
Beacon Lights

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Faithful Shepherds of the Flock

by John Huizenga



Christ, by means of His church, sent a shepherd to a flock of sheep with the command “feed my sheep.” Each Lord’s day the shepherd faithfully led the sheep to the green pastures to feed. The shepherd had been carefully trained to discern grass that would nourish God’s sheep from the grass and weeds that would make them sick and die. He had been warned not to give in to the natural appetite of sheep for the sweet weeds and grass that were laden with poison.

As the shepherd observed the sheep each day, he began to notice some strange behavior. Having led the sheep into a lush green pasture, some sheep would simply lie down in the grass and doze all the day long while the others ate hungrily. The sheep were very friendly, and complimented the shepherd each day on the fine pastures. When asked why they did not eat, the sheep replied “nothing is wrong, we get what we want, everything is just fine.”

In the evening, the sheep that did not eat, wandered off into the shadows and began devouring the sweet grass that grew in the shade and the poisonous weeds that crept up through the rocks. Alarmed, the shepherd warned the wayward sheep of the danger and admonished them to eat the grass in the pastures. When they complained that the grass was too old and tough, the shepherd was careful to bring them to tender grass where the younger sheep fed. Each day and night, the shepherd prayed to the Great Shepherd who alone filled His sheep with desire for the good pastures.

One or two of these sheep were restored to a healthy appetite, but the rest began to distance themselves from the shepherd. They tried to hide in the tall grass, they lay out near the edge of the flock, and some left the pastures at noon to go their own way. Again the shepherd brought sharp rebukes, “do not sleep in the grass that you must eat in order to live! You will die if you continue in your ways!” The rest of the flock huddled more closely together with these sharp words and ate the more hungrily, but the sleepy sheep only snorted in disgust.

As the sheep got up to wander off into the shadows, the shepherd blocked them with his staff. Again he asked, “Why do you refuse to eat the good grass of the pastures? You eat that which the goats desire. Your behavior is that of the goats.” With that, their eyes narrowed and their whole appearance did become much more goat-like as they spat out the words, “Who are you to decide what we must eat? The grass to which you lead us is tough and tasteless. When we eat it, it makes us sleepy. You are to blame. We have belonged to the flock all our lives, nothing we have eaten has ever harmed us; leave us alone.”

Such words cut to the heart and soul of the shepherd. These members of the flock would certainly die unless all available means were applied to their salvation. He explained carefully that the Great Shepherd alone determines what brings life and death for the sheep. He showed from God’s Word that the Great Shepherd gives to certain men the ability and the authority to lead His sheep to green pastures. “On the basis of God’s Word alone,” declared the shepherd, “I admonish you to go to the pastures and eat, or you will die.”

Some of these continued on their way. They joined other flocks nearby whose shepherd did not bother over the weeds and sweet grass. These shepherds led sheep to the weed-filled pastures where God's sheep were thin and the sheep-like goats were satisfied and content. They told the sheep about the Great Shepherd, but let them decide which grass to eat. Others left the sheepfolds altogether and joined the goats to gorge themselves with every green thing under the sun.

Those that remained with the flock began to challenge the authority and ability of the shepherd to lead them into green pastures. "You are a sheep just like us," they charged with a goat-like voice. "You are not perfect. The pastures to which you lead us are often tainted with weeds. We will pick and choose what we want to eat, just don't tell us we need to eat it all. After all, the Good Shepherd did send His Spirit to give us an appetite for what is good. Sometimes what is good for one sheep is not good for another."

This philosophy grew in popularity within the flock. Many who lived with guilt for their daily snack of weeds now relaxed in the false notion that the prohibition of the shepherd was merely his own interpretation. Those who swallowed hard the strong doctrinal grasses were relieved to pass it by if they chose. But soon many became weak and sickly. Only after sincere repentance, prayer, and instruction from the shepherd did these become strong again.

The strong healthy sheep did not blindly follow their shepherd, they knew that his voice was the voice of the Great Shepherd Himself. They understood the truth of God's Word that the shepherd is given the ability and the authority to speak the words of Christ. They understood that this was the way in which the Great Shepherd determined to feed His sheep while absent from us in His human nature. The shepherd was not telling them *about* the Great Shepherd and giving his advice about which pastures the Great Shepherd would want them to feed upon. When the shepherd spoke, they heard Christ speak. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27)

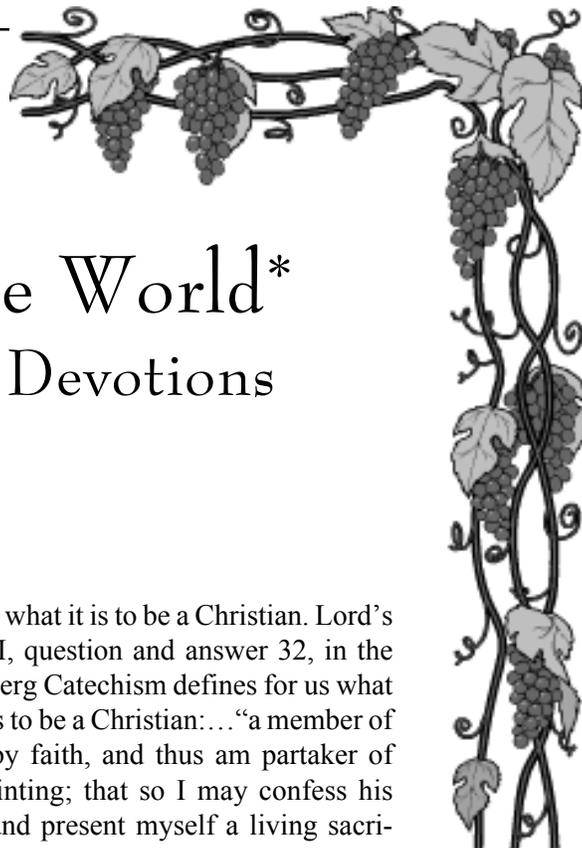
It is true, Christ himself spoke the words of the above quoted text, but it must also be applied to the ministers today. If Christ ceases to lead His sheep and call them to green pastures today, the sheep would be scattered. Romans 10:14,15 makes clear that the shepherd is used today to speak the actual words of Christ. The Authorized Version of the Bible we use reads "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard." But there is no Greek word in the original for the preposition "of" that is found in the AV. The original reads "How shall they believe in him whom they have not heard?" The idea is, we can not believe unless we hear the voice of Christ. It is not enough just to hear about Christ. We will not believe unless Christ speaks to us and we are given ears to hear it.

It is also true that Christ sends His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, into the hearts of His sheep to guide them. This does not mean, however, that each sheep is its own shepherd. Neither are the sheep led by an inner voice that speaks to their heart. Christ sends the Holy Spirit so that the sheep can distinguish the real voice of the shepherd, not find their own grass.

If we do not believe that Christ speaks to us through the preacher, then we are without a shepherd and lost. We will not feel any urgency to listen attentively to the preaching. We will feel free to pick and choose what we want to hear. We will soon grow sick spiritually and die. If we do not hear the voice of Christ in our pastor, we will wander to our own destruction.

A faithful shepherd is responsible for the welfare of the sheep. Those wandering must be brought back with every available means. The preaching must be used to draw the sheep back. Ceaseless admonitions and visits from the elders must be used to draw them back. If nothing works, they may not be left to wander among the flock and die there, but must be cast out from the flock with the hope that God will use this means to open deaf ears and blind eyes.

Let us pray for our pastors that they may be diligent and faithful shepherds. Let us give thanks to God for giving us faithful shepherds. ❖



In the World, Not of the World*

Christian Education Beyond Devotions and Bible Class

by Dan Van Uffelen

**This article was written for the 1998 Protestant Reformed Scholarship essay.*

There was something about the school setting that immediately called out to me, loud and clear. I'm not exactly sure what it was that ignited my interest; kindergarten is always a staggering, monumental event for a child. It could have been anything from those wonderful monkey bars on the playground to the mesmerizing teaching style of my teacher, Mrs. Huisken. I do not know what was tugging at me, but something about the classroom fascinated me from the start, causing me to argue endlessly with my sister over who would teach kindergarten when we grew older.

Although I was not always brave enough to admit it, I had a fantastic time at school. Naturally, I put two and two together and decided that becoming a teacher would guarantee a lifetime of fun for me. However, as the years fell like dominoes behind me, I realized how naive I had been. Discovering how truly significant the job of a teacher really is, I learned that teaching isn't all fun and games. Something far more meaningful is at stake. I came to understand that teachers must behave as role models, and more importantly, Christian role models. Teachers must always bear this in mind at school, not only during devotions and Bible class, but just as importantly while teaching the subjects that are not as obviously Christ-centered. This must also carry through outside the classroom and away from school. Teachers, and all Christians for that matter, must remember that they are in the world, not of the world.

