
Beacon Lights

*September
1999*

*Volume LVIII
Number 9*





He That Loveth Pleasure Shall Be a Poor Man (1)

by Aaron J. Cleveland

We can picture this man referred to in Proverbs 21:17. He spends nearly every penny he has in the pursuit of pleasure. He lives far beyond his means. He cashes his paycheck on Friday and by Monday it is spent with little or no money left for the necessities of the week. His house is falling apart in disrepair. His car barely starts in the morning as he hurries off to work. He does not seem to care that his personal appearance is slovenly and that he lives a disorganized lifestyle.

Money is not this man's problem. He makes more than an adequate wage. His problem is that he spends his money and extra time foolishly in the pursuit of pleasure. He has given himself over to the pursuit of it, and consequently he is brought to poverty. He has nothing to show for his work. He is poor. This is indeed the sad reality for many in our own country.

But the spiritual reality which Proverbs 21:17 brings to our attention is more sad. It is one thing to be brought to poverty of things physical because of poor stewardship of time and money. It is quite another to be wanting of things spiritual. Spiritual poverty is indeed a very bad state to be in. What is even more sad is that those who are living in a state of spiritual poverty usually are quite unaware of their condition. In their own mind they are quite well off. They see no reason to be worried. They are quite content in their present state of want. They continue to rush headlong in their pursuit of pleasure despite the fact that they are living in abject spiritual poverty.

In II Timothy 3:1 we read that "in the last days perilous times shall come." Beginning in verse 2 we have a description of what men will be like during the end times. Immediately in verse 2 we read that "men shall be lovers of their own selves." Later in the same description we read that the same men will be "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (verses 4 & 5).

Both Proverbs 21:17 and II Timothy 3 contain very important instruction for us regarding how we ought to view pleasure and the spiritual consequences of the pursuit of pleasure. By pleasure seeking we do not mean a temporary break from our God-given labors so that we may enjoy some worthwhile recreation and a break from the demands of our work. By pleasure seeking we mean what is called "the ethical doctrine of hedonism." A hedonist, according to The American Heritage Dictionary (1982 Second College Edition), is "one who holds that pleasure is the chief good." And if we define pleasure as "self-gratification" and "self-indulgence" a clear picture is painted for us of a pleasure seeker. He is a self-lover (II Tim. 3:2,5). His chief concern in life is not self-denial and submission to God's will, but self-indulgence and the pursuit of his own will. This is the pleasure seeker that will exist in the perilous last days. This is the pleasure seeker that will be in the church,

“having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (II Tim. 3:5). This is the pleasure seeker which is held in high esteem by many in the church, but is labeled a “poor man” by God’s Word.

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By a “poor man” we mean someone who is so given over to the “tasting” of the delights of this world that he has lost his appetite for things spiritual. His belly is so full of the things which this world holds out as fun and worthwhile that he has no room in it for things heavenly and spiritual. When he schedules his time for the days and weeks to come, the first dates to be reserved on the calendar are the various pleasures he will seek. If there are any important obligations or responsibilities of a spiritual nature, there will be time for them also, if they don’t interfere with the pleasure.

By nature, all of us, young and old, desire the pleasures of Egypt above the true riches which are to be found in the promised land. This is because of our sin. Apart from God’s grace we would live out of the principle of the old man. And that old man is a self-lover, self-exalter, and a God-hater. That old man desires the pleasures of this world above all else. That old man hates everything that is spiritually edifying and has no use for submission to the will of God.

But by grace, we live out of the principle of the new man. This means that we have “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” (Catechism, Q & A 90). Really, living out of the principle of the new man means that we, above all other things, love God! Knowing God and submitting to His will becomes our chief good. This is the exact opposite of what it is to be a pleasure seeker. God-love is the exact opposite of self-love and self-seeking. Seeking to know God and submitting to His will is the exact opposite of seeking the things of the world and advancing our own will. We have this idea set plainly before us in I John 2:15-17 where we read: Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth THE WILL OF GOD abideth for ever.

It is evident that a child of God cannot be a lover of this world and at the same time submit to the will of God. For one who submits to the will of God puts off the “lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” He seeks not the approval of the worldlings around him, but he covets the approval of God. He seeks not to exalt his own name and trumpet his accomplishments after the manner of the worldly, but he knows that his exaltation in Christ comes in the way of lowliness, submission and obedience to God.

The way of submission and obedience is indeed a very hard road to travel, especially in these end times. This world has so much to offer which appeals to our old man of sin. The affluence of our day only adds to the temptations which surround us. The young people in the church have both extra time and

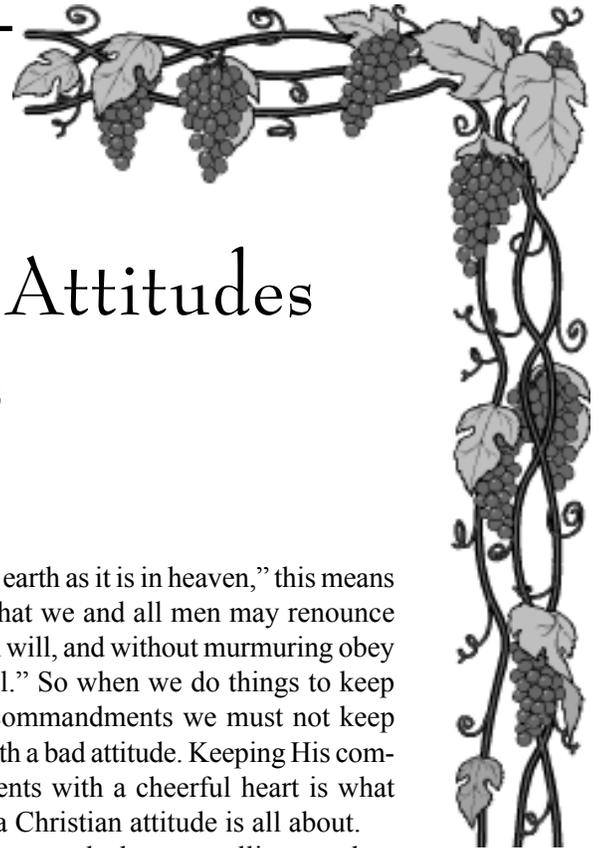
The young people in the church have both extra time and money like never before and the world demands that it be spent in the pursuit of pleasure.

money like never before and the world demands that it be spent in the pursuit of pleasure. “Come join us in our fun. Get out of your homes, away from your parents. We have everything you could possibly need or want; a good time, no responsibilities, no drudgery. It’s all yours, if you just come along with us!”

Even more inviting is the fact that pleasure seeking has entered the very worship of God in many false and departing churches. These churches have cast aside God-centered worship and set up man-centered entertainment. There is no sound preaching, singing of Psalms, or prayer, but rather very worldly dancing, dramas, and concerts. And all of these vile activities are geared towards the young people of the church, with great pressure being put upon faithful Reformed young people to join these churches.

But there is another area where the world beckons us to come and join them in their pleasures. It is an area of great danger to both adults and young people alike. It is an activity which has been labeled as “educational” and is heralded as a “great teacher,” but must be understood for what it is. It is an activity which has a legitimate use, but when misused is a threat to the spiritual life of individuals, families, and the church. This we will, Lord willing, examine next time. ❖

Fruitful Branches



Nurturing Christian Attitudes in Students

by Carisa Bleyenberg

Nurturing Christian attitudes is required of us as Christians whether we are a mom, dad, sibling, friend, co-worker, minister, or a teacher. Attitude towards life affects every aspect of our lives. Being taught how and why to have Christian attitudes at a young age is essential. As a teacher I would explain to the children that one needs to have a Christian attitude because God requires it, not because I say that it is important or their parents say that it is important.

Our attitude toward God flows out of the love we have for Him through the grace He gives us. This attitude is above all most precious. We have a calling to obey God. In John 14:15 Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” Also Lord’s Day 49 Question and Answer 124 teaches that when we pray “Thy will be

done on earth as it is in heaven,” this means “grant that we and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey Thy will.” So when we do things to keep God’s commandments we must not keep them with a bad attitude. Keeping His commandments with a cheerful heart is what having a Christian attitude is all about.

We not only have a calling to obey God, but also to follow Him and imitate His walk on earth. In Matthew 16:24 Jesus said unto his disciples, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.” In I Peter 2:21 it states, “For even hereunto were ye called: Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.” These two verses give

us a lot to live up to. Christ lived a perfect life. He had no sin. He still says that we have to follow in his footsteps. This isn't going to be easy for a Christian. Taking up the cross isn't going to be easy either. We are all going to be tempted by the devil. While we are following in Christ's footsteps and taking up the cross we must not complain. Instead we must be witnesses. I Peter 3:25 says, "But sanctify the Lord your God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." That hope must be seen in us always. If we do not have a Christian attitude, that hope will not be seen in us.

God not only requires us to love Him and have a Christian attitude towards Him, but we must also love one another. In Matthew 7:12 Jesus states, "Therefore

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all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." Lord's Day 43 Question and Answer 111 of the Heidelberg Catechism also teaches us in the 8th commandment what God requires of us towards one another. "What doth God require in this commandment?" "That I promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may; and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others: further also that I faithfully labor, so that I may be able to relieve the needy." This law can be easy to those who are our friends and to those that have Christian attitudes towards us, but what about our enemies? Luke 6:27 states, "But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you." This is a hard task that is required of us. God even tells us to pray for our enemies. One may say, "Why should I love my enemy and pray for him if he did this or that to me?" We have to because God commands it of us.

Likewise God commands us to love ourselves. Our attitudes towards ourselves affect how we look and handle different situations and how other people view us. We must let them know that we are content with the many gifts and blessings God has given us, that we are

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not proud, but that we realize that everything that we have is given to us by the hand of our Father in heaven. There are two extremes in loving ourselves. One is being self-centered and the other being depressed and not happy with how God made us or content with the gifts He has given us.

We all have to remember that we are all totally depraved. In the Belgic Confession, Article XV, it states, "We believe that, through the disobedience of Adam, original sin is extended to all mankind; which is a corruption of the whole nature." Man is born in sin and the only way we can do anything is by the grace of God. We have no reason to be proud or take credit for achievements we make because it is God who worketh all things in us. God by His good grace gives us many gifts. We must humbly accept them and use them in every way possible to glorify God.

