also take note of the fact that it is not a day wherein we are to celebrate what men give unto us, but a day to rejoice with thanksgiving in what God gives us through His Son; and what He **TOOK AWAY** from us, namely our guilt and unholiness!

By all means have that wonderful gift and work of God before your mind now, as we approach the day of Christ's birth, but also on that day when we celebrate His coming in our flesh for our salvation. Salvation is a most wonderful gift of God's grace. We are going to lose every gift that man gives unto us; but rejoice in God's everlasting gift of love, mercy, and grace. **Read: Isaiah 40:1-8.**

December 2

OUR ALMIGHTY SAVIOR'S COMING Having yesterday considered our calling to look forward to our celebration of God's wonderful gift to us, namely, His Son, and through Him salvation, we should today go a step further into this rich truth.

In Isaiah 40:10 we read, "Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him; behold his reward is with him, and his work before him." Here we have a very comforting truth in regard to our Savior's birth. He came with a strong arm and hand, which will fulfill all God's promises to us—from the promise He gave us the day we fell into sin, onward to those in the book of Revelation. He will crush the head of Satan and his hosts through the crushing of His heel on the cross. The victory for us is absolutely sure!

This is true because, as Isaiah presented it, when Christ suffers on His cross it is God, as He came into our flesh, Who is realizing salvation for us. Christ is the second Person in the Holy Trinity Who died in His human nature, in order that we may be raised to heavenly glory through Him. He came, not as the strongest man, but as the almighty God. The strongest man, Adam, could not stand before Satan. He fell. But the almighty God came in our flesh to save us fully by His strong hand and arm. He Who is the I AM, realized for us what we will be everlastingly. We must say, "I will do this or that, if God gives me strength." He, the I AM, depends on no one and nothing. Indeed, all things depend upon Him. We have an almighty Savior.

What a blessed gift our Savior is! How wonderful it is that we have the almighty God as our Savior, the Savior before Whom Satan and all his host of fallen angels and ungodly men cannot stand! Our salvation is sure because our almighty Savior came and is realizing our salvation in all that which is taking place in the world. **Read: John 14:1-11.**

December 3

OUR CERTAIN AND ALMIGHTY PROTECTION Salvation is sure because our Savior is the almighty God come into our flesh, and come to represent us and bring us out of our guilt, our evil nature, and our death and into everlasting life and heavenly glory. Christ, Whose birthday is approaching, will take good care of us and bring us to the glory which God has promised us. This is pictured beautifully in Isaiah 40:11, where we find these comforting words: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

The comforting truth here is that He loves us. All that which we read here tells us that truth, revealing how greatly He loves us and cares for us. All that which we read here tells us that He will give us everything that we need to reach the heavenly glory that God promised us. As our shepherd He will feed us, bring us what we need, and supply us every day with the necessities of our life. He loves us. This is manifested also in the tender care and protection that we receive from His hand. The shepherd pictured here reveals that so clearly in gathering the lambs, carrying them in His bosom, gently leading those with young. We have almighty and wonderful protection from all our enemies, and the tender loving care of an almighty Savior.

No creature needs protection as much as does a sheep, which cannot fight against the wolves, bears, and lions. No animal needs to be led to green pastures as does a sheep. Our shepherd does this for us. On the day we celebrate His birth we are called not only to rejoice, but also to praise God for having sent Him Who earned our salvation by His suffering and death. Satan and the antichristian world cannot keep us from the glory

God promised in our Savior. Be confident that He has you in His bosom and is coming back to fulfill all God's promises to us. **Read: Psalm 23.**

December 4

A SONG FOR EVERY DAY Days and weeks before the day man calls "Christmas" arrives, there are songs sung which afterward are set aside for months. They are called "Christmas carols," some of which do sing about Christ and His birth. Some are beautiful, with truths that express Christ as our Savior, and have very pleasing music. Some reveal absolutely no thought about Him and our salvation.

But we had better take a firm hold on what God declares in Isaiah 42:10. There God Himself calls us to "Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof." That song we must sing all through life, and not merely a few days before what we call Christmas.

The world sings it because it enjoys the music, not because of the truth presented in these songs. They sing them to please men, not to praise God. We do well to heed this word of God that we sing unto the Lord a new song, a song of praise to God. We may sing before men, as a choir, or as a soloist. But by all means sing unto the Lord. And let us sing it from the heart, not merely from the mouth. Let us sing God's praises, and not sing to get man's praises directed to us for having sung those words with that music.

That song must be a new song. It must not be the old songs the flesh of man sings because of delight in music. Since God sent His Son to save us there is a new song, a song of redemption, a song of God's grace and tender mercy upon those whom He chose in Christ.

Can we, after we celebrate the birth of Christ, forget what He did for us? If His birth means a little to us for only a short period of time in the year, His cross and the salvation which He realized for us will also be a superficial and temporary thing.

Let us every day, in our hearts, sing a new song to Jehovah, for the wonders He has wrought. **Read: Psalm 98.**

December 5

CREATED FOR GOD'S GLORY What is coming in the future is frightening, unless we know and believe Who, not simply what, is coming. Wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes in diverse places, and the cruel reign of the Antichrist are coming soon, according to what our God tells us in His Word. But the Christian is looking for Christ to come.

And on what the world calls Christmas (but for us is Christ's birthday, and not a mass which we celebrate) we will rejoice, because Christ came and is using all things to bring about the day when we shall enter His kingdom with body as well as soul. Our God, in Isaiah 43:7, declares that He has redeemed us, "Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him." This refers to those who in verse 6 are called His sons and daughters.

Today these sons and daughters are called Christians, which means not only that they belong to Christ, but that they are spiritually like Him. Only such should be called Christians. And when in a few days we celebrate His birthday, we must not overlook the fact that He, the Son of God, causes us to be the children of God. Only such may be called Christians, for only they belong to Christ as members of His body, the church.

We should, on the day we celebrate His birth, but also every day in our lives, reveal that truth that we were created through Christ to God's glory. Yes, by His cross He saved us from our guilt and punishment. But He also by His Spirit re-creates us so that we may and do glorify God. On the day called Christmas we should celebrate Christ's coming as that work of God's grace whereby He causes us to be those who glorify Him consciously and willingly.

That is a wonderful gift which God gives us. What a blessed truth! Our glory is that we were made capable of glorifying God. That will be our wonderful life when Christ returns. **Read: Isaiah 43:1-7.**

December 6

OUR POWERFUL REDEEMER Let us take hold of the truth which we find in Isaiah 47:4. And let us confess it with our lips, but also by our whole walk of life.

There we read, "As for our redeemer, the Lord of hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel." Now, plainly, our God is here speaking through Isaiah of Jesus Christ our Savior. For He is our Redeemer. He bought us out of our guilty state, and caused us to be freed from the everlasting punishment which we deserve. He brought us back to covenant fellowship with God. And through Him God gives us a most wonderful present, the most wonderful possible.

Our salvation is a complete deliverance from the curse which we deserve, and it is a gift of everlasting value. Christmas presents given by man soon wear out, or no longer fit our needs and desires. The gift we received as little children does not compare with what we desire as adults. But salvation brings redemption; bestows upon us that which we need desperately; and never, never wears out. It is that which we never want discarded.

For our Redeemer is the Lord of Hosts, the Holy One of Israel. HE is God's gift to us. What a gift! To receive the Redeemer is wonderful. A Savior Who is the Lord of Hosts assures us that we will get a most precious gift, yea, that we already have a most precious gift, a Savior Who cannot be stopped in His work of salvation upon us.