What does it mean to be a Christian teacher? I've often asked myself this complex question. After sweating over it for quite some time, I have concluded that there are three important steps used by God to mold a Christian teacher. First of all, one must know, believe,

and live what it is to be a Christian. Lord's Day XII, question and answer 32, in the Heidelberg Catechism defines for us what it means to be a Christian: . . . "a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of his anointing; that so I may confess his name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to him: and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life; and afterwards reign with him eternally, over all creatures." Secondly, one must know, or be willing to learn, how to teach. Finally, one must be able to blend the first two steps together and, by the grace of God, be able to teach in a Christian way. A gifted Christian teacher must be able to give Christian instruction to his or her students in every area of life; not just while reading a passage from the Bible in the morning, not just while leading the class in prayer, not just by pounding theology into the students' heads, but also while teaching the subjects of the world. One must never separate the honorable label of Christian from the occupation of teacher. Christianity applies to every aspect of our busy and complicated lives.

Christian education is much more than devotions and Bible class. Christian education blankets an area thousands of miles larger than our tiny Protestant Reformed plot of land. What I mean by this is that Christian education must cover the same realm as public education. Both elementary and high school students must be knowledgeable about the world we live in—the world that God has given us. This is why Christian teachers must remember that we live *in the world*. We must not isolate ourselves from society and pretend that Covenant Christian High and our PR grade schools are invincible fortresses from the sinful world in which we live. We

must not be religious separatists, keeping ourselves from the world like hermits in some desolate, uncharted wilderness. We must be able to get around in today's world, both physically and mentally.

As teachers and students we have to explore the same topics as the public school across the street, but in the light of God's Word. In biology class, teachers *should* speak on Darwin and his theory of evolution. In English, teachers *should* discuss Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and their differing transcendental views of nature. In world history, teachers *should* emphasize the Nazis and the Holocaust that destroyed more than six million Jews. In geography, teachers *should* describe the different cultures of Asia and their differing religions: Buddhism, Shintoism, Hinduism, and so on. It is good for our students to go on field trips, to skip over to John Ball Zoo or to Cedar Point. Christians have to know about the world they live in. It is the profoundly important task of parents and teachers to prepare children for the shock of getting out into "the real world." Students need to understand the ways of the world in order to deal with the world in later life. If our Christian education fails to cover the subjects of the world, the unprepared children of the church could be easily snatched from the church by the blood-smeared talons of this wicked world. This is why God uses teachers to prepare children for this battle of the antithesis. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Matthew 10:16

Christian teachers must remember that we live *in the world*, but at the same time, it is even more important that they remember we are *not of the world*. Both students and teachers must remember that they are God's special, chosen people. I Peter 2:9 reads: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." As Christians, wherever we go, we must be witnessing to the world who we are and Whom we stand for. Even though we live in the world, we must behave differently. We should *want* to behave differently. We should want to give gratitude to God for saving us from this terrible world of iniquity.

In biology class, teachers must make it perfectly clear that Darwin's evolution theory is an opinion of unbelief and a slap in the face of Christianity. With the help of God, teachers must pass out spiritual ammunition against evolution. In English class it should be pointed out that Emerson and Thoreau ventured from the Word of God

and created their own Bible, calling it "nature." In world history, the great stories of faith in the midst of the Holocaust and World War II should be told. God's providence and the preservation of His saints throughout history should be described. In geography, the heathen religions of Asia and the rest of the world should be shot down in the light of God's Word. On class trips, Christian students should be learning to witness to the rest of the world. In all of our Christian education, this world should be explored with God as our navigator.

We are strangers in a strange land, merely passing through this world until that glorious day when God leads us to our home with Him. We must always be ready to deal with the world, to learn the things of this world with the Scriptures as our guide, and to witness to the world that we are *in the world, not of the world*. Christian teachers must remember this too. They must deal with a variety of different studies, but always keep in mind that God is the foundation of everything. We can be comforted by the words of Solomon in Proverbs 22:6 as we apply this: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." ❖

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

Short Story Contest

The *Beacon Lights* is having a short story writing contest. The entries must be between 800 and 1500 words, portray a distinctively Reformed perspective, and be suitable for a teen audience. The entries will be judged in two categories: post-high and high-school and younger. Three prizes will be awarded for each category: \$100, \$50, \$25. Send your entry including a self addressed stamped envelope to the editorial office listed inside the front cover. Entries postmarked after July 31, 1999 will not be considered for a prize.

In the Twister's Path

by John Huizenga

Muddy grime dripped from the dog's tongue as he dug furiously into the damp soil. After a deep long sniff in the gopher hole, he continued with renewed strength. Only his wagging tail stuck out of the hole he had dug. Damp earth lay strewn out behind him. When he stopped to rest, Bob petted him and urged him on with encouraging words.

Bob and his dog, Prince, had been hunting gophers much of the afternoon. The hot sun beat down on them as they sat in the middle of the hay field peering into the dark hole. Bob knew it was getting close to chores time, but he didn't feel like going home. Papa might be upset, but they were too close to success to stop now. He would just tell Papa that Prince ran into the marsh and wouldn't come home right away.

Bob was so busy, he didn't notice how still it had become. He never noticed that the killdeer which had been sending out her shrill "killdeer ... killdeer ... killdeer," hoping to distract them from her nest, had stopped. Not a single breeze could be felt. An eerie yellowish light was giving the field a brighter green color.

Suddenly Prince stopped breathing. He looked in the direction of the farm with ears perked, and whined. "What's wrong, Prince?" Bob whispered. Then he noticed the eerie light and the stillness, and a chill went up his spine. Prince stood up, looked back down the hole, and then back west toward the farm. A long rolling hill blocked his view to the farm. Again Prince's ears perked up and he began to run in spurts up the hill. Bob could now see billowing white clouds towering above the hill, and then he heard faintly his name being called.

Without hesitating, they ran up the hill. Before reaching the top, Bob could see the blond hair of his sister as she came up the other side. Prince had already reached her and barked a happy but tired greeting. Sarah was breathing heavily as Bob ran up to her. "You've got to get home," she cried, "Papa has already started chores and a bad storm is coming."

The sunlight went strangely dim as the clouds surged upwards and blocked its light as they raced home across

the field. Bob could see the flickers of lighting and hear the low rumbling of thunder. The buildings of the farm stood out sharply against the black background of the approaching storm. A gray band of low gray clouds hung beneath the billowing thunderheads. It reminded Bob of the upper lip of a giant fish. Beneath it wisps of white cloud scurried upward in a swirl.

A few giant drops of rain plopped into the dust and a sharp gust of wind picked up the cornhusks scattered around the corncrib. The treetops began to moan in the wind. With legs burning and lungs gasping for breath, Bob struggled onto the farmyard, Prince at his heels. The cat and a few chickens joined the excitement as they ran toward the barn. They heard a steady thunderous sound. Bob looked up. The sky had become black and then greenish.

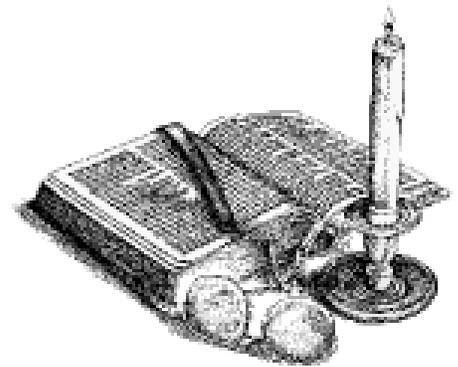
Papa appeared in the doorway of the barn. He looked angry. "Bob, where have you been?" Before Bob could answer, papa's face turned pale. "Hurry," he shouted. "Tornado!" The thundering rumble grew steadily louder. Mother came to his side with a pail in her hand just as the children reached the barn door. Papa rushed his family into the feed room where the thick cement walls would protect them.

When the earsplitting roar faded into the distance, Papa led his family outside again. Everything was dripping wet and quiet. Bob looked across the field where he and Sarah had just run and a hard lump came into his throat. It looked as if a giant brush had scrubbed the ground leaving a brown muddy stripe across the green field. Pieces of junk and debris were strewn across the field. Bob knew this destruction was a revelation of God's wrath against sin. "God is very angry even with my deceitful thoughts," Bob whispered. He had been disobedient, but God had delivered him from this path of destruction. How great is the love of God to deliver us from the eternal destruction we deserve. ❖

John is a member of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph Wisconsin and is Editor of the Beacon Lights.

