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# Beacon Lights

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October  
1998

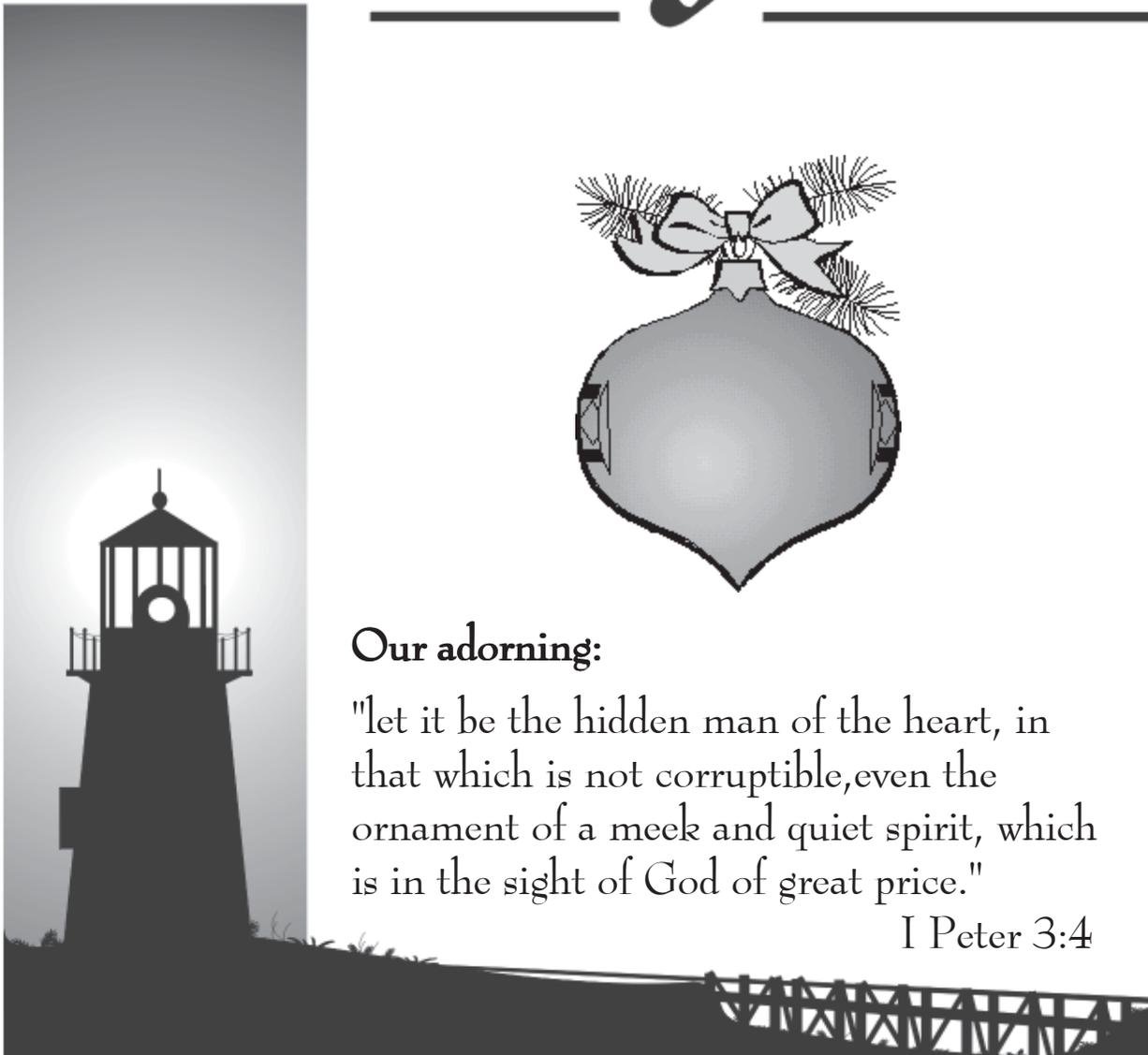
Volume LVII  
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## Our adorning:

"let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

I Peter 3:4





# Body Ornamentation

by John Huizenga



**E**xcuse me, sir, may I ask you a rather personal question? I couldn't help but notice the rings in your ears, nose, and...eyebrow. Why do people do that?

Well, for me it began when I started high school. Having an earring was daring and radical. An earring was the rite of passage into the group that was cool. With my earring I belonged to a group that had connections. The nerds would cast a furtive glance of awe. I was emboldened to go places I did not dare go before. When the cool kids saw my earring, they knew I was one of them and treated me with respect.

The earring gave me power and I wanted more. I wanted to have more impact on people. I wanted to push my parents around a bit and flex my individuality. That's when I got a ring in my other ear. My parents did not know what to do. They cried, they became angry, they wrung their hands, but they could do nothing to change what I had done. It was great! Some people thought I was a homosexual. I really didn't care what they thought, I had pushed beyond the old traditional boundaries. I knew what lay beyond. I had knowledge that they did not have. Eventually they looked at me with more awe and respect.

Then I started seeing people with rings on other parts of their body. It was exciting to look in the tattoo and body piercing shops and see all the cool and creative things that can be done. I started to try new things and explore. I began to see my body as my very own canvas upon which I could experiment and advertise who I am. Friends told me about the awesome experience of inflicting intense pain upon their own bodies for the euphoric reaction. For some it became a type of atonement and inner peace.

Body piercing is not new. It has a long history in many exciting cultures. Only recently has it made a huge surge into American culture. Now that it can be done safely, I look at it as a form of art that enhances me. So many people are doing it now. The key to successful body ornamentation is to know yourself, to be creative, and be different than everyone else.

That first earring opened up a whole new world for me; a world of new people, exciting people, daring people, different people. It freed me from the stuffy religion and tradition of my parents and helped me to see that real people in the everyday world have a wonderful variety of religious ideas and expressions. I believe now that every culture and religion has something good to offer. The best life is one that is a good mixture of all these things that is suitable for who you are. Life is colorful, not black and white. Look around you, don't you see all the Christmas lights that adorn the trees and buildings? We need to do all we can to make our lives more colorful. Christmas is the one part of Christianity that I like because it is so cheerful and decorative. All the rigid sermons and stagnant doctrine is quite worthless for an exciting and colorful life. The Roman Catholics, I think, do the best job of making worship colorful, though many other Christian groups are making some progress. People just need to relax a bit.

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You just need to take that first step. I can tell just by looking at you that you are stuck in your old traditional rut. If you want to enjoy life, you need to loosen up a bit. You need to find yourself. Bring out the real you with some body enhancements. Don't hide it all behind your fears of what might happen.

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One pierced ear; is that so bad? I would never go any further than that. It would certainly get attention from the guys at school. I'm sure it would open some doors for me into that "new world." I would be the talk of the church people around their dinner tables. Some of the hopelessly stuffy folk will look at me with scorn, but deep down they probably would like to have a taste of life with the cool group. Besides, what is the big deal about a little hole punched in my ear? It is just a cultural thing. There does not have to be any religious significance attached. Even the Israelite men that came from Egypt had earrings.

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Is it so simple, so innocent? Let's take a look at the idea of a man being pierced. What does God reveal to us concerning his will regarding men and pierced body parts. We read in Exodus 21:6 and Deuteronomy 15:17 of the slave that wants to be a slave of a particular master all his life: "Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever." Here having one's ear pierced was a sign of life-long submission to a master. In Exodus 32:1-4 we read that sons, along with the wives and daughters broke off earrings for making the golden calf. Does this mean it was customary for Israelite men to wear earrings? It only proves that slaves had earrings, for they had just come out of slavery from Egypt. Some men did wear earrings out of custom, but they were not Israelites, they were the Ishmaelites (Judges 8:24). When we look to the New Testament, we note that Christ was pierced with a spear after he died. This was a testimony of His total submission to the Father (cf. Philippians 2:8; Isaiah 53:5,10). It is a general principle throughout the word of God that for a man to be pierced means to be lowered.

Yet the word of God also reveals that it is not shameful or demeaning for a woman to have earrings. We read in Ezekiel 16:12 of the picture of God taking His people as a bride unto Himself: "And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head." We also read in Genesis 24 that the servant of Abraham put earrings in the ears of Rebecca. In marriage, being pierced is a symbol of the woman's life-long union with her husband as head. She belongs to him and she submits to him as her head. And in a Christ centered marriage, submission to a loving husband brings great peace and contentment to the home.

God has ordained marriage and God-ordained authorities as the only place among human relations where submission brings joy and harmony before God. Submission outside of marriage and God ordained authority is miserable bondage. The child of God fights against the worldly philosophies and sinful life that ever seeks to have dominion. He does not give in and show signs upon his body that he serves another god. The godly woman also does not feel threatened when she sees men entering the realm of ear piercing and pierces her ears with multiple holes. She understands the principles and sticks with simple modesty.

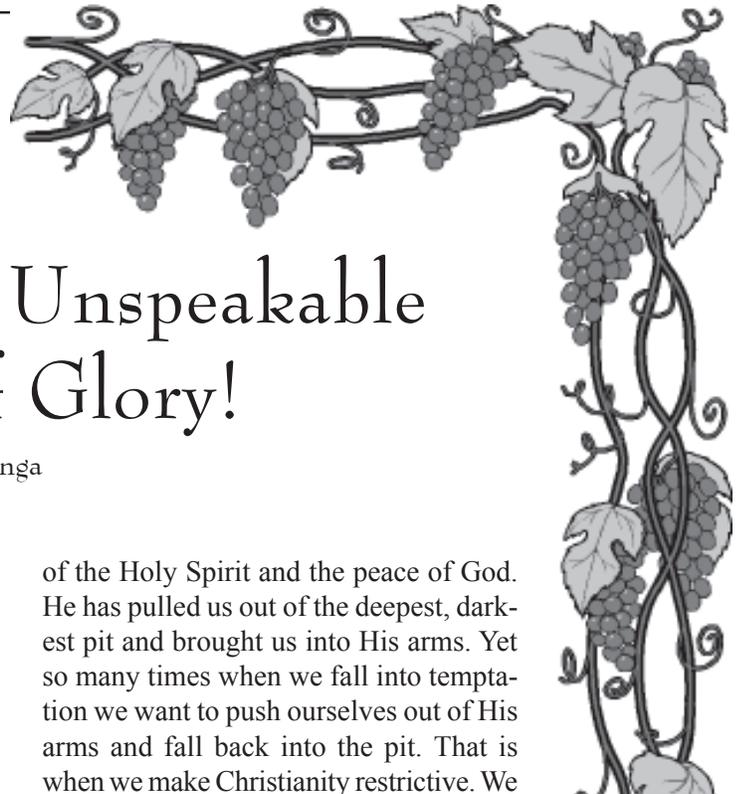
What about tattoos or any other cutting of one's body for decorative or mystical experiences? All these things belong to an outward show of the antithesis between the people of God and the wicked. God makes this distinguishing separation between His people and the wicked: His people were to put no permanent marks upon their bodies. Those who did, did not show themselves to be the people of God. (Leviticus 19:28; Leviticus 21:5; Deut. 14:1; I Kings 18:28; Jeremiah 16:6; Jeremiah 48:37; Mark 5:5; Rev. 13:16-17; Rev. 14:9; Rev. 14:11; Rev. 15:2; Rev. 16:2; Rev. 19:20; Rev. 20:4). The pagans used to gash their skin and put a die upon the wound making it a permanent sign of slavery to their pagan deity. With this the child of God will have nothing to do. The antithesis is spiritual in essence, but God has

given a physical sign as well. Only those marks ordained by God, such as circumcision in the Old Testament belong to the people of God.

We are servants (slaves) of the Living God. The sign of belonging to Him is our baptism and lives of thankful obedience. Does this mean that the life of the child of God is as dull and colorless as some would claim? Not at all. Of all people, the believer is the most beautifully adorned. We read of the godly woman, “Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands:” (I Peter 3:3-5). A meek and quiet spirit is not the ornament of the woman only, but also the man in Christ for we read in Col. 3:12-14, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.” Let us put on the jewelry of faith, the sign of our belonging to God.