We will most assuredly with our souls enter heavenly glory, the moment we die here on this earth. And our bodies will most assuredly be raised so that with body and soul we enter the new Jerusalem.

For the world, and for Satan who is the prince of this world, Christ's birth means a complete defeat. For us it means a most blessed gift. We have a most powerful Redeemer. He did redeem us one hundred per cent. And there is no one that can stop Him from bringing us that everlasting present of covenant fellowship with God in the glory of His kingdom of heaven. **Read: Revelation 22.**

December 7

THAT WONDERFUL GIFT OF SALVATION What do you need more than anything else? What is the most precious gift that you want God to give you? Can you rejoice and be glad because of what God took away from you? Or are you more interested in what He can give to you? Is salvation a gift to you, or a work whereby He takes something from you?

Salvation is both of these works of God. We look forward to celebrating the day of Christ's birth because it tells us that He gave us a Savior. But remember also that He gave us this Savior so that our guilt and corrupt natures might be taken away from us. He made it possible for us to leave our way down to hell. He gave us a Savior Who will bring us up to heaven.

To appreciate this we must take hold of the truth which we find in Jeremiah 23:6, where we read, "In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell in safety: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

We have here both the taking away, which is implied in that word "saved," and the giving of the gift, which is implied in those words "dwell in safety." What hurts He removed, and what gives us peace and joy He gives. Our unrighteousness He removes, and He Whose name is the Lord Our Righteousness gives us righteousness.

We should also note that Jeremiah here speaks not simply of Christ's "day," but of His "days." What is more, His day began when in Bethlehem He was born; but His days as our Savior are still here, and will be here everlastingly in the new Jerusalem. Although in a special way we may celebrate one day a year concerning His coming day, we have the calling

to thank Him every day for what He took from us and for what He gives unto us.

Take that blessed truth along with you the rest of your days here on this earth. Use every day which He gives you in confessing Him to have made you righteous, and in taking away all your guilt and punishment. **Read: Jeremiah 23:1-8.**

December 8

JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS What we considered yesterday is the truth that we have salvation as a wonderful gift from God. This is explained in Jeremiah 23:6 by the truth that our Savior is “The Lord our righteousness.” Today we had better delve a bit deeper into that truth.

Jeremiah wrote in this verse that God’s church—called Judah and Israel in the text—shall be saved and will dwell safely. All this is presented to us because Israel was a type of God’s church. The name “Israel,” which was given to Jacob, means “Prince of God.” The name “Lord” here in Jeremiah 23:5 is literally “Jehovah”; and, as we noted, “Jehovah” means “I Am.” Thus, what Jeremiah wrote was that Jehovah Our Righteousness is our Savior’s name.

Now, Christ is called this because He is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. He came to dwell in our flesh, but His person is that of the Son of God. This explains how He could suffer and die and thereby pay for our sins.

He saved us in the sense of redeeming us, that is, of buying salvation for us by His blood and suffering. That punishment and death we deserve. He bought freedom from these, and He also bought everlasting blessedness. Redemption does not merely set us free from punishment, but also gives us everlasting glory and joy.

What a salvation then do we have! What a blessed day it was when God Himself came into our flesh in order to take away our guilt and give us heavenly blessedness! We are not simply freed from the cruelty and wickedness of our spiritual enemies. We are given unspeakable joy through Christ as the Lord Our Righteousness. Jehovah, the I Am Who changes not, made us righteous.

This day which men call Christmas is the day when God gave us a most wonderful and everlasting gift. We are righteous, because we belong to Jehovah the Righteous One. Thank God for making you righteous through Jehovah Our Righteousness. **Read: Psalm 130.**

December 9

OUR SURE AND BLESSED REST A few days ago we took note of the truth that Jesus Christ our Savior is our Redeemer, which means that He bought us out of our guilt and the curse, which we by nature deserve because we fell in Adam.

A beautiful truth, that stands in connection with this purchase of our salvation, we find in Jeremiah 50:34. There we read: “Their Redeemer is strong; the Lord of hosts is his name: he shall thoroughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon.”

Let us today take note of the truth that our Redeemer’s name is Lord of Hosts. Here again, that word “Lord” is the Hebrew word “Jehovah,” that is, “I Am.” The point to note here is that He is Jehovah of Hosts; and a host is a multitude of people. Do not then think that the church is only a handful of people, even though Satan’s army of sinners is far greater in number.

The comforting truth here is that, as we approach the day of celebrating the birth of our Savior, we are assured that our Redeemer saves a host of sinners. God has chosen a host of sinners, a very large group out of every nation, tongue, and tribe, and established Him as their Redeemer. That body of Christ will have an exact number of members, and there will be a host like the sand on the seashore (Hebrews 11:12).

Today, and on what is called Christmas Day, thank God for the assurance that we are going to get a land of rest, and that we have a strong Redeemer Who is Jehovah, the I AM, Who is unchangeable, and al-

mighty to realize every word in every promise which our God has given us.

What a comforting truth there is in what we ought to celebrate on the day of Christ’s birth. We have a strong Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, Who will bring us victory and a most blessed rest in His kingdom. **Read: Matthew 11:20-30.**

December 10

THAT PRECIOUS IMPORTANT GIFT In a little more than two weeks, Christmas presents will be given and received. What present would you want to receive? What would you call a most precious and important gift? Would it be what is presented to us through Ezekiel as God’s gift to the members of His church? In Ezekiel 36:26 we read, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”

Do you want that? Or are there other gifts that you prefer above and instead of that gift? Do men please you with what they give, and do these gifts give you more joy than that gift of which God here speaks? Do you look forward to what is called Christmas Day, because you want what you consider to be more valuable things than such a heart? If on that day you will get only one gift, would you choose that to be the present you would most like to receive?

We need a heart to receive any gift. When our heart stops beating we lose all our earthly possessions. It is indeed a most wonderful work of God when, as our text states, He takes away our hard, sinful heart and gives us a new, soft heart that loves Him, and causes us to want to serve and glorify Him.

Man comes into this world with a stony heart. With such a heart all men are born, for we come into this world without the smallest love for God, and with a heart that hates Him. We all come into this world hardhearted, having hearts that reveal a spirit of hatred against God and against all the things of His kingdom. Christ’s birth then is not in our judgment a blessing.

As believers we must appreciate that birth of Christ, Who came in order to bring us this gift of hearts that love God. That is a most precious gift. It reveals the blessedness of God’s love for us. **Read: Ezekiel 36:16-27.**

December 11

THAT ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY GIFT What do you want? Yesterday we considered what God promised to give us, namely, new hearts. Without that new heart there will be nothing spiritually new in our lives, but sin will continue and abound. But there is something of deeper need than a new heart, and David presents that in Psalm 23.

In Psalm 23:1 he wrote, “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.” We need Christ as our shepherd so badly. For our new hearts to beat in love of God we need Christ as our shepherd. For we are God’s sheep, and we are greatly in need of a shepherd. Let us go back to that first promise that God gave us the day we fell into sin in Adam.

In Genesis 3:15 the whole human race is presented as consisting in two spiritual parts. One is the seed of the woman, and the other is the seed of the serpent. What is more, the seed of the serpent will do all in its power to try to kill the seed of the woman. That does not mean merely to kill physically, as Cain killed his brother Abel. But the seed of the serpent is Satan’s tool whereby he tries to kill us spiritually and make us hate God and His Christ.

