Beacon Lights

The Lord of Hosts hath visited His Flock the house of Judah, and hath made them as His goodly horse in the battle.

Zechariah 10:3

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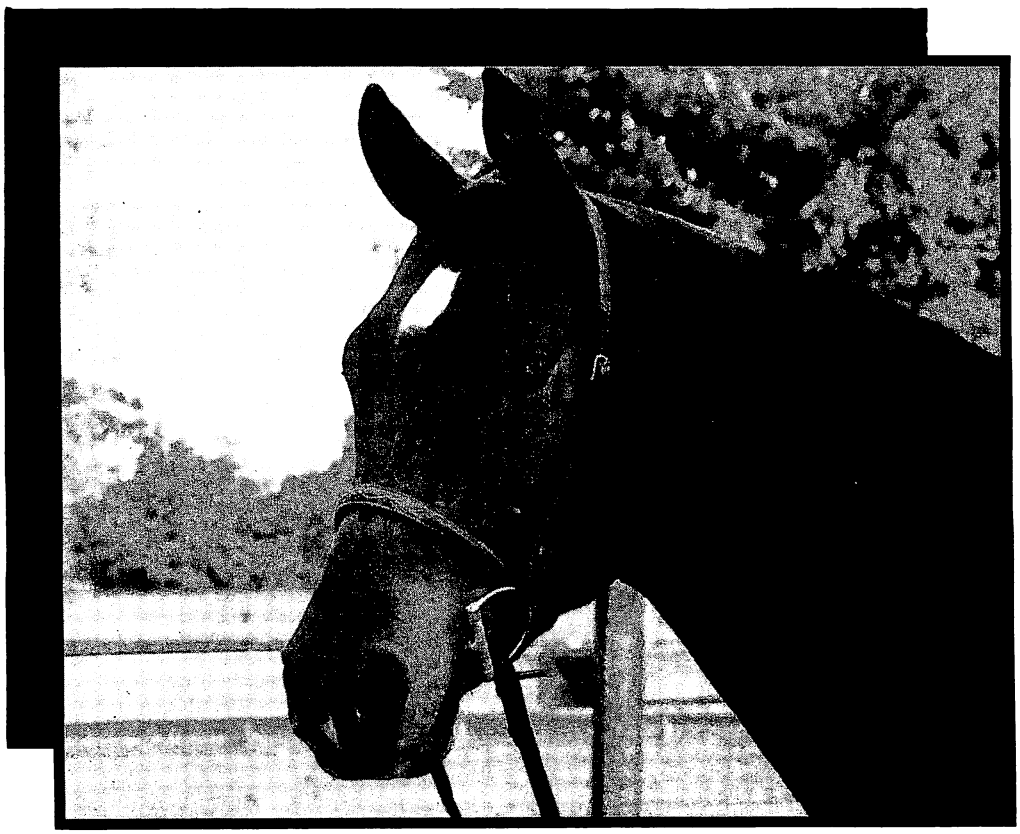

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"Tell No Man"

(Taken from Mark 7:36)

About two thousand years ago in a town some six miles south of Jerusalem a baby was born in a stable. His earthly parents called him Jesus, the name given to them by an angel. I would like to look at what He said and the message He wanted proclaimed, as the first three gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, reveal it.

The message of the Bible, including these three books, is that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God. The very first verse in Mark proclaims Jesus as the Son of God and the first chapters of Matthew and Luke tell of the virgin birth, something without parallel in human history. Knowing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and keeping in mind Jesus' teachings that we should let our light shine before men, we would expect Jesus to proclaim to all that He is the Messiah, the Son of God, Word made flesh. What we find in the first three gospels, however, is something quite different.

Throughout Matthew, Luke, and especially Mark, Jesus commands demons, disciples and people healed not to tell anyone that He is the Messiah. Although I may have missed some, I know at least sixteen texts where Jesus silenced those wanting to proclaim that He is the Messiah (Matthew 8:4, 12:16, 16:20, 17:9, 9:30; Mark 1:23-25, 1:34, 1:43-44, 3:11-12, 4:10-12, 5:43, 7:36, 8:26, 8:30; Luke 5:14, 9:21). Why would Jesus institute a Messianic secret?

The first possible explanation is that Jesus feared the Pharisees. Jesus did not fear for his life, since this is evident in giving His life on the cross to save us from our sins. Since the time had not come for Jesus to give His life, maybe He was trying to smooth things out with the Pharisees. In Mark 1:45, for example, after Jesus cleansed a leper, the leper went abroad telling what Jesus had done for him, and Jesus was forced to move from the city to a desert place. In John 5:16, the Apostle tells us that after Jesus healed the invalid at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath, the Jews sought to slay Him. Under these conditions, it seems likely that Jesus did not want the Pharisees to prevent the gospel message from going abroad.

The explanation, however, seems unlikely. First, from the very beginning, at His baptism (Matthew 3:7) Jesus did not cower before the Pharisees, but called them a "generation of vipers." Nowhere in the gospels does Jesus give in to the Pharisees for the sake of peace. Second, saying that Jesus did not proclaim the gospel to further the Kingdom is contradictory. Never in history has silence of the Good News of Jesus Christ served the purpose of the Kingdom. This was true in the time of the prophets, it is true today, it will be true in the future and it certainly was true in the time of Jesus.

Another possible explanation is that Jesus used "reverse psychology," i.e., He commanded people and demons not to reveal that He was the Messiah, knowing that this mandate would further the spread of His name. This was what happened when Jesus healed the deaf and mute man. Jesus "charged them that they should tell me no man; but the more He charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it."

This too seems an unlikely explanation. God does not command us to do one thing with the hope that we do something else. God's commands are right and should be followed—to say otherwise would contradict the attributes of God.

An explanation made popular in this century by critics is that Jesus Himself did not believe, or at least understand, that He was the Messiah. They popularized this Messianic secret because Jesus Himself did not explicitly claim to be the Messiah until the end of the Gospels.

This explanation goes against clear facts. Jesus could perform miracles, and if He expected others to see this as a sign of His divinity, He Himself would recognize that as a sign. Also, it is certain that His parents told him of His miraculous birth.

A fourth explanation is that Jesus did not want anyone to know that He was the Messiah or at least until after His resurrection. This seems to make sense: Jesus commanded people not to tell that He was the Messiah because he did not want anyone to know. In Caesarea Philippi, when Peter made his great confession that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus "commanded them to tell no man that thing; saying, the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain and be raised the third day." Luke 9:21b-22. When Jesus, Peter, James, and John ascended the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus charged them with a similar command. "Jesus charged them saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead" (Matthew 17:9).

Although this may be the most likely and clear explanation, it is not without its problems. First, had Jesus' intent been to hide the fact that He was the Messiah, He did a poor job of it. In Mark 6, Jesus performs the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, a miracle that comes between other miracles in which He commands His "Messianic Secret" not to be revealed. He performed this miracle in the public and all could see the power of Christ.

Second, Jesus publicly declared Himself to be the Messiah before the resurrection. During His questioning by the high priest, Caiphas asked Jesus point blank, "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tellest whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus answered, "Thou hast said." Had Jesus wanted no one to know that He was the Christ or at least until after His resurrection, why did He Himself publicly reveal His identity?

Third, to get a proper understanding of the situation, we need to consider the purpose of miracles, for it is often at the time of a miracle that Jesus commands people not to reveal that He is the Christ. One of the purposes of miracles was to exhibit the fact that Jesus was sent from God. The miracles were given as a testimony and as a support of Jesus' divinity. It is contradictory to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God through a miracle, but then squelch that testimony. Jesus Himself expected the people to recognize his divinity through His miracles, and accused "the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not" (Matthew 11:20).

Whatever the reason that Jesus commanded people and demons not to reveal that He was the Christ, one thing is certain: Those who saw Christ and His miracles through the spectacles of faith given to them by the Holy Spirit recognized Him as the Messiah, while others stumbled in their blindness. Matthew tells us that since Capernaum saw the works of Jesus but did not repent, judgment will be greater for them than for Sodom. Jesus said concerning parables in Mark 4:11-12, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but to them that are without, all these things are done in parables; that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted and their sins forgiven them."

