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Lights



God Will Have Obedience

by Aaron J. Cleveland



The life of the child of God is a life of obedience to God. Not an external obedience, but an obedience that proceeds from the heart and affects the thoughts, words, and actions. This obedience, a result of the work of God's grace in our hearts, is part of the life of thankfulness which we live. It is impossible to live in obedience if we are not thankful. This is a Biblical idea developed throughout the Heidelberg Catechism.

In Lord's Day 33 we read of the mortification of the old man and the quickening of the new man. In Q&A 90, we have an excellent definition of what obedience is. When the question is asked, "What is the quickening of the new man?" the response is, "It is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works." Obedience for the believer is living in sincere love for God according to His will in good works.

When we look at Q&A 91, we are given the proper understanding of good works. Good works are "only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men." Our obedience involves living a life of good works. We must see the three important aspects of this answer. First, good works proceed only from true faith, which is knowledge of God and assurance of our salvation. Secondly, good works are performed only according to the law of God. Finally, a work is good if it is done to the glory of God. Negatively, a work is evil if it does not proceed from faith, is not done according to the law of God, and is not done to the glory of God. Evil works are those "founded on our imaginations" and "the institutions of men."

Because of our sinful natures, we sometimes fall into sins of disobedience. It may even be that in certain areas of our life, we live in almost complete disobedience. When this happens we are tempted to ease our consciences and substitute sacrifice in the place of obedience. Though we know that we are living in disobedience, we fool ourselves into thinking that God will be equally pleased with the sacrifices which we bring instead of humble obedience. Sacrifice can take the place of obedience not only in the life of an individual, but also in the life of a family and even a denomination. The more sacrifice takes the place of obedience, the farther removed an individual or group is from God.

We have a sharp warning against this substitution, recorded for us in I Samuel 15:22 where we read of the following words of Samuel to Saul, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." These words of God were spoken against Saul after Saul had ignored the explicit command of God to, "go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amelekites, and fight against them until they be consumed." Instead, Saul spared the king of the Amelekites, some sheep and oxen, and "the chief of the things." Saul's excuse for this disobedience was that the people intended to bring sacrifices to God with the spoil of the Amelekites.

We must be convicted in our hearts that God is not pleased with our sacrifices when we are living in disobedience to His will and law. This is something that Saul, as an unbeliever, was not convicted of, as we shall see later. In Isaiah 1:10-19 we are warned that God is provoked with our sacrifices

when they are not accompanied with obedience. In these verses we have a picture drawn for us of a people whose hearts were void of true devotion. They came in the presence of God only to be seen of men. As Matthew Henry states in his commentary on verse 12, “they looked no further than to be seen of men, and went no further than that which men see.”

A similar warning is recorded for us in Hosea 6:6 where we read, “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” God requires of us serious piety of heart and life (obedience). Matthew Henry again makes an important point about this verse when he comments, “Serious piety in the heart and life is the one thing needful, and separate from that, the performances of devotion, though ever to plausible, ever so costly, are of no account.”

We must not take this to mean that sacrifices are of no use altogether. Rather, we must understand that they are pleasing in the sight of God only where true devotion and obedience are found. If our hearts are void of the truth, and we are living in disobedience and not out of a love for God’s law, He will not be pleased with the sacrifices which we substitute for obedience. This is because the sacrifice which we bring is nothing more than a hollow, external, men-pleasing exercise. God was never in our thoughts. With this sacrifice, God is displeased.

Rather, we must seek to exercise a life of obedience. This life of obedience is two-fold. First, it is the mortification of the old man (Q&A 89). Secondly, it is the quickening of the new man (Q&A 90). This two-fold pattern of obedience is also recorded for us in Isaiah 1:16, 17. It is the putting away and ceasing from evil and the learning to do well.

The first part of obedience is living a life of continual repentance. Repentance is a deep sorrow for sin and a turning away from sin toward God. Repentance also involves the killing of the root of our sin which arises from our hearts. These evil thoughts and desires which reside in our hearts must be crushed and mortified. As we grow in a life of repentance we come more and more to sorrow for our sins because by them we have provoked God. Because of this deep sorrow, we learn more and more to hate our sin and run from it. An indication that we are living a life of sacrifice rather than a life of obedience is when we do not sorrow for our sins as we should and we would rather continue to live in them rather than flee from them. We are living in disobedience when we would rather part with our sacrifices than our sins.

The second aspect of obedience is the quickening of the new man. It is a sincere love for God and a desire to live as He has commanded. As Isaiah 1:17 states, obedience is learning to do well, seeding judgment, relieving the oppressed, judging the fatherless, and pleading for the widow. It is a life of good works proceeding from faith. It is a life of thankfulness. Beyond this, it is the bringing of all of our thoughts and desires into harmony with God’s will and law. In Hosea 6:6 we see the relation between possessing and growing in the knowledge of God and living in obedience. The more we know God, and the more we grow in the knowledge of God, the more we are able to live obediently. Our obedience to God, that is our love for God and the neighbor, flows from our knowledge of God. Those who do not want to hear doctrine preached and who do not want the knowledge of God expounded, have no desire to live in obedience. This can be seen in the lives of those who attend denominations where doctrine is no longer preached. The lives of the members of these churches and the worship services of the churches themselves are filled with nothing but hollow sacrifices. Sacrifice has taken the place of obedience.

A striking example of unrepentance and disobedience we can see in Saul, recorded in I Samuel 15. We do well to learn from this history, for sometimes we exhibit the same sinful characteristics of Saul. First, we must see in the confession of Saul (vs. 24) that he was not sincerely repentant. He was not

sorry for his sins. In fact, Saul had a rather shallow show of remorse. This is evident from the fact that Saul was more concerned about how he appeared in the eyes of Samuel than in the eyes of God. Saul cunningly says, "I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, AND THY WORDS," as if the greater disobedience had been his ignoring of Samuel's words. Saul's remorse was not that he had offended God, but that Samuel was displeased with him and was making him look bad in front of the people.

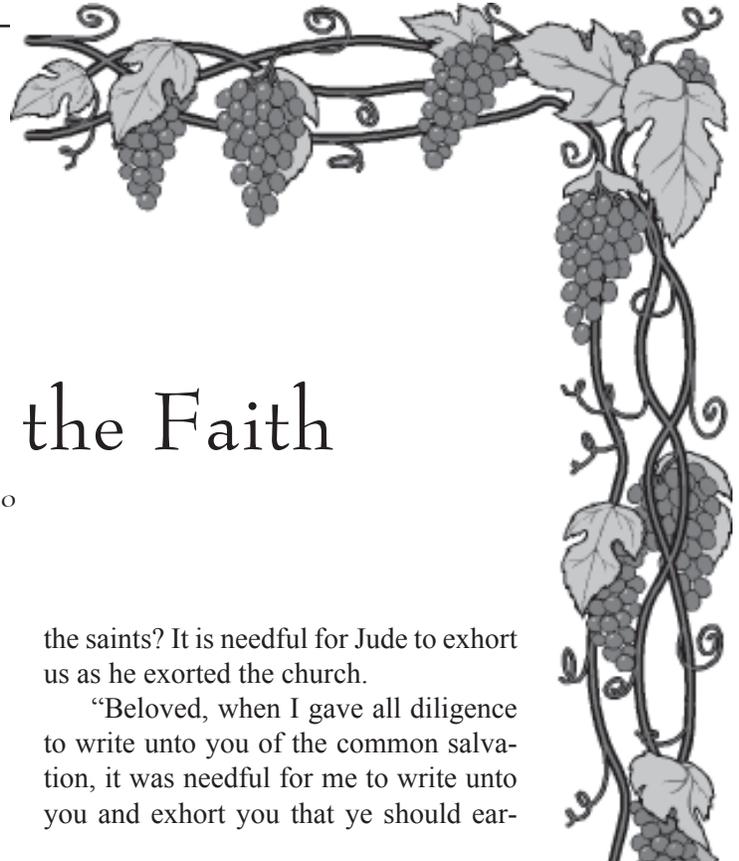
Second, we must see that in his very confession, Saul excuses his sin. "The people made me do it!" he cries (vs. 24). Here we see that Saul was in no way sorry for his sin and had no desire to turn from it.

Third, we must see that Saul was impenitent when he asks Samuel to turn again with him that they may worship the Lord. If Saul had been truly penitent, he would have asked Samuel to shame him in front of the people. Rather, Saul foolishly asks Samuel to play along with him in front of the people.

From this history, we see the true character of disobedience. We can also see that the sacrifice which Saul wanted to bring was not sacrifice at all, but merely outward ritual. Where there is true obedience there is also true sacrifice pleasing to God.

Our life of obedience must be a life of true sorrow for sin, a turning from sin, and a quickening of the new man. When by the grace of God we do this, we are living in pleasing obedience to God. ❖

Fruitful Branches



Contending for the Faith

by Sarah Hanko

We as Protestant Reformed young people have a blessed heritage. Will we sell our birthright as Esau for a mess of Pottage? Ask yourself how much your birthright as a child of God and inheritance as an heir of the promise mean to you. Are you willing to content for the faith once delivered to

the saints? It is needful for Jude to exhort us as he exhorted the church.

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that ye should ear-

nestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). This is the faith our fathers died for and this is the faith the fathers of the Protestant Reformed Church were deposed for.

To “contend” is to strive earnestly. It is the words of Paul to Timothy to: “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession” (I Timothy 6:12-13). As Christians we profess to be disciples of Christ. Are you willing to stand before the Pilates of this world and make a good profession?

We as Christians are called to FIGHT. No, this does not mean to take up swords and spears in the physical sense: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour on God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:12-17).

God has promised that when we go before kings and rulers He will put words in our mouth. However, He does so by way of our faithfully studying and memorizing the Scripture. If you go into battle unprepared you WILL be defeated.

You may say to yourself “Why contend for the faith when there is religious freedom and peace.” The devil, like the serpent, is more subtle than any creature. He crieth “peace, peace where there is no peace.” Be not deceived the warfare is not yet accomplished. The devil goes about as a wolf in sheep’s clothing, in the guise of ecumenicalism, charismaticism, liberalism....

Contend for the faith in the church, in school, and in the world. It is your duty as a member of the church to ensure that the truth is preached from the pulpits. Do you search the Scriptures as the Berians so that you can discern truth and error? Do you know the faith the Protestant Reformed Church holds to as expressed in the creeds? Most of the young people in our churches have had the privilege of attending Christian schools. Do you appreciate and take advantage of the distinctly Christian education you have had, enabling you to contend for the faith in college?

Remember an important part of witnessing is your conversation. Conversation in the Bible means your whole way of life. Your confession is as sounding brass and a tinkling symbol if your life does not back it up: “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; And in nothing be terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you salvation, and that of God” (Philippians 1:27-29).

To those who keep the commands of God He promises his blessing. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:10-12). Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. ❖

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The Misjudged Man

by J.P. de Klerk

Jonathan Rabone was a lonely, poor man, in a former farmhouse, at the outskirts of the village. It was cold that Saturday afternoon and the first snow of the season came whirling down from the dark winter sky. He had cut some more wood from a dead pine tree, behind the stable. In a corner of his livingroom, he had a fire with an iron pot hanging above it on a copper chain. That was how he made pea-soup with a leg of pork in it.

