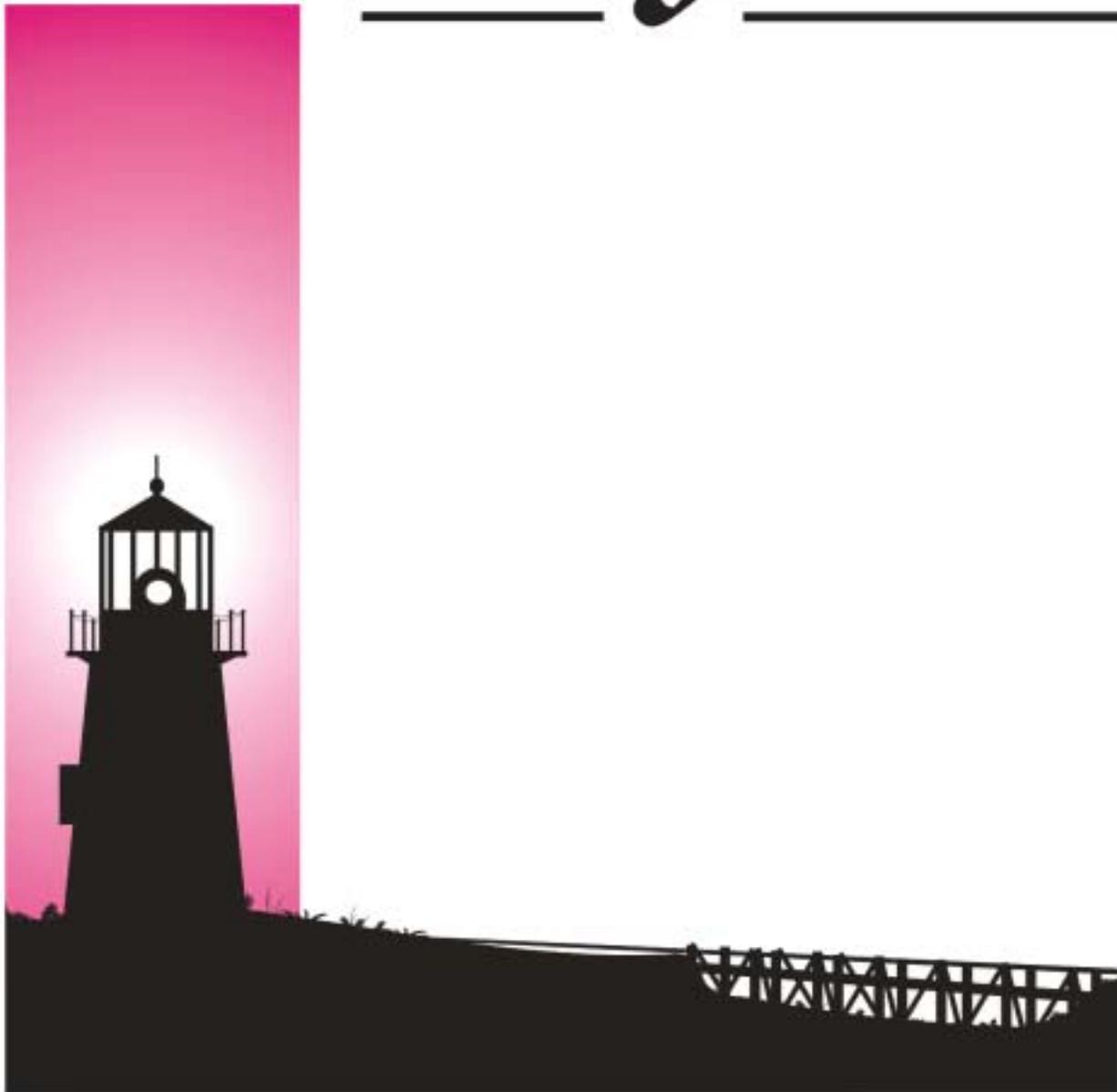


Beacon Lights

*January
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Our Father is Sovereign

by John Huizenga



We live in a world of boundaries. A fish cannot live beyond the bounds of water. He can survive only when he have enough oxygen and within a narrow range of temperature. Man works hard to extend his boundaries but he remains a creature limited by space and time. All creation had a time when it began and its existence is measured by time. All creation fits within a particular space. All creation is finite.

Our heavenly Father is not limited by boundaries. The boundaries of time and space that make creation finite do not apply to God. Time and space were created by God to be the boundaries of His creative handiwork. God alone is infinite. He alone is without bounds or limit.

The Word of God found in II Peter 3:8 expresses the truth that God is not bound by time. In that passage this earthly realm is compared to the heavenly and we read “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” God is beyond the realm of time. Time does not apply to God in any way.

Sometimes we may think of God as existing for a length of time, that is without beginning or end. When the psalmist expresses God’s infinity in terms of time, he says, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Psalm 90:2). And again, “But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end” (Psalm 102:27). Because we are creatures of time, God reveals His infinity in terms of time. Even so we must keep in mind that II Peter 3:8 reveals to us that He is exalted above time. God also reveals that He is not limited by space. After King Solomon built the glorious house of God, he confessed that such a building, no matter how glorious, could in no way enclose God. God did not put all of His Being inside the temple so that He could not be found in any other place. We read Solomon’s words in I Kings 8:27: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” Not even the entire universe can contain God. As God is exalted above and beyond time, so God is exalted above space. Again we are limited by our earthly minds. We say that He is omnipresent, and by this we often think of God filling every part of the universe. But He, through His servant Solomon, reveals in I Kings 8:27 that He goes far beyond the universe. Nothing can contain Him. We must again remember that space is a creature of God that serves the created realm.