This is true today as well. Many can plainly see that Jesus is the Son of God but do not believe, and many hear the Word of God but remain with hardened hearts. For those hearts that the Holy Spirit renews, there is no "Messianic Secret." Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

From The Editor

Welcome to the February issue of the *Beacon Lights*. I would especially like to welcome those who are reading the *Beacon Lights* for the first time, and encourage you to continue to read it, as well as the Bible, in the future.

Sarah Hanko, daughter of our missionary Rev. Ronald Hanko, gives us the first of a series of three articles. This article calls all, young and old, to be holy, for God is holy. Look in following issues for the next two articles on righteousness and knowledge. Paula Faber, a teacher at Heritage School in Hudsonville, Michigan, gives us the last article of our home rubric. It tells of a girl who makes a change in her life—a change which involves a more vigorous devotional life. Many of us can see ourselves in this story.

Rev. Gritters includes the first of a three-part article on Biblical marriage. This article, included in the dating and marriage rubric, was first given at a speech at Hope College for the Holland PRC Evangelism Committee. John Huizenga wrote an interesting, educational, and inspirational article on ants. He notes that Proverbs 6:6 says that we must consider the ways (notice the plural) of the ant, and gives some suggestions as to what those ways might be.

As the second part of his Church Family rubric, Tom Bergman included a poem about our hope of heaven. It requires two people to read, so find a partner and read the poem together. Dave Hanko wrote an article about the importance of the catechism class. This can not be over stressed, for catechistic instruction is vital to the spiritual development of the youth of the church, those who will some day lead and rule God's church. This month's devotionals, based on the book of Proverbs, were written by Rodney Kleyn. Writing the devotionals takes a great deal of time and energy, so if you see Rodney, thank him for his efforts which are appreciated by so many.

The last part of Rev. Mahtani's speech was inadvertently omitted and will be included in the next issue.

Don't forget to notice the convention advertisement on the back of the magazine. This year's convention will be held in South Holland, Illinois, and they hope to have a good turnout. Mark the dates on your calendar and plan to attend!

May God be with you in the coming month.

Guest Article

Holiness Unto the Lord

by Sarah Hanko

We as New Testament Christians are anointed by the Holy Spirit to the three fold office of all believers: prophet, king and priest. In these offices we are but a shadow of the triune God Who is our eternal Prophet, Priest and King (Revelation 1:6). Through the fall we lost the image of God necessary to exercise these offices but God in His

grace was pleased to restore unto us His image: knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24).

These parts of the image are not abstract; because knowledge is a necessary gift for a prophet, righteousness for a king and holiness for a priest. How beautifully the image corresponds with our offices.

The three constituents of the image are talents that we are to employ in God's service. In the day of judgment we will have to give account of our employment of these talents. How many of us, when the Master comes, will have buried the talents in the ground like the unprofitable servant in the parable of the talents? Our God Who dwells in heaven knows the heart and will reckon unto us our just reward.

Perhaps the talent that is least exercised today is holiness. The essence of holiness is separation for God's service. Therefore the call of Christ to His bride becomes all the more urgent: "Be ye holy; as I am holy" (I Peter 1:15). Heed this call and be not slack.

The Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament, the dispensation of types and shadows, teach us the essence of New Testament priesthood. Look with me at the inscription on the plate fitted across their forehead: "Holiness unto the Lord." These men did not have an ordinary vocation in life but were dedicated to God's service in the tabernacle. However: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple are ye" (I Corinthians 3:16-17).

We are living stones made without hands dedicated to everlasting service in God's eternal temple of which Christ is the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:21-22). God's eternal decree, the blueprint for the temple, includes us as stones not because God foresaw our good works but because He foreknew or foreloved us. As living stones in His temple we must be "holy and unblameable in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation."

As priests or stones in God's temple, the negative aspect of our calling is to be separate from the evil world around us. Antithetical living is the command of Christ and we must not build bridges that the world may infiltrate our camp less we become defiled. Young people, the temptation is great and the devil's allurements enticing, but once we have entered the camp of the world it will not be long before we join the devil's ranks. Beware for "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve both God and Mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

Serve God as your Master out of gratitude!

The positive aspect of our calling as priests is to serve God with all our hearts, minds and souls, not only in actions but also in words. Do not despair for Christ Who called you will preserve you in this holy calling.

God is Holy and He cannot dwell with an unholy people; wherefore, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord? (Hebrews 12:14).

Sarah is living in North Ireland with her family. Her father, Rev. Ron Hanko, is missionary there.

Family Time

Charlene's Conviction

by Paula Faber

Charlene slipped into the pew at ten after nine. She was early, something that didn't happen often on Sunday morning. Twenty minutes were left to sit back and watch the church fill up. Charlene didn't realize that God would be using those twenty minutes to convict her of being negligent in her prayer and devotional life.

In came family after family. She noticed a dear friend, who had been sick for weeks, was here this morning! Suddenly she was asked to move down to allow

room in her row for a family. She smiled, as the gentlemen and his two little sons sat down. The man's wife had left him about two years ago. As the rows began to fill up, Charlene became uneasy. Her prayers last night, and for nights on end had been empty. They had centered about her needs, as she would drift off to sleep. The minister began to speak and Charlene changed her thoughts to the prayer being offered to God. As the congregation rose to sing, the minister announced that last night an elderly gentleman from the congregation had passed away, and was now in glory. Charlene could not keep back the tears. They flowed down her cheeks. Why had she forgotten to pray for this man as he suffered from his recent heart surgery? Why had no time been taken to pray for the young family who was separated because of marriage problems? Why had she neglected to take her friend's sickness to God in prayer? As she wiped away tears of sorrow, the minister asked the congregation to turn to...

Charlene turned the key and walked inside her home. It was chilly outside. She put the coffee on and sat down in a comfy chair. She shook her head. What should she do? How would she make time for this important part of life? How could changes be made and kept? She poured herself a cup of coffee and began to ponder these thoughts.

The following morning, a loud buzz from the alarm clock startled her. She rolled over to check the time. Her clock read 6:03 AM. It was early, and she felt tired. She could hear a pelting rain blow against her window. A perfect morning to roll over and sleep a little longer. She almost caught herself screaming, NO! Charlene was determined to take the convictions God had given yesterday, and make a specific time to spend in prayer and Bible reading. She pulled her robe around her and flicked on the lights in her study. It was quiet and still in the house. She opened her Bible to Psalm 57. She began reading. After finishing the chapter, she jotted down a few thoughts about what she had read. She then bowed her head and thanked the Lord for pricking her heart, and she asked Him for zeal and fervent love to serve Him.

Every Friday night, Charlene and several friends met for coffee at a local restaurant. They were dedicated Christians who loved God, and were a great encouragement to one another in their walk with God. This Friday night was no different. After the waitress had taken their order, Charlene turned to her friend, Barb. She tried to share how God had exposed her slackness in personal devotions. The table of friends suddenly became quiet. Everyone began to listen, and then a buzz of talk began as everyone began to share their similar problems and thoughts about their devotional life.

Mark, a nurse assistant in a nearby hospital was the first to speak. "I enjoy reading passages of God's Word to the patients I see every day. Since I work on the floor with cancer patients, I can often talk with them about the providence of God. I usually pray with my patients in their great need (as many feel death is coming quickly). I know that I am growing spiritually through this exercise. I try to study the Bible every day so that I will have words to speak to those who are hurting. I've come to see that I must start the day in prayer to God. How can I pray with my patients, if I don't pray myself? God will not regard or answer my prayers if they are done out of formality. It helps me keep a good perspective on my work, my patients, and God's plan in all of this. I have come to acknowledge that God's plan is perfect and I hope to spread this hope to my patients."

"That's great Mark!" said Brenda, a florist in the downtown area. "Although, my job doesn't make the circumstances for anything like that possible, my devotional life is more private and personal. I've been reading through the book of Isaiah. I use a commentary after each few verses. Isaiah's life was not an easy one, as he witnessed to those about him. I've been trying to take the lessons I'm learning and apply them to my own life. One of the things God has taught me, is that obedience to His commands does give real freedom!"