Anne had been to the local grocer for her mother, to buy some candied peel and raisins, because Mrs. Mitchel wanted to make a cake for Anne's birthday which would be next week. Anne went on her bicycle though the road was somewhat slippery. On her way back more snow came down and there was more wind. This forced her to get off her bicycle and to go further pushing it at the handlebar. It was difficult to walk straight, and she did not notice that at a given moment she did not see anymore where she was going in the snowstorm; the foot-path snowed under and the buildings were blurred. She went round a wrong corner, and later again, so that she ended up in the opposite direction, out of the village. She stopped and prayed: "Lord, please, help me. I don't know where I am." Surrounded by thousands of snowflakes, she followed the track wheels had made and reasoned that somehow somewhere she would meet someone who could help her get home. About half an hour later she noticed there were no tracks anymore, and she saw a window with a light behind it. There was less snowing and she saw the house.... She recognized it. Children were afraid of this one, because the people in the village said that there lived a strange man, but nobody ever said why. Anne Mitchel made an effort to pass the road, to reach the light, but then it went all wrong. She slipped, the bike fell down, and the bag from the shop.... Dazedly she tried to get up, reaching out for the handlebars and the saddle, but she could not get hold of anything.... She turned over on her side and felt a pain in



her left ankle. Suddenly there was a voice of a man who kindly asked "Do you mind if I lend you a helping hand?" She saw an old man with a white moustache like a walrus, who bent over to her. He managed to get on one foot. She held on to his shoulder and so together they went over the road to his house. He returned to pick up her bicycle and the bag of the grocer. They went inside and he put her on a chair. He grinned and said: "Now you are in the house of that silly old farmer, misjudged by the whole village. Please, tell me the phone number of your parents." She told him and he went to a antique telephone on the wall and told her mother: "This is old Jim speaking. I think I have here a daughter of yours, who fell in the snow. Could you come and bring her home?"... Well, they all became good friends, including also Anne's father and old Jim, as he continued to call himself. On the Lord's Day father picked Jim up to go with them to Church, and often he stayed for a meal....



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Angels in the Scriptures

by Vi DeBoer

Angels through the scriptures tell the heavenly plan,
Bring the messages of God down to earthy man.
Angel with a message of judgment or of woe;
Angel with a message of victory o'er the foe.

Angels were sent to bar Edens door;
A grim reminder that perfection was no more.
When Hagar fled to the desert, an angel came to her there.
He brought the Word of God: "Return. The Lord has heard your prayer."
Abraham on Mt. Moriah would make Isaac the sacrifice,
But the Angel of the Lord said, "Harm him not, the ram will now suffice."
Abram entertained the strangers and fed them from his store
Unaware the holy angels sent from God were standing at his door.
As the angels told their message: they would have a son.
Sarai laughed within the tent and thought it could not be done.
An angel from God told Abraham to send Hagar away.
And the Angel of the Lord rescued Lot in Sodom's day.
God comforted Jacob on his lonely flight
With a vision of heavenly angels as he slept that night.
God sent His angel to go before the Israelites,
And he would purge the land of all the Canaanites.
Balaam's ass fell down in fear when she saw an angel in the way,
So God told wicked Balaam exactly what he must and must not say.
The Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon
To encourage him to fight the hosts of Midian.
Manoah knew when he had seen an angel of the Lord.
And David cried for mercy from the angel with the sword.
Daniel confessed that God had sent an angel to the den
So lions did not harm him but devoured the sinful men.
The Psalms give us assurance that the Angel of the Lord encamps around His own
And He shall give His angels charge lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.
Zacharias saw an angel in the temple on Atonement Day.
Gabriel said their son, John, would prepare the Saviour's way.
The angel Gabriel was also sent to Nazareth to Mary.
With the wondrous message that she the Christ child should carry!
And who can forget the multitude of angels sent on Christmas night?
Singing "Glory to God in the highest" as the skies were filled with light.
After Christ endured Satan's three severe temptations,

Angels were sent from heaven for our Saviour's consolation.
 And who, said Jesus, ever behold the Father's face?
 Angels of our little ones chosen by God's grace.
 On resurrection morning an angel rolled the stone from the door.
 In dazzling white he proclaimed that death held our Lord no more.
 The Lord sent an angel to Cornelius so he was assured
 His many prayers were answered: they would hear God's Word.
 John saw the angels in the book of Revelation;
 Angels busy carrying out the plan of God's salvation.
 At the end of time God shall send His angels with trumpet's mighty sound
 The dead in Christ shall rise as the nations gather round.

*L*ord, we thank Thee for the angels, creatures in Thy hand.
 May we as the angels await Thy wise command.

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Death...and Life!

*T*here in his chair the old saint sat
 His body weak, his face forlorn.
 The mind that once was bright, alert
 Was now so dull, its memory torn.

*W*hat an awakening that will be!
 Eyes so long blind—what sights behold!
 And meeting Jesus face to face
 His Savior, Lord—what joy untold!

*H*is days of Spring and Summer gone;
 The Fall of life—it too had flown.
 And deep in Winter's drab he sat
 With sightless eyes and soul's deep groan.

*O*h, blessed death that takes our life!
 The sting is gone! It gives release
 From earthly cares and troubles sore
 The gateway to eternal peace!

*N*ow Death has come to take away
 This loved one who once talked with us.
 His soul has risen to Heaven's throne;
 His body will sleep in earth's warm dust.

*S*o, don't despair, dear Christian friend,
 As you grow old and suffer loss.
 It's only a temporary state
 Just keep your eyes fixed on the cross!

*B*ut soon will come Resurrection Day!
 The trump shall sound! The dead shall rise!
 His body in its weakness sown
 Shall in perfection gain the skies!

*L*ife's winter days will soon be done
 And springtime will return once more
 A home in Glory waits for you
 Just over there on Heaven's shore.

by Nancy (Ezinga) Moelker

Little Children, No Idols!

by Rev. Richard J. Smit



Me? A little child?

Having read the title, perhaps you may conclude already that this article does not apply since you are not a little child anymore. Perhaps you wonder if the author is holding the young people in low esteem by calling them “little children.”

Before we in haste turn the page, we must understand that this is a Word of God to all His little children of all ages. The “little children” include not only grandparents, but also include even very young children and particularly now the young people. It applies because we are God’s Covenant children, but we also all have our idols.

As you begin 1999, what is your godly resolve? Your godly resolve may be completely in harmony with Scripture. That’s commendable. But, remember that Christ said that we cannot serve two masters. We cannot nor may we attempt to sojourn through 1999 trying to maintain that godly resolve *and* have our idol hidden under the saddle.

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols!” (I John 5:21)

The Bible gives us many examples of idol gods of the heathen. For example, in the Old Testament, there was Dagon, who was the god of the Philistines. There was the worship of Baal and Asherah which Jezebel introduced into Israel from Phoenicia. There was the idol Molech, who was the god of the Ammonites. This was an idol whose worship included the sacrifice of children. In the hot iron arms of the idol, little children would be placed by parents to roast over a fire which was below the arms of the idol. There was also the idol Chemosh, who was the god of the Moabites. In the New Testament, there was the idol goddess of Diana which was

found in Ephesus. Today one finds that many still bow to the idol of Buddha.

Those idols all had one thing in common. They were the work of men’s hands. A man cut down a tree or chiseled a stone. Another man shaped it. Another man covered it in gold. A man hammered it together with nails. A man covered it with clothing of purple. A man built a temple in its remembrance and honour. Men fashioned these idols and their worship after their imagination and their will (Jeremiah 10:1-9).

Not all make their idols out of wood and stone. The text does not limit itself to just idols of wood and stone. An idol is something which man makes and serves as his god. That god or idol is something creaturely which man exalts as his god. There are many examples of that today.

Beaches are full of sun-worshippers. Some are obsessed with the tanning rays of the sun as though that will give them happiness and identity.

Some make a god out of animals. There are those in the world who regard a cow as sacred and holy.

Some worship other people. Teenagers define their life in terms of a movie star. They consecrate and dedicate themselves to that individual. They revere even the sweat of the movie star’s hand so that after having shaken hands with the movie star, they vow never to wash their hands for months.

There are the idols of the sports world. Bedroom walls are plastered with pictures of the icons of the sports world. Young men try to imitate or even impersonate the walk, the talk, and the bad attitude of these gods of baseball, basketball, football, golf, hockey, motor sports, and soccer.

Some consecrate themselves to a specific sport. They find their happiness and identity in the vanity of sports.

The result is that their life is nothing outside the rink, the field, the course, or the driver's seat.

Some make idols out of money or earthly possessions. They trust that those things will give them standing and reputation. They begin to think that their life consists in those things. They put their trust in their money to supply their daily bread.

Some little children make an idol out of Nintendo. They covet after the latest gadget, the latest joystick, and the latest version. They waste hours fanatically consecrated to the blips and boops of the altar of Nintendo.

Others worship a false god of their own doctrine. They take the revelation of the one true God in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son Who came into our flesh (I John 5:20), twist that revelation, and worship that image as their god.

On and on our list of examples could go.

But, there is one more idol to consider. This idol you do not find out there. You see him everyday. Yes, you see him in the bathroom mirror. We make an idol of self! We exalt our wisdom and ideas. We set ourselves up as god. We wash and brighten our righteousness. We preen our pride.

Little children, no idols!

No, not even one!

Let us not think that we can attempt to serve the Father and idols. Let us not think that we can get away with serving idols. We cannot.

Sure, parents may not see through the walls of your bedroom. They may not see you watch the evil drama on television. None may see us read that dirty book or page through the immoral magazine. No, they cannot see under the saddle at the idol god beneath. Perhaps we think we can hide our idol gods as Rachel did beneath her saddle.

Little children, no idols!

No, not even that hidden one which I, your Father, can see! I see through not only the walls of your bedroom, but also the walls of your heart.

Before this command and our Righteous Father Who speaks it, we realize by the leading of the Spirit that we by nature are so dead in sin. By nature idol worshipers are so easily allured to worshiping men or other creatures. Do we not have our pet idol under the saddle, too?

The Father says, "No idols!"

Why? We are His children to live as He commands. We are the chosen and precious children of your heavenly Father. So precious are we to Him that He has loved us from eternity in Christ. So precious are we that He

bought us with the precious blood of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. By giving up His only begotten Son, He has delivered us from the power of the devil and from the bondage of sin and idol worship. Now, we belong solely to Him. He takes us as His own into His Family in Jesus Christ. Into us He works that life of new obedience unto Him.

Yet it becomes plain, does it not, that we have only a small beginning of this new obedience? But, the Father is rich in mercy and longsuffering unto us. That forgiving mercy we undoubtedly will need in 1999 and beyond. We need the irresistible grace of God in Jesus Christ to keep us from the idols without and within. Only by that grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone can and must we keep ourselves faithful to our only Master, our heavenly Father. Though we will fall into temptation to serve idols, we must not despair of God's mercy nor continue in that sin, but by faith with all our hearts, souls, mind, and strength, destroy the idols.