The ornamentation of the believer is opposite in character to that of the unbeliever. The ornamentation of the unbeliever is loud, drawing attention to self, while that of the believer is quiet, drawing attention away from self and toward God. It is ornamentation that is very strange to the unbeliever. A meek spirit makes one invisible as far as worldly attention goes. When noticed, the meek are despised by the world. But a meek and quiet spirit is beautiful within the life of believers in the church and beautiful in the eyes of God. A meek and quiet spirit is that ornamentation of the church which reflects the perfect grace of God. May we strive to show forth His glory and beauty in our lives as believers. ❖

## Fruitful Branches



# Rejoice with Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory!

by Holly Elzinga

**C**hristianity is not meant to be boring, drab, or restricting. It's not a set of rules that we have to follow. It's not “don't do this,” and “don't do that.” Christianity is meant to be enjoyable! Sometimes we make Christianity boring and restricting, but it doesn't need to be that way. Christ has saved us and put His fiery love in our hearts. He gives us the power

of the Holy Spirit and the peace of God. He has pulled us out of the deepest, darkest pit and brought us into His arms. Yet so many times when we fall into temptation we want to push ourselves out of His arms and fall back into the pit. That is when we make Christianity restrictive. We

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say that Christianity won't let us do this or that—it won't allow us to fall back into that pit of sin that our sinful selves want to fall into. We make Christianity boring by saying that we aren't allowed to do so many things. But what about the things we can do? We don't have to suffer, starving and naked, in that deep, dark pit of sin. God has pulled us out so we can enjoy the mountains and the valleys and the meadows. Instead of looking down into that pit at the sinful things of this world and wishing we could be there, we need to enjoy our salvation! Love the

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Instead of looking down into that pit at the sinful things of this world and wishing we could be there, we need to enjoy our salvation!

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Lord! Tell others about Him. The love God puts in our hearts is over flowing—give it to others. Show the world that we are different. We are Christians, and we ENJOY our Christianity!



God is our gracious Savior who out of His great love pulled us out of that pit. We owe everything to Him. He makes it possible for us to love Him and to give that love away to others. Ecclesiastes 12:13 and 14 says, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." When I realize how great God is and how much he loves me, my heart hurts because I owe so much to Him.

We are wretched sinners, disobeying all of God's commandments. Yet God loves us anyway. It is amazing to think that God would love us even though we continue to sin against Him over and over again. His love is so great that He sent His only begotten son, the perfect Jesus, to die. Jesus was willing to give up His life for us with the horrible death on the cross. Bearing our shame and punishment, He justified and sanctified us. We can now go before God blameless because of His great love for us. We owe God so much and there is no way we can

ever repay him for saving us. But we can show Him thankfulness.

We show our thankfulness to God by keeping His commandments. God tells us that the greatest commandment is to love Him with everything we've got. Our love for Him should be shown in everything we do. Every hour of every day must be used to glorify God. When we look at God's commandments this way, they're not a set of rules. Realizing how much God has done, we want to obey them as a small token of our thankfulness. And

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When we look at God's commandments this way, they're not a set of rules. Realizing how much God has done, we want to obey them as a small token of our thankfulness.

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when we do follow his commandments, God will give us His perfect peace.

Every morning come to God in prayer. Ask Him for His guidance throughout the day. Ask Him to help you serve Him and love Him in everything you do. And thank Him for everything. Then throughout the day remember Him. Fear Him and keep His commandments. Psalm 97:12 says, "Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness."



When we go through our life showing our love for God, others will notice. They will see that our life is not empty; we have a reason for living. And we are joyful! It is our duty to give the love God gives us away to others, believer and unbeliever alike. So many verses in the Bible tell us that we are to love our neighbor. I John 3:18 tells us how we are to love. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and truth." When we are truly enjoying our salvation, our love for others will be displayed in our actions.

Our relationship to a fellow believer should be one of love and peace. Fellow believers are all those who confess and believe in the one true God of the scriptures. They are found all over the earth in many differ-

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ent nations, tongues, and denominations. All Christians share a common bond in Christ. We are all members of the body of Jesus with one common goal: to glorify our heavenly Father. I think sometimes we're too concerned about our little differences to take the time to live and enjoy our faith. Christianity is not all about arguing with closed minds about little doctrinal differences while we neglect proclaiming the gospel to others. Christians who spend their time telling others about Jesus are certainly showing their love in deed and truth. This does not mean doctrine is not important. By searching the scriptures daily, we can find the one truth of the Word and be a witness to it. Our duty to fellow believers is to love them and put them higher than ourselves. Always have an open mind and look at the other person's point of view. And be a peace maker. Give of yourself to make the other person happy. "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." Colossians 3:15.

We should also be peacemakers among the ungodly. Every opportunity we have, we must be showing them God's love. Show them the peace of God which passeth all understanding. Instead of viewing unbelievers as wicked sinners damned to hell, view them as lost sinners in need of God's salvation. We will never know how God will use our witness to bring His children to Himself. That is why we must always witness with an open mind. If we have a negative attitude when we witness, others will not want to listen and we are not showing God's love. God's love overflowing in our hearts will cause us to want everyone to know about Jesus. We want all the world to hear. We must be willing to give of ourselves so that we can give to the cause of God's Name. Our relationship to an unbeliever should be one of compassion and friendliness. II Corinthians 6:14 reminds us not to unequally yoked together with unbelievers. We are unequally yoked with unbelievers when we develop close friendships with them. Being friendly with unbelievers is not wrong, but we must be careful that we have an influence on them and not them on us. Our faith has to be so strong that we can live among unbelievers and yet not be influenced by them. With God working in us, this is possible. John 16:22 says that no one is able to take away that joy that we have in Christ.

We need to treat others with love and respect. View others as better than yourself. Always be a peacemaker and remember to give of yourself to make others happy. Show others the love of God. Take every opportunity there is to give that love away to others. Be a witness

and tell the world of Christ. Do not be ashamed to stand up for Jesus.



When God pulled us out of that dark pit of sin, he gave us new life. We are no longer dead, for the Holy Spirit Himself lives in us! It is really amazing to think that God Himself actually comes and dwells in our bodies. I Corinthians 3:16 and 17 says, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, Him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." Our bodies are made holy because God dwells in them. He gives us His Holy Spirit to comfort us and give us power. We are not to defile this holy temple of God. We are to realize how great God made us, and love ourselves so we can serve Christ better.

There are many ways that we defile our body. Jesus calls them the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:18-21. We are to keep ourselves from adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lasciviousness. God says he will destroy those who defile the temple of God. Our bodies are holy, and God lives in them. It is our duty to keep them holy by abstaining from evil. We have to take care of our bod-

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ies and keep them pure. Using drugs is abusing your body. It is taking the beautiful working system of life that God gave us and messing it up. Addiction to these drugs comes so easily, causing your body to need the drug to survive. Smoking is also defiling your body. I believe that smoking is wrong because it is not keeping your body pure. We need to take care of our bodies.

God made us so great, and we should not look at ourselves and say we are inadequate or not good enough. In fact, the Bible even commands us to love ourselves. Matthew 22:39 says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." We are commanded in this verse not only to love our neighbor but also to love ourselves. Loving ourselves does not mean that we think we are better than others. We cannot be obsessed with ourselves. But it is

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wrong to think we are inadequate. God has given each of us so many gifts and talents. We need to use what we have to serve Christ whole-heartedly. We may not complain that God has not made us good enough. God has given us everything we need to serve Him perfectly in this life and accomplish everything He's planned for us. It is our duty to love ourselves so we can serve God joyfully to the fullest. God has made us perfect and has redeemed us fully so each of us can use our special gifts to serve Him.

Our bodies are not our own. We belong to Christ. When we keep this in mind, it will be quite obvious to us what we should or should not do to keep our bodies temples of the Holy Spirit. Christianity is a matter of the heart. If we really want to live our lives for God, we will know how to treat our bodies as temples of God. We will not look at ourselves as inadequate, but we will realize that God made us wonderful. We will joyfully want to serve Him with everything he has given us.



God brought us out of that dark pit and into His beautiful creation. Isaiah 55:12 speaks of how the creation takes part in our joy. "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." We need to enjoy God's beautiful creation and take care of it. God tells Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply, replenish the earth, and subdue it. God also gave man dominion over the animals. God tells them in Genesis 2:15 to dress the Garden of Eden and keep it. This means they had to serve and work in the garden and guard it from evil.

God has given man a high place on this earth. We are not like the animals; we have a living soul capable of serving God. God gave us power over the animals and

responsibility over creation. We need to take care of creation. We can do this in many ways: recycling, conserving natural resources, not littering, and not polluting as much as possible. This earth is a beautiful place that God gave us to live in and we need to take care of it. It is important that we realize how wonderful God's creation is. God created everything so perfect and beautiful. It is amazing and wonderful when we examine God's creation and see how great it is. God makes everything work out perfect. Our needs are provided for by creation: food, shelter, and clothing. He has given such a great gift for us to enjoy. Every day new wonders of creation pop out at us: tender flowers opening, mountains rising in majesty, the singing of birds and rivers, a bolt of lightning, or the rising sun. Behold creation's beauty!



We have so much to be thankful for, it's incredible! God has given us so much. He has pulled us out of that dark pit of sin and made us glorious children of His! Now with His love in our hearts we can tell others about Him. He has made us wonderful and beautiful people with clean hearts. All of our sin is washed away in Christ's blood. He put each of us on this earth at this time in history so that we can accomplish His special purpose for us. We need to go through life with joy seeking to find and accomplish that special purpose. Christ has given us so much to be thankful for and we need to be joyful! When we realize how great God is and how much He's done for us, we will be joyful. It is impossible to be washed over with such love and not "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" I Peter 1:8. God's people are blessed so much! "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted" Psalm 89:15 and 16. ❖

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

# And Was Elizabeth Jealous?

by J.P. de Klerk

Ms. Van Diemen had made it a habit every day to make a pot of tea at three o'clock in the afternoon. Those who were at home came to the livingroom or to the garden (that depended on season, winter or summer), and it was cozy to eat a couple of biscuits, drink tea and chat.

Mr. Van Diemen was a policeman and as a rule he came home at seven o'clock in the evening.

All four children were teenagers who went to a Christian school for secondary education. There were three sons and a daughter.

Elizabeth was at home this day, preparing herself for an exam.

Because it was Monday the washing was hanging on the clothesline above the grass field in the garden.

In three weeks time the summer holidays would start and some plans were already made.

The tea was poured out at the round wooden table under a sun umbrella in all the colors of the rainbow, and Elizabeth took a waffle. Mother and daughter regarded each other with curiosity. There was nobody else there. Elizabeth flickered her eyes, and muttered somewhat shy: "I believe that not being jealous is an art, and even Christian girls sometimes have problems with it."

She looked fixedly at the adornment of her teacup.

"True," answered Mrs. Van Diemen. "Already in the Scriptures we find examples of people who were jealous, because someone else was more beautiful, rich, or clever. Apart from that, some people were play-acting, they fooled others with hollow promises. But perhaps you meant something else that bothered you?"

Elizabeth folded her hands and said "Mum, I found out that I am often jealous of Mary, in my classroom. It



is childish of me. She is my best friend, but she has qualities which I don't have, and that irritates me somehow. She is always full of joy and happiness. It seems that she is a girl to be ever daunted. Even though she does something stupid sometimes, or she had completely forgotten to do a particular part of her homework and is sometimes punished by the teacher, she is still content. She says 'sorry' and forgets about it. Last week I asked her openly, what her secret was, and I confessed that I was jealous. Well, she was speechless and then she told me, that *she* was sometimes jealous of *me*, because I always had good marks for my work. I explained to her, that God gave me the strength and that I usually found things very difficult so that I had to mug for hours in my small room. Then she said that I had all I needed, but they were poor and she was often worried because her father was often very ill.

"I once knew twins, who seemed lovely girls, but they were very mean. That is worse. They enjoyed making me angry."

Elizabeth took up her cup of tea.