"You both make it sound so easy," sighed Heidi. "I'm just having an awful time praying and reading my Bible. My mind wanders so easily to other things. I find I read several verses without even thinking about what is really happening, much less how it applies to my life."

"Heidi, you ought to try what I have been doing. I keep a journal. I use the journal to record what I've read and what I've learned as I go through a book of the Bible. Some days I'll even record my prayers. This enables me to keep focused on God. It also helps me pray in a meaningful way, not with cold, empty words," said Luke.

Luke spoke again, "Has anyone used the letters of the word "ACTS" to remind them of things to pray for?

A stands for Adoration.
C stands for Confession.
T stands for Thanksgiving.
S stands for Supplication."

Our purpose, is to glorify God. I write down verses of the Bible about the power and majesty of our God.

They bring to mind the reason for adoration, as I prepare to pray.

When we confess our sins, then we acknowledge that God is perfect and holy, and that we are sinners in need of being made righteous. Writing down specific sins and bringing them before God, helps us see ourselves, as we really are. It shows us the need of salvation through Jesus Christ.

It is also amazing how very unthankful we can be. God has supplied so much for our bodies and souls. Our discussion tonight is something we ought to thank God for. God gives so much. Each gift should be received with thanksgiving.

Then there are the many needs we see and feel for others and for ourselves. We may bring our troubles and joys to God, whether they are large or small."

"God has given us His Word and promised that He will hear our prayers!" said Barb. "It's amazing how God has made us each so different, yet how He knows we each need to read the Bible and pray. I don't think any one of us reads the same passage or prays at the exact time. We seem to each have a time, and a way to have devotions that will work for us, yet we all need to pray and read His Word."

The restaurant was nearly empty now. Only a few "night owls" were sipping on steaming coffee, when everyone in that corner booth bowed their heads to pray. The prayer Mark offered that night was simple yet full of meaning, as he asked God to bring fruit upon the discussion, and courage for each one to press on in their devotional life.

Paula is a member of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, and a teacher at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Dating & Marriage

Biblical Marriage

Part I

by Rev. Barry Gritters

This article is adapted for young people from a speech given for Holland Protestant Reformed Chruch's Evangelism Committee.

For the glory of God and the peace of God's people, the church's young people seek godly marriages.

God's glory is first.

Man's happiness is second, based on God's Glory.

Miserable marriages of professing Christians bring dishonor to God's Name.

They also make miserable the lives of God's people, and bring children to ruin. I have seen more tears shed for the misery of bad marriages than almost anything else. More hurt, more pain, more wounds from miserable marriages than all of them put together. If anything can be done to spare God's people of that pain—especially the pain of the children who suffer so immeasurably, and sometimes perish from the parents' folly—I pray that God will use this kind of instruction from God's Word.

Two basic presuppositions we begin with. Without them we go nowhere.

First, the rules for marriage are determined by God in His Word. If not by God, by whom? Sally Jesse Raphael? Geraldo? Ann Landers? Dr. Laura Schlesinger? I warn you: take their word, and by the time ten years pass, the advice of these godless counselors will have changed, and you will be ruled by a different, fickle, always changing standard. No, God created marriage and the family; God determines how it must go.

Imagine, once, the whole human race consistently ignoring the law of gravity. Every day, men and women walked off cliffs, stepped out of airplanes; children jumped out of tall trees, stepped off high roofs. Everyone watched them do it, but no one learned. They kept breaking their legs, losing their lives, ruining themselves because they ignored the law of God that says objects will fall to the earth at a rate of 32 feet per second squared. "What fools. What absolute fools. Utter stupidity," the world would cry. All would agree. They have no sense at all. They should know the law, really do know the law, but ignore it absolutely."

But year after year, day after day, *marriages* are made. But because God's laws for marriage are ignored, more people come to ruin than in almost any other way.

When will they ever learn?

When they come to know Jesus Christ.

That's the second presupposition. To know anything about marriage—really *know* something—you must know Jesus Christ. There is only one word that must be heard clearly today. You cannot know about marriage without knowing about Jesus Christ. The more you know about Jesus Christ, the more you know about marriage. Biblical marriage is all about Jesus Christ.

*** ***** ***

Biblical marriage between two persons is to be modeled after the real marriage—the marriage between Christ and the Church. There are different ways to approach the subject of marriage. The best way is to see that marriage is a reflection (picture) of the relationship between Christ and His Church.

This is biblical. Ephesians 5:22-33 has a long comparison between earthly marriages and the marriage between Jesus and His wife, the church. Speaking about our marriages, the passage ends in verse 32 saying, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

What *is* the relationship of Christ and the Church? Briefly:

1. God Himself is the husband of the body of His people, the Church (Isaiah 54:5). 2. God married Himself to us through Jesus Christ, Who is God the Son. 3. The marriage of Jesus Christ to the Church, His body, is legal. It was secured by the death of Jesus on the cross. At the cross, Jesus obtained the marriage license, and God approved of this when He raised Jesus from the dead. 4. This marriage is spiritually compatible, because Jesus Christ prepares His bride for the wedding and the life of marriage. By putting His Spirit in our hearts, He makes us love Him, behave like Him, give ourselves for Him, submit to His rule of grace and love. By washing us with water by the Word, He cleanses us, purges us from our filth, and makes us attractive to Him. Oh, this marriage is the mother of all marriages!!

This marriage is first and primary.

The relationship of marriage, as you and I know it—the loving bond between husband and wife—exists because the relationship between Christ and the Church exists. In the mind and will of God, our marriages were not first and then Christ came to save us from the misery into which Adam and Eve plunged us. In the mind and will of God, Christ's marriage with the Church was first. Marriage between man and wife was created as an *illustration* of that relation (see Colossians 1:15, 16).

This is why earthly marriages pass away, and the marriage between Christ and the Church, which is the original marriage, will last forever. There are some practical points that ought to be made here: *First*, knowing this will help us endure the loss of a spouse—we're going to see him or her again in a far higher, more glorious relationship than we had on earth; in the eternal marriage in glory! *Second*, this will help us think soberly about our own hoped-for marriages (I Corinthians 7:29ff)! Marriages are not the most important thing in the world; they are important only insofar as they are reflections of the original marriage—and that's important! *Third*, this frees the singles from despair. Not to have an earthly marriage is not the worst thing in the

world! *Fourth*, (know this, you who follow Jesus Christ,) if there is a choice between your marriage to Jesus Christ and your marriage to an earthly spouse, you choose Jesus Christ (Matthew 10:35-39).

This marriage is a union *planned in eternity* to glorify God.

From before He created the worlds, God planned to glorify His Name through uniting His Son to a fallen people, to give to His Son a body—the Church. Then, in time, He united that Church to Christ, by sovereign love.

This marriage is a union in which Christ is the Head.

We are His body. He rules over us. He's our Lord. He governs us just as our head governs our body. Ephesians 5:23 says that "Christ is the head of the church."

This marriage is a union in which *the Church is subject to Christ.*

The Church submits to the rule and headship of Christ; the Church reverences Christ; the Church obeys Christ in all things according to His Word. This comes out in verse 24: "Therefore the church is subject unto Christ." The will of Christ is sovereign in her life.

This marriage is a union in which *Christ gives Himself* to the Church.

Christ loves the Church, and is the Savior of the Church. By giving Himself over to death and hell, Jesus redeems His Body—the Church—from the death of hell which they deserve because of their sins. This comes out in verses 25b, 26: "Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it..."

And then He gives Himself to them in their own lifetime in that He gives them His Own life. He nourishes them with grace and with all the blessings of salvation, so that they can be strong and live in this world. This comes out in verse 29: He "nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church."

Our marriages are to be patterned after that marriage!!

Does anyone consider this anymore?

Did your parents teach you this for your future life in marriage? Do parents always seek to improve their marriages by asking themselves how Christ and His bride behave toward each other?