Then in trust of God's mercy and grace, little children, let us fear God! Let us love Him alone!

That love includes, first of all, that we acknowledge the Father daily as the source of all that we need daily in body and soul. That is what little children do. When hungry or thirsty, they ask mother for food. When sick, they run to mother for medicine. When fearful, they run to father for protection and comfort. When in the arms of father or mother, there is contentment and trust. Likewise, must we by faith flee from idols and into the arms of the Father for His perfect care and comfort. When hungry for the righteousness of Christ, go to the Father. When bruised by a fall into sin, go the Father who heals and lifts up in mercy. When fearful of the allurements of this world, go to the Father in the sanctuary of prayer for refuge. When fearful and anxious about the future, go to the Father with all your cares for peace, contentment, and guidance according to His Word.

Secondly, that love includes a desire to know Him more and more. Love of the Father is knowledge of Him in the truth. In 1999, do you desire to grow in the knowledge of the Father. The little child of the Father learns to say "yes" because to know the true God is eternal life (I John 5:20).

Thirdly, this love means that we keep His commandments. That is not just keeping them in memory and ready for a regurgitation on a quiz in Heidelberg Catechism. Rather, this means keeping them in our hearts. Carefully watching our steps that our next step in life does not go closer to the idol which allures. In the way of those com-

mandments, we will keep ourselves from idols and grow closer by faith unto God in true knowledge of Him.

Finally, this means that we love one another also. One who does not love his brother in reality clings to an idol. He who loves not his brother does not love God, but only loves and clings to his idol. That is not the duty of the children of the Father. To the Father we must cling in faith and obedience. In so doing, little children, love your spiritual siblings, too.

Therefore, in the home, the classroom, on the field, in the office, before the teacher, behind the backs of parents and teachers, in the church and before the world, let your godly resolve be to keep yourselves from idols. Let your godly resolve be to cling to the Father as our One, Only, True and Eternal Living God in Jesus Christ.

May God's grace and mercy be with us to be faithful and obedient little children in 1999. ❖

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Dating and Marriage

God's Plan for Me

by Kathy Looyenga

What do you say to your teenagers about those difficult, growing years? There is so much information we can share with our teenagers from the experiences we had while growing up. But, we must seek God's guidance in how we share these experiences with them. I would like to share some of my thoughts about my teen years and what God had in His plans for me.

I was brought up in a Christian home and went to church faithfully all my life. I knew right from wrong, what pleased mom and dad, and that God knew all my thoughts, words, and deeds. I knew I couldn't hide from God. But, that didn't stop me from doing what many teens do. I smoked, drank, stayed out too late, wanted to party all the time, and got way too serious with boys. How did this careless lifestyle end? By the loving grace of God. He directed my life in ways that were more befitting of one of God's children. I began to change gradually, beginning the night I met my future mate.

Twenty-one years later, I look back and thank God for turning my life around and showing me the right paths to follow. I have so much to be thankful for because I have never deserved in any way to be called a child of God, and yet I am! I have gained much wisdom since my teen years, yet I know that I am still learning and will continue to learn more about God until I die.

I hope in some small way I can help a teenager or teens that are struggling. God has a plan for each one of you as He did for me. Your teen years may be going the way mine did, but you can not count on it to turn out well years later. Even though God has a plan for you, you don't know what it is yet. The sooner you begin showing that God is number one in your life and that He is in control of your life, the sooner you will find real joy and peace. Your life on this earth is only temporary and really meaningless when you compare it to eternity with God our Father. You may think your life now is one big party, but what will you have gained when you have to stand before your Creator on Judgment Day and explain your teen years to Him. I feel so ashamed of myself every time I think about my actions. I hope you feel ashamed too. I hope you feel so ashamed that you ask God to forgive you of your sins so that you may begin the rest of your life in service to God our Father.

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Ice Crystals Through the Spectacles of Scripture

by John Huizenga

The winds die down, a hard coldness settles in, the naked trees begin to pop and creak, bright moonlight spills across the white sparkling blanket of snow. From inside the warm house the furnace labors to keep out the probing fingers of the bitter cold. Somewhere between the outside and inside windowpane, the cold meets the warmth. There at the windowpane, the cold steadily saps heat energy from within. The scant water vapor floating in the air near the windowpane is squeezed out into tiny droplets on the glass as the air shrinks and gives up its water-holding energy to the cold.

The cold is not finished. The whole outdoors is filled with deep and bitter cold, seeking to swallow up the last drops of warmth from the world. The heat slowly drains from the tiny droplets of water stuck on the glass. The trillions of tiny water molecules moving within a single particle of mist on the window begin to slow, and finally stop, locked in the frozen grip of its neighbor. Another molecule of water slowly drifting by gives up the fight and is pulled into position on top of the others.

As the cold pushes on, it begins to paint a picture of its progress. Slowly, imperceptibly, the work continues and by morning the windowsill frames a wondrous picture of hills and forests, bridges and sharp spires, valleys and fanciful otherworldly palaces of crystalline glory.

The sticking together of water molecules is not a random chaotic affair. Rather, the process is amazingly orderly and beautiful as is evident from the beautiful patterns of frost. To begin with, we know that a water molecule is made of two Hydrogen atoms and an Oxygen atom. The Oxygen atom is between the two Hydro-

gen atoms, but they do not lie along a straight line, rather, they form a triangular shape with the angle at the Oxygen atom being 104.5 degrees. If, however, you were able to see the triangular shape of the atoms in the molecule and could feel the atoms, the molecule would feel like a tetrahedron—a three sided pyramid. Inside the tetrahedron would be the Oxygen atom. On two corners you would find the two Hydrogen atoms. The other two corners would be invisible because they are formed by two pair of electrons. These two pair of electrons are like sockets into which the Hydrogen atoms of another water molecule can plug. The sockets, however, do not match up evenly with the two Hydrogen atoms of another water molecule so each molecule of water is attached to two other molecules. The two Hydrogen atoms of the original water molecule are in turn plugged into the sockets of two other molecules. Hence, every molecule within a pure ice crystal, except those molecules at the edge, is connected to four other molecules and form six-sided rings. These are the building blocks of an ice crystal.

You may want to try drawing or making a model of the molecular arrangement, but there is an easier way to appreciate the beauty of the molecular arrangement: Just look at a snowflake. Notice the relation between the general shape of a snowflake and the basic geometric shape formed by the molecules: both are six sided. By looking at a snowflake we get a magnified view of the very shape formed by interlocked water molecules. Snowflakes always have six-sided geometry, due in part, to the hexagonal geometry of frozen water molecules.

The crystal shapes of other substances also reveal the shape of the atomic arrangements of those substances. A grain of salt, for example, is a perfect cube reflecting the cubic arrangement of the Sodium and Chlorine atoms. The facets of a diamond can be cut into a beautiful arrangement because the atomic structure of the carbon of which it is composed is in the same beautiful arrangement. A grain of salt can not be cut into a pyramid shape without unnatural force and rough edges. The shapes of salt, diamonds, and other crystals are what they are because of the shape of their building blocks. The shape we see tells us something fundamental about the substance that we can not see with our eyes.

Back on the windowpane, the cold slowly drains away the heat energy of the molecules and they lock into one another to form six-sided rings and an infinite number of other related shapes due to the adhesion to the irregularities of the glass and uneven merging of crystals. The unchanging and driving principle of the water molecule paints a wondrously beautiful scene of frost. Every scene on windows exposed to the cold is unique. Each one is new and original. Each is filled with new beauty. Each one is so fragile that with a breath of warm air from your lips, a whole section of the world is loosened, melted, and erased.

At first frost looks rather bleak through the spectacles of Scripture. We read in Psalm 78:47, "He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycamore trees with frost." Frost upon the dead body of King Jehoiakim is part of the curse that God lay upon this wicked king (Jeremiah 36:30). Certainly we have all observed the destruction of hail or frost upon plants at some point. A few other passages also speak of the destructiveness of frost (Genesis 31:40, Job 6:16).

Something we can not miss as we look through the spectacles of Scripture at frost is the fact that every crystal that makes up the blanket of white that covers the earth finds its origin in God (Psalm 147:16). God breaths it forth (Job 37:10). He brings it all into existence (Job 38:29). God sends the cold. God created water molecules to be as they are. God upholds the existence of all things by His power.

The word used for "hail" and "frost" is also translated in Ezekiel 1:22 as "crystal" denoting a solid but clear foundation. The orderly arrangement of atoms within a crystal is the reason why light is able to pass through it. Here Scripture directs our attention to the beauty of crystalline formations. The beauty of orderly atomic arrangements is used to describe the beauty of

Christ and heavenly glory. See also the following passages: Exodus 24:10 "And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness," Ezekiel 10:1. "Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubims there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne," Revelation 4:3. "And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald," Revelation 4:6. "And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind," Revelation 21:11. "Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."

Scripture also opens our eyes to see further into the principle behind the beauty of crystals. Remember, the shapes and beauty of crystals are what they are because of the shape of their building blocks. The shape we see tells us something fundamental about the substance that we can not see with our eyes. God reveals to us that He has placed within each child of God a new principle of life. We can not see the new principle of life, but as with a crystal, when that life is consistent throughout our life, we can see and observe the beauty of it in our daily walk of life. The life within us can be seen only when our outward life follows the pattern of the inward life. The new life in Christ is truly more beautiful than anything we have ever seen. It is more amazing than the shape of frozen water molecules and far more glorious than the intricacies of a snowflake or frost on the windowpane.

The beautiful snowflake grows as a result of the bitter cold. So our spiritual beauty grows and develops as we struggle against sin and death. God breathes forth the cold and so governs death and sin that his people grow as beautiful saints out of the principle of Christ. Without the bitter cold of death, we would never see the glories of God manifest in the lives of His people in Christ. Let us give praise to God even for the bitter cold and frosty nights. ❖

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The Song of Zion

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

Devotions on Psalm 79 by Keven Moelker

* Calvin's Commentaries on the Psalms

January 1 Read Psalm 79:1-4, Psalter 216:1-4.

[The heathen Assyrians inhabit Jerusalem, giving way to a bloody physical slaughter of the saints of God, causing God's people to pray for the destruction of the heathen. Tyranny and death have come upon Israel.]

"The heathen have come into Thine inheritance; Thy holy temple they have defiled." (Psalm 79:1).

In this connection, read Jeremiah 22:7-9. Forsake not the covenant!]

Read Psalm 78:33-35. We are given answers to Israel's trouble. When God slew Israel by the hand of the heathen through chastisement and correction, then they sought Him. They remembered that God was their Rock and Strength.

Do we remember our Sovereign God on a daily schedule? Do we bring Him to mind throughout each passing day? We must not forget our Creator. We need prayer. We need diligent study of Scripture. We need Christ—our Rock and High Tower. As we live in the final days of history, we need to be alert concerning our calling to live antithetical lives, to know our sin and misery, to live against sin and those around us that hate Christ and His kingdom. (Read Malachi 4:1-4). Seek Christ and grow in your faith for the wicked shall be destroyed. The inheritance is ours!

January 2 Read Psalm 79:5-9, Psalter 216:1-2

["...smite the kingdoms that defy Thee." (Psalter 216:2).