A Tumbling Loaf of Barley Bread

by Rev. Richard J. Smit



If you were at the bottom of a big hill, would you be afraid of a little loaf of barley bread tumbling down the hillside towards you? Perhaps you would not be. However, in the passage we look at this time there was a tumbling loaf of barley bread which struck fear in the hearts of two men. We might in amazement ask, “who would ever be afraid of a loaf of bread?” To us it might seem almost ridiculous. Nevertheless, it was an important part of the next step in Gideon’s march to the battlefield as the valiant servant of Jehovah (Judges 7:9-14).

Remember that Gideon’s army had just been sifted from a small army to virtually no army. Only 300 men stood around him on the eve of the battle. That was a difficult situation.

How would we have stood there spiritually while facing an innumerable multitude of enemies with only 300 men? Before the impossible situation, our knees would knock. We would break out in a cold sweat. Our hearts would faint. We would have gone home.

Though Gideon may have had thoughts of turning back, the LORD from heaven commanded Gideon, “Arise, get thee down unto the host!” (Judges 7:9a). Gideon must march to the battlefield and fight. The battle must be fought through faith worked by God’s sovereign grace.

There was no turning back.

Gideon not only may not turn back, but he also could not turn back. The LORD added to His command the reason why Gideon could only go to the battlefield. The LORD stated the reason when He said, “for I have delivered it into thine hand” (Judges 7:9b). The deliverance of Gideon and Israel was certain.

However, the faith of the child of God is not always so persuaded of those certain promises of God. Often we stand before mighty spiritual enemies in weakness.

In the face of the enemies, the LORD speaks to us His promises: for example, that “they that put their trust in the LORD shall be as Mount Zion which cannot be removed, but abideth forever” (Psalm 125:1). Yet, is it not true that our faith is weak and not persuaded of the certain and unchanging truth of those promises? We doubt and fear. We waver and hesitate. We become faint-hearted and despair. If left to ourselves, we would certainly be drowned by an engulfing tide of disquietness in our souls.

This was Gideon’s condition on the eve of the big battle. He was spiritually very nervous. He faced a battle whose outcome seemingly would be won by the Midianites. Yet, the LORD said that He would deliver the Midianites into Gideon’s hand. Would Gideon walk by faith in that sure promise or would he live by what he saw with his eyes on the battlefield. Would he believe the promises or trust his eyes which counted an innumerable multitude of Midianites against just 301 Israelites?

Gideon’s faith was put to a severe test.

Only by the grace of God did Gideon not stumble and fall in unbelief. We see in this trial of Gideon’s faith that the LORD is mindful of His people’s weakness and frailty. That was true with Gideon. This is true of us, is it not? We sing of that in *Psalter 281*: “Mindful of our human frailty, is the God in whom we trust...”

The LORD in mercy knew the weakness of Gideon’s faith, and He in mercy led Gideon to a sure faith. The

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LORD did that because not in a wavering faith, but in a sure faith must Gideon go to the battlefield. To that end, the LORD commanded Gideon to go down to the host. In fact, when the LORD commanded Gideon, the LORD was already preparing what Gideon would need to bolster his faith.

Surely, Gideon needed the strengthening of his faith. He needed assurance. He needed to be persuaded with a sure conviction of the outcome of the battle. Do we not often need such strengthening? We need that encouragement daily. For Gideon, the LORD in mercy provided exactly that which by His Spirit would work in Gideon's heart a sure spiritual confidence and trust in the LORD.

We read in the passage that the LORD said to Gideon, "But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: and thou shalt hear what they say: and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host." (Judges 7:10-11a)

Then we read that Gideon did go down to the host that night. By doing so, Gideon had humbled himself to confess his own need for strengthening. He desired that the LORD would help his unbelief, and he earnestly sought the assurance that the LORD had provided.

We learn in this passage that the LORD provided this assurance in a very unique way. Out of the mouth of His own enemies, the LORD would strengthen the heart of His servant, Gideon.

In the dark night, Gideon and his servant, Phurah, move quietly and carefully from bush to bush, behind this tree and the next tree, down the hillside together toward the outer part of the camp of the Midianites. Very cautiously, they crawled closer and closer until they were right next to a tent with two Midianite soldiers inside.

There at the first tent which they found, Gideon heard the soldiers inside talking together. Gideon overheard the one soldier tell a dream. Apparently, the soldier had awakened suddenly after a bad dream. Then when Gideon had come near the tent, the soldier was rehearsing his dream in the ears of his buddy. The timing of Gideon's approach to the tent and the telling of the dream was no accident. The LORD sovereignly governed all those things perfectly. The LORD did this in sovereign mercy for Gideon's sake.

What was the dream that the Midianite soldier had? We are told in Scripture: "Lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of the Midianite, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along."

A loaf of barley bread squashing a tent? What could that mean?

The buddy of the Midianite soldier knew exactly what it meant. He gave the interpretation right then and there. He said, "this is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host."

That's what it meant. The loaf of barley bread represented Gideon. Barley bread was the poor man's bread. That pictured the fact that Israel and Gideon were poor, despised, and oppressed. Gideon himself was not mighty and noble, but weak and despised. In addition to the meaning of the bread, the tent referred to not just any tent, but the central tent in the heart of the host. The tent in the dream was the captain's tent. The loaf of barley bread had violently destroyed the tent of the Midianites' captain. This meant undoubtedly that the lowly Gideon, as one man against a thousand, would rout the Midianites by a violent and sudden destruction.

This dream and the interpretation were exactly what Gideon needed. Having heard the dream and the interpretation, Gideon on the spot near the tent worshiped the LORD in humble thanksgiving. Then he got up and in quiet confidence returned to his little band.

How did the dream do that? What was so significant about the dream and its interpretation that made Gideon so sure and confident of victory? First, the dream and the interpretation showed Gideon that the terror of the LORD and his servant, Gideon, had gripped the hearts of all the Midianites. It was common knowledge. The men in the tent talked as though everyone knew about Gideon. It was evident that the Midianites were not ignorant of Gideon's approach to make war. They had heard the news that the trumpet blast had been sounded in Israel to gather an army against the Midianites. As they awaited the impending attack of Gideon and his army, the thought of Gideon loomed larger and larger in their minds. Of course, that terror was not because of Gideon himself. That growing terror in the hearts of the Midianites was the work of the Spirit of the LORD. He sovereignly worked terror in their hearts unto their destruction.

The news that the Midianites were terrified of Gideon was great encouragement to Gideon. In war strategy, often that is what generals try to do. They try to strike terror in the hearts of the enemy. When the enemy loses the battle in its collective heart against its own fears, they are also sure to lose against the real enemy in the real battle. Likewise, in this battle against the Midianites,

the LORD as the Captain of that little band of 300 men struck terror in the hearts of the Midianites. Their terror was a terror of Jehovah, Who stood on Gideon's and Israel's side for Christ's sake. Before Him, the proud wicked know they cannot stand.

As a result, Gideon was also convinced of the truth that Jehovah was with him. It was obvious to him that he himself could not strike terror in the hearts of his enemies. Only Jehovah could take an unknown Gideon, and make him a terror to the enemy. Thus, through the

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mouth of the Midianites, Gideon was convinced Jehovah was on his side. In that knowledge, Gideon returned to his host with confidence. By faith he saw not 301 Israelites against innumerable Midianites, but by faith he saw Jehovah in His glory against the heathen horde. Indeed, from that viewpoint of faith, Gideon went to battle in victory in peaceful assurance of Who the Victorious One always is.

Secondly, the dream and the interpretation also convinced Gideon in his soul of the promise of God in another way. More positively, what the Midianite said was very important to Gideon. The Midianite repeated exactly what Jehovah had said to Gideon: "Into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host." Notice, that he said, "*delivered*." The Midianite as Jehovah spoke as though the battle was over and finished. The Midianites in their own minds were defeated long before even one sword was unsheathed.

By that, Gideon was assured that he would receive the victory in the battle. The victory was not up for grabs to the strongest army. The victory was decided already. Jehovah had decided that already in His counsel, and according to His promises to be fulfilled in the coming Messiah. By faith in the sure promises of Jehovah, Gideon must go to bring the defeat of the Midianites.

Gideon learned also that he would not go to the battlefield to establish the victory. The victory was already established. What a great comfort that was to him! The battle was won. In the comfort of that sure promise, Gideon could make his preparations for battle knowing that God by His grace alone had established the out-

come. The salvation of God's people did not depend upon him at all. Jehovah would use that tumbling loaf of barley bread to squash His enemies to destruction to show that He is God Alone Who saves and defends His people.