"Mum, yesterday in the Church, the sermon of Rev. Broekstra amazed me, because he drew my attention to the fact that when Elizabeth was expecting John the Baptist, and Mary, Jesus Christ, *Elizabeth was not jealous of Mary*. It was like he said it to me! He mentioned the sin and the names. It was like a warning, don't you think so?"

Mrs. Van Diemen nodded and smiled. ❖

*J.P. de Klerk is an author and journalist from Ashhurst, New Zealand.*

# Suicide: A Closer Look

by Deborah Benson

In June of 1998, an article appeared in the *Beacon Lights* entitled, “Do Christians Who Commit Suicide Go To Hell?” The article was a brief answer to this question. I would like to begin this “closer look” by answering that same question.

The question, as posed, can be very easily and very quickly answered. No! Not one Christian will ever “go to hell,” regardless of the way in which he/she died. By Christian I refer to those in whom the Spirit of God has implanted faith. I cite Philippians 1:6 as an absolute assurance that God will cause all His children to persevere in faith. “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ...” God saves His people by implanting faith and completing His work in every one of His people, until “the day of Jesus Christ.” This is an assurance of perseverance in faith, *not* an assurance of insulation from sin, or the miseries that are attendant thereto! Many more passages could be cited which demonstrate the perseverance of the saints, I will assume that this doctrine is not under dispute and plunge forward.

That was easy to answer, but perhaps what was really intended in the original question was, “Is it *possible* for a Christian to commit suicide?” This question is more difficult to answer. After searching Scripture, I find no passage which would suggest that there is one particular transgression against the law from which all those in whom faith has been planted will be insulated. To commit suicide is a sin against the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill.” It is the sin of self-murder. If we search our own souls, we know that we ourselves have committed murder against our neighbors and against ourselves, if not in deed, then in thought and word. Is the offense of thought and word less to God? Are there degrees of transgression against His law?

If we consider the sixth commandment as the one among ten to which the believer must hold *perfectly* to be regenerated, we must wrestle with many, many Scripture passages. But consider now, Romans 2:1-4 “Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same

things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” Holy Writ knows nothing of the believer who has conquered *any* part of the law! Christ, for His people has conquered *every* part of the law!

We have ample evidence from Scripture that the flesh will always, on this earth, be at war with the Spirit, or the “new man.” To verify, look up Romans 7:18-25. Perhaps even more striking, we know from our own lives that the sin which “we would not, that we do.” We generally acknowledge that the “old man,” at war with the Spirit can manifest itself in outward acts of theft, false witness and adultery (and many others). We have in fact the record of King David, a man after God’s own heart, committing active, open and conscious adultery and *murder*. The sins of David to which I refer were not momentary, but somewhat protracted. Then came that blessed day for David; God sent the prophet Nathan. The sin David was ready to condemn in another, he now (finally) saw in himself. But then we come to another frequent argument with respect to suicide. We might say, “yes, David committed the sin of murder, but he also repented, a record of which is believed to be found in Psalm 51.” The sin of self-murder allows for no opportunity of repentance, is it then possible for such a one to be with the Lord? (Of course this begs another question: Was David *unsaved* during the period of time he was *unrepentant*?)

We must turn to Scripture and query, did Christ die only for the sins which we have *verbally or consciously* repented of? Or asked in another way, “Must a Christian die in a state of *outward or visible* repentance to realize his (supposed) salvation?” If this is so, every Christian can be assured that his salvation *is not* come out of Zion! Not one Christian is conscious of a fraction of those sins which he has committed. We could never say with confidence, “Christ is my Savior”. We could say, “Christ is

## Winter Slays

by John Huizenga

*Winter slays  
With icy breath  
The tender living flower.  
God removes  
The sting of death  
All with His gracious power.*

*Winter holds  
With loyal grip  
'til God commands  
and waters drip  
a bud unfolds.*

*Winter serves  
our all-wise God  
who made the flower it kills.  
Death, we know  
doth serve His plan  
our questions all He stills*

## The Death of Someone Close

by Meri Beth Zandstra

*Sometimes God takes from us loved ones,  
We really don't know why.  
He does it for the best of us,  
"But," we always ask, "Why?"*

*God will have to tell us,  
When we see Him face to face.  
It's hard for us to understand,  
But God will tell us, by His Grace.*

*When we lose a loved one,  
It's hard to understand,  
But they are safe in Heaven,  
Guided by God's hand.*

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*Meri Beth was in sixth grade at Adams  
Christian School when she wrote this poem in  
1997 in memory of her baby sister Rebecca  
Joy, and Mrs. Heidi Baas.*

In Memory of a Dear Person  
(Someone who will always be close to my heart)

## Heidi L. Baas

May 1957 – July 1997

by Angela M. Schipper

*As every day passes and the minutes go by,  
The pain never ceases and I start to cry.  
The memories within me they always appear,  
Whether good ones or bad ones, they start with a tear.*

*He took you away from us, to be with Him there,  
Your heavenly mansion was already prepared.  
Often I wonder why He had to take you,  
Didn't He know that we needed you?*

*The first time I saw you, I just stood there in shock,  
You didn't look like Aunt Heidi; this picture I wanted blocked.  
I wanted to scream and drop to my knees,  
I didn't want you to be gone – "God help me please!"*

*There were feelings inside me, and things I wanted to say,  
But you're no longer here and I had to walk away.*

*When I found out you had died, I cried in my sleep,  
That's when the pain started, it started so deep.  
I hated myself for never saying the phrase:  
That was "I love you, I'll love you always."*

*You are gone now, away from me, but so near to my heart,  
Your memories I'll cherish, they'll never depart.  
Often I find myself thinking of them,  
Wishing to turn back and that the "rules" could bend.*

*But I know where you are now,  
And how happy you must be.  
Because you are singing with the angels,  
Living with God and His Son for all eternity.*

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my Savior, providing *I*, in my flesh, can maintain an outward or visible manifestation of repentance.” (A *major* work!) Scripture does not allow this. Even if we knew every sin, could we be sure that we would not die during the commission of some sin?

Consider this actual example: A teenage son, in rebellion and anger toward his parents, (ultimately toward God), broke the Sabbath by skipping church and going swimming with his “friends.” As a result of a dive off the dock, his neck was broken and he was killed immediately. Let us apply the logic often used with suicide, to this example: a) It is sin to break the Sabbath day, b) the teenage son died in the commission of that sin, c) the teenage son was unable to repent of that particular sin, d) the teenage son must have been unregenerate, e) all those who break the Sabbath, and die as a direct result thereof, are unregenerate. There is no Scripture passage that would allow us to “leap that high.” Neither the means by which death came, nor the visible evidence of repentance *prove the case*. (Unless of course you are a Roman Catholic and hold to the erroneous doctrine of mortal and venial sins.) The work of God, found in the heart, *by God*, proves the case. It is remarkable how our own sins appear so “forgivable” to us, but when they are the sins of another (different from our own), we flippantly stand in the place of God and seek to wield His Law.

The above logic is often applied to the Scriptural references to Saul and Judas, both of whom committed suicide. It is true that the Scriptures seem to indicate that both men were unregenerate. Jesus calls Judas the ‘son of perdition’. And God’s words to Samuel, about Saul, are not at all encouraging. What was the cause of their unregenerate state? Faith was never implanted in them. *If* Saul and Judas are in hell, it is because they were at enmity with God and His work was not found in them. To take a “hermeneutical gymnastic leap” and conclude from these two examples that all who die by suicide are unregenerate, is to presuppose that the work of grace was prohibited *by the sin of suicide*. Now we’ve stepped in a mine field! Scripture clearly states that *all* transgression is equally damning before the Law of God, we would have to conclude that the work of grace is prohibited by *all sin*. *When* God’s people are found (in spite of immeasurable sin), in heaven, it will be because God found *His* work in our hearts. *He* will find the seed of faith which *He* planted, watered and nurtured to the exact measure which *He* intended. *If He* planted it, *He* will find it, *regardless* of any sin which His wretched children have committed.

Repentance is not merely an act which we perform, due to the implanting of faith. We see this in the Scriptural example of the thief on the cross. His *heart* turned from sin, and Christ the Lord recognized that work of His own. There was no opportunity for verbal communication of repentance, much less a conscious effort to tally his sins. *Normally*, in the life of a believer we do hear and see outward evidence of repentance. We know, however, that God’s work of grace, in the heart, is not *dependant* on rational functioning of the mind, the absence of sin or the visible manifestation of repentance, to be efficacious. This can be clearly recognized by a short visit to a respected and loved saint, spending his/her later years in senility. Such a one can exhibit bizarre and uninhibited sin, be devoid of rational thought and all the while visibly (to us) *unconscious* of the faith long professed and lived. Is the work of grace in the heart *destroyed or prohibited* by the miseries and sins which are manifested in the human mind and body, due to a myriad of external and internal causes?

Thanks be to God, that in spite of the knowledge of our great sin, and diverse disease, we might say (confidently) with the Psalmist, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth *all* thine iniquities; who healeth *all* thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;” We can say this not because we have the assurance that in this life we are delivered from sin and sorrow, but because His Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are the sons of God. Some striking words are given to the Israelites as they prepare to enter Canaan. These words apply not only to Israel (the nation), but to *every child of God*. “Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness: *from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the Lord,*” (Deuteronomy 9:8).

I have frequently heard it said that the Word of God gives us little or no guidance on the sin of suicide. I couldn’t disagree more. The sin of murder (in any form) is clearly sin. The wages of sin is clearly death. Salvation is clearly of grace. Our Savior is clearly *full* of grace. The lives of God’s people will clearly be inundated with sin and disease of every kind. What more do we ask of His Word? Could it be, perhaps, that we want just ‘one little thing’ that we can bring before the judgement seat, *other than Christ*? “Well yes, He’s my Savior. I mean, I did skip church a few times, I lied a little, I was rebel-

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lious once, and ok, I admit it, I got drunk a few times. OK, I transgressed all the laws! *But I never committed suicide!*" Again, Scripture is clear, you can come with nothing but *Christ*.

It is *possible* that a child of God, either willfully, in great sin and rebellion; or unwillingly, as in disease of the mind (depression, dementia, senility, schizophrenia, etc.), would commit suicide *in deed*. It is *probable* that every child of God has committed suicide *in his heart or by his word*.

When we speak as if we know that *all* (self)murderers, (*all liars, all adulterers, all thieves, etc.*) are in hell, we begin to play the part of God. We do this *knowing* that we are equally culpable before the Law of

God. We trifle with the Law of God. *This* sin is unforgivable. We trifle with the power of grace. Grace *requires* the rational or conscious exercise of the mind to be effective. We trifle with repentance. Repentance must be *verbal or visible*. We trifle with the judgment of God. *Such sin leads straight to hell!* I ask you. Which sin *doesn't* lead straight to hell?

God *is* the judge. God *knows*. After all of human history has passed, and all the words have been spoken, and all the 'dirty deeds' are done; it won't have been about *us*, and it won't have been about the *self-murderer*; it *was, is* and *always will be* about *Christ*. *What a Savior He is!* ❖

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From the Web

# Other Replies to the Question of Suicide

by Rev. Richard Moore

**T**here were several that responded to my answer on the topic of suicide. The gist of the remarks were questions about, the one who may have a serious mental, chemical, etc. imbalance, or the one that may have been under the influence of drugs or some such. Further there was the implication that we are judging the heart when we make any kind of statement about suicide. That such a matter really cannot be answered. And finally several mentioned Samson. I will answer these responses briefly as follows.

In the first place when I speak of suicide I define it as the murder of oneself in defiance of God's law, "Thou shalt not kill." Further, suicide in this narrow definition is to die in sin. And then God's Word teaches us that the in I John 3:15 "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." To willfully commit suicide and to kill oneself in defiance of God is to go lost. This in the first place.

Secondly, the only unforgivable sin is that against the Holy Ghost which is the sin of impenitence. Most willful suicides in transgression of God's law are by the nature of the case impenitent sin and leads one swiftly to hell.