"Pour out Thy wrath upon the heathen that have not called upon Thee, and upon the Kingdoms that have not called upon Thy Name." (Psalm 79:6; Read also Isaiah 37: 22-23).]*

In verse 9, Israel asks for the purging away of their sins and for salvation. We also read of this purging in Psalm 44: 7-18, 26: "Arise for our help and redeem us for Thy mercies' sake." Israel seeks God's deliverance from evil. Do we seek our deliverance? Do we seek out the mercies of Christ through prayer and supplication? Do we cry the words of Psalm 74:2?—"Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast purchased of old; the rod of Thine inheritance."

Although we must seek God's deliverance in the battle, we must also obey our Lord by fighting the battle of faith against our enemies. These enemies can also be found within the sphere of the covenant, make no mistake about it! We are under a spiritual attack! As Israel found themselves under the physical oppression of Assyria from the outside, so we can find ourselves under attack from within the walls of Zion. (Read Psalm 74:4). Therefore, we must live antithetically which means suffering reproach. "Help us and deliver us, O God of our salvation!" (Psalm 79:9).

January 3 Read Psalm 79:10-13, Psalter 216:1-3

["And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached Thee, O Lord." (Psalm 79:12).]

Here Israel cries for justice. The cry is heard throughout the ages and today continues to be the cry of the redeemed people of God in the presence of pain and physical persecution in distant lands of the world. Oppression is the lot of the redeemed as they fight the battle of faith.

God's people also have to battle their sinful nature as well as their actual sins—a battle which is a struggle for each child of God. We are aware of it. We are aware of the battle. Israel of old was aware of it. From a physical point of view, Israel was brought low. From Israel's example, we can see that the enemies of God are always strong. And we are often found so weak. Yet, God's Word tells us to trust in Him. Rejoice and be glad! Our pilgrimage here on the earth is short in comparison to the eternal life of Christ's inheritance which is given to us through our Intercessor's perfect redeeming work, death and ascension. Therefore, we can say, "Israel is mine inheritance," and, "We belong to Christ." (Isaiah 19:25; Hosea 2:23).

January 4 Read Psalm 79:1-13, Psalter 216:1-4

While studying this passage, meditate upon these texts:

The remnant of Jacob is among the Gentiles. (Read Micah 5:7-8). We are counted in the elect line. (Read Romans 11:5). God will smite the wicked in His fury. (Micah 5:15). Our God delights in mercy. (Micah 7:18). Mercy and judgment is for the benefit of the elect. Give thanks to God for His gracious gift to us. Live lives of thankfulness and praise. Show forth His praise to all generations. (Read Psalm 79:13)

["Let children learn God's righteous ways and on Him stay their heart, that they may not forget His works nor from His ways depart." (Psalter 215:6).]

Devotionals on Psalm 80 by Susan Adams

January 5 Read Psalm 80, noting especially vs.1-4.

Psalm 80, from which Psalms 218 through 221 are taken, is a prayer written by Asaph for God's blessing on His chosen nation. Asaph may be pleading especially for the ten tribes of Israel who separated from Judah and deserted the true worship of God. Asaph calls on God as the Shepherd. He leads and loves His people who depend on Him as helplessly as a flock of sheep. God dwells between the cherubim, mighty over the hosts of angels. We can trust Him for all our needs in every aspect of life! Read or sing Psalms 218:1, 219:1, 220:1, and 221:1.

January 6 Read Psalm 80: 5-7 and Numbers 6: 25ff.

In Psalm 80 we see the repeated refrain “Restore us, cause Thy face to shine on us, and we will be saved!” Notice the similar words in the passage from Numbers which is the benediction often prayed in our worship services. We know that our only comfort and deliverance from the sorrows of this life is God’s grace. Think of someone you love, a family member or a good friend. You would not want to do or say something which would offend that person, would you? No, your good relationship with that person makes you very happy. Our ultimate joy is in living with God’s face always shining on us, which we will have fully in heaven. Read/sing Psalters 218:2, 220:2, and 221:2.

January 7 Read Psalm 80: 8-11 and Psalm 1.

God’s people are pictured as a flourishing plant God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt, and strengthened them to conquer the enemy inhabitants of Canaan. He tends to His elect like a gardener. The whole history of the world is centered on the good of the Church. (Rom. 8:28) God established Israel in the Promised Land. This makes us think of our hope for the final Home God prepares for us in Heaven. Are you living daily with this hope in your heart? Read/sing Psalters 218:3 and 220:3.

January 8 Read Psalm 80: 12-14 and Psalm 81.

Why would God seem to cast off His nation Israel, after He had delivered their fathers mightily? Israel had turned against Him, and would not hear the prophets He sent. God sends His people trials to make them look to Him alone. Over and over in their history the Israelites fell into sin and God left them open to attacks from enemies. This judgment brought His people to humble themselves and see their need of Him. Each of us experience this pattern of falling into sin in our own lives, don’t we? Let us not deny God in pride and hope to avoid the consequences of our disobedience. Read/sing Psalters 218:4 and 220:4.

January 9 Read Psalm 80: 15-17 and Isaiah 11.

The “Branch” in this Psalm refers not only to the nation of Israel but the Son, Jesus. The Psalmist pleads to God for the sake of His own Glory! He must protect and preserve the vine and punish the enemies so that the promised Savior could come forth from the line of Jacob and David! We must acknowledge that all God’s works are for His own good, not just our convenience. When we honor Him first we can be confident our prayers are heard. Read/sing Psalters 218:5 and 220:5.

January 10 Read Psalm 80:17-19 and Philippians 3:13-21.

It is common to make resolutions at the beginning of each new year. The promise to follow God and call on Him is the most meaningful vow we can make, and we can expect His blessing if we keep it. We continue all our lives to renew this promise and prayer for revival in our spirit. We resolve this in our hearts each time we take the Lord’s Supper. Each day we must ask God to turn us to Him again so that we can live before Him. Read and sing Psalters 218:6, 219:2, 220:6, and 221:3.

Devotionals on Psalm 81 & Psalter #222 by Ryan Hanko**January 11 Read Psalter 222:1, Psalm 81:1-2.**

The first verses of this Psalm are the preface of a song of thanksgiving, which is intended for public recitation at one of the great public festivals—either the Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles. The people of God are not to stand deaf and dumb in His house; but rather are to make an open profession of their piety, to show forth the unity of their faith, and join with one accord in praising God. What

is our praise? We praise the God of our deliverance—by His “mighty hand and stretched-out arm,” He has saved us from Egypt, leads us on our pilgrimage through this wilderness of sin, and finally leads us to our home in the Canaan that He has prepared for us. He promises to do this as the God of Jacob—the God of the covenant that He has made with Himself and His elect in Christ.

January 12 Read Psalter 222:2, Psalm 81:3-5a.

What a great privilege we have in that we are able to keep the commandments of God! God has given them to us as the standard by which we live as a means of thankfulness for His great gift of salvation. The word “testimony” could just as well be translated “covenant”—so the law is part of the covenant that God has made. Is it a chore to get up on Sunday morning and go to God’s house and to spend time every day in His presence? If it is, then, because you have lost sight of the heart of the law, it is no longer the law of liberty, but of bondage. Though the keeping of the law is our duty, it should also be our greatest delight. What a joy it truly is to worship God as He has commanded. Do we not love to hear Christ speaking to us in the preaching, to talk to Him in prayer, and to sing the songs of Zion and hear them played on musical instruments?

January 13 Read Psalter 222:3, Psalm 81:5b-7.

God is speaking here now, giving the reason why He has the right to demand praise and worship of His people. Israel in the O.T. was a picture of the church of God throughout all the ages. God brought Israel out of the land of Egypt to save them out of the hand of The Wicked One and his allies, wicked men. He did this after they cried to him under the weight of their bondage. God, through His Holy Spirit, made them see that the bondage of Egypt was a picture of the bondage of sin; and that servitude to the Egyptians was a picture of servitude to the Devil. He gave them grace to see this and to cry to Him. Then, for the sake of the promised mercies of Christ, He conquered Pharaoh and His hosts and led His people out of bondage toward the promised land. But the way to the promised land was through the trials and tests of the desert. So our pilgrimage in this world will not be easy; yet we know that this “proving” will strengthen our faith.

January 14 Read Psalter 222:4, Psalm 81:8-9.

What! Are we so foolish that we act sometimes as deaf men and pretend that we cannot hear God? Yes, whenever we fall into sin, we cannot stand to hear His words and His reproof. Our nature, as it is in Adam, hates to be told that it is wrong. We, by nature, hate the truths and laws of God, which condemn us and “cut us to the quick”. So, time and again, God must come to us in grace and mercy and open our ears to hear what He has to say to us. Only in the way of paying attention to what He has to say will we learn how we must worship and praise Him. He is the One and Only God of heaven and earth. He is jealous of His honor and will tolerate no infringement of it through worship of another. Our God and Father is the One on whom we must lean and in whom we must put our trust. If we truly know God then we know that He is the only God. He who truly knows God will have no desire to worship another.

January 15 Read Psalter 222:5, Psalm 81:10.

God has proved His power and His goodness to us by delivering us from bondage. Having led us out into this barren wilderness, He will not leave us to starve or to try to fend for ourselves; but, instead will feed us with manna from heaven. God does not try to “force-feed” us, but instead makes our souls willing to open up to partake of all the riches and blessings of heaven. Let us not be like the rest of mankind; which, either from disgust, or pride, or madness, refuses to eat of the blessings of God. Instead, let us go to the foot of the

throne of God, where, whatever are the needs of God's people, there is an abundance of grace for supplying and satisfying our every need. Then we have the promise and oath of God Himself, "I am the bread of life, he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."—John 6:35 (It is well worth reading this entire chapter, which is concerned throughout with revealing to us the true Bread of Life.)

January 16 Read Psalter 222:6, Psalm 81:11-12.

God's curse is on those who knowingly depart from the truth that they have heard and seen. The judgment of God is much more severe on those who have been in the church of God and willingly turn their back on it, than on those who have never heard the gospel preached but yet have seen God's revelation in creation. Let us not forget, however, that the same spirit of apostasy is in all of us; and it is only grace that has prevented us from turning aside from the Lord. Let us take warning from the terrible judgment that God pronounces on such people. There is no retribution of God more severe than His abandoning people to their own sinful natures. When God no longer guides their thoughts and works, they can do nothing else than follow their own foolish counsels—counsels which lead them on the road to eternal separation from God and everlasting condemnation. Let us pray to God that, when we sin, He will not give us over to them; but, rather, that He will give us the grace to repent of our sins and look to Him as our Guide on the pathway to eternal glory.

January 17 Read Psalter 222:7, Psalm 81:13-14.

Once again, God must come to us with the admonition to pay attention to what He is trying to teach us. This shows us how weak our flesh really is! How often, when we are worshipping God, do not our thoughts and attention stray far away from Him! Sometimes, when we have fallen into sin, God will not give us temporal blessings, because our state of mind and heart would turn them into moral and spiritual curses. It is the grief of love that it must restrain the gifts lest they be misused. Sin strips us of our armor, and leaves us naked before the assaults of our enemies. Sin cannot overthrow us unless we have first overthrown ourselves. Sin costs us a great deal. It not only takes away from what we presently have, but it also prevents us from gaining the knowledge and blessings of God. Yet the promise of God is that, through faithfulness, He will carry us in His arms through the battle, driving our enemies before Him and us, and preventing any harm from coming on us.

