Beacon Lights

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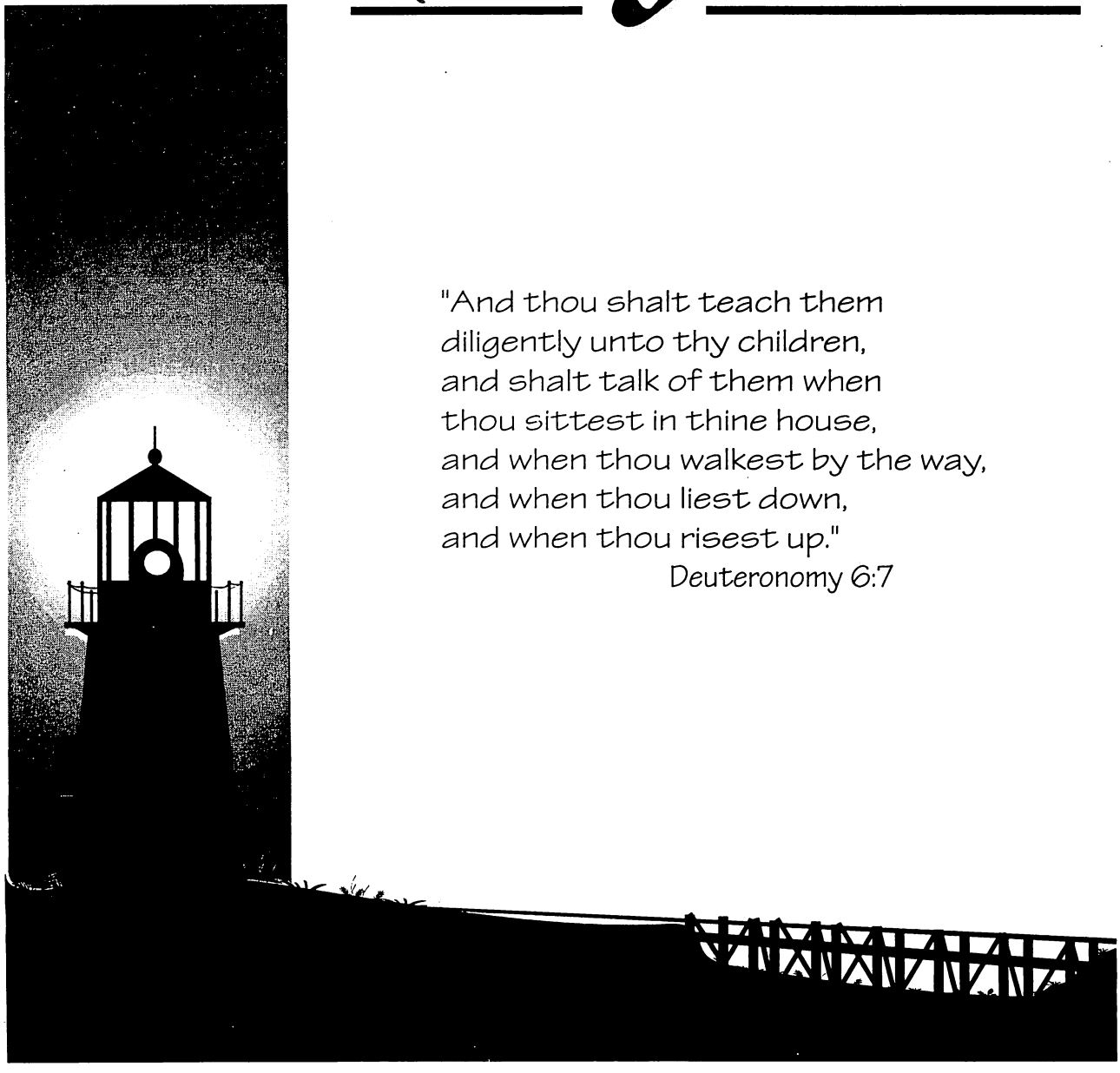

"And thou shalt teach them
diligently unto thy children,
and shalt talk of them when
thou sittest in thine house,
and when thou walkest by the way,
and when thou liest down,
and when thou risest up."
Deuteronomy 6:7

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Names of those on the August cover photo starting in the back, left to right: Mike Feenstra, Mike Kortering, Steve Faber, Steve Spencer, Nathan Brummel; front: Beth De Vries, Erin Kortering, Mindy DeMeester, Tom Bergman, John Huizenga.

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Associate Editors ..... Michael Kortering
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All information and letters pertaining to the contents of the *Beacon Lights* mail to (e-mail if at all possible, or computer disks preferred):

EDITORIAL OFFICE
John Huizenga
W1009 Cemetery Road
Randolph, WI 53956
Phone: (414)326-5196
Internet: jhuize@peoples.net

Subscription Price: $10.00
For a subscription or an address change, please write:
Beacon Lights
P.O. Box 375
Jenison, MI 49428

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Persecution— A Sign of the Times

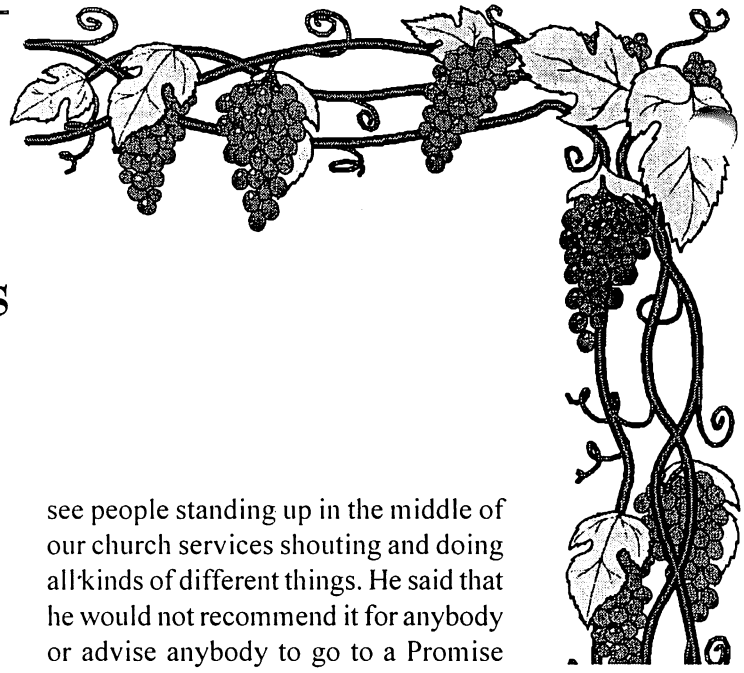
by Steve Spencer

In Matthew 24 the disciples asked Jesus how they would know when the end of the world was coming. Jesus responded in verses 5-9 by saying, "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." Here, Jesus presents the truth that the end times will be marked with trials and tribulations.

When we look for the signs of the times it is relatively easy for us to see some: false doctrine abounds and many are deceived; daily we hear of wars and rumors of war; and earthquakes, hurricanes, and famines are all frequent signs that Christ will come again soon. All these which are beginnings of sorrows are easily recognizable in our times, but what about persecution? Sometimes it seems in our day and age that persecution is a thing of the past. We can attend church freely. We can confess our faith openly. We can even establish our own schools to provide our children covenant instruction. And the laws of the land forbid the state from intruding on any of these activities. When we compare our lot to the saints of the early church or of the reformation, who daily had to face the prospect of torture for these activities, we should thank God for these blessings. Yet we must heed Christ's words, "then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." Persecution is not a thing of the past. There is persecution even today, and persecution will become more common as the return of Christ approaches.

Recently, you may have read about a great number of church burnings that have occurred in our country. These fires seem to be more likely to occur in predominantly African-American congregations and some of these fires were clearly set by racists. So in one sense these fires are a sign of the times in that they expose the hatred and rising up of nation against nation that characterizes the end times. This attitude of hatred must be deplored. But in another sense these fires represent another sign of the times, persecution. One aspect of this problem that has received virtually no attention—I read about it in the middle of the religion section in the Grand Rapids Press—is that church burnings are common in all types of congregations. In fact, this article claimed that insurance company statistics show that church buildings are more likely to be set on fire than any other type of building in our country. Clearly, there are forces seeking to destroy the cause of Christ's kingdom, even in its visible manifestation. Persecution is a part of our society.

All this should not surprise us. Jesus told us this would occur, and we can expect that the level and intensity of this persecution will only increase as his return approaches. But this should not make us faint of heart. After all, Christ teaches in verse 9 above, that we are persecuted for his "name's sake." So let us endure persecution knowing that it brings glory and honor to God, and as verse 13 teaches, "he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved."