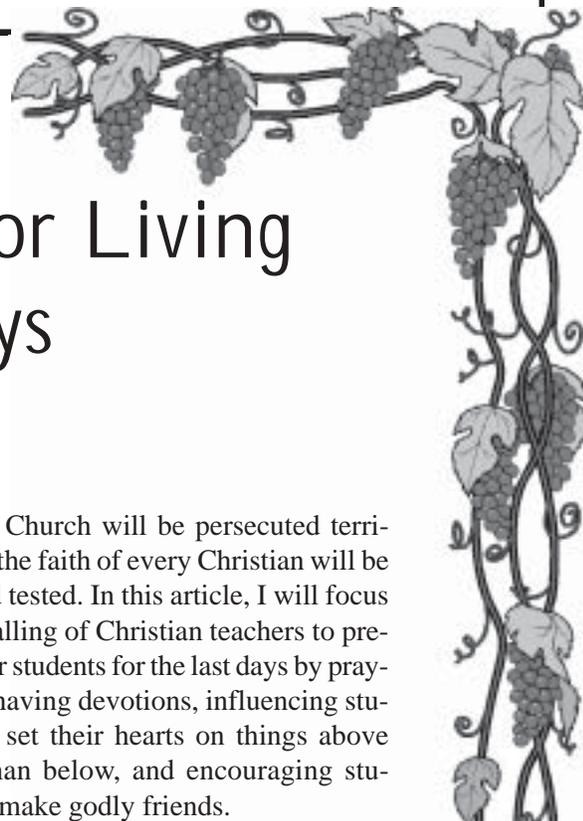
How then can we who are limited by time and space and unable even to comprehend anything beyond time and space know God as our Father? We can’t do this by ourselves, but in Christ we do know God as our Father. By faith we know that the infinite God became united with the finite creature in Christ. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The work of the incarnation is and can only be the work of the sovereign and infinite God. We cannot fathom the wonder of God’s attributes and neither can we fathom the wonder of God’s works. Yet God reveals this work to us, and He works faith within our hearts to know this work as the work of our heavenly Father.

In Christ we see the infinite nature of God expressed in His other attributes such as love, mercy, grace, holiness, etc. The holy and infinitely exalted God came to the wicked loathsome creatures we are by nature through the Fall. He came in love and tender mercy. He gave His only begotten Son to atone for our sins. When we know these fundamental truths of God’s work of salvation, then we see boundless love and mercy. Then we see and experience something of the infinite God as our Father. In the risen and exalted Christ we

get a glimpse of life beyond the realm of this earthly life. In Christ we find a door that breaks through the boundaries of time and space and we are given a glimpse of God's glory. In Christ we know the infinite God as our Father. He has adopted us to be His children so that by the wonder work of salvation we can enter into covenant fellowship with Him forever.

Whenever we walk into the realm of God's revelation, we walk in a beautiful garden of mysteries. By faith our eyes are opened to see the grace and glory of God. While living by faith on this earth we have only a glimpse and a certain hope of life with our Father. "But as it is written, ye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him," I Corinthians 2:9. The child of God does not ignore a study of the attributes of God thinking they are beyond comprehension anyway, but rather he loves to ponder the wonders of God and studies what God has revealed. After all, knowing God is life eternal. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). ❖

Fruitful Branches



Preparing Students For Living in the Last Days

by Dan Van Uffelen

A Protestant Reformed Scholarship essay.

Life seems so easy for us. We live in a land where almost any dream is possible. We live in a land of cushy jobs, gorgeous homes, speedy cars with leather interiors, luxurious foods, protection from lawbreakers, and religious freedom. We're happy at home, happy at school, happy at work, happy with our friends, and happy at church. Why in this wide world would we be worried about preparing students for living in the last days? Because the time that we live in today is just the calm before the storm. The Devil is very busy right now spoiling us with the endless pleasures of everyday life and distracting us from our Lord. Under the facade of the easy life, the Devil works destruction for us. The easier we have it in life—the more we are in danger. This is why preparing students for living in the end times (our times) is so very important. The Church may have never before been in this much danger. In the last days, false teachers will persuade many to follow them, earthquakes and famines will ravage the world, friends and relatives will betray each other, morality will sink to an all-time

low, the Church will be persecuted terribly, and the faith of every Christian will be tried and tested. In this article, I will focus on the calling of Christian teachers to prepare their students for the last days by praying and having devotions, influencing students to set their hearts on things above rather than below, and encouraging students to make godly friends.

It is extremely important that students understand the value of prayer and searching the Scriptures. It's only by communing with God through prayer that we can become edified by the Bible; and it's only by reading God's infallible Word revealed in the Bible that we can learn how to live to God's glory and prepare for the last days. To emphasize prayer's importance, the Heidelberg Catechism asks and answers, "Why is prayer necessary for Christians? Because God will give his grace and Holy Spirit to those *only*, who with sincere desires continually ask them of him, and

are thankful for them” (Q&A 116). We will need God’s grace in the terror of the last days, and it is only through prayer and the cross of Christ that God grants us the grace to survive. The Apostle Peter writes of prayer in the last days, “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer” (I Peter 4:7). Recognizing the necessity for prayer in all things, Peter advises us to pray for strength in the last days. Without communion with God, how can a Christian expect to survive the ugliest chapter of human history? It’s only through the power of prayer.

Knowing the Bible is just as important. In II Timothy 3:16 and 17 we read that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” Knowing how to behave and become stronger in our faith in the last days is only possible by knowing the way in which God requires us to act. God lays out His guidelines for our life in His Word, warning us of the signs of the end times. God’s Word brings the good news of our salvation in Christ and teaches us the truth in all things. In the last days, false prophets will offer their corrupt swords of wisdom.” Our Bibles could very possibly be yanked away from us. How will we be able to combat false teachers if our Bibles are gone and we are foggy on the truth of God’s Word ourselves? We need to be diligently searching the Scriptures right now.

Teachers need to be aware of the profound need for devotions in class. God’s Word must be brought into every classroom and every subject area. Teachers should begin and end every day with heads bowed down in meditation with God. It’s the calling of teachers to both teach the Word of God and teach the students to teach themselves the Word of God. Prayer and Bible reading are the two most important tools God equips us with to prepare for living in the last days.

The age we live in is an age of selfish materialism. Materialism is one of the Devil’s favorite games. The Devil tempts us with so many goodies, and he does it for a specific reason: the Devil knows that if our greedy hearts embrace the things of this world, we will be distracted from the things of God. The Devil distracts us with possessions and glamour so that when the last days come “as a thief in the night,” no one will be watching. Jesus warns us of the deadly sin of materialism in Matthew 16: 19&20: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through

nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Materialism devoured Lot’s wife when she looked back on the earthly pleasures of Sodom and Gomorrah. Materialism pushed Judas Iscariot to value 30 pieces of silver over the value of faith. Materialism has destroyed so many lives. We must make sure that in our age of record-breaking materialism, we do not become overcome with it all and forget that we need to be watching for Christ’s return. In the last days, our possessions could very possibly be torn from us and, without the “Mark of the Beast,” we will be unable to buy and sell. If we forget the words of Jesus and fall in love with our possessions, resisting the world in the last days will be extremely difficult.