January 18 Read Psalter 222:8, Psalm 81:15.

The wicked hate Jehovah because He is our Protector and because He is the Source of all good. They desperately desire to destroy us (and God through us), because they cannot stand to see themselves condemned by the good. Yet, when we by the grace of God continue in His way, then our enemies lose all power against us. They cannot fight against the Almighty and Omnipotent God. He is the One who gives all men whatever power that they may have. We stand because God has made us holy; and nothing confirms a church or person like holiness. If we are firm in obedience, then we would be firmly established, firm in happiness, and we would have true prosperity. Then too, our hope for life everlasting in the kingdom of God and of His dear Son, would be assured to us, so that we might with longing look for the end of this world and the coming of our Lord and Savior.

January 19 Read Psalter 222:9, Psalm 81:16.

"Famine" is a word that is completely unknown to the people of God. We are fed with the richest food that God can supply, and have an overwhelming abundance of it for our daily diet. All our earthly needs are filled, as is signified by the wheat. But also, and far more importantly, our spiritual needs are filled by Christ the Rock of our

salvation. Our sweetest blessings and joys and pleasures flow from the grace of God poured out on His people for the sake of the cross of Calvary. There God gave to us the greatest revelation and manifestation of His love for us when He sent His Only, Begotten Son to open the way to heaven, that heaven itself would open up and flood the souls of God's people with every blessing conceivable and even more than that. So, as we come to the end of this Psalm, let our prayer to God be, that He will give us the grace to remain faithful to the end so that we may through His grace make the confession of the apostle Paul. II Timothy 4:7, 8—"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing."

Devotionals on Psalm 82-84 by John Huizenga

January 20 Read Deuteronomy 1:1-17; Psalm 82:1, 2.

This Psalm is somewhat unusual in that it is a sermon of admonition to those whom God gave authority to judge. Let us not forget that even in the way of admonition we praise God. Even by speaking and singing the truth of God's word, we give praise to God. The judge needs to remember always that the law of God is not his own law, but the law of God alone. He must not let the anger of men for the law of God prevent him from punishing the wicked. None of his judgment must be tainted or biased the status or ideas of men because it is the law of God. But the judges then and today treat the law as though it is a work of man that can be adjusted and twisted to suit particular human conditions. We witness the injustice of judges today who defend the mothers who murder unborn children and our anger is rightly stirred. Let us sing this song in righteous protest and in doing so render God praise and glory. Sing Psalter 223:1.

January 21 Read Deuteronomy 10:12-22; Psalm 82:3-5.

Another time when sin takes a heavy toll on righteous judgment is when money is involved. Perhaps the judge is unwilling to consider the cause of someone who is poor and insignificant because he feels that he has more important cases to deal with. Perhaps bribes tempt him to reward the wicked with good. In light of the truth of God's sovereign grace toward us we must be ever so careful not to treat with honor those who are able to give us something in return, and treat with spite or indifference those who have nothing for us. We had nothing to give to God, in fact we were enemies of God in our sin, but God in sovereign love chose us to be his. Let us be willing to give without seeking something in return. Sing Psalter 223:2.

January 22 Read Exodus 22:1-29; Psalm 82:6-8.

The judges have great power but they must remember that they are men who will die and be judged by God. The great power a judge has is indicated by the fact that they are called "gods." They have been given authority which comes from God alone to do that which God has power and authority to do. In the Psalter we sing the truth that God has called them and given them this high position. But with a high calling comes great responsibilities. We all bear these responsibilities to some degree as parents and office bearers in the church. Let us all render just and prayerful judgment toward one another. May we also come to God to plead our cause when we have been unjustly judged. Sing Psalter 223:3.

January 23 Read Acts 17:1-9; Psalm 83:1-2.

When the wicked understand the truth of the word of God, they become angry and violent. Paul and Silas made the word of God plain through sound and careful preaching and brought the wrath of the wicked upon them. David also when he walked in humble sub-

mission to the will of God provoked the wrath of the wicked. These men did not go out with the purpose to provoke a violent reaction, but the simple truth of God's word in the ears of wicked men will cause this reaction. May our preachers and personal walk of faith be such that the hearts of the wicked are pricked. Then we also will come to God as dear children seeking refuge in Him. In this way God is glorified and makes known to His people is grace and power. Sing Psalter 224:1.

January 24 Read Colossians 3:1-17; Psalm 83:3-4.

David calls the people of God "hidden ones" a number of times in the Psalms. The idea is not that God hides his people from the world. The context makes this clear for the clear presence of God's people is what stirs up the wrath of the wicked. He does shield and protect them, but we are always exposed to the world as a testimony of the wondrous work of God. We are not hidden from the world until we are buried in the grave. What is hidden from the world is our covenant relationship of friendship with God. It is our spiritual life that is hidden, the life which manifests itself in a life in this world of obedience to God. Like the Holy Spirit, our spiritual life is like the wind which is invisible, but powerful. Against such life the world fights in blind madness. Sing Psalter 224:2.

January 25 Read Revelation 17:1-14; Psalm 83:5-8.

The list of enemies in today's reading is well summarized in the Psalter as "Thy ancient foe." Though the enemies of the church throughout history have been many and varied, they all are united in their purpose to destroy the counsel of God for the gathering of His people into the church. Today also, the people of God are attacked by many different enemies that hate the church because it cleaves to the truth of God's word. Even so, by the providence of God, they have been unable to unite into one mind and will remain so until the day of antichrist. Then will be the day when the Lamb will reveal the power of God to destroy the enemy. Essentially the enemy fights against God, and God will make known his sovereignty in their eternal destruction. Sing Psalter 224:3.

January 26 Read Judges 7; Psalm 83:9-12.

The Old Testament is filled with pictures of the coming salvation of Christ. Israel, which was the church of the Old Testament confronted heathen nations which were pictures of sin and death. God taught his people in these battles that He alone was able to deliver them from their enemies. These battles were all pictures of Christ dying on the cross to pay for sin and destroy the power of sin. Now we do not long to see more pictures because we have the real thing: deliverance from sin in Christ. We do not hope for physical warfare where we can go out and kill wicked people and destroy wicked nations like in the days of Israel. But the pictures do help us to see that great spiritual battle which took place on the cross and still takes place each day in our hearts. For this reason we still cherish the Old Testament, teach the stories to our children, and sing the Psalms. Sing Psalter 224:4.

January 27 Read Matthew 3:1-12; Psalm 83:13-14.

David prays for the destruction of the wicked using the language of the farmer harvesting wheat. The kernels are gathered up with the stem and husk. They endure a tremendous thrashing which separates them from the chaff. Then a mighty blast of wind sends the chaff away for destruction and gathers the kernels for safe keeping. The prayer is heard and Christ Himself repeats the language to show that He is the answer to the prayer of David and the church as a whole. Presently He harvests and threshes the wheat. He gathers the

elect into heaven and blows the reprobate into the consuming fires of hell. May we rejoice in the victory of Christ and look forward to the final glory of the church. Sing Psalter 83:5.

January 28 Read Isaiah 42:1-16; Psalm 83:15-18.

Men worship many different gods. These are gods that men adore and fear whether they be riches or things in this world, or powers in their imaginations. But there is one who alone is to be worshiped as God, and His name is Jehovah. His name means that He is the creator of heaven and earth, and the covenant friend of His people. In covenant fellowship with Him alone is joy, peace, contentment, and salvation. Apart from Him is confusion, fear, and shame. No matter how hard men may look, no matter how sophisticated man becomes, he will not find contentment and the joy prepared for man in any other place. All the searching and troubles that God sends upon wicked man confirms there is no God but Jehovah. Let us look to him alone and give Him thanks for His salvation. Sing Psalter 224:6.

January 29 Read Revelation 21; Psalm 84:1, 2.

Do you long to be where God is, or would you rather be somewhere where God could not see you? Perhaps you feel indifferent and have neither an overwhelming desire to dwell in the tabernacle of God nor to hide from the presence of God. A strong desire for the presence of God is the sign of a spiritually healthy child of God. David was not always healthy, and neither are we. Sin constantly distracts our attention, weakens our appetite for fellowship with God, or even ties our hearts into revulsion of the house of God. A lack of desire for God and worship with the saints in church is reason for us to worry and come to God in a prayer of repentance. We must pray for a hunger and thirst for God. Sing Psalter 225:1; 227:1; 229:1; 421:1.

January 30 Read Matthew 23; Psalm 84:3.

Watch the birds of the springtime as they search diligently for just the right place to build a nest. At last a place is chosen and they tirelessly carry grass, feathers, and mud to build a nest for their young. There in that place prepared perfectly for their precious young they care for their naked helpless baby birds without complaint. There is no better place for those baby birds as they seek the food and care of their parents. God calls us to see ourselves in those baby birds. God our Father has prepared for us a place where his people find perfect peace and contentment, and he sovereignly draws his children there. Though the world and apostate church may try to prevent this, God will accomplish his purpose. Do you seek the nest of the Lord? It is found in the cross where God reveals His great love for us. Sing Psalter 225:2; 227:2; 229:2; 421:2.

January 31 Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10; Psalm 84:4-7.

One remarkable virtue of the Christian is the turning of the sorrows of life into blessedness. The Christian does not do this himself, neither does it happen over night, but rather it is worked by God gradually until perfect culmination in heaven. The valley of Baca is literally "a valley of sorrows." Even the valley of sorrows for the child of God who lives in close communion with God and the people of the church is turned into a well, i.e., a place where covenant fellowship is enjoyed and refreshing water is had. The way of sorrows is the way in which we experience the power of Christ most intimately. May we seek the grace of God to endure afflictions, and not merely bear them without complaining, but even to find the blessedness of the power of Christ there. Sing Psalter 225:3; 227:3; 229:3; 421:3.

I Will Sing...

by Rev. John A. Heys

Reprint from the Standard Bearer vol. 29, pp. 277-278.

By the addition of only one letter to the word “heave” we get the entirely different “heaven.” What a tremendous difference in meaning there is between those two words! And by adding the three short words, “unto the Lord,” to our theme of the last installment in this department we get an entirely different concept also.

To say, “I will sing,” is to give expression to an activity which is very common among men. To add the three words above and say, “I will sing unto the Lord,” does not merely express to whom it is that we are directing our song, it also limits very severely the contents and the manner of our singing.

If we are talented and gifted with a pleasing voice, it may safely be said that our singing is and has been chiefly unto men. If our training has been negligible, our talent a bare minimum and the tonal quality of our singing very distasteful to others, it is safe to say even then that our singing has been and is chiefly unto man. Whether we sing merely for the entertainment of men, or whether we sing merely for our own personal enjoyment, we have missed the point, we have missed the mark (which is literally the meaning of one of Scripture’s words for sin) and are as the man in the parable of the talents who went and hid his talent in the ground rather than to put it in use for his master.