The reverse side of being self-centered is being depressed because of how we look or not happy with the gifts that we have. We must all remember that we are made after the image of God and that He made each of us in a different and special way; and also that God had a purpose for each of us in this world, and we have to be content with the place that He has given us in the world. We must remember the words of Paul in Philippians 4:11, "...for I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Paul was in prison and was persecuted; he had to learn that he had to be content because that was what God required of him. That is a perfect example of having a Christian attitude.

We must remember the words of Paul when we are in situations where it is hard to be content. For example, when we have to go to school to learn and we don't particularly like school, we have to be content until we graduate. Another example would be if God sends trials in our lives. We have to have faith in Him and remember that all things work together for the good of those that love Him. We have to show others that we still have a Christian attitude when things get hard in our lives.

So as we are pilgrims on this earth we must never put down our guard. We must always stand strong and pray to God for strength to withstand the trials in our lives. We must also pray that God will give us the ability to have a Christian attitude towards everything in our lives, especially when we are going through hard times. The devil is always watching and waiting, and he knows our weaknesses, so we have to rely on God for help! We also have to remember that we will fall short and so we have to confess our sins before God and ask Him for forgiveness. Learning how to develop a Christian attitude at a young age is so important. So as I an-

ticipate becoming a teacher I have to think about ways that I can teach the children Christian attitudes. I also have to remember that my attitude has to be Christian also because the children will learn from my example. So I pray to God that He will give me the strength to withstand the trials in my life and help me be a good example to those around me. ❖

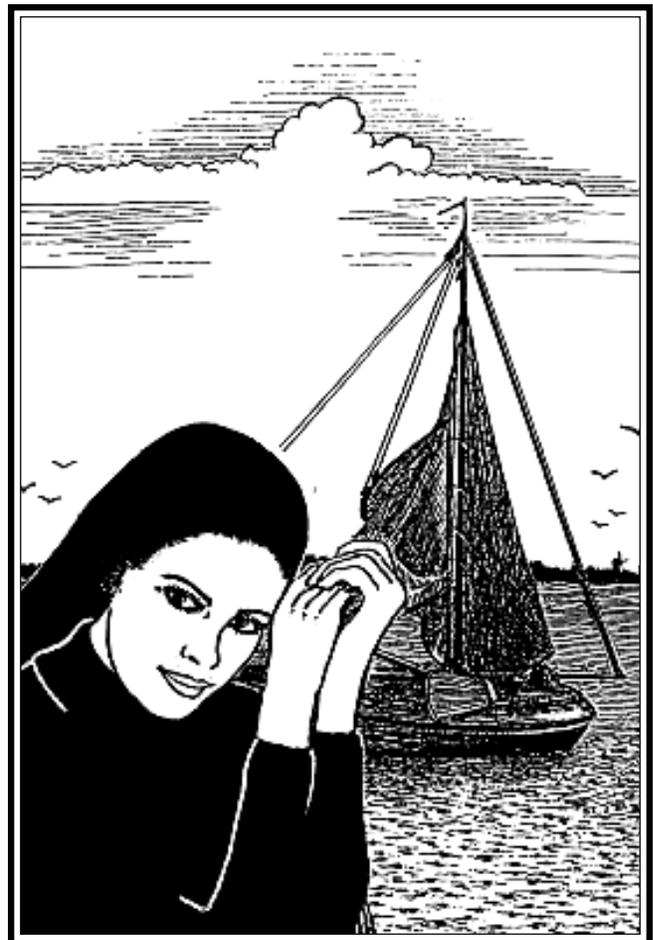
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Story Time

On A River Vessel

by J.P. de Klerk

Josien Buys wondered that afternoon, was she in a somber mood or was she very content? But, as a healthy girl of 23 years old she did not want to be absorbed by that question. The date was Wednesday, October 1, and her birthday had just been celebrated last night. Now, at eight o'clock in the morning her three young brothers had left in a rowboat to a small tributary to catch eels. They had told her that it was the right kind of weather for it; the weather report of the radio had said that it would not rain. Together they had had their breakfast on board the river vessel "Katrijn" where they lived. Were, the oldest boy had said grace and Josien had read some passage from the Bible. They had quickly cleaned the flap-table and washed up together. That was how it went every morning, since father Buys had suddenly departed this life. So they had adopted a number of simple tasks and habits as self-evident to keep their home together without spending any words over it. However, they did miss father Buys, the skipper of the vessel Katrijn, the name that he had painted on the bow in remembrance of his wife and their mother. They all resembled much their father and they knew it: Josien, Wim, Piet and Bram. Mother had drowned already several years ago during a tempest at the Hollands Diep. They had continued on



board, and there was usually enough to do with transporting goods and all kinds of products.

Josien drank yet a cup of tea and went quickly up some steps to the deck of the ship, putting some tools aside and cleaning a seat. That day an elderly man would come to inspect and repair the sails. She looked out over the wide river, where two streams came together, but there was not much interesting to see. Freight ships were yet loading, the small fishing-boats had passed by already earlier in the morning with their catches of plaices and haddocks. There were a few black-headed gulls that flew in the direction of the sea. Josien went back downstairs and put on her new black woolen jersey, which she had recently hand-knitted. Then she went over the small landing stage ashore, where she took a seat on a facing of piles, enjoying the pure air. She had no need for talks with strangers passing by. She never felt alone but on the contrary happy and blessed by the Lord with her good health and the sympathy of her young brothers. She gave the boys the lessons they needed, with the help of a correspondence course. The study material she picked up each time when the Katrijn came in the neighborhood of the city of Arnhem. Then she would jump on her old bike and go to the post office, where she had a postbox for all her mail, which she collected. Sometimes, when they reached a town where there was a Reformed church that was not modern, they could go there on a Sunday, but they seldom knew that in advance. The timetable could always be changed by the demands of customers and the kind of goods they had for transport (they could be perishable).

The Katrijn was well maintained. Josien had taken care of it that its reputation would not suffer by neglect or carelessness. There was enough room for the quartet of Buys; it would appear that the shipbuilder had once made it for them. The floor covering was made of vinyl tiles, because that was easy to keep clean. Josien had the room that her parents had. The boys had a room with three beds and a table at which they could make their homework; they helped each other and made good progress—the supervising teachers of the correspondence school gave them high marks for all subjects. When they went through small canals with many bridges, the boys helped on deck. They had to blow the horn to warn the bridge-keepers who had to make room for the ship to pass; in some cases they had to do that themselves. When the weather was fine, it was fun for the boys to do this, but when there was a rainstorm, it was a difficult and risky job. In wintertime, with ice and snow

it could be close to impossible, which caused serious delays. Josien had a belt with a mobile telephone and a knife, which her father had always used. During the summer-months, standing behind the steering wheel, she wore a hat with a wide brim against the sun and sunglasses when the water glittered very much. When something out of the ordinary happened, she wrote that down in the evening in her diary that lay next to the bills of lading and the sailing list. She had been taught, to be careful with the administration. There was a notebook hanging on a nail above the big compass of the Katrijn. Involuntarily Josien thought about her uncle in Australia, who had stopped writing her since she had told him at some length about her faith and her constant trust in God... She had also a niece in Sweden, who always sent her once a year a birthday card from somewhere in the world, but never wrote her a letter.



By the time the boys came back, the wind had freshened up. After the departure of the man who had repaired the sails, Josien had turned the ship and fastened it to a mooring buoy. They had a big lot of eels and had cleaned them already, so that they were ready to cook. Josien helped them with the frying. The boys were cock-a-hoop over their success. There was enough eel and bread for all four. After the meal the boys fetched some buckets water out of the clean river and washed themselves properly before they went to bed, tired and satisfied. Josien had put fresh sheets on their beds. Early the following morning they had to travel again. Probably they would not need to use the small engine which was at the rear of the ship, because the wind came from the south. Josien wanted to hoist the sails as soon as it would dawn.



In the city of Arnhem the Katrijn got a lot of in-board cargo of cement in sacks, portions of which had to be delivered in a list of towns, like Deventer, Zwolle, Dalfsen, Meppel, Assen and Groningen. The ship came to draw nearly seven feet of water. Josien hoped and prayed that the weather would remain favorable. She went quickly on her bike to the post office in the center of the city and emptied there her post office box. She noticed that amongst the mail there was a thick air mail envelope, from Sweden, which had many postmarks and remarks written next to them. It had gone from one place to another till it reached Arnhem; that had taken a month. It was addressed in this way:

To captain Minus Buys, skip Katrijn, on a river in The Netherlands...

Josien found a seat on a bench and opened the scratched envelope carefully. She laid the letter unfolded on her lap.

It was written by her niece Klaartje Westma, who obviously did not yet know that Josien's father had died. She wrote:



Dear Minus,

Several times I tried to begin this letter, but each time I had soon to stop, because I got a lot of pain in my back, and then later I did not have the strength or the courage to begin again. Not that I have any secrets, or that I want to hide anything from you.

I feel ashamed that during several years I have not taken the time to write. Please, forgive me I have been very busy, doing many things for people who needed my help. Perhaps you do remember that I had at the time a girlfriend who persuaded me to join a number of very active and self-sacrificing Christians, who wanted to bring the Gospel to other countries. I was not sure, whether I could do it, but God gave me the courage and the strength and the wisdom. I dare to say that sometimes He laid the words in my mouth. I discovered that it is true, that with God you can jump over hurdles and walls. I overcame all kinds of difficulties, including expressing myself in different languages, under what you would say impossible circumstances. I guess that you have also had your problems and disappointments to overcome and you will somehow have had that kind of experience.

I have been in Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. I spoke with wounded soldiers, refugees who were very ill, and dying orphans in forgotten places, amid the ruins of farms and villages.

Several times I had to flee for Communist terrorists or fanatic Moslems. I was often in peril. I had to climb over high mountains, where the air was so thin, that I had difficulty with breathing. As you know, I am asthmatic. But there are circumstances that you have no choice, and it is the Lord Who helps you to come through it.

I have assisted nurses and doctors in places where nobody ever had heard about God and Jesus Christ. I loved to tell them all about our faith in a way that they could understand; a kind of elementary evangelism. Doing this I had to learn languages and dialects in a primitive and tiring way. But I barely had the time to found a Bible class, when I had to flee again because a war zone shifted in our direction and we came in the firing line. Besides, I saw in Vietnam how the heathen have murdered and burnt down whole villages and towns uncompromisingly.