You can see, then, that *our* concern in the erosion of marriages is far different from the concern of most others in the world. (Here you can see that a conference of a sound Reformed church will be radically different from a conference on marriage in almost any other place.) Everyone, it seems, is concerned about marriage and the family. Just about every week I get something more in the mail talking about the Christian family. *Everyone* is talking about this family! Even the President of the United States has a "Council on the Family." But this concern, for the most part, is not a concern rooted in the Bible. For the most part it is simply a *pragmatic* concern—they see the erosion of biblical values as a loss of earthly peace and earthly prosperity. Or it's simply an emotional concern—they remember the good family life they had when they were young, and believe that it gave them a good life today.

Recently I received in the mail a church newspaper with an article about divorce by James Dobson. As much as I appreciate some of the things that he produces, I'm shocked at the failure of this professed Christian to *root his concern* for the family in this: it has to do with the glory of God in Christ!

Our concern with undermining of family life in the church is the glory of God. This is why we are concerned with husbands being the heads in the home, with wives being subject. This is why we are horrified at the prevalence of divorce and remarriage, with the lack of fellowship anymore in homes! The glory of God is at stake! If this is not our concern, God will not bless our efforts at all.

This is uniquely a *Reformed* concern. A Reformed church and Reformed believers put this on the top of their list of priorities in every aspect of life—church as well as home. "How does this behavior, or how does this confession affect the Name of our God Who saved us and demands to be glorified?" is the question that is important to the Reformed child of God.

And *motives*, in the Christian life, are everything.

If we are doing something with the wrong motive, God is not pleased with our effort, and will not bless our efforts, either. So with the Christian family.

(to be continued next issue)

Rev. Gritters is pastor of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Rodney Kleyn

February 1

Read Proverbs 1:1-19.

The Book of Proverbs is God's book of wisdom. It is His book of wisdom for His church. As members of the church we ought to use this book. The usefulness of the Proverbs is pointed out in the opening verses of the book. We can use the Proverbs to become wise. However, before any wisdom can be gained from the Proverbs, we must have the fear of God in our hearts. We must know God as our God, and we must fear him. We must believe that His Word, the Bible, is the only truth. With this fear of God in our hearts the Proverbs can be of great benefit to us, and we can grow in wisdom.

February 2

Read Proverbs 1:20-33.

What is wisdom? Wisdom is not just being smart enough to make the right decisions at the right time. Wisdom is not just being educated enough to have a good job. Wisdom is not just being old and full of experience. No, real wisdom is listening to the words of God and doing them. Wisdom is turning away from our own evil thoughts and desires, and turning to hear the Word of God. Sometimes the Word of God is a word of reproof, but the Word of God is always a word of Salvation, too. Wisdom is always turning first to hear what God says before anything else. Read Proverbs 1:23 again, and think about it throughout your day.

February 3

Read Proverbs 2:1-12.

From where do we receive wisdom? What inspires us to turn and hear God's Word? When we look at ourselves, we see that there certainly is not any natural desire in us to listen to God and to do what is right. How is it then that we do come to God to hear His Word, and to follow him? First God pours out His Spirit upon us (Proverbs 1:23), then we have a desire to seek after wisdom (Proverbs 2:1-4). God gives wisdom. He lays up wisdom for the righteous (Proverbs 2:7). He gives wisdom to the righteous, so that they are preserved in all of their way through life. He gives them so much wisdom that they understand everything that is right, and are preserved and delivered from everything that is evil.

February 4

Read Proverbs 2:10 - 3:4.

If we have a treasure we keep it as close to us as we can, so that we know it is safe. If we have jewelry we will wear it, and as long as we are still wearing it, we know it is safe. When we embrace somebody, to show that we love them, we embrace them so that they are close to our heart, and so that they can feel safe. We say that we love them with all of our heart. This is how we should treasure mercy and truth. We must bind them about our neck, and write them upon the table of our hearts. Mercy is an expression of our love for one another. Our keeping of the truth is an expression of our love for one another. Our keeping of the truth is an expression of our love for God. By holding these two as treasures, we shall find favor before God.

February 5

Read Proverbs 3:5-20.

What do we mean when we say, "In God we trust?" Does our country really trust in God? When we trust in God we rely totally on Him. When we trust in God we do not rely on ourselves, and we do not make decisions based on what we believe. No, we go to God whenever we need help. God is our helper (Psalm 90). Trusting in God means that we confess Him to be the giver of all things. It means that we fear God, and that we forsake our sin. It means that we give cheerfully to the work of the Lord in the church. When we trust in God by being wise in His eyes, and not in our own, then we can be sure that He will bless us and provide us with all that we need.

February 6

Read Job 23 & Proverbs 3:11-12.

Sometimes our life seems hard. Sometimes it seems like we are always battling through problems. Especially as young people our life often seems difficult. We have so many decisions to make. We want to have friends and popularity. We want to have fun and enjoy life. But, it seems like we have no friends. It seems like we can't have any fun because our parents won't let us. It seems like all we ever do is work and study and sleep. Our life often seems so hard. And yes, it is hard. But, in all of our hardships we must remember that we are being prepared by God for our place in heaven. He is purging us of our impurities, so that we can stand before Him as pure as gold. We must then realize that the difficulties of life are a blessing from God, and we must submit to them, and be sure that they are for our good.

February 7

Read Proverbs 3:21-35.

We ought to be a giving people. We should give good things to others. Giving to others does not just mean giving gifts to them at Christmas or on their birthday. We can give people a whole lot more than just possessions. Our attitude toward others must be a giving attitude. This means that we should greet other people happily. It means that we should talk to the lonely people. They need that more than any possession. To give means that we behave in love toward others. It means that we think only good things about others, and it means that we do not want to think bad about others. We must understand that God scorns the scorner, but that He gives grace, saving grace, to the humble of heart.

February 8

Read Proverbs 4.

We are called here to walk in the light. We are told that the wicked walk in darkness and we should not follow after them. The wicked walk in sin. Sin and evil are against the commandment of God. Sin and wickedness do not receive the approval of God. Because of their wicked deeds the wicked are separate from God. This separation from God is the darkness in which they walk. In this darkness they attempt to trap the just man and to make him fall. However, they cannot cause the righteous to fall, for the path of the just is a shining light. In the light of God's favor the just are able to walk looking straight on to the perfect day when they will be with God. The righteous are enabled, by God's grace, to walk separately from the sin and darkness of the world. Thank God, then, for His wonderful gift of grace!

February 9

Read Proverbs 5:1-14.

In these verses we have described for us the whorish woman of this world. Her lips drop as honeycomb. She seems sweet and pleasurable, but, her end is bitter. Her end is hell, and she will bring down to hell all those who go a lusting after her. But the passage is not speaking only of the whorish woman. No, this whorish woman is a picture of the wicked world around us. We are called here to remove ourselves far from the world. We are called here to live antithetically. We are called to live separate from the world. It is crucial that we realize that those who walk with the world will go down with the world into hell. So, obey the voice of God, your teacher, and incline your ear to His instruction.

February 10

Read Proverbs 7.

In this chapter we see again the same truth that we saw yesterday. The world and it's leader, the devil, seek to devour and bring down to destruction the people of God. The world and the devil seek to do this especially to the people of God when their faith is weak. The simple one in verse 7 is also the strong one in verse 26. This young man thought he was strong, but, he was void of understanding. Thinking that he was strong, he forgot God, and was snared by the temptations of the world. We must not rely on our own strength to overcome the temptations of the world. The temptations are too strong for our human flesh to resist. This whore coaxes this young man into her bed so sweetly and so smoothly that he cannot in his own strength resist her. The world does the same. So, pray to God that he will give you wisdom as your sister, so that you can resist the world.

February 11

Read Proverbs 6:20-35.

Today let us look specifically at the sin of adultery, and how this sin leads to destruction. This sin is not just the actual act committed with a whore, but this sin starts a long time before the actual act. This sin starts when a woman portrays herself in an immodest way. This sin starts when a man sees such a woman, and does not turn his head in disgust, but rather takes a good look at her, and lusts after her beauty in his heart. This sin starts with the pornography of the world, and the watching of all the filth that comes from Hollywood. If you are guilty of any of these sins, and you persist in them, then you are walking on hot coals, and you will be burned! Adultery and fornication are sins which destroy your soul. FLEE from them!