Promise Keepers

by Brian Koole

Promise Keepers: is it right or is it wrong? I interviewed a member of our churches, Dave, who attended the Promise Keepers Assemby at the Pontiac Silverdome. He said it was a revival of about 75,000 men. There was not one women except for the ones serving lunch. It was over a period of 2 days. A Friday night and Saturday morning. On Saturday the men were served 2 big meals. There were 6 speakers, all of whom were from different denominations. He said the whole idea of the Promise Keepers is to bring the family closer together and for the men to take more responsibility. He said that he also benefited from that teaching. Another thing that Dave said is that Promise Keepers told men to discuss their family problems with strangers. He said he felt kind of awkward in this situation, because he does not usually discuss that kind of thing with another man, but rather with his wife. The first 2 speakers were on Friday night and the other 4 spoke on Saturday morning. Before the speakers were introduced, there was a whole lot of singing. They sang many traditional hymns such as, The Lord's Prayer, Holy Holy Holy and others. He also said that it was a truly remarkable thing to see 75,000 men singing the Lord's Prayer all at once, no matter what anybody says. The first few speakers did speak strongly against divorce, drugs, and anything that would disrupt the family life. The last few speakers strayed somewhat away from the family life, and spoke more on the general religious life. The speakers said a lot about the Kingdom of God, but during the end they started talking about the kingdom here on earth. When they talked about the kingdom on earth, and how great man is, and what man can do, and what they wanted to accomplish, Dave could see that their teaching was not reformed. He said that one must be very strong in the faith to endure these challenges. Dave also said there was one speaker in particular, he could not remember his name, who worked up the whole crowd. Men were shouting and doing different things. I do not think that this is right, because I don't see people standing up in the middle of our church services shouting and doing all kinds of different things. He said that he would not recommend it for anybody or advise anybody to go to a Promise Keepers gathering. He said he was glad he went, but he would not go again. The information I got for the rest of my paper, I got out of a handbook called *Promise Keepers and the Forgotten Promise*, it is writtem by Ernest D. Pickering, Th. D. Some of the speakers at the Promise Keepers are not sound in their theology and practice. They present a wide spectrum of theological teaching which would not be in harmony with the teachings in our churches. In the book it says that this movement of the Promise Keepers has a disregard for the biblical teaching on ecclesiastical separation. It is very difficult to protect the kind of teaching that is taught in our churches because the opinion of the public is strongly against us. In some churches there are those that are members, and sometimes even leaders, that are not strong in the same convictions as the rest of the church and if the preacher does not promote the Promise Keepers, such people are willing to leave the church and follow the crowd, without even giving their own church a good try. Once people join the Promise Keepers they begin to ignore or lessen the importance of a sound doctrine, and it gets easier and easier to continue doing this, and soon they are in no manner of holiness. In conclusion we need to watch out for these types of movements, and the pastor and the leaders of the church must lead the people away from such things. By what Dave says and by what this book says I would not go to a Promise Keepers gathering and I would not recommend it for anybody else.

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

Equal But Different Duties

by Shari R. Vaalburg

Dear Editor,

This is a good natured rebuttal to Rev. Gritter's article "Biblical Marriage" Part II. The section labeled "Second, the wife is not her husband's equal," is the part that I will focus on.

I agree with the biblical idea of marriage, and of the different duties God has given man and wife. But the word "equal" should be carefully defined when discussing men and women or husband and wife. What Rev. Gritters means by the word "equal" is not very clear, and that's a problem. When the word "equal" is used, it sounds like God values the man over the woman.

God commanded men to perform certain duties and their wives to perform others on this earth. It's not appropriate to say that "the wife is not her husband's equal." The duties that God has given to men cannot be compared to the duties God has given women because they are different duties.

God created men and women in His image (Genesis 1:27).This shows that he considers them equally important.

Rev. Gritter uses the analogy of Christ and the church as compared to the relationship of husband and wife. The analogy is appropriate, but at the point where he compares husband and wife to this remark, "Never in her life would the Chruch dare to say that she is equal to Christ in strength, in honor, in glory, in wisdom, in power," the analogy has gone too far. We know that woman is man's equal mentally (can be wise), and can be as strong and powerful. Also, man isn't necessarily full of glory.

Women should reverence their husbands, and the husbands should be head of the home, but this doesn't mean that God thinks the man's place is more important.

God commanded husbands to use their abilities in one way and wives in another (to be help meets). That is what should be focused on instead of ideas like "wives are not their husband's equal" implying that God considers wives worth less than husbands. Some women might think after reading a comment like that, "Well, I can never be valued as highly as my husband (or men) by God, so apparently I don't have to be as godly." Or girls who are told that God doesn't consider them equal to men may be confused, applying it to earthly terms, and trying to prove that they can indeed do men's jobs and sometimes better, all the while eluding the fact that they should not be focusing on what they can do, but on what God wants them to do.

It is true that the Church does not have the same duties as Christ nor the wife as the husband, but how can it be said that God considers them unequal in value? The point is that it's not a question of equality, it's a question of having completely different God-given positions.

Shari, her husband and children are members of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

Response

Dear Shari,

Thank you for reading the article I wrote in *The Beacon Lights*. Discussion on these subjects is good for us.

Some of what you write, I believe, is correct. I will respond to what you write that I believe is not.

First, your letter's main thesis depends on a misinterpreting of my article. You assume that my "not equal" means something that I did not say or intend to say. Repeatedly you misinterpret my "not equal" as: "God values the man over the woman," or: not "equally important," or: "man's place is more important," or: "worth less," or: "God considers them unequal in value." By doing this, you are making the article say what it did not say. Christian women *are* equally valuable to God—both men and women have been bought by the same precious blood of Jesus, and are "co-heirs" of the kingdom of heaven.

Second, your warning in the last paragraph that some women would read "a statement like that" and be led astray ignores the fact that the very next section in my article exalts the high and glorious creation that the woman is by God's grace. No Christian will read only the sentence you refer to, out of context, and be misled in the way you fear.

Most important, you state that "It's not appropriate to say that 'the wife is not her husband's equal.'" Then you reduce the difference between men and women to a difference of *duties*. But the Scripture teaches that the difference between men and women is far more than a difference of duties, although it is a difference of duties, too. It is also a difference of ***position***—she *submits* to her husband, is her husband's *helper,* created to *serve* him, and may not rule in the church. (This is different from what you mean by "completely different God-given positions," for you explain that this difference of position means only different responsibilities.) It is also a difference of ***strength***—she is the "weaker vessel," according to I Peter 3. I submit that the difference between the man and the woman is as real as the difference between Christ and the church. The differences are not identical, of course; they are as real and as significant.

I believe that the danger is far greater that women don't understand these truths, than the danger that women will think they are worthless. But let us resist both errors, standing for the truth of God in Jesus Christ.

In His Service,
Pastor Barry Gritters

Story Time

The Protest of Juanita

by J.P. de Klerk

It is already several years ago that in American public schools, reading in the Bible and prayers were removed from the daily programs they have. After many discussions the decision was made by the highest court in the nation.

There is a woman who takes a personal pride in what she regards as a triumph for the secular society against the Christians. Her name is well-known in the media and she is very vocal, travelling from one college or university to another, speaking to whoever wants to hear her; she likes everybody to know about her viewpoint...

She is especially interested in the young people. In fact, it seems she wants to organize them against everything that has something to do with religion. Well, this lady was delighted when one day she was invited by a university up North to address a party of about 350 students, who wanted to know what exactly she was standing for and what her reasoning behind it all was. They never met her before...

She stood there and she was full of praise for all kinds of humanism, but soon she started *to attack Christianity*. She called God "big pappa" and she referred to His only begotten Son as "J.C." for short. The Holy Spirit was, in her vocabulary, "the spook."

She ridiculed a number of well-known Christians of articular churches. As a news item in the press later stated, all her sentences were full of sarcastic, disdainful remarks.

It was obvious she had expected that the way she talked would be liked by the students, but it did not take long before she discovered that her audience looked at her with bewilderment.

Therefore she changed her tactics and showered the young people with scientific-sounding terminology and platitudes, citing prominent people who thought like her, hoping to impress them. She tried about everything not to lose contact with her audience.

Finally, with a philosophical smile, she suggested that everybody would have the opportunity to put questions to her. Probably she had quite a few ready-made answers in store.

But the young people were not that easy to satisfy and she became nervous, blunt, and grumpy, so that they gave up.

But then, at the back, a girl stood up, looking pale of indignation. She was Juanita, and she walked quickly to the front. With a hoarse voice she spoke, carefully choosing her words.

She said, "Madam, I am glad that you have taken the trouble tonight to come to us with your speech, but probably I speak in the name of most of the others if I tell you that we have listened carefully to your tirades against the Christian faith.... You have shown us what an atheist really is.... We have been strengthened in *our* faith after listening to *you*.... But now we feel sorry for you, because you are standing here all *alone*, unable to hold on to anything. You will go back to an existence without prospects. We, however, have our faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.... Thank you for coming and may God have mercy on you...."

The speaker was tongue-tied.

Juanita left the hall.

You could have heard a pin drop. Everybody heard her departing footsteps as well as the speakers angry snort of contempt in the microphone.... Then there was wild applause.

The students urged Juanita to come back and speak further, but she did not. In the hall, they stopped clapping their hands and calling her name. The students left without paying anymore attention to the speaker.... On the door of her room, Juanita had glued a piece of paper with the message: "See Psalm 1:1."

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

C-H-U-R-C-H F-A-M-I-L-Y

[A] - Admonish

Would You?

by Tom Bergman

Hi! You and I are friends. Such close friends we are that whenever I am in trouble, I call you. When other people talk poorly about you, you call me. We talk. We talk a lot. Sometimes we talk about important things: God's direction in our lives, choosing a college, picking the right career (we really don't want to mess this up). We wonder if there is only one opportunity to choose the correct vocation. If we choose the wrong ones, do we pay for those mistakes for the rest of our lives? We talk. We talk about the need to buy a car when there is not enough money for insurance. We ask why so many of our "friends" drink.

Sometimes, we discuss nothing at all- for a long time! We could talk for hours about nothing: who likes whom, if it is "who likes whom" or "who likes who," the purpose of grammar anyway, if so-and-so are back together, why your little brother is grounded, laughing about a couple at the mall, stuff we bought at the mall, griping about curfews, etc.

You get the idea. We are good friends. Best friends. Now, I have to know. Tell me the truth. Would you come to me if you knew I did something rebellious? Would you call me up if you saw me intentionally do something wrong? Would you...?

If I went to a party at a classmates house and got plastered?

If I went to a party and had three beers?

If I went to a party and had one sip? Or none at all?

Where would you draw the line?