A couple of times I have been very ill and had to go back to Sweden for treatment and after that as soon as possible back at work.

I made acquaintance with missionaries of an Overseas Missionary Fellowship and members of a Swiss Mission's Bible College. When I was in Cambodia I received spontaneous help of a Kmer Evangelical Fellowship Church when I was robbed of everything, except my Bible.

Josien noticed that her eyes became moist of emotion. She felt kind of upset to read all this, while she had not suspected that the Christian faith of Klaartje Westma was so strong that she was willing to risk life and property to serve the Lord. Surprising? God had given her and Klaartje each another task in life, at different places and in a different way. Josien would have liked to write her, if she had known where she was and what she was doing, but probably her letters would not even have reached her in those far-away and turbulent countries. She continued to read:

I am laying in bed in my flatlet in Stockholm. I contracted a tropical disease against which the doctors can not yet do much, but a consulting physician in the hospital assured me that it will be possible to get me on my legs again. He explained

that my body was terribly pulled down overseas by the heat, dirty water, not enough food, etc. I have given an interview to a couple of journalists about my experiences and that has been published in a newspaper. I could send it to you but you would probably not be able to read it because it is in Swedish. I wished I could see you now on your ship on the water.

Two months ago I paid a short visit to France because I wanted to see two small Reformed churches founded by young Christian ministers I had met in Cambodia. They have a lot of energy and bring the Gospel with gladness. However, they were bitter about the bad influence of modernist clergymen all over the place. They have killed the faith of many people who were members of churches of a variety of denominations. It is shocking. I have also seen it here; many churches are almost empty; they stand there yet like historic monuments. The people are more interested in materialistic things. They call that trend modern and do not want to be called conservative.

Now about Cambodia... I have been told that about 1000 Christians survived the acts of war, the tortures and the criminalities of the Communists. Some Swiss missionaries trained some people in the mountains of Laos to keep the congregations and the preaching going, before they had to flee. The latest news is that in the whole of these countries there are now 15000 Christians. In Vietnam are two ministers from Australia officially allowed to work again. This is encouraging. Pity that Moslems are entering, who are supported by the rich Arabian nations.

Well, Rinus, how is it meanwhile with you and your family? Do the children help you? What are their ages now? Does Josien the administration? The ship still in a good condition?

Klaartje had written her address in Roman letters under her letter. Josien had to tell her, that father was no longer alive and that she looked after the boys. She would mention her telephone number.

Josien saw herself suddenly confronted with what was going on in the world. She saw Klaartje still in her mind like she had been, the last time that she saw her,

spending a week on board. In those days the ship was still pulled by a horse.

She thought, what would happen if she became ill and the boys would have to cook for themselves. Suppose that a doctor would say that she had to go to a hospital. Would she be as brave as Klaartje was? She did not have life insurance, only some money at the bank reserved for sudden repairs on the ship, and there was also something in a little box on board. She wondered, would this be the right time to get Piet more involved in writing invoices and doing the bookkeeping? It should not be too difficult for him to get an idea of the paperwork.

She walked back to the ship with her bike at her right hand and a bag with groceries on her left arm. The sun gave the river a beautiful glow, with the white clouds above it. The Katrijn rocked gently on the undulating water, which sometimes could be so wild. This day it was quiet.

Josien said to herself that the same evening she would start to write a letter to Klaartje. Perhaps she looked forward to hearing something from The Netherlands. Anyhow, the boys needed not to suffer under the letter. Back on board she looked at the cover of the family Bible, where it said that the Lord would give you peace in all kinds of ways. It was the kind of peace she still had in her heart, even though she felt to be insignificant in comparison with Klaartje. Her world was small, without big adventures and risks; that thought preyed on her mind.

Standing on the gang-board, she had more trouble than usual with getting her bike back on board. But she softened when she saw two pigeons walking on the deck, inquisitively looking around and unafraid of her. Weren't they symbols of the peace the Bible meant?

She closed the hatches, above the bags with cement. The boys had cleaned them already with a broom. Their teamwork was a blessing. The pigeons followed her and she fed bread crumbs to them.

She found the boys back involved in playing Monopoly in the wheel house, while sitting on the floor; there was just enough space for them. They were still enjoying life every day as it came to them. They saw many people passing by in big and in small harbors, landing stages, factories, sluices and building sites, wherever the Katrijn came to pick things up or to deliver; an almost endless stream of faces and names with or without exchanging some words. They had become used to it. Next to the helm hung, screwed tight on the oak panel,

a framed photo made at the day their parents were married. Wim, the oldest boy, often looked at that photo, but he did not tell the others what he was thinking. Josien looked in turn at him. He was now older, and she noticed that when they came in a church he gazed sometimes at a girl he saw, and she smiled. She wondered, would he perhaps have a preference for a particular kind of girl? But she did not ask him this; perhaps he would feel embarrassed.

They had a pleasant evening together, but as soon as the boys had gone to bed, Josien started to write to Klaartje. It kept her busy till midnight because there were so many things to tell about the past years that they had not seen each other.

On board the next day would be about the same as the last one, more or less, she thought. The ship had to move, with or without wind, and she would have to get it through the opened bridges with the help of the boys like they had done many times before. Would Klaartje find that interesting? Josien would have to provide coffee or tea at the discharging berths or unloading platforms; it was part of the job, to show kindness and appreciation. Sometimes she would suddenly get extra freight. In fact transport by ship was cheaper than by road. Sometimes she got a call over the mobile telephone

only a couple of hours in advance; that meant pressure for the timetable. The Lord provided in many ways, even when something broke down or the boys had a cold; they needed not to worry. People who got to know them admired their courage.



When Josien became twenty-nine years old, she married a minister of the Liberated Reformed Churches of The Netherlands in a village called Smilde, in the province of Drente. He was the son of a carpenter, who had once done some repair work on the ship after a collision. Wim followed a training course at the nautical college, got his Diploma, which opened the way for him to a job at the bridge of a big freight steamer, traveling up and down between Rotterdam and New York. Piet went to the horticultural college in Bodegraven and became after that the manager of a tree nursery in Dedemsvaart. Bram was enabled to study at the University for Economy in Rotterdam Josien financed it by selling the Katrijn. They all praised the Lord for His guidance and protection. ❖

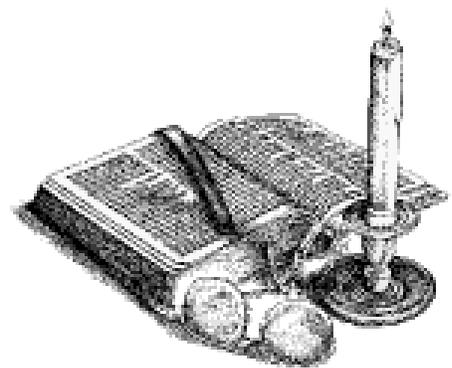
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From the Pastor's Study

The Sword of the LORD and of Gideon

by Rev. Richard J. Smit

Gideon returned from the camp of the Midianites in a strong faith that the LORD was with him and that the Word of the LORD would surely come to pass. Swiftly Gideon moves into action as the leader of Jehovah's little army of 300 men. However, leading the small band against the host



of the Midianites, Gideon wielded the mighty sword which always conquers the foe.

It was dark in the valley where the Midianites camped as well as in the surrounding hills where Gideon's little band of faithful soldiers were waiting for their leader's signal. The word of Gideon echoed still in

their hearts: “Arise; for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian!” (Judges 7:14). Like their leader, they too were confident in the Word of the LORD. In that confidence, they waited for Gideon’s signal to begin the battle.

Around the valley in the surrounding hills Gideon’s men were stationed in three groups of 100 men each. Swiftly and quietly they had dispersed with their orders from Gideon. Then they stood patiently in their three different positions overlooking the large camp of well-armed Midianites sprawled over the valley below.

The men of Gideon’s army were also well-equipped with the right weapons. It might seem odd to us, but Gideon gave his men trumpets and torches which were covered by large clay pitchers. The torches were lit, but quickly covered by the pitchers so that the light would not be seen until Gideon gave the signal. With their weapons in hand, the soldiers dispersed confidently to their three separate positions in the hills surrounding the Midianite infested valley.

Where were the swords? Where were the spears, shields, breastplates, helmets, coats of armour, coats of mail, chariots, and all the other weapons of warfare with which wars were commonly fought? Confidently, the men stood ready with their torches covered by the pitchers in one hand, and their trumpets in the other hand. We understand then that their hands were full. There was no more room for all those other weapons of warfare. The swords had to remain in their sheaths.

In addition, they would not need those earthly weapons for two reasons. First, what they brought to the battlefield must reflect the truth that Midian was given into their hand. Their unique arsenal of torches and trumpets was a reflection of their confession of the truth that the victory was theirs according to the Word of the LORD.

Secondly, they did not need the earthly sword on the battlefield because there was a sword present on the battlefield whose power was sufficient to destroy the host of the Midianites. That sword Gideon and his men carried by the hand of faith to the battlefield. One could not see that great sword outwardly. In fact it seemed outwardly like Gideon’s men were using no sword at all. From that viewpoint, they looked like they would be complete failures. Yet by faith we analyze the situation differently. Though the Midianites had an innumerable number of earthly swords, yet Gideon and his men wielded that one invincible sword.

With that sword in the hand of faith, Gideon waited for the watch in the Midianite camp to change

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(Judges 7:19). When Gideon’s men had reached their positions in the surrounding hills, the beginning of the middle watch had just been set in the Midianite camp. Those newly set Midianite watchmen were filled with terror from the rumours of that Israelite warrior lurking in the darkness of the surrounding hills. At that moment, Gideon gave the signal! “And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, “The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon!” (Judges 7:20).