From that point of view let it be understood that although the seed of the woman are sheep, the seed of the serpent are wolves who attack and try to eat up the seed of the woman. Do not overlook the fact which we find presented in Matthew 7:15, where we are told to beware of false prophets, which come to us in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves.

Appreciate then that truth which our God gave us through David. We have been given a shepherd Who will keep us safe. Take hold of that truth in your celebration of Christ's birth. What a wonderful, but also very necessary, gift. That gift is far more important than all the gold and silver in this world. This is a gift which assures us of being kept safe, and sure of entering Christ's kingdom of heaven. He will keep our new hearts in us, and keep the seed of the serpent from stopping those hearts. **Read: Psalm 23.**

December 12

THAT WONDERFUL AND COMFORTING TRUTH It is true that in a physical sense we have many needs. There is so much that is necessary for our lives as creatures. But what is above all necessary is that which our lives from a spiritual point of view stand in need of, and which must be given us. That is why, as we considered yesterday, we have that wonderful truth of Psalm 23:1 that "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want."

However, what we ought to take hold of and keep before our minds is that God Himself speaks here through David and tells us that we have no want, for we have a shepherd Who supplies all our needs. Because Christ is our Shepherd, we have what is necessary to bring us from hell to heaven, from sin and guilt to holiness and righteousness. The question before us is whether we want these presents, and whether we will praise and thank God on the day we celebrate Christ's birth for this wonderful, all-important gift.

Take hold of that truth: We want nothing! God has sent His Son to do all that which is necessary to bring us out of all our punishment and guilt, and from all our unholiness and godlessness.

Consider that as it is because of Christ's birth, which took place about 2,000 years ago, that we call the year in which we find ourselves A.D. 1996. That means that we are in the year 1996 of our Lord; for the letters "A.D.," an abbreviation of "anno domini," mean "in the year of our Lord."

1996 years ago our God gave us our Lord, Who is our good shepherd Who took away all our wants, and gave us all that which our salvation calls for or wants for its realization.

We have Christ today as our shepherd, and we lack nothing and no one necessary for our full salvation. He did die for us, rose again and ascended into heaven to prepare places for us.

What a gift! And what a calling we have to celebrate the day of His birth with praise and thanksgiving to God. **Read: John 10:1-18.**

December 13

THAT GIFT OF SPIRITUAL STRENGTH Life is a wonderful gift which our God is pleased to bestow upon us. But how much we are going to use our life depends upon how much strength God is pleased to give us. A paralyzed person has life but is very limited in the strength of some of his members, limited as to what he can do.

It is therefore also so very important that we are given spiritual strength as well as spiritual life, so that we can serve God by walking in good works. In Psalm 29:11 David wrote, "The Lord will give strength unto his people." We must take note of the fact that He is speaking to a special people to whom God had given that special gift of spiritual strength.

Is it not plain that God gives physical strength to all men? In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). What counts, however, is whether God gives us spiritual strength, and how much of this He gives us. Does He enable us to walk in love to Himself? How able are we to walk in love for Him? All the born-again have some strength to do this. But certainly we all must pray for more strength.

We do thank God for earthly things and experiences. That is our calling. But by all means thank God for strength and ability to walk in love to Him. And pray for more strength in order to serve Him in love more fully.

Because that strength is a gift made possible by the gift of His Son in our flesh, we owe God thanks. We should remember this when in a few

days we celebrate the gift of His Son. Through His Son that gift of spiritual strength may be and is given us. When, then, we celebrate His birth, let us remember and give thanks to God for spiritual strength. That is more important than the physical strength which He gives us. To be spiritually strong is a wonderful gift through His Son Whom in His grace He gave us to be our King. **Read: Psalm 28.**

December 14

THAT BLESSED GIFT OF PEACE Yesterday we briefly considered the gift of spiritual strength which our God is pleased to give us, and which is listed in Psalm 29:11. In this verse we also find the gift of peace. The complete verse declares, "The Lord will give strength unto his people; the Lord will bless his people with peace...."

What we should bear in mind first of all is that this peace is given only to those to whom God gives spiritual strength, which strength is mentioned in the first part of this verse. To enjoy this peace we need spiritual strength.

The idea here is not that we have peace with men in this life. No, the day we fell into sin in Adam God told the devil and us that there will be enmity, a war between mankind with crushing of heads and heels (Genesis 3:15).

What is so wonderful is that we, the seed of the woman, have peace with God. Not only does He deal with us in peace, but He strengthens us spiritually so that we can live in peace with Him, walking in love for Him.

Let us then, on the day we celebrate the birth of His Son, remember that He has given us the wonderful change whereby we no longer hate Him and fight against Him and His holy law, but strive to do what pleases Him and glorifies Him as our God and Father.

Indeed, what the psalmist says is so very true. This peace with God is a blessing. David states that God will bless us with peace. The question is whether we are doing that which pleases God. The question is not whether we want God to do what pleases us, but whether we consider it a blessed gift that He has made us able to please Him. **Read: Psalm 29.**

December 15

GIVEN OUR HEART'S DESIRE We need more and more strength to live in peace with God. And we should more and more be thankful to God for the strength and peace which He gives us. Here are wonderful gifts which only God can give us.

It is understandable that children desire certain toys or other objects as birthday presents and Christmas gifts. But the adult child of God should desire what David desired and presented to us in Psalm 37:4. There we read, "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." The truth here is that when we delight in the Lord, He will grant us what we desire. That limits severely what we are going to get; but it assures us that we will get what we desire.

Surely, it is difficult for a child of God to desire fellowship with God. We came into this world, by nature, as seed of the serpent, those who hate God and want nothing to do with Him and His law. On the day when the church celebrates the birth of Christ, the world very clearly reveals that it does not delight in the Lord but in earthly things and in that which satisfies their sinful flesh. It would be far better for us not to call that day Christmas. What some call their Mass is not taught in Scripture; and although calling it Christmas does not make it our day for celebrating a Mass, we ought to avoid that word.

To delight in the Lord means to find joy in serving Him and in having covenant fellowship with Him. It means that we find delight in spiritual things, and that we agree with David when in Psalm 27:4 he says, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple."

Is that delightful to you? Is that the one thing that controls all the rest of the things which you desire? Will that be the one thing that is in your

mind when that day arrives when we will celebrate the birth of our Savior? Is having Him as your Savior the one thing that you desire, and that which characterizes all your walk of life? **Read: Psalm 37.**

December 16

GIVEN ALL THAT WHICH IS GOOD Two precious gifts which God gives us are grace and glory. That truth we find presented in Psalm 84:11. In that verse we read, “For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

Now grace is favor. It means that we have not earned salvation and its blessings, but have it given to us apart from anything which we did. And glory is the radiation, the shining forth, of virtue. Take hold then of that comforting truth that God will not withhold from us any good thing, and will always give us that which is good for us.

Since God will not withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly, we must believe that, in all circumstances of life, what He sends upon us is for our good and serves, bringing us to the glory He promises His people. So very clearly this is revealed in the birth of our Savior. In His grace God sent His own Son to die for us. We do not deserve it. Christ most assuredly is the most precious gift which God gave us in His grace. He, Christ, brings us out of our guilt, and thus out of hell; and He brings us to heaven where the highest glory for human beings will be bestowed upon us.

Christ’s birth, then, is that good thing which He in His grace gave us so that we would reach heavenly glory. Joseph supplied nothing, and Mary was God’s tool whereby He brought us our Savior. God’s grace used Mary so that we could come out of the curse and be raised to glory.