In that sure knowledge, Gideon returned and commanded his little band of faithful men go forward to the battlefield. He said, "arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian."

Now Gideon was fully ready to fight the good fight of faith. In the full persuasion of his faith and trust in God, he went forward to fight the foe.

Are we ready to face and to fight the enemies in that same conviction? Do we have the same sure and unswerving trust in the promises of His Word?

The LORD teaches us that the enemy is also delivered into our hands. We might wonder how can that be true when the battles have not been fought yet. However, the LORD reminds us that in the atoning blood poured out on Calvary and in the glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have the victory over all our enemies. That means that when God speaks His promises unto us, He does so on the basis of the perfect and complete work and person of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him, the promises of God are fulfilled and sure.

Being persuaded of that by the grace of God, we may go forward to fight the battle in a faith that calmly rests in that truth. That truth also teaches us that when we fight, we fight *not for*, but *in* the victory of the Captain of our salvation once and certainly accomplished

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by Him for us. That victory He works in and through us by His Spirit of sovereign grace whereby we are faithfully and irresistibly called unto fighting the good fight of faith. In that victory of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall tread our enemies under foot, even our very own sin and unbelief.

Are you attacked by temptations of your sinful nature or of the world? Do you struggle against sin and the choking worldliness around us? Do you battle with the mighty enemies of guilt, doubt, despair, or grief?

God commands us not to turn back from the battlefield. Rather, He calls us unto the battle that the glory of His Banner might be displayed.

So, the LORD commands us: “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 Timothy 6:12). ❖

Rev. Smit is pastor of Doon Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa.

Where We Stand

The Gift of Discipleship (1)

by Prof. Herman Hanko and Rev. Ron Hanko

The following article was originally written for the “Newsletter” which is being published by the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland.

“**T**hen said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me,” Matthew 16:24.

A reader, calling attention to this powerful verse in Matthew, asked: “Our discipleship: is it ‘conditional’ or ‘unconditional’? ‘offered’ or ‘demanded’? a matter of ‘decision’ or ‘election’?”

I remember that, as a young man, I heard a sermon on this passage by Rev. Herman Hoeksema. He began his sermon with these startling words: “Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ. We have in this passage a three-fold prescription for going to hell.”

He meant by those introductory words to impress upon us that the requirements of discipleship were so contrary to anything we want in life that none of us would ever agree to be a disciple of Jesus. To deny ourselves? Whoever in all the world wants to do that? To take up a cross? Every man who seeks followers makes lavish promises of what benefits will be the possession of those who follow him. But here is someone who says: “If you want to follow me, you will have to carry a cross!” Who would ever do that? Follow Christ? But the path He walked led to shame, rejection, crucifixion, and death. Can any of us really say that we would deliberately choose that path that Christ walked?

I mention these things deliberately because, in a way, the very impossibility of it all points also to the answer to the question.

The question, if I understand it correctly, means to ask whether we are offered the chance to become a disciple; whether discipleship is, therefore a matter of our decision; and whether discipleship is, as a result, conditional upon what we do. I.e., we decide we would like to accept Jesus’ offer and so become a disciple of Jesus, so that our discipleship is conditioned upon our actions.

Or is the matter rather that discipleship is a matter of sovereign election; an unconditional work of grace; and a demand of the gospel?

It ought to be apparent to anyone at the outset that, if the decision were ours to make, we would never, never make it. And we would never be or become a disciple of Christ.

Let it be clearly understood that every one who becomes a disciple of Jesus becomes one through a sovereign and irresistible work of grace. Only the elect of God ever become Christ’s disciples, and the work is God’s work in its entirety. He not only makes us disciples of Christ, but by His grace He also preserves us as disciples throughout all our life. If He did not, we would resign as quickly as possible!

This is clearly taught in the whole of Scripture where repeatedly Scripture emphasizes that the whole of salvation is God’s work—and discipleship belongs to salvation!

We have an interesting illustration of this in one of the clearest pictures of discipleship in all Scripture. I

refer to Mark 15:21. There we are told that Simon the Cyrenian carried Jesus' cross behind Christ to Calvary. But he was compelled to carry it, the text says.

But this same truth is clear from the context in which these words of Jesus are found.

First of all, after his amazing confession (given to him by grace), Peter is lifted up in pride. When Jesus begins to describe the suffering that awaits him, Peter attempts to dissuade the Lord. Peter thinks he knows better than the Lord the road the Lord ought to take to His kingdom.

The Lord brushes Peter's foolishness aside with a sharp reprimand in which He informs Peter that Peter's remarks are part of Satan's temptation.

And so, we have this text. The way Christ must walk is not an easy way. It is a way of suffering, and being killed. But, to be a disciple of Christ is to come after Him, and that way for every disciple is equally a way of suffering and death.

In other words, Jesus is not explaining the conditions of discipleship which a man must fulfill to become a disciple. Who in all the world would ever do what Jesus says? But Jesus is correcting a serious impression on the part of Peter and the disciples, that the way of discipleship was a way which would lead to glory, riches and fame in an earthly kingdom.

In the second place, it ought not to escape us that the text itself says, "Then said Jesus unto his disciples...." These men were disciples already, made such by sovereign grace. Now they had to learn an important lesson about what discipleship would cost. Hence these words.

There is more here. But we will save that for our next article. ❖

Prof. Herman Hanko is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary and Rev. Ron Hanko is missionary-pastor of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland.

Correspondence

The Divinity of Christ

by Skip Hunter

Recently I received a letter concerning the correctness of a devotional that I wrote for April 23, 1999. I appreciated the letter because first of all I never wish to incorrectly represent the cause of God and His Son. Secondly, I appreciate it because this helps me to know that I am not writing to a vacuum. I quote the whole devotional in order that you may read what I wrote for that day.

April 23 Read Philippians 2:5-11

Psalm 91:14 In this Psalm there seems to be a change in who is addressed. In the first part of the Psalm it is the child of God. In the second part it is Christ. Christ loved His heavenly Father. He loved Him so much that He obeyed Him and walked on this earth giving Himself on the cross. He gave up all that He had in heaven, emptied Himself of His divinity, and came to suffer on this earth. What was God's response? He set Him at His right hand in heaven. Do we obey our heavenly Father? Do we willingly walk the way He has ordained for us? Do we confess His name among all kinds of people? Let us do this as we dwell in His secret place, and let us live the life of the confidence of faith. Sing Psalter 249:4.

The statement that was questioned was the following. "He gave up all that He had in heaven, emptied Himself of His divinity, and came to suffer on this earth." It was the second part especially that our reader questioned: emptied Himself of His divinity. The reader correctly quotes from Belgic Confession of Faith article 19. "But in the meantime the divine nature always remained united with the human even when He lay in the grave." My statement indicates that Christ put His divinity away. That of course can never be. The meaning that I wished to convey to you was that Christ suppressed His divinity in order to take upon Himself our sins. Christ was truly God while on this earth. Of that there can be no doubt. I apologize for my incorrect statement and ask that this explanation serve the cause of Christ. I also wish to once again thank our reader for writing with his concerns.

In Christ,
Skip Hunter



The Song of Zion

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

by Rev. Heys

Psalter devotionals were not available this month. Sorry for the inconvenience.

July 1

Read Ephesians 2:1-5

We should bear in mind the fact that every husband and wife brings forth a child that by nature is spiritually dead. For God told Adam, that the day he committed his first sin, he would die. And that does not merely mean that he would die physically. He would, and did, die spiritually the moment he committed his first sin. Physical death came much later; but spiritual death came at once! And the awesome fact is that every descendant of a man and woman comes into being spiritually dead. But the comforting truth, in the text quoted above, is that God will make spiritually alive those whom He eternally chose, to be those for whom Christ would die. Here is a very, very comforting truth, presented by God, Who is rich in His mercy, and loves all those whom He chose in Christ.

July 2

Read Genesis 3:15.

Giving us spiritual life, God works enmity in us against Satan and sin. We do not change ourselves spiritually. We are changed by God's grace. And we owe God thanks every minute of our new spiritual lives, for our hatred against Satan and sin, and for our love of God, quickened by His grace. As we read in Ephesians 2:5, God quickened us together with Christ. Satan got all the descendants of fallen Adam and Eve to walk in sin by nature. And the awesome question is whether we find in our lives that walk of love toward God. Are you sure that you were born again? Your walk will reveal whether God began spiritual life in you.

July 3

Read Psalm 139:14.