Thirdly, as was also stated in the original answer, it is not for you or me to judge whether there was repen-

tance or not in specific cases. This God will judge. We can never judge the heart, and have no right to. This has nothing to do with the matter of whether suicide is a sin unto death. If it is committed as defined above, and there is not repentance, it is a sin unto death, thus saith the Word. If there is repentance, then there is salvation.

The so called exceptions are no exceptions at all. The one who has brain damage that is not in control of his will may do a thing that will cause him to lose his life, but does not willfully walk in disobedience to God's law. This may be. Again even this would be difficult for us to judge, nor are we called to. We leave the judgment to God. The example of Samson is not an example of suicide, but is rather the fruit of Samson's fighting the battles of the Lord. And by pulling down the coliseum he killed more of the enemies of God than in all of his other battles. Many a soldier goes to battle and loses his life in performing their duty before God. So did Samson walk. The book of Hebrews, chapter 11, makes it clear that he so walked in faith. Thus his life and death really have nothing to do with the question.

Perhaps the reason that this subject draws so much attention and usually causes many to object to speaking of suicide as a judgmental death is the reason that so many of us have in our families or in our close acquaintances someone who has seemingly committed suicide.

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The natural reaction is to try to excuse the particular walk, or to attempt to judge the heart and to say that the individual is saved. The truth of the matter is that our comfort cannot be found in this way. In the first place, we do not need to and cannot judge the heart one way or the other. God shall in perfection judge. He accomplishes

His purpose in the saving of His elect and in the condemnation of the wicked. Our comfort rests in His sovereignty and His good pleasure. God is always good, righteous and holy in His ways. Rest in this, and be at peace with the will of God. Let us always call upon our God for the grace to rest in Him. ❖

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## Christmas Decorations

by Rev. Richard Moore

### Question

I was just wondering if there is any place for a Christmas tree, Christmas lights, and all the other things that we see at Christmas time in the Christian home?

### Answer

We will keep our answer to this question rather brief. In the first place it appears that the use of the Christmas tree in the home came into being sometime early in the 17th century. The practice started in France or Germany. Later in the 1800's it seems as though a consort of the Queen Victoria introduced its use in Great Britain and from there, came to the United States. There is a least one or two sources that attribute the introduction of the Christmas tree to the Reformer Martin Luther, who is said to have brought an evergreen tree into his home for this use.

It really matters not exactly how it was introduced as a holiday tradition for us today. It is a tradition, which brings a festive atmosphere to the house during the holiday season. With respect to your question I would answer that the use of the Christmas tree belongs to the area of Christian liberty. Many of God's children in good conscience use the tree during this time of the year and it serves the homey feeling of the home much in the same manner as a fire in the fireplace during a winter eve. Certainly the season in which we remember with much thanksgiving the birth of Jesus as the gift of God, given us to deliver us from our sin is a time of joy and festive rejoicing for the church of Christ. And if we attribute no special spiritual significance to the tree, do not use it to teach about Christ, etc., we may use the tree in the home much as we also use plants to decorate our home normally or on special occasions.

On the other hand, there are those who in good conscience, cannot have the tree in their homes because in their opinion and minds it detracts from the proper remembrance of the birth of Christ and the thanksgiving they would render on God. These children of God usually attribute the tree with the present day materialism associated with Christmas, and thus in good conscience cannot use the tree. This is in harmony with the whole concept of Christian liberty.

The one thing in this connection as with so many others, we must not make precepts where God has not. We must not be legalistic as the Pharisees. And there is the danger of this as one would consider such a question as the above. Another thing to remember is that we ought not to judge one as to his use of such a thing, or his lack of use of such a thing. Our judge as to why we do such and such that is not directed literally by the Scripture is the living God, in these things we are to judge not. Paul teaches in I Corinthians 4:3-6 "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another." ❖

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



# The Song of Zion

by Skip Hunter

## A Psalter-Psalm Devotional of Praise to Our Sovereign Covenant God

### December 1 Read Psalm 76

**Psalm 76:1-3** Notice the four names for the church of God found in the first two verses. It is a great comfort to us that God is in our midst. With Him we do not need to fear anything any enemy might bring against us. Because He is known, and His name is great, we have no reason to doubt the salvation that He has wrought in Jesus Christ. The word *Selah* at the end of verse three indicates a pause in the music. This pause can give to us a chance to truly comprehend the meaning and thrust of this section. Let us be glad that God is in our midst and that He will fight all our battles for us. Sing Psalters 207:1 and 208:1.

### December 2 Read Ezekiel 38:1-13

**Psalm 76:4-7** After pausing to consider the truths of the first three verses the Psalmist continues to extol the greatness of God in His victories over the powers of evil. Quite often these powers use means that we ourselves appropriate. When we do this, we must not put our trust in them; but rather we must put our trust in our mighty God. Many in the church world like to extol the God of love. That is true; He is a God of love-for His people. Verse seven shows us a God angry at sinners who attack His beloved church. We can be thankful for such an angry God, for then we can really appreciate our election and salvation. By nature we are no better than the world. By God's grace we find a peace that passeth understanding. Pray for peace but only for your soul and not for the world. Sing Psalter 207:2.

### December 3 Read Ezekiel 28:14-23

**Psalm 76:8-10** In verse eight we see the truth that God is God over all the earth. This includes not only the world of men but also the brute creation. All the earth, men and beast, will be stilled and are stilled by His appearing. In verse nine we see the glory of salvation for the meek. The meek remember are the citizens of the kingdom as delineated in Matthew 5. Much of the world is preparing for Christmas. Only the meek ones look to rejoice in the birth of a Christ child who died on a cross, arose, and will come again. When our God comes all men will be forced to praise Him because all men will know that He is truly God and must be feared. These are awesome truths, people of God. Let's take a *Selah* and reflect on them. Then let us pray and thank the God who judges the earth and brings salvation to the meek. Sing Psalters 207:3 and 208:2-3.

### December 4 Read Psalm 76

**Psalm 76:11-12** Today is the end of our work week. In two days we will go up to the house of God. One required aspect of our worship services is the giving of our offerings to God. Are we considering this as we bring home our paychecks? Yes, this means you, too, young people! All of God's people have an obligation here. The vow can be something special, but it also includes our weekly gifts. We pay these as tokens of our gratitude for our salvation. We do this because we know how great and how terrible our God is. We do this out of a cheerful heart knowing that "the Lord loveth a cheerful giver". Let us ponder this truth even as we ready ourselves for the Lord's Day. Sing Psalters 207:4 and 208:4.

### December 5 Read Psalm 77:1-9

**Psalm 77:1-2** Verse one gives to us the certainty of prayer. Asaph cried and God heard Him. Is this our experience? Do we cry often to Him going boldly to the throne of grace? In verse two the Psalmist gives the occasion for his prayer. He had a problem of some sort of trouble. It was grievous and he could not be comforted even at night. Sleep would not come. He found no comfort awake or asleep. He had only one thing to do. He prayed. People of God, do we remember to pray in times of trouble? Do we pray even before trouble, or does God use trouble to drive us to our knees in prayer? Pray, people of God, and pray without ceasing. Sing Psalters 209:1-2 and 210:1.

### December 6 Read Ezra 9:1-8

**Psalm 77:3-4** Complain, complain, complain! Young people, does this describe you. Older people of God, does this describe us? Do we complain about the station and calling that we have on this earth? Do we complain about what happens to us? Complaining is blaming God for our troubles. Troubles that may have been brought about by our sins and weaknesses. As we enter the house of God today, are we complaining as we do it? Would we rather be somewhere else? Do we complain because the professional football game is off limits as dishonoring to God? If we complain, we will be troubled and our spirits will be overwhelmed. If we complain, we will be struck dumb in our troubles. Let us leave complaining behind and enter into the presence of the Lord with cheerful hearts. Then let us vow not to complain as we live our lives throughout our week. Sing Psalters 209:3 and 210:2.

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**December 7 Read Ezra 9:9-15**

**Psalm 77:5-9** As Asaph continues his contemplation over his troubles, he looks back over past history. He knows that God has been merciful toward His people. What has gone wrong? Is it possible that God has forgotten to be kind? Is He so angry that His kindness is locked away within Himself? Asaph knows that the church and its members give to God many reason to be angry with them. He ponders and ponders and can find no answer. Is this our way, people of God? Do we wonder whether our God has forgotten us? Do we think our sins are so bad that there is no mercy for us? Just the thought points us to the way of hope. When we know our misery, we will know our deliverer. We must take heart in that and know "that all things work together for good to them that love God." Sing Psalters 209:4-6 and 210:3-4.

**December 8 Read Psalm 77:10-20**

**Psalm 77:10-12** Asaph knows his troubles. But he also knows that the way of escape is not within himself or any other on this earth. He must continue to meditate on the ways of God. He must continue to talk of God's doings. People of God, when we are in such a state, do we think only about God? Do we talk to others about Him and what He has done for us. Wallowing in self-pity will do no good. Traipsing to one earthly counselor after another will be fruitless. Only in the way of meditation upon God and speaking of Him will we find true peace within our souls. Let us do that. Let us not shun the communion of saints, but rather seek it out and we will be blessed. Sing Psalters 209:7-8 and 210:5.

**December 9 Read Ezra 10:1-8**

**Psalm 77:13-15** What is the way for our deliverance? Where will we find peace for our troubled and weary souls? The text is plain. "Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary." We are in the middle of the week. Are we longing for church, or are we dreading the coming Sabbath? Asaph found his answer in the fact that God was sovereign. He was strong. He could do all and did all for His people. That same almighty God would be His help and redeemer even in this trouble. What about us? Can we come to the same realization? Not without meditation upon God's word. Not without attendance to the means of grace on the Sabbath. God's way is in the sanctuary. Long for it and understand the necessity of being in church twice on the Lord's Day. Sing Psalters 209:9 and 211:1.

**December 10 Read Exodus 15:1-10**

**Psalm 77:16-18** Yesterday we saw that Asaph saw where He could find solace in his troubles. That way was in the sanctuary of God where He saw God's goodness for His people. Today's text contains a continuation of that thought. Our God is so great that even nature must bow before Him. This is true because He is its creator. Creation not only glorifies God but it must also obey Him. This comforting truth will not be found in the doctrine of evolution. There can be no comfort found there. Even today creation does God's bidding for the good of His people. Observe creation and see the way of your salvation. Sing Psalters 209:10 and 211:2.

**December 11 Read Exodus 15:11-19 and Psalm 77:1**

**Psalm 77:19-20** We come to the end of the Psalm whose main idea is in its first verse. God heard Asaph in his prayers. God heard Israel as they cried in distress by the shores of the Red Sea. And God will hear us when we cry to Him. Troubles, whether caused by sin or by some other reason, must be brought to our heavenly Father. He will hear us. While deliverance may not be as dramatic as Israel's from Egypt, God will bring deliverance to His people. Often this deliverance will be in the way of confession of sin and the experience of forgiveness. God will often use faithful officebearers to help us through our troubles. Call upon God, people of God. Call upon your God, young people. He will hear us and give to us deliverance. Sing Psalters 209:11 and 211:3.

**December 12 Read Psalm 78:1-10**

**Psalm 78:1-3** In this Psalm Asaph begins to teach the people of God the specific truths to which he alluded in the last Psalm namely the wonders done by Jehovah. These are things which Israel passed down from father to son. What about us? What are we passing down to the generations following? Are they learning from us greed, the love of sports, or materialism? Or are they learning about the fear of Jehovah? Have they learned from us the Scriptures which are able to make them wise unto salvation? Are they learning to love God and their neighbor as themselves? We have been given a great treasure in God's truth. What are we doing with it? Sing Psalters 213:1 and 215:1-2.