Walk uprightly, then, and you will have the assurance that Christ came for you, and that He most assuredly will bring you to the glory that Christ now has and is realizing for all His people.

Therefore also walk uprightly, and you will have reason to rejoice and have peace of mind on the day when we celebrate Christ’s birth. Then you will know that His cross is God’s work of grace for your glory. **Read: Psalm 84.**

December 17

THAT BLESSED GRANTING OF SALVATION What in your mind does the word “salvation” mean? From what do you want to be saved?

The Hebrew word that we find in Psalm 85:7 means to cause one to be safe. All that which is evil cannot touch those who are saved. That salvation comes fully when Christ returns and we are all taken into the Kingdom of Heaven, and all the seed of the serpent, who are our enemies, will be cast into everlasting torment in the lake of fire!

Take hold of that truth! Read Psalm 85:7. Here is what we read in it: “Show us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation.” Plainly, then, that for which the psalmist prays here (and for which we should also pray) is that Christ will finish His work, and bring us to that place of glory where there is no sin, or sinners who can touch us. In glory we will even be cut off from their sneers and hateful glances.

But, above all, salvation is safety from God’s wrath and the punishment which we deserve. That cross of Christ is, then, such a wonderful gift. Not meaning that it is a day for Mass celebration, Christmas is such a wonderful day, reminding us of such a wonderful gift.

Let us, therefore, as we approach the day when we celebrate Christ’s birth, keep that precious gift in mind. That gift opens the way for God to work all things together for our good. This birth of Christ opens the door to our right to all the blessings which God’s mercy has realized for us.

Pray to God that He will open your eyes wider, so that you will see more clearly and richly His mercy which grants you salvation as a free gift, with everlasting blessedness. Pray too that He may give a more sinless life, so that you will find the fruit of salvation in you, the evidence that Christ was born in our flesh, and by His cross blotted out your guilt.

And, on the day when we celebrate His birth, pray for more power to thank Him for His mercy and gift of salvation. **Read: Psalm 85.**

December 18

OUR SAVIOR GRACIOUSLY PROMISED There are from a spiritual point of view only two kinds of angels. There is Satan and his host that hate God, and there are the holy angels who love Him. Likewise, here on this earth, there are from a spiritual point of view only two kinds of people: believers and unbelievers.

This tremendously important truth is revealed in Genesis 3:15, which is called the Mother Promise. There God said to the devil, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall crush thy head, and thou shalt crush his heel.” In the Hebrew language, as written by Moses, that word is “crush,” not merely “bruise.”

Here is the first gospel promise, for it is the first promise of the coming of Christ in our flesh. This enmity and spiritual difference of mankind became plain in Adam and Eve’s first two children: Cain the unbeliever and Abel the believer. When Cain killed Abel, the believing seed of the woman, Seth, was provided by our God. In the line of Seth were Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And from Jacob came twelve tribes, with believers and unbelievers in each tribe, the tribe of Judah being appointed by God to bring forth the kings. And THE King came when from the virgin Mary Christ was born. Here is a tremendously important truth. Christ is the Seed of the Woman. He will deliver the church completely from the coming Antichrist who is the Seed of Satan. The truth which we should take hold of, as we approach the day when we celebrate the birth of Christ, is that Christmas does clearly reveal to us God’s faithfulness to all His promises.

Christmas is coming in a week. As we approach it, let us take hold of the truth that God always fulfills perfectly every promise that He gives us. Satan’s head is going to be crushed, as will also the head of his spiritual seed. But ours is the victory, because the Son of God came into our flesh and represented us and saved us by His cross. **Read: Galatians 3:1-16.**

December 19

THE FULFILLING OF GOD’S PROMISE As we noted yesterday, the very day when man fell into sin, God promised the coming of Christ to save us from Satan’s power, and from the punishment we deserve because of our sin and guilt. Today we will look a bit more closely at God’s faithfulness to His promises.

To do this let us turn to Isaiah 11:1, where we read, “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.” Our God, Who told Satan that He would crush his head through Christ, Whose heel Satan would crush, presents to us here a wonderfully comforting truth. Because Satan crushes our heel, that is, persecutes us, and brings death upon the woman’s seed, and God’s Son has His heel crushed, that is, suffers death on His cross, we will have the victory. On the day when we celebrate Christ’s birth we can enjoy this truth.

So often it looks as though God is not keeping His promise to us. The crushing of our heel seems to deny His faithfulness. But it is not so.

In Judah the line of David, which God set aside to bring forth our King, ended in a virgin. That made it look hopeless for a king to be born. It looked, as we read in Isaiah 53:2, as though the dry ground could not bring forth a tree. Mary, the virgin, could find no husband in that line of Jesse and David. Joseph, whom she planned on marrying, could not bring forth the royal seed of David. He was a dry ground, and she was therefore also dry ground.

But as we look forward to celebrating Christ’s birth, let us read those words of Isaiah in chapter 53:2, namely, “For he (Christ) shall grow up before him (God) as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground.”

Remember then that this fulfillment of God’s promise through the virgin Mary reveals that no matter how dark the future may look, Christ will come, and God’s promise to us in Him will be completely fulfilled.

Celebrate Christmas then with this comforting truth in your mind. **Read: Isaiah 11.**

December 20

OUR REDEEMER'S COMING All over the world, Christmas is celebrated. But it is not celebrated properly by the majority of the human race. What is important is that we observe it as the day when we received the most precious gift that there is. We should hold on to the truth as we find it in Isaiah 59:20, where we read, "And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord."

Here are two important truths for which we must be thankful and which we must remember in our Christmas celebration. Christ is our Redeemer, that is, the one Who bought us salvation by His cross. And He comes for only some of the human race, the part here called Zion.

The sad fact is that our earthly Christmas presents at Christmas time take our thoughts away from this most wonderful gift of Christ and the salvation which He earned for us by His cross, the gift of the forgiveness of our sins and everlasting covenant fellowship with God. He takes away from us our guilt, and gives us an everlasting life with much closer fellowship and friendship with God than the highest angels have. We have that wonderful gift of becoming sons and daughters of the almighty God. He takes from us the guilt and misery into which Satan led us, and blesses us with sweet communion with God.

Whether He came for us and bought this salvation for us to enjoy is revealed in the gift He gives us already in this life. He will cause us to be born again with a new spiritual life which hates sin and wants to walk in a way pleasing in God's eyes. He came from heaven in order to bring us heavenly blessedness. And turning away from transgressions, hating sin and walking in love to God, reveals that this is His Christmas gift to us.

Even as He came once to earn all this, and be raised with a glorified body, He will come again to bring it fully unto us. **Read: Romans 11:22-27.**

December 21

THAT DIVINE SIGN A sign is a tool that brings information from those who are not with you to speak to you. The sign on the building stating that it is for sale tells you what those who own it say, while they are not there to do it with their mouths.

Thus also in Isaiah 7:14 we read, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

Our God is here speaking to us through a work which He performs, so that we might have this truth and enjoy its blessedness. This work is a sign through which He speaks to us.

There is a very important truth here that we must believe. Our God has done for us that which no creature can do. A virgin cannot bring forth a son. Yet God did this humanly impossible work, causing a child to be born by a virgin and bringing us salvation through that Son.

We cannot save ourselves, because we are spiritually dead; and our sin calls for an everlasting punishment. Our Savior must be the eternal Son of God, Who never sinned and Whose work has everlasting value.