Teachers should not encourage their students to have a passion for math, English, or science; they should encourage their students to have a passion to glorify God through these subjects.

Teachers must teach students the harmful way of materialism. Teachers should not encourage their students to have a passion for math, English, or science; they should encourage their students to have a passion to glorify God through these subjects. Rather than inspiring students to find a career that brings home the most cash, teachers should inspire their students to find a career in which their talents can best be used for the glory of God.

A third way in which teachers can prepare students for living in the last days is by encouraging the finding of godly friends. Godly friends are priceless. They strengthen a person’s faith, lend a listening ear, and offer godly advice. Worldly friends, on the other hand, draw a person away from God. Question and Answer 55 of the Heidelberg Catechism teaches us that befriending godly people and using our gifts for people of the church is very important: “What do you understand by the ‘communion of saint?’ Everyone must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, to the salvation and advantage of other members.” We need to make

godly friends to strengthen ourselves and help fellow Christians along the treacherous pathway of life.

In the last days we will learn who our true, godly friends were and who our fake, ungodly friends were. In Luke 21:16, Jesus warns us of the last days: “And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and *friends*: and some of you shall they cause to be put to death.” Jesus illustrates the significance of who a person is associated with. Family and friends will turn against each other in the end. In preparation for living in the last days, we must make sure that our friends are not enemies in disguise, but friends that worship the same Lord that we do.

Teachers must make this message known at school. They must do this by becoming reliable, godly friends with the students themselves, exemplifying true friendship by cooperating with other teachers, and encouraging students to find friends in the Lord. For these reasons, it is important for Christian teachers to work in Christian schools and Christian parents to send their children to Christian schools. School is where the bulk of our friendships are made, which is why a Christian setting is important for students.

Preparing for the last days is an activity that every Christian should be engaged in. Teachers, as well as

preachers, family, and friends, have the important calling to prepare students for the persecution at the end of time. Students must learn to earnestly involve themselves in devotions, prayer, and Bible-study, shy away from the materialism of today by setting their hearts on things above, and seek godly friends. When we need to know how to prepare for anything, we must always look to Jesus. In Jesus’ last days on this earth, he taught all of us how to behave in our last days. Jesus spent his last days in prayer with God at the Garden of Gethsemane, teaching us to pray in preparation for the last days. In the Garden, Jesus also taught us to keep our minds on heavenly things, unlike His disciples who chose to sleep while He watched and prayed. In the upper room, Jesus communed with his true friends and disciples and told his false friend Judas Iscariot to leave, showing us that in preparation for the last days we need to stick with godly friends and get rid of ungodly friends who will only betray us. Jesus must always be our example and our foundation. With Jesus as our Savior and friend, the last days are only a passageway into the first days of eternal life with Him. ❖

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

Creation Through the Spectacles of Scripture

“When I in Awesome Wonder...” Michigan’s Golden Coast— Splendid Grass

by Deane Wassink

The lakeshore contains one of the most inspiring environments that have been fashioned by the hand of our Creator. In this ecosystem is a unique combination of creatures that reflect the glory of our Lord. The child of God needs only to be on a dune bluff in the midst of a storm to realize both the awesome

power of God in the wind and the waves and the temporary and changeable nature of this world in the erosion of great dunes and the building of them again.

One of the most fascinating plants created for the specific environment of the sandy coastline is the lowly dunegrass. The environment is one of pure white sand

baking in the sun and under constant erosion from wind and wave. It is an environment so harsh most plants cannot start, much less thrive in this corner of the creation. The lowly dunegrass, however, is perfectly suited to fit into this niche of the creation. This grass is an incredible example of the simple beauty of our Lord's handiwork.

Dunegrass has many different names: sawgrass, marram grass, american beach grass. The seed is sterile, so it spreads by reproducing through eyes (stolons) that are part of the root system. These eyes are carried by the waves to new territory when pieces break off in the spring and fall storms. When they wash up on a new beach they are buried again by sand. It is only in the non-summer months that the plant is dormant (asleep) so that it can survive the trip unharmed.

This plant can be buried by several feet of sand and still grow to the surface. These buried roots help form a deep tangled mat that helps to keep the dune from washing away into the lake. The other way dunegrass controls erosion is through the toughness of its blades. These blades stand tall until snow flattens them in the winter. They turn brown with the frost. However, they do not rot away for many years. The result is that a dense mat of this dead grass is formed on the surface of the sand which keeps it from washing away in the rain or blowing away in the wind.

Interestingly enough, this plant grows next to both oceans, which are saltwater, and next to all of the great lakes, which are fresh water. It is unaffected by saltwater. It likes the northern latitudes. It rarely grows below South Carolina. Therefore, dunegrass is the primary plant that keeps sand from blowing around the country.

As tenacious and tough this plant is, why doesn't it take over all the other plants? Its spread is limited naturally to the places where waves can move it around. It loves the accretion and erosion of the lakeshore. It does not like humus or competition. It disappears soon after other plants get a chance to grow using the protection it provides. In fact, that is why it is a transition plant preparing the land for woodland plants like trees, shrubs, flowers and ferns. Many insects and animals make their home among the dunegrass plants as well.

Man has learned to use this gift of God by planting it for erosion control on lakes and inland sand hills. This was done in great volume in the WPA days of the Great Depression. Also, it is planted in home landscapes to provide a no-maintenance yard.

If our Maker has so wondrously covered the barren sand dunes to bring them to life, He can certainly take

care of the hearts of His people. He takes their dead hearts, dry and lifeless with sin and brings them to life by covering them with His blood.

We see how our Creator has wisely given a special plant for a particular place and situation. Just as the dunegrass plays a major part in the control of erosion in all of the creation, each plant, each animal, each insect is created to fill a special niche, a particular place that only it can fill. In filling that roll, each creature reflects God's glory in a unique way. For this reason alone it is important to protect species from complete destruction. Just as each creature has its special place, God has given each saint a particular place in the body of Christ. Whatever his color, size, abilities, sex or social status each reflects His glory in a particular way. Also, He gives these individuals to the church to serve in important and unique ways. Never may we look down on a fellow saint. The least is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. May God give us grace to appreciate His handiwork.