February 12

Read Proverbs 5:15-23.

In this passage we have a positive calling. The passage tells us to find our joy and satisfaction at home, and within our own family. Spiritually our positive calling here is to find our friends and pleasures within the realm of God's church. We are to seek out our friends and our future life partner within the fellowship of the church of God. Our friends are to be from the church only, and we are not to have strangers or outsiders as friends. Our husband or wife must come from within the church, and we must *always*, until death, be ravished with the love of that husband or wife. When God supplies us with a godly mate, then marriage is good, and marriage is permanent.

February 13

Read Proverbs 30:10-31.

Tomorrow is Valentines Day. You will probably go and buy something for your sweetheart. You will secretly or openly let that person know that you have feelings of affection towards him or her. Have you considered why you say you love your valentine? What is it in that person that draws you to him or her? We have just read in this chapter about the virtuous woman. Notice in verse thirty that it is not favor with others nor outward beauty that makes her virtuous, but it is the fear of the Lord from which all of her virtue flows. She loves God. She wants to please God. She fulfills her God-given calling cheerfully and willingly. All her virtue proceeds, not from her outward beauty and popularity, but from her godly walk. So, when you consider who you are going to date, and who you want for your valentine, look at their real virtues, and not just what you superficially see in their outward appearance and popularity.

February 14

Read Proverbs 18:22 and 19:14.

Today is Valentines Day. Today is the day of dates and candle-lit dinners and sweethearts. How serious are you about dating? Do you date just because it is fun, and just to promote your own popularity? Dating is the modern method for a man to find a wife. We may date, but we must not think that dating is just a game that we can play while we are teenagers. Dating is the way that a man finds his wife, and it is the way that God brings a woman to a man. One who uses dating to find a wife obtains the favor of the Lord, but one who plays with dating like a toy will certainly not receive any favor from God. Finding a wife is a good thing. One who finds a prudent wife, a wife who is brought to him by the Lord, finds a good thing. So, don't play around with dating, use it seriously, prayerfully and wisely.

February 15

Read Proverbs 6:1-19.

We are called here to be eager workers. We must be willing stewards of our God-given gifts and tasks. We must realize that if we do not work, then God will bring us to poverty. Also, we must see that if we do not perform our spiritual tasks, then we will starve our souls, and they will become spiritually poor. Daily we must work at our God-given jobs, and daily we must do our spiritual work. We must work at our jobs so that our mouths are fed, and we must perform our spiritual work, so that our souls are fed. Our spiritual work is to attend unto the wisdom of God each day of our lives. Attending unto the wisdom of God is reading the Scriptures daily and meditating on the Scripture continually. God is our great God, and His Word is our spiritual food. By faith in that Word we will never become spiritually poor.

February 16

Read Proverbs 8.

In the Gospels Christ is called the Word. Here we see that Christ is called Wisdom. He is wisdom. All wisdom and understanding come from Him. Without Him there is no wisdom, and without Him there is no understanding. By Him kings reign. He gives to the rulers their power, and without Him, they would not reign. Christ is from everlasting. When the heavens were created, He was there. Christ is our great God. Listen then to the wisdom of Christ, and realize that with Christ is favor from the Lord. With Christ is life, life which is eternal. Refuse to take heed to the wisdom of Christ, and realize that without Christ is death. Refusing Christ is hating Christ, and those who hate Christ love death.

February 17

Read Proverbs 9.

The scorner in verse eight of this chapter is a scorner of God. All those who will not repent and turn from their evil ways are scorners of God. We are told that we should not rebuke a scorner. When we see the men of the world sinning, we shouldn't always be rebuking and correcting them. Rather, our lives ought to be such examples to the wicked that they will see their errors. We should not give people the impression that we are more righteous than them, by always rebuking them. But, we must rebuke our fellow Christians when they sin. Even more, we must love our fellow Christians when they rebuke us, because they are showing concern for our souls. Be ready then always to receive correction, and live a godly life that is an example to others.

February 18

Read Proverbs 10:1-10.

In Psalm 133 we read, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." This is especially true within a family of children and parents. We see unity in our families, because God has given His wisdom to family members. But, this God-fearing wisdom is not always present in families, and without this wisdom there is no unity. We have read today that "a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." When parent's neglect their duty to instruct and bring up their children in the fear of God's Name, then the children will go astray. And when children neglect the good instruction of their parents, they bring heaviness of heart and grief to their parents. So, as parents, bring up your children mindful always of their eternal destiny, and as children and young people, obey your parents, and walk in the fear of the Lord.

February 19

Read Proverbs 10:9-21.

Here in verse twelve we read, "love covereth all sins." How true! If a friend sins so that you are hurt, and you bear a grudge, you will cause trouble. Pretty soon you will loose that friend and probably a lot of others too. But, if you on the other hand forgive that friend, and express that forgiveness with your friendship and love, pretty soon all your hurt will be gone, and their sin will be forgotten. The truth of this test is especially clear in the love that God has for us, His people. In His love He has forgotten all of our sins, and covered them from His sight. Certainly the love of God covers a multitude of sins. Thank Him for the love that He has for us, and thank Him that our sins are forgiven and forgotten.

February 20

Read Proverbs 10:19-32.

In verse nineteen of this chapter we see an important and applicable truth. We are people who always want to be heard. We want others to know what we are thinking. We always have a bigger and better story to tell. We want to put our two cents worth in. But God says to us here in this text that, "the more you speak, the more you sin." Our nature is so depraved that we can hardly speak without offending God with sinful words. This is the truth and we ought to realize it and heed the warning in this verse. Let us be wise and refrain our lips from speaking guile. Let us pray with the psalmist in Psalm 141:3, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

February 21

Read Proverbs 11:1-16.

What is your goal in life? Do you want to become rich someday? Are your career goals motivated by wealth, and the hope of someday having a big house, and nice cars, and maybe a boat and a snowmobile and a camper, or perhaps a mobile home? We all want these things, don't we? But we should stop in the midst of our mad rushing lives, and take a look at the things that are of real value. We should realize the truth of what is pointed out in verse four of this chapter. Riches and wealth and all the possessions of this world are of no value before the eyes of our God, the Judge of heaven and earth. On the judgment day riches will not buy deliverance from hell. The only thing that can save us from the everlasting punishment of hell is the righteousness of Christ, our Savior. Look to Him with faith, and set your affections and desires on things of eternal value, and not on the things of this world.

February 22

Read Proverbs 11:17-31.

What does it mean to be merciful? Mercy is the opposite to cruelty. But what is cruelty? A cruel man is described here as one that works deceitfully (vs. 18), and one that troubles his own house (vs. 29). He is cruel even to his own house by neglecting to provide for them in their need. The merciful man on the other hand is one who desires good (vs. 23), and who gives liberally (vs. 25). However, this mercy is not only external. If we look at verse 30 we find a man who exercises spiritual mercy. He has concern for the spiritual well-being of others. Christ, our Merciful High Priest, is the perfect example of this merciful man. He loved His own, and He gave Himself so that they could be saved. Let us follow this example by being merciful to those whom we see going astray. Let us express this mercy by telling them

to repent of their sins and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And, let us pray for them.

February 23

Read Proverbs 12:1-15.

In the morning of the day we often pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." Then, after we have prayed that prayer we don't just sit down and wait for God to rain down some bread from heaven for us, but rather we go out and we work so that we can have bread on our table to eat. And then, when we have worked, and God provides us with bread, we are satisfied, and we thank Him for His goodness in providing us with food. And, according to verse eleven of this chapter, that is the way it should be. Those who work are satisfied with just the necessities of life. But, on the other hand, those who follow vain persons, or empty-heads, are never satisfied with just bread. Instead they go out and they gamble all their money away, hoping to get more than they need, and they end up with nothing, not even their necessary food. So, work diligently at your daily tasks, and you will be satisfied with your daily bread. (Suggested extra reading: Luke 15:11-32)

February 24

Read Proverbs 12:15-28.