Our God did for us what we do not deserve, and saved us from what we do deserve. In that virgin birth we have a divine sign which tells us that we owe Him everlasting thanks for this gift of His grace. We should bear this in mind when in a few days we celebrate that birth of Christ.

God Himself came into our flesh by a virgin birth so that we might become His spiritual sons and daughters. And when Christ returns pretty soon we are going to have an everlasting day of celebrating this wonder work of God's grace, this mighty work whereby He has changed us.

Read the sign and rejoice in the truth that He saves us by a wonder work of His sovereign grace. **Read: Luke 1:26-35.**

December 22

HUMBLE SUBMISSION In the wonder of God's grace a virgin brought forth the Christ-child. Our salvation became possible because of what our God did in His grace. Mary brought forth this Child, but she did so because God worked upon her and through her. The praise and thanksgiving must be given to God.

Our God made Mary a devout believer. In Luke 1:38 we read, "And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." We ought to consider how wonderfully God worked. As hard as it was for Mary's flesh to do what would rule her in the eyes of mankind as an harlot, she bowed before God and believed that this humanly impossible birth of the Savior would take place. She would suffer shame before men, but she would walk in a way pleasing in God's eyes.

Note the statement, "Be it unto me according to thy word." Note also that she called herself God's hand-maid, that is, servant. Although we cannot perform the work which Mary accomplished, we can and must say to our God, "I am Thy servant. Do unto me what pleases Thee. Give me grace and ability to do Thy will in all my walk of life." How much of that did you do today?

Let us therefore also, with a view to the observance of the day when we celebrate Christ's birth, serve God by thanking Him for this gift of His Son. Let us enter Christmas not only seeing it as the day of God's almighty power and infinite wisdom displaying themselves, but also as the day of His love and grace to send His own Son into our flesh to die for us that we may live with Him in everlasting blessedness.

Christ's coming in our flesh opens the way for us to come into sweet communion with God through blotted out sins, and by a new life given us by His Spirit. Christmas must be a thanksgiving day that moves us to daily thanks-giving for salvation as the gift of His grace. **Read: Matthew 1:18-25.**

December 23

GOD'S MERCY UPON US On Christmas Day it is a custom to give enjoyable presents to loved ones. But it is a blessing which God gives us in order that we may be with Him in His house of many mansions. And the blessedness of Christmas is also that which God takes away from us. For what He takes from us, namely, our guilt, makes that dwelling with Him in glory possible.

We need to have our guilt removed by the blotting out of our sins. Therefore our Christmas must be a day wherein we praise God's name and thank Him for the work of His grace that sent His Son to be our Savior. It must also be a day wherein we do this for His mercy, as Mary said to Elisabeth when she visited her, "And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation."

Now mercy is kindness, compassion, pity, tenderness. We sinners certainly need that, because Adam, the first man in the human race, brought guilt upon the whole human race. From Adam we received those totally depraved natures that add sin to sin all the days of our lives.

On Christmas we must remember how guilty we are in Adam, and because of our own sinful walk of life. Our guilt must be taken from us in order that blessings may be given unto us.

At Christmas, but also every day in our lives, we must come to God with thankfulness for His mercy as well as for the gifts of His grace. Take note of the fact that God's mercy is "on them that fear Him." This means that it is only on the believers. For to fear God is to believe that He alone is God, and that Christ is His Son come into our flesh.

If you have that fear, that awesome respect and trust in God, you may be sure that He sent His Son to take away your guilt, and to bring you to everlasting blessedness in His kingdom of heaven. His sending of His Son opened the way for His blotting out of our guilt. Christ's coming in our flesh made it possible for us to come with Him into heavenly glory. **Read: Luke 1:46-56.**

December 24

SAVED BY GRACE Two women were informed by our God that our Savior was going to be born in the line of David. But He also informed a man, and even told him what name should be given to the Son of God in our flesh. In Matthew 1:21 we read that to Joseph it was said, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins....”

This man, engaged to become the husband of Mary, had first thought that she had sinned. He intended therefore to put her away. In verse 19 we read that he, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

To this Joseph was given the wonderful truth that we should take hold of, and hold on to with all our spiritual strength, namely, “He shall save his people from their sins.” By all means take hold of that truth on Christmas Day. That forgiveness of our sins is a most wonderful gift of God’s grace. Worldly gifts and presents do not even stand in the shade of that gift of God’s grace.

Tomorrow we celebrate Christ’s birth, and the chief attraction of that day is not what men or women give us, not what human brothers and sisters do for us, but what Christ, the Son of God in our flesh, did for us and is doing daily for us.

Let us tomorrow sing God’s praises. Let us thank Him for what He took from us, and for what He gave us in its place. Let us before the world testify that Christ is the Savior. For that name “Jesus” means “Jehovah Saves.” Let us tomorrow, and every day, rejoice that our guilt has been taken away, and that we are given righteousness and holiness as a free gift of God’s grace. Let us sing a new song to Jehovah for the wonders He has wrought. **Read: Psalm 98.**

December 25

GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY A blessed Christmas to you. For what our God through an angel declared in Luke 2:10 presents to us a most blessed truth. Through an angel our covenant God says to us, “Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.” And these good tidings are that unto us a Savior has been born, which is Christ the Lord.

It is true that His name “Jesus” means “Jehovah saves,” for He is the Son of God, the First Person in the Holy Trinity, come into our flesh. But that He is Christ means that He is in our flesh the anointed one, anointed by God to represent and bless us. And that He is Lord means that He rules over us, but also over all creation with its creatures for our good.

What more precious gift could be given us on Christmas Day? What more powerful and sure Savior can there be than one Who is rightly by God called Christ and Lord? For He is God’s anointed Head of His church. And as Lord He can and does bring to us the most precious gifts that there are and will be in the new creation.

He is not a lord, but The Lord Who has complete control over all creation. That He is Christ means that He is God’s choice for the position of representing us on the cross in order to open the door for us to enter everlasting blessedness.

Take hold of that truth! His gift to us will never, no never, wear out. His gift is not something we outgrow, like toys given us at Christmas when we were little children. No, this day speaks to us of the good tidings of great joy that will never end, and that are so rich that we will never become weary of them. Our joy in them will everlastingly increase.

Rejoice then today, but also all the rest of the days of your life here below. Thank Him for this gift which is an everlasting blessedness wrought for us through Christ, the eternal Son of God. **Read: Isaiah 40:1-11.**

December 26

SEEING AND BELIEVING Although they were shepherds watching their flock of sheep by night, they did not yet know and understand the message of the angel that this child Who was born in Bethlehem is The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. But they did

believe what the angel told them, and they went to “see this thing which had come to pass.” They were believers and revealed strong faith in Him as their Savior.

We read that they came with haste and found the babe lying in a manger. Of all places for a newborn child to be born! What humility it showed for one Who the angel said was their Savior! What is so revealing, and what is evidence that He is our Savior, is the fact that He, as the Son of God in our flesh, caused the shepherds to make “known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child” (Luke 2:17).

Here, indeed, is instruction and exhortation to us. Christmas is past. But is its truth past as far as your life is concerned? You still have the gifts your loved ones gave you yesterday. But do you cherish and appreciate more today than you did a year ago the gift of God’s Son, after celebrating the birth of Christ?

Since last year we added a load of sin to our sins of the past. These sins made necessary not only the coming of our Savior, but also His dying on the cross to save us from their punishment. Since these sins increased, did His birth as Savior have richer meaning yesterday than a year ago? Do you more enthusiastically sing with the angels, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to men”?

