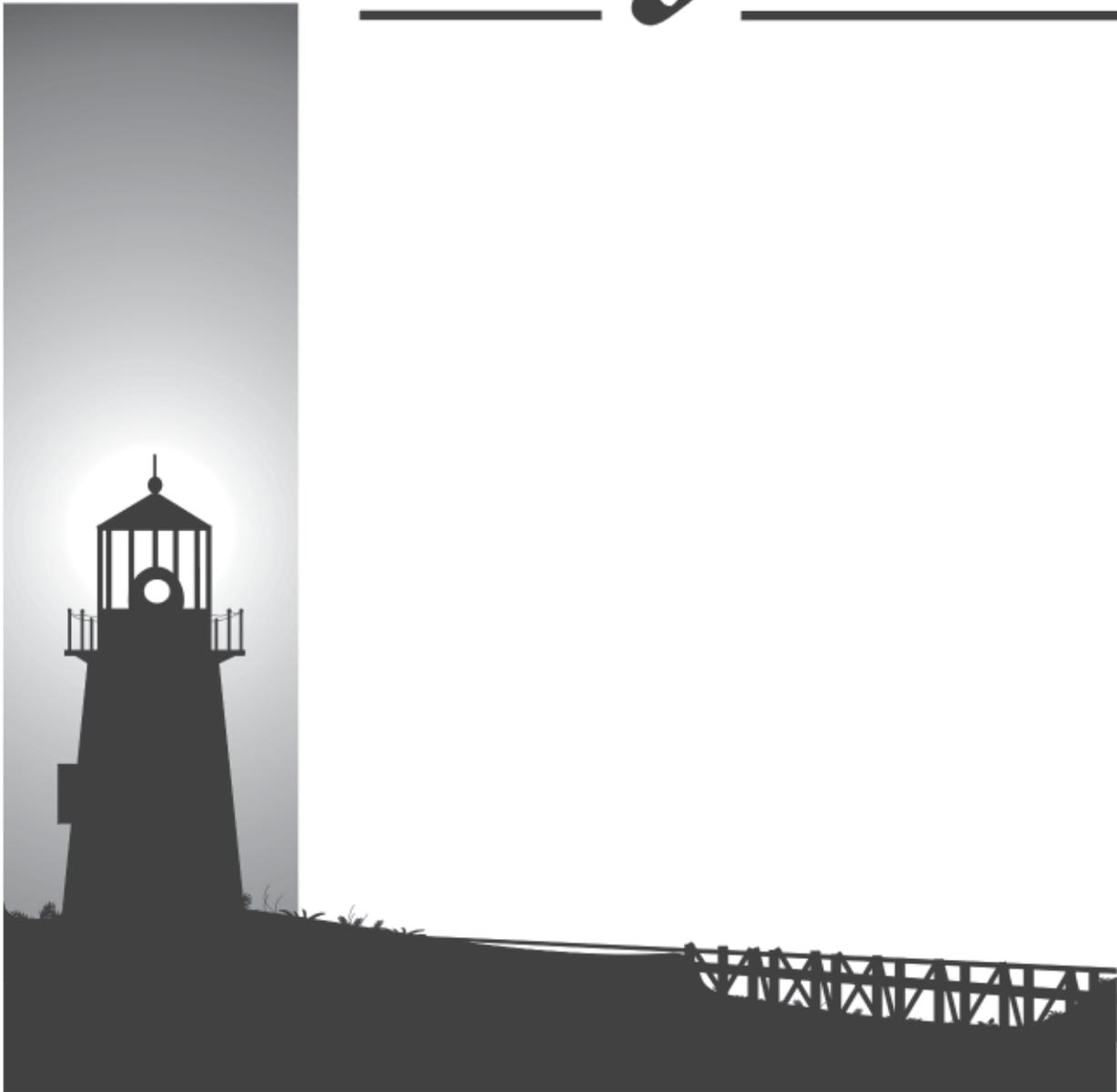

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Big Boys' Toys

by John Huizinga

Heads turned as the gleaming truck rolled down the street and turned into his driveway. After a brief rev, the powerful engine was silent except for the ping of the cooling exhaust. Backwoods Bob remained inside fiddling with the radio and lights as his neighbor strolled across the street to check out this new rig. Meanwhile Bob's wife and two children came out the front door of the house. Bob stepped out to greet his neighbor and they admired the cool features of the truck. They soon drifted deeply into conversation about the great fishing and hunting trips that lay ahead with the rest of the boys.

Little Joe walked around the truck to his dad but did not get his attention until he pried open the gas flap and let it slam. Dad's jovial talk turned instantly into a scolding bark. Little Joe walked around the truck and came back to dad. He begged dad to come and see the fort he built in the back yard, but dad only said "pretty soon."

Mother walked back into the house. She picked up the coupons she had been saving and began to wonder if the money she has saved would ever be used for the family camping trip. Lately his vacation time had been spent out in the woods or lake with his buddies. She had thought that his circle of buddies would leave after they were married and his passion for cars, hunting, and fishing would turn into strong dedication to the family; but things had not changed much. It never was very easy to get his attention, but she thought once she broke through his world of cheap thrills that he would see the importance of church and the family. She had been certain that a loving wife and comfortable home would make him happy and content, but he said that he still needed time for himself with his buddies. She began to feel as though she was but one of many his many toys.

As the years went by, the family structure was becoming soft and weak. It looked good on the outside as long as no major problems arose, but there was not much there to withstand severe trials should they come. Dad could not be bothered with discipline problems when he came home from work. His prayers were shallow and hurried. He worked overtime so he could pay for his hobbies and a few extra toys for the kids to keep them happy in his absence. After work he needed some quiet time behind the newspaper away from the bustle of family life. He did not have time to play with the kids or answer their questions and explain their catechism lesson. He did not have patience for his wife or any interest in her day. He even suggested that she find a job to supplement his income. He was not ready to give up the carefree life and toys he had grown used to while he was single. Meanwhile, the family was growing weak and bitterness began to seep into the cracks.

The same was true with the families of his buddies. Everything looked good on the outside, but the inside was hollow and empty. They had nice homes. They sent their kids to a Christian school.

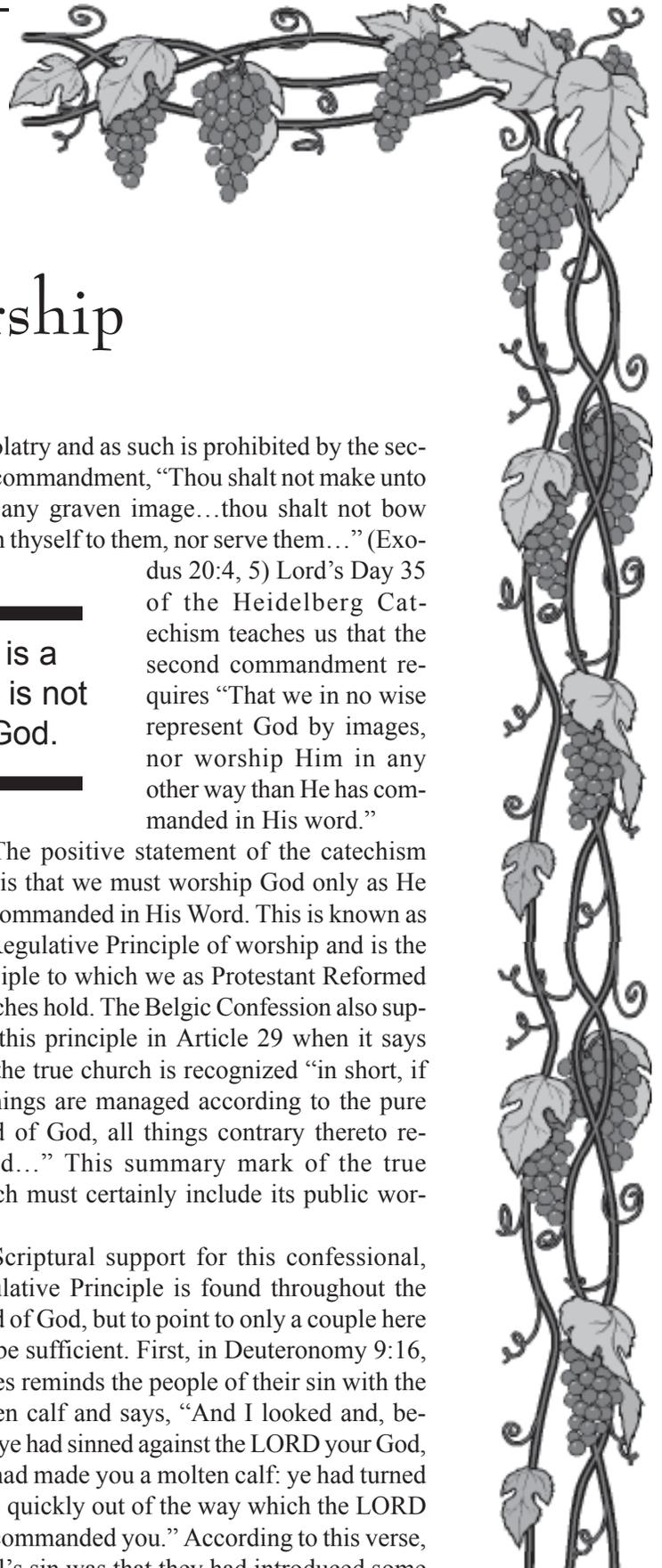
They all belonged to the same church. They all walked into church faithfully each Sunday and talked long together in the parking lot. They would talk excitedly and laugh, but when the pastor walked up, they had little to say. Like little boys, their heads were filled with their toys; yet they were old enough to know that the head of a household should be busy guiding his family toward covenant life with God. Home was not the place where Bob and his friends wanted to be. Home was ok for awhile, but they did not hurry home in order to settle in with the family for the evening. At home they were grumpy. They would rather be out having some fun flying free in a boat, four-wheel drive, or snow-mobile or working by themselves in a hobby shop. Selfish desire to satisfy ones own wants was a top priority. A strong home was not the goal toward which to devote ones energy. Making sure the family was in church and a few other traditional things was good enough. The home was becoming a white-washed sepulchre.