If I went to the theatre and saw an R-rated movie?

If I rented an R-rated video and watched it in the comfort of my own home?

If I liked a PG-13 movie?

If I knew your sister had gone to the movies and did not tell you?

How much of this concerns you?

If I went on a date and had sex?

If I went way too far, but not all the way?

If I went just a little beyond kissing?

If the date was for all the wrong reasons?

If my date was questionably of Christian character?

Why are you upset with me?

If I skipped church Sunday evening to drive out to the beach?

If I told my parents I went to another church in order to skip?

If I skipped church on Good Friday by intentionally picking up hours at work?

If you did any of these things with me, what could you say then? A-ha! Would you still feel guilty and bring it up anyway?

You may not be able to answer all of these questions right away. But, it is important to me as your best friend to know how you feel. It makes me feel good to know that you would admonish me for sinning. I can only hope that I would respond in true Christian manner. It makes me feel good to know that you care about me enough to confront me. I would do the same for you.

Don't stop reading. Keep going through this last part. Drop whatever you are doing and listen. What you and I need to know is that your reaction to my sin makes a huge difference. Where you decide to draw the line and when you admonish me plays a big role in the future life of our congregation. This is where you say, "Huh? What are you talking about?" Perhaps no one else would ever find out if I drank like a fish and you never scolded me for it. I am saying to you that your reaction or inaction is a deciding factor, used instrumentally by God, in deciding the health of our church. No Christian admonition, no spiritual health. No spiritual health, no church. We as young people do play a part. As the future of His church, D.V., we need to stay in good shape. Our fitness determines the unity of the brethren. Admonition can play a big role.

So, would you confront me if I watched a made-for-TV movie?

Would you admonish me if I watched the Super Bowl?

If I watched soap operas in the afternoon?

If I watched pseudo-soap operas during primetime?

If I watched 20 hours of sports a week?

If I watched Home Improvement?

If I watched Seinfeld?

What if I did homework on Sunday? Would you talk to me?

I pray to God that you would confront me about every single thing listed above. Each one is bad, and I hope that you would be there for me to tell that there are better ways to spend my time. Not enough good admonition goes on around here. Not enough goes on among conscientious young people. Let's pick up the banner and take charge. God help us.

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

Theologians' Views on Dating and Marriage (1)

by Steve Spencer

In Matthew 19:4-6 Jesus teaches us, "he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

As I take over a share of the responsibility for this rubric and plan a new series of articles, I plan to let this teaching guide my analysis. I want to emphasize three things about this passage. First, God made people as man and woman for the purpose that he would join them together into one flesh. This means that marriage is an institution ordained and executed by God. God is sovereign in dating and marriage.

Dating is an anxious time for many young people. I know I thought that no one would ever want to go out with me, but God was in control and brought my wife into my life just at the right time. In these articles I hope to make plain how God's sovereignty over dating and marriage can be a great comfort to young people during this tumultuous time in their life.

Second, the above passage teaches us that marriage, because it is executed by God, is a life long bond that is unbreakable. When a man and a woman join together in marriage, it is God that joins them and only he can separate them. The teaching, "let not man put asunder" it not merely a command, it is an expression of the truth that man cannot undue the work of God. This means that divorce, although allowed by our laws, is not a reality. When people are married they are joined together by God and they will be married until God separates them in death. This means that dating and marriage is a serious business, one that is not to be taken lightly.

Third, this passage teaches us that marriage is about sex or more correctly that sex is about marriage. We must not understand this teaching in a worldly sense: marriage is not about the fulfillment of our sensual pleasures. We must understand our sexuality in a biblical way. Sex is an expression of the bond that God has established between a man and a woman in marriage. It is an expression of intimacy and unity like that seen between Christ and the church. Sex should be a happy, pleasant, and joyful expression of the bond of love between a husband and wife, but this action like all others must be directed to the glory of God. Sex in a Godly marriage, glorifies God in two ways, it expresses the bond which He has established, and it brings covenant children—his heritage—into the world. This teaching clearly forbids sex outside of marriage; sex must not be a part of dating.

With this basic teaching in mind I plan to focus the next few articles in this rubric on the views of dating and marriage held by orthodox theologians. We will examine the teachings of Augustine, Luther, Calvin and others. These men will have much to teach us about dating and marriage, but unlike almost any other area of theology all three of these men erred in their teaching on dating and marriage. Let this serve as a warning to us. If men such as these can depart from the truth in their understanding of dating and marriage, then we can as well. Let us diligently search the Scriptures on this topic and hold fast to the Word of truth we find there.

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

Witnessing: Why Is It Our Calling?

Mitchell Kamps

Witnessing can be done in different areas. To witness is very hard work! To do it right you must be humble, have knowledge in the scripture, do it boldly and to the glory and honor of God.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:32, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." In this verse Jesus makes intercession for his witnesses. When we are around our church or home it is much easier to speak truthfully with our fellow Christian. When we are at work it is much more difficult to witness our religion. We may be ashamed or scared to defend the Bible or other issues dealing with the Bible. By not witnessing it means we are ashamed of Christ himself, or do not care enough about the Name of God to defend his name from swearing or of false gospel.

Many of us young people have jobs with unbelievers or "weak Christians." If you become friends with them and go away with them on weekends, this can be very dangerous, because they like the worldly parties or may go to movies which we can not take part in. So we must stay away from these dangers and show them from scripture why drinking and movies are wrong, and not make friends with the world.

It is very true that we do not witness enough, but when we do witness we have to be careful how we do it. Our witness is the confession of our faith given to us by the Holy Spirit. The working of the Holy Spirit comes from praying and reading the Bible diligently and hearing the true Word of God by the preaching. This will help us greatly when we witness.

In Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." We must be up front with our co-worker and not laugh at his or her worldly jokes or when they take God's name in vain. Instead we must rebuke him or her by showing how the Bible tells them that these actions are wrong. Show the co-worker that you are not better than him or her but tell them that you too are a sinner in need of the grace of God, and that you daily have to pray for forgiveness.

In summary, I would like to give you a few tips that will help us in witnessing to others.

1. We must remember always that the world is watching our actions and our speech, so that everyday we must show this in how we act, that we love God.

2. When an opportunity comes to witness, take it. Don't back down and say maybe another time. It is easier to not say anything, but as a Christian we must stand up and confess God's name, with no shame.

3. Don't judge the one you are witnessing to. We are witnessing for God and we are just wicked sinners. We can instruct and rebuke them, but don't say they are not going to be saved. God could work in them and they could be a child of God.

4. We must constantly study scripture so that when someone asks why we are different, we readily can tell them of Christ's saving work in us. Instead of getting caught up in the things of this world we should stay home more, open our Bibles and study so that we become confident to proclaim His Word.

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

Watching Daily At My Gates

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

by Cornelius Jonker

For our meditations this month, we will briefly look at Biblical words and concepts that begin with the letter "C."

September 1

Read II Peter 1:1-12

CALLING—Simply put, this is the act of one who calls. But it can also mean a vocation or a summons, and the Bible usually refers to it in this manner. We often speak of a minister's high calling to preach the gospel and this is very true indeed. However, we all have a calling; not only to choose our life's vocation very carefully and prayerfully but as we read in II Thess. 1:11-12a, "We pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling...that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you and ye in him." May this be the focus of our lives today and every day.

September 2

Read Hebrews 2:9-12

CAPTAIN—This word immediately makes us think of an army or a company of soldiers, trained and fit for battle. If each soldier in this army was allowed to do as he pleased on the battlefield, chaos would result, and the enemy would soon overcome this disorganized group. That's why a leader is necessary, one who is in authority to train and discipline his troops, give them the proper weapons and devise the necessary strategy to be victorious. So it is with the Church of God. That's why we are called the Church militant. We must fight against the devil, the world and our own flesh who assault us daily. Without a captain, this battle would be lost. But we have a captain, the risen Christ, the King of His Church and the Captain of His hosts. He provides us with the necessary armor (cf. Eph. 6:13-17) and the offensive weapon, the word of God. Even though the enemy fights to destroy the Church, the victory is assured through Him that loved us even unto the end.

September 3

Read Psalm 55:16-23

CARE—We probably have heard it said about someone, "he (or she) doesn't have a care in the world." Well, it may appear that way on the outside, but I believe everyone has their own cares and concerns. And these cause worry and anxiety, sometimes even to the point where it's difficult to function properly. Many are legitimate to be sure. Sometimes, as Scripture tells us in Luke 8:14, people "are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." These kinds of cares ought not to be said of us. On the contrary, we must strive to "be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men." (Titus 6:8b) And if we are burdened with cares that cause us sorrow and concern, listen to God's Word in I Peter 5:6 & 7 "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

September 4

Read Psalm 35:1-9

CAUSE—I find it interesting in the English language how one word can be used in so many different ways. Such a word is "cause." The Bible also uses it in various forms, such as reason or plea or case. By our words and actions we can cause happiness or sadness, joy or grief. You children, did you cause your parents or siblings anger or happiness today because of what you said or did? Young people, do you cause your parents sorrow because of wrong attitudes and conduct, or do you cause them joy because they see you walking in the fear of the Lord? Parents, do you plead the cause of yourselves and your children before the Throne of Grace? May all of us make this our daily prayer: "Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee." Psalm 143:8

September 5

Read I Corinthians 13

CHARITY—This is one of the most beautiful words in Scripture. As you most likely know, it means love or kindness. Does this virtue characterize you and I in our dealings with others? None of us, according to our old nature can claim this virtue. The Bible tells us in Titus 3:3, "For we ourselves also were sometimes...living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." That's not a very pretty picture. But God, by His regenerating Spirit makes us alive in Christ, and imparts to us the fruit of the Spirit, namely love, joy, peace, longsuffering and kindness. This is not given to the ungodly, for in Proverbs 12:10b we read: "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." How much more pleasant our lives and relationships would be if all of us practiced charity in word and deed. Pray for, and practice this great gift of God.