As the valley echoed with the shrill blasts of 301 trumpets and the confident shout, the terrified Midianites bolted from their tents into a swarming mass of chaos and confusion. As Gideon and his men stood confidently on the hills, the Midianites “ran, and cried, and fled.” (Judges 7:21). In the darkness, the LORD caused the Midianites by their confusion and terror to slay one another with the sword. Mistakenly thinking that Gideon’s army was in their camp, the Midianites duelled themselves to death. Those of the host, who managed to escape the LORD’s slaughter, tried to flee across the Jordan river. However, many were captured and killed by the help of the men from Napthali, Manasseh, Asher, and Ephraim (Judges 7:23-25). Eventually, the kings of the Midianites were also captured by Gideon and destroyed (Judges 8:11-12). The Midianites were destroyed. Israel was delivered. They were delivered by the sword of the LORD and of Gideon.

What was that sword?

That question brings to mind what Valiant-For-Truth said to Great-Heart in the allegorical story, *Pilgrim’s Progress*. After the two had discussed Valiant’s recent battle against Wild-head, Inconsiderate, and Pragmatic, Great-Heart asked Valiant-For-Truth: “...Let me see thy sword.”

After Great-Heart had examined the sword, he exclaimed, “Ha! It is a right Jerusalem blade!” (Isaiah 2:3)

Valiant-For-Truth agreed. “...Its edges will never blunt. It will cut flesh and bones, and soul and spirit, and all.” With that sword, Valiant-For-Truth went on to ex-

plain, he did fight until that sword cleaved to his hand and, as it were, grew out of his arm.¹

Likewise, we also ask: what was that sword of the LORD and of Gideon? First, that sword is the mighty Word of Jehovah. That Word is first THE WORD, Who is the Son of God. Christ is the eternal Word of Jehovah Whom Jehovah sends forth to accomplish His eternal counsel. That Word goes forth in sovereign and almighty power to bring to destruction those whom God has rejected from eternity, and to raise unto glorious salvation and peace those whom God has eternally chosen in Christ. That Christ as the angel of Jehovah in the Old Testament, went before Gideon's band and fought for Gideon. He went forth conquering the enemy that the Word of God might accomplish that which Jehovah had said, and might prosper in the thing whereto Jehovah sent it (Isaiah 55:11).

Secondly, the sword is also the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the infallibly inspired Word of God. Therein is Christ, the eternal Word of God, revealed unto us. That was true already in the Old Testament. In Genesis 3:15, Adam and Eve heard the Word of God concerning the promise of the Seed of the Woman. That promised seed was Christ. That Word of God in the promises and types that surrounded Gideon was the sword by which he conquered the enemy. That remains true even for the believing young person today. The Scriptures are a mighty sword to defend ourselves from temptation.

Thirdly, the sword is the doctrine of God's Word. The doctrinal teachings of the Scriptures set forth Christ crucified as the only ground and foundation of all our salvation. In that truth, the glory of Jehovah is made known. Particularly, the doctrinal teachings of the Reformed Faith make this truth known clearly and sharply. For example, they are the doctrines of the TULIP, the everlasting covenant of sovereign grace, and the doctrines as taught in our *Three Forms of Unity*. This is "the right Jerusalem blade" for the believer's warfare.

If we were to carry anything less than those doctrines of the Reformed Faith onto the spiritual battlefields, then we would wield a blunt, brittle, and flimsy sword by which would be left defenseless. Rather than meet the enemy defenseless, is it your spiritual desire to meet the enemy well-equipped and prepared with that sword of the LORD, the truth of His Word?

To that end, you must faithfully attend catechism, particularly for training and instruction in the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Essentials of Reformed Doctrine*. By the Spirit and grace of God, this will train and

prepare you to defend yourselves against the present day evil teachings of Satan by which He desires to destroy you and the Word of God in you. In catechism and on the Lord's Day, Christ, the Captain of our salvation, trains us to use that Sword of the LORD for our defense and protection. By the grace of God and His Spirit, through His training and instruction, we will then wield the "right Jerusalem blade" in the spiritual battles of life.

Finally, that sword also involves a true and living faith. True faith is the hand that grips the Sword of the LORD. Without a hand, a soldier could not hold his sword. Without a true faith, one cannot hold the Scriptures as the sword against the enemy. Those who merely hold to the Reformed Faith intellectually, ace catechism tests with a cold intellectualism, and merely discuss and debate its various aspects for entertainment, are like a weaponless, defenseless soldier on the battlefield. In the heat of spiritual battles, such will be severely wounded or destroyed in their cold intellectualism and dead orthodoxy.

Rather than meet that end, we need that God-given, sovereignly bestowed and worked, undeserved faith. That true faith is, first, that "certain knowledge whereby [we] hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word." (Heidelberg Catechism LD VII, Q&A 21) That is a knowledge of the heart which arises out of the regenerated heart. A knowledge whereby we know and love God as our God. A knowledge whereby we love that Sword of the LORD and trust in it as our sure defense. Secondly, that faith is also "an assured confidence" whereby we are convinced that what God says to us about our salvation is undoubtedly true for the sake of Christ's merits. By that assured confidence, we are persuaded that His Word concerning our salvation shall surely be brought to pass for Jesus' sake.

That's the spiritual hand which grips the Sword of the Scriptures so that sword and hand become one. Clinging to Christ, His Word, and His promises, the believer goes forth into the spiritual battlefields to conquer as the fruit of God's sovereign grace alone. As we use that sword we need not fear its power and ability because "...the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." (II Cor. 10:4) It will break down the strongholds of Satan.

Remember, whether we fight the battles against our own sinful natures, against sinful lusts for pleasure, possessions, and things that are downright sinful, against the world, against false teachers and heretics, against false doctrines, or against worldliness, we have been

given by the grace of God the Sword of the LORD by which we stand in the victory of Christ crucified and risen.

Blessed is that spiritual soldier who wields that "Jerusalem blade" in the hand of true faith. Such lives in the blessed truth of Psalm 27, "the LORD is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?... Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise up against me, in this will I be confident."

We may be confident that the victory is the LORD's. Because the victory is His and since we are His for Jesus' sake, the victory is ours, too. Our enemies shall be fully destroyed, and we shall be redeemed unto complete glory in order "that men may know that Thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, are the most high over all the earth" (Psalm 83:18). ❖

¹John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Old Tappan, NJ: Spire Books, 1974), p. 257.

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Notice!

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Gem of the Month

I Went To God In Prayer Tonight...

*I went to God in prayer tonight,
To ask Him to free me from sin.
I went to God in prayer tonight,
To have Him take away the troubles within.*

*I went to God in prayer tonight,
I asked Him to hear my needs.
I went to God in prayer tonight,
And I asked Him to remember me.*

*I went to God in prayer tonight,
Because today I failed to see
That **HE** is in control of things
And His plan is not up to me.*

*I went to God in prayer tonight,
I asked to be forgiven.
I also asked for guidance
In the life that I am living.*

*I went to God in prayer tonight,
I asked that He humble my pride.
I went to God in prayer tonight,
And I asked that my faith never slide.*

*I went to God in prayer tonight,
As I do most every day.
I went to God in prayer tonight,
And I asked that my Comforter, my Redeemer
He will always stay.*

by Angela Schipper



The Song of Zion

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

September 1 Read Jeremiah 14:1-9

Psalm 106:7-8 After reading these two verses, do we have any doubts about the mercy of Jehovah? Israel had sinned greatly yet He saved them. Our sins mount up against us day by day, yet God takes them all away in His mercy. For what reason is this done? It is done so that He might glorify His holy name. God does this for His own glory. We must never take credit for our salvation. That credit belongs only to God. As we read Israel's history, we must remember that it parallels our own. We must learn from it. We must learn never to forsake our heavenly Father. Most of all we must learn that all things are for His glory and His alone. Sing Psalter 290:7.

September 2 Read Nahum 1:1-7

Psalm 106:9-12 In these four verses we find a summary of the historical deliverance of Israel from Egypt. It is a type of the spiritual deliverance of God's people from sin. He leads us through the Red Sea of evil that would overwhelm us. He saves us from the enemy that is ever around us. And He sent His son to deliver us from sin. He also will destroy all the workers of iniquity who try to kill us. Our God is powerful. Of that there is no doubt. He does all these things, and no one can stand against Him. What is our response? Israel sang praises on the far bank of the Red Sea. Do we daily praise God for the wonderful deliverance that He has provided for us? Do we praise Him from Whom all blessings flow? Do we believe? Let us ponder our great deliverance and praise our deliverer, Jehovah, God of the covenant. Sing Psalter 290:8.

September 3 Read Psalm 106:13-27

Psalm 106:13-15 Do we sometimes wish for things? I am sure we do. Sometimes these things are good because with them we can glorify God. Such things as covenant education for our children, the lively preaching of the Word, or the ability to spread the gospel are good things. But sometimes we want things that are self-glorifying. We want possessions, a place in society, or other such desires. Sometimes God gives them to us like He gave quail to Israel. But with these things He gives to us times of spiritual weakness. God does this for our good so that we might learn not to lust after the possessions in this life. He must teach us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt. Let us learn from Israel's folly so that we may be wise and not foolish. Sing Psalter 290:9.

September 4 Read Hebrews 13:1-9

Psalm 106:16-18 Do you esteem highly those whom God has placed over you in the church? Do you teach your children to respect the minister, elders, and deacons because of their offices? Young people, do you respect these men in whose hands God has placed your soul? Israel did not. They did not like the decisions made by Moses and Aaron. They wanted to be the authority themselves. Of course their sin, which is also ours when we fail to respect the officebearers, is the sin of rebellion against God. In their offices these men stand in the place of Christ. When we refuse to obey them by not learning our catechism or not going to catechism, we refuse to obey Christ. The office is worthy of honor because it is God's office. Let us honor it daily no matter what our age. Sing Psalter 290:10.

September 5 Read Exodus 20:1-6

Psalm 106:19-20 So, what are your gods and idols? We have them, you know. They could be the sports stars that grace our walls. They could be the possessions on which we spend much time and money. They could be the sporting activity that takes us away from the activities of church and families. Israel wanted an idol. They worshipped that idol. We probably are worshipping God today, but what about tomorrow or the rest of the week? Our God is in the heavens, we must not worship any other. Let us examine our hearts and our lives and put away all that causes us to fail to give the glory to God that He demands and deserves. Let us put away the gods and idols which lead us into sin. Sing Psalter 290:11.