*Our hearts by nature barren, dry, and dead
As dunes are blown by winds, unable to rest;
Are anguished and sad, filled with dread,
Unable to stand in the smallest test.
Our hearts by grace are pulsing with life,
Planted with His Spirit, hope do hold
Of victory in the midst of trial and strife,
In life's trials and storms able to be bold. ❖*

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



The Fourth Man

A Story from the Time of the Afscheiding

by P. S. Kuiper

translated by Rev. Cornelius Hanko

Chapter 3

Toon as a Beggar-by-the-Sea

All hands in your desks.... Slates on the desk!" One hundred slates came out of the desks and were noisily laid on top. Teacher De Liefde waved his hand and everything was quiet. "Clean your slates."

That started a loud rustling in the class. The children of the first and some of the middle rows took out their sponge boxes, took out the little sponge, and began to wipe out the sums of the morning lesson. The students dried the slates with a small chamois. The sponge boxes were often show-pieces decorated with all kinds of cute figures. The owners were very proud of them.

The children who could not afford the luxury of a sponge box had their own method of cleaning their slates. They spit a little bit on the slate, wiped off what they had written with their sleeve, and wiped their slates dry on their black stockings.

When all that was finished, the children were given instructions to copy the poem of the morning that was still on the board. The scraping of a hundred slate-pencils sounded through the stuffy room.

In the meantime, Teacher De Liefde left his chair and walked along the long rows spying on each student. Sometimes he wiped out a letter and wrote it over for the student. Sometimes he took a small, grimy hand in his own big white hand and 'steered' it along.

"Lift your hand quickly; put it down lightly," he said, over and over again. Occasionally he discovered that a boy or girl did not write as neatly as he or she could. That one received a sharp rap of a ruler on the knuckles.

Suddenly the instructor stood still by Toon's seat. "What kind of bungling is that for a boy who can write so

well?" he cried angrily, and he gave the boy two raps on the fingers. "Ow, Ow," howled Toon, but it didn't help. He had to wipe his slate clean and write the poem over again. The class was surprised because every one knew that Toon could write beautifully. Now he was the last one to finish.

After the writing lesson followed the reading lesson. Cornelis van Ravenswaay was given the first turn. He sat up a little straighter and began to read.

"Lotje was a very kind, friendly and understanding girl, and all the girls who played with her liked her. If other children were naughty or mischievous, Lotje would say to them: 'Shame on you, children, you must not be naughty. We should play nicely together. Then Father and Mother will love us, and then we can be happy and content.'"

"Well read, Cornelis," said the teacher approvingly, while he added the admonition: "Remember that also boys can take this noble Lotje as an example!"¹ He cleared his throat in a dignified manner. The teacher then ordered Toon to continue reading. But there was only a painful silence. Every one looked at Toon, whose eyes rapidly raced over the lines, but with a growing sense of despair.

"The little fellow Bollebakker does not know where we are." The voice sounded slow and threatening. "One more neglect of his duty and he will get a more severe punishment! Zadok Pakkendrager, you read!"

Dokkie sniffed his snotty nose and read with a droning voice the goody-goody tale of the exemplary Lotje.

Cornelis thought that he could allow himself a bit less attention since he had now had his turn to read. Carefully he opened his sponge box. It did not smell very good. He gave his neighbor Maarten a poke. Maarten looked over and glanced at Cornelis' sponge box.

There was a big bean inside the sponge box which was beginning to germinate in the moisture. Both boys snickered silently and quickly turned back to their reading lesson, because they had to keep up with Dokkie.

The bean in Cornelis' sponge box reminded Maarten of the brown beans that Toon had eaten at lunch, and it gradually dawned on him what Toon's problem was: He had eaten too many brown beans!

When Maarten saw Toon's red face and his restless moving back and forth in his seat, his suspicion became a certainty. On the one hand, he felt sorry for the unfortunate fatty; on the other hand he had to put forth an effort to suppress his enjoyment of Toon's misery. After a few other girls were allowed to read, the books were again put away.

Teacher De Liefde sat once more behind his desk. After he tapped his desk twice, the room was completely quiet. "Children, what day is it today?" he asked after a few moments. Cornelis raised his hand "Good Friday, Teacher!"

"No, no, I do not mean that," said the instructor, almost shocked. He was forbidden to speak of the Christian faith in the public school. To do so was regarded as intolerable by Jewish and unbelieving parents.²

Dokkie gave the answer that the instructor wanted: "April 1, 1836." "Splendid! This afternoon I am going to tell you about another April 1 from our wonderful past national history. Be sure to listen attentively!"

They now became as quiet as a mouse. An extra story, especially from their national history—who could ever have dreamt of a treat like that? Their eyes shone.

And from the moment that Teacher De Liefde began his story of the capture of Den Briel by the Beggars-of-the-Sea on April 1, 1572, the children hung on his words.³

Only the unfortunate Toon focused his attention on something quite different. Maarten's suspicions were only too correct. That noon at home, Toon had offered to "empty the pan," something the gluttonous boy now regretted. He had the feeling as if his stomach was in an uproar, while sharp cramps tortured him.

Should he ask permission to be excused to go to the toilet behind the school? But that would disturb the story and would only make both the teacher and the children angry.

If only he had asked earlier! Outside, the tower clock struck half past two, but Toon was the only one who noticed it.

The instructor and the children were living in the anxious past. But Toon was thinking only of the anxious present and the likely anxious future. Then suddenly a new and stronger cramp seized the poor boy.

The perspiration broke out on his forehead. Desperately he looked at the instructor, who noticed nothing in the excitement of his story.

"Then Simon the Rich⁴ called out: 'Let's use the key of Holland, men!' The Beggars-of-the-Sea took a huge mast they had taken down from one of their ships and rammed it against the gate of the city. 'Boys...., one blow, two blows, and then the last one.'"

At that very moment things became too much for the miserable Toon. He jumped out of his seat, and as the Beggars-of-the-Sea raced into the city, Toon raced with them, but out the back door of the room.

For a few seconds the class was completely speechless. Suddenly someone burst out laughing. Then the laughter of the class resounded so loudly that it could be heard at the Kerkbrink. A couple of boys literally fell out of their seats laughing.

Maarten took advantage of the frenzy. He got up from his seat and out of pure mischief held his pant legs together as he marched out. That was his second mistake of the day.