September 6

Read I Cor. 15:51-58

CHANGE—We are creatures of change, aren't we? We live in a world that changes continually. Rulers come and go; buildings are torn down and replaced with new; technology changes so fast that in the field of computers and electronics, items are almost obsolete before they can get to the showroom. Many changes are for the better, of course, but others are not. The ungodly make changes to serve their own evil purposes such as we read in Roman 1:25, "who changed the truth of God into a lie and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever." What a terrible indictment! But what a contrast to all this is the comforting and reassuring Word of God which tells us in Mal. 3:6: "For I am the Lord. I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

Because God and His Word never change, we may have the assurance that our salvation is sure and that we shall be blessed partakers of the final change when our Savior shall change our vile body like unto His most glorious body.

September 7

Read Romans 8:31-39

CHARGE—What do you think of when you hear this word? A rushing attack, perhaps, by an armed troop, or maybe purchasing goods by means of a credit card? Both meanings are valid but the Bible usually speaks of a charge as a command or responsibility. To cite a few instances, the Levites were to keep the charge of the tabernacle; Joshua was charged by God to lead the Israelites into Canaan. When Jesus performed healing miracles on persons he often charged them to tell no man. Paul charged Timothy to war a good warfare, to act without partiality, to keep the commandments and to preach the Word. These charges apply to the Church of all ages, and therefore to us also. But the most comforting aspect of this word is found in Psalm 91:11, "For he shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways." What a blessed assurance this is for us!

September 8

Read Psalm 118:14-21

CHASTEN—Why is it that none of us like to be reproved or rebuked? It is distasteful to our flesh and wounds our sinful pride. Yet it is so necessary that we be chastened, because we are such sinners. We only have a small beginning of that new obedience in our hearts. In Heb. 12:6 we read: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." And in verse 11, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Therefore we see that chastening is for our good, for our salvation and we can pray that God will chasten us, not in His anger, but according to His mercy. And just a word to our children—if you are punished by your parents for some wrongdoing, remember that it's because they love you and seek your salvation. In fact, God says to us in Prov. 13:24: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." Let us be thankful then to God that He doesn't leave us in our sins, but corrects and chastens us so that we may be fit for His Kingdom.

September 9

Read Luke 14:7-11

CHIEF—To be a chief really appeals to most of us, doesn't it? To be chief means that that person is the boss, that he or she is important and is the highest in authority, and accordingly when that word is used as an adjective (meaning to describe something) it means the highest and most important. Remember the strife among Jesus' disciples over which of them should be the greatest? Jesus tells them, "he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." Luke 22:26. Paul the great and gifted apostle was one of the chief of the Pharisees, he was the chief speaker on his missionary journeys, but do you know what he confessed in I Tim 1:15? "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." May this also be our prayer based on the finished work of Christ who is the chief cornerstone.

September 10

Read Deuteronomy 6:3-9

CHILDREN—As I ponder this word, wondering what to say, I am taken back in my mind to my own childhood with its fears, foolishness, joys and wrongdoings. Then I echo David the psalmist who prays: "Remember not the sins of my youth." But I also thankfully remember Godly parents who lovingly and constantly brought me up in the fear of the Lord. What great responsibility it is for parents to instruct their children as covenant seed. And what a glorious promise is given in Prov. 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Jesus Himself took little children in His arms and said, "for of such is the kingdom of God", meaning that we must humble ourselves and be guileless as little children in order to be fit for the kingdom of heaven. We thank God for our children. We thank God for His covenant promises that He will gather His church through our children and our children's children even unto the end of time.

September 11

Read Psalm 25:8-12

CHOOSE—This is an activity that we perform every day. We choose which clothes we wear, what food we eat, with whom will we be friends, what books we read and on and on we make choices. God made us rational creatures, able to think, will, and choose. Because of Adam's fall into sin, our natures became corrupt and so we choose sin and the lie rather than God. But God in His mercy from all eternity chose us in Christ through the way of sin and grace, implanting that new life of Christ in our hearts, so that then we can choose to serve Him. There is a passage in Deut. 7:7 & 8a that touches my heart: "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you...." That's the answer—we love Him because He first loved us. Praise His name!

September 12

Read Eph. 4:11-13

CHURCH—Hundreds of volumes could be and have been written about the Church. An exhaustive study of the Church and all that pertains to it would be very profitable, but in these few lines we will limit ourselves to one small aspect of it. It is likened to a body made up of many members—each with their own gifts, personalities and talents. Do you ever think that your place in this body is unimportant? Then listen to Romans 12:18: "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased him." And in verse 26: "and whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." So you see how important your own special place is in the congregation. Use your gifts, whatever they may be, to encourage and help your fellow members. Never neglect to gather with this body of believers as they worship, for Christ Himself speaks to them through the minister and bestows His grace upon them.

September 13

Read Isaiah 64:6-9

CLAY—To many of us, clay is just a hard piece of ground that gets sticky and miry when wet. That may be true but it's really quite a versatile substance, and the Bible speaks of this interesting material frequently. The Israelites in Egypt made bricks of clay and straw. In many lands even up to the present time, clay is used to make all sorts of vases, bowls, cups and plates. This is done on a revolving wheel and the person who forms these objects is called a potter. In the Bible, God is often called the potter and people the clay. A beautiful description of election and reprobation is found in Romans 9 where God (the potter) has the perfect right to make some vessels unto honor (elect) and others to dishonor (reprobate). Our present bodies, according to Job 33:6 and Gen. 2:7 are made from this substance. When we die, our bodies will revert back to clay and dust, but God promises us that when Jesus returns He will change our vile bodies to conform to His glorious body fit for eternal life. What a blessed hope that is!

September 14

Read Revelation 7:9-12

CLOTHED—To be clothed is to be covered. We would be very uncomfortable to be seen by everyone if we were unclothed. This is really due to

sin. Before Adam and Eve fell into sin, they were both naked and not ashamed, but as soon as they sinned, they were ashamed and tried to cover themselves with fig leaves. God in His mercy clothed them with coats of skin, which meant the death or sacrifice of an animal. This was a symbol or type of Christ's perfect sacrifice Who covered us with His blood and thereby exchanged our filthy garments, stained by sin, with His pure white garments of salvation. The world glories in their shame and boasts in their nudity. But let us as God's people not imitate them. Rather, as Scripture says, we should adorn ourselves in modest apparel with sobriety, being clothed with humility, looking forward to that eternal day when we will be clothed in white linen made white by the blood of the Lamb.

September 15

Read Psalm 36:5-7

CLOUD—It is fascinating and pleasant to gaze into a blue sky dotted with clouds and let our imaginations run free. But it can be a bit frightening to see a huge black cloud looming overhead signaling a violent storm. Already in Genesis we read that God set His bow in the cloud for a token of a covenant. A cloud led the Israelites through the desert, and when Jesus ascended into heaven, a cloud received Him out of the disciples' sight. The earth could not bring forth food if there were no clouds because that is what gives us the necessary rain. In the great day of Christ's return He will come in the clouds with great power and glory. Listen to a beautiful reference to clouds in Is. 44:22: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me: for I have redeemed thee." Think about this as you look up in the sky today.

September 16

Read Psalm 19:7-11

COMMANDMENT—What do you think of when you hear this word? Some would say that it's simply an order or a mandate issued by someone in authority. And that is true, of course. But most of us associate this word with the ten commandments given by God in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. We also believe that these commandments are so important that they are read every Sunday morning in our church worship services. Even though by the perfect work of Christ, we are not under the law, but under grace, we must never trample the law of God under our feet. The law is a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ. It teaches us how sinful we are. It makes us flee to Christ for forgiveness. And it instills in us a desire to walk in newness of life. Listen carefully to each commandment as you hear it read, and prayerfully sing: "O, how love I Thy law: it is my meditation all the day."

September 17

Read Psalm 122

CITY—Do you know who is recorded in the Bible as building the first city? It was wicked Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve. The next time we read of a city was at the time of the tower of Babel. This also was a wicked attempt to establish a great empire in defiance of God. But certainly not all cities had such an evil connotation as these. We read of the cities of refuge where persons could flee for safety. The angels at Jesus' birth said: "for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior." Jerusalem, that great city, mentioned in no less than 34 books of the Bible, had a colorful history, was the center of Israel's religious worship and is a type of that heavenly city, the new Jerusalem which cometh down from heaven. May we, as Abraham, look for that "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Heb. 11:10

September 18

Read Matthew 11:25-30

COME—It is interesting and profitable to search the Scriptures and find out in how many aspects the word "come" is used. Here are just a few examples: COME—"Let thy mercies come also unto me, 0 Lord" Ps. 119:41a. COME DOWN—"Zaccheus, make haste, and come down." Luke 19:5. COME AGAIN—"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again." John 14:31. COME FORTH—"When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Job 23:10. COME NEAR—"Let my cry come near before thee, oh Lord." Ps. 119:169. COME NOW—"Come now and let us reason together saith the Lord." Is. 1:18. COME OUT—"Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord." II Cor. 6:17. We could cite many hundred more examples, but this will suffice to show the meaningful beauty of this simple word. May we, by that new life within us, eagerly look forward to the day when we hear our Savior say "Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." Matt. 25:34.