September 6 Read Mark 15:27-38

Psalm 106:21-23 Have we forgotten the wonderful things of God? Do you remember the text of yesterday's sermons? Do you remember the truths of those sermons? Like Israel God gives to us many manifestations of Himself. Like Israel we quickly forget what we have seen and learned. Like Israel God is angry at our sin. Like Israel God has graciously given to us a mediator. It must have been hard for Moses to stand between sinning Israel and the holy God. Christ had to stand between our sins and the holy God. He sweated as it were great drops of blood. He cried out "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What is our reaction? Are we thankful for our deliverance from sin, Satan, and hell? Or do we like Israel go back to our sinful ways? Let us thank God for Christ's mediation for us, His people, and let us live lives of gratitude and holiness for that deliverance. Sing Psalter 291:1.

September 7 Read Hebrews 3:7-19

Psalm 106:24-27 Despising heaven? In principle, that was what Israel did. In not clinging to the promises of the land flowing with milk and honey they despised Caanan. In doing so they refused to believe the type and shadow that God had given them. Sometimes they wished to return to Egypt. Other times they wished for graves in the wilderness. In both instances they chose hell over heaven. What about us? Where do we pitch our tent? Is it in the eye-pleasing land of Egypt, Sodom, or the wilderness? Or do we wish for the city which "has foundations whose builder and maker is God"? Do we believe in God's Word that there is a heaven and that He is preparing a place for us there, or would we rather wallow in the pleasures of this life which lead to hell? Sing Psalter 291:2.

September 8 Read Psalm 106:28-39

Psalm 106:28-30 After Israel was delivered from Balak's hand through God, Balaam gave to Balak advice about how to cause Israel to sin. That advice was to cause the young men and young women of each country to see each other, become married, and take up the idolatry of Moab. Israel did not resist the temptation. Fathers gave their daughters and sons into marriage with worldly young people. The result was disastrous. It is no different today. If we allow our young people to marry those who are not solidly Reformed believers, disaster will strike those marriages and our families. Marriage is too precious a picture to be marred by having two become married who are not one in the Lord. Fathers, you must do your duty and not allow your sons and daughter to date and marry those who will not worship with you now and after the wedding. Young people, seek mates in the sphere of the church and your marriage will be pleasing to God. Sing Psalter 291:3.

September 9 Read Numbers 25:10-13

Psalm 106:31 Yesterday we saw how Israel provoked God to anger with heathen marriages and the sin of idolatry. Today's verse and reading shows the blessedness of one who was zealous for the faith. He saw sin in God's church, he saw God's anger because of that sin, and he acted. Do we act when we see sin in ourselves, in our children, and in our acquaintances? Phinehas walked the walk of sanctification when he picked up that spear and thrust it through the sinning couple. He saw that this was not holiness as God commands us to be holy even as He is holy. We, too, must root out sin in our lives. We must act decisively when we see sin in the church. Only in this way will we be blessed and God's church kept holy. Sing Psalter 291:4.

September 10 Read James 3:1-12

Psalm 106:32-33 Do we speak "unadvisedly with our lips"? I am sure that is a sin that all of us must confess daily. Our tongues are quick to speak works against God and our fellow men. We are quick to condemn. We are quick to curse God or use His name in vain. Moses paid for his sin by not being allowed to enter the promise land. That should cause us to hold our tongues in many situations. We should not talk about others unless we are promoting them. We must not be overcome with anger so that we curse or swear. Language is a wonderful gift from God. Let us use it only to His honor and glory and for the love of the neighbor. Sing Psalter 291:5.

September 11 Read Isaiah 57:1-12

Psalm 106:34-39 What do our works say about us? For what will we be remembered after we die? Children, young people, parents, grandparents, other people of God, these questions are for us. Verses 34-39 are a sad epitaph upon the children of Israel. Even more sad is that these same sins belong to us. We mingle with the wicked freely. We let him into our house by way of the television. We serve idols. You know which are your household gods. We sacrifice our young people to our god of desire. We have works in our lives that are not God's works. Read what Isaiah said in the verse 12 once again. These works are not for our profit. These works are to our shame. Let us bury these works and live lives pleasing to God in all things. Adults, we must be examples in these things. Children and young people, you must put away your evil works as well. Sing Psalter 291:6.

September 12 Read Psalm 106:40-48

Psalm 106:40-42 When David sinned by counting the people, God gave to Him a choice of punishments. He chose a punishment at the hand of God rather than the hand of an enemy. Israel had to endure much chastisement and punishment at the hand of the enemy. They had sinned so greatly that God delivered them into the hand of the wicked. We know that we sin in this life. We also know that God chastises us because of our sin. He does this because He loves us. He even gave His Son into the hand of the wicked Jews for us. We must examine His chastisement of us. If we find that we are being chastised by God through the means of evil men, we had better examine ourselves very closely, turn from our evil ways, and walk in the new life. This is always true, but the manner of chastisement can give to us a clue of God's way with us. Examination of our lives in the mirror of God's Word can bring to us the right way to live. Sing Psalter 291:7.

September 13 Read Judges 2:16-23

Psalm 106:43 A main theme of the book of the Judges is God's mercy for His undeserving people. If you have studied this book in school or society, you have noticed a cycle of sin, oppression, forgiveness, and deliverance. Israel did not deserve God's mercy. They trampled it underfoot time after time. We, the church of the new dispensation, do not deserve God's mercy either. We constantly trample it like hogs in a yard. Daily we must pray for this mercy, and daily we must thank God for His mercy. As we begin our work or school week, let us remember God's mercy and work and study in a way that is pleasing to him. Sing Psalter 291:8.

September 14 Read Lamentations 3:22-32

Psalm 106:44-45 Why does God show to us mercy? Why did He not destroy Israel from the face of this earth? The answer is because of the covenant promise that He had established with Israel and has established with us and our seed. God does not break His covenant because He is the immutable God. Even when He sent Israel into captivity, He gave to them the promise that they would return and that He would send the Savior. Even when we are undeserving of His covenant faithfulness, He is faithful to us because of His covenant. This should be enough to show us the way that we must go in this life. Let us walk in His light and in the glory of His covenant of grace. Sing Psalter 291:9.

September 15 Read Ezra 9:1-15

Psalm 106:46 God's grace to His people extends to His sovereign control over their enemies. This can be shown often throughout Scripture as today's reading is an example. This is no reason for us to become friends with the wicked, but rather proof to us of God's care for us. He loves us as no human can love any other human being. In this love He sent His Son to be our Savior. We must love Him who first loved us. Let us rejoice in this fact, love Him with our whole hearts, and show our love to His people around us. Sing Psalter 291:10.

September 16 Read II Corinthians 5:12-21

Psalm 106:47 After reading this summary of Israel's history, we must pray like Israel to God for salvation. We must ask to be delivered from the wicked who loom all around us. Why must we pray this prayer? We do this so that we can thank God by means of His holy name. We do this through worship whether it be the official worship on the Sabbath, those family devotions which are so important to us, or those private devotions which are so necessary to our lives. We must thank God by using these means. Secondly we wish salvation so that we can praise Him with songs of triumph. These are not the songs of the world or its triumphs; these are the songs of God's triumph over Satan for us. Let us pray and let us thank the Lord for salvation. Sing Psalter 291:11.

September 17 Read Revelation 19:1-9

Psalm 106:48 This final verse of Psalm 106 is a grand doxology of praise. We do well to speak well of our covenant God. We must and should do this every day and in whatever situation we have been placed. We do this because He is the eternal God and has chosen us from eternity. Our Amen to God must ring loud and clear for His wonderful care toward us. Hallelujah must not be an idle word on our lips, but rather we must raise loud heartfelt hallelujah's to our Covenant God. People of God, praise the Lord for His work of salvation for us. Parents, teach your children the proper use of hallelujah. Young people, are you praising the Lord and saying Amen to His decrees? Sing Psalter 291:12.

September 18 Read Psalm 107:1-7

Psalm 107:1-3 This psalm, like the ones before it, are expressions of gratitude for God's care toward His people. It is good for us to ponder these thoughts because we, too, are the people of God. The Old Testament is full of instruction for us. It is not the words of a bygone era. It is the living Word of God which makes plain to us salvation. In verse one the goodness and mercy of our God is the reason for our gratitude. It is by this goodness and mercy that we receive salvation. In verse two we read of the redeemed. They are the elect who Christ bought with His precious blood. In verse three we see that God will gather His people from all lands. He will not let one of them go lost but will bring them all together in heaven. O give thanks unto Jehovah for He is good. Sing Psalters 292:1-2 and 297:1.

September 19 Read Hosea 5:1-15

Psalm 107:4-7 Notice the word city used twice in these verses. Man is always looking for an abiding place. We read of homelessness in our land. We are homeless on this earth. Like Israel wandering in the wilderness we cannot find a place for refuge on

this earth. But God cares for us. He has a city for us. This city is the new Jerusalem in heaven. Christ is preparing for us a place in that city. It will be a city to which none on this earth can be compared. None of its neighborhoods will have to be sanitized for visiting dignitaries. It is a city of glory, beauty, and grandeur unmatched by anything that man can build. God has shown us the way to this city. It is the way of obedience with the Lord as our shepherd. People of God, stop looking for a home in this world. Look for your eternal habitation in heaven. Sing Psalters 292:3-4 and 297:2.

September 20 Read Psalm 107:8-16

Psalm 107:8-9 People of God, are you searching for something for your souls? Are you traveling from church to church looking to be comfortable in a church? Are you looking for that church home that is right? Could it be that you are looking for the wrong thing? Could it be that your souls are looking for the spiritual meat and drink which is only provided by the lively preaching of the Word? God feeds through the preaching alone. He does not feed through programs or other means of worship. He does not feed with church doings. He feeds with preaching. When you find the lively preaching of the Word, your soul will be satisfied, and you will praise Jehovah for His goodness and mercy. Stop searching to be satisfied physically and search to be satisfied spiritually. Sing Psalters 292:5 and 297:3.

September 21 Read Luke 7:24-30

Psalm 107:10-12 Rebelling against the word of God! What a terrible thing! Two days ago we sat under the preaching of the Word. Can we remember the sermons that we heard that day? Are we putting into practice the words that Christ himself brought to us? Are we rebelling against those words as we work and play in this week? The Israelites heard the Word; they rebelled. The Pharisees heard the Word; they rebelled and were party to putting Christ to death. We hear the Word. What are we doing with it? Are we living lives that show that we should be taken captive? Are we preparing to crucify Christ anew? Hear that Word, people of God. Heed that Word. In that way God will be glorified and will reward us with rewards that we can never imagine. Sing Psalter 293:1.