Seeing His cross, we ought to be far more thankful this year than last year, understanding more clearly what He did for us, and that He is the Lamb of God Who removed our guilt. **Read: Luke 2:8-20.**

December 27

AN AWESOME AND COMFORTING PROPHECY Forty days after Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary brought Him to the temple to be presented to God. Of the necessity of this we read in Leviticus 12:1-4. When they brought Him there an amazing event took place.

An elderly man, named Simeon, had been informed that he would not die until he had seen “the Lord’s Christ.” And when Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple “to present Him to the Lord” Simeon took the babe, Jesus, up in his arms and, among other things, said, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against.”

It may seem strange that a Savior is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel. Yet, not so, if we recall Genesis 3:15 where God told Satan that the human race will be divided into seed of the woman and seed of the serpent, these seeds hating each other, the head of the serpent’s seed being crushed, and the heel of the woman’s seed being crushed. This is a very important truth, for the whole human race fell into sin. But God is pleased to save some, causing these to hate Satan and sin. A promise is given that He will nullify some of Satan’s work and his temporary victory, and will work faith and love of God in some whom He eternally chose in Christ.

In Christ, Who is God’s work of grace, will Satan’s work be defeated in as many members of the human race as it pleases God to realize this. What we have manifested to us, then, concerning this Child in Simeon’s arms, is a most beautiful and comforting truth about God’s grace and love for His elect.

God promised to save us not only from our punishment, but also from the power and control of Satan. That newborn babe, Christ, manifests God’s love that will implant the love of Him in our hearts. What a blessed gift which we considered on the day we celebrated Christ’s birth. How wonderful that this enmity is realized in us against Satan and sin. **Read: I John 3:1-17.**

December 28

THANKFUL FOR OUR REDEMPTION It was the hand of our God that brought Simeon to the temple the hour that Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to be presented unto the Lord, as was required. But it was also the mercy of our God that caused a believing woman named Anna to be in the temple to see Simeon holding the Christ Child.

This woman, more than 84 years as a widow, and about 100 years old, was spiritually as well as physically very spry and active. She thanked God for the gift of His Son; for we read in Luke 2:30, "And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

Is it not amazing what control our almighty God has over all things? He preserved Simeon's life till Christ was presented in the temple. He let Anna go far beyond the fourscore years of the strong (Psalm 90:10), so that she might see our Savior, and He also preserved for us what she said about our Savior.

She saw redemption and thanked God for it. She saw our Redeemer. She did not know that Herod would try to kill Him, and that He would die on a cross; but she knew that God keeps His word, and that here was our Savior Who most assuredly would redeem us, that is, take away all our guilt. This in turn meant that she believed that He would bring to us all that God promised in His Word.

And now, as we begin to be farther and farther from the day in which we celebrated Jesus' birth, we have presented here to us our calling to thank God for giving us this Redeemer. It is well that we celebrate that day of the month; but our calling is to thank God every day of every year for this wonderful gift—or present, if you want to call it that—of a Redeemer, Who not only died for our sins, but is now at God's right hand preparing places for us in a holy, blessed kingdom. Do that every day, and not only once a year. **Read: Psalm 98.**

December 29

RULED BY A MERCIFUL SHEPHERD There are times when an Old Testament verse is quoted in the New Testament. When this happens the Greek word in the New Testament often brings out a new element of truth.

We find this fact in Matthew 2:6 where we find a statement written in Micah 5:2. This difference we cannot find in the King James Version of the Bible. But the Greek word used by Matthew does enrich what Micah wrote. In Matthew 2:6 we find the chief priests and scribes stating that out of Judah "shall come a Governor, that shall rule the people of Israel." However, the word "rule," which we find here, and which appears also in Micah 5:2, although it presents the truth literally, means "to shepherd." It means, thus, to rule as a shepherd rules the sheep of his flock. Does not Jesus Himself in John 10:14 say, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine"? A shepherd loves his sheep and seeks to protect them from all the wolves that would like to kill them. And Christ, as our shepherd, protects the seed of the woman from the attacks of the seed of the serpent. A ruler can be cruel. A shepherd tenderly cares for his sheep, Jesus even laying down His life for His sheep.

Here we have a blessed truth concerning Jesus and His birth, which we should appreciate and hold on to tightly when we celebrate His birth, but also every day of our lives. His birthday is past, but the truth concerning Him is everlasting.

We have a shepherd Who willingly laid down His life to give us an everlasting and wonderful life with God in the new Jerusalem. Let us not set aside our appreciation of His coming in our flesh. Let us not set aside the truth that we have such a wonderful Savior, and think of Him only occasionally. What men call Christmas is past; but let us not set aside the truth of having such a merciful shepherd Who came to save us and bless us. **Read: John 10**

December 30

REMEMBERING OUR BLESSED SHEPHERD Yesterday we took note of the fact that Christ rules us as a shepherd Who is deeply concerned with our well-being as His sheep.

Let us now take note of the fact that long after His birth wise men came from afar to worship Him. They did this many days before Herod sent out soldiers to kill all the male children two years old and younger.

Here then are those that loved Christ, and those who hated Him and wanted Him killed.

Let us also appreciate the fact that they came to worship Jesus long after the day of His birth. This underscores the truth that one day in a year is not the only time when we should reveal our spiritual interest in His coming as our savior and king. Our thankfulness for His coming into our flesh to save us from our sins must be in our hearts every day in every month of every year. Even if we live to be, as Anna was, 100 years old, for us to come before God to thank Him for our Savior 100 times (i.e., once a year) would be, not a worthy thing, but a shame. Every day, in every week, of every year we should come to our God and thank Him for having sent His Son as our Good Shepherd, Who is now watching over us in love, and preparing the way for His return to bring us to heavenly blessedness.

Listen! We read of those wise men, who had true wisdom in their souls, that they wisely went such a great distance, and on a day other than the one on which Jesus was born. They revealed by this that they are wise men.

Go then to God with heart and soul to thank Him for sending His Son for our salvation. Open the Scriptures daily to see more clearly what His Son did for us. Put all your trust in His return to finish His work as our Savior, our kind and tender shepherd. Confess by deeds as well as words, "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want."

Then you will also say that wherewith these devotionals began the first day of this year: "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." **Read: Psalm 23.**

December 31

OUR PROPER ATTITUDE Once more we have come to the end of a year. The question may properly be raised, Can you say with the psalmist, what he said in Psalm 119:65? There we read, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word...."

Looking back on the year that ends today, can you say what the psalmist said in absolute sincerity? Or was your year full of grumbling and complaining, murmuring and expressing disappointments? What happened in your life this year that is coming to its close today?

Indeed, there are events that bring us grief, sadness, and tears. Our Savior Himself wept at the tomb of Lazarus, and groaned when some of the Jews said, "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" They did not understand His weeping and groaning. It is not always sinful to weep because a loved one is taken away, or when you are in deep pain.

The big and important question is whether we, because of what happened this year, doubt God's mercy and wisdom. How sincerely can we say, no matter what happens, that God has dealt well with us? How sure are we that all things work together for good to us? Do we agree with what Paul wrote in Romans 8:28?

The end of all things is near. And the end of this year reminds us that an end is coming to time, and to this present world in its present form.

Our calling is to believe this truth presented by the psalmist, and to confess this before the world. All is well for God's people. Sing then and rejoice because all that happened and will yet happen was and is God dealing well with His people. The end of this year assures God's people of the beginning of an endless age of covenant fellowship between God and His people. The end of this world reveals the end of a world of sin. Do you want to have sin brought to its end? **Read: Psalm 119:65-80.**

Give Thanks

Give thanks to God

Taste of His joy,

In everything.