September 19

Read II Corinthians 1:3-5

COMFORT—Many times throughout our lives we need comfort. Little babies require much of it. Toddlers who are prone to falls need it. Teenagers, with various sort of "growing up" problems need comfort and understanding. And since everyone needs comfort, this of course includes the grown ups. Giving comfort can take many forms, but a hug, a kind word, a pat on the back, sympathetic listening, a shoulder to cry upon, and fitting words from Scripture with prayer can comprise much comfort and solace to the hurt and sorrowing. The first question and answer of our beloved Heidelberg Catechism reads: "What is thy only comfort in life and death? That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ." God grant that we may truly confess that with all our hearts.

September 20

Read Psalm 31:1-5

COMMIT—Today's word "commit" is not used very often in our everyday conversation. But it is found many times in the Bible, and means to do, or to give in trust or charge. The prophet Jeremiah lamenting over the Jews for their many sins describes many of them and exclaims "they weary themselves to commit iniquity." Jer. 9:5. And on an opposite note, we read in I John 3:9, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." I believe this means that because those who have God's Spirit in their heart do not delight in sin. They confess their sins and God beholds them in Christ as if they had never committed any sin. What a merciful and forgiving God we have! The other meaning of this word, to give in charge, is beautifully stated in Psalm 37:5, "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." Don't trust in your own strength, but always have this prayer on your lips: "Lord what would'st Thou have me do?"

September 21

Read Psalm 119:57-64

COMPANION—Most of us are gregarious creatures. Oh you may ask, what does that mean? It simply means we are fond of company, that we are social persons. I realize that there are a few loners in society, but they are the exception. A companion is a friend, one with whom we associate, and, yes, my next question is, 'Who are your friends?' Do they influence you rightly or wrongly? Do they give evidence of being God-fearing? Listen to what the Bible tells us in Prov. 13:20 "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." And in Amos 3:3 "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" So be a wise and Godly companion to others, and seek the same kind of friends for yourself.

September 22

Read Psalm 78:35-39

COMPASSION—This word is closely related to comfort or consolation, but has a deeper feeling of pity and sympathy. By nature, we are not

compassionate, but rather we are proud and seek our own ends. Only by grace can we practice this virtue. God is the very essence of compassion for we read in Lam. 3:22 & 23: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because *his* compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." Time and again when Jesus healed the sick, Scripture tells us that He was moved with compassion. The apostle Peter enjoins us in his epistle to "be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, humbleminded." I Peter 3:8. That's quite an order, isn't it? Shall you and I start to practice it today?

September 23

Read Romans 10:8-11

CONFESS—Will you partake in this activity today? The answer should be a resounding "yes." You see, to confess means to acknowledge, to own or to admit. Every day we must confess not only our sins against a holy and just God, which is of utmost importance, but we read in James 5:16a, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another." And not only that, but our whole life must serve as our confession, as an acknowledgment that we are the children of God. What a privilege to publicly make confession of faith in the church, saying that we love God and will live for Him. And the reward? It is of grace, for Jesus said, "whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." Matt. 10:32.

September 24

Read I John 5:14-15

CONFIDENCE—Without confidence we probably wouldn't dare to get out of bed each morning. Confidence means to believe in the trustworthiness or reliability of a person or thing. We trust that our car will take us to work or on a trip. We board planes in the confidence that they are airworthy. We order food in a restaurant in the confidence that we will enjoy it and that it won't poison us. Many more examples could be given, but they really fall short of true confidence which is wholehearted trust in the Lord. We read in Prov. 14:26, "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge." Put your trust in Him and not in the princes of this world and your earthly pilgrimage will, by His grace, take you to that heavenly Canaan.

September 25

Read Isaiah 35:1-6

CONFIRM—This word "confirm" means to strengthen or to make certain or sure. When I was in business and some company's purchasing agent called in an order by telephone, we would respond by saying thanks and asking them to confirm it in writing. So also in Scripture this word is used in the same sense. Just before His ascension into heaven, Jesus instructed His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel. "And they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them and confirming the word with signs following." Mark 16:20. Will your actions and words today, tomorrow, and every day, confirm the fact that you, both with soul and body, belong to Christ?

September 26

Read Psalm 26:8-12

CONGREGATION—In Hebrews chapter 10 the Lord tells His people to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting the assembling of themselves together, but encouraging one another. This assembling or meeting together is done in the congregation. God is pleased to have His people gather together, not only to mutually edify each other, but to have them hear His word. In Jer. 10:1 we read: "Hear ye the word which the Lord speaketh unto you, 0 house of Israel." And in Psalm 40:9 "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, 0 Lord, thou knowest." So we not only have a solemn duty and obligation to meet in congregational worship, but it is a most blessed privilege, because God is pleased to save His people in this manner.

September 27

Read I Peter 3:13-16

CONSCIENCE—Have you ever had a guilty conscience? I'm afraid that all of us would have to answer yes to that question. Our conscience is that faculty within us which decides upon the moral quality of our actions and motives, and since we constantly sin against the most high God, our conscience tells us that we did wrong. The unbeliever also has a conscience for Romans 2:15 tells us that their conscience bears witness against them. The difference is that God works repentance in the hearts of His people so that they cry out for forgiveness, whereas the ungodly are described as having their conscience seared with a hot iron. If you are tempted to do something that is pleasurable but your conscience tells you that it is a sinful pleasure, then you had better listen to your conscience, and pray to God for grace to walk in a new and holy life.

September 28

Read Hebrews 13:1-5

CONTENT—Are you satisfied with your lot in life? Or do you wish you were someone else, or that you were rich, or that you were better looking, or that you had different parents or different talents? Let me tell you something. God, in His wisdom determined every aspect of your life, from your appearance, your parents, your place in society, your gifts, to the exact time you would be born. If we all look at ourselves with spiritual eyes in that light, then we will be content and happy, and say with the apostle Paul in Phil. 4:11, "For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

September 29

Read I Peter 1:13-16

CONVERSATION—When we hear this word, we immediately associate it with an interchange of spoken words. We converse with one another, we talk together. This is something we engage in every day. In regard to this, God's Word tells us in Col. 4:6 "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." The word "conversation", in the Bible (KJV), however, means our conduct, our behavior, our walk of life. As God's people, we are to live holy lives, as salt of the earth, as lights of the world. We are called to walk antithetically over against the world with all its wickedness, lust, greed and pleasure madness. In II Cor. 6:17, we read: "Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."

September 30

Read Psalm 27:11-14

COURAGE—What is courage? The dictionary defines it as "the quality of mind that enables one to encounter difficulties and changes with firmness or without fear." How many of us really possess it? There are many examples of courage in Scripture. Moses said to the spies as they entered Canaan, "Be ye of good courage and bring of the fruit of the land." Moses said to Joshua in the sight of all Israel: "Be strong and of a good courage", and the Lord Himself spoke similar words to Joshua before a hostile Canaan. We need courage each day to fight the battle against the world, the devil, and our own sinful flesh. Where will we find that courage? David in Psalm 31:1 writes: "In thee, 0 Lord, do I put my trust: deliver me in thy righteousness." He ends this Psalm in verse. 31: "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord."

Another area in which the antithesis of God's Church in the world is seen is in the many different movements and revivals which call themselves Christian. In analyzing them, many distinctives of our faith are brought to light. A new pamphlet reveals some of those distinctives.

New Pamphlet Exposes Promise Keepers Movement

by Jeffrey M. Kalsbeek

A new pamphlet entitled "Promises, Promises, Promises....", and recently published by the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, directs its attention to a timely subject. In this publication, Rev. R. Cammenga evaluates the well known "Promise Keepers" movement, now sweeping through the United States, from a "distinctively Reformed perspective"(preface). Witnessing the multitude of Christian churches and "reformed" people so enthusiastic about this movement, such a Reformed assessment is a helpful one.

The Promise Keepers movement is a ministry to men, intending to bring thousands of men together "to learn to be better husbands and fathers" (p. 1). The pamphlet begins by acquainting the reader with the movement by giving a history of how it began, explaining the separate branches of the movement in its organization, and pointing to its philosophy by listing the "Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper."

Rev. Cammenga proceeds to evaluate Promise Keepers from a "Biblical perspective" which takes the form of six basic criticisms. These criticisms, and the fact that they are proven to be true of Promise Keepers, serve to expose this movement for all to see. The Promise Keepers movement is shown to promote unity at the expense of the truth, to be making concessions to Roman Catholicism, to assume duties given only to the instituted church, to be charismatic in nature, to compromise the doctrines of sovereign grace, and to undermine the institution of marriage.

By revealing the Promise Keeper movement's unbiblical and heretical views, this pamphlet serves to answer the all important question about Promise Keepers; Is it of God? (p. 4). This question is answered. And missing from the answer is the weak, wavering, uncertain sound. There is no lauding Promise Keepers for its "sincere concern" for family values. There is no weak chastising of the movement for some "bad elements" while at the same time praising it for the "nice things." Instead there is the clear, trumpet sound of the watchman warning of evil. A movement attributed to our Lord is actually a "tool of Satan" (p. 30).

An implication brought out by the pamphlet is already stated on page 4, "We must be discerning Christians." In order to discern one must know and understand what God has revealed in the Bible. The temptation is to adhere to that which our parents taught us when children without being convinced for ourselves of its truth as young people. If so, we cannot be discerning any more than those who receive a watered down gospel.

Discerning, we "try the spirits" whether they are true and do so by comparing them to what the Bible teaches. Undoubtedly, a major factor in why so many people have been deceived by Promise Keepers, is a lack of knowledge. The pamphlet is a reminder of the effort and devotion necessary to be a true discerning Christian. To be able to apply oneself to know God's Word, only comes from a desire within the heart, for the covenant life of friendship with God through His Word. We see this work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, also the lack of it, and this pamphlet serves as a reminder to ask for it.