September 22 Read Luke 4:14-22

Psalm 107:13-16 The words that we consider today are a prophecy of Christ. Like words can be found in the book of Isaiah, also a prophecy of Christ. Christ preached on these words in the synagogue in Nazareth. What happened? The people wished to kill Him. When we hear that we are distressed and diseased and blind spiritually, and find out that the only balm is to be found at the cross, what is our reaction? Do we protest that we are not sick? Do we self-righteously say that we have no need of a savior? Do we say that we would never treat Christ like the people of Nazareth? If we say such things, we need to stop for a minute and look at our lives. We must be honest and confess our sins. Children and young people, you need to do this. You cannot say that you love God and then not learn your catechism. You cannot say that you love God and then snub others at school. See God's goodness. Praise Him for it and live lives of gratitude and sanctification. Sing Psalter 293:2-3.

September 23 Read Psalm 107:17-32

Psalm 107:17-20 As we read through this Psalm notice the progress in the intensity of sin. What was true of Israel, is true of the church of all ages. We first try a little wrong doing then we do more and more. The psalmist calls these people fools. That is a strong condemnation. But if you study these three verses, you see why he does so. These people do nothing to help their soul. The figure of speech used here is of eating. They want nothing but junk food for the soul; they do not want meat. But yet God in His mercy hears us when we cry unto Him. In His lovingkindness He saves and heals us. Let us learn and not walk so foolishly in our lives. Sing Psalter 294:1-2.

September 24 Read Hebrews 3:10-19

Psalm 107:21-22 Notice the number of times in this Psalm that we read the words, "Oh that men would praise the Lord..." The Psalmist is figuratively shaking his head at the stubbornness of God's people. God showed His power from Egypt to Caanan and more besides, and they still would not listen. He brought them through the Red Sea and the Jordan River, and what did the people do? They worshipped idols and images. The Psalmist seems to be saying, "Won't these people learn anything?!" But are we any different? We have God's Word. We see His power in the world around us. We see that the signs of the times are coming to pass and that Christ is returning. What do we do? We sin, sin, sin. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness..." Sing Psalter 294:3.

September 25 Read Psalm Jonah 1:4-16

Psalm 107:23-27 One of the comforting things about Scripture is that God uses language and situations that are easily understood by His people. A sailor can read the first chapter of Jonah and cannot help understand that God is God. He then can relate his experiences to others in the church of Christ. The sea is full of wonders of God. Just to watch the majestic whales or see the billows roll and toss should fill us with awe toward our God. The sailors of Jonah's day understood what Jonah was telling them. The disciples could understand the words "Peace, be still" We, too, can use these experiences to comfort us in the spiritual storms of this life. As long as God is with us we will not be overwhelmed by the waves of Satan. Sing Psalter 295:1-2.

September 26 Read Mark 6:45-52

Psalm 107:28-32 I alluded to this passage in yesterday's meditation. "Peace, be still" I can only think of two more comforting words spoken by God. They are "Fear not." The world cries for peace today. Men meet hour after hour trying to hammer out a peace treaty to calm a war-torn area of this earth. But true peace can only come from God. Are you buffeted by the evil one? Does strife in this world fill your soul with fear and dread? Go to our heavenly Father and hear Him say, "Peace, be still." These are words of true comfort, people of God. He will bring us into His haven of rest. Then we can praise the Lord for all His wonderful works and goodness which He shows unto us. Let us do this not only alone but with the whole church. Let us hear the beautiful benediction as it is found in verses 31 and 32. Sing Psalter 295:3-4.

September 27 Read Psalm 107:33-43

Psalm 107:33-37 Those of us who live in the Southwestern portion of the United States can understand these words well. As you walk through fields of vegetables planted in what once was desert land, you can see what it means to turn a wilderness into a fruitful land. Once again we see a picture of spiritual things. God takes from those who refuse to walk in His way the water of His goodness. He makes others to be fruitful in their faithfulness. Now, of course, this is not their work. No, it is His work. He makes them to be fruitful. Left to ourselves our lives would produce nothing but spiritual weeds. Seek to bring forth the fruits of repentance that it may go well with you. Sing Psalter 296:1-2.

September 28 Read Hebrews 6:1-12

Psalm 107:38-39 The cycle continues. The people of God are blessed and what do they do? They fall into sin? Do they repent? Not until God causes their worldly possessions to be touched. Is there anything for us to learn in all this? Indeed there is! People of God, if we find our physical lives in trouble, we had better examine our spiritual lives! Are we playing fast and loose with God's commandments? Are we trying to bend them for our own good? Do we think for a minute that we can desecrate the Sabbath Day just a little bit and be blessed? God's law is the schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. Sometimes that schoolmaster must be stern. Are we paying attention to what God is telling us? Are we listening to His voice? Look at your life. If you think you are suffering, check your spiritual life. God speaks; let us listen. Sing Psalter 296:3.

September 29 Read II Corinthians 8:1-15

Psalm 107:40-41 We are in the middle of another week. How much did you give last Sunday to God? How much are you giving this coming week? You might be wondering why must we worry about that now? The reason, of course, is that the poor are always with us. The kingdom causes are always before us. God cares for the poor. He will have His kingdom to prosper. Sometimes He does this by afflicting those of us who forget the poor and the cause of Christ's kingdom. God has a special care for His poor. He leads them in the paths of righteousness. God has given to us much. Let us use our riches to praise, honor, and glorify His name. To do otherwise has severe consequences. Sing Psalter 296:4.

September 30 Read Psalm 107:33-43

Psalm 107:42-43 We come to the end of this Psalm. Verse 43 speaks well about what we must learn from it. Are we wise? Do we observe all these things? If we are (not in man's wisdom) and if we do see these things, then we shall understand Jehovah's lovingkindness. Young people, do you long for the mercy of the Lord? Do you reflect that mercy in your lives upon your friends? Children are you kind in school? If the answer to the last three questions is no or even maybe, we had better start over again. God will not be mocked. He will have His name glorified. He will make us to see His goodness even if it means affliction upon us. Let us learn, and let us taste the goodness of God's mercy. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and for the wonderful works to the children of men." Sing Psalter 296:5.

Psalter 248—Overshadowing Protection

by Beth DeVries

We turn this month to Psalter 248 which is a versification of the first eight verses of Psalm 91. This Psalter in entitled Overshadowing Protection which reflects the emphasis of this Psalm. We are reminded that though troubles beset us on many sides God will always be our protector. We also see in this Psalm the truth that God not only protects His people but also punishes the wicked.

This Psalter versification begins by speaking of those who find abode in the dwelling place of God. The secret places of God are our hiding place, which means that the enemy can not find us in this place of safety. One of the ways in which we enter this secret place is through prayer to God. This is our time alone with our almighty God and protector. A time when we can talk to our Heavenly Father and no one else knows what is said. Although God calls us to pray to Him in thankfulness, it is also through this time in prayer that we sense the overshadowing protection of our Father.

This Psalm goes on to lead us to confess that we put our trust in God not just in any God but in “My God”. He is our refuge and our stay in all the troubles that surround us in this world. To whom can we flee but to the rock and fortress. The word “fortress” leads us to think of something that is impregnable. The foe can not overcome us or bring us low. We have learned that this fortress is found in the living God. We put our trust in Him

to protect us from the enemy. No enemy can defeat the living God. We seem to have great difficulty putting our trust in God and we constantly want to go it alone. What a wonderful truth that God will not forsake us but always protect us.

God will keep His people from the snare of the fowler. We can think of the fowlers net as a trap set for us by the devil to ensnare us, but God will protect us from this snare. Our God will sovereignly keep His people and turn the evils for our good as He did for Joseph. We read of this in Genesis 50:20 “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.” The attacks of the enemy can be out in the open but most often the trap is set and we do not even notice it until we are in it. We know that our God will protect us and keep us from becoming ensnared.

God protects His people under the safety of His wings.

This idea is that of a very gentle protection. We think of how a mother bird protects her young under her wings so that the enemy can not so much as touch them. God likewise keeps us under His wings so that the enemy can not get to us. As the wings of a bird offer a gentle protection for the young, so also God in love gently protects His people. We feel the safety of this protection when in difficulties. We know that God will always be with us and this gives us the confidence to continue. God is ever faithful and in

248 Overshadowing Protection

PSALM 91 L. M. SOPRA William B. Bradbery

1. The man who once has found a - bode With - in the
2. I of the Lord my God will say, He is my
3. The Lord with His pro - tect - ing care Shall keep thee
4. Thou shalt be - neath His wings a - bide, And safe with-

as - cret place of God Shall with Al - might - y
ref - uge and my stay; To Him for safe - ty
from the hid - den snare; When fear - ful plagues a -
in His care con - side; His faith - ful - ness shall

God a - bide, And in His shad - ow safe - ly hide.
I will see, In Him my con - stant trust shall be.
round pre - vail Thy life the scourge shall not as - ail.
ev - er be A sure pro - tec - tion on - to thee.

this faithfulness leads them in the right path. At times we feel that we have taken the wrong path but in confidence we know that this is God's path and it is right for us.

This Psalm and Psalter versification goes on to speak of many of the ways in which we may be attacked. It speaks of terrors in the night, for often times we fear what may befall us in the dark. We are reminded that God never forsakes us in the night in Proverbs 3:24. "When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet." Nor are we to fear the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that is in the darkness, nor destruction at noonday. This protection of God encompasses all times for we are never left exposed to the enemy.