There are two truths which we must believe and maintain. As we read in Scripture, we are fearfully and wonderfully made. God works upon us as His elect, in a most wonderful way. He performs marvellous works of grace upon us and in us. And it is because of this work of His grace that we have the comforting truth, which moves us to sing: "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below." Do you sing that with your heart, as well as with your mouth? Do you look forward to doing it so fully and constantly, when He brings you into His house on every Sabbath Day? Do you every day thank God for His gift of salvation? Or is your "worship of God" what you do on Sunday only?

July 4

Read I Corinthians 15:57.

In Scripture we read the comforting truth that God, being rich in His mercy and grace, gives His elect the victory, which brings them into heavenly blessedness. By nature we are born as spiritually dead. But our God causes every one of those, whom He chose in Christ, to be born with a spiritual life, and thus with heavenly blessedness. He causes every one of His elect to love Himself, and to find joy in serving Him. That truth we find in Ephesians 2:5. We, by God's grace are quickened together with Christ, revealing His grace upon us. Do you sing a new song to Jehovah, and thank Him for the wonders He promises His elect?

July 5

Read Ephesians 2:6-10

In His grace God raises us up spiritually, already in this life; and He will, when Christ returns, both bring us with body and soul into that coming New Jerusalem. He saves us from all our guilt, but also from all our love of sin. We will be made to sit in heavenly places. And as Paul wrote it—that is, God wrote it through Paul—we will assuredly sit in heavenly places. This will be the gift of God's grace, the gift Christ earned for us. Salvation is one hundred percent a gift of God's grace. We do deserve everlasting punishment. But by His grace God saves us through faith, which is His gift unto us, and in no way is our gift to Him.

July 6

Read John 1:16.

Hold on tightly to the truth that in God's fullness we receive grace for grace. What God does in His grace is what He does in His love and kindness, upon those who by nature deserve everlasting torment in hell! Bear in mind the awesome truth that, after they fell into their first sin, Adam and Eve deserved everlasting torment in hell! One's sin calls for everlasting punishment. The comforting truth, therefore, is that God promised to deal graciously with all His elect. And He sent Christ Jesus, His Son, to blot out the guilt of those whom He eternally chose in Christ. Still more, He sent His Son to earn for us a blessed life, far higher than Adam and Eve had before they fell into sin. It will be an everlasting blessedness.

July 7

Read Psalm 23:1-3

The most precious gift for us is to have God as our Shepherd. That precious possession we lost through Adam and Eve. God told them that, if they would disobey Him, they would die. Look up

Genesis 2:17. That did not merely mean that they would die physically. They died spiritually. And in His grace God told Satan that He would save those whom He had chosen in Christ. Upon that grace of God we depend. As we read in Ephesians 2:8 we are saved by grace. We are not saved by our own works, but by that which God does in His grace. Confess God, therefore, to be your Shepherd; and also therefore all of your salvation to be the gift of God's grace. We, through Satan, earned everlasting torment. By God's grace we have peace which we shall never lose.

July 8

Read Ephesians 2:11-16.

The awesome truth is that by God's grace we are saved. The whole human race was by Satan caused to die spiritually. But by God's grace some of the human race are saved through His Son, Who came into our flesh, without an earthly father, and thus without any guilt, and with no sinful nature, as we all do. Most of mankind are, and can properly be called, anti-Christian, that is "against Christ." For they are without true faith and spiritual hope. And nothing that they hope for will come. Foolishly they may even commit suicide, thinking that they will escape misery. We, however, by God's grace will enter into an everlasting blessed peace. Thank God for this promise.

July 9

Read Romans 8:24-25.

Whether we do from God, receive that precious gift of hope, which God gives to His elect, depends upon God's eternal will. So often we do say "I hope so." And we merely mean that we desire something we do not yet have. But the hope of the child of God, having been born again, is certain expectation. To hope is to wait with the assurance of its coming completely, and most assuredly. We hope for what Christ earned for us, and for what we are absolutely sure He will return with, for our everlasting enjoyment. Do you have that hope for salvation and all its blessedness? By grace we are saved through faith. By grace, are you saved by God's gift of faith to you?

July 10

Read Matthew 27:35-37.

The basic truth, which we should hold on to tightly, is that Christ Jesus, our Saviour, realized salvation for us by His cross. He had no personal sins which called for His crucifixion. The unbelieving Jews accused Him of sin, and wanted Him to be crucified for their carnal joy. But He reconciled us to God by His cross, removing all our guilt, which calls for our everlasting punishment in hell. What a blessed, comforting truth! Christ died on His cross so that we not only need no cross, but will live with Christ in heavenly glory. Does that truth fill you with a blessed confidence and joy?

July 11

Read Ephesians 2:17-22.

The awesome question is not whether we heard a man preach the truth that Christ saves us from sins and punishment. That promise we have. But the awesome question is whether God speaks that truth in our hearts, and causes us to believe that truth, causing us to be born again spiritually, and whether we are thankful for that comforting truth. What is so absolutely necessary is that God causes our hearts—not merely our tongues—to say: "All that I am I owe to Thee, Thy wisdom, Lord, has fashioned me." Yes, sing that comforting truth, presented in Psalter Number 383:1. In His grace God gave us that truth, and the joy that causes us to sing it.

July 12

Read Psalm 139:14.

God's work, through His Son, Jesus Christ, is that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. That fearfulness is being full of awe and thankfulness for the salvation God began in us. Very correctly, every Sunday, God has His elect, who have been born again, sing: "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow." And, when we sing that, it must be the expression of our hearts, and not merely of our tongues and lips. Being fearfully and wonderfully made, we praise God, having Him in our hearts and minds, with a spiritual joy, which He implanted in us.

July 13

Read Acts 11:21-22.

Are you correctly called a Christian? You may be called that by fellow citizens; but the awesome question is whether God calls you that. In Ephesians 2:19 we do find that comforting truth, concerning some men. There we read: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." By His Spirit we are caused to be born again spiritually. And the important fact is whether He has made us to be such. The awesome question is whether God calls us to be citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whether we are those, of whom it is true, that we are those to whom God's blessings flow; whether we truly are Christians.

July 14

Read II Corinthians 6:16.

Our God in this passage calls us to be His holy temple. Now the Old Testament temple was the place where God revealed Himself, and the saints had sweet communion with Him. As we read in Ephesians 2:22 the believers are "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." As those born again, we have sweet communion with God. The awesome question is whether we experience that communion, that is, have sweet communion with God. How often during the day do you have God, not only in your mind, but also in your heart? The question is not merely whether you have God in your mind. Is He in your heart? Are you a child of God, because He caused you to be born again, this time born spiritually? Do you eagerly go to Him in prayer, and thank Him for that which He gave you, and into which He led you? Or do you find fault in what He did for you? Do you go to sleep at night, confident that all is well, and working for your good?

July 15

Read Psalm 23.

A tremendously important fact and truth is presented to us by God through David, namely, that God is our Shepherd, taking care of us, and causing all things to work together for our good. Hold on tightly to that truth presented in the verses you read. Since God is our Shepherd, we have everything that happens as a blessing. We may have things that trouble our flesh. But do you believe that you lack nothing good that He sends upon you? There is much trouble for our flesh in this life. But are you convinced that God is your shepherd, and that He is, in love, taking care of you? Truly we want nothing in our lives, whereby God is not working it for our good. Sing that truth again: "All that I am I owe to Thee. Thy wisdom, Lord, hath fashioned me."

July 16

Read John 10:1-4.

Since God is our shepherd, we, every minute of our earthly lives get an experience which He, in His love and grace, brings upon us. As we read in I Peter 5:4 “When the chief shepherd shall come, and the sheep shall receive a crown of glory, that fadeth not away.” Indeed, when Christ, the chief shepherd, appears, we shall receive that crown of glory, that never fadeth away. And we can be sure that nothing that happens to us in this life can or will prevent us from getting the glory which God promises us. He is the Almighty God; and no one can, and nothing can, keep us from the everlasting glory, which God promises us. He is the ALMIGHTY GOD, and no one, and nothing, can keep us one step from the glory which He promises His elect. He is THE SHEPHERD. He always was and always will be such.

July 17

Read Psalm 46:1.

All of mankind know what physical help we need. It is obvious that, regardless of how much money we have, we are on the way to death, and the loss of all our earthly possessions. We all have troubles, as the Psalmist here declares. But the child of God is here assured that every child of God has refuge and strength. As we noted in Psalm 23, David very correctly states that the Lord is our Shepherd; and therefore we want nothing that is not good, but only what brings us blessings. Get that wonderful truth. We want nothing. Having God as our Saviour all is well, for He has all things under His control, and loves every one of His elect. Do you know God as your shepherd? He is almighty, and constantly faithful in fulfilling all His promises. Read Psalm 130:7-8.