Our life is a vale of tears. We struggle with grief and pain all our days. Often there seems no hope for us. Our grief seems to breed on itself so that we begin to stoop under the burden of it. At times like this a good word, and a comforting word is the only thing that can make us happy again. This is what verse 25 of what we have read tells us. But, it seems often that there is no good word to cheer us in our affliction. Nothing that people say has any effect on us, and words certainly do not take away our grief. But, there is a good word which can cheer the heavy heart of a man. That word is God's Word. In Psalm 119:50 we read, "This is my comfort in my affliction, for thy word hath quickened me." In all of our distress and heartache there is a God in heaven Who always has a word of comfort and encouragement for us. So, when you are bowed down and heavy hearted, take out the Word of God, the Bible, and read, and you will find comfort and rest for your soul.

February 25

Read Proverbs 13:1-17.

"A righteous man hateth lying." This is what we have read in verse five. Note that the Scriptures do not say that "a righteous man never lies." This would be a lie in itself. Rather the scripture says, "A righteous man hateth lying." In his righteousness the righteous man hates lying and will have nothing to do with it. But, this is also true of the righteous man, "What I hate, that I do" (Romans 7:15). The righteous man is still subject to sin. Daily there is a war within him between the new man of Christ and the old man of sin. However, his new man is made after the image of God (Colossians 3:10), and so the new man will have the victory. So, as the image bearer of God seek Him for help in your life, and learn to hate evil and the lie. Let this prayer of the Psalmist be your prayer, "Remove from me the way of lying" (Psalm 119:29).

February 26

Read Proverbs 13:18:25.

What do you think of discipline? What do you think when you remember the many times that your parents gave you a spanking with the rod? Are you thankful to them for all the harsh discipline that you have received throughout your life? Do you know the real motivation behind the discipline that Christian parents administer on their children? If you are a parent, do you use the rod on your children? All these questions, but they all have one answer, the answer of the Scriptures "He that spareth his rod hateth his son, but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." And what is the love that is expressed in this chastening? It is the only love that is true love. It is a love and concern for the spiritual well-being of the child. "Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell" (Proverbs 23:14). The fruit of discipline, administered with the rod, is the salvation of the covenant seed. Be thankful then that God uses this means to save your soul from hell.

February 27

Read Proverbs 14:1-19.

Again and again in the book of Judges we read, "and every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Is it any different today? Isn't this the way that the world lives? Isn't this the whole idea of everyone having his own rights? Everybody wants to be free from law, and everyone wants to do what seems right to himself. Today, this word comes to us from the Scriptures, "there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." This way, which seems right to a man, is the way that he thinks will bring happiness. This is what the Scripture says in the very next verse about that happiness, "The end of that mirth is heaviness." So, don't live following the way that seems right to you. Instead, realize that you are living to glorify God, for "the Lord has made all things for himself" (Proverbs 16:4).

February 28

Read Proverbs 14:20-35.

As Christians we face great battles and warfare. Daily we must fight our own man of sin, and daily we must face the world and all of its temptations. Also, we daily face the persecution of the world by being labeled as "different," and in the future we face persecutions which will be physical. However, as Christians we do not face all these things with fear and with dread. Instead we face them with a strong confidence (Proverbs 14:26). Fearing and following God we place all our trust in Him, and He gives us confidence. He gives us confidence and courage here below, and He has in store for us a place of refuge. He will bring us to His eternal habitation where we will be safe forever from all the hurt that the devil would seek to bring on us. There we shall live forever with Him in perfect peace.

February 29

Read Proverbs 15:1-9.

God knows everything. God sees everything. God is everywhere. God is all righteousness, and in Him is nothing that is wicked. And so, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." We do well to remember this. We do well to stop and pray to God during our daily activities that He will give us a consciousness and awareness of His being everywhere and seeing everything. How easy it is to forget God and to fall into sin. If we would just realize more often that God is always right there watching us when we sin, then we would learn to forsake sin. So, remember God is watching. Do this by memorizing the Scriptures and thinking of them throughout the day. Do this by realizing God's powerful and wonderful works in creation. Do this by speaking often to others about the joy that lies within you. Do this by praying to God that He will write His law on your heart, and give you faith. Faith is the victory over all sin and evil thoughts. Thank the Lord for the faith He has given you.

The Ant: Consider Her Ways and Be Wise

by John Huizenga

In our busy lives, do we ever take time to consider the ant? Do you ever sit down and watch ants tirelessly carry pieces of dirt from their hole and deposit it outside only to return quickly for another piece? Have you ever wondered how that ant carrying food through the grass knows where it is going? The inspired writer of the book of Proverbs watched ants and God commands us to do the same. God commands us! Let us take heed and be wise. When we watch ants through the spectacles of Scripture, then we grow in knowledge and wisdom.

When you read Proverbs 6:6, you will notice that God commands the sluggard to consider the ways of the ant. That means that we all must consider the ant. Even if you consider yourself an extremely busy and efficient person, you must still consider the ant because the sluggard in this text is not one who is merely slow in daily work, but one who is spiritually sluggish. No matter how busy we appear to men, we are by nature spiritual sluggards. Often it is the case that the more busy we are in earthly things, the more sluggish we are with spiritual things. There is not a person in the whole church who can say "this command does not apply to me."

The book of Proverbs directs our attention to spiritual wisdom and not merely practical wisdom for daily life. Spiritual wisdom is the foundation and basis for the practical wisdom of earthly living. Wisdom in the book of Proverbs is first of all knowledge of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Spiritual sluggishness is apparent when we don't feel like searching the Scriptures diligently to grow in our knowledge of Christ and our salvation. Growing in wisdom involves a great deal of work. We are all by nature sluggards, and therefore we all must consider the ant so that we can learn how to be busy spiritually.

The best way to consider the ant, is to go outside, stop, and watch them and think about their activity in light of the Word of God. Keep in mind that they are working toward the goal of storing up food for winter, and think about the goal for the Christian: knowledge of God through salvation in Christ. This simple activity of watching an ant come out of its hole with a piece of dirt, walk a couple inches, drop it, and disappear again down its hole will give you plenty upon which to meditate. Here is just one question to ponder. How does your diligence in seeking the Kingdom of God compare to the diligence of the ant?

Watching an ant dig its hole is not the only "way" of the ant. The Scriptures command us to consider the "ways" - plural - of the ant. Let us therefore consider the ant a little more closely and discover some things about the ant which are not so easily seen.

When God created the earth, He made sure that we would be able easily to find these tiny instructors in wisdom. They can be found on nearly every square foot of dry ground. In fact biologists consider the ant to be one of our planet's dominant creatures in that they greatly outnumber all other non-insect terrestrial animals combined. Imagine that! Count every man, woman and child, every mouse, chicken, dog, cat, and every other animal in the whole world, and the ants still far outnumber them.

Ants have a distinctive activity. When we look at the two places in the Bible where we read about ants, we notice that both passages refer to their gathering up of food in the summer. This work of gathering involves a complex array of tasks, but standing out from this activity are two important things that are specifically mentioned for our instruction. The first is that the ants have no guide, overseer, or ruler, the second is that the ants are so small and "a people not strong" (Proverbs 30:24-25). These two truths about the work of ants and the ants themselves manifest the wisdom of ants, and serve specifically for our instruction in wisdom.

> When we consider the ant and its relationship to the colony, the likeness to the church and the believer is striking!

We begin by considering the ant's gathering of food. Gathering food in the summer is important for the ant because it is a matter of life or death. It is important that they gather food in the summer because that is the time which God has given them for the gathering of food. If they wait around for another day, they will starve and die. This simple principle also applies to us. God has given to us our life on this earth as a time for us to gather spiritual food. The child of God is regenerated and therefore wise to seek spiritual food. Waiting ends only in spiritual death.

When ants gather food they look for anything that is sweet and can be converted into liquid sugar which fuels their active little bodies. We all know how quickly ants find something sweet on the picnic table; but did you know that ants also "milk" aphid cows, and cultivate gardens under the ground? Aphids are tiny insects which group together on plants and suck out sugary juices. They are also slow, vulnerable creatures and defenseless against wasps and ladybugs which prey upon them, but God has provided the ants to guard and defend them against predators. In return, the aphids produce excess sugary fluid for the ants to drink. Using this quick energy, the ants are able to gather more food for the colony.