**December 13 Read Deuteronomy 4:1-9**

**Psalm 78:4-5** Every parent and teacher should be familiar with today's two passages. They give to us solemn instructions concerning covenant child rearing. To hide something means to place it where it cannot be seen. Where is our Bible knowledge? Have our children seen the praises of God, His strengths, and His wonders? Do they see them as we sing in church today, or are our mouths barely open? Notice covenant child rearing is not an option; it is a command from God Himself. It is not something to do when we have time. It is something to do all the time. Young people, you, too, have the calling to prepare yourself for this obligation. If you wait to start working at it when you take your first baby home from the hospital, you are sure to struggle. As we attend worship today, let us individually and corporately pray for the grace to carry out this calling. Sing Psalters 213:2 and 215:3-4.

**December 14 Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9**

**Psalm 78:6-7** First of all I wish for us to ponder the truth that one of the reasons for covenant education is for the good of the covenant children who have not yet been born. In teaching today's covenant seed, we prepare for the next generation of learners and teachers. Then we see that the purpose is so our children may hope in God. This is the well-founded hope that makes one not ashamed. This is not the wishy-washy hope of the world. Finally according to these verses we teach our children the things of Jehovah so that they may obey them and Him. Where do we stand? Are we teaching? Are we teaching by word and example? Sing Psalters 213:3 and 215:5-6.

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**December 15 Read Deuteronomy 6:13-25**

**Psalm 78:8-10** After giving to us positive reasons for teaching God's law to our children, Asaph turns to the negative. This is unheard of in today's psychological and education world. But the Holy Spirit in His wisdom uses the technique. Some of those who had been called Israel had gone astray and God removed them from His sight. Our children need to know this so they can walk in the good paths. Our children must be ready to fight the battle of faith and never turn back. We must constantly be on the vigil for slackness in our children, and if God permits, eradicate it from their lives. The good weapons will never be used if our children refuse to fight. Sing Psalter 213:4.

**December 16 Read Psalm 78:11-20**

**Psalm 78:11-14** With today's text we begin the account of Israel making its way to Caanan. In each of these verses Asaph recounts the wondrous works that God has done. These wondrous works should have inspired Israel of old as well as serving to inspire the church of today. We, like Israel, have a journey to finish. This journey is a spiritual journey. This journey like theirs is arduous. But we like Israel of old have wonders of God to encourage us upon our path. Some of these wonders can be found in creation around us. Others we must recognize in our own lives. Look for these wonders, people of God, even as the wise men looked for the Christ child. Be encouraged by them and run with patience the race that is set before you. Sing Psalter 213:5.

**December 17 Read Isaiah 41:10-20**

**Psalm 78:15-20** As Israel traversed the wilderness God took care of them. Sometimes His care was not to their liking. They did not like the food and drink that He gave them. They wanted other food more to their desires. The food, drink, and refusing are symbolic of spiritual food, drink, and refusing. The heavenly manna which God has given us in His Word is all that we need. But because we get used to the food and drink of the Egypt in which we live we sometimes murmur against God and His Word. Sermons are too dry. Catechism is boring. Scripture memorization is pointless we think. Then because we provoke God, He gives to us spiritual famine. He chokes us with the worldly quail around us. How do we react? Do we run to the Word or away from it? Sing Psalter 213:6.

**December 18 Read Psalm 78:21-32**

**Psalm 78:21-24** Today's text gives the consequences of not wanting the spiritual food which is good for you. If we refuse to eat nutritious foods, we will suffer. If we refuse nutritious spiritual food, we will suffer as well. Notice how grievous Israel's unbelief was. They did not believe in God or trust in His salvation. At this time of the year we hear much of salvation. Christmas songs inundate us like flood waters. How many people of the world and even of the so-called church world believe the thoughts of these songs or trust in the salvation that the songs proclaim? What about us? Is the true meaning of Christmas foremost in our thoughts or are we caught up in the celebration of the season and not the celebration of the Christ and the salvation He gives His people? Sing Psalter 213:7.

**December 19 Read John 6:32-44**

**Psalm 78:25-28** Israel of the Old Testament had manna from heaven and rejected God. The Jews of Jesus time had the bread of life in their midst and they rejected Him. What about us? On each of our tables and from Sunday to Sunday we have the Word which the manna signified. We hear the Word which is Christ. As Jesus said to His disciples, "Will ye also go away?" They had the right answer. Jesus had the words of life. Do we desire those words of life. Can we find peace anywhere else but in His word? The opportunity for us to study that Word is great. How is your society attendance? What is your memory work grade like? We have angel's food in our presence. What are we doing with it? Sing Psalter 213:8.

**December 20 Read John 6:45-58**

**Psalm 78:29-32** People of God, what do you desire? As Christmas approaches we must constantly be warning and teaching our children about proper desires. They must learn about the true meaning of Christmas. This task is not easy considering how they are bombarded with temptations on every side. Israel had failed to teach their children while they were in Egypt and now they were reaping the consequences. Today is Sunday. How are we spending it? Is there a Christmas party which takes away from the peace and rest of the day? Christmas parties may have a place, but they must not displace Christ or the Sabbath. As soon as we allow our desires to be worldly, God will choke us in those desires. Let us contemplate these thoughts as we worship today and celebrate Christmas. Sing Psalter 213:9.

**December 21 Read Psalm 78:33-42**

**Psalm 78:33-36** Why do you obey traffic laws? Is it the law or the consequences? When Israel saw the consequences of their sinful actions, they turned back to God. But we read that it was lip service only and not from the heart. We can see ourselves in these verses. We are quick to obey when someone is looking, but do we remember that God seeth all? Do we confess with our mouths truthfully that God is our rock and our redeemer? A rock is a place of refuge. A redeemer saves us from our debts. Having the Rock and the Redeemer is good, but He is only ours when our confession is true and holy. We must pray for the grace to confess these things with both our lips and our hearts. Sing Psalter 213:10.

**December 22 Read Nehemiah 9:1-17**

**Psalm 78:37-40** When Israel returned from captivity, they fell into some of the sins of their fathers. As Ezra and Nehemiah were teaching them the law of God, they read to them from the history of Israel. Throughout Israel's history God showed himself to be a God of compassion and lovingkindness. Ezra once scolded the people severely for walking in their father's sins. In a sense he said, "Won't you learn now!" It is good that God is a God of mercy other wise we would be consumed both in and for our sin. But God who sent His Son to the earth for us loves us and cares for us. Let us remember that at this season of the year and praise Him for His lovingkindness which endures forever. Sing Psalter 213:11-12.

**December 23 Nehemiah 9:18-38**

**Psalm 78:41-42** "Limiting the Holy One of Israel" What a terrible thing to have said about you! Now of course mere man

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cannot limit almighty God's counsel! But in this instance that what it appears to be. God uses this type of language to help us understand the depths to which we fall. We must never limit God. The New Testament calls it "quenching the Spirit". Because of grace this is ultimately impossible. We must consciously live lives which promote the glory of God and not limit Him. Sing Psalter 213:13.

**December 24 Read Psalm 78:43-55**

**Psalm 78:43-50** God brought deliverance to Israel from Egypt by means of Egypt's destruction. At the season of the year, we hear many Christmas carols proclaiming a God of love. Is this true? It is, but only for His own people. God is angry with the wicked everyday. What is our response to this truth? It must be one of gratitude. Our deliverance from the spiritual slavery should and must fill us with gratitude. We must be thankful for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Israel's deliverance is a picture of our deliverance. Let us be glad that we have a God who loves His people. Sing Psalter 213:14.

**December 25 Read John 10:11-18**

**Psalm 78:51-52** The final plague upon Egypt was the destruction of its first born. Through those deaths God wrought deliverance for His people. There were deaths in Israel which were connected with that final plague. Those deaths were lambs that were slain and whose blood marked the houses of the people of God. Those lambs pointed to another lamb-the Lamb of God. God sent His Son who was sacrificed so that we might be passed over. As we celebrate Christmas, let us remember that we are commemorating the birth of the Lamb of God who was slain that we might live. Sing Psalter 213:15.

**December 26 Read Joshua 4:1-9**

**Psalm 78:53-54** As Asaph continues recounting the story of Israel's journey through the wilderness he comes to the part when they enter Caanan. First of all God brings Israel to the Jordan, the final picture of the separation of the world and heaven. Then after crossing the Jordan, he brings them to Jerusalem on Mt. Zion the picture of the church. Today is Saturday. We stand at the door to the Sabbath. Are we ready to cross? Are we ready to spend the day preparing for the eternal Sabbath in heaven? Israel had to ready themselves; we must, too. How? With prayer, meditation, and eagerness to enter the doors of the sanctuary. Let us ready ourselves for the morrow when we are privileged to go into God's house Sing Psalter 214:1-2

**December 27 Read Joshua 4:10-24**

**Psalm 78:55** Verse 55 of Psalm 78 serves as the positive conclusion to the account of Israel's history. Notice I said positive account. The Psalm is not finished. Israel would fall away time after time. God would have to bring them back. It is good for us to review this history. In the reading for the last two days, we have seen that God commanded Israel to leave a memorial for the purpose of instruction. We have those memorials for us as well. No, not the stone pillars. But those things which the church service provide for us to teach our children about our God's goodness and justice. Let us do that today as we enter into His house. Sing Psalter 214:3.

**December 28 Read Psalm 78:56-64**

**Psalm 78:56-60** Yesterday I gave you a hint of what was to come in this Psalm. Israel would fall away often. In fact they fell away soon after gaining the land for which they did absolutely nothing. What was God's final remedy at this time? He took the picture of His almighty presence out of their midst. What a terrible thing! In the book of Revelation one of the seven churches is warned that unless it repents, God will remove the candlestick from its midst. Were we happy with the lively preaching yesterday? Do our lifestyles show our love for God and His ways? We must take heed to Old Testament history lest God removes our candlestick from our churches. Sing Psalter 214:4.

**December 29 Read I Samuel 4:1-11**

**Psalm 78:61-64** When we read a book to our children, are there not times that they say "no, don't do it" to a character? I have that feeling when I read the history of today's reading. Israel was doing as much wrong as could be done. It is almost as if the final straw was to take the ark out to battle. In order to teach them, God had to chastise them severely. As we end this calendar year, we sometimes look back over what has happened to us. We must ask, "Are we being chastised for some shortcoming in our life?" Even though we know that Christ has died for our sins, we also know that because God, our Father, loves us he chastens us. Let us think about this in the days to come. Sing Psalter 214:5.

**December 30 Read Psalm 78:65-72**

**Psalm 78:65-69** Notice the word picture found in verse 69. God has established His church as strongly as He has established the very foundations of the earth. That should afford us great comfort and trust in almighty God. Even though we fall into sin, He has mercy upon us and delivers us from all evil. Even when the road seems rough and hard, we can be comforted because it leads to heaven. We have a sure foundation in God's church; one that will last forever. As we finish the year we do not worry about what lies ahead. We can know that whatsoever comes to pass will be for our good. Sing Psalter 214:6.

**December 31 Read Micah 5:1-7**

**Psalm 78:70-72** This Psalm closes with a short history about King David. These verses are also a prophecy about another king-Christ. Like David, Christ is a shepherd. Like David, Christ cares for His people from His heart. Like Israel of old, we can rest in confidence that Christ will skillfully lead us. As we finish 1998 and look ahead to the last year in the 1900's, we can know that our shepherd will lead us through this year and into as many as it is His will. For some of us this may be the last New Year's Eve we see. For others it may be another of more until Christ returns. Whatever the case, we can have great confidence in our Savior who like a shepherd leads us in the green pastures. Let us end this year in prayer to our gracious God who has established His church for His glory. Sing Psalter 214:7.

# Psalter 116— Remembrance of God

by Beth De Vries

**W**e go to Psalm 42 this time and contemplate the words of Psalter 116. The title of this Psalm, Remembrance of God, leads us to the truths expressed in this Psalm. We are to remember God as our strength at all times, but especially in times of despair.

The first stanza of this Psalter speaks of the desperateness of a deer in search of refreshing water when being chased. We are likened unto a deer when we search with longing soul for God. God sends His refreshing grace to us in answer to our request, and we are renewed.

Oh, how we long for the living God and His grace. We often hide ourselves from His presence by our sin. As the deer thirsts for water so are we thirsty for our Saviour and His grace. We wonder where our Lord has gone, often not realizing that we are responsible for having lost sight of our God. Then we know that we are not really lost when God shines His face on us again. God uses our sin to bring us to our knees in repentance and make us realize what a great gift grace is. Grief over our sins make us seek the Lord most high.