July 18

Read Psalm 116:8.

The awesome question is not whether God has already restored our bodies. Indeed He promises to do so, and will give us that blessing. But the question is whether He is pleased to deliver our souls from spiritual death, which we have at birth, because Adam and Eve were brought by Satan into spiritual death. But it pleases God to save the lives of every one of His elect, and that already in this life. Having our souls saved from spiritual death, we shall be saved with body, as well as soul, when Christ returns. Take hold of that blessed comforting truth presented in Psalm 116:9. There we read: “I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.” We, by God’s grace, will live in the New Jerusalem, when it comes.

July 19

Read Psalm 34:10.

The basic element of our salvation is that God restores our souls in this life. Yes, He will restore our bodies when Christ returns. But we need to have our souls restored in this life. Hold on tightly to that truth in Psalm 23. The Lord is—not will become—our Shepherd, and we His sheep. Do you know any earthly sheep, that decided who his parents would be? Do you however believe that you are God’s sheep? Are you not only aware of, but rejoicing in that blessed truth that you are one of God’s sheep? He brought you into being as one of His sheep. And He also causes every one of these sheep to know, and rejoice in the truth that he is one of God’s sheep. Praise Him then for this blessed gift.

July 20

Read Psalm 130:1-8.

As pointed out before, we hope for everything that God promises His elect and that will be fulfilled. Now to hope is not merely to desire. To hope for what God promises us is to be convinced that He will give it to us. In fact to hope is to expect. By God’s grace we expect what He promises. He is not dependent on our acceptance. We depend upon His work of causing us to desire, with absolute assurance that He will give it to us, causing it to become ours. Do we not read in Psalm 23:1 that, because God is our shepherd, we will not lack what we need? Even though we walk through the valley where the shadow of death falls, as believers we are absolutely sure that every part of God’s promise will be fulfilled. We wait for what God promises us because He is God, the Almighty Father Who loves His elect.

July 21

Read Revelation 21:1-4.

As we are taught, and as we considered a few days ago, we, as those God eternally chose, are confident that we will dwell with God eternally in the New Jerusalem. By God’s grace we are absolutely sure that God will wipe away all the tears of our eyes, and that we shall dwell with God in that coming Kingdom of Heaven. We shall, with body as well as soul, be closer to God than the holy angels, who are now with Him in heaven. God shall wipe away *all* tears from our eyes. He will raise us up above all the angels that have been with Him in heaven since the week He created all things. What a blessing lies ahead for all the elect. What a gift for which we should and will be thankful, praising God’s Name, from Whom all blessings flow.

July 22

Read Romans 8:1-4.

What was not, the day Adam and Eve were created, now is today; and it calls for every child of God to sing His praises, because of its truth and blessedness. Adam and Eve had no guilt, as created, but they were condemned because of their sin. They had a blessed, pleasing life, knowing God and walking in their love toward Him. But Satan came as a subtle enemy, hating God, and wanting Adam and Eve also to hate Him. He did get them to hate God and in it to sin against Him. And the awesome question we should ask is whether we listen to Satan, and walk in hatred against God. Are we living according to our flesh? We should get down on our knees, and pray to God for strength to live in love toward Him. Our calling is to fight against sin; and the lie of Satan, which gets man to believe; and the evil wherein to walk.

July 23

Read Romans 8:5.

What a blessed truth we find here. Minding the things of the Spirit is walking in love of and toward God. Sad to say, however, we still do have sin in our hearts and minds. Satan is controlling us in sinful ways, revealing hatred of God, rather than love of Him. But by God’s grace we, as born again children of God, must examine our hearts and minds, and pray to God for hatred of sin, and for love toward Him. Our calling is to pray to God for spiritual help, and for the guidance of His Spirit into ways of love toward Him. That we must not do simply and merely on Sunday, but every day from the moment that we wake up. Our calling is to pray for God’s Spirit to make us want and seek spiritual purity. Do you do so the minute that you awake in the morning?

July 24

Read Romans 8:6.

Get that blessed truth, and hold on tightly to it. To be spiritually minded is life and peace. Do you want peace with God? No, the question is not merely whether you want God to deal with you peacefully. Do you want your heart to love God and peacefully walk, every day and every moment, loving God and keeping His commandments? Do you simply want salvation in the sense of escape from the punishment which you deserve? The question surely is whether you want to walk in love of God. We were created in order to walk in such love of God. But Satan got all of us to be spiritually dead, in the sense that we did not love God, but hating Him walk and live against Him in all our thinking and willing. Do you want to be spiritually minded, and walk in love toward God every day, and every minute of every day?

July 25

Read Romans 8:14

What an awesome and significant truth our God presents here through the Apostle Paul. Absolutely every bit of our salvation depends upon God, and was designed by God, before we were born. Yes, when salvation begins in us, it is because God began it in us in His grace. We did not think and will any part of salvation until God began that thinking and willing in us. Satan got Adam and Eve, and also all their descendants, to be his sons and daughters. Our thankfulness, for every bit of salvation, is God's work upon all of us, and for all our knowledge of having been chosen unto it by God. Indeed we must be thankful for being given thanks for that salvation. God owes us nothing. We owe Him thanks for every bit of our salvation, and for our desire for it. We are led by the Spirit of God unto all proper thankfulness.

July 26

Read Romans 8:24-25.

That we hope to be saved means that we depend upon God for this desire as well as for the beginning of it. We must hold on tightly to the truth that we owe God thanks, for the desire for salvation as well as the salvation itself. We are not saved because we hope for it. We are thankful for it, because we believe that all that we are, we owe to God. As pointed out before: "All that I am I owe to Thee, Thy wisdom, Lord, hath fashioned me." By nature we do not see that salvation and hope for it. The Spirit makes us groan for salvation. Absolutely every part of our salvation is God's gift to us. Not simply on Sunday, and in church, but every day we should with our hearts sing praise to God, from Whom all our blessings flow. Do you have that thankfulness every day, and say it in your prayers?

July 27

Read Romans 8:28.

Here we have a most wonderful and comforting truth concerning our salvation. When God begins salvation in us He causes us to know that all things work together for good in us. All that happens is not going to please our flesh; and to die is to remove us from all our earthly possessions. But the blessed and comforting truth is that sickness and death work together for our good, in the sense that we are going to be with God in the blessed life of peace and holiness. We will be freed completely from Satan and sin; and we shall have sweet communion with God. Take hold then of that blessed truth in the verse read. All things shall work together, so that we have sweet communion with God in His house of many mansions. A sweeter gift there is not for us.

July 28

Romans 8:29-31.

Here we have a most blessed and comforting truth. All things have worked together for our good. We reach the blessedness which God predestinated us to receive. Find comfort in the truth that all this blessedness is absolutely sure, because the almighty, unchangeable God has promised it, but also begun it. Find comfort also in the truth that, through His Son, God has already realized such blessedness of body and soul. Hold on tightly also to the truth that our God Who promises this blessedness is the almighty, unchangeable God. No one and nothing can stop Him from fulfilling all His promises. And as the I AM, He will not change His mind or will. He will not turn against us, but turn us completely, as our God and Father. He spared not His own Son; and will most assuredly not spare us everlasting blessedness.

July 29

Read Romans 8:32.

A truth which we should maintain, and never brush aside, is that God freely gives us all the elements of our salvation. We must believe that, if we are going to enjoy our salvation. But believing that is only part of our salvation. We do not buy salvation, or get it because of what we do. We buy absolutely nothing from God. He gives us all of salvation, and as we read the other day, we are wonderfully and fearfully made. Faith is one hundred percent a gift of God's grace. As we read in Ephesians 2:8 and 9, faith is the gift of God's grace. It is not something that we give to God. It is that which God begins and gives to His elect. We owe God thanks for working faith in us. As we correctly sing: "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow."

July 30

Read Romans 8:35.

The awesome, blessed truth is that the salvation God has begun in us shall never leave us. Satan is trying very hard, by men and false doctrines, to get us against God, rather than to walk with Him in the love which He gave us. Get that truth, and hold on to it tightly: Neither we, nor Satan and his evil soldiers, can take from us the salvation which God began in us. Just look up Psalm 48:1. There we read: "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, on the mountain of His holiness." Sing then with your heart as well as with your mouth: "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow." Having salvation begun in us, we will look for its coming fullness.

July 31

Read Romans 8:38-39.