But being head of a household is not a part time job in light of God's Word. A godly home must be the chief goal of a father and husband. We read in Deut. 6:6-7, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." And in Ephesians 5:25 we read "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;" The husband and father must give himself to his family.

A proper attitude begins even before marriage. We read in Ecclesiastes 11:9 "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." Freedom to follow the desires of a sinful heart is bondage to sin. The young man must learn to seek the will of God when he is young, then he will also be humble and willing to seek the will of God in marriage as well. Instead of wasting the years of youth on self-satisfaction, we read in Titus 2:6-8 "Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you." Whether single or married, the sober-minded young man will take seriously his calling in the church.

The married man is called to devote his life to his wife and family, and he must do it out of obedience and love for God and not view it as an unfortunate side effect of marriage. The family must not be seen as an interference with his personal life. His home must be cultivated and led in accordance with God's word so that it is like a refreshing garden and a place desired after a day of work. His home, not his toys, must be his joy.

The devotion of a godly husband and father to his home results in a strong home, and a church that has strong homes is a strong church. It is a church in which covenant children grow up in the fear of the Lord and are prepared to defend the truth for another generation. The husband and father who looks for ways to avoid his home and would rather play with his toys is a man who heaps up treasures in this earth. He and his family become dead wood in the church. We need to fight against this in our churches. Those who already have an established home must continually strive for a strong godly home. Those who are looking forward to married life must begin now by practicing those attitudes, practices, and priorities which God commands in His Word. May the young men of our churches willingly submit by God's grace to their calling. May the young women also prepare to be a wife and mother in such a household. ❖



Public Worship

by David Overway

Public worship today comes in a wide variety of forms and substance. A quick glance at the “Religion” section of the newspaper on any given weekend reveals some of what goes on in churches on Sunday mornings. We are aware of worship services which are comprised of and include plays, films, bands and choirs and even the viewing of sports events. The variety extends from churches introducing praise worship (rhythmic clapping while singing hymns) to churches promoting the outrageous practice of “holy laughter.” Are these practices acceptable to God? How do we know? Also, how do we know what proper worship is?

Being familiar with our Bibles, we know that not all worship is acceptable to God. We know that the Lord did not have respect unto Cain’s offering (Genesis 4), and we know how Israel sinned against God by attempting to worship Him through the golden calf in the wilderness (Exodus 32). Also, both of these instances of improper worship were punished severely by God. Cain’s improper worship led to jealousy, anger, and murder of his own brother, and he was punished by being made a “fugitive and a vagabond” (Genesis 4:10-12). Israel’s sin with the golden calf led to the deaths of about 3,000 of the worshippers that very day by the sword of the Levites, “and the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf.” (Exodus 32:35) Improper worship is a serious offense and is not viewed lightly by God.

We also understand the seriousness of worship when we realize that all improper worship

is idolatry and as such is prohibited by the second commandment, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image...thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them...” (Exodus 20:4, 5)

Lord’s Day 35 of the Heidelberg Catechism teaches us that the second commandment requires “That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His word.”

The positive statement of the catechism then is that we must worship God only as He has commanded in His Word. This is known as the Regulative Principle of worship and is the principle to which we as Protestant Reformed churches hold. The Belgic Confession also support this principle in Article 29 when it says that the true church is recognized “in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected...” This summary mark of the true church must certainly include its public worship.

Scriptural support for this confessional, Regulative Principle is found throughout the Word of God, but to point to only a couple here will be sufficient. First, in Deuteronomy 9:16, Moses reminds the people of their sin with the golden calf and says, “And I looked and, behold ye had sinned against the LORD your God, and had made you a molten calf: ye had turned aside quickly out of the way which the LORD had commanded you.” According to this verse, Israel’s sin was that they had introduced some new element into their worship which God had

Improper worship is a serious offense and is not viewed lightly by God.

not commanded them to use. They worshipped God other than the way that He had commanded. They violated the Regulative Principle.

Second, Deuteronomy 12 speaks at length concerning proper Old Testament worship regarding offerings, tithes, and sacrifices, but God ends this section of His Word with the principle: “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it” (vs. 32). Again, we must worship our God only as He has commanded in His Word.

Looking to Scripture then, we find that only a few spiritual activities are explicitly commanded as fitting activities for the believer in the worship of His God. These elements of worship along with their accompanying proof texts are listed in the pamphlet, *Public Worship and the Reformed Faith*, and read as follows: “Singing of the Psalms (Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:19,20); offering of prayer (I Tim. 2:1-8); reading of Scriptures (I Thes. 5:27, I Tim. 4:13); the preaching and hearing of God’s Word (Rom. 10:13-17, II Tim. 4:1:2); the administration of the two sacraments (Matt. 28:19,20, I Cor. 11:23-29); and the giving of our offerings in the support of the ministry and the relief of the poor (I Cor. 16:1,2, I Cor. 9:11-14)”¹

Simply performing these external activities however is, of course, still unacceptable to God. Jesus teaches us that “God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24) In this passage He instructs us that we must take heed to worship God in the right spirit or with the right attitude.

It is this spirit of worship also that is being corrupted today. In the filling of the worship service with unscriptural extras, many have forgotten the plain and simple worship of the heart, and with it have gained a casual and irreverent attitude in worship. What kind of spirit then is pleasing and acceptable to God? What is the correct attitude with which to approach the Almighty King?

John Calvin, while commenting on the previously mentioned passage in John 4 states, “as we cannot ascend to the height of God, let us remember that we ought to seek from His Word the rule by which we are governed.”² So again we turn to the Scriptures to answer our questions. In Psalm 89:7 we learn that “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him.” Psalm 5:7 reads, “and in thy fear will I worship...” We must not worship God (publicly or privately) with a casual attitude or a flippant spirit, but instead with fear and reverence. If we go to draw near to God, we must approach

Him only with repentance and humility (James 4:8-10). We can be sure that God who dwells “in the high and holy place” will only dwell “with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit” (Isaiah 57:15). “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17). We must only come into God’s presence with this spirit (rare though it may be today), and then through the singing of the Psalms, the hearing of the Word, the offering of

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prayer, giving charitably to the causes of God’s kingdom, and the administering of the sacraments, our hearts will be lifted up into the deep and powerful joy of our salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Observing the abuse of worship in the church world today, we ought to be moved to pray that God will restore those who have strayed and are in error. We must humbly thank Him that He has preserved us as Protestant Reformed Churches in the proper Biblical form of worship and pray that He will continue to preserve us in the future in the way of His Word. Each of us individually, also must pray that He will teach us to worship in spirit and truth. We ought also to come before our God with humble and joyful sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, thanking him for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, for only in Christ is any worship acceptable.

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, . . . Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith . . .” (Hebrews 10:19 & 22a) ❖

¹*Public Worship and the Reformed Faith*, by Rev. B. Gritters, Byron Center P.R.C. Evangelism Society, 1990.

²Calvin, John. *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Volume XVII.

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



Atonement



*I*nto Gethsemane's garden
Jesus retreated to pray,
Knowing the path He must travel;
The price for our sins He would pay.

*H*is trial, unjust and so evil
He endured. Yes, He drained the full cup—
The cup of affliction and torment;
On the cross the last drop was filled up.

*I*ncomp'able anguish He suffered,
Forsaken by man and by God.
The pure, holy Lamb bore our vileness—
Bore the wrath of His own Father's rod.

*H*e perfectly, willingly suffered,
Because of His love for His own.
This one sacrifice was sufficient
For all of our guilt to atone.

*M*ay we now reflect that devotion;
And with joy bear our own paltry pain;
For our light afflictions are meager
Compared with the glory we'll gain.

Thelma Westra



***Wanted:** Poetry from the pens of poets young or old.
Please send us those flashes of inspiration. If you do
not want your name published just let me know. Send
your poetry to the editor via e-mail or regular mail.*



Needing the Lord's Help

by J.P. de Klerk

Christina Standish had promised, that she would again write an article for the Christian monthly for girls and boys of the Church. In the past year she had done that three times, and the editor was very pleased with that and had asked her to do it again. He had only a few contributors.

She had also received encouraging comments from readers, which was comforting, but it did not make this work any easier. She felt a great responsibility and while the dateline approached, she became nervous.

She got that strange feeling that there was someone whispering in her ear, "You cannot do it. You are not a professional. This time you won't be ready in time. You will be the laughing stock of the whole monthly."

Outside the sun was out again. She heard the blackbirds, finches and thrushes through the open windows.

Christina forced herself to bring the pieces of paper together on her desk—the thoughts she had scrawled down in the past weeks (even on the very edge of a newspaper), reacting upon things that happened. She saw the hand of the Creator in everything; she saw that nothing happened by chance. God had His own plan with this world. She wanted the next generation to see that more clearly in all the small things of every day in these confusing times.

When finally she got it nicely together at the typewriter, she discovered a lot of mistakes and decided to do it over again.

It went well, till she was half way and there was chaos around her: Christina's children came home with injuries and quarrels, there were phone calls, a postman came with a registered letter.

But her article *had* to go in the mail that day.

She just typed a line, when her neighbor, Bill Powell, came to the backdoor with some capsicum and tomato plants, because he had too many of them for his garden.



He was a kind, elderly man. She drank a cup of tea with him, but she was on pins and needles.