Why art thou restless and cast down my soul? The third stanza begins with the Psalmist questioning his own soul. His soul is cast down because of a lack of trust in God. We often become cast down in soul because we

forget to put our trust in God. The plea of restlessness of the Psalmist is a plea that many of us have also made when we try to do things on our own. God is our aid in these difficult times and to Him we must turn, then our sighs will be turned to joy. This joy is a result of peace

in our soul by the working of the Holy Spirit.

The Psalmist expresses disquiet of soul repeatedly in Psalm 42 where, in verse 7, he speaks of the waters billowing over him. The Psalmist then turns to the God that will never forsake him and will show His lovingkindness day and night. When trials come upon him, the Psalmist speaks of the enemies taunting him by questioning where is his God.

The Psalmist recognizes that these trials are sent him of God's hand and become a strength to him. We also must trust in God when difficulties come our way. These trials are sent of God, and when we trust in Him we will be strengthened by them. We shall yet praise God who is our eternal spring of life. May we sing this Psalm and remember that God makes us to pant after Him to fill our thirsty souls. ❖

116 Remembrance of God

PSALM 42 C. M. KATHRINE Charles H. Gabriel

*Stately*

1. As pants the hart for cool - ing streams, When heat - ed in the chase,  
2. For Thee, my God, the liv - ing God, My thirst - y soul doth pine;  
3. Why rest - less, why cast down, my soul? Trust God, Who will em - ploy  
4. Why rest - less, why cast down, my soul? Hope still, and thou shalt sing

So longs my soul, O God, for Thee And Thy re - fresh - ing grace.  
O when shall I be - hold Thy face, Thou Maj - es - ty Di - vine?  
His aid for thee, and change these sighs To thank - ful hymns of joy.  
The praise of Him Who is thy God, Thy health's e - ter - nal spring.

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# Confession of Faith (5)

by Rev. Ronald Cammenga

*Reprinted from the Standard Bearer Vol. 63 pp. 356-357.*

Last time we began our discussion of the second question asked of those who make public confession of faith: “Have you resolved by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine; to reject all heresies repugnant thereto and to lead a new, godly life?” We considered the antithetical nature of confession of faith, that confession of faith is not only acknowledging positively the truth of God’s Word, but also “rejecting all heresies repugnant thereto.” We also considered the “new, godly life” to which those who make confession of faith are called.

In this article we want to focus especially on the fact that those who make confession of faith resolve “by the grace of God” to maintain the true doctrine and to lead a new, godly life.

## **By The Grace Of God**

The grace of God is necessary for anyone to confess his faith. As faith itself is a gift of the grace of God, so is the ability to confess this faith. The Apostle brings this out in I Corinthians 12:3 when he says that “... no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, *but by the Holy Ghost.*”

The grace of God opens our mouths and loosens our tongues so that we are able to give a testimony concerning our faith in Jesus Christ. The grace of God gives us the courage to do this when such a testimony entails reproach, rejection, and even bodily persecution. It was the grace of God that enabled the three friends of Daniel to confess their faith, even when such a confession meant the burning, fiery furnace. It was the grace of God that enabled Paul to give a good confession before the mighty of this earth, the Agrippas and the Caesars, even when that confession meant for him in the end martyrdom. It was the grace of God that enabled the early Christians stedfastly to confess their faith even when that confession meant death by burning.

That we resolve to remain faithful to the confession we make, by the grace of God, teaches us our weakness. It is important that the Christian recognizes his weakness, for only when we are weak can we be strong. It is only by the grace of God that we will ever “adhere to this doctrine.” It is only by the grace of God that we will be able “to reject all heresies repugnant” to the true doctrine. It is only by the grace of God that we will be able “to lead a new, godly life.” The grace of God underlies the entire Christian life.

That means that the Christian life is one of conscious dependence upon God. Do we know this? Really know this? Does it live in our consciousness that the only possibility of our living the life of one who is a disciple of Jesus Christ is the grace of God? Do we think about this very often?

We can be sure that if we forget our need of the grace of God there are going to be serious problems in our Christian life. Our Christian life is going to degenerate

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**We can be sure that if we forget our need of the grace of God there are going to be serious problems in our Christian life.**

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drastically. At best we are going to become apathetic in our Christian life, with the resultant loss of joy in the Christian life. At worst, we are going to fall into serious sin.

Those who make confession of faith must be asked whether they are consciously depending upon the grace of God to live the life to which they are called. Are they living in daily dependence upon God for the strength to

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live this life? Do they recognize their own weakness and inability in this regard?

### **The Means Of Grace**

Our dependence on the grace of God to live the Christian life brings up the subject of the means of grace. We depend on the grace of God. But God gives us His grace through means, the means of grace. One who is living in dependence on the grace of God is one who is making use of the means of that grace.

Of importance here are, first of all, what we might call the “private means of grace.” I refer here especially to prayer and Bible reading. Personal prayer and reading of the Scriptures are absolutely indispensable in the Christian life. There simply can be no Christian life apart from them.

Does the young person making confession of faith have a place in his daily life for prayer and Bible reading? Does he make a point every day of engaging in these necessary activities? It cannot be questioned that God blesses these activities. It cannot be questioned that God uses these activities to strengthen the faith of His child. It cannot be questioned that through these activities God gives grace to His child to live a godly life in the midst of this world.

A young person who has no time for daily, private prayer is in no condition to make public confession of faith. A young person who cannot take the time to read

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**A young person who has no time for daily, private prayer is in no condition to make public confession of faith.**

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the Scriptures cannot be resolved by the grace of God to adhere to the true doctrine and lead a new, godly life.

Besides the private reading of God’s Word and prayer, the second question for public confession of faith implies the importance of the use of the public means of grace. By the public means of grace we refer to the official means of grace established by Christ in His church, the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments.

It is especially through the preaching of the Word and the sacraments that God bestows on us the grace to

live the life which we resolve to live at the time we make confession of faith. Apart from the official means of grace, the Christian life is impossible.

The Christian life is not “een hoekje met een boekje,” that is, going off into some little corner by ourselves with our own little book and privately cultivating Christianity. The Christian life is not some individual endeavor, altogether divorced from the rest of the people of God and from the church institute. The vitality and very existence of the Christian life depends on the official means of grace in the church.

A resolution, therefore, to live a new, godly life “by the grace of God,” is a resolution to be diligent in our use of the means of grace. Has the young person making confession of faith been diligent in using the means of grace in the past, including attending catechism classes? Is he resolved to be diligent in the future? Is it important to him to attend both Sunday worship services? Is his attendance more than merely habit?

This is a serious matter, a terribly serious matter. Let no young person take this matter lightly! Before God and His church you resolve, promise faithfully to make use of the means of grace. That is involved in your confession of faith. To resolve to lead a new, holy life by God’s grace, and then to neglect the means of grace is to give the lie to your confession. To promise to live a life under the grace of God, and then to be unfaithful in attending the worship services of the church is to go back on the promise that is involved in your confession of faith.

It is also for this reason that young people who confess their faith and declare publicly their agreement with and commitment to the doctrine of the Scriptures as “taught here in this Christian Church,” and then who leave that Christian Church commit serious sin. How is it possible to “adhere to this doctrine and reject all heresies repugnant thereto” in a church that does not faithfully preach that doctrine? How is it possible to lead a “new, godly life” in a church where the sacraments are corrupted and the Word of God is distorted? In the end, it is not possible.

### **The Preaching And Our Godly Walk**

The diligent use of the means of grace is crucial with respect to the godly walk the confessing member of Christ’s church is called to live. The importance of our attendance at the worship services of the church is certainly, first of all, the glory of God. God is glorified by the worship of His church. But there is also practical benefit here for ourselves. In the second question for

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public confession of faith a promise is made to make good use of the means of grace. The carrying out of this promise is absolutely necessary if we are going to carry out the additional promise to lead a holy life.

The Scriptures emphasize the importance of the Word of God and the preaching of that Word for the holiness of the Christian. In John 17:17 Jesus prays, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." In Acts 26:18 the Apostle Paul gives as the purpose of his ministry that he might turn men "...from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

One outstanding purpose of the preaching of the gospel is to equip God's people to live a holy Christian life.

The gospel does this, first of all, by giving us the proper motive—thanksgiving for gracious salvation in the cross of Jesus Christ, according to the electing grace of God, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. And the gospel does this, in the second place, by setting before us the standard of such a holy life—the law and will of God contained in Holy Scripture.

May our young people take seriously their vow of confession of faith. May they be diligent in their use of the means of grace, privately and publicly. Just in this way may they receive God's grace to live a new, holy life. ❖

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*Rev. Cammenga is pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.*

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## Book Review

# The Two Margarets

reviewed by Lori and Carol Baldwin

**T**his book is a true story about a teenager and a seventy-year-old who are both named Margaret. The story takes place in 1684-1685 in Scotland. They are both strong Christians who will not give up their true Christian faith.

The young Margaret's parents serve the King of England, Charles II, who is wicked because he thought he was the head of the church and not God. He persecuted Covenanters who worshipped God only in the ways that God commanded instead of the ways that the king commanded.

The king was so cruel that if there was a young man walking down a quiet road by himself, soldiers would question him and ask him where he was going. He would probably say, "I have some business to tend to." The guards would say, "You are probably attending one of those Covenanter meetings" and would give him a beating he would never forget.

The older Margaret seemed to always to be able to comfort people with a Bible verse. After they are both put in prison because of their beliefs, the older Margaret comforts the younger one with Scripture. Readers will find out what God ordained for the two Margarets.

I think *The Two Margarets* is a good book because it quotes more Scripture than most books. I didn't dislike anything about it. I think this book is appropriate for ages six and up; it is short and easy to understand. The book was written by Carine Mackenzie and published in 1985 by Christian Publications Ltd. ❖

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*Lori is nine years old and is a fourth grader at Carmel Christian School in Charlotte, North Carolina. Carol, her mother, enjoys reading Christian history books with her daughters.*

# “Living the Antithesis” (2)

(or, “Living *with* God and *apart from* the World”)

by Prof. David J. Engelsma

*This is the text of the keynote address to the Convention of Protestant Reformed Young People at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan on July 20, 1998.*

## What Living the Antithesis Is

**L**iving the antithesis is living *apart from the world*. This is a spiritual separation, not a physical separation. A physical separation would be that you try to isolate yourselves from all contact with wicked people and from all use of the products of culture, e.g., cars, tractors, computers, newspapers, musical pieces, radios, and television sets. Some have tried this. At the time of the Reformation, they were known as the “Anabaptists.” Our stand for the antithesis is falsely accused of this error.

Physical separation is unbiblical. God’s salvation is not that He takes us out of the world, but that in the world He keeps us from the evil (John 17:15).

No, living apart from the world is not physical, but spiritual, and a spiritual separation is very simply this: a separation worked in your heart by the Holy Spirit that expresses itself in your life in these ways.

First, you never have fellowship with an unbeliever, regarding him as a friend and behaving with him the way a friend behaves with a friend. *Never!* You have contact with him, whether at school, or at work, or in the neighborhood. You are civil and kind: you greet him; you speak with him; you help him when there is need; if he asks, you tell him the reason for your hope, that is, the truth of the gospel. But you are no friend, nor do you let him think so. In fact, you tell him that you cannot be his friend, and why. “Friendship evangelism,” as it is called, is disobedience to the calling that God gives us to live the antithesis.

One tremendously important aspect of living apart from the world, for young people, is dating and marriage, as another speaker will show.

You may not be a member of an organization of unbelievers that regards itself as a “brotherhood” of friends, e.g., lodges and labor unions.

You may not become part of the contemporary religious organizations, existing for spiritual ends, whether Bible study, growth in grace, or faithfulness in Christian duty, that include unbelieving people. And remember, members of cults, e.g., the Mormons, and members of false churches, e.g., the Roman Catholic Church and the Vineyard, are to be regarded as unbelieving persons.