Leaf-cutter ants live in the tropics and tend gardens of fungus underground. With their big jaws, they neatly clip off chunks of leaf many times their own size and carry them to their holes. They harvest tons of leaves removing about 15 percent of leaf production in the rain-forests where they live. Since ants are unable to eat and digest the leaves, they must undergo further processing. Inside the nest, slightly smaller workers cut the leaves into smaller bits and passes the pieces to another class of ants which chew them into pulp and mixes it with waste material and dead insects for fertilizer. Other ants carry this leaf paste into empty chambers where yet another group will transplant living fungus into the rich leaf mulch prepared by the ants. In these carefully prepared chambers, the environment is just right and the fungus grows rapidly. While the fungus is growing in these chambers, the smallest ants in the colony will tend and harvest the fungus which is excellent food for the ants.

So much work and care for premium food! The ant uses every available resource and works hard when it is time to work. So must be our diligence in seeking spiritual food. All our school work and other activities ought to be done with the goal of growing in our knowledge of God and gathering the people of God into the Church. We ought to consider our talents and think about how our talents can best be employed for work in the church. The church needs good fathers and mothers, teachers, elders, deacons, and those who care for the elderly. The church also needs money to function in this world and therefore she needs people with generous hearts and willing hands and minds to work.

We read in the Bible of the ants as a "people not strong." In itself, an ant is small and insignificant. As an organized group, however, the ant colony is able to do amazing things. They are small and therefore their strength lies in numbers. But they are not merely a mass. They work together as a harmonious whole. Some com-

pare each ant to one of thousands of transistors in a computer chip, and the colony to a computer or mind. The strength of the ant lies not merely in numbers, but in wisdom.

What is that wisdom? For an ant to be wise is to live in accordance with the law God has given to the ant. God has given them the goal and task to gather food in the summer. They know that goal and they conform all their activity to the attainment of that goal. They work together in the most efficient way possible while the sun is hot and God is providing food for them to gather. That is wisdom.

Working together to find food requires some sort of system. Yet we read in the Bible that the ants have no ruler to coordinate the work. Actually it would be rather foolish for one ant to coordinate the work because an ant in itself is weak. We already noticed that their strength was in the wisdom of working together. So how do they work together? God rules over them. God is the source of the ant's wisdom and strength. Within the colony there are various sized ants for various tasks. Some work as soldiers to defend the colony, some gather food, and some take care of matters in the nest. Size is determined by the way in which infant ants are fed. If the infant would be fed all it could eat, it would grow and grow to an oversized worthless giant of two or three inches long. The feeding is carefully regulated by workers to produce the most efficient proportion of workers for various tasks. Some are fed so that they become large food gatherers, others are very small garden tenders. Each one knows its place and works in harmony with the others.

The workers which are out gathering food use an amazing system of communication and navigation. When the ant goes out to search for new food sources, it navigates with "splash" patterns of sunlight in the atmosphere. Even on a cloudy day, the ant is able to see the patterns of light from which it can determine its location with relation to its hole. When one ant discovers an abundant source of food, it takes only a little and returns to the colony as quickly as possible. It determines the straightest path possible and leaves behind an invisible chemical trail. The chemicals hover in the air close to the ground in the thick grass where the air remains undisturbed and holds the scent in place for a time. The other ants are able to follow the trail easily with their antennae and at the same time release more chemical with each trip back to signal the fact that more food remains. The stronger the scent, the more ants follow it. Even if their path becomes blocked, God has given to the ant the ability to assess the situation, and within minutes recognize, in the most mathematically efficient way possible, the network which will lead back home the quickest.

When we consider the ant and its relationship to the colony, the likeness to the church and the believer is striking! God is pleased to gather His people into a Church which is the body of Christ. We are wise when we strive to work and fellowship together as the body of Christ. This wisdom is found only in those whose hearts have been renewed by the atoning work of Christ. Yet we must fight against our old foolish nature. If we seek our own individual goals, our work is futile and worthless and we will perish. We need to be of one mind and pursue one goal. That is the command of God to us when He commands us to consider the ant. Go out side now and consider the ant!

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

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[H]-Heaven Our Hope

by Tom Bergman

The poem I have written to fit the topic "Heaven our Hope" is written in dialogue form. That means, two people – or two groups of people – read the two columns of the poem simultaneously. When a reader's side has only a blank line, he waits for the other reader to recite the "solo" piece, then joins in again where the next line picks up. It can be tricky to get it right on the first attempt, so select a partner and run through it a couple times until the harmony and the message shine clearly through.

Heaven is our hope!
The fact that we know

our work is complete,
that God the Lord
of heaven

will call and bring us home
to be with Him in mansions of glory.
Heaven is our hope.

Heaven is our hope!
The fact that we know
when our journey is done,

that God the Lord

and earth
will call and bring us home
to be with Him in mansions of glory.
Heaven is our hope.

This hope of ours
should bring us
together
as a church

...the Body of Christ.
Every sister,

every father,

every child of the Father
has the same home

A place in glory.
Heaven is our hope.

This hope of ours

together

the Church—
...the Body of Christ.

every brother,

every mother,
every child of the Father

the very same home,
A place in glory.
Heaven is our hope.

So we live together,
each member of the church.
Young and old.

So we live together,
each member of the church.

Shy and bold.

With words and actions we say we love Christ
by loving His church,
our church family
because heaven is our hope.

Big and small.

Short and tall.
With words and actions we say we love Christ

our church family
because heaven is our hope.

We all have something

in common

Christ that lives within us!
Christ that lives within my heart

It does not matter
if you are athletic or not

It is the beauty within,
The Christ within!
So no matter what we think of each other,

together

common
Heaven is our hope.

We all have something
(very personal)
in common
What is that?

and my heart.
It does not matter

outwardly attractive or not,
It is the beauty within,
The Christ within!
So no matter what we think of each other,
God put us here
together
as a church, with this in
common
Heaven is our hope.

Christ is there in heaven is He not?

Yes, He is! For lowliest of sinners,
has conquered death and sin.
Ascended to His throne in heaven
and gathers us to him.

Savior, holy and fair,
We have a guarantee
that since Thou art ascended,
that's where we will be.
Heaven, heaven, heaven.
Heaven is our hope.

Heaven, heaven, heaven.
Heaven is our hope.

Now this should tell us something
about our closest friends

Now this should tell us something

and those we never talk to...

Let's go and make amends.
For those we never think about,

Let's try a little harder

Our time and hard-earned money,

Because of what we have
in common.
All we have is theirs.
(slowly) We all have
the same home...
Heaven.

and those we never talk to...
Let's go and make amends.

(perhaps not even care)

to love and give and share.

our thoughts and fervent prayers.

in common.
All we have is theirs.
(slowly) We all have
the same home...
Heaven.

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

Guest Article

The Catechism Class— Necessary for an Active Faith

by Dave Hanko

In the church world today, doctrinal distinctions are overlooked so that churches might join together to fight the social injustice in this world. They proclaim a god whose essence and commandments may be defined by each individual. The knowledge of God, as revealed to us through Scripture, is necessary for us to serve Him. How can we love a God that we do not know? How can we do His will if we do not know what pleases Him? The catechism class is the only educational institution of the church in which youth are instructed in the fundamental truths of the gospel. Without the knowledge of these doctrines, one does not know the gospel of salvation. Through His prophet Hosea, God declared concerning apostate Israel, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge I also will reject thee" (Hosea 4:6).

The Scriptures are clear in its teaching that spiritual instruction must begin at an early age. "Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts" (Isaiah 28:9). It is during youth when a person undergoes great changes both physically and psychologically. Spiritual growth generally results simultaneously with these other changes. A baby is given

immunization shots before he ever leaves the safety and cleanliness of the hospital to prevent disease. So it must be with spiritual instruction. As soon as a child is able to assimilate facts, that child must be taught the Word of God to immunize him from the filth of this world.