Indeed, we may sing *before* men. If the Almighty has given you talents above other men, He has given them to you for these others. He has given them to you that you may lead them in the enjoyment of what wonderful things the Almighty has made for His own glory. And He has given them to you that through and with you they may then praise God for all that which He has done both in the realm of the natural and in the realm of the spiritual.

Psalms 19 is beautiful in this respect. Even a rather superficial examination of the Psalm will show you that the psalmist speaks of God’s praises in both the realm of

the natural and of the spiritual. Beginning with the glory of God displayed in the works of His hands, in the extent of creation as man from his position on the earth can see it, he then turns our attention to the spiritual in God’s word and law. There is no spot where they do not speak of the praise of God. And upon this earth, where the law and word of God has been spoken by God Himself, His glory shines forth in the spiritual works of His hands. Therefore the psalmist being awed and humbled by the Spirit, cries out that the words of his mouth and the meditation of his heart may be acceptable to that great God Who is his strength and redeemer.

Can you pray that before you sing? Singing, surely has to do with the words of your mouth. Singing must come forth as the expression of that murmuring, that meditation of your heart. And when you have finished your song, you are confident that both the words and the motive were acceptable to God? You rejoiced not in the praise of men but in that you praised God and led others in the contemplation of His wonderful praised?

I will sing unto the Lord! That is a lofty resolve! It is the only proper resolve! It is the resolve of a regenerated heart. The world sings purely for entertainment. And it sings of all the evil and filth that resides in its heart. It sings its atheism. It sings its rebellion against the living God. It sings its unbelief, its superstition, its godless philosophies, its adultery and immorality, the latter both by words and rhythm!

And a regenerated child of God can revel in it? It becomes increasingly difficult to get away from it! With that miserable junk box in every restaurant, with every radio and television dealer demonstrating his wares, it is well nigh impossible to get away from the songs of the world. But you do not bring them home or let your children do so, do you? WHAT? You let the unbeliever, the immoral world, the atheist, the antichristian elements of the human race befoul your home? Still more you let them spill their garbage and filth into your mind and soul? Go stand with the psalmist and pray that the words of your mouth and the meditation of your heart may be

acceptable to God! If it is a narrow-minded view to take such a stand against the world and its songs of unbelief and godless levity, then let it be narrow-minded. It IS Scriptural. And let us not be broader-minded than God! Remember that His judgment is narrow, and His judgment is final and determinative!

It is, perhaps, a little too obvious to be mentioned, but it certainly is true that much of that which passes today for singing by the world is only by the greatest stretch of the imagination even to be classed as music.

Praising Our Great King

by Julie Bergman

*Let the children sing
Let their voices fill the air
Let them sing to Jesus and praise
His Holy Name.*

*His name is Great
that nothing can compare.
So let the children sing and praise
His Holy Name.*

*The birds sing in their own sweet melody
and praise the Great God on high.
Let the whole creation sing and praise
His Holy Name.*

*The church too let them glorify His Name.
Let them sing with the Angels and praise
His Holy Name.*

*Our children are the church with us.
So let us lift our voices together and praise
His Holy Name.*

*Praise to Thee our Great King
Thy Name be glorified may we sing praises to
Thy Holy Name.*

The coarser a woman's voice is, the rougher and more boldly she may sing her suggestive songs, the higher her praise and hone among the ungodly. Indeed, we said a moment ago that one can hardly get away from such trash! You hear enough, even though you seek to avoid it, to turn your stomach. And the sad thing is that we all too soon become hardened even to it. Hence these articles awaken us out of our sleep and drifting in the world and with the world. And if the psalmist said, as he did, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable, then certainly he means also by his prayer that his ears may be open only to that which is to the praise of God. For the meditation of his heart will surely be influenced by what he hears. Remember Eve! Her whole heart and life were put in reverse when she received through her ears and into her heart that which was not praise to God but the lie upon which all this present unbelief, atheism, philosophy, evil thinking and corruption rests.

And how many of the songs of Zion do you and your children know? The songs of the world are ringing in your ears all day long. You hum and sing them at work. Perhaps you sing them along with the ungodly man at the bench next to you or at the next counter. But do you and your children *ever* sing the songs of Zion outside of Divine services? Have you ever caught yourself humming or whistling the tune of a hymn only to check yourself when you realized that it would give you away as a believer? Shame on you! But if this never was your experience, can you and do you sing the songs of Zion at your work? Do you find such delight and joy in their truth? Does your heart so murmur with these spiritual truths that you enjoy singing them even before the unbeliever?

Another thing, are you tired of singing the same spiritual songs over and over again? Are you, perhaps, clamoring for a manual of praise with more than versification of the Psalms? Is it, perhaps, so with you that you desire some new tunes? Room for that there surely is, not only because tunes themselves become tiring after repeated use, but also because tunes are not always appropriate for the sentiment expressed in words of the song. But let us be on our guard, lest it be the words which tire us. Let us be sure that the truth which is expressed in the song does not become so wearisome to us that it is for that reason that we clamor for a change. It is impossible that a child of God who desires to sing to the Lord would become weary of the truth expressed in the Psalms. And if we are always avoiding the Psalms to

sing hymns, which are not the versification of the Scriptures but the versifications of man's opinions of the Word of God and of his spiritual (?) experiences, we may well ask ourselves whether our singing is to the Lord or to men.

Many of our modern hymns are chosen and sung exactly for their tune, harmony and rhythm and for NO other reason. Take such an unspiritual Negro spiritual as "On the Jericho Road." Who will deny that it has a lilting rhythm and "catchy" tune? But where is there *anything* spiritual in it? Where does Scripture attach any spiritual significance to the *Jericho road*? What praise to God does the whole song utter? The same may be said of, "Roll, Jordan, Roll!" And what Arminianism is there not expressed in such a hymn (shall we call it a hymn?) as "There's a New Name Written Down in Glory." The Scriptures declare that our names were written down in the Lamb's book of life from before the

foundation of the world. The Scriptures teach sovereign and eternal ELECTION and firmly deny that in time new names are written down. And yet many Reformed circles, which profess to believe in the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions, enjoy such a son that militates against the word of God. You cannot sing that song *unto* the Lord! You can sing it unto man, and man will love it because it ascribes something to him that rightfully belongs only to God. And then you also have such superficial, sacrilegious expressions in what passes today for hymns as the statement that we will "shake Jesus' hand" and say, "Hello" to Him, or that in heaven we want to "See my Saviour first." What will we want to see afterward? ... We could continue and continue, but put yourself before the question, Do I sing unto the Lord or unto men? ❖

The late Rev. Heys was minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches from 1941 to 1980.

Church Family

Confession of Faith (6)

by Rev. Ronald Cammenga

Reprinted from the Standard Bearer Vol. 63 pp. 372-374.

“Will you submit to church government, and in case you should become delinquent (which may God graciously forbid) to church discipline?”

This third question asked of those who make public confession of faith is closely related to the previous two questions. In the first question we acknowledge the doctrine of the Old and New Testaments as taught in the confessions of the church. By means of Christian discipline, purity of doctrine is preserved in the church. In the second question we resolve by the grace of God to lead a new, godly life. The purpose of Christian discipline is to maintain godly living among the members of the church. The objects of Christian discipline are those members of the church who err either in doctrine or in life. The purpose of the exercise of discipline is the maintenance of true doctrine and holy living in the church.

Principles Of Church Government

Three outstanding principles of church government are implied in this third question. Those who make confession of faith ought to understand these principles.

First of all, the Head and Supreme Ruler of the church is Jesus Christ. The form of government of the church is not democratic but monarchical. Christ alone rules in the church, and His rule is absolute and sovereign. He said that to His disciples at the time of His ascension: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Having ascended into heaven, Christ is seated at the right hand of God, the position of rule and authority.

In the second place, although Christ rules in the church, He exercises His rule through men whom He calls and appoints to office. The rule of Christ in the church is the rule that He carries out through the office-bearers of the church. The authority that the office-bearers have is the authority that Christ has given to them.

The Scriptures are plain enough in teaching this truth. In Ephesians 4:11 we read: "And He (i.e., the ascended

Lord Jesus Christ) gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” Repeatedly the Apostle Paul refers to himself as the servant or minister of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:17; Rom. 1:1). Hebrews 5:4 is relevant: “And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.”

In the third place, although Christ rules the church and although He rules the church through office-bearers, He exercises His rule through the church herself. The church as a whole is responsible for this rule and actually carries it out.

It is for this reason that the third question speaks of “church government” and “church discipline.” The emphasis of the question is on the responsibility of the church as a whole for the proper government and discipline of the church.

That government and discipline are activities of the church as a whole is born out by several considerations. First, it is the church that administers the means of grace and exercises the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Contrary to the teaching of Rome, to no individual, but to the church, Christ has given the power of the keys. Second, the involvement of the church is seen in the fact that every member of the church is an office-bearer. Occupying the office of all believers, he is a prophet, priest, and king under Christ. And third, the involvement of the church is seen in the teaching of Scripture that even those who are appointed to special office in the church are appointed by the membership of the church herself. The first deacons were chosen and called by the church at Jerusalem, Acts 6:3-5. Paul was called and sent out by the church at Antioch, Acts 13:1-3. Timothy had been ordained and entrusted with the duties of his office by the presbytery (elders) of the congregation of Ephesus, I Timothy 4:14.

Called To Submit To Church Government

To the rule of Christ exercised through the officebearers appointed by the congregation, we are called to submit. The person making public confession

The person making public confession of faith vows to submit to church government.

of faith vows to submit to church government. When he confesses his faith in Jesus Christ, he confesses faith in Jesus Christ not only as his Savior, but also as his Lord. Believing in Jesus Christ he also willingly places himself under the rule of Jesus Christ.

Many passages of Scripture lay before us the calling to be in submission to the office-bearers of the church. After carefully explaining the duty of the elders, the Apostle Peter exhorts in I Peter 5:5, “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder.” In I Thessalonians 5:12, 13 we read: “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves.” An especially powerful passage is Hebrews 13:17: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”

We are called to be in submission to the officebearers of the church. We are called to obey them because they “have the rule” over us. We are not to obey them merely because they are older or wiser than we are. We are not to obey them because of any kind of penalty or punishment that might result from our not being in submission to them. For no other reason are we to submit to them

For no other reason are we to submit to them than that they have been given the rule over us.

than that they have been given the rule over us. Christ has set them in authority, and us under their authority. Not for the sake of their person, because we happen to like or dislike the person of the officebearer, but for the sake of his office and the authority of his office we are to submit to the office-bearer.

Here is an important test of our allegiance to Christ. Here is the proof that we are servants of Christ and that we honor Christ as our Lord and King. It is easy enough to say that Christ is our Lord. It is easy enough to speak of Christ as the King of our life. But then we must show that, by our submission to the authority of Christ where

He is pleased to manifest that authority. We must submit to the government and discipline of the church.

In Case We Become Delinquent

Especially urgent is our submission to the government of the church if we should become delinquent. This may very well happen. This has happened in the past, and happens today. It is a very real possibility that we

It is a very real possibility that we fall into sin, serious sin, sin that we do not immediately repent of, sin that becomes the occasion of the discipline of the church.

fall into sin, serious sin, sin that we do not immediately repent of, sin that becomes the occasion of the discipline of the church. When this happens, we promise to submit to that discipline of the church and to receive the correction of that discipline.