A second way that spiritual separation expresses itself is that you not share in or cooperate with the wicked deeds of unbelievers. To use the very example that Paul uses in Ephesians 5, if at work or at school or in the neighborhood or at the barber shop, a group amuses itself by telling filthy stories or jokes, you may not join in by laughing, or even telling one yourself.

I am told that retirement parties for men who work in shops and businesses where our men also work sometimes consist of bringing in a stripper. Living the antithesis means that the child of light is not there, or walks out condemning what Paul calls “filthiness.” For a young person, the modern form of this evil is watching pornography on the Internet.

The warning of Ephesians 5 is that if we do take part in the sin, or if we do amuse ourselves with watching or listening to some wickedness, we actually have fellowship with it. When Ephesians 5:11 admonishes, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness,” it implies that one can have real fellowship with these works—not now with people, but with wicked works. Then we are not living the antithesis. We give the world an opening to influence and destroy us.

Instead, we are to reprove those evil works: “...but rather reprove them.” We must speak out to condemn them.

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Do this among yourselves, when someone says that he got drunk, or that she slept with somebody, or that he breaks the law of God and his parents some other way.

Do this at this convention.

You leaders, do this—you young people whom the others look up to, whom Christ gives a natural position of leadership. Don't laugh along, or say, "that's cool." (Do young people still say, "That's cool"?) Don't just stand there in silence, because you are embarrassed to improve the works of darkness. Live the antithesis!

In this matter of not sharing in the wicked deeds of the ungodly, you must use discretion. Everything that the wicked man does is a sin *on his part*, whether he plows a field, or writes a poem, or assembles a new car in Detroit. He does not do it to the glory of God, and that makes it a sin *for him*.

But many things that the wicked invent and make, we may use and enjoy. Things are not sinful in themselves. You may eat bread that comes from the farm of a wicked man through a wicked baker and a wicked owner of a grocery store. You may listen to classical music that has been composed by the ungodly Mozart. You may read books written by ungodly authors.

The *act* of the wicked in growing the wheat or writing the symphony was a sin, but the *product* is not sinful.

In your use of the cultural products of the world, you must exercise wisdom.

Is the thing so full of the corruption of sin as to make it impossible for you to use it rightly and safely, e.g., a book full of cursing, obscenities, and violence for the sake of violence?

Does the thing have the effect on you, to stir up sinful desires, to weaken you spiritually, and to make you fall into sin, e.g., certain kinds of music.

Can you use and enjoy the thing as a child of light to the glory of the Light?

Even as regards the thing that you can use and enjoy properly, you must use it carefully and critically. When you read Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, you must not allow yourself to be overcome by the lust for and delight in revenge, which is the theme of the book.

One gross evil of the world that we must avoid like the black plague is an evil often overlooked, especially in speeches to young people. It is an evil every bit as destructive as drunkenness and fornication. It is an evil that adults in the church are prone to. I refer to covetousness, the craving for things as the main purpose of life. Because money gets all things, covetousness is the

craving for money, lots of money. More than anything else, this is characteristic of our society, of our world. It is in the churches.

Covetousness is a monstrous wickedness: it is idolatry.

In the ungodly, covetousness is the result of not having God. One who does not have God as his God will set his heart on money and possessions instead.

In us, covetousness is the practical rejection of the true God whom we profess.

This is not the same as *being* rich. It is having our hearts set on being rich. When riches increase, it is setting our hearts on those riches.

Avoiding covetousness will prove itself by our use of our money for the kingdom of Christ: our Christian schools, missions, publishing Reformed materials, the poor.

Live apart from the world! You are light, and the world is darkness. Darkness detests the light and tries to swallow it up, even in nature. Light hates the darkness and chases it away.

There is also a positive aspect to living the antithesis: living *with* God.

This is first. This is the main thing. If you live with God, you will live apart from the world. If you do not live with God, your outward separation from the world has no value; you might as well run with the world. But then do not call yourself a Christian.

As children of light, love and have friendship with your Father, just as earthly children enjoy friendship with their earthly parents. (You do enjoy friendship with your parents, don't you?) In the covenant, in the church, God is your friend. He wants to live in friendship with you, and He wants you to live in friendship with Him. You do this, by His grace, by gathering for worship every Lord's Day; by partaking of the Lord's Supper, which means that you confess your faith (have all of you confessed your faith? are you thinking about confessing your faith?); by prayer; by reading the Bible; by friendship with the other children of God; and by actively participating in the fruitful works of God on earth.

The antithesis must be lived. Do not be deceived. In the end, a young person born into and reared in the sphere of the covenant who refuses to *live* the antithesis shows that he or she is no real covenant child at all, no child of light. One who is determined to be a friend of the world shows that he is no friend of God. But if one is no friend of God, he is an enemy of God. And if he is an enemy, he is darkness, and will perish as darkness.

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So serious is the antithesis.

There are, therefore, incentives to encourage you to live the antithesis

### **What the Incentives Are**

The days are evil.

There are terrific pressures from the world and its god to destroy you by swallowing you up in the world.

This has always been the case. The days have always been evil for Reformed young people. I attended conventions as a young person from about 1955-1960 or so—some 40 years ago. A few got drunk during the convention. There were some who sneaked off to a motel in the area to fornicate. Some who attended conventions in those days later left the Protestant Reformed Churches for churches that are violently opposed to the truth. Some fell away to the world altogether.

But there were no drugs. Television was just becoming available to the people. The big hit was Johnny Cash's innocent "I Walk the Line." Elvis was just coming on the scene, and television hesitated to show his gyrating hips. There were no videos. Even worldly society frowned on drunkenness, fornication, adultery, and divorce.

Compare the pressures on young people of convention-age today!

Live the antithesis, because the days are evil.

Live the antithesis also because you are deeply thankful that God has saved you from the darkness. Once you too were darkness. You are not naturally light. You were totally unholy. Just as God is the light, the personal source of darkness is Satan, so that you were a slave, a plaything of Satan—a kid in Satan's service.

This is why you cannot be proud that now you are light. This is why you should be compassionate to some of your own number who fall into the darkness.

How dreadful to be darkness!

Hating God and the good!

Darkness is death, and it leads to the everlasting, outer darkness of hell.

From this, God rescued you.

Don't go back! Don't play around with the darkness!

The story of the interview with applicants to be driver of the carriage of the Queen of the Netherlands is instructive here. The question to each was: to prove how good a driver you are, how close to the edge of the precipice could you safely drive the queen's carriage? The first said, "Ten feet." The second said, "Three feet." The third said, "So do I love and reverence my queen that I

would always drive as far from the edge as possible." He was hired.

How close can you get to the world, and still not be swallowed up?

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How close can you get to the world, and still not be swallowed up?

If you love and adore God, who rescued you from sin, death, and hell by His own Son, you will stay as far away from the world as you can.

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If you love and adore God, who rescued you from sin, death, and hell by His own Son, you will stay as far away from the world as you can.

Then, there is the incentive that it is a privilege to be light in this dark world. It is nothing to be ashamed of that you are light. Light is holiness, truth, strength, beauty, and life. To be light is to be like God.

Walk as light.

You can!

It is tough going. It is for me too. In fact, it is tougher now than it was 40-odd years ago when I sat where you are sitting tonight.

What makes it especially tough is that we still have the darkness in us. We are light, but not perfectly. I like the world. The world appeals to me. Some ungodly people attract me. Certain works of darkness look good to me—they tempt me strongly.

But we are able to live the antithesis.

For we *are* light, by the sovereign work of the gracious, almighty God.

All of the physical darkness of night cannot put out the light of one candle.

All of the spiritual darkness of the wicked world cannot snuff out the light of God on earth: *you*. ❖

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*Prof. Engelsma is Professor of Dogmatics at the Protestant Reformed Seminary.*

# Through Strife to Victory

## Chapter 11

### Classis Grand Rapids West

by Rev. C. Hanko

It could only be expected that Classis West would take the same action against the Rev. Henry Danhof, minister of the First Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan, since he had openly declared, already before synod, that he would not cease opposing the error of common grace and the three points.

In the meantime, there was another minister in Classis West, Rev. George Martin Ophoff of the Hope



*Rev. Ophoff as a seminary student, a short time before being called on to stand antithetically for the truth.*

Christian Reformed Church of Walker, Michigan, who had, with part of his consistory, taken a stand against the three points as adopted by the synod. He preached for the Eastern Avenue congregation while the case of Rev. Hoeksema and his consistory was pending at Classis East and he had joined the staff of the *Standard Bearer*, which had published the first issue in October 1924, thus carrying on the conflict against the three points. Although Rev. Ophoff had not yet written in this periodical, it was specifically because his name appeared on the masthead of the *Standard Bearer* that he also was required to sign the three points.

After a lengthy debate, the chairman of Classis West asked Rev. Ophoff if he would adhere to the three points and refrain from propagating his views against them until a final decision was made by the synod of 1926.

To this the Reverend responded:

My soul is in a strange state. I am glad that it has come to this, and yet I am sad. I am sad because the committee spurned my arguments. It was because the arguments were too deep for them. It is because they couldn't comprehend them. (Later he explained that his point was that his arguments were clear and to the point, but the committee of Classis refused to recognize them and brushed them aside). I declare that the arguments I gave are sound and the committee is afraid to meet them.

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I am going to speak. I am going to preach. I am going to write as long as God gives me life and breath. If the Classis will not hear, the denomination will. Those copious arguments refuted the contention that the three points are fundamental and interpreted to be so by the synod. That is why they remain unanswered.

Mr. President, if you were to place me before a gun to be shot or before the three points to adhere to them I would choose the former. I can't sign the three points. If I did, I would be tearing the Bible to shreds. I would be stamping the Word of God under foot. I would be slapping God in the face.

As an interesting aside, when the *Grand Rapids Press* carried this news item in the evening edition, the article was headed in large type: "OPHOFF CHOOSES DEATH."

At three o'clock on Thursday afternoon, January 22, 1925, the Rev. George Martin Ophoff was deposed from office on the grounds of insubordination to the Classis and schism in the churches.

Just two days later, on Saturday morning, as a denouncement of a sad history, Rev. Henry Danhof was deposed from office as minister of the Word, as well as his consistory as elders in the First Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan, on the grounds mentioned before.



*Photos courtesy of Calvin College Archives*

*Rev. Danhoff in the 1920's  
and as he looked in the  
1950's.*



To one's mind come the words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:29: "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake."