Teacher De Liefde, who at first was completely stunned by the sudden chaos he saw in his class, came out of his chair with a start. Immediately the tumult settled down and gave place to an anxious silence. Maarten now sat like the rest, like a wax image, but it was too late. Teacher De Liefde could stand a joke, but this disrupting of his story made him angry.

"Boelhouwer, come here!" he roared, while he picked up the rod from his chair. Shortly the feared means of discipline was applied rigorously to the back of Maarten's trousers.

The boy pressed his lips firmly together, although the tears trickled down his cheeks.

Just as the chastisement was finished, the back door opened and Toon appeared upon the threshold, embarrassed and afraid.

The teacher called him next to his chair where Toon had to hold out both hands.

He received a few blows of the rod on each hand, which made him moan with pain. The teacher took both of the boys by their collars and set them in the hall, after which he returned to the room to try once more to take up the thread of his story.

And so the Beggars-of-the-Sea finally came with great difficulty and pain into the city of Den Briel. ❖

¹ This is another illustration of the moralistic teachings, which were the only religion the pupils received in the State Schools in the years before the Afscheiding. All religion was said to be nothing more than living a moral and exemplary life.

² These were not public schools such as we have in America. They were church schools in fact, but were supported by the government, for the church was a state church. Christianity, except in the bland form of moralistic teachings, might not be taught. Although the government officially supported the Reformed Churches, the government also practiced toleration of other religions. So as not to offend the students of other religions, teachers were forbidden to teach the Christian faith.

³ The Beggars of the Sea were Dutch sailors in the early history of the struggle for Dutch independence from Spain. When the Reformation came to the Lowlands, Spain attempted to eradicate it by terrible persecution.

The Dutch, under the leadership of William the Silent, fought back. They were, however, hopelessly outnumbered and their cause seemed often to be hopeless. But the Dutch were known for their ship building skills and for their daring and skilled seamanship. Some of these sea-faring ships armed themselves and harassed Spanish shipping. Often they captured Spanish ships, turned them into their own use, and prevented the wealth of foreign lands from entering Spanish ports. They sank armed vessels in daring attacks, raided coastal cities and plundered them, and kept Dutch hopes alive. A sort of turning point in the war was the capture of Den Briel by these Sea Beggars, for it gave the Dutch armies a foothold from which to launch land attacks against Spanish troops. At a later date, these Sea Beggars, sailed their ships overland when the dikes were broken and came to the aid of the city of Leiden which city had been nearly starved into submission by Spanish troops.

⁴ A captain of the Beggars who was leading the attack on Den Briel.

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Watching Daily At My Gates

Meditations on the Epistle of James
by Cornelius Jonker

January 1 Read Isaiah 41 :8-13

On this New Year's Day we turn momentarily from our study of the epistle of James to these beautiful words from Isaiah 41:10, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God...." This was a comforting message to the Old Testament church and it is equally comforting to us today. The year 2000 has come and gone, and now we begin another. Do you wonder what it holds in store for you? Are you concerned or anxious as you face the future? The world makes its humanistic resolutions and usually fails to keep any of them. But we are not of the world, are we? We can face this new year clinging by faith to God's promise that He will be with us. How can we then possibly be filled with fear? He is not only with us, but He will strengthen us, will help us, and uphold us with His right hand of power and holiness. By faith cling to this God and face the coming year with peace and confidence. Sing Psalter 247:1, 2.

January 2 Read Romans 2:1-3

James 3:1 James begins this chapter with the address, "My brethren," just as he did in the former ones, and warns us not to be many masters or teachers. He is not saying that we must not have teachers, for instruction is necessary and profitable, for we read elsewhere in Scripture that God has appointed teachers in the church. However, this verse must be viewed according to the context which speaks of the tongue, and especially the tendency of the tongue to speak in an evil manner. The idea of being many masters points to self-conceit, or our sinful inclination to censure or judge others when we ourselves are guilty. Do you find it easy to tell others what to do and insist that your way is the best? James, led by the Spirit, instructs us not rashly or arrogantly to reprove others with the warning that they who do this will receive heavier judgment themselves. May we daily pray for grace to esteem each other better than ourselves. Sing Psalter 206:2, 3.

January 3 Read Matthew 12:35-37

James 3:2 In connection with the preceding verse where we were warned against haughty judgments against our neighbor, we see that James posits two arguments here. The first is that all of us make mistakes. There's no doubt about that, to be sure. Then he goes on to say that if any offend not in word, the same is a perfect man and able to control the whole body. This brings to the fore, the matter of the tongue. The tongue is a vital part of our body which is fearfully and wonderfully made by God. With our tongue we speak and communicate to others. Because of our sinful nature, our speech is also sinful. Before we realize it, we speak words which hurt others. Only a perfect man can bridle his tongue so as never to offend, and who of us can fit that description? Only by grace can we control this powerful little member. Pray daily for that grace. Sing Psalter 383:1, 5.

January 4 Read Proverbs 21 :20-23

James 3:3-5 Most of you have seen huge ships that sail the Great Lakes or ocean liners so big that they are called floating cities. Did you know that a comparatively small flat sheet of steel in the stern, called a rudder, can make the ship turn at the discretion of the pilot? Many of you have ridden horses and so you know that a gentle pull on the rein fastened to its bridle will make this large animal obey you. James uses these examples to

show us how similarly our tongue affects our whole body. Do you detect a warning here, dear reader? Do you exercise control over your tongue? Our little tongues can boast great things, can't they? Many forest fires are started by a tiny spark from a campfire perhaps, but soon that small blaze roars out of control and consumes thousands of acres. Words come forth from our mouths so quickly and, once out, they have an effect. As we ponder the matter of the evil tongue, pray that God will sanctify our lips and heart as we speak. Sing Psalter 382:1, 2.

January 5 Read Proverbs 16:23-27

James 3:6-8 As we saw yesterday, the tongue is a small member of our bodies, yet it possesses great power. In our passage today we see how evil and deadly that tongue really is. Satan used his tongue to tempt man to fall in paradise. Ever since, that tongue cannot be tamed and it infects our whole body with sin. Scripture is replete with references to wicked and lying lips, and the Heidelberg Catechism refers to the sins of the tongue as the very works of the devil. Just think of the results of the uncontrollable tongue in our homes, in the church and among the nations. Speech is a wonderful gift but sinful man uses it to backbite, to create unrest, to hurt and to destroy. Are you and I guilty of these practices? Each of us must look in our own hearts because Jesus said in Matt. 12:34, "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh." And then we must pray as David did in Psalm 51:10 "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Sing Psalter 141:1, 2.