This certainly is an outstanding reason for church government and for office-bearers in the church. One purpose of church discipline is the recovery of the wayward. In II Timothy 2:25, 26, Paul calls the office-bearers to labor with those members of the church who have fallen into sin: "... if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

Sad to say, in many cases this vow is broken. Often it is the case that those who fall into sin will not submit to the government of the church. They will not receive the pastor or elders when they call on them to admonish them. If they receive the office-bearers, they will not be convinced by the teaching of the Word of God, but stubbornly persist in their sin. Often instead of submitting to government of the church, they simply "ask for their papers" and leave the church entirely, or go to a church which fails to manifest faithfully the marks of the true church of Christ in the world.

This is serious sin! Sin is a serious matter. Unrepented-of-sin is a serious matter. But stubbornly to persist in sin after the admonition and discipline of the church is still more serious. To do this in spite of the

solemn promise we have made to submit to the government of the church is the worst sin of all.

Freedom Of Conscience

This does not mean that every decision of the church is to be obeyed unquestioningly. Our obedience to the government of the church is our obedience to Jesus Christ and to the Word of Jesus Christ. If the church exercises authority apart from Jesus Christ, in contradiction to the Word of Christ, in good conscience the believer cannot obey. Our conscience is not bound to the church and the decrees of the church, but our conscience is bound to the Word of God. And no church may ever attempt to find the conscience of the members of the church. This, in fact, is a mark of the false church.

Two possibilities may be conceived of here. First, decisions are made by the church with which a member disagrees or is not satisfied, but these decisions do not concern matters of principle. The member may question the wisdom or the appropriateness of such decisions. Perhaps the decision concerns a building project, a change in the liturgy of the church, change of time of the Sunday worship services, or many similar matters. In this case, although the individual is personally opposed to the decision, because it does not involve a fundamental teaching of the Word of God, he acquiesces to the decision and abides by it. This is submission to church government.

The second possibility is that decisions are made by the church that are plainly contrary to the Word of God. Perhaps the church has decided to open the special offices to the women. In this case, the member cannot in good conscience before God obey the government of the church. To do so would be to obey men rather than God.

At the same time, involved in submission to church government when the government of the church demands of us what is contrary to the Word of God, is our calling to bring our objections to the decisions of the church in the orderly way.

Even then, he is called to submit. He cannot obey, but he must submit. It is possible for him not to obey, and at the same time to submit. The opposite of submission is rebellion, and no child of God under any circumstances may rebel against those in authority. Even when those in authority demand of us what is contrary to the Word of God, we may not rise up against those in authority, we may not be abusive of those in authority, we may not seek the overthrow of those in authority.

At the same time, involved in submission to church government when the government of the church demands of us what is contrary to the Word of God, is our calling to bring our objections to the decisions of the church in the orderly way. A member does this by protest and

appeal. This is the way of submission. In this way, the member hopes to convince the church of its wrong-doing. If, in the end, this fails, the member is left with no alternative but to leave his church for one that adheres faithfully to the truth, or institute the church anew with other like-minded Christians.

The Word of God to covenant young people is clear. Confess your faith in Christ! Hold to the sound doctrine! Live the new, godly life! Submit to the government of the church!

This is the straight and narrow way that leads to life everlasting. ❖

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

Where We Stand

Pitching Your Tent Toward Sodom

by Rev. Michael De Vries

The back door slammed shut with a loud bang. “Mom, you won’t believe it! I’ve been offered a fantastic job with a corporation in Garden City! It’s just what I’ve been hoping for—an excellent position in my field! Look at the salary and benefits package they are offering me! Why, I’ll have my student loans paid off in just a couple of years! Can you believe it?” John exclaimed. He rarely got this excited.

“Whoa! slow down; yes, John, it certainly is exciting, but there are many things to consider,” mother replied.

Later, John and his parents had a lengthy discussion about John’s career opportunity in Garden City. His parents were very happy for him. At the same time, they reminded him of many important considerations, not the least of which was the church. And now as John lay sideways upon his bed, his long legs propped up on the wall, one brief statement his father had made kept running through his mind, “Remember Lot’s wife.”



It was the word of the Lord Jesus (Luke 17:32). Whenever we feel tempted or inclined to make decisions

solely on the basis of the financial benefit, or the opportunity for wealth and success, remember Lot’s wife! And remember Lot!

Greed, worldlimindedness, opportunity for success had so blinded Lot’s eyes that he was willing to sacrifice his spiritual welfare. He was ready to leave Abram and pitch his tent toward Sodom. His eye was on the world, its wealth and opportunities, not on the city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. What riches were there in the cities of the plain! What career opportunities! What pleasures! What success! There he could really make it!

Lot was like a moth fluttering around a flame. Yes, he was a righteous man. Yes, his righteous soul would be vexed by the wickedness that surrounded him in Sodom. Yes, he had good intentions and many excuses, but his “career move” would be a dreadful mistake! It would involve personal separation from Abram, and upon Abram were the promises of God’s covenant. It would involve leaving the strength and joy of Abram’s fellowship in that strange land. He needed that fellowship. How very precious and necessary is the communion of the saints! It would involve leaving the sphere of the true

church. Leaving Abram, Lot was leaving the altar where Abram worshipped. Lot was leaving the faithful and proper worship of Jehovah!

But you can almost see the wheels turning in his brain, can't you? "I'm a child of God; I'm not going to lose my salvation. I'll continue to worship God. God has His people in other places too. After all, God has placed this wonderful opportunity on my pathway. I can be a good example and let my light shine in Sodom.

Certainly God wants me to use my talents and abilities and advance myself as much as possible, reaching my full potential. I feel this is God's will for my life." Such must have been Lot's reasoning.

Certainly God wants me to use my talents and abilities and advance myself as much as possible, reaching my full potential. I feel this is God's will for my life." Such must have been Lot's reasoning.

Are we too attracted to the riches of the plain? Is Sodom appealing?

Around us too there are "well-watered plains," many of them. They are typical of all the material prosperity, financial success, and carnal pleasures this world has to offer. Sodom is a picture of that world in the raw. Jehovah Himself describes it in the prophecy of Ezekiel, chapter 16:49,50: "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: Therefore I took them away as I saw good." Sodom—that's where the action is! That's where the opportunities are! Wealth, prestige, success, power are there, right at your fingertips. Move to Sodom and you can get rid of your pilgrim's tent. Lot did!

The temptation is great for us to reason as Lot did: What a wonderful opportunity this job offer is! What a marvelous chance to advance myself in the industry! With the increase in income, I'll finally be able to get on top

of things; I'll have considerably more money to give for kingdom causes. We're not the only true church; God has His people in other denominations too. I can live a "good Christian life" in that locale too. I can be a witness there. I'm confident about my salvation, and it seems as if God has opened this door for me. My talents and skills will be put to so much better use in this new position.

But, is it so? Are career advancements, larger salaries, prestigious corporate positions the important things in life? Jesus says, "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6:27). "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven..." (Matthew 6:19, 20). God does not care so much about our career advancements, about the big bucks we can bring home, about the earthly success we attain. His concern is our living according to His Word and unto His glory in whatever work He gives us to do.

No, our Protestant Reformed Churches are not the only true church from a denominational point of view. God certainly preserves His people in many different churches, some of which are even making serious departures from His truth. But that is not the point. The question we face is: Where must I join myself? Where is the church in which I am called to live and worship in active membership? The Belgic Confession in Article 29 presents us with the three marks by which the true church is known and by which it is recognized. "The marks, by which the truth church is known, are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin..." Certainly the ecclesiastical scene is complex today—so many different churches and denominations. But our calling is to join and remain a member of that church which most clearly manifests these pure marks of the true church.

No, we will not lose our salvation; not one of Christ's sheep can be plucked from His hand. But we may not foolishly suppose that we can remain spiritually strong and healthy where the pure milk of the gospel is watered down, or worse, poisoned with false doctrine. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Peter 2:2). To live a "good Christian life," we need that pure milk of the gospel. We need that

pure milk of the gospel for our light to shine brightly from day to day. Without it, like Lot, we will backslide; we will gradually weaken spiritually, increasingly compromise our principles until we must be pulled out of the fire (Jude 23). Yes, Lot was saved; saved in spite of his own folly. But how painfully Lot must be saved! The Lord caused his soul to be vexed with the wickedness of Sodom. For a time he was captive of Chedorlaomer and the kings of the East. He had to be rescued by Abram. He ends up losing what he sought the most, earthly possessions and material prosperity. He is left in a most miserable condition, according to the world.

What about our family, our children, and children's children? What about the covenant of God in our generations? In the way of departing from the truth we see generations cut off. Consider Lot's family—they became involved in Sodom's ruin. His wife, who was an apostate, was double-hearted, destroyed. His daughters were adulteresses, hard-hearted, carnal and conniving, making Lot father-in-law to Sodomites when they married, and themselves making him father of heathen nations. Lot lost his family, also in their generations.

More importantly, we must remember that the glory of God is at stake in these things. Our God is glorified by the truth! To the extent that the truth is compromised, God is denied His glory. How can we expect the blessing of God in that way?

Finally, we must be very careful in coming to conclusions regarding what God's will is for our lives. Many give themselves over to subjectivism: "I feel this is the Lord's will for my life." But nowhere does Scripture teach that God reveals His will through mere subjective feelings and impressions. Perhaps these notions arise from our sinful nature, the allurements of the world, the temptations of Satan, etc. Has God necessarily opened this door? God does not always give absolutely clear providential signs for our decisions in life. In confronting us with such decisions God may well be testing us, trying our faith. We must continually pray for wisdom to walk in the light of His Word so that we, and our families, may serve Him faithfully in the church where we may hear the pure

preaching of the gospel, where we may glorify Him in the truth. As Solomon also declares, apart from God, all our labor is vanity (Ecclesiastes 2:18-26).

The next morning at the breakfast table John spoke to his parents, his mouth half full of Cheerios, "I've thought a lot about my job offer, and prayed about it too. I'm going to pass up the job in Garden City. You're right, first things first. The church, the truth, faithfully serving God—these are the important things! I'm confident that the Lord will be with me and bless me in this decision. Thanks for your help."

"Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32)! ♦

Rev. De Vries is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

FEDERATION BOARD OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUNG PEOPLE

Balance as of May 1, 1997		\$23,518.84
Receipts:		
Dues	5,837.00	
Fundraisers	8,833.66	
Singpirations	1,155.40	
Collections	1,177.95	
From South Holland Convention	11,552.00	
From Hudsonville Convention	13,966.66	
Return of <i>Beacon Lights</i> payment	880.00	
Interest	668.04	44,070.71
Disbursements:		
Scholarship Fund	1,619.15	
<i>Beacon Lights</i> Fund	429.79	
Rent for Singpirations	290.00	
Fall retreat	500.00	
Spring retreat—Loveland	1,500.00	
Office supplies	28.80	
Foreign exchange loss (Canadian)	106.85	
For Conventions:		
Hudsonville	246.18	
Southeast	5,000.00	9,720.77
Balance as of April 30, 1998		\$57,868.78

Through Strife to Victory

Chapter 12

The Split of 1924

by Rev. C. Hanko

What had been feared for some time had finally happened in the first week of December. The minister of the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church had been suspended from office and his consistory deposed. His deposition would soon follow. The classis had run rough shod over proper Church Order and assumed an authority which they did not have. For good reason a Classis could declare a pastor and his consistory outside of the denomination, but that was the extent of their power.