This part of the Psalm concludes by speaking of God punishing the enemy. Thousands of the enemy shall die

but God's people remain unharmed. This does not necessarily mean no physical harm but spiritual harm. No enemy can take us from our God's protecting care and cast us to eternal fire. We are confident of this protection because we know and trust in the doctrine of the preservation of the saints. We read of this in many passages of Scripture such as: Psalm 37:28, Jeremiah 32:40, John 10:27-29 and Romans 8:35-39. We know that the reward of the wicked is eternal damnation but that the righteous shall reign forever with Christ in Heaven. We look forward to that day when God's justice will be seen by all. When we sing this Psalter versification may we find comfort in the truth of God's sovereign protection of His people. ❖

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

Church Family

Antithetical Dating and Marriage

Part I: The Beautiful Bond of Marriage

by Rev. James Laning

This is the first of a few articles on the subject of antithetical dating and marriage. We use the word *antithetical* frequently, and it is important that we know what that word means. It means *the exact opposite*. So by using the word *antithetical*, we mean to say that our view of both marriage and dating is the exact opposite of that of the world. We maintain marriage to be a lifelong bond, a bond established by God and broken only by God through death. The world speaks of marriage as an institution of man, that can be broken at man's will. We see dating as leading up to and preparing for marriage. The world sees dating as merely a game, a time to enjoy and fulfill the lusts of the flesh before one must settle down and become married. On this subject, just as on all other subjects, our view and the world's view are directly opposed to one another.

We consider marriage first, because a godly marriage is the goal. If you are dating, you should be dating someone you believe you could actually marry. You should be dating someone out of a desire to get to know

**We consider marriage first,
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that person better, in order that you might know whether it is indeed the will of God for you to marry him or her. But to make that kind of a decision, one must be certain he understands what the covenant bond of marriage really is.

The Covenant Bond of Marriage

Marriage is a picture of the covenant bond of friendship between Christ and His church. This is a very important point, which must be clearly understood. Because the covenant is friendship, and because marriage is a covenant bond, what a man and a woman of God will experience when they are drawn together by God is a very intimate *friendship*. When you meet the man or the woman that God would have you to marry, you will normally experience a bond of friendship that is far more intimate than you have experienced before. That is one

When you meet the man or the woman that God would have you to marry, you will normally experience a bond of friendship that is far more intimate than you have experienced before.

of the ways God shows you that this is the one God has for you to marry.

The covenant bond of marriage is a very intimate bond. It is so intimate that the two actually become *one flesh*. This becoming of one flesh refers to more than the bodily union of the sexual relationship. It refers to being one in both body and soul. It refers to having one mind and one will, and together living one life. This indicates how important it is that the husband and wife be spiritually like-minded in Jesus Christ. They must have the same faith. They must have the same love for the truth, and the same hatred for the lie.

The First Marriage

We can learn a lot about marriage by considering the first marriage. In the second chapter of Genesis we read that God created the woman to be an *help meet* for her husband. That she was to be an *help meet* for her husband means that she was to be an *helper perfectly suited* for her husband. God showed Adam that he needed

such a helper by having him name the animals. While he was naming these animals he noticed that they were all paired, the male and its female. This made him recognize that he was incomplete, for there was not a mate for him. Then, after Adam recognized his need for a wife, the Lord brought him a wife, a wife formed and built out of his own rib.

This teaches us some important things. First, it teaches us that God is the One Who brings to a man his wife. This is always the case. When two people get married, it is because God sovereignly brought the woman to the man. Secondly, just as Adam first recognized his need for a wife before God gave him a wife, so the believing young man as he matures spiritually is made to recognize his need for a wife before God brings him the woman that is perfectly suited for him. When God brings to a man the woman He would have him to marry, the man recognizes this, even as Adam did. Not perfectly and not immediately, but he does recognize this. He does not realize it at the very moment he sets his eyes on her. But God works in him and causes him to see this in time, sometimes in a rather short period of time. The realization of this does not end when the two get married. In fact, the longer a believing husband is married, the more he will recognize that God has brought to him the very woman he needs.

The Lifelong Bond of Marriage

This very intimate bond of marriage is also a lifelong bond. Almost nobody is willing to confess that anymore. And yet it is true. Just as the covenant that God has made with us is unbreakable, so the marriage of a husband and wife is unbreakable in this life. God is the One Who forms the bond, and God is the only One Who can break the bond, which He does at death. Scripture states this very clearly, as for example in Romans 7:2, where God says the wife is “bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth.”

The world says that in most cases the husband and wife *should not* break the bond of marriage. The truth is that the husband and wife *cannot* break the bond of marriage. It is not possible. When a man and a woman utter their marriage vows and become married, they are bound to one another for life.

Even a biblical divorce does not dissolve the marriage bond. It is true that Scripture speaks of divorce being allowed for fornication, but such a divorce is not a dissolving of the marriage bond. This is a crucially important point. That is why someone who is divorced and remarried while his or her original spouse is still living

is committing adultery. That is also why such an adulterous marriage must be broken off, even if the couple has had children.

The truth of the lifelong marriage bond is hated by the world, but is for us a source of great comfort. It assures us that we will remain married to Christ as long as we live, which means forever and ever; for the life we

have in our heart is the everlasting life of heaven. This is the life of the covenant we will forever experience, as we forever live with our God, our Husband and our Friend. ❖

Rev. Laning is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Where We Stand

God's Immutability

by Rev. Ron Hanko

Reprinted from the Loveland Protestant Reformed Church newsletter vol. 2, No. 1.

It is fitting that we think of the Immutability of God as we go through this year. Many things have happened in the world during the past year and many things have changed. There has been economic, social and political change. Every day brings more news of great changes that affect all our lives.

Political changes and war have redrawn the boundaries of nations, destroyed nations, and created nations. Here in Northern Ireland, where we live, there has been talk of great changes that may affect our very existence as a country. Some speak of political betrayal, others of a possible solution to our troubles. Which, if either, will it be?

Even in the church there have been changes. The love of many has waxed cold. Iniquity abounds (Matt. 24:10-12). More and more the faithful church appears to be "a besieged city" (Is. 1:8). Things, at least for the present, do not bode well for the church of Jesus Christ.

In our families many of us have experienced great changes also, not all of them pleasant. For some there has been happiness and health, marriage and children, success and well-being. But for others there has been loss and trouble. Some of us still mourn loved ones who have died. Some have endured grievous trials. For some there has been suffering and pain.

What will another year bring? No one knows, though many think themselves prophets. Only of this can we be certain, that another year will bring even more change and decay, for the world in which we live is still the same old world of sin and death.

But God does not change! That is what His IMMUTABILITY means. He *cannot* change. He is "JEHOVAH who changes not" (Mal. 3:6), "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas. 1:17).

He has not changed His purpose and plan for all things. He still unchangeably wills the salvation of His people. Nor has He changed in power, so that He is no longer the Almighty, the sovereign God of heaven and earth. He still controls and directs all things (Ps. 115:3), including everything that happens to us.

Above all He has not changed in His love and grace. He has not forgotten or forsaken us, even when it seems so to us. Especially of that we can be sure because our Lord Jesus, the One through Whom our immutable God reveals Himself, is "the SAME, yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

Is it not wonderfully comforting to know that our God does not change? In Him, through the unchangeable Jesus, we rest. ❖

Rev. Hanko is missionary-pastor of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland.

Early Church History— The Apostolic Fathers (2)

by Rev. John A. Heys

Reprinted from the December, 1945 issue of Beacon Lights.

Last month we gave you a brief sketch of the period called the Apostolic Age. It is now our intention to consider more in detail one of the Apostolic Fathers who lived in that age.

There were, as we remarked last time, six of these Apostolic Fathers whose names we know. They are Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Barnabas, Hermas and Papias. Of these we have singled out Ignatius of Antioch for special consideration today. We do so not because we consider him to be the greatest defender of the truth in that age, but rather because he left a more abundant amount of writing than the others and from him we gain a clearer conception of the age. Clement of Rome rivals him for a prominent place in this age, but all the writings ascribed to him are disputed as to their genuineness. Many deny that they are really his work. Ignatius on the other hand has seven epistles which were written to Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Smyrna, Philadelphia and one to Polycarp.

There are very few facts concerning his life that do not come to us by way of tradition. A few points can be gained from his writings, but most of the facts are derived from tradition handed down from generation to generation. Some of these facts are, to say the least, quite amusing and sound as though men wanted to “build him up” to be a big man. There is for example the tradition that he is the child mentioned in Mark 9:35 whom Jesus took up in His arms when He rebuked His disciples and told them that they must become like this child. Others claim that he was not born until about the year 50 A.D. or some twenty years after Christ’s death and resurrection.

Another thing that tradition tells us about him is that he was a disciple of the apostle John. His writings however show a much greater leaning to Paul. In his writings he makes frequent reference to Peter and Paul. In Romans 4:3 for example he writes, “I do not enjoin you as Peter and Paul did. They were Apostles, I am a con-

vict.” An excerpt which shows a distinct leaning towards Paul reads thus, “But myself am ashamed to be called one of them (i.e. a Christian, J.A.H.); for neither am I worthy, being the very last and an untimely birth.” The language and thought here reminds one immediately of what Paul wrote in I Cor. 15:8, 9. Paul writes, “And last of all He was seen of me also, as one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

One can feel in reading these passages of Ignatius quoted above that it is not the inspired Word of God. Something tells us immediately that this is purely man’s work and word.

Ignatius is reported to have been the third bishop of Antioch. The Roman Catholic church has taken a great liking to Ignatius, and the Catholic Encyclopedia devotes page after page to his writings and the tradition concerning his life. Since he taught that the bishop in the congregation had authority over the elders and deacons, it is to be understood that the Roman Catholic church took a liking to him. We hasten to add again, however, that we are convinced by all that we read of his writings that he would not sanction the modern teachings of Rome of the infallibility of the Pope, saint worship, the corrupt indulgences, etc. He advocated this stand that the bishop or minister was the highest authority in the *local* congregation for the sake of *unity* and not as Rome does for heirarchical reasons. But liking him for this teaching—and we may add that Rome wants to like him for this teaching—they point to this tenet of his to show that the Roman Catholic Doctrine is to be traced back to the time of Peter and the Apostles. They also claim that Peter appointed him to be the third bishop of Antioch. In this way they defend their stand that Peter was the first pope and that Jesus gave to Peter personally and solely the keys of the kingdom of heaven rather than to the church. Rome cannot prove that Peter appointed Ignatius to be bishop of Antioch and never has proven it.

Appearing as a leader in the church in the period after the Apostles who were inspired in their teaching, who were taught at Jesus' feet, who received special revelations and were infallibly guided in their writings, we cannot expect any one of them or all of the Apostolic Fathers together to begin to measure up to the stature of any one of the Apostles.