What a blessed, comforting truth do we find here! Nothing and no one shall separate us from God and His grace. Bear in mind that the name Jehovah means I AM. There is absolutely no change taking place in Him. We, nor Satan, nor any fallen angels can change God's mind and will. He fulfills perfectly every part of His eternal counsel. Remember that every day, and never question what God causes to take place. Never doubt His promises. He is the I AM, and rightly we sing: "All that I am I owe to Thee, Thy wisdom Lord, hath fashioned me." Sing that in your heart, and you will cause your body to walk in love toward Him. Look forward to the day when He fulfills all His promises concerning our salvation. Praise God from Whom *all* blessings flow.

Psalter 11—Prayer and Protection

by Beth DeVries

We direct our attention to a versification of Psalm 5 this month. This Psalm is a prayer of David which was uttered in a time of distress. It is difficult to determine when David wrote this Psalm because his life was filled with distress. In this Psalter versification we see the need to earnestly seek God as David did. We are reminded to frequently call upon God's name. The blessedness that God showers on us in His care is also shown.

This Psalter versification begins with a plea to God to hear the voice of His servant David. This plea appears to come from the depths of David's soul. David expresses assurance that God will hear his plea and be attentive to his thoughts. We learn from this that God will always hear the words of His people. We too may cry out as David did to our God and King. Psalm 5 also speaks of the meditations of David being heard by God. This should encourage us to meditate on the Word of God not just to read it.

David calls to God in the morning light. This is how he begins his day. It is good to begin our day in prayer to God for He is our strength. In the morning our minds are fresh and not yet filled with the cares of this world. This makes it a most appropriate time to meditate on God and spend time in earnest prayer. David knows that God expects a prayer in the morning. We know that God expects prayer from us frequently as is seen in Psalm 55:17 where we read "Evening, morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice." We also read of the frequency of prayer in I

Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." We must utter sincere prayers to God many times a day. God will hear and answer those prayers.

This Psalter versification jumps to verse 11 and continues on the theme of trusting in God. Many times in Scripture we are called upon to put our trust in God. Psalm 37:5, Psalm 125:1, Proverbs 3:5, Isaiah 26:4 are just a few places in Scripture where we are taught to

trust in God. We tend to get caught up in the worries of this life and think that we must fix them ourselves. It is very easy for us to put our trust in ourselves and not in our God. God will humble us and remind us that all things are from Him and that He will always care for us. In Psalm 5 David had a plea to bring to God and he trusted that God would answer him. May we have the same trust in our prayers. When we trust in God we also become filled with a joy in our hearts. We are grate-

ful for the care that God gives to us. We sing in this versification of Psalm 5 of being safely guarded by the Lord. This protection brings comfort and joy to those who love the Lord and trust in Him.

There is a blessing that accompanies this trust and joy. God promises His blessings to His people. Calvin, in his commentary on this Psalm, remarks that when God blesses one of His people, all of His people are to take comfort in this. We are to remember that as God blesses one He will also bless us. These blessings are bestowed upon the righteous. The favor of God will protect us from the harm of those around us. There is great encouragement from the words "compass about" because they show

11 Prayer and Protection

PSALM 5 7a RICHARD ROLFEHEAD RICHARD ROLFEHEAD

1. O Je-ho-vah, hear my voice, To my thro' at-ten-tive be;
2. With the morn-ing light, O Lord, Thou shalt hear my voice a- rise,
3. O let all that trust Thy care Er-er glad and joy-ful be;
4. For a bless-ing from Thy store To the right-ous Thou wilt yield;

Hear my cry, my King, my God, I will make my prayer to Thee.
And ex-pect-ant I will bring Prayer as morn-ing sac-ri-fice.
Let them joy who love Thy Name, Side-by-guard-ed, Lord, by Thee.
Thee will com-pass him a-bout With Thy fa-vor as a shield.

(Attributed to Richard Rolfehead)

that there are no gaps in this protection. There is no hole where the enemy can invade and destroy us. God protects us completely.

We learn many things in this Psalm about our prayer life and our God. We know that God will hear us when we call to Him in time of need and that He will answer our requests. We know that we may and should pray to God frequently. We also learn that we must trust in God for He is our protector. These things will bring peace and joy to our hearts. Then our prayers will be filled

with thanksgiving to God for the benefits He has bestowed on us. We are reminded here of the words of Paul in Philippians 4:6, 7, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” ❖

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

Church Family

Faithful Witnesses of God (3) The Work of the Spirit

by Aaron J. Cleveland

*L*ast time we ended with our calling to “sanctify the Lord God in our hearts.” We emphasized that this is only done when we have a faith-wrought knowledge of God. When we know God, then can we give an answer to those who ask for the reason of the hope that is in us.

It is folly to think that one can give an answer without really knowing God and without having applied himself to knowing God. Yet this is the thinking and practice of most so-called “witnesses.” It seems to be in style today that on Sunday one is converted and accepts Jesus as his Savior and on Monday he is out and about witnessing FOR God and bringing scores to accept Jesus as their Savior. (Today a convert, tomorrow a witness.) It typically happens in Arminian churches that a person, perhaps going to church for only the first or second time, gets caught up in an emotional appeal by the minister to accept Christ when offered. (Of course, this is not possible.) Upon doing so, this person is armed with a few Bible passages which “teach” that God loves all men and wants to save everyone. Further, he is reminded that the only way to be saved is to accept Christ and let Him into your heart. Again, a few verses ripped out of context can prove this “offer” and “acceptance” nicely. But that is beside the point, because true doctrine and knowl-

edge of God are not necessary in order to witness FOR God. It is only important that as many people as possible are “confronted” with Christ and told that God loves them and wants to save them, if only they accept the offer. Such is the “witnessing” prevalent today among false and departing churches. But this is not the witnessing spoken of in God’s Word.

The Reformed person looks at witnessing in a very different light, that of God’s Word. First, we must understand that we are faithful witnesses OF God by virtue of the fact that He has enlightened us with a spiritual knowledge of Him by His Spirit in our hearts. This faith-wrought knowledge affects our whole walk and confes-

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sion. God changes us so that we no longer stumble in darkness, but walk in the light of His truth, and we speak words of truth. The more we know God, the more our walk and confession reflects His glorious perfections.

Second, we must understand the important work of the Holy Spirit in relation to witnessing. It is His work! Don't think for a minute that man has any power whatsoever of himself to walk a godly walk, speak words of truth, or bring a faithful witness that will bear fruit. It is the work of the Spirit from beginning to end. God by His Spirit witnesses through us. He gives the spiritual understanding necessary to know the truth. He puts the words we must speak in our mouths. Further, He presents both the opportunity and the occasion for witness. Finally, and most importantly, He is the One that makes the witness bear the fruit He has providentially intended.

That the Spirit presents both the opportunity and occasion for witness must be understood. This is the context of I Peter 3:15. That one must be ready to give an answer presupposes that a question must first be asked. This is also the idea we have in Colossians 4:5, 6, where we read, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."

The Apostle Paul, in his journeys, was asked to give an answer for the truth he preached on several occasions. In Acts 24:10-21, one of these incidences is recorded. Here we read, "Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned him to speak, answered, . . . so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets: And have hope toward God . . ." (vs. 14,15). Another one of these occasions is presented for us in Acts 24:24,25, where we read, "And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled . . ."

Yet another striking example of Paul giving an answer is found in the 26th chapter of Acts. Acts 26 verses 1 and 6 read, "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: . . . And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our Fathers" (vs. 6). Interesting to note from verses 6 and 7 of this chapter is the word "hope." Paul is giving an answer for the reason of the "hope" that is in him and for which "hope" he suffers persecution (I Peter 3:15).

We must understand that God by His Spirit sovereignly brings His Word wherever He pleases, whether that is the preached word or the faithful witness (confession) of a child of God. God will cause His elect to come under the faithful preaching of the Word and it may be that the means in many situations is the godly conversation of believers. This idea is explained for us in the Canons of Dordrecht, a lengthy portion of which is well worth quoting. In the 3rd and 4th Heads, Article 11 we read:

But when God accomplishes his good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, he not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their minds by his Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, pervades the inmost recesses of the man; he opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, he quickens; from being evil disobedient, and refractory, he renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good action.

The overwhelming idea that is to be found in this article as well as the articles which follow in the Canons is the all-powerful work of God through His Spirit. Sinful man, apart from the grace of God, is dead and cannot bring himself to life as the Arminians teach. It is ONLY by the work of the Spirit that man is brought to life and fellowship with God.