When she sat again behind the typewriter, she typed quickly without looking at the keyboard, what she always used to do, but this time she was too much in a hurry. Something went wrong! When she looked at the paper she saw a chaos of letters.

She had hit the wrong keys, word after word. If she had not stopped, the result would have been worthless. Despite her best intentions Christina moaned and said, "Oh, Lord, help me! All goes wrong!" Then she did the whole lot over again, and it went without any trouble.

That evening, when the children were to bed and her husband sat reading the newspaper, in a corner of the living room, she reflected. She made for herself a comparison with the bigger responsibilities, obligations and commissions in life.

We are weak people of ourselves, easily distracted, stumbling, trying, searching, hitting the wrong keys without noticing it. The result is that what we produce is never perfect, never good enough. How often we make a hopeless mess of things!

Yes, thought Christina, I need the Lord's help with every thing, every day. I can't do a thing without Him. ❖

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

Spiritual Growth

by Aaron J. Cleveland

Growth is a natural part of life. During our lifetime we experience physical, mental, and psychological growth. In the life of the child of God, spiritual growth is also part of our maturing process. While physical, mental, and to a certain extent psychological growth may end and even regress, this is never the case with spiritual growth. Never is there a time in the life of a child of God that one has reached full spiritual maturity and is no longer able to further grow. Spiritual growth is a lifelong and never ending process.

We do good to examine ourselves in this area of spiritual growth, because especially in our younger years it ought to be apparent that we are maturing spiritually. In fact, it would be quite unnatural if our spiritual develop-

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development.

ment did not progress along with our physical and mental development. The Scriptures in many places puts before us that our spiritual growth requires of us that we have a strong appetite for the knowledge and understanding of God and His Word. In Proverbs 2:3-5 we read, "Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasure; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

Just as a growing youth has a strong appetite for physical food to sustain his physical growth, so ought a spiritually developing youth have a strong appetite for spiritual food to sustain his spiritual growth. Just as a boy has a hearty desire to grow to physical maturity, so must we have a desire to grow in spiritual maturity. In fact, it can properly be called shameful when young men and women in the church are perfectly content to remain spiritual children in understanding. In I Corinthians 14:20 we read the command, "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men."

This spiritual growth is accomplished by many means which ought not to be neglected. The first of these is through the reading and studying of God's Word. What a laughable endeavor in the eyes of most people. Sadly enough, this practice is even despised by those who call themselves Reformed. No longer is Bible study extolled. But not in the life of the spiritually growing Reformed young person. The Bible is a spiritual gold mine of knowledge; knowledge necessary for spiritual growth. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope," we read in Romans 15:4. God's written word is given to us that we might learn. The only way we will learn from this Word is to read and study it.

Another passage of Scripture that impresses upon us the importance of the reading and studying of God's Word is II Timothy 3:15-17. First of all, in these verses we read that even children are to be instructed in God's Word. Secondly, we see that God's Word is of incomparable value in all areas of life. It "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Finally, we read that without it, the man of

God cannot live a life of good works of thankfulness to God.

This studying of the Word of God ought to have the highest priority in our lives. It is a frightening trend when the study of a particular section of God's Word in young people's Bible study societies is replaced by the discussion of topics, no matter how relevant these topics may seem to be. Have we forgotten the profitableness of God's Word?

Second, our spiritual growth is accomplished through the instruction and preaching of our ministers and elders. This instruction takes place from the pulpit, in the catechism room, and in the pastor's study. It is a very

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Biblical concept that pastors literally feed us with knowledge and understanding. In Jeremiah 3:15 we read, "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." In Ecclesiastes 12:9 we read of the preacher who taught the people knowledge. Just as with any other means, it is necessary that we make use of them. How easy it is for us to forget this aspect of our spiritual growth. When the young people will not hear sound doctrinal preaching and catechism instruction or the ministers are not preaching sound doctrinal sermons, the young people are not being fed with knowledge and understanding, and the church remains in spiritual infancy. One does not have to look too far to see the dire consequences of a disregard in this aspect of spiritual growth in other churches.

Finally, another important element of our spiritual growth is the reading of good reformed books and magazines. There is no shortage of these books available, but how many of us actually take the time to read them? What a shame it is when we let go unread what men 500 years ago would have paid dearly for. There is no excuse for spiritual laziness in this area when we live in an era of written abundance.

When we avail ourselves of these means of spiritual growth and grow in the knowledge and understanding of God, we will find that we grow closer to God. Grow-

ing in the knowledge of God, we grow in grace and in a life that better reflects the perfections of God.

When we do not do this, we will find the opposite to be true. We will become further separated from God and our life will not reflect His perfections. In fact, we will find our life to be full of many troublesome spiritual experiences. Wrote Martin Lloyd-Jones, "Looking back over my experience as a pastor for some thirty-four years, I can testify without the slightest hesitation that the people I have found most frequently in trouble in their spiritual experience have been those who have lacked understanding... You will go wrong in the realms of practical living and experience if you have not a true understanding."

Those who are not well grounded with the knowledge and understanding of God's Word are the "simple" of Proverbs 14:15 who believe "every word" and consequently do not "try the spirits" and are lead down many erroneous paths. This must not be the state in which we are found, but rather we must be found persevering. This persevering, as John Calvin writes, means that we are always making advances spiritually. Never can it be said that one perseveres by standing still and not advancing and growing.

This growing in the knowledge and understanding of God and who He is and what He does is reason for exaltation. This is really our only proper reason to glory, that we know and understand God. There are no others. No earthly achievements, no mental conquests, or no worldly recognition is reason to glory.

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exerciseth loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

This is what God's Word says to us in Jeremiah 9:24. We constantly need reminding of this. How easy it is to get lost in the realm of our earthly accomplishments and lose sight of what our true calling is: that of spiritual growth in the knowledge and understanding of God. When we struggle to fight against our laziness in spiritual growth, we will find that God will bless us, and our desire to grow in understanding will become stronger and stronger. ❖

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



The Song of Zion

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

Devotionals by Beth De Vries

May 1 Read Psalm 55:1-7

We cry to Thee, O Lord in our trouble. How often do we not feel the need to bring our many woes and trials before Jehovah! We have assurance in this Psalm that God will hear our cry and give ear to our prayer. We easily become overwhelmed in our troubles in this life, and these complaints we bring to our God. Our trust in God wavers when we become restless with moans and sighs. Is this good that we moan and sigh to our God who has given us life eternal? We know that we must trust in God to care for our problems; also that when we earnestly seek His presence in true prayer, He will hear us. Though our answer may not be what we want, may we rest in the Lord's sovereign will. Sing Psalter 148:1.

May 2 Read Isaiah 66:5-14

The enemies of God and His church will continually oppress the righteous. They are quick to speak and attempt to bring the people of God low. The wicked will use all means in their power to afflict those that are precious in God's sight. The Lord used these afflictions to teach His people to depend on Him. We see in this passage in Isaiah how the Lord will deliver His people from the hands of the wicked. The Lord shall be glorified in that His will will be completed when the wicked are brought to shame. The wicked love to see God's people in distress but God will be the victor in the final battle. May we in confidence believe this truth. Sing Psalter 148:2.

May 3 Read Romans 5:1-5

We often find pain in our hearts and it seems so difficult to ease that pain. When we think of death from the earthly point of view, it is a horrible event filled with despair. We can quickly lose sight of Christ our Saviour at these times and become as the ungodly. Psalter 148:3 brings out how we feel when we are overwhelmed by our troubles. May we then remember the comfort we find in the entire Bible as seen in Romans 5:1-5 where we see that God gives us these trials and tribulations to work in us patience, experience, and hope. May our tribulations throw us into the arms of our everlasting Saviour Jesus Christ. Sing Psalter 148:3.

May 4 Read Psalm 116:1-9

The rest that we receive at the Lord's hand is the natural result of our throwing ourselves into the arms of our Saviour. In our text we see the distressed Psalmist calling upon God and being brought back to the place of rest. In Psalter 148 we sing of the Psalmist searching like a bird in flight for a place of rest and peace far away from the tumults of the world. When we turn to Psalm 116 we find

that place of peace to be a gift from God. We are called to follow this up with a godly walk. As we remain close to our Lord, we will cast our cares and burdens on Him and He will continually give us the rest which we desire. Sing Psalter 148:4.

May 5 Read Isaiah 4

We find many comforts when we are led to the place of rest. Isaiah speaks of the beauty that will be seen in that rest. The branch that gives us this rest is Christ our Lord and Saviour; He produces the good fruit of the elect as is seen in Isa. 4:2. This passage shows how the Lord will create a place of rest in mount Zion after purifying the church. There shall be a tabernacle, far better than the Old Testament type, which shall provide shelter for God's people in their time of need. In the New Testament, this shelter is communion with God through prayer. We no longer need to go to the tabernacle to commune with God. We are called, however, to go to God's house on the Sabbath to hear His word preached to us. Christ and His body, the church universal, provide the place of rest in which we seek to be renewed from past battles and prepared for future ones. Sing Psalter 148:5.

May 6 Read Genesis 11:1-9

When we look at Gen. 11 and the history of the tower of Babel, we see how God allowed the wicked to progress in their ways. When he saw that they were advanced in their sins and attempting to be like unto Himself; then He confounded their speech and spread them throughout the earth. We read in Psalm 55:9,10 how God confounds the wicked in their cities and allows them to increase in their sins. It appears as if He allows the wicked to prosper and increase but really they increase in wickedness and fill the cup of iniquity. God will judge them for their wickedness and cast them into eternal hell. We need to remember that when it seems as though the world's swelling tide is about to overtake us. God is ever faithful and His judgement shall be just. Sing Psalter 148:6&7.