Sunday School classes and Young People Societies are different than the catechism class. The Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches is responsible for the content and distribution of Catechism books. The PRC Synod of 1995 created the Catechism Book Committee to improve and add to the existing catechism material. Catechism needs to be a complete course in the essential truths of the Old and New Testaments as set forth by the creeds of the Protestant Reformed Churches. This makes catechism attendance mandatory to all youth of the church. Most of us are blessed with excellent Sunday School classes, Young People Societies and Bible classes in our Christian School which assist parent in the teaching of their children, but none of these can replace the catechism class.

The purpose of catechetical instruction is to teach you the fundamental truths of the Bible. A knowledge of God's work in creation, of His covenant faithfulness to Israel, of Christ's death upon the cross, will enable you to understand the preaching, to study the Bible, and to pray. Without spiritual food you will die. A knowledge of our sins turns us to look for a Savior, Jesus Christ, to whom we are ever thankful. Is not that how our Heidelberg Catechism is divided? Of the Misery of Man. Of Man's Deliverance. Of Thankfulness. Catechism prepares you for a public profession of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You will be able to stand up and "acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the Articles of the Christian faith and taught here in this Christian Church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation." You will be full members of the Church, able to partake of the Lord's Supper and to take your place, whether that be as a married person or single; whether that be as a leader in the church or a nurturer at home.

But the instruction received in catechism class is not only for your future role in the church, it is essential now while you are young people. It is now that the ground work is being laid for your future life. Good habits should be developed for Bible study, private devotions and prayer. What you do and how you live now will affect your future life. Will you be able to erase from your mind the violent and sex filled scenes that you have seen on the movie screen? Will you be able to give up your rock music without a struggle? Will you be able to promise your future spouse sexual faithfulness when you have not lived according to the seventh commandment? When the many temptations of your teenage years arise you need the strength of the Scriptures. When a friend suddenly passes away you will have the assurance that God is omnipotent and works all for the good of His church. When you are persecuted for your faith you have comfort in knowing that God will avenge your adversaries. When you fall into sin you need the assurance of the preservation of the saints.

Proper catechetical instruction will provide children and young people the ability and motivation to apply God's Word to all aspects of their lives. Many churches today are limiting the time spent in catechism classes and encouraging young people to become more active in their communities by door-to-door witnessing, organizing prayer groups, and helping the poor and underprivileged. This will teach our children to be active in their faith, they argue. Are not these activities more worthwhile than sitting passively in a catechism class? Catechism instructs us in the fear of God's Name. It teaches us of our great salvation through Christ. After hearing of the great doctrines of our salvation won't we be eager to show our thankfulness in all that we do? Must we create opportunities to be active in our faith? Our love of God must not be limited to certain times and places. Young people, respect your parents and your friends will take note. Take time off from work to attend mid-week worship services and your fellow workers will notice. Befriend those that do not have a high social status. Seek ye first the kingdom of God. In catechism you have learned why you want to do this.

The catechism class is the foremost educational tool of our churches to teach children and young people the fear of the Lord. We must cherish it, love it, and cling to it with passion and determination. Parents, teachers, and coaches, impress it upon your children that no party, ball game, work or school activity must interfere with catechism attendance. Pastors, stress the catechism class in your preaching, and pray for it in congregational prayers. Children and young people, learn to fear the Lord your God.

Dave is a member of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.

What Is Love?

Love is a force tremendous in scope,
'Tis stronger than steel and encompasses hope.
The Scriptures reveal many things it can't be,
Such as: envious and boastful and proud (seeking *me*).
But love suffers long and is kind and endures;
It rejoices in truth and it always assures.
When around us is failure and much unbelief,
Then love overrules all our trouble and grief.

Yet apart from our God there can never be love;
The concept is His–it's a gift from above.
Base mankind continues its quest–all in vain;
They cannot find love and the reason is plain:
Their hatred for God, Who *is* love, foils their scheme.
Their vile pseudo products are not what they seem.
They try to convince men corruption is pleasure
And the sins of the flesh are a thrill they can treasure.

But the children of God can so love one another
As reflections of His love–the love of a Father;
The love that is tender, compassionate, pure,
The love that is lively, benevolent, sure.
When God's love indwells us, our love too will grow:
The Spirit infuses, makes joy overflow.
God's love is the base: because He loves, so we
Love Him and each other. *To Him glory be!*

by Thelma Westra

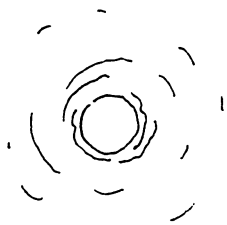
"LITTLE LIGHTS" . . . LET IT SHINE!

Faithfulness (Part 8)

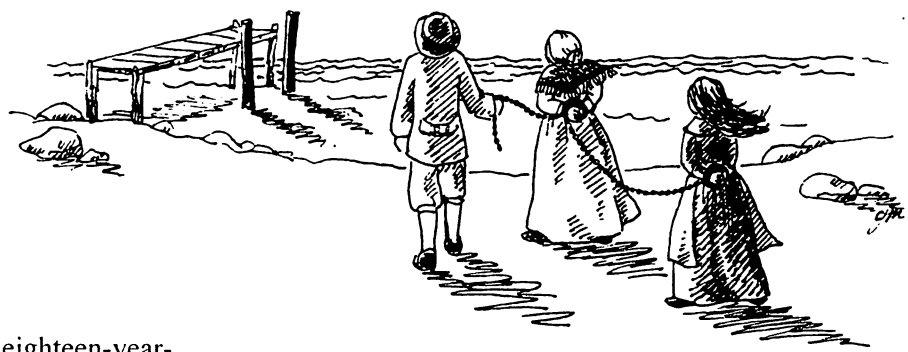
by Connie Meyer

"Julie, will you help me with the windows upstairs pretty soon?" Mother asked as she passed through the livingroom with a bucket and rag.

"Sure," Julie answered rather absently. She was looking through a stack of books on the coffee table. *Hm, this looks interesting*, she thought to herself when she came upon a little book in the middle of the stack, *The Two Margarets, A Struggle for Christian Freedom*, by Carine Mackenzie.



Julie made herself comfortable in a corner of the couch and began to read. Because the book was only forty-eight pages long, she was soon finished. Julie sat still for awhile and pondered the story. Here was a young girl, only eighteen years old, with her brother and thirteen-year-old sister, all forced out of their home because they wanted to worship God as Reformed Christians. They had to hide in deserted hills and caves or they would be caught by the king's soldiers.



But that wasn't the worst of it! The eighteen-year-old Margaret and her younger sister were finally arrested one day when they tried to visit another godly friend, a sixty-three-year-old widow whose name was also Margaret. Suddenly all three found themselves together in jail, and soon all three were sentenced to die. The date of their death would be May 11, 1685. Before that date the sister's father managed to obtain the youngest girl's freedom, but the two Margarets remained in prison.

Then the morning of May 11 came. Would the two Margarets now agree to worship God the king's way and thus be set free? Or would they say "no," and thus be tied to two poles on the edge of the sea where they would surely drown?

They would refuse. They would remain faithful. They would drown. But at the same time they would obtain a crown, the crown of eternal life.

Would I be that faithful? thought Julie. *Not by myself, but maybe—if God helped me. God helped them.*

Then she heard her mother's voice from upstairs calling, "Julie, I'm ready for you to help now."

"Okay, I'll be right there." And she was.

[If you would like to read *The Two Margarets*, written by Carine Mackenzie and published by Christian Focus Publications Ltd., Scotland, it is available for $2.99 at your local Christian bookstore.]

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

Unscramble these words from Revelation 2:10.

". . . eb huto taufflih tnou adhet, dna
". . . __ ____ ________ ____ _____, ___

I liwl vige hete a rnwoc fo file."
I ____ ____ ____ a _____ __ ____."

(UPSS046-840)

1996 Young Peoples' Convention

Godly Friendship

Hosted by:
South Holland Protestant Reformed
Young Peoples' Society

To be held:
July 29 - August 2

Speakers:
Rev. Bruinsma: ***Church Fellowship***
Rev. Van Overloop: ***Personal Friendship***
Rev. Gritters: ***Friendship, Dating, and Marriage***

Plan Now to Attend!