His praises sing.

Until His cause:

Angelic hosts

Earth's portals ring!

New anthems bring.

Kneel at His throne,

Savior and King!



Thelma Westra

Theologians' Views on Dating and Marriage (II) Augustine on Sex and Marriage

by Steve Spencer

Of all the early church fathers, perhaps none has had more influence on Reformed thought than Augustine. Particularly, his refutations of Pelagius' heretical views on free will formed a sure foundation on which the Reformed doctrine of salvation was built. Yet in his teaching on sex and marriage Augustine made serious errors—or more correctly only understood part of the truth—and these errors have had important consequences as they form the basis of the erroneous teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on sex and marriage. While we should admire much of Augustine teachings, we must reject some of his teachings on sex and marriage and in doing so we must understand how our views differ from the Roman Catholics.

Augustine understood that sex in marriage was not sinful. In this teaching he broke from one of his mentors, Jerome, who taught that all sexual relations were sinful and thus celibacy was the preferred state to which all Christians should aspire. Augustine followed the Bible too closely to agree with such a position. He knew that the Bible esteemed the state of marriage and child-rearing too highly for such a position to be correct. Therefore, Augustine argued, "The union, then, of male and female for the purpose of procreation is the natural good of marriage." He believed that sex within marriage was good as long as the purpose of sex was bringing forth a child, and he further knew that it was not simply enough to want to have a child, but the married couple must desire to bring forth a child that will be a child of God and serve God. With this thrust of his teaching we must heartily agree. In our marriages we must desire to bring forth covenant children that will serve and honor God.

But from this point, on Augustine stumbles. Augustine sees bringing forth children as the only acceptable purpose that allows husband and wife to have sexual

relations. This belief led Augustine to teach that when a husband and wife have sex and do not intend to have a child they commit a sin, what Augustine called a venial sin. Further, if a husband and wife have sexual relations in marriage and try to prevent having a child such as when a couple uses birth control then they commit what Augustine called a mortal sin.

Now it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the Roman Catholic churches' current teachings on mortal and venial sins, but what Augustine meant by this distinction is far different in any event. What Augustine meant is similar to the distinction that is made in our Lord's Supper form. Some sins are such a break from covenant fellowship with God that the church must implement discipline and the member who commits such sins must be barred from the Lord's Table—this is what Augustine meant by mortal sins. On the other hand, we also commit sins that "remaineth against our wills in us," to use the words of our Lord's Supper form; these sins we must repent from, but they do not bar us from the Table of the Lord—this is what Augustine meant by venial sins.

Thus Augustine's belief was that if a husband and wife have sex without trying to conceive a child then they sin. If they have sex simply without thinking of conceiving a child this is a sin that they must repent from but it is not a violation of the seventh commandment. However, if a husband and wife have sex and intend not to bring forth a child then in Augustine's view they commit adultery. This teaching is still fundamentally the position of the Roman Catholics (although a significant change was made in the 1950's when it was proclaimed by the Pope that the rhythm method of birth control was not a mortal sin; Augustine would have seen this as adultery as well.)

The reason for Augustine's error is that he failed to appreciate a second purpose for sexual relations that God

has given married couples. God has given husband and wife sex as a wonderful gift not only to bring forth covenant children, although this is surely another important reason that God has included sex in the marital relationship, but also to express the unity that exists between the husband and wife. God gives sex to married couples so that they can express that they are one flesh. This union between husband and wife serves to glorify God in that in binding together as one flesh this union testifies to the unity between Christ and his bride the church.

This important teaching about sex and marriage Augustine was unable to see, and with only part of the truth he was led astray and adopted an unbiblical position. He did not correctly understand the teaching of Hebrew 13:4 where we read, “Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled.” And he misinterpreted I Corinthians chapter 7 that we explained in the last installment in this series. This chapter teaches that sexual relations between a man and a woman are acceptable in the eyes of God. Augustine however, believed that because this passage teaches that sex is only permitted and not commanded that sexual relations might very well be sinful. Thus in his rush to sweep away the important implications of this text he failed to appreciate that sexual relations can glorify God in that they bring man and wife together as one flesh.

In practice, Augustine’s position leads to absurdities. If a couple is incapable of having children from Augustine’s point of view then they should try to remain celibate. When couples pass the age of child bearing then they should try to remain chaste. Any sexual relations

by these couples would constitute sin. This the Bible does not teach. Married couples can and should have sexual relations as long as these sexual relations glorify God. Now in most marriages sexual relations can glorify God by bring forth children and all who can glorify God in this way should seek to do so. But for those who cannot have children their sexual relations can still glorify God by expressing that they are one flesh and God has made them such.

In a similar way we must not believe as the Roman Catholics do that any use of birth control is wrong. No Christian husband and wife should use birth control without searching their heart to be certain that they are not using it for the wrong purposes. They must realize that one of the ways that their sexual relations can glorify God is through bringing forth children. Thus they will want to have as many children as they can. On the other hand, they may realize that for a season, perhaps for the health of the wife or to make it possible to raise the existing children, they may try not to have children. Still their sexual relations can glorify God, because their relations can still express the oneness of flesh in their marriage.

Let us thank God for the wonderful gift of marriage which he gives to many of us, and may we glorify God in our marriages and specifically in our sexual relations in marriage by bringing forth children and by expressing the unity of husband and wife that God has established. ❖

Steve is a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Where We Stand

The Threat of the New Age Movement in the Classroom

By Shanda Bleyenbergh

New Age! What is it? The New Age Movement is extremely anti-Christian. It is in total contradiction with God and His Word. As I researched this topic, I was reminded of how fast this movement is growing. The dangers are so great, but ap-

pear so small and insignificant. The threat of the New Age Movement is also very alive in education. More and more students are taught the sinful views involved in this movement. I will explain some of the views of this movement and relate them to the classroom.

“Relax! Lie in silence on the classroom floor. Look at the sun and soak in the warmth. Do you want to be perfect? Imagine yourself being whatever you want to be, to be perfect! You are full of wisdom and contain all power.” In the book *The Great Depression*, Jonathan D. James explains how educator Beverly Gaylean practices this with her twenty-five 1st graders in Los Angeles public school. First graders! At such a young age, children are taught that they are divine and perfect. The Bible clearly teaches against this notion. Jeremiah 17:9 states, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” The heart is wicked; it is not divine or perfect. Romans 3:23 states, “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” No creature can be equal to the glorious, almighty God in Heaven.

All those who maintain the thought of the New Age are pantheistic. This means that everything is God and God is in everything. With this belief system, schools are trying to gain oneness with creation. In a college near my hometown, a class participated in a form of yoga. They relaxed their bodies and became free of all stressful thoughts. Many of the students participated and thought nothing of what they were doing. That is the scariest part. People are participating in the fast growing New Age Movement without even realizing what they are doing. Ignorance is not an excuse. We must have the knowledge of the Bible to know the truth.

The idea that man is God is definitely wrong. The Heidelberg Catechism explains the depravity of human nature. Our nature is corrupt. Question eight asks, “Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness?” The answer: “Indeed we are; except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.” God regenerates His children, but He does not make them to be God. Article two in the second head of doctrine in the Canons of Dort says, “we are unable to make that satisfaction in our own persons, or to deliver ourselves from the wrath of God.”