January 6 Read Ephesians 5:1-4

James 3:9-12 We saw yesterday how the tongue is an unruly evil, full of poison and uncontrollable by man. Today, James depicts to us the good and bad use of the tongue especially in the church of Jesus Christ. We use the same member to praise God and speak evil to and about our neighbor. Who of us can claim innocence in this regard? Perhaps after a worship service where we praised God, a fellow member made a remark to which we took offense, and we lashed back with bitter words, or even worse, that a curse may have been uttered by us. James rightly states, "My brethren, these things ought not so to be." Then he gives examples in nature of the impossibility of both sweet and salt water coming from the same fountain, as well as a fig tree bearing olives. We have regenerated hearts, but only a small beginning of that new obedience. We are new creatures in Christ, but the old man of sin constantly besets us. These are not excuses for our sins but point to the need for us to humble ourselves before God and pray for forgiveness. Sing Psalter 386:1, 4.

January 7 Read Proverbs 8:7-12

James 3:13-14 James now turns to another matter closely related to his discourse on the evil tongue. He exhorts to Godly meekness as opposed to envy and strife. Who among you is wise and has knowledge, he asks? Let that person show in his life that all his actions are characterized by meekness and wisdom. A man may have all sorts of knowledge, but if it is not coupled with wisdom, what good is it? True spiritual knowledge, coupled with wisdom, displayed by meekness, results in mercy and peace. The author then contrasts this wisdom with a scenario of bitter jealousy and strife in our hearts. If that is the case, he states, don't boast and deny the truth. You have the privilege to gather in the communion of saints

today. Listen carefully to God's Word, grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and pray for wisdom to live a prudent and fruitful life. Sing Psalter 336:2.

January 8 Read Proverbs 6:16-19

James 3:15-16 We see that James elaborates further on yesterday's picture of hearts that boast great things but are actually filled with envy and strife. He describes it as wisdom; not the wisdom which comes from above, but a carnal wisdom having these three properties; earthly, sensual and devilish. We know that the world possesses this type of wisdom. They delight in evil and glory in their shame. But when this shows itself in the church, it results in disorder and every evil work. The passage you read from Proverbs 6 tells us how serious this sin is. God hates it and it is an abomination to Him. What is our calling then, children, young people and parents? We may not wink at sin when we encounter it, but reprove with love and meekness. Memorize this passage from Eph. 4:32: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Sing Psalter 369:1, 2, 3.

January 9 Read I Corinthians 2:4-7

James 3:17 In contrast to the earthly wisdom described in yesterday's passage which in reality was sinful envy and jealousy, we have a description of true wisdom. This wisdom comes from above; from God Who by His Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts, bestowing upon us the benefits of Christ. This wisdom is characterized by seven different properties, all highly to be desired. God only possesses these attributes perfectly, but they are reflected in His elect saints. How can we attain this wisdom from above? Since the Spirit Himself bestows these gifts, we must earnestly pray for them and by faith cultivate these desirable blessings. Is your conduct pure, do you promote peace, are you gentle in your behavior, courteous to others, merciful and fruitful, do you show impartiality and true sincerity? In the measure that you by God's grace possess and practice these qualities, you may be assured that you are a recipient of that wisdom from above. Sing Psalter 308:1, 3.

January 10 Read Philippians 4:4-7

James 3:18 We come to the conclusion of the discourse on the desirable properties of the wisdom which descends from above, namely that the fruit or harvest of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. We hear a lot about peace in the world. Peacekeepers are sent to all parts of the earth to maintain peace. They are often able to accomplish a temporary peace in that open warfare is stopped, but true peace will forever elude them, for we read in Is. 48:22, "There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked." God's children, who by grace obey His royal law to love Him with all their heart and soul and mind and their neighbor as themselves, experience the true peace which passeth all understanding. They are justified by faith and reap harvests of blessings. The blessed result for the church is that when peace is sown, the harvest is an abundance of fruits of righteousness. People of God, sow, water, cultivate and nurture these seeds of peace. Sing Psalter 198:1, 2.

January 11 Read Isaiah 1:12-17

James 4:1-3 These verses direct our attention to a situation in the churches to whom James is writing. There were fightings and quarrels resulting from sinful lusts and covetousness. Worldly pleasures and materialism dominated their desires so that disharmony and contentions abounded. And don't think that this problem pertained only to the church of that day. Satan is just as busy or more so today promoting these evils, as he was when this epistle was written. It stands to reason that prayer life in this atmosphere was adversely affected. Some gave up praying because their prayers were not answered. Others prayed, but their prayers were not proper. What kind of prayer life typifies you, people of God? Are your prayers reverent, never bringing God down to your level, and free of carnal desires? Prayer is a holy art, the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us. Read Lord's Day 45 of our Heidelberg Catechism and model your prayers according to the Lord's prayer which really sets our priorities straight. Sing Psalter 31:1, 2.

January 12 Read I John 2:15-17

James 4:4 Continuing his admonition to his brethren in this practical epistle, James draws our attention to another evil evidently prevalent in the early church. That is the sin of worldly-mindedness, and we know only too well how many inroads this sin has made into the church and lives of God's people today. True, we don't change worship services for football games, but we can easily stay home from spiritually profitable lectures and seminars, and on the other hand never miss a basketball game. Young people, are you as diligent in studying your society and catechism lessons as you are in pursuing the allurements the world has to offer? The world affects us more than we care to admit. The Spirit confronts us squarely with these words, "whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Strong words, but so true. We are in the world to be sure, but we are not of the world. Pray for grace that your life and conduct show that you are a friend of God. Sing Psalter 62:1, 2.

January 13 Read I John 3:21-24

James 4:5 Commentators and Biblical expositors find this passage difficult to interpret. There are no literal quotations in Scripture as mentioned in this verse. The word "spirit" seems to give the most problems. Some other translations are: "Or do you suppose the Scripture speaks to no purpose? The Spirit who took up His abode in us, yearns jealously over us," "Or what do you think the Scripture means when it says that the Holy Spirit whom God placed within us, watches over us with tender jealousy?" James has just reprimanded the members of the church for being friends of the world, calling them spiritual adulteresses. Now he says "Don't you hear what the Scriptures say?" How is it possible to say that our carnal lusts are the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. That can never be. Is it any wonder then that you cannot pray? The Spirit is grieved and filled with jealousy when we are unfaithful. People of God, earnestly pray that you may be illumined by the Spirit, and be led by Him to live a Godly antithetical walk in the midst of a sinful world. Sing Psalter 144:1, 2, 6.

January 14 Read Proverbs 16:16-19

James 4:6 There is probably no sin more prevalent in the world than the sin of pride. From the first person who lived in the world to the very last, this is a basic evil that clings to all. Satan and his cohorts fell because of pride, as did our first parents in paradise. We read in Ezekiel 16 that pride is listed first among Sodom's many sins. James directs our attention to this matter by way of contrasting pride and humility. He speaks of a proud man who is conceited and exalts himself over against God and his fellow men. He also says that God resists the proud, meaning that He opposes them and counts them his enemies. Over against this, James speaks of a humble person. What is humility? This is a virtue given by grace whereby we realize how small and insignificant we really are, confessing our sins and acknowledging our dependence upon God for all things. May we all grow in the grace of humility. Sing Psalter 366:1, 2, 3.

January 15 Read Hebrews 2:9-15

James 4:7 We saw yesterday that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Because of that, they are therefore to submit to God in all things but not to yield to the devil in anything. The devil, we are told in I Peter 5, goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He also transforms himself into an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14). Are you fully aware, dear reader, of his deceit and cunning? He is very much alive today and will use any means to destroy God's church. How can you and I resist him? In Eph. 6 we are told to put on the whole armour of God in order to stand against the wiles of the devil, above all taking the shield of faith to quench his fiery darts. Even as Jesus said "Get thee hence, Satan," so must we resist him by prayer and the Word. Jesus broke the devil's power by His death on the cross, so we have the assurance that when we resist him, he will flee from us. Sing Psalter 188:1, 2.

January 16 Read Psalm 73:25-28

James 4:8 The first part of this text almost gives the impression that God's drawing nigh to us depends upon us. Unless we make the first

move, God will not come near us. Many people believe that. Then we have a God Who can do nothing unless man makes the first move. What a sad and hopeless doctrine! Jesus said in John 6:44, “No man can come unto me, except the Father which has sent me draw him.” When we confess that God is sovereign, that we can contribute nothing to our salvation, realizing that according to His mercy He draws us to Himself, then we have comfort. It is certainly true that experientially we feel God’s presence in the measure that we draw nigh to Him, but it is always His work through His Spirit and Word. Then when God draws us to Him, we “cleanse our hands” by putting away sin and “purify our hearts” by sanctified living rather than being double minded and easily turned in different directions. May you truly experience God’s nearness in your life each day. Sing Psalter 100:1, 2.

January 17 Read Psalm 126

James 4:9-10 The admonition in our passage today is not something that appeals to our nature, but it is something very desirable nevertheless. We are told to weep and mourn, and why must we do that? It’s because of our sins. We have missed the mark, we have transgressed God’s law, we have offended the Most High. How can we harmonize this with the admonition which the apostle Paul gives in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say rejoice?” Throughout the whole Bible we read of the joy of the Christian. However, that joy comes from the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Forgiveness requires sincere sorrow for our sins and, yes, even mourning and weeping at times. Remember the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears of sorrow and repentance? Jesus told her that her sins were forgiven, and her sorrow turned to joy. Perhaps we don’t shed tears very often because of our sins, but we should. Heartfelt sorrow for sins is God’s work in our hearts and He will exalt us, now in principle and one day perfectly. Sing Psalter 83:1, 2, 3.

January 18 Read Romans 2:1-4

James 4:11-12 Did you ever lend an ear to someone who told you in confidence, “I heard that Mr. So & So did this or that,” or “Did you hear what Mrs. So & So said the other day?” These are examples, of course, but they are nevertheless real and prevalent in our midst. James speaks again of this sin that often appears in the church, that is, gossip or backbiting that degrades and destroys. Usually the person to whom this matter is told can hardly contain it and so passes it on to someone else whether it is true or not. Actually it makes little difference because James says when we speak evil of a brother, we judge him. In our minds we have tried him, found him guilty, and in so doing we judge the law and speak evil of it. We are warned to stop short! Only God is the law giver and perfect judge. We stand before the mirror of that law which requires us to love God and love our neighbor. Let us practice this, not by ignoring sins in others, but dealing with our neighbor in love according to God’s Word. Sing Psalter 69:1, 2, 7.

January 19 Read Hebrews 6:1-3

James 4:13-15 As you arose this morning did you make plans for the day? Or perhaps are you busy planning a trip in the near future and are full of all the details involved? Still further are you contemplating marriage, a business venture or another major undertaking? In this very practical passage James comes to us and says “Hold on! Wait a minute! Be sure to realize what you are doing.” We ask the question—is it wrong to plan? Certainly not, we answer. Good stewardship requires planning, but **how** we make those plans is the point James makes. He gives an example of a man who boastfully makes plans to move to a city, become rich in business, never considering his family’s spiritual welfare. His plans are entirely materialistic. Since none of us know what tomorrow may bring and since our lives are compared to a morning fog that soon disappears, we must always say, “if the Lord wills.” Does that mean we must audibly preface all our stated intentions with this phrase? No, but we should say it with our mouths more often than we do, and always be conscious of it in our hearts. Sing Psalter 46:1, 3.

January 20 Read John 14:8-12

James 4:16-17 It’s so easy to be boastful. We live in a materialistic age and most of us live in affluence. We like nice clothes, new cars, fancy homes, and even though we may not flaunt them outwardly, yet our natures take sinful pride in them. We may have an influential position in the business world or in the church; we may have above average education and intelligence, but if that leads to arrogance or boastful rejoicing, it is evil. James concludes this chapter by saying, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” In effect, he tells us to look back on his admonitions and be active in doing good. What are good works? We can find no better answer than that of the Heidelberg Catechism (Q.91) “Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory, and not such as are founded on our imagination, or the institutions of men.” This is God’s work in His redeemed people, bought by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. People of God, strive to walk in good works. Sing Psalter 246:1, 2, 3.

January 21 Read Matthew 6:19-21

James 5:1-3 Once again James addresses those within the church who are rich in worldly goods but not rich toward God. They set their goals on earthly treasures and boast in them. Once again he uses the term: “Go to now” or “pay attention to what I’m saying.” These men are told to cry and wail for the judgment that is coming upon them. All their riches upon which they set their heart are corrupted. Some of the treasures that man would lay up such as rich garments and oil and grain, more than they could ever use, would actually be corrupted. Their gold and silver, though not susceptible to rust in the literal sense, would be a witness against them. We are taught a lesson here. Are our possessions something in which we place our trust, or does God give them to us so that we may honor Him and do good to others? Do we frantically work to amass a big retirement account so we can consume it on earthly pleasures? God tells us that where our heart is, there will our treasure be also. Pray that we may be true Christian stewards and lay up treasures in heaven. Sing Psalter 105:1, 5, 6.

January 22 Read Deuteronomy 24:14-15

James 5:4-6 Yesterday we saw that some rich men set their hearts on gathering great amounts of earthly goods and treasures. Today James accuses them of gathering those riches by willful deception and fraud. They exploited their poor labourers who worked in their fields and reaped the harvest. These rich men, however, don’t reckon with the Lord of Sabaoth who hears the cries of the unpaid or poorly paid workers. The term Sabaoth refers to the mighty Lord of Hosts. He will vindicate His oppressed people. And not only have the rich men accumulated their riches by fraud, but they have lived in wanton luxury and culminated their wickedness by condemning and killing the righteous. Not many of us fit the example of the rich who amass great fortunes. A lot of us, however, have much goods and live in luxury. Have we obtained them properly and not at the expense of others who should have shared in it? It is no sin to be rich, but our natures are such that we desire more and more. Let us heed God’s warning to be ethical, just and liberal to our fellow saints. Sing Psalter 97:1, 2, 3.

January 23 Read Hebrews 10:35-37

James 5:7-8 We turn in this passage from the wicked oppressors to the poor brethren who suffered under their hands. James encourages them to persevere with patience even amid all their evil treatment. He gives an example of a farmer who plants his seed and now must wait with patience for the crops to come up. Maybe some of us are farmers whose livelihood depends on the seed to germinate and grow. Will the seed sprout? Is the ground properly prepared? Will there be too much rain or excessive drought which might affect it? Much patience and trustful waiting is necessary. So it is the duty of the child of God to be patient in his afflictions, taking courage because the Lord is coming. We are told to “stablish our hearts,” which means in the Greek to “prop up.” We do this by being faithful to God’s Word, being constant in prayer and clinging by His grace to the

promise of Christ in Rev. 22:7 “Behold I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.” Sing Psalter 259:1, 5, 6.

January 24 Read I Corinthians 10:6-11

James 5:9 It is so easy to grumble and have a complaint against someone. Who is really immune to it? Perhaps a person criticized you or said something that you perceived to be an insult. Maybe a classmate receives better marks than you do, or perhaps you are envious of someone who is better off than you are; self pity sets in, and you think you are treated unjustly. And so a feeling of ill will or resentment arises within your hearts and if not dealt with properly, almost consumes you. James has a rare insight into the human heart, realizing that we as Christians are susceptible to this sin because of our evil natures. Don’t grudge or murmur against one another, he says, because the Judge is standing at the door. Let the righteous Judge, Who alone knows the heart, do the criticizing, not you, less you yourself come under judgment. Sing Psalter 139:3, 6.

January 25 Read Hebrews 6:9-12

James 5:10-11 After James tells his poor oppressed brethren to be patient and not murmur against each other, he reminds them of the prophets and Job who all suffered much affliction. They endured, not in their own strength, but in the strength of the Lord. Job especially is singled out as one who endured affliction with patience. He lost his dear children and all his possessions in one day. His body was plagued with sores. His wife told him to curse God and die. Even his dear friends, instead of comforting him, added to his woes by accusing him of sin. Although at first he did not understand God’s dealings with him, yet he maintained his faith. What an example for you and I to emulate when faced with severe trials. Even as Job confessed, “I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes,” so must we each day. The Lord always has a purpose in trials to show His great mercy and will turn them to our good, even as He blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning. Sing Psalter 329:1, 4.

January 26 Read Matthew 5:33-37

James 5:12 As we are nearing the end of this epistle, James begins this verse with the statement, “Above all things, my brethren, swear not...” We believe this refers not only to the immediately preceding verses but to his entire epistle. We heard about the evil of an untamed tongue and the sin of grudging and murmuring against one another. All this shows how easy it is to sin with the tongue. Because swearing dishonors God and heaps contempt upon His name, it is forbidden above all things. But may we not swear an oath? Yes, we may if the magistrates demand it, but usually the more a person swears that he is speaking the truth, the more we tend to disbelieve it. The Jews in Jesus’ day perverted the proper use of the oath and would preface their statements by swearing by heaven or by earthly things. Our lives as well as our speech must show that we live and speak the truth always. Then we have no need of more than a simple yes or no. Pray for grace that others may see that proper example in our lives. Sing Psalter 40:1, 5, 6.

January 27 Read Psalm 92:1-4

James 5:13 We are confronted with a contrast in this text, and although opposites, yet they are related. Both affect the use of the tongue. James first asks this question, “Is any sick among you?” or “is any afflicted?” Even though it is put in question form, it is a statement of fact. Affliction is part of our lives because of our sins, and whether we blame or bless God for it, does not alter the fact that it happens to us. Affliction, especially bodily suffering, drives the child of God to his knees in prayer. Have you experienced this, dear reader? To whom else can we pour out our hearts to receive the only real comfort and assurance that He loves us and will turn all things to our good? Then secondly, James asks “is any merry? let him sing psalms.” We are not necessarily happy by everything that comes our way, but in spite of it. How can the redeemed child of God **not** rejoice with praise and singing? Sing, people of God, whether you sound like a nightingale or a frog, but sing and praise God! And what better songs can we sing than our beloved and God glorifying psalms. Sing Psalter 424:1, 2.

January 28 Read Psalm 30:1-4

James 5:14-15 We saw yesterday that when we are afflicted with bodily suffering we must turn to prayer. In prayer we seek not only forgiveness, but patience to be submissive to God’s will also in our suffering. Today we learn that sometimes we are so spiritually sick and depressed that we cannot pray. The cause