In appraising a man like Ignatius, we must take into consideration the age in which he lived. Appearing as a leader in the church in the period after the Apostles who were inspired in their teaching, who were taught at Jesus' feet, who received special revelations and were infallibly guided in their writings, we cannot expect any one of them or all of the Apostolic Fathers together to begin to measure up to the stature of any one of the Apostles.

Our allotted space is more than up but we like to make this final remark that, among other things which he taught, we like him for his vigorous defense of the human nature of Christ. He emphasized that He was truly born, tempted, persecuted, crucified, died and resurrected. Ignatius died a martyr's death for His sake. ❖

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

That Church in Dordrecht

by J.P. De Klerk

The name of the Dutch city of Dordrecht will always have a special significance for people in the Reformed Churches, if they stick to the Holy Scriptures.

Dordrecht was officially founded in 1220 by Count William I, after he came back from the fifth crusade (1218-1219) when he took the city of Damiate in Egypt, but it started its history in fact already in 1049 as a village; it became an important trade center. The building of this Church began in 1280, but the tower thirty years later (it could not be finished, because there was not enough money). In 1457, it was destroyed by fire, but rebuilt, though the tower was finished in 1953 (as it looks now), with bells and a clock.

There have been a lot of quarrels before the Church accepted the Reformation. A well known follower of Dr. Martin Luther, Cornelis Woutersz, was even executed with a sword at October 26, 1529.

But finally on June 25, 1572, the first Reformed divine service was held. The next year Prince William I of Orange came and had there Holy Supper. The first minister was Chris Sinapius Venlo.

A Latin School for ministers was opened in 1600, which got the name *Illustre School* later, but in 1684 officially a Reformed Theological High School (the first

professor was Dr. S. van Til), but the school was closed in 1765.

Gradually Dordrecht became a centre for theological meetings and synods, but seldom the Church was used for that purpose. It was more a well-known Reformed symbol.

From June 15-28, 1574, the first (provincial) Reformed Synod was organized in Dordrecht, but only the provinces of Holland and Zeeland could send representatives of their Churches, because there was still a war going on. The initiative for the Synod came from the chaplain to the Prince of Orange, Ref. Taffin. Measures against the Roman Catholics and the Anabaptists were strongly recommended.

On June 21, 1577, the French speaking Reformed Churches ("Waalse kerken") had a separate Synod, led by Rev. Taffin with the help of Rev. Fuegueray, who followed all recommendations of the first Synod.

A general Synod was held from June 3-18, 1578, including representatives from Germany, England and France (Reformed Churches there). ❖

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



BEACON LIGHTS



The 75th Anniversary Committee is pleased to announce the progress being made on the upcoming 75th Anniversary Celebration. The 75th Anniversary is scheduled for June 19-23, 2000, and is going to be held on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI.

The celebration is being set up with many spiritual activities. The children will start their day at breakfast with their families and then off to Children's Bible School. This includes singing, stories, and interactive discussion and crafts. The adults will meet after breakfast and have discussions and sections which will include information regarding various missionary fields and activities of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The theme for the Celebration will be *Living Out of Our Heritage* based on Psalm 16:5 & 6. The evenings will begin on Tuesday evening with Rev. Jason Kortering speaking on "A Beautiful Heritage" and on Wednesday evening with Prof. David Engelsma speaking on "A Present Necessity." The final message will be delivered on Thursday evening by Rev. Carl Haak and will be on "A Sure Light for the Future."

Along with the spiritual activities there will be many recreational activities. The activities for the adults on the field day will include organized competition in coed 16" softball and coed volleyball. For the children there will also be monitored events, such as soccer and relay races. Besides the monitored events there are many unstructured events which will include horseshoes, frisbee golf, closest to the pin, crazy putting, and many more.

The Family Fun Day will include fun activities like: Moonwalk, Kids Inflatable Maze, Kids Caterpillar, Bungee Run, Giant Slide, a Rock Climbing Wall, and many other activities. The pool will be open every afternoon for your family's enjoyment. Some of the leisure activities will include a church tour of historical buildings, an organ recital, contributing and helping with items to send to Myanmar, story time, nature walks, trips to the local museums (Van Andel and Gerald R. Ford), a trip to Fredrik Meijer Gardens, golf, and time enjoying company of new friends.

One of the best benefits of the celebration may be the good Christian fellowship that will be enjoyed with believers from throughout God's creation, including, the Lord willing, from Singapore, Australia, and other parts of the world. We hope that the 120 page book of the Protestant Reformed Churches and video will capture the wonderful experience of the Celebration, but being a part of the event will be the experience that individuals will talk about for years to come.

The Celebration is set up to have something for everyone. That is why we recommend setting this week aside with your family and taking the opportunity to grow spiritually with fellow believers. Through this we pray that God may strengthen our churches for His work in the future and that we may truly celebrate, *Living Out of Our Heritage*.

The 75th Anniversary Committee

The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places: yea, I have a goodly heritage. Ps 16:6

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

Stitches

Images of terrible things flashed across the screen of the television. Susan wanted to shut her eyes, but somehow they couldn't help taking in all the suffering that was being shown on the news. People in one country were starving. People in another country had been hit by a flood. And still another country had been rocked by an earthquake. It was awful.

"Why do such bad things happen, Mom?" she asked.

Mother sighed. "At the very bottom of it all," she paused for emphasis, "—is sin. Sin is the reason. God is a holy God, and He can tolerate no sin at all, not even one. So suffering and death are the result." She paused again. "Sin is the enemy."

Susan had to think about that for awhile. She had heard it said that suffering was the enemy, and that we must do all we can to stop it. *People hate suffering*, she thought, *but not many people hate sin!* Then another thought struck her. *I sin too!*

"God will punish my sin, too!" she thought aloud.

"What's that, Susan?" Mother asked.

"Oh, n-nothing." She was embarrassed that she had spoken when she hadn't meant to. But Mother had an idea of what she was thinking.

"Christ took the punishment for the sins of His people," Mother reminded Susan. "You don't have to be afraid. God won't punish us. He might use suffering to correct us, but when He does, it's to teach us and to help us for our good—because He loves us."

"Even when I had to get stitches in my knee? God used that for my good?"

"Yes," Mother nodded, "He did."

Susan looked at the scar on her knee and smiled. She had never thought of it that way before. *Hm, maybe this scar isn't so ugly after all.*

Mother turned off the news. "Any more questions?"

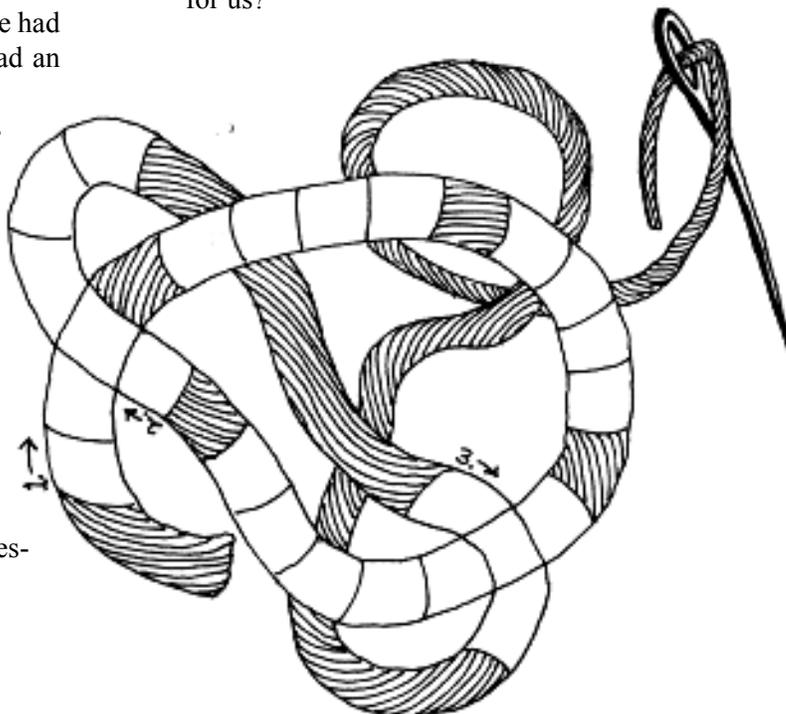
Susan shook her head. "No. But I still don't like suffering."

"Neither do I," said Mother. "But never forget—sin is worse. Much worse!" ❖

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

Follow the path of thread to learn more about sin and its consequences:

1. Look up Ezekiel 18:4. Who shall die?
2. Look up Proverbs 8:36. What do haters of God love?
3. Look up II Corinthians 5:21. Christ was made what for us?



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Church News

BAPTISMS

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

Mark 16:16

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

Logan William, son of Mr. & Mrs.
Jared Van Overloop—Bethel, IL
Megan Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs.
Ron Hunderman—Byron Center, MI
Kayli Nicole, daughter of Mr. & Mrs.
Jim Schimmel—Holland, MI
Colby Dale, son of Mr. & Mrs. Greg
Flint—Lynden, WA
Gysbert John, son of Mr. & Mrs. John
Huizenga—Randolph, WI
Caleb John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Wayne
Buiten—Redlands, CA
Abigail Ruth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs.
Calvin Dykstra—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:

Cassie Bonestroo—Doon, IA
Erin Van Egdon—Doon, IA
Nicole Van Bommel—Doon, IA
Karen DeVries—Edmonton, Alberta,
Canada
Michael Klaassens—Edmonton,
Alberta, Canada
Lisa Tolsma—Edmonton, Alberta,
Canada
Daryl Koole—Hope, MI

MARRIAGES

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

Matthew 19:5

United in the bonds of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Mike Pollema and Miss Nicole
Van Bommel—Doon, IA
Mr. Stephan DeJong and Miss
Jennifer Wynia—Doon, IA
Mr. Brenden Looyenga and Miss
Kelly Scholten—Faith, MI
Mr. Steve Young and Miss Abigail
Teat—First, MI
Mr. Dirk Hollebeek and Miss Stacy
Heemstra—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Matt Van Overloop and Miss
Jodee Kotman—Holland, MI
Mr. Paul Joostens and Miss Rebecca
Tolsma—Lynden, WA

Correction from last month:

Mr. Tom VerStrate and Miss Christy
Hoekstra were united in Marriage.