Negatively, to be discerning, implies that we do not join ourselves to a movement merely because it flies under the "Christian" banner. To do so is to disregard the biblical warning of false prophets to come, with the instruction to "be not deceived." Paul, warning Timothy about being deceived (II Tim. 3: 13-15), reveals the only protection against deception:

> But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

As well as being a help in discerning the truth about such a movement, this critique of Promise Keepers also enables us to help others. Is it not the case sometimes, that we young believers are suspect of a certain belief or movement, yet are unable to pinpoint the fundamental error? This pamphlet helps us in that respect, so that, with some study, we are able to concretely state our objections to this movement and be of help to others who are unable to discern the errors.

The pamphlet also serves to show to us what to expect in the future; the bringing together of all religions into the one religion of the Anti-Christ (p. 29). The deception will only get worse, with the false church leading the way. The next generation is already taught that unity of all religions is the ideal. An article in the July 6 Grand Rapids Press is revealing. In it, a reformed minister is speaking of a Vacation Bible School for children which was put on at his church, and which included children from "divergent Christian faiths." He states, "This is not just an ecumenical thing, but there's a big emphasis on breaking down the walls between churches."

"Promises, Promises, Promises...." is not difficult reading and is in such a format which makes it easy to retain the main points. It serves as an encouragement to continue in the life of fellowship with God, recognizing that through such movements, our Lord is coming. To inquire, write to:

Southwest Prot. Ref. Church
4875 Ivanrest S.W.
Grandville, MI 49418

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

Church History

The Battle at Milvian Bridge

by David Overway

It is not my aim in this essay to bore the reader with needless historical details nor to overwhelm with an abundance of names and dates. Instead, it is my goal to show Constantine the Great as an individual personality in a particular, specific culture and to discuss the significance of his "conversion" as it relates to early Christianity.

First, however, we must understand the story of Constantine at the Milvian Bridge. Briefly then, we enter the scene as Constantine and Maxentius, two powerful sons of former emperors of the weakening Roman Empire prepare to engage in a decisive battle just to the west of Rome near the Milvian Bridge. Constantine had soundly defeated Maxentius at two previous encounters and now entered this battle confidently expecting a third victory.

Constantine's optimistic hope of victory sprang from the fact that he had been sent a vision from God just the day before. The vision had appeared high in the sky before him and consisted of a cross of light and the words "conquer by this." Many of the men in Constantine's army also witnessed this amazing apparition. During the night, Christ Himself appeared to Constantine in a dream and instructed him to make a replica of the cross-shaped figure he had seen in the vision and to use it as protection against his enemies. The very next morning Constantine instructed artisans within his camp to exercise their skill and now his troops marched forward proudly carrying replicas of the visionary figure and bearing shields freshly decorated with the mysterious cross-like emblem.

During the course of the ensuing battle Constantine began to gain the upper hand and Maxentius and his army began to retreat. As the retreating troops fled across the Milvian Bridge the entire structure suddenly gave way beneath them and the shocked soldiers found themselves struggling for their lives in the powerful river. That river was the last enemy Maxentius ever fought, he died while trying to swim to safety. The victory was Constantine's.

As the river carried away the body of Maxentius, so the river of History carried in an era of tolerance to Christianity such that the world had not known before. Constantine was convinced that his victory over Maxentius was due to the power of God and reflected an attitude of Divine favor toward himself. Constantine, therefore, considered himself a Christian for the rest of his life, becoming the first Roman Emperor who was a professed Christian. From his seat of almost absolute power, Constantine was able to favor Christianity politically in a way no Christian had done before. Constantine's rule marked a turning point in History in which Christianity gradually increased in popularity and acceptance.

Having said all this, it would be easy to over-simplify the situation and assume that the Church now entered into a trouble-free period of idealistic peace and to view Constantine as a Christian Hero and Warrior of the Church. However, both of these assumptions could be disputed.

First of all, Constantine was not a model of ideal Christian behavior. The list of victims that were murdered by him is a long one. One of the names on the list was Sopater who was a good friend and advisor of Constantine but was killed by the emperor because it was believed he had practiced magic and changed the direction of the wind. Far worse than the murder of Sopater is the glaring fact that Constantine executed his own eldest son, Crispus. In the same year that he executed his son, he also killed his wife, Fausta. Constantine was not a hero in his roles as friend, father or husband.

Further investigating the image of Constantine as hero, we turn to his attitude of tolerance. It is a well-known fact that in the year 313 A.D. Constantine passed the Edict of Milan proclaiming a tolerant attitude toward all religions and a restoration of confiscated property to Christians. Less known is that there had been several other edicts of toleration to Christians passed by previous rulers. In fact, such an edict had been passed only two years earlier by a ruler who had previously persecuted Christians. Constantine was not unique in tolerating Christianity politically.

Finally, we need to examine Constantine's "vision" on the day before the Battle of Milvian Bridge. For one thing this was not the only vision Constantine claimed to have had in his lifetime. His life both before and after the Milvian incident contained a series of visions. Also we must remember that this was a historical time period very familiar with visions. They were a common experience for both leaders and commoners alike and it was even expected that great leaders would have visions on a somewhat regular basis. Also keep in mind that the full story of the Milvian vision complete with written message in the sky and nigh-time dream did not come out until considerably later in Constantine's life. In addition, none of the men who were reputed to have shared in the sighting of the vision left any written record of their experience. At the least, Constantine's vision experience seems dubious.

Despite these considerations, Constantine's favorable attitude toward Christianity did bear fruit in many positive ways. The previously mentioned Edict of Milan allowed Christians to openly practice their religion without interference from their pagan neighbors. Constantine also appointed many Christians to positions of political power (although he never relinquished his own position of absolute power over both Church and State). He decreed that Church lands were not subject to tax and he supplied labor and materials for church building. He even donated free gifts of food and money to the clergy and needy Christians. In fact, Constantine was so generous that the subsequent ruler cut his allowances to the clergy by two-thirds.

Constantine's political and financial backing of the Christian religion caused many opportunists to seek church membership. This led to problems both then and in the future. Philip Schaff writes in his *History of the Christian Church*, "From the time of Constantine church discipline declines; the whole Roman world having become nominally Christian, and the host of hypocritical professors multiplying beyond all control" (Vol. III, p. 5).

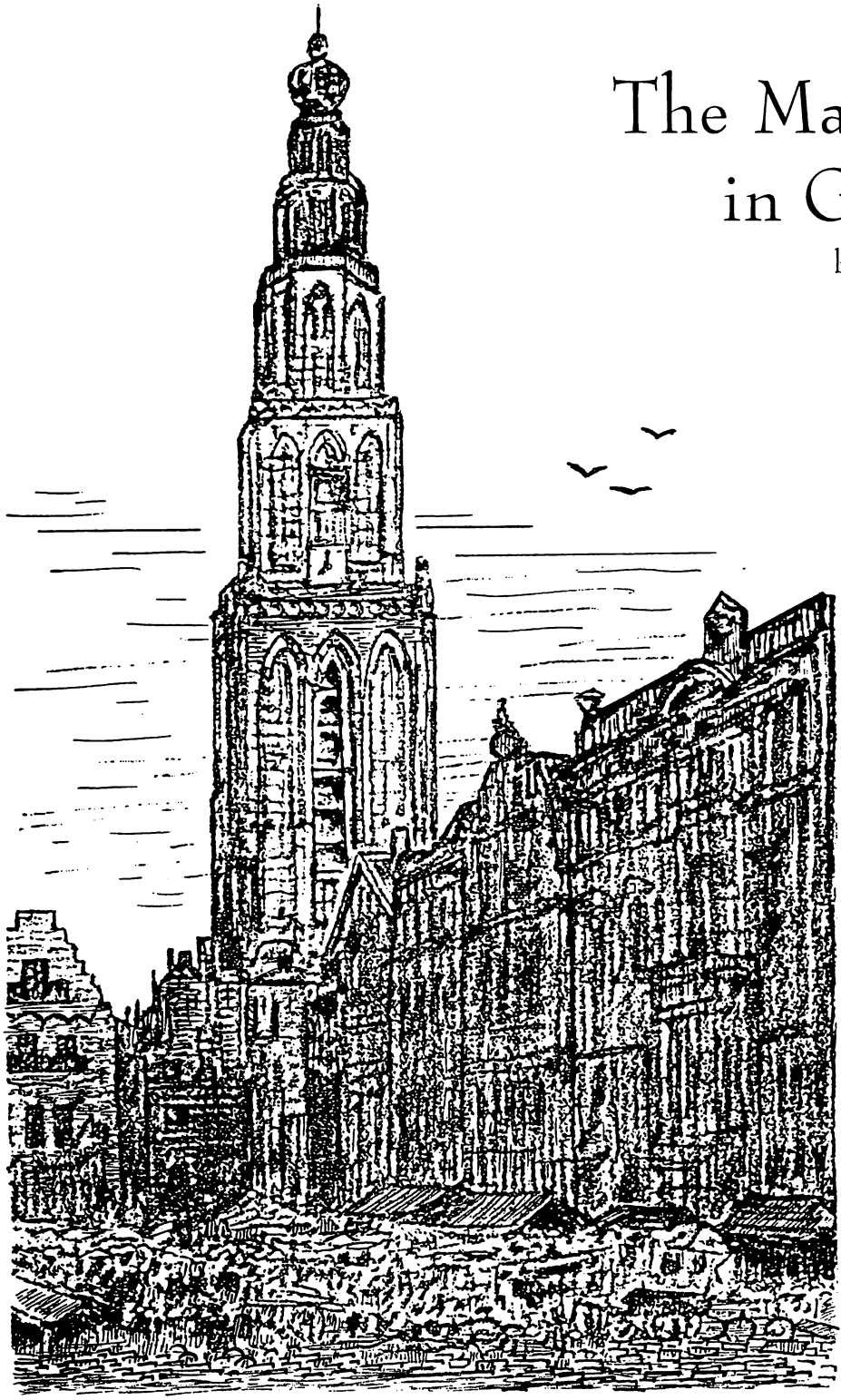
Constantine's rule did much to benefit the Christian Church. However, the good he did was marred both by the poor example he gave through his own personal life and by the infiltration of the church by those who were merely seeking advantage and opportunity.