May 7 Read Psalm 55:12-15

This part of Psalm 55 is not versified in the Psalter though it speaks about a unique type of situation. The passage describes a child of God betrayed by a hypocrite, one that was trusted and loved. The pain of being despised by one with whom we walked in the house of God and kept holy company is very great and bears upon our soul. This demonstrates how the true children of God will show themselves during difficult times in the church. It is not for us to judge the heart, for God knows the heart of all men and will have His justice known. We read of this in Romans 1:28-32.

May 8 Read Psalm 137

We read in Psalm 137 of the destruction of God's enemies. The inhabitants of Babylon and the children of Edom are completely destroyed. This is the reward for their great sins. In this passage we see that God joys in His justice being accomplished even to the killing of the children. This judgement upon children demonstrates that we are all born in sin and responsible for Adam's sin. This is similar to in Psalm 55:15 where the text reads "Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them." In contrast, Psalm 137 gives us the instruction to remember Jerusalem and God's city as our chief delight. If we do this, all will be well with our souls. Sing Psalter 148:8.

Devotionals by Mike Feenstra

May 9 Read Psalm 55:16-17

In marked contrast from the previous verse, we read that David says, "As for me, I will call upon God." And what a difference that is. When the wicked are punished by God with severe hardship or are frightened by the terror of death, they have nothing to turn to for lasting peace. They can only turn to the vain pleasures of this earth which are as the daffodil in the spring that fades away in a few short weeks. But for us it is different because we have the Word of God which stands forever. In that Word we are taught that we must pray to God when we are reproached and persecuted. When we do this, God will surely hear us and give us that eternal peace that passeth all understanding. Therefore, let us pray often, and let us follow David's example in our lives by not only setting certain times to pray but also praying in our hearts throughout the day. Sing Psalter #150:3, #149:1.

May 10 Read Psalm 55:18

Are you aware that at this very moment many of our fellow Christians are being severely persecuted? Some of these fellow saints are under an oppressive government, and some are mocked by their pagan neighbors or even their own families. In fact, some of you may even be in these situations. What should you think in this difficult time? And for us in the U.S. and elsewhere, what should we think about the coming dark days of persecution? Our text for today gives the answer. When the powers of this world are arrayed in great numbers against us, we must understand that we already have the victory in the redeeming blood of Christ. Therefore, we can say with David that we are "delivered in peace" for we believe that because our Lord Jesus died and rose again, we will be brought into the everlasting peace of heaven. Sing Psalter #149:2.

May 11 Read Psalm 55:19

In this verse David continues to sound his confidence in God. In verses 16-23 he confesses several times that God will surely deliver him and judge the wicked. How could he have such confidence? The answer is that David believed in the Eternal Living God, the Almighty Creator and Sustainer of the universe Who has in His control everything in all the earth and in all of time. But we must remember that David not only believed that God was *able* to save him but that God was also *willing* to do it *for him*. This was David's faith. He believed that the Eternal, Unchangeable God would certainly realize the Promise of sending Christ to die for *his* sins. This is also our faith, although our faith by God's grace alone lays hold on Christ's finished work. Because God has given us this faith, we can believe that God will surely afflict and judge those men who mockingly persecute us while they themselves live in unthankfulness for their God-given success. Sing Psalter #149:3.

May 12 Read Psalm 55:20, 21

Do you know what the words, "...And break their plighted troth," mean? How often do we sing these words of Psalter #149:4 without knowing their meanings? If we do not take a close look at these words we may think that the man in the stanza broke a decayed feeding trough of a horse. Therefore, we must understand the true meaning of the stanza by first studying the Psalm text and then the word meanings. The corresponding passage to stanza four is verse 20 of Psalm 55. There we read of an evil man (note that the "he" is not God) who broke an important pledge, a pledge to live in covenant friendship with his fellow saints. To break one's plighted troth is to do as this man because a "plighted troth" means a pledged pledge. To *break* one's pledge to live in covenant fellowship with one's fellow saints is very displeasing to God. Therefore, let us not follow the example of this wicked man but rather keep the promises that we have made to our fellow saints. Sing Psalter #149:4.

May 13 Read Psalm 55:22, 23

As we near the close of this Psalm we must remind ourselves that David here is in a desperate situation. After crying out in verse 4 that the terrors of death were fallen on him, he asks God in verse 6 for wings like a dove so that he can fly away into the wilderness, far from his trouble. Truly, each one of us would ask the same thing if we were in his shoes. Yet, we must not seek to fly away from our troubles, but look to God as David does when he says, "Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain thee." By saying this, David confesses that God will give him the strength to bear his troubles. David here shows us the truth of Isaiah 40:31, that they who wait on the Lord shall mount up with wings as eagles. These are the wings of strength that only flow from the Strength of Israel. With His strength, our burdens will never bring us down and crush us. Sing Psalter #149:5, #150:4.

May 14 Read Psalm 55:22-23

In our verses for today we see the great truth of the antithesis as it applies to the eternal destiny of the righteous and the wicked. In order to see this truth we must understand first that in Adam all men are conceived and born in sin. As such, man is wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined unto all wickedness. If a man is never delivered from this bondage, God will surely bring him down into the grave, or pit, of destruction. My fellow believers, we deserve to be brought down into that horrible pit, a pit from which no mere man can escape. Praise God, that He has sent His Christ to conquer the grave and reconcile His people unto Himself, the Rock. When the elect are in that Rock, they shall never be moved or utterly cast down into destruction. What a contrast this is to the end of the wicked. Let us thank God for that contrast! Sing Psalter #149:6.

Devotionals by John Huizenga

May 15 Read I Samuel 21:10-15; Psalm 56:1, 2

The heading of this Psalm directs our attention to the time when David fled from his enemy Saul to Gath. In Gath he quickly realized that they were dangerous enemies of his as well. All David can see is his enemies. It would appear to him as though they surrounded him with gaping mouths ready to swallow him up. They are ever present. Their hate is constant. They watch from morning to night. Do you see the enemy standing around you every day from morn to night? Do you know your sinful human nature? Do you recognize the devil with his innumerable devices for tempting you and leading you away from the way of life? Do you see all these things along with wicked men waiting with gaping mouths? We need not fear. We should fear if all looks well to us. May we like David call upon

God to be merciful, look down upon us and deliver us from certain death. Sing Psalter 151:1; 153:1.

May 16 Read Luke 12:1-7; Psalm 56:3, 4

The world likes to boast about having no fear. We see the words “No Fear” on T-shirts and bumper stickers. But fearlessness is nothing to brag about, especially for those who trust in themselves. Often the T-shirt reveals one who is blind to the reality of eternal punishment in hell. If you are spiritually alive, you will see many spiritual enemies all around and you will be afraid. Often we are even afraid of those men, diseases, or accidents that could kill the body. When you are afraid, what do you do? Do you increase your insurance coverage? Do you save up more money? David says, “I will put my trust in God.” Our Lord also reveals to us that we are children of God and always under His watchful eye. May we put our trust in Him Who has redeemed us. What a comfort this is in times of fear. Let us sing His praises. Psalter 151:2; 152:1; 153:2.

May 17 Read Luke 11:45-54; Psalm 56:5-7

They meet, they lurk, they watch. This has been the activity of Satan and his hosts since the fall of Adam. The wicked devote their whole life to the overthrow of God and His people. David experienced this oppression very intensely day after day. Christ reveals the activity as it has continued since the days of Adam and Eve and then felt as never before the intense pressure of Satan through the scribes and Pharisees as they spent their energy trying to trap Jesus. As with many of the saints before, the enemies of the Church resorted with Jesus to twisting His words in order to condemn and find fault. This pressure has only increased since then and will continue to increase. Today false shepherds take the word of God and twist it in order to lead many astray. They meet and lurk to destroy the church. Do not be afraid to call the judgment of God upon those who seek to destroy the church. Let us sing these words from the heart. Psalter 151:3.

May 18 Read Hebrews 11:32-12:3; Psalm 56:8, 9

Life may appear to us altogether as aimless wandering. Just when things begin to go smoothly and the future looks bright, God sends us off in another uncertain direction. When we consider all the sorrows and trials of the people of God today and throughout the history of the world, we can’t begin to comprehend the overall plan of God for the salvation of His church. But God does have a plan. He reveals to us in the book of Hebrews that all these were led down the one path of the promised Messiah. They walked by faith. They are to us a cloud of witnesses. God watched over them each step of the way, and He watches over us. Every tear is important and God, as it were, keeps them in a bottle. “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” Sing Psalter 151:4.

May 19 Read Hebrews 6:11-20; Psalm 56:10, 11

The words of men are full of lies, but God can not lie. His word is sure. David was inspired to praise the very word of his covenant God Jehovah. What is the word of God? It is the promise of deliverance and salvation from sin. The more we see the bondage of our sin and feel our alienation from God, the more precious the word of God becomes. The word of God is our strong consolation. We flee to the word to lay hold of the hope which is an anchor for our soul. We can not have the blessed hope in God’s word if we do not diligently read His word and listen to it carefully each Lord’s Day. What a blessing it is to hear the true word of God. May we never despise the preaching. May we praise the word of grace. Sing Psalter 151:5.

May 20 Read 1 Samuel 1; Psalm 56:12, 13

The vow of a wise believer is a beautiful confession. The vow often arises from the heart which sees the greatness of the debt owed to God. Hannah knew only God could give her a child, and she expressed her profound knowledge of the covenant promises in a vow to give her child for service to God. Sometimes foolish vows are made or sinful pride creeps in to make one regret a vow. God tells us it is better not to make a vow at all than to make one and break it. The sinner who comes to a realization of his sin and the greatness of his salvation is filled with a desire to walk in a life of thankful obedience. He wants to confess before God and the church this desire that has been worked by God’s grace and promise to walk in a life of obedience in Christ. This is not a foolish vow if we truly know that it is only by God’s grace that we can keep it. May the youth of our churches come to a certain knowledge of their salvation and cheerfully make confession of their faith. Sing Psalter 151:6; 152:5; 153:3, 4.