If I become a teacher, I will teach my students to humble themselves in the sight of God. I will teach them that God is alone all mighty. We have so much thanks to give to our gracious Father. We are a unique creature born above any beast, but without God we are dead in sin, totally depraved.

When I think of the New Age Movement entering into classrooms, I think of public schools. But today, Christian schools are becoming warped with the New Age Movement. The thought that all religion is tolerated is a view of the New Age. I have come across this idea fre-

quently. With this view, there are no absolutes, no standards. Everything is relative! The Bible stands in complete contradiction with this as is evident in the Ten Commandments. The Bible teaches only truth and does contain standards and norms. If one teaches that everything is relative then the door is open to all sin. Children are taught that homosexuality, adultery, and abortion are accepted. This is so sad!

Schools carry many other New Age signs. In a Lutheran college near my school, teachers tell their students how to use horoscopes and encourage them to use such things. I also see the Ying-Yang symbol on many t-shirts and jewelry. Some people know what this symbol is about, some don't, and some don't care. It is sad to see this enter into Christian schools. We must be on our guard and be a witness at all times.

It is so very important to have knowledge in the truth of the Bible, but also in the New Age Movement. In order to prevent this horrible belief system to creep on us even more, we must know what is involved in it. Television, music, video games, and board games all can contain views of the New Age Movement. Parents must be very aware of the toys and games that children have. Cartoons that may seem so innocent can be full of New Age views. As a teacher, I would be aware of the dangers of this movement and alert my students about these dangers. I pray that God will guide me so I may teach to the best of my ability, and that I may teach the truth of God without false practices as of the New Age.

We must constantly give God thanks for directing our lives in the truth. II Corinthians 4:6 states, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” If God did not bestow upon us His grace, we too would follow the spirit of the world. May God bless us in each day to walk the narrow path which is set before us. May we educate our children based on the glorious truth of our Father. Thanks be to God! ❖

Shanda is a member of Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota.

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

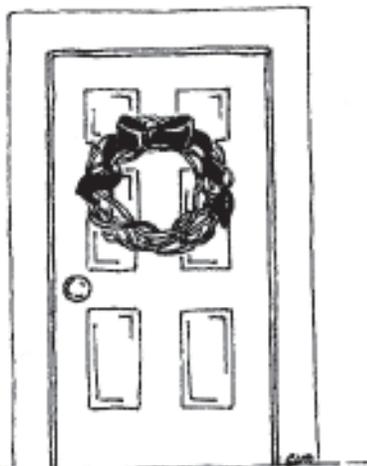
What Is True (1)

Knock, knock.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Sir.

May we have a few words with you today? We see so many events happening around us that tell us the end of the world is near..."



I listened to my father and the two strangers talk awhile. The strangers looked like nice people. One was a nicely dressed man and the other was a friendly looking lady.

Then I heard my dad say, "But what do you believe about Jesus?" It sounded like they weren't agreeing on this. A few minutes later my father sent them away. They tried to give him a booklet before they left, but Dad wouldn't take it. He shut the door.

"Why did you stop talking with them, Dad?" I asked.

"What they came to tell us wasn't true. They belong to a cult called Jehovah's Witnesses, and they say that Jesus is just a man and not really God. We know the wonder of Christmas is that Jesus was born both 'very man' and 'very God'."

"Why didn't you take their booklet?" I asked.

"Well, Philip, why would I want to spend my time reading and thinking about what isn't true? Come, let's find something worthwhile to read. In fact, let's read the first chapter of Matthew for devotions and think about Who Jesus really is. *That is 'the truth'.*"



"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true,... think on these things" Philippians 4:8. ❖

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

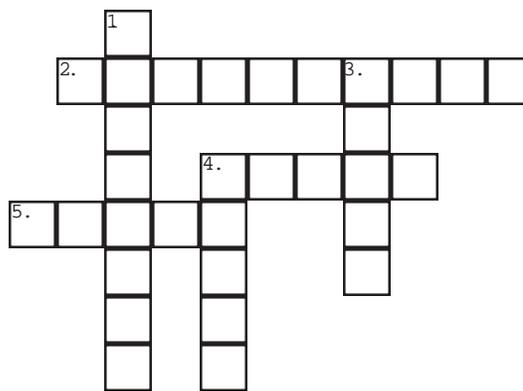
... *let it shine!*

by Connie Meyer

Look up Lord's Day 6 of the Heidelberg Catechism, question and answer 18. In the question, what is Jesus called? (1. down). In the answer, what is the last thing mentioned that He "of God is made unto us"? (2. across).

Fill in these blanks from John 1:14, "...full of (5. across) and (3. down). Whom do these words refer to?(4. across).

In the story, Philip's father was thinking of John 14:6 when he said, "*That is 'the truth'.*" Who said, "the truth," in this verse? (4. down).



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Church News

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

FAITH, MI

Baptism was administered to Emily Anne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ron Koole, and to Sarah Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bob Moelker.

GRANDVILLE, MI

Kayleigh Jean, daughter of Rick & Carol Bos, and Jake Collin, son of Leon & Ellen Kamps, were presented for holy baptism.

HOLLAND, MI

Tom & Cherie Cammenga presented their twin sons, Daniel Joel & Jonathan Thomas, for baptism.

HOPE, MI

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to Tess Louise, daughter of Harlan & Lenora Hoekstra and to Jesse Phillip, son of Tim & Brenda Bomers.

HULL, IA

Mr. & Mrs. Paul DeRoos presented their daughter, Sarah Dawn, for baptism.

LOVELAND, CO

The sacrament of baptism was administered to Samuel, son of Mr. & Mrs. John Moore.

PEACE, IL

Alyssa Laine, daughter of Ken & Cindy Poortinga, was presented for baptism.

SOUTH HOLLAND, IL

Chad Douglas, son of Mark & Brenda Zandstra, was presented for holy baptism.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"...and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."
Romans 10:10

EDGERTON, MN

Heidi Bleyenbergh has made public her profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

HOPE, MI

Public profession of faith was made by Jason Cleveland.

HUDSONVILLE, MI

Matthew Kamps had made public his profession of faith in the Lord Jesus.

HULL, IA

Public profession of faith was made by Shawn Hoksbergen, Melissa Hoksbergen, & Alissa Brummel.

SOUTH HOLLAND, IL

Brian Lenting, Dale Zandstra & Sandra Zandstra have made public profession of faith in the Lord.

Public profession in Jesus Christ was made by Michael Bultema & Joel Holleman.

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

HULL, IA

Joined in holy matrimony were Lane Brummel & Tricia Vander Steen.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S STUDIES: As the societies once again begin for the year, we thought it may be of interest to see what the young people are studying. May the Lord use this study of His Word to build up our young people in the Christian faith.

BETHEL, IL—Traditional vs.
Contemporary Christian Music
DOON, IA—Daniel 1
EDMONTON, AB—I John 4
EDGERTON, MN—Proverbs
GRANDVILLE, MI—Ephesians 1
HOPE, MI—Ruth
HULL, IA—Common Grace
LOVELAND, CO—Acts 15
LYNDEN, WA—I John
PEACE, IL—I Thessalonians
RANDOLPH, WI—Ruth
SOUTH HOLLAND, IL—John 8

Thank -you to those of you who sent in bulletins this month. Please continue to send them in. We *welcome* more news from the other churches who have not yet sent in their bulletins. You may send your bulletins to:

Melinda DeMeester
1171 Sunset Hills NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49544

or e-mail to:

melindad@juno.com