We must understand this truth when we consider witnessing. We must not think that God will use the means of our faithful witness to bring scores and scores of people to repentance and faith. Few there are that are truly children of God, especially as the end approaches. Neither must we get caught up in the false idea that we are to be obnoxiously going about confronting strangers and forcing upon them our witness. God, by His Spirit,

after they see our godly walk and observe that we have the new life of Christ in us, one of two things will happen.

will lead those across our path who will observe our godly conversation. And after they see our godly walk and observe that we have the new life of Christ in us, one of two things will happen. They will either become hardened in their hatred of God and of His cause or God will sovereignly use the means of our witness to bring them under the preaching of His Word. It is most often the case that our godly walk will bring upon us the reproach and persecution of those who observe that we are children of God.

Even when this is the case, we must not become discouraged. God's Word tells us of this effect of our walk and confession. We need only to remember the history of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to understand that a godly walk and sound confession will

bring the lion's den and fiery furnaces to the righteous. Rather, we must continue, by the grace of God, to persevere in our godly walk and confession. We must continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of God, that our walk may more perfectly reflect His glorious perfections. Further, we must grow in our knowledge of doctrine so that we are more and more able to give an answer for the reason of the hope that is in us. Next time, Lord willing, we will discuss the biblical principles concerning the content of our answer (confession), what it is to contain, and how it must be given. ❖

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

Gem of the Month

A Mother's Love

By Shauna Schut

*My mother's love is always there,
Yes, always there with plenty to share,
It's there when I feel sad and lonely,
It's there when I too have love to share,*

*She cared for me as a tiny baby,
Giving up precious sleep to answer my colicky screams,
All that rocking and bouncing,
'Till my cries gave way to precious dreams,*

*Her love is from Jesus,
It is plain for me to see,
For I know through Jesus,
Her love shines through me!*

Shauna is a member of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Bauer, Michigan.

Early Church History*

by Rev. John A. Heys

* Reprinted from the October, 1945 issue of Beacon Lights.

This new department in *Beacon Lights* for which we have been asked to write was advertised in last month's issue as "Early Church History." We intend to keep that title and see no objection in it if we only bear in mind that this department will deal with the early church history of the new dispensation. Early church history in the strictest sense of the word would mean the history of the church as it stood in Paradise in Adam and Eve. That is where church history began and not, as is so often erroneously supposed, in the upper room on Pentecost. The church is almost as old as this world, the first church members appearing upon this earth the sixth day of its existence.

We begin our first installment in this department with these introductory words because there is a very prevalent heresy which denies this fact that the people of God in the Old and New Testament times are one church and one people of God. According to this theory the Jews and the Gentiles remain eternally distinct, the Jews being the people of God, and the Gentiles being the church of God. Perhaps we shall have opportunity to consider this theory more fully in the future when we arrive at that period of history where it was first taught. For the time being, let a few verses from Scripture be quoted to show that this theory is in error. On the last day of Pentecost, Peter addressed this New Testament church and said, "For the promise is unto you and to your children and all that afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." To the New Testament church and its children Peter declares that the promises of the Old Testament church are one and the same. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:11, 22 that they who are Gentiles are become "fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets." From these passages it will be plain that God considers all the elect from paradise to the Parousia, that is, the coming of Christ, as His Church.

Our reason for beginning this department with these introductory words is, in the second place, the fact that we are striving to remember in writing this department that it is written for youth especially. This means that each year another group of young men and women attain to that age when they are admitted into Young People's Societies and become readers of our paper. That also these may get off to a proper start and begin this series of essays on early church history from the proper viewpoint, we deemed these few words advisable.

There is another matter we would also like to pen down now before we begin to treat the matter of church history as such. It is this, in Church History you will find and therefore expect to find in these articles, that it always centers around the doctrine of the church. On the day of Pentecost the church received the Spirit and saw the truth of Christ and His atonement. However, from that time onward two things happened. False doctrines, lies, crept into the church and through the ages had their influence upon the history of the church. We will follow the course of these heresies in as far as is necessary for the correct view of the church and the truth. The second

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thing that happened was that the church, partly spurred on by the appearance of these false doctrines, developed the truth. Seeking to maintain it and to overthrow the lie, the church studied God's Word more diligently and by the Spirit it was led to see the truth more clearly and richly than before. Thus from the day of Pentecost to this present time the church has progressed in the development of doctrine. This development of doctrine is in-

separably connected with and belongs to the history of the church. A church whose doctrine has no development and history has no history worth considering.

In the second place you will find that church history centers around men who manufactured these false doctrines and other men whom the Spirit led to maintain and develop the truth. In the Scriptures you find the history of the church centered around such men as Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Peter and Paul to mention only a few. In principle of course it centers around Christ Who is its head and then through Him around those He ordains and places at the head of or in prominent places in His church in the world. So, too, in the history of the church after Pentecost we can expect to find men in the church whose lives and works we must

consider in connection with the history of the church. At the same time there are also to be found men whom the devil uses to try to overthrow the church by causing it to believe the lie. This, of course, is all according to God's eternal counsel and for the sake of His church, and must be viewed in that light.

In this department we hope to consider together the lives and works of these men around whom the history of the church centers, both those Christ uses to develop and maintain the truth and those the devil stirred up to teach and spread false doctrines. ❖

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

Church News

Church News

BAPTISMS

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

Mark 16:16

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

Erika Jaye, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mike Velthouse—Byron Center, MI

Justin Clarence, son of Mr. & Mrs. Craig VanderVeen—Doon, IA

Nicolette Paige, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jon Bruckbauer—Georgetown, MI

Madeline Alyce, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Scott Riemersma—Georgetown, MI

Grant Charles, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan Kamps—Southwest, MI

Benjamin Richard, son of Mr. & Mrs. Craig Kuiper—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:

Kristie Kamminga—Georgetown, MI

Michelle Kamminga—Georgetown, MI

MARRIAGES

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

Matthew 19:5

United in the bonds of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Jeff Krosschell and Miss Marisa Vander Meulen—Doon, IA

Mr. Shawn Feenstra and Miss Holly Ondersma—Georgetown, MI

Mr. Marc Hop and Miss Janelle Wittiveen—Hope, MI

Mr. Jeremy Huizinga and Miss Jennifer Looyenga—Southwest, MI

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

Battles and Onions

"What's the matter, Mom? Why are you crying?" said Abby with genuine concern.

"Oh, don't worry," Mother smiled as she sniffed, "I'm just cutting up onions. See?"

Abby looked inside the bowl and took a whiff. "Ew! I don't think I'd like that job."

Mother laughed. "You don't have to like this job, dear, but you can hand me another onion." Abby took one out of the onion bag and gave it to her mother.

But Mother copied her daughter, "Ew!" Abby laughed, but Mother was serious, "You chose a rotten one, Abby. Look, it's starting to sprout. See what happens to the onion when it starts to grow?"



Abby crunched up her shoulders.

"It dies," said Mother, and confirmed her statement with a squish of the onion.

"Find a nice firm one for me, okay?"

Abby tried again and came up with a beauty.

"Ah, that's better," sniffed Mother, and she began to cut some more.

Abby picked up the rotten onion and inspected it. It didn't smell as fresh as the others, and it was definitely getting soft. A small patch of mold was beginning to form on the bottom. She set it down and crinkled her nose.

"That rotten onion is like you—and me," said Mother.

Abby responded with surprise. "I'm a rotten onion?"

"No, you're *like* a rotten onion. So am I. Our 'new man' has begun to sprout, but our 'old man' has to die for the new man to grow. The more we die, the more we live and grow. Just like the onion."

"I think those onions are affecting you, Mom."

Mother laughed. "They are! I never thought of onions like that before. But it's true. Our old man of sin has to die. It's the biggest battle of our lives."

Abby picked up the onion once more. She remembered how she had fought with her brother that morning, and how she had talked about one of her friends at school. She couldn't deny it. Being like a rotten onion was pretty accurate. But a green stem was beginning to grow. And how she wanted to grow and be good!

"There. That ought to be enough," said Mother and she wiped her hands.

"Is there anything else you need, Mom?" asked Abby.

"Not right now, thank you. But there is something we can do together."

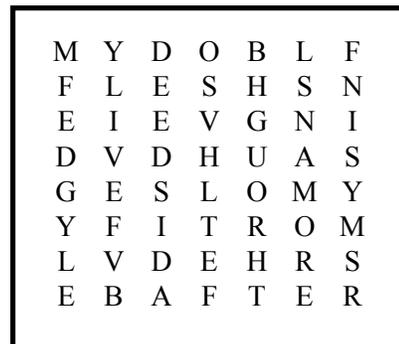
"What's that?"

Mother tossed the rotten onion into the trash. "Sort through the onion bag and get rid of those rotten onions!" ❖

Connie is the mother of 5 children and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Find the underlined words in the puzzle below:

"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Romans 8:13



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