Because he was the first Christian ruler of the empire, the legends about Constantine are many. It should be our objective not to perpetuate the legends and make him a hero but instead to realize that the spread of Chris-

tianity throughout Europe was inevitable and Constantine was only a man used by God to achieve this end.

"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever He will" (Proverbs 21:1). The hearts of kings and the mighty river of History are both as easily and completely directed by our omnipotent Lord. He alone is King!

David is a member or First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan.



The Martini-Church in Groningen

by J.P. de Klerk

Far in the northeastern part of The Netherlands you find the city of Groningen (in the local tongue this is pronounced: Grön). It is the biggest city in that part of the country and I have been there many times over the years. The Martini-Church was built in the thirteenth century and the tower (96 meters high) partly in the fifteenth and partly in the sixteenth century. The church is named after Martinus van Tours. He was born in 316 in Pannonia (Hungary), travelled to France where he became a monk. He founded a monastery in Ligugé. In 371 he became bishop of Tours; he died there in 397. In The Netherlands he was known as Saint Martin and many legends were told about him. The best known one is, that he met one day a poor man in the midst of the winter without enough clothes to keep himself warm, and he cut his coat in half with his sword and gave one half to the poor man. At his birthday, 11 November, children still celebrate that. Groningen was founded in 1040.

The drawing was made at the marketplace in 1922 by Dr. H.P. Berlage.

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

Crossing the Threshold of Hope

by Pope John Paul II
reviewed by John Huizenga

Pope John Paul II, Crossing the Threshold of Hope by Pope John Paul II. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1994.

This book by the current Pope consists of a series of questions asked by journalist Vettorio Messori along with the Pope's answers. Although displaying a learned broad philosophical background, the Pope in this book attempts to speak directly and simply to all people. His basic message is "be not afraid."

The book is useful in that it gives a brief down to earth summary of the Roman Catholic faith as it exists today. We Reformed young people are accustomed to hearing about the Roman church and doctrines as they came to light in the Reformation. Perhaps we wonder whether Rome has changed since then and our understanding outdated. This book makes it clear that things have not changed and that the gulf between us is not getting any narrower. Even the Pope himself confesses this.

In this review I will summarize the questions and what I understand to be the heart of his somewhat long and drawn out answers, and then give some commentary. The first question asked is "Do you really think you are the Vicar of Jesus Christ i.e. the man on earth who represents the Son of God, who takes the place of the Second Person of the omnipotent God of the Trinity?" To this weighty matter that would make any man who should bear such a position tremble, the pope says "be not afraid." He points out that such titles are embedded deep in the tradition of the church and "one must not be afraid of words" (6). He then argues that in a sense "Christ brings about a special presence in every priest," and that the title serves only to give dignity to each priest and each of the baptized. He says that the idea of the pope as the Vicar of Christ is a mystery and it is expected that this concept be "a sign that will be contradicted" (cf. Lk 2:34) (p. 11).

This response is the classic Roman Catholic response: Don't worry about it (since you are just one of the laity and not a clergy), the church has always believed it since its hazy early history, and here is a text to prove that such mysteries are hard to swallow.

The next question is "how do you pray for everyone?" To which he responds "the Holy Spirit helps me." He explains that he prays for all the church as one community.

Q. Can (and how can) one come to the conclusion that God really exists? A. Basically his simple answer is that the church simply believes in Christ. After some lengthy philosophical discussion, he concludes "Our faith is profoundly anthropological, rooted constitutively in coexistence, in the community of God's people, and in communion with this eternal THOU" (36). Basically what he is saying is that one can not think adequately about man without reference to God. It is an argument for the existence of God from the experience of man.

Q. If God exists, why is He hiding? A. The pope answers that God is a mystery because we are creatures. Nevertheless, God reveals Himself in the man Jesus Christ and is really not hiding. The pope hits on some key points in his answer but says nothing in this context about our fallen state and sin or revelation in the Word of God.

Q. Is Jesus the Son of God, it seems like a very radical claim? A. The pope points out that the wonder of this radical claim was recognized by the apostle Paul. He says that Jesus is indeed unlike Muhammad, Socrates, or Buddha, and points to the Nicene Creed which clearly teaches that Jesus is the Son of God.

Q. Did a God who is a loving Father really need to sacrifice cruelly His own Son? A. This question is raised

in the heart of man and expressed by many philosophers but we must remember that only God and nothing in creation can give salvation. The ultimate answer to this question lies in the will of God. I find it surprising that the pope says nothing here about God's justice.

Q. Why is there so much evil in the world? A. God in His wisdom and love desires to justify Himself to mankind and therefore places Himself before the judgment of man so that man sees his own guilt in all this evil but also knows that Christ suffers with us. This language of God justifying Himself is strange and stands in contrast to the Reformed teaching of God revealing His justice in the punishment of sin.

Q. Why does God tolerate suffering? A. Because God reveals Himself as always being on the side of the suffering and the cross reveals His love.

Q. What is salvation? A. To liberate from the evil of death and bring happiness in union with God. In elaboration on this answer, the pope says "God has embraced all men by the Cross and the Resurrection of His Son" (74). This doctrine of salvation is at the heart of our condemnation of Rome and comes up again in another question later in the book. The pope also says that the sacraments "create in man the seed of eternal life" (75). This teaching stands in contrast to the Reformed doctrine the God works regeneration in the heart of infants and adults by the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit in close connection with the preaching of the Word of God.

Q. Why are there so many different religions? A. All religions manifest the working of the Holy Spirit in humanity as God gradually leads humanity to Christ. There is a common fundamental element and root in all religions and "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions," nevertheless, Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and man that ultimately there is salvation only in Christ. The pope then analyzes some of the major religions and says of Buddhism that it is Gnostic and in conflict with all that is essentially Christian. The Roman church has a high regard for Muhammadanism because of their piety in prayer. However, they view God only in his majesty and never as Emmanuel. The pope expresses a desire for dialogue with the Muslims. The Roman Church experiences cordial relations with Judaism and is drawing closer.

Q. Why is God allowing Catholics to become a minority in the world? (By the year 2000 AD. Moslems will outnumber Catholics.) A. Numbers are not important; "we are speaking of values which are not quantifiable" (102). When Christ says "fear not little flock" he means that success is not easy. The point that the pope is making here is that the world in general is getting better morally and becoming more like Christians and eventually the Roman church will be able to extend its structure over them all.

Q. What is the "New Evangelism" of which you frequently speak? A. The new challenges we face as the church in obedience to the command of God spreads the gospel. "If the world is not Catholic from a denominational point of view, it is nonetheless profoundly permeated by the Gospel. We can say that the mystery of the Church, the body of Christ, is in some way invisibly present in it." Really this response can also be applied to the question before this one and reveals that Roman church is trying to fit its doctrine that the structure of the Roman Church is the true church to the pious people who do not claim to be under that structure.

Q. Is there any hope in the youth? A. Yes, as is evident in the "World Youth Days" organizations in which we see that the young are searching for God.

Q. Is only Rome right? A. Yes, though others have truth in so far as they have some relation with Rome: The Church as the Body of Christ is an instrument of salvation. "Man is saved in the Church by being brought into the Mystery of the Divine Trinity, in the mystery of intimate life with God" (131). "Besides a formal membership in the Church, the sphere of salvation can also include other forms of relation to the Church" (140). "Although the Catholic Church knows that it has received the fullness of the means of salvation, it rejoices when other Christian communities join her in preaching the gospel" (141). This is a spiritual mystery and goes beyond our understanding, yet the fact remains that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church (141).

Q. Is Ecumenism possible? A. What unites is greater than what separates. Unity is desired by most and we find our hope in the truth that God will finish His plan. Even so, Rome acknowledges that the gape with the Reformed is serious because "several fundamental elements established by Christ were not respected" (148). I find it interesting that the pope does not directly accuse us of false doctrine which is really the issue.

Q. Why does the Holy Spirit permit division? A. Perhaps to discover in it the wealth of the gospel, though this is no excuse for division.

Q. Did the Council (Second Vatican) open the doors so that people could enter or exit the Church? (N.B. by "doors" is meant the Council's opening up "dialogue of salvation" with all religions). A. The main emphasis of

the Council is "the great synthesis" and a sense of unity n the world (164).

Q. Is the Church failing in light of the fact that the world is not accepting certain teachings on morals? A. The Church's new focus on the people rather than the institution reveals a need to reexamine the rigid schemata. Yet we must see that those who do follow the teachings are not merely doing it in a superficial way as many did in the past.

Q. Do heaven, purgatory, and hell still exist? A. It is true that there is not much preaching on these matters today. That is due in large part to the secularism which desensitizes the people to eschatology. We are also stumped by the question "If God desires to save all, can He damn?" This is a mystery and perhaps all we can say is that some purification is necessary and at least it is good for man's conscience while in earth.

In this answer it is plain that Rome denies eternal election and reprobation and is essentially Arminian. There is no comfort for the believer who knows his sin in a theology in which God only desires to save. When a church becomes weak on God's sovereignty in salvation, then it moves closer to Rome.

Q. What is the use of faith if it is possible to live an onest and upright life without it?

A. "[W]e can say that the essential usefulness of faith consists in the fact that, through faith, man achieves the good of his rational nature. And he achieves it by giving his response to God, as is his duty-a duty not only to God, but also to himself.