May 21 Read Ruth 2; Psalm 57:1

The heading of this Psalm instructs us that David was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write these words when he fled from Saul to the cave. He was being hunted down and pictured the life of every child of God as we are stalked day and night by Satan. As with the previous Psalm, David pleads to God for His mercy. David acknowledges that he is helpless and in need of the sovereign Ruler over all. He compares himself to a helpless, naked, baby bird that will quickly die unless it is sheltered under the wings of its mother. This beautiful picture is also used to describe the situation of Ruth the Moabitess. By the grace of God she left her life of sin and was welcomed into the nest of Israel. May we also humbly seek Jehovah God and welcome those who are led to our churches. Sing Psalter 154:1.

May 22 Read Hebrews 13:15-21; Psalm 57:2

As David cries out to God for deliverance, he brings to mind the various names of God and His works. In verse 2 he calls upon “God that performeth all things for me.” In the reading from Hebrews we have one of the many teachings of God concerning the work of salvation within His people. No matter where in Scripture you find instruction concerning our salvation, we learn that it is by sovereign grace alone. This does not make us passive robots as some who know not the Scriptures would have us believe. The God that saves by sovereign grace also makes His people free and willing servants whose will is knit with the will of God. The relationship surpasses our comprehension, but we begin to enjoy it now in this life. Sing Psalter 154:2.

May 23 Read Matthew 28:1-15; Psalm 57:3, 4

David describes the enemy that surrounds him in most graphic and terrible pictures. He is on the verge of being destroyed. If we bring before our mind the scene at the tomb of Jesus on Friday night and Saturday, we see the dead body of Jesus surrounded by wicked scornful soldiers commissioned by wicked rulers. It would appear as though after years of trying to kill the servants of Jehovah, they finally killed the Lord’s Anointed. But then and once and for all God sent from heaven His mercy and truth. Jesus arose from the grave and conquered death to give salvation to all His people. The enemies trembled with fear and the work of Christ on earth was finished. We still face the enemy, but we have hope in the reality that death has in principle been destroyed. The enemy is yet very real. The Psalms are often very vivid in describing the wicked. I fear that Satan and his hosts are working hard to disguise their true

nature today. Too often things do not seem so bad. It is so important for us to read the Psalms that we might gain a true picture of reality and pray for deliverance. Sing Psalter 154:3.

May 24 Read Isaiah 2:1-17; Psalm 57:5

In everything, even in our sufferings of persecution and the haughty boastings of the wicked, God is glorified. The glory of God is the end and purpose of all things. He is the creator of all. He has fashioned each one of us for His own glory. We are foolish to think that we deserve some glory. The glory of God is the purpose of our entire life. When our pride seeps into our thinking, it is impossible to give God glory. We become jealous and feel that we are worthy of something better than to exalt another. When we are humbled and see how great our sins are, how unworthy we are in ourselves, how dependent we are upon God, then we begin to glorify God. David gives God glory in this section of the Psalm which reveals his great danger and the rescue of God. David again sings praise to God at the end of Psalter 155. Sing Psalter 154:4 and may the words resound in your heart today.

May 25 Read 1 Samuel 23:14-29; Psalm 57:6

David had fled from place to place while Saul sought to kill him. Now he was under the cover of the forest in the wilderness and mountains of Ziph. Even here, the inhabitants of the land offered their assistance to Saul by spying on David so they would be able to set up a trap; and David is grieved. During this time God sent Jonathan to encourage and strengthen David, and David was able by faith to write in the same verse that his enemies would surely fall into their traps. David was unable to gather with the congregation in worship at this time. Sometimes in our afflictions we also are unable to gather for worship. Let us give thanks for the friends and family which God gives to us as means to strengthen our faith in times of need. Sing Psalter 155:1.

May 26 Read Romans 5:1-8; Psalm 57:7

What a comfort and joy it is to see the evidence of God's grace working in the saint who suffers tribulation and is able to glory in tribulation. God revealed to Paul that tribulation worketh patience, and David experienced this patience in a steadfast heart. Though his life was in turmoil his heart was fixed. He had hope in God and the hope made him unashamed to sing praise to God. A song in the midst of tribulation is a work of God's grace. Paul and Silas sang in prison. The elderly saint who lies on the bed of affliction and barely responds to any stimulation can burst into clear and joyful songs of praise to God. Apart from God, man responds to tribulation with bitterness. "It's not fair," they cry. But in Christ we have a hope that wells up in song, and God gives us songs to sing in these times of tribulation. Sing Psalter 155:2.

May 27 Read Acts 2:22-36; Psalm 57:8-10

Why does the child of God sing in times of distress? Why does David glory in tribulation? David confesses that the song is because the mercies of God and His truth is exalted even to the clouds. We learn from the light of the New Testament that the mercy and truth which David saw was salvation in Christ. In Christ is fulfilled the hope of every child of God from Adam to the end of the world. In Christ we see that tribulation is the means whereby we are drawn into fellowship with God. Knowing our sins and the misery which results from sin, we sing in thankfulness to God for deliverance. Let us pray for a right understanding of trials and tribulation that we might sing praise unto God, and even rise early with the Psalms in our heart. Sing Psalter 155:3.

May 28 Read Matthew 6:9-13; Psalm 57:11

Again as in verse 5 David gives glory to God. We can sing the same Psalm at the end of Psalter 154 and 155. Giving such praise to God is the purpose for which we were created. God so directs every detail of our lives that we are led to sing forth these words of David. Our Lord also instructed us to give glory to God in prayer. In the beginning of the Lord's prayer we acknowledge the holiness of God's name and we pray that the will of God be accomplished in His kingdom. Then we make our petitions, not because we want to be satisfied in ourselves, but because we desire to be fit for God's praise. The prayer ends "for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever." In all the details of our life and the petitions for earthly needs, we must always have in mind the reason why we ask these things: that we might glorify God. Sing Psalter 154 & 155:4.

May 29 Read John 11:47-53; Psalm 58:1-5

God directs our attention in this Psalm to the wicked and His judgment upon them. They appear to seek justice and truth, but their hearts are set upon their own agendas and sinful pride. They are compared to a poisonous snake that bites and will not be charmed. Unlike the thinking of the world which says that wickedness is learned in bad environments, the inspired Psalmist reveals that they are born wicked. We are all conceived and born in sin. There is no such thing as an innocent baby. The corrupt natures we have at birth would develop until we were like the wicked hypocrites that condemned Jesus were it not for the power of God's grace alone. We have nothing to boast about in ourselves. We are saved by the blood of Christ alone. Sing Psalter 156:1, 2.

May 30 Read Luke 9:54-56; 1 John 3:1-9; Psalm 58:6-9

David cried out to God that he would destroy his enemies. He called upon God to break their teeth, make them melt away, cut them to pieces with arrows, and whisk them away in the whirlwind of His wrath. But when the disciples of Jesus wanted to call fire down from heaven to destroy those who would not receive them into their village, Jesus rebuked them. Has God changed from being a God of wrath to a God of love? No, God has not changed. God will certainly come to destroy the wicked, and were it not for salvation in Christ, everyone in the world would be destroyed in God's wrath. God has been pleased in His eternal council to reveal the full spectrum of His attributes from wrath to love in the way of saving those whom He has chosen from among those whom He will destroy. Let us pray that God's will be done and sing praises to Him who does all things righteously. Sing Psalter 156:3.

May 31 Read Revelation 11:1-18; Psalm 58:10-11

David is inspired during this time of persecution to write concerning the victory of Christ over the seed of the serpent. When Christ returns to gather His elect into heaven and cast the wicked into hell, all will confess that God is just and righteous in all that He does. Then we will see as never before that all the schemes and grand empires of the wicked were in the hands of God to serve His people. We will not rejoice because the injustice done to us has been punished, but because all those who were filled with hatred against God and blasphemed His Name will have been justly condemned. Our songs of praise will be directed to God because He is God and accomplishes all His good pleasure. Sing Psalter 156:4.

Psalter #42— Love for God's Word

By Beth De Vries

We hear the law of God read every Sunday to remind us of the requirement to live lives holy and acceptable to God. This versification of Psalm 19 also reminds us of how precious God's law is to our lives. As the first stanza shows us, the law of God is perfect. What could be a better guide for our lives? The law restores the straying people of God and shows them God's way. We have confidence that the way in which we are led is right for us and in accordance with God's eternal plan. When we hear the law read, we are convicted in our hearts of the righteousness of God. It is joy that fills our soul and heart when we remember the wisdom of God in giving us these laws and in giving us His Son. The Saviour who perfectly kept the law that we might have eternal life. We are called to fulfill the requirements of the law also but in our great sin we are unable. We are cleansed in the blood of the Lamb and made whole before God.

We find in stanza 3 that the fear of God is undefiled, humbly we admit that this is not our doing, for we constantly transgress against God. We are ever grateful for our intercessor and mediator who makes us white as snow before the judgement seat of God. We are ever upheld in the truths of God as they are from the beginning of time and shall endure until the end of time. God's truths and judgements are pure and righteous. God unfolds His divine plan throughout time and His name is ever to be glorified.

The statutes of God warn us from wicked ways, which displease God and bring shame upon His name.

We know that of ourselves we are incapable of keeping these laws and that our old man of sin often seems to rule in our hearts. We strive to please God, yet all our thoughts are filled with wickedness and sin. We see a comfort in the last line of the 4th stanza which speaks of

the great reward for keeping God's law. The great reward is the gift of eternal life, graciously bestowed upon God's elect people. The gift of eternal life reminds us to at all times praise God for giving His son to suffer and die on the cross to merit eternal life for us unworthy sinners.