Yet we can rejoice in the fact that Zion is redeemed through judgment. God's cause was preserved. ❖

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*Rev. Hanko is an emeritus minister of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America and is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.*

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## The "Helpoort" of Maastricht

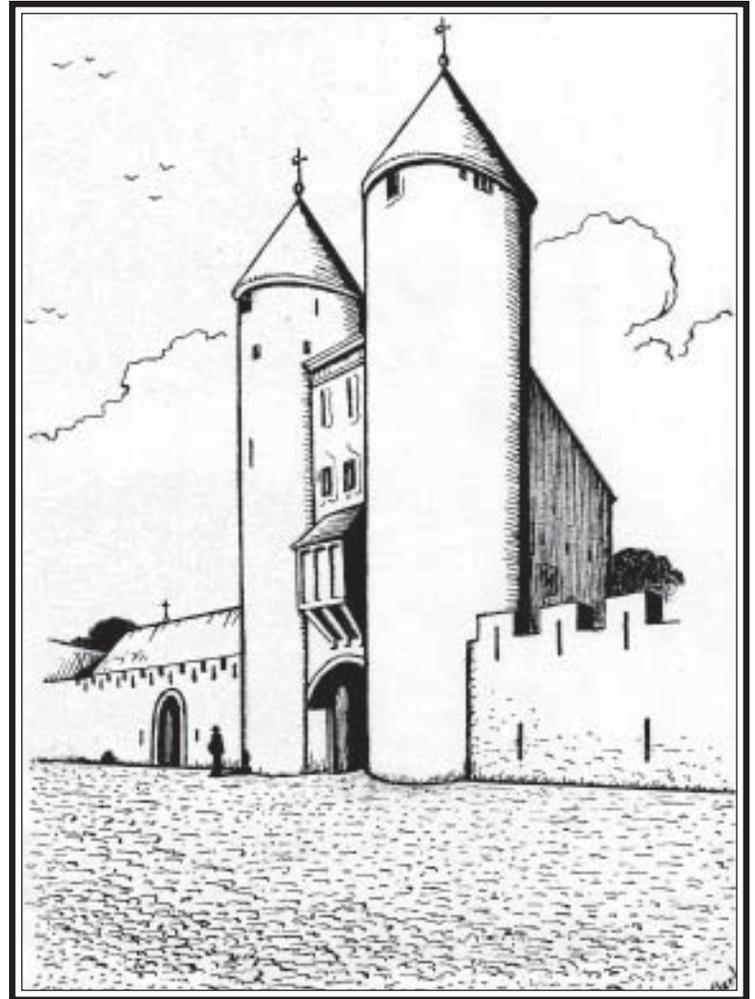
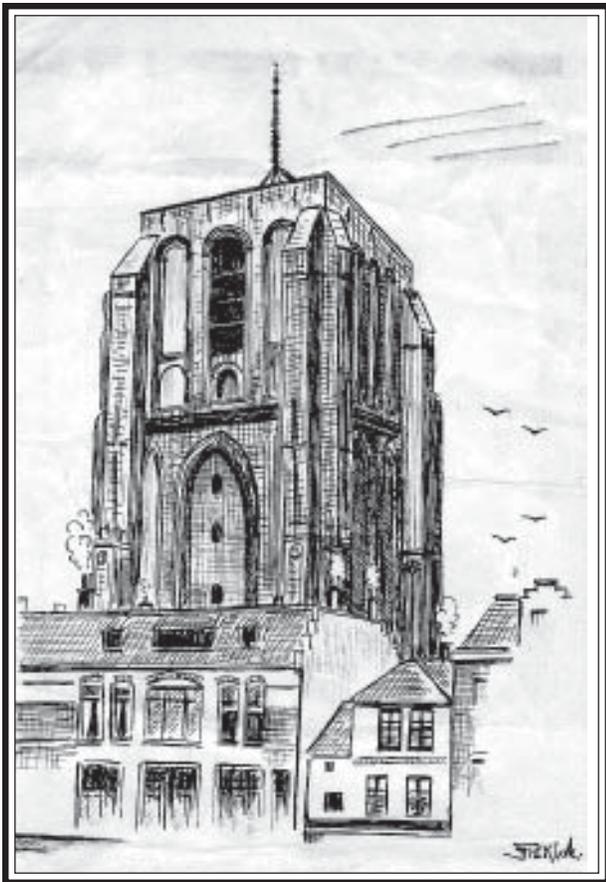
by J.P. de Klerk

The word "hel" has nothing to do with the English word "hell" but with a word that comes from the local dialect, under the influence of the German language. It means "this is the *gate* to the *light*." The gate is part of the defense wall of the Dutch city of *Maastricht*, built in 1229, made of big bricks.

The city was founded in the year 50 after Christ, by the Roman army who had there a primitive bridge over the river *Maas*, for the battalions who moved to and fro between the cities of Cologne and Boulogne. In 1300 the Franciscus Church was built here and a Chapel of the Dominicans. The Reformation was brought in by Petrus

Dathenus, a Reformed minister (1531-1588), who knew John Calvin. He came from Flanders to The Netherlands. Maastricht is a city in the far South of the country, between Germany and Belgium. Later came Napoleon who chased the Reformed preachers away I made the drawing in 1943

## The “Oldehove” In Leeuwarden



This is the tower in the center of the capital of the Dutch province of Friesland, built as part of the St. Vitus Church in the twelfth century (1190). There was also the monastery Mariengarde. In that time, Leeuwarden was a harbor city, but the connection with the sea closed itself by huge amounts of silt. The name of the city was Ljouwert in the Friesian language. The Church and the monastery have gone, but close by there is the Jacobijnenkerk (1487) where family members of Prince William I of Orange-Nassau have been buried, who have been very active in promoting the Reformation in Friesland (1584-1747). I made the drawing of the old tower in 1940. The walls and gates around the city have all been demolished for enlarging it all with houses and factories. ❖

*J.P. de Klerk is an author and journalist from Ashhurst, New Zealand.*

# The British Reformed Fellowship Family Conference — July 1998

by Susan Adams

**T**his past summer, the fourth family conference was held in Castlewellan, Northern Ireland. The British Reformed Fellowship has organized a week-long family conference in the British Isles every second summer since 1990, and this year's was probably the best one yet!

The members of the Fellowship from Scotland, Wales, England, and Northern Ireland really look forward to this contact, since they are in small and scattered groups. Many do not have an established Reformed church to go to.

The group that met this year was very diverse and included people of many spiritual backgrounds and from many countries. About 150 people attended, many of them young people travelling from the States. There were a month-old baby, a newly-married couple, and elderly saints as well.

Our sister church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland had arranged for the group to stay in a 15th-century style castle! It was built in the 1800's and restored to be a comfortable Christian Conference Center. It overlooked a beautiful lake, with gardens and a campground nearby. There were trails throughout the grounds and many of the young people walked around the lake after group devotions every evening. The castle, set on a hill with its windows lit up, was bright and inviting seen from the dark woods!

The conference theme was Eschatology, or the doctrine of the End Times. There were daily speeches with

question and answer periods which became a source for much discussion. Professors Engelsma and Hanks presented the Scriptural Reformed perspective on a number of challenging subjects. They also led the Sunday worship services held in Ballymena, an hour's drive from the castle.

The issues of amillenianism and the place of the Law in church and state were debated by young and old. People could be found in the lounges till long after midnight, singing around the piano or talking heatedly over their Bibles.

There were several day-trips planned during the week. The tourists rode in a double-decker bus to see the church and statue of St. Patrick and tour a historical estate. One day was spent seeing the sights of Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland, and one afternoon a large group hiked up Slieve Donard, the highest peak in the area. There was plenty of free time for recreational activities such as the favorite Irish sport, football (soccer.)

The conference was a great time of Christian fellowship and provided much food for spiritual growth. Everyone grew in appreciation for the universality of the Church, and all who can will try to attend the next conference in Wales in the summer of 2000! ❖

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*Susan is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

## Church News

### BAPTISMS

*"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."*

*Mark 16:16*

**The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:**

Jeanette Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bryan VanBaren—Byron Center, MI

Alyssa Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Matt Kuiper—Faith, MI

Aaron Spencer, son of Mr. & Mrs. Eric VanDyke—Faith, MI

Kelsey Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kelvin TenBroeke—Georgetown, MI

Kelli Sue, daughter of Dr. & Mrs. Doug Bleyenburgh—Georgetown, MI

Baruch Nathaniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Marc Kamps—Georgetown, MI

Jordan Bruce, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dave Steenwyk—Georgetown, MI

Brett Andrew, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan Feenstra—Holland, MI

Amber Leigh, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Shon Griess—Hope, MI

Hannah Nicole, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Kalsbeek—Hope, MI

Mackenzie Malia, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kevin Scholfield—Loveland, CO

Lance Alan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Scott Bonzelaar—Loveland, CO

### CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

*"...and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."*

*Romans 10:10*

**Public profession of faith in our Lord Jesus**

**Christ was made by:**

Jodi Oomkes—Byron Center, MI

Elizabeth Kalsbeek—Hope, MI

Jennifer Merren—Hope, MI

Andy Lanning—Hudsonville, MI

Kevin and Carol Scholfield—Loveland, CO

Kris Campbell—Loveland, CO

Jamie Hawk—Loveland, CO

Mr & Mrs. Michael Decker—Lynden, WA

Greg Bruinsma—Peace, IL

Elisa DeJong—Peace, IL

Alan Dykshorn—Peace, IL

Brandyn Dykshorn—Peace, IL

Nicole Eriks—Peace, IL

**MARRIAGES** *"...and they twain shall be one flesh."*

*Matthew 19:5*

**United in the bonds of Holy Matrimony were:**

Mr. Jay VanBaren and Miss Heidi Holstege—Faith, MI

Mr. Mark Meinzer and Miss Monica Hoekstra—Georgetown, MI

Mr. Dave Meulenberg and Miss Dawn Kaptein—Grace, MI

Mr. Aaron Cleveland and Miss Molly MacGraw—Hope, MI

Mr. Brian Kalsbeek and Miss Jennifer Merren—Hope, MI

# "LITTLE LIGHTS"

*... let it shine!*

by Connie Meyer

## Diary Found on a Farm

December 7

Dear Diary,

The orange-pink sun arose this cold and misty morning, while the frost encrusted grass crunched beneath my feet. I headed toward the barn among little puffs of steam that my own breath made in the crisp, winter air. I had put an extra sweatshirt on underneath my coat, but I still shivered. I pulled my hat down over my ears. I would hurry with my chores this morning!

Feeding the calves is my responsibility. I scoop the special powdered milk into buckets, mix it with warm water, and then hang a bucket by each calf's stall. This morning I laughed when they jumped with eagerness as I brought them their milk. They grow so fast! They've almost outgrown their stalls already, but they are as playful and saucy as ever.

Soon my job was finished. By now the sun was a little higher and a little stronger, and its rays were breaking through the mist. I took off my hat as I walked back to the house. The sun felt good on my cheeks.

Now it was my turn for breakfast! And how warm and cozy the kitchen was. I settled in by the table with the rest of my family. After eating, we read Malachi 4 for family devotions. I couldn't help but take note of verse 2:

But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

What a picture! For us who fear God, Jesus comes like the sun, and we grow up like calves. After doing my chores this morning, I think I understand that verse a little

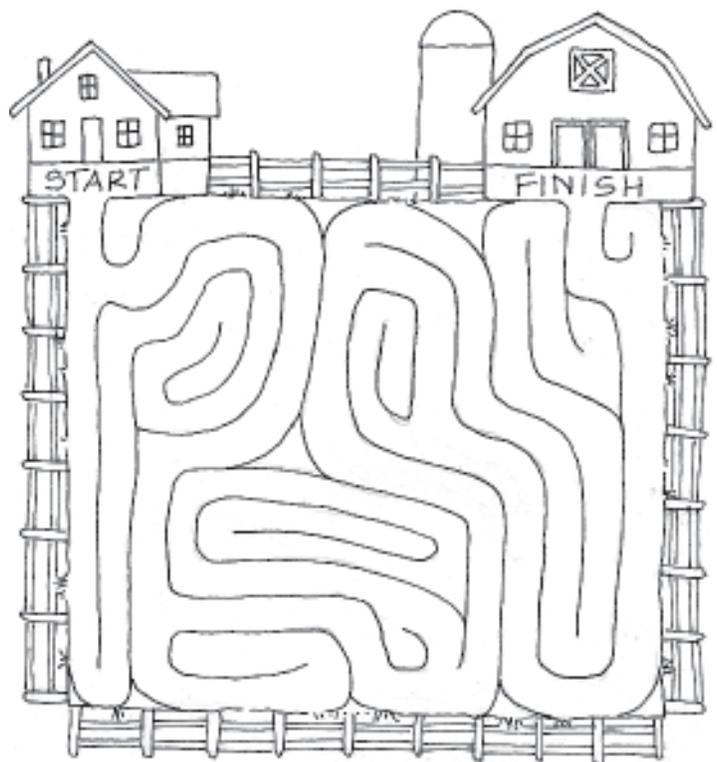
more. I can still feel the warmth of the sun and see the calves frolicking about!

Well, Diary, I have some homework I better do now, but I wanted to tell you about this morning first. It was special.

Sincerely,  
Gerry

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



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# California Convention

~August 16-20, 1999~

## **THEME**

Ready To Give An Answer

## **SPEAKERS**

Rev. Kenneth Koole  
Rev. Barry Gritters  
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

For additional information, contact Jonathan den Hartog at  
(909)792-0307 or [jonspc@juno.com](mailto:jonspc@juno.com)