"Christ did everything in order to convince us of the importance of this response. Man is called upon to give this response with inner freedom so that it will radiate that veritatis splendor so essential to human dignity" (192).

[I]f a life is truly upright it is because the Gospel, not known and therefore not rejected on a conscious level, is in reality already at work in the depths of the person who searches for the truth with honest effort and who willingly accepts it as soon as it becomes known to him. Such willingness is, in fact, a manifestation of grace at work in the soul. The Spirit blows where He wills and as He wills (cf. Jn 3:8). The freedom of the Spirit meets the freedom of man and fully confirms it.

This clarification was necessary in order to avoid any danger of a Pelagian interpretation. This danger already existed in the time of Saint Augustine, and seems to be surfacing again in our time. Pelagius asserted that ven without divine grace, man could lead a good and nappy life. Divine grace, therefore, was not necessary for him. But the truth is that man is actually called to salvation; that a good life is the condition of salvation; and that salvation cannot be attained without the help of grace.

Ultimately, only God can save man, but He expects man to cooperate. That fact that man can cooperate with God determines his authentic greatness. The truth according to which man is called to cooperate with God in all things, with a view toward the ultimate purpose of his life-his salvation and divination-found expression in the Eastern tradition in the doctrine of synergism. With God, man "creates" the world; with God, man "creates" his personal salvation. The divinization of man comes from God. But here, too, man must cooperate with God (194-195).

The continual emphasis by Rome on the inherent dignity of man is a denial of total depravity and thus an entirely new life in Christ. A spiritually dead man does not cooperate with God. One who believes such teachings does not know himself, the wonder of salvation, or the great love of God. The idea that man can cooperate with God puts man on God's level, blurs the distinction between the Creator and the creature, and reflects the desire of Adam to challenge God's command and seek a salvation in which he has some say.

The pope speaks of a work of grace in the heart of man that makes him willing to seek God. But this grace is not a saving power, but only a helping power that can be rendered ineffectual by the will of man. Only the Reformed doctrine of sovereign grace exalts our God and takes away all boasting in ourselves. All our boasting, rejoicing, and giving of thanks is in Christ. That is true thanksgiving and leads to the knowledge of God's love and righteousness.

The pope then answers some questions regarding the right to life. If we listen to the news we know that the pope opposes abortion and fights for human rights. In conclusion, the pope answers some interesting questions regarding Mariolotry.

Q. What can you tell us about your devotion to Mary?

A. "[T]rue devotion to the Mother of God is actually Christocentric, indeed, it is very profoundly rooted in the Mystery of the Blessed Trinity. ...Mary is the new Eve, placed by God in close relation to Christ, the new Adam, beginning with the Annunciation, through the night of His birth in Bethlehem, through the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee, through the Cross at Calvary, and up to the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Mother of Christ the Redeemer is the Mother of the Church.

The Second Vatican Council made great strides forward with regard to both Marian doctrine and devotion (213)....

The solemn Marian procession, which takes place before the solemnity of the Assumption, is nothing else but the expression of faith of the Christian people that the Mother of God shares in a unique way in the Resurrection and in the Glory of her own Son (214).

According to Rome, not only does each man have a significant role in his own salvation, Mary does also as something of a partner with Christ. Just as Christ is the new Adam, so Mary is the new Eve. It would be interesting to study the "great strides" made in this doctrine by the Council. Once more we see how Rome takes salvation away from Christ who according to Scripture and the Reformed Creeds is the only Saviour.

Significant also is the statement that Mary is "the Mother of the Church." The pope elaborates on this idea somewhat when asked why he says "be not afraid." He says:

Mary's participation in the victory of Christ became clear to me above all from the experience of my people. Cardinal Stefan Wyszunski told me that his predecessor, Cardinal August Hlond, had spoken these prophetic words as he was dying: "The victory, if it comes, will come through Mary." During my pastoral ministry in Poland, I saw for myself how those words were coming true.

After my election as Pope, as I became more involved in the problems of the universal Church, I came to have a similar conviction: On this universal level, if victory comes it will be brought by Mary. Christ will conquer through her, because He wants the Church's victories now and in the future to be linked to her (220-221).

The pope clearly ties Mary close to the institution of the Roman Catholic Church. It seems to me that though the pope speaks of respect for other religions and denominations, his desire is that the instituted Roman church alone will eventually rule in a earthly way.

Rome is a wolf in sheep's clothing, a shepherd who comes into the fold in a way other than the Door. The people of God find no comfort in the words of a pope who must frantically whisper to the scattering sheep "don't be afraid!" Our only comfort is found in Christ alone. Christ speaks through the pure preaching of His Word directly to the heart of men, women and children who know themselves to be sinners. In Christ alone we come to know the great love of God for His chosen people.

John is a member of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

Gem of the Month

The Fruit of the Spirit

The Spirit of Christ which is working in me
Is known by the fruit which my neighbor can see.
Does he see in me love? Not of self but of others—
Do I show forth true joy to my sisters and brothers?
Is there evident peace in the way that God leads?
Is longsuffering shown when a neighbor has needs?
Am I gentle and good in the midst of distress?
Does my faith e'er shine through in the midst of the press?
Am I meek, self-effacing, no pride showing through?
Am I temperate always, in all that I do?

I know that in these things I've just a beginning;
The "old man" within me beguiles me to sinning;
Yet I know that the work which my Savior's begun
In me will continue till my race is run.

THELMA WESTRA

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

. . . let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

Everywhere

The train continued its tireless traveling and the sound of the steel wheels against the rails never seemed to end. Billy sat in one of the passenger cars and knew that every moment he was being taken farther on his journey—farther from his home.

❊ ❊ ❊

The jet gathered speed until at a critical moment its nose lifted off the ground and the whole heavy machine began to ride on air. Susan gripped the armrests of her seat while she peeked out of her window and watched the rooftops of houses and factories become smaller and smaller. Soon they were above the clouds and she could see no trace of the city at all. Now they were in a land of pure white cotton mountains and bright sunshine—a completely new world.

❊ ❊ ❊

The rhythm of waves hitting the front of the ship was even, while the massive ferryboat cut through the water. Jerry stood on the top deck with his hands tightly holding onto the railing while he leaned into the wind. He watched the landing they had left behind disappear on the horizon. He walked to the other side of the deck and gazed ahead. The view looked the same everywhere. Sky and water—that's all he could see.

❊ ❊ ❊

The afternoon sun was blocked by the tall, full-leaved maple trees and the shade they provided was cool and comfortable. Sharon sat barefoot beneath them with one of her favorite books and stroked the grass with her toes. She could see their back porch from this spot even though it was a little hidden from the house—it was her special, favorite place to be.

❊ ❊ ❊

Where are you? Over here? Over there? It doesn't matter where. God is there—everywhere.

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

My sincere apologies to those whose patience was tried as they attempted to do last month's puzzle. A space was omitted which left it impossible to answer. C.L.M.

Fill in the blanks:

"_____ shall I go from they _____? or whither shall I _____ from thy _____? If I _____ up into _____, thou art there: if I make my _____ in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the _____ of the _____, and _____ in the uttermost parts of the _____; Even there shall thy _____ lead me, and thy _____ hand shall _____ me."

Psalm 139:7-10

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Church News

BIRTHS *"Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord."* *Psalm 127:3*

FAITH, MI

The Lord has blessed Mr. & Mrs. Dave Griffioen with a son, Joel David.

HULL, IA

Mr. & Mrs. Veryl Heynen rejoice in the birth of a son, Dalton Dean.

Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Andringa became the parents of a baby boy, Zachary James.

PELLA, IA

Thomas Gerard was born to Mr. & Mrs. Bert Mulder.

SOUTH HOLLAND, IL

Jeff & Stephanie Zylstra rejoice in the birth of a son, Tyler Jeffrey.

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

GRANDVILLE, MI

The sacrament of baptism was administered to Caitlin Anne, daughter of Bill & Lori Smeda.

PELLA, IA

Baptism was administered to Thomas Berard, son of Mr. & Mrs. Bert Mulder.

Rachel LeeAnn, daughter of Kevin & Lisa Rowe was presented for baptism.

Presented for holy baptism was Kristen Leigh, daughter of Chuck & Jan Pawloski.

LYNDEN, WA

The sacrament of baptism was administered to Kelsey Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kent Bouwman, to Jarrod Herman, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ed DeBoer, to Raquel Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jake DeHoog, and to Megan Jannique, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Molenkamp.

REDLANDS, CA

Glen & Beth Feenstra presented their son, Bruce Henry, for baptism.

SOUTH HOLLAND, IL

Gwen, daughter of Phil & Karen VanBaren was presented for baptism.

Baptism was administered to Bryce Alexander, son of Todd & Kristin Lange, to Levi Robert, son of Joel & Debbie Smits, and to Clark Randall, son of Randy & Shelly VanDerNoord.

SOUTHWEST, MI

Benjamin Scott, son of Mr. & Mrs. Scott Bartelds was presented for baptism.

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

PEACE, IL

Jennifer Poortinga has made her faith in the Lord public before her congregation.

Confession of faith was made by Brian Bruinsma, Micheal DeJong. and Nathaniel Houck

SOUTH HOLLAND, IL

Public confession of faith was made by Jennifer Bruinsma, Katie Haak, & Kelly Regnerus.

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

GRANDVILLE, MI

Todd Cammenga and Kara Koermer were united in holy matrimony.

HOLLAND, MI

Chera Koops and Peter Rizk were united in marriage.

HULL, IA

Joined in marraige were Carl Maassen and Jill VanMaanen.