We next turn to the chorus which reminds us to love the law of God with all our hearts. We are called to meditate upon it all the day. The repetition of those phrases emphasizes our need to not forget the laws of God during the week, but to always carry them with us. It is easy to become trapped in vain repetitions and not be attentive to the law when it is read on the Sabbath but this psalter versification reminds us to listen and remember the law of God not only on Sunday but every moment of every day. With great

joy we sing the words of this Psalter number, and when we sing this Psalter as we go about our daily tasks it helps us to remember our calling to walk in God's ways. May we meditate on the great significance of the law of God every day. ❖

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

The Altar Call

by Rev. Allen Brummel

Many of our young people attend schools where they are expected to respond to “altar calls” or to make “decisions for Christ.” They face intense pressure by teachers, ministers, and even fellow students to give an open, immediate reaction to the gospel in some visible way. Others have perhaps heard of youth rallies in which a “decision for Christ” was requested. The “altar call” takes many different forms. It can be an appeal to come forward to a certain place in the front of the auditorium or church. It can be an invitation to stand, raise the hand, sign a card, or do something similar. Basic to all kinds is a desire for some type of visible, man-determined response to a biblical message. Also, fundamental to the “altar call” is an understanding that faith is the work of man and that some kind of decision is necessary for salvation. Although it is often confessed that God’s grace and assistance are necessary, the activity required for salvation is still spoken of as an act of man.

A Biblical Method?

What ought to be our response to such a requirement? Is this biblical? Is our salvation dependent upon our making a “decision for Christ?”

The Bible is the only rule of faith and practice, therefore we must turn to the Bible and find out what the Bible says about such a requirement. If there were any book where we might find such a requirement being practiced, it would be in the book of Acts. The book of Acts reveals the zeal and urgency of the New Testament church in her mission labors. As the apostles preached the Word of God to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, they directed all their listeners to Jesus Christ and stressed the need to repent. Many turned to the Lord, and daily God added to the church such as should be saved. (Acts 2:47) In all of this do we find any direction or evidence of “altar calls” being used? Were men commanded to come forward, or to sign a pledge, or to fill out a card, or to hold up their hands? Was a “decision for Christ” required in order to be saved? We find nothing of the sort!

The invitation, “altar call,” or “decision for Christ” conflicts with the very heart of the apostles’ preaching.

The apostles preached sin and grace. The response to the sermons of Peter and Paul was that men and women were pricked in their hearts and realized they could do nothing to save themselves. The response of faith was: “Men and brethren, what must we do?” (Acts 2:37) When they asked for a requirement, what did Peter require of them? He said, “Repent, and be baptized.” (Acts 2:38) Repentance was the required response to the preached word; a response worked by grace; a response which was possible only because of the fruit of the Holy Spirit’s work in their hearts.

We must be clear that there is a response to the good news of the gospel. That response is to see one’s sinfulness and to lay hold of Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior by a true and living faith. This response is not a prerequisite to salvation, but a necessary fruit of salvation. We must trust in Jesus, we must make a commitment to live for Him and must sacrifice our lives to Him. This response is not the response of our own free-will, but is worked in the elect sinner by the wonderful grace of the Holy Spirit. This response is personal and shows itself publicly in a desire to make public confession of faith, to be baptized (if not already as an infant), and to live a godly life.

A Basic Critique

First, the focus in the “altar call” is placed upon man, rather than upon God. There has always been, and continues to be, an attempt to reconcile God to man rather than man to God. Men want to compromise God and his teaching so as to bring Him into conformity with the will of man. Man wants to be in control of everything, including his salvation. So called converts, therefore, are weak because they depend on their own will and their own ability to keep their salvation. They are constantly looking at themselves rather than at God. The whole focus of their attention is upon whether or not they are doing enough or are good enough. The result of this is that often the same individuals come forward week after week. These individuals ask Jesus into their hearts time and time again. There is no assurance in our feelings nor

in our abilities. We need to trust alone in the ability of God who is able to keep us from falling. (Jude 24)

The focus of the Scriptures and of salvation is on Jesus Christ. Our salvation is found only in His righteousness and in His life. He, rather than our own abil-

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ity, becomes the object of our trust and confidence. When our faith is rooted in Christ we can have confidence and assurance of our salvation. We are sinners, but our confidence is in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who went to the cross to cover our sins and to give us abundant pardon.

Second, the emphasis of the “altar call” is on the act of faith, rather than the object of faith. Many sermons and messages found in evangelical and Reformed churches and schools preach faith, not Christ. This makes an idol out of faith! According to Scripture, faith is the means, the instrument of justification and salvation. (Romans 5:1) Faith is a gift of God which must be rooted in the finished work of Jesus Christ and His righteousness. By faith we take Christ’s righteousness and believe that it has been made our own. Our fascination is not found in our decision or our going up front, not in our act of faith, but rather in the object of our faith, Jesus Christ. All boasting and blessedness is found in Christ, the object of faith and the one from whom all the blessings of salvation flow through a true, living faith. True faith looks to Christ.

Thirdly, the “altar call” presents the promise of the gospel as a general, free offer to all who will come forward and receive Jesus Christ. Is that a free offer? It is not at all free. You must come and get it—you must be good enough to come and receive it. There are strings attached!

The Scriptures make clear that the promise of the gospel is a free, particular promise of salvation to all those whom God calls. (Acts 2:39) The faith and grace given to lay hold of that promise are not general, but particular. The promise, though promiscuously preached, is a particular promise to those who know themselves to

be spiritually poor in spirit, weary and heavy laden, and thirsty. (Matthew 5:3, 11:28, Isaiah 55:1, Rev. 22:17)

The biblical truth of Calvinism leaves no room for any kind of “altar call.” The “altar call” compromises the Biblical teachings concerning total depravity, the sovereignty of God’s grace, good works, and many others. Calvinism preaches the wonder of the promise—the free gift of God’s grace in Jesus Christ to those whom the Father has given Him. Calvinism commands men and women to repent and believe. Men and women are not left in confusion as to their responsibility before God, but are instructed to turn from their sins and to trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior.

No Place For Man In The Work Of Salvation?

Does our rejection of the ‘altar call’ mean that man has no place in his own salvation? It emphatically does! We do not merely minimize man’s part in salvation, we emphatically assert that man has no place in his salvation. “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.” (John 15:16) “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:44)

No Need For A Response To The Gospel?

Does our rejection of the “altar call” and the need for a “decision for Christ” mean that it does not matter how Christians live and that we are not responsible before God? It does not! Men stand before God as responsible individuals. Those whom God has chosen and whose hearts He has opened will respond to the wonder of grace which God works in their hearts. The response will be a response of grace and the fruit of their salva-

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tion. When the sinner hears the preaching of God’s holiness, righteousness, mercy, love, and grace, then the elect sinner is convicted by the Holy Spirit and brought to his knees in true repentance. The preaching of sovereign grace provides the answers which the struggling sinner needs to hear. By the grace of God our response must be

to repent and believe that our sins are forgiven! The response to the preached word is repentance and life-long conversion. This repentance and conversion is grounded in God's abundant grace and mercy.

No Need To Pray?

There are some who might respond—What then is the sense of praying for the salvation of our neighbors if it is all determined by God anyway? Our response ought to be to put the question right back at them—What is the sense of praying if God is not in complete control of salvation? Those who believe the doctrine of God's eternal election and His sovereignty in salvation can and do pray for the salvation of their neighbors. If God is not in control of salvation, then God is sitting in heaven eagerly hoping that people will use their free will and ac-

cept Jesus as their Savior. Why pray to God for the salvation of individuals if God is powerless to help? This god is not the God of the Bible, but is an idol!

Thanks be to God that He has power! He has power to overrule hearts, to penetrate stubborn and rebellious minds, and to bring sinners to Christ. He does not plead with sinners to come forward, but commands all men everywhere to repent. (Acts 17:30) He has complete power over the salvation of men. He may not choose to answer our prayers the way we would like, but He is the only one who can ultimately change things, and He will not allow any of His own to perish. (II Peter 3:9) ❖

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Church History

Through Strife to Victory

Chapter 4

Common Grace in Calvin College

by Rev. C. Hanko

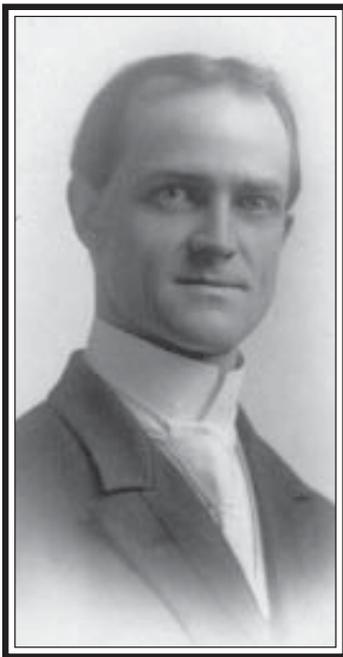


Photo courtesy of Calvin College Archives

Janssen: "Unbiased" Despiser of Prophecy

You will recall that in a previous article (Chapter 3) we saw that the theory of common grace is completely contrary to the beautiful truth of the antithesis, and replaces the antithesis with a synthesis, a compromise between Jerusalem and Athens, the church and the world, the believer and the unbeliever. This synthesis shows itself in the fact that the unbeliever supposedly has the ability to do good in the sight of the Lord. By the theory of Common Grace, it is maintained that we can and must accept the findings of the unbelieving scientists, even when they are contrary to the Scriptures, such as, the long periods of creation. We must also accept the findings of the unbelieving scholars and professors of theology, though they are not based upon the infallible Scriptures, and even contradict them.

This error of common grace found its way into Calvin College in the early years of this century, and consequently also in Eastern Ave C.R.C. I remember the Sunday services there as a child. In the front row of the left section of the auditorium sat the consistory. Often at one end of this row sat our catechism teacher, Mr. Sevensma. On the opposite end sat Mr. Bishop, the kerosene peddler. Five rows behind him sat the Prof. Ralph Janssen and his family.

Ralph Janssen had already served as professor in Calvin College from the years 1904 to 1906. He had not been reappointed after this because his teachings had been brought into question. He had studied in Europe and had been strongly influenced by



Photo courtesy of Calvin College Archives

Eastern Avenue CRC sanctuary in 1990 and most likely how it looked to Rev. Hanko and Dr. Janssen in 1920's.

the teachings of the higher critics. Strangely enough he was appointed again as Professor in 1914, in spite of the problems of the past.

Prof. Janssen's views had not changed while absent. In his course on "The Introduction to the Old Testament" he taught that the approach to the Scriptures must not be the approach of faith, (the conviction that the Scriptures are the infallibly inspired Word of God), but rather that it must be the "unbiased" approach, (which is actually the approach of unbelief). According to Janssen, this unbiased approach is the way to discover whether the Scriptures are the Word of God. He is quoted in his student notes as saying,

In every science we must take a position. When the givens are placed before us we must determine what appears to be true and what is false. A person's religious views may not influence him in his investigation, nor allow him to draw conclusions.

This empirical-critical approach is entirely contrary to the Word of God itself, as we are told in II Timothy 3:16 and in II Peter 1:20, 21. Verse twenty states,

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

The approach of the believer must always be that of faith in God and in His revelation to us.

According to Janssen, the Bible student was to approach the first five books of Moses attempting to determine whether these are the writings of one author, or possibly a number of authors. This approach had brought him to the conclusion that there were at least four authors, whose writings were interspersed throughout the first five books of Moses.

With this approach the professor felt free to ask whether the accounts recorded in Scripture were reality or based on legend. He readily concluded that the miracles were not special signs of God's grace upon His people, but rather mere natural phenomena which occurred at significant times. This faithless approach is what compelled his very imaginative speculation. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was occasioned by lightning which struck upon the sulphur and brimstone located in that area. The ten plagues were explained as arising out of natural causes. The passage through the Red Sea was made possible by a strong east wind that blew all night and drove the sea so far back that Israel could pass over

on dry ground where the sea had been. The professor described the falling of the walls of Jericho as happening through an earthquake, so that a breach was made in the walls, whereby it was possible for Israel to enter the city. Hebrews 11:30 teaches us something quite different!

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

Any careful study of the Scriptures will immediately help us to see that this was a terrible error, because it denied miracles in the Word of God.

Dr. Janssen spoke of Abraham as a deeply religious man who lived a full Christian life and therefore did not concern himself with the hereafter. (Compare Hebrews 11:13-16.) Concerning Abraham's sojourn in Egypt he said, "Abraham was a Babylonian, a leader of a tribe and an important individual. Therefore he wanted to establish a relationship with the Egyptian palace. He had need of that. He imagined that he could attain that through Sarah. Abraham allowed his wife to enter an Egyptian harem, and that with the purpose of becoming rich." (Once more, compare this to the account of Abraham in the Bible!)

David's desire to build the temple was said to have been rooted in the fact that he was very progressive and

strove to be like the heathen nations round about, a fact which influenced him in other religious matters.

Prof. Janssen regarded the book of Ecclesiastes as writings of a contemplative thinker, who saw that the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. The writer, according to Prof. Janssen, came to the conclusion that "all is vanity." He suffered from doubt and unbelief. He discovered that the human mind is limited. This also is vanity. He had times when he doubted the immortality of the soul, and again he saw the vanity of life. He finally concluded in faith, "Fear God and keep His commandments."

Janssen considered the Song of Solomon to be nothing more than a love song, which can be used to refer to Christ and His church, but as such is not to be considered spiritual at all. As can be seen, the divine inspiration of the Scriptures does not enter in.

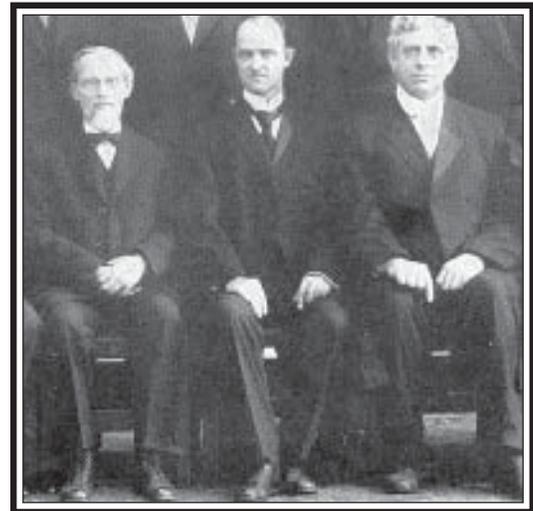
But enough. This is sufficient to show that the professor was guilty of sheer modernism and certainly deserved to be deposed from office, as happened at the Synod of 1922.

It is important to remember as was said before, that common grace was taught and accepted within the Christian Reformed Churches at this time. Therefore it is noteworthy that when Prof. Janssen's teachings were called into question, the Professor used the theory of common grace as his defense for his teachings. He charged his opponents with a wrong world and life view, resulting from their denial of common grace. He spoke of a crisis in the Christian Reformed Church consisting in this:

There are two trends in our churches, which have existed for many years, which now come in conflict with each other, of which one or the other will be restrained or placed outside of the stream of our ecclesiastical life. The one trend is sickly, unreformed, Anabaptistic, and the other wants to proceed in the direction of Reformed theology, the main lines of which are drawn up by Kuyper and Bavinck, and other Netherlands theologians. The church will have to decide for one or the other, because both trends stand in opposition to each other.

Because of the teachings of Prof. Janssen four professors at Calvin requested the Curatorium, (Committee in charge of the Seminary) to investigate the teachings of Prof. Janssen, yet without bringing any definite charges. Since they had not spoken with Prof. Janssen concerning these matters, neither the Curatorium nor the Synod would enter into the matter. Later they appealed again to the Curatorium, and in the meantime published a pamphlet exposing the errors of the professor. By this

time Rev. Herman Hoeksema had examined a student's notes of Dr. Janssen's lectures and he began to write about them in *The Banner*. The four professors insisted that such modern teachings should not be allowed in the seminary. A committee was appointed by the Curatorium.



Dr. Janssen, flanked by fellow Prof's TenHoor and Berkhof in a 1920 faculty photo.

This committee reported to the Synod of 1922 with a majority and a minority report. A few of the members of the committee supported Prof. Janssen in their minority report. The majority report, of which a young Rev. Herman Hoeksema was part of, exposed the errors of the professor and this report was adopted by the Synod, and the professor was deposed from office.

Later Rev. Jan Karel Van Baalen, a champion of Common Grace wrote:

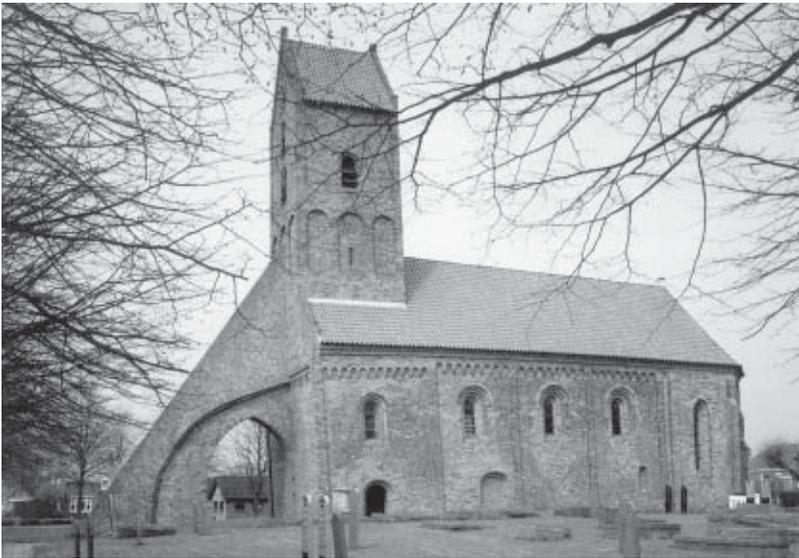
Even though Dr. Janssen was deposed by the Iowa Synod, to a great extent through your (Rev. Hoeksema's) influence, along with respect for the memory of this great leader, we protest against the manner in which you attacked him. (*The Denial of Common Grace Not Reformed But Anabaptist?* page 52.)

No one needed to ask where the sentiments of this minister and of others were directed, even though Dr. Janssen was deposed. ❖

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.

The Buttress Church in Bierum Revisited

by J.P. de Klerk



Do you remember, that in *Beacon Lights* of August 1996 I wrote about the State Reformed Church of Bierum (province of Groningen, in the northeastern part of The Netherlands)? Well, two readers of *Beacon Lights* (from Jenison, Michigan) have paid that Church a visit during the past summer, and made this photo that shows the whole Church. Yes, Phil and Joanne Lotterman also went inside, and you see her sitting upstairs behind the organ. The Church emblem with the Lamb of God the visitors depicted high

up in one of the vaults of the Church; it is the seal used since many centuries. The Church was built in the 13th century. The walls could tell you of the waves of the seas which lashed at this building, and of the people who found a sanctuary within her. But they could also tell you of the



pomp and circumstance on the occasion of the wedding of the daughter of the lord of the neighboring castle, "Luiningaborg" (which no longer exists). The choir was built onto the Church in the 14th century. There is also the pulpit. The whole building is restored in 1949/1950, when beautiful formal murals were discovered under the paint.

The lords of the castle presented the church in 1792 with the organ and the Communion silver. They were followers of the Reformed Princes of Orange and therefore called Orangists. The baptismal font is as old as the Church. The organ was built by the German, Franz Casper Schnitger, with the assistance of H.H. Freytag, with very expensive pipes and massive oak wood, well preserved. During the Second World War it was slightly damaged, but in 1953 carefully restored. The sound of this organ is soft and noble. The pulpit is artistic but not extravagant, decorated with the shape of a shield-bearer and a crowned head probably of a countess. ❖

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



A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23

review by Karen Van Baren

A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23 by Philip Keller. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. 142 pp. Price unknown (hard cover).

The author of this little book was a shepherd in both the literal and figurative sense of the word. He was owner of a large sheep ranch in British Columbia, but also served as shepherd to the flock of God. Therefore, he brings a unique perspective to the well-loved Psalm 23.

He states the purpose of his book in his introduction. "He (the reader, KVB) will be brought into a bold, new appreciation of the endless effort put forth by our Saviour, for His sheep. Out of this there will then emerge a growing admiration and affection for The Great Shepherd of his soul."

As I read the explanations and examples of such terms as "under the rod", "cast", "fence crawler", and "butting order," I better understood why God refers to His people as sheep. As I read about the grueling, often exasperating work of the shepherd, I did, as the author said I would, learn a new appreciation and love for the work and person of Jesus Christ.

Let me give an example from the chapter entitled "Thy Rod and Thy Staff They Comfort Me". In explaining the use of the shepherd's tools Keller writes, "The owner's rod, his weapon of power, authority and defense, is a continuous comfort to him (the sheep, KVB). For with it the manager is able to carry out effective control of his flock in every situation...The rod speaks. . .of the spoken word, the expressed intent, the extended activity of God's mind and will in dealing with men. It implies the authority of divinity. It carries with it the convicting power and irrefutable impact of "Thus saith the Lord."

Having said that, I do think that the author carries the metaphors of shepherd and sheep too far in his interpretation of the Psalm. I cite the claim that the "prepared table" refers to the mesas or tablelands found in Israel, to which the shepherd would lead his sheep for summer pasture. David does not carry the metaphor into this verse or the following verses. Rather, David speaks more generally of the goodness of God to his people.

As I read, I did wonder from time to time, about Keller's theological background. His choice of words made me uneasy at certain points. For example, he writes of "entrusting" one's self to Christ, and of living in "cooperation" with Him. It seemed that with these particular words and phrases, the author is over-emphasizing man's actions in his relationship to Christ. Thus, this book is no different from all books in that it must be read with discernment.

In spite of the stretched metaphor, and the sometimes questionable choice of words, the book does provide a rich background for understanding this Psalm, and numerous other portions of Scripture in which the metaphors of shepherd and sheep are used. It is for that reason that I recommend the book.

A Bounteous Feast

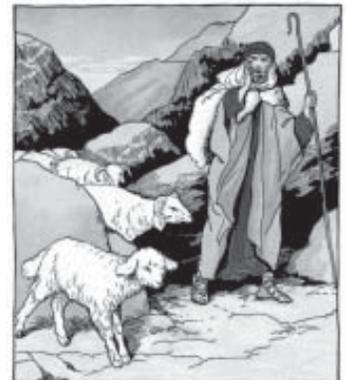
By Karen Van Baren

*I taste a bounteous feast as
I revel in green pastures and
Frolic beside still waters,
Hearing behind the
Pursuing footsteps of His mercies.*

*My laughter is silenced
As I entered a shadowed vale,
Where I cannot see the Sun.
He who fed me and gave me drink,
Now leads me even here.*

*Yea, I shall not fear:
For I feel the gentle prod
Of His shepherd's rod,
And hear His voice say,
"Turn, follow Me."*

Karen is a member of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois.



"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

Tulips and Lilies

Linda took out first one dress and then another. Soon her whole closet was on the bed! She wanted to look especially nice today because Mother was taking her along to visit a special friend, but none of her outfits seemed just right. Linda liked to be "grown-up" and pick out her own clothes, but Mother would have to help if she didn't hurry...

Linda ran to catch up with her mother. It wasn't that her little legs couldn't move fast enough, but they kept on stopping in front of every patch of blooming tulips that they passed.

"Yes, Linda, they're beautiful, but we must keep walking or we'll be late," her mother chided.

The sun shone on the flowers and made the colors so bright that Linda couldn't keep her eyes off them as she walked. She bumped into her mother.

"Now Linda, what is wrong with you?" Mother grabbed Linda's hand to keep her walking safely. Suddenly, though, it was Mother's turn to stop. They had passed not only tulips on their way, but many shops, too. Now Mother abruptly took Linda into one of them.

Linda's eyes were wide. She had never been in a florist shop before. It was wonderful! Not just tulips, but flowers of all kinds and colors completely filled the store. Linda was so overwhelmed that she didn't notice what her mother had purchased. Soon they were on their way again.

Later that day Mother called Linda into the kitchen. She laughed when she saw Linda's expression.

"Oh Mother, they're so pretty!" said Linda as she saw the vase of tulips on the table. She examined them closely.

"Now you may look at them as long as you want to!" said Mother.

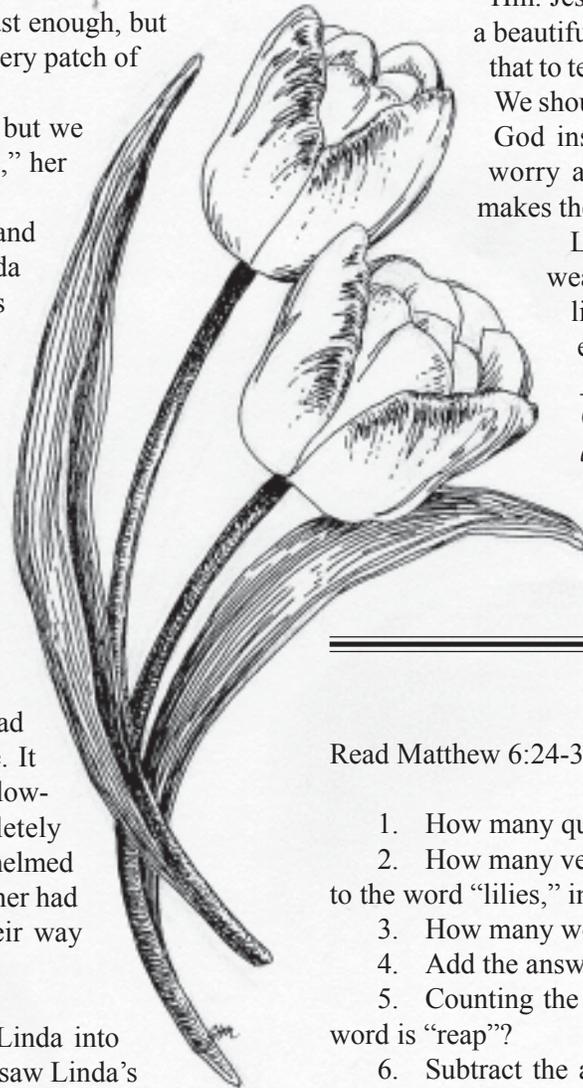
Linda carefully fingered one of the velvet-like petals. "Why did God make flowers?" she asked.

"Hm. Jesus talked about lilies that are like a beautiful robe for a field. He talked about that to teach us not to worry about clothes.

We should be thinking about the things of God instead. The field doesn't have to worry about clothes, does it? God just makes the flowers grow!"

Linda looked at the dress she was wearing. Then she looked at the tulips again. No, she shouldn't worry, either! ♦

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



Puzzle

Read Matthew 6:24-34.

1. How many questions are in this passage?
2. How many verses do you read in order to come to the word "lilies," including that verse?
3. How many words are in verse 30?
4. Add the answers to the above three questions.
5. Counting the words in verse 26, what number word is "reap"?
6. Subtract the answer of question five from the answer of question four.
7. Read this number verse—answer to question six—again! (Hint: you will find the word "kingdom" in it.)

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Church News

BAPTISMS

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

Mark 16:16

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

Eric Scott, son of Mr. & Mrs. Scott DeYoung—Byron Center, MI
Daniel James, son of Rev. and Mrs. Doug Kuiper—Byron Center, MI
Lucas John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mike Mantel—Doon, IA
Alexa Rose, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brent Meyer—Doon, IA
Kalie Renea, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ken Vink—Doon, IA
Leanna Jane, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jim Daling—Faith, MI
Michael James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Howard Pastoor—Faith, MI
Rachel Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. John VanBaren—Faith, MI
Kaitlyn Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff VanBaren—Faith, MI
Levi Jordan, son of Mr. and Mrs. Thad Lubbers—Georgetown, MI
Brooke Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brent Klammer—Hope, MI
Kirsti Beth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. David Kooiker—Hull, IA
Collin Todd, son of Mr. & Mrs. Veryl Heynen—Hull, IA
Crystal Sue, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. David King—Hull, IA
Damon James, son of Mr. & Mrs. James Kooiker—Randolph, WI

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:

Aaron Gunnink—Byron Center, MI
Jeff Uittenbogaard—Hull, IA
Kent Hoksbergen—Hull, IA
Scott Hoekstra—Hull, IA
Jeff Westra—Hull, IA
Peter Kalkman—Edmonton, Alberta
Andrea Tolsma—Edmonton, Alberta
Philip Tolsma—Edmonton, Alberta

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

Matthew 19:5

United in the bonds of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. David Overway and Miss Rebecca Vermeer—Hope, MI
Mr. Aric Bleyenbergh and Miss Rachel VanBaren—Loveland, CO

Correction:

Mr. **Joel** Beute and Miss Stephanie Peterson were united in holy matrimony. My apologies for the mistake.