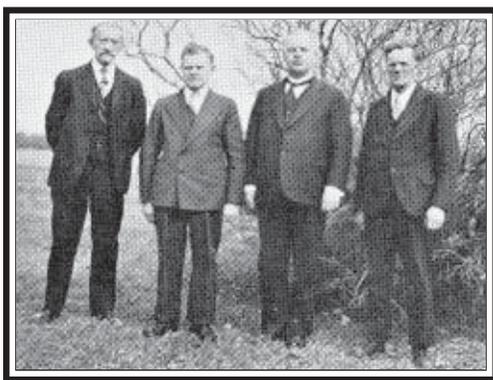
On the Sunday evening previous to this, Rev. Batema of the Beverly Christian Reformed Church preached for Eastern Ave. church and already suggested that our pastor would be suspended and deposed. At the same time, he very emphatically confirmed that our pastor defended the truth of the Scripture and the Confessions and stated

that it was our duty, come what may, to stand with our pastor for the sake of the truth. When this time came, Rev. Batema did not.

A few weeks later another Christian Reformed minister preached for us, even though the suspension had already taken place and we were virtually outside of the Christian Reformed Church. Shortly after this he apologized to the classis for having preached for us.

In this connection it may be well to add that there were more such ministers who encouraged the Revs. Danhof and Hoeksema to stand for the truth and not to succumb to the opposition, but that all of these, with the exception of Rev. George Martin Ophoff of the Hope Christian Reformed Church of Walker, Michigan, remained in their church and thus by implication approved of the action taken against the two ministers.

When it became evident to all that Rev. Ophoff agreed with the two ministers in their denial of common grace, he was soon invited by a few leaders of the Christian Reformed Church to meet with them. He consented, and they did their utmost to persuade him to give up the position he had taken. In fact, he related to us that he had been offered a rather large congregation in Grand Rapids if he would give up his stand. Ironic as it may seem, the minister who preached for us after we were virtually out of the denomination and then later apologized for it, received a call from that church and accepted it. It may be added that during this meeting of Rev. Ophoff with certain of the CRC leaders, Rev. Ophoff's elder was pacing the street, waiting for his pastor to come out of that meeting. As the hours slipped by, he became more



The deposed consistory of Hope CRC (left to right): G. DeJong, R. Newhouse, Rev. G.M. Ophoff, I. Korhorn.

and more concerned. When finally his pastor did appear, the elders first question to him was: "Did you give in?" to which he received the response: "Of course not!" Let it be added that Rev. Ophoff remained a staunch defender of the truth along with Rev. Hoeksema throughout his entire life, even until he died.

One more incident comes to mind. On the evening of December 8, ten young people appeared before the consistory to make confession of their faith. I happened to be one of them. It was very evident to all of us young people that the elders were bone weary after the long and bitter struggle they had gone through but the usual questions were asked and we responded. We were also questioned as to our position in regard to common grace and the offer of salvation which were the issues of the day and proof texts were required for our conviction. All ten were accepted, yet a few weeks later, at the time of the public confession three had dropped out. We had made our confession while still in the Christian Reformed Church, we made our public confession when we were virtually out of the church.

The next day, on December 9, Rev. Hoeksema was suspended from office and his consistory deposed. I attended Calvin College early that morning and was informed by one of the students that on that day my minister would be put out. He asked me what I would do. I told him that if my minister was put out, I also was put out. As was the general attitude at this time, he informed me in no uncertain terms that our friendship was ended then and there.

On the Sunday morning following the suspension from office, Rev. Hoeksema met his congregation as usual in the Eastern Avenue church edifice. The usual large gathering was assembled and had eagerly waited for the service to begin, though with mixed feelings. On the one hand, we were sad and of a heavy heart. We were no longer members of the Christian Reformed denomination, and a number of former members had left us and were now meeting separately in the Sherman Street Christian Reformed Church. Families were broken up, friendships were shattered, and even if efforts were made to maintain friendships the differences were too great to overcome. Yes, many wounds were made. On the other hand, the joy experienced, surpassed and drowned out the sorrow. It was a great relief that now the tension was over, as the inevitable break had come to pass. The truth of God's sovereign grace had triumphed, at least as far as we were concerned, and would triumph in the future. We had a goal to work for, we had

to hold that which we had, that no man should take our crown.

Our pastor took as his text John 6:67: "Then said Jesus unto the twelve, will ye also go away?" He emphasized that each of us must take a personal stand according to the deepest conviction of our hearts. We must let nothing interfere with that. The following account of the sermon appeared in the *Grand Rapids Press* on December 12:

If the situation is such that you would rather have the earthly kingdom than the truth, feel free to go. God is not dependent on numerical strength. The church of God is not counted by numbers nor weighed by the pound. Take this question home with you. Some have already gone, will ye also go?

Preserve the peace, first of all. Do nothing for which you could not give account before God. And I beg of you take no step in this matter, whatever happens, before taking counsel with your consistory. For the rest, commit all to God. Though from a natural point of view this is painful, yet we have rejoiced and do rejoice.

To this was added, in the newspaper, that considerable feeling was evident in the Sunday audiences. That became evident especially when the rafters virtually rang as the congregation joined in giving expression to their innermost conviction:

Thou art, O God, our boast, the glory of our power;
Thy sovereign grace is e'er our fortress and our tower
We lift our heads aloft, for God our shield, is o'er us;
Through Him, through Him alone, whose power goes
before us.

We'll wear the victor's crown, no more by foes assaulted,

We'll triumph through our King, by Israel's God exalted.

After the service many of the members of the congregation crowded to the front of the auditorium to assure their pastor with a firm handshake of their support.

It was an experience never to be forgotten. ❖

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.

A Church In Bradwell-On-Sea

by J. P. de Klerk

The first and oldest Cathedral of England stands still in *Bradwell-on-Sea*, on the edge of the marshes, well away from the village, 18 miles East of the city of Chelmsford in the province of Essex. It may look like an old barn now, but when it was built in AD 654, it was all the Christian congregation could afford. This was their Cathedral, and they had even a bishop with the name *Cedd*.

It is obvious that there have been buildings on both sides, which have later been destroyed during many wars that have been fought in East-England against invaders, coming in from the sea. Bishop Cedd came from Lindisfarne, at the invitation of King Sigbert of the Saxons, to bring Christianity to the pagans of Essex (he was born in Germany). He found the ruins of a Roman fort and used the stones to build this Church. He founded also a little monastery. In the following years the people formed a community in wooden huts around the primitive Cathedral, as Cedd called it. After his departure it continued to function for another two centuries, until the Essex coast came under constant attack from *Viking* raiders (from Norway and Denmark). Many people were killed or had to flee. The Church was severely damaged, used as a smugglers' hideaway, and later local farmers knocked a piece of the wall in and started to use it as a barn. Still England's oldest Cathedral survived, was restored and inside is now a Protestant Chapel. Every Lord's Day the people come from far and wide (it is only accessible across the fields) and so the services are well attended. Also it attracts many hundreds of visitors each year. The official name of the building is: Peter-on-the-Wall.



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

Church News

BAPTISMS

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

Mark 16:16

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

Erik John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jens Praestgaard—Bethel, IL

Mitchell Scott, son of Mr. & Mrs. David Miedema—Byron Center, MI

Phillip John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brent Dommissie—Byron Center, MI

Rachel Lanae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bruce Korver—Hull, IA

Lindsey Jean, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Steve Kooima—Hull, IA

Matthew Jacob, son of Mr. & Mrs. Rodney Kleyn—Southwest, MI

Emily Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dan Schipper—Southwest, MI

Carter Lee, son of Mr. & Mrs. Randy Dykstra—Southwest, MI

Noah James, son of Mr. & Mrs. John Kamps—Southwest, MI

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:

Stacy Elzinga—Byron Center, MI

Amy Bylsma—Faith, MI

Tricia Flikkema—Faith, MI

Clint Karsemeyer—Faith, MI

Eric Petroelje—Faith, MI

Delia Vander Schaaf—Faith, MI

Jennifer VanTil—Faith, MI

David Decker—Georgetown, MI

Jeremy Schipper—Georgetown, MI

Dave Vander Waal—Georgetown, MI

Bill VanOverloop—Georgetown, MI

Danielle Kaptein—Grace, MI

Brad Langerak—Grace, MI

Jeffery Kotman—Holland, MI

Corey Terpstra—Holland, MI

Eric Lubbers—Hudsonville, MI

Jessica Lubbers—Hudsonville, MI

Tom VerStrate—Hudsonville, MI

Kim Tolsma—Loveland, CO

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

The House

Once upon a time there lived a little boy and a little girl in a great big house. The house was so large that the boy and girl could wander from room to room all morning long, and still have places to explore after dinner. The rooms were furnished with the finest of furniture, and the walls were dressed with the richest of velvets and tapestries. Cupboards, shelves, and sideboards held every kind of pleasant object they could imagine. What a delight to live in such a wonderful house!

But one day the little boy and little girl discovered something more. They had explored all afternoon and so, deciding to rest awhile. They sat quietly in one of the rooms and just looked around. Slowly they began to notice things they had never seen before.

"Look, look on that shelf over there!" said the boy.

"Yes—oh yes. But see these wooden panels over here?" said the girl. She walked over to them and gently touched the beautiful carving that framed one of the panels. Then she gasped as the panel swung open.

"A secret door!" said the boy. They looked at each other in wonder. The boy touched another panel, and that one swung open too. "We're surrounded by secret passageways!"

Together they went through one of the doors. The passageway was lined with silver tiles, and around the corner it led to a great hall of gleaming crystal and gold. The children were struck with awe! They ran back to the room they had come from and tried another door. This passageway contained sculptured marble and led to a beautiful garden of blooming flowers, trees, and fountains. The children were amazed!

But what was that behind the trees? A beautiful gate of polished stone and brass. And to what other wonders could this gate possibly lead? The little boy and little girl could not imagine.

But they were not afraid to find out. They knew the way was good and right, for the house was theirs to enjoy and explore, and the depths were theirs to discover.

The End



Would you like to live in a house like that? You do! But it is a spiritual house--of God and in Christ. In fact, this story is a poor illustration of the spiritual glory and riches that are ours to discover and behold as we study and hear the preaching of God's Word. ❖

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

Find the following underlined words in the puzzle below:

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out!" Romans 11:33

S N A M O R T D E S H P
M F I N D I N G K G O R
U L E W I S D O M S W E
S T N E M E G D U J Y D
W A H K L H J B G T E S
S Y A W Y C I O W P T A
T L O F R I N T T S O C
U N S E A R C H A B L E
K R A S T B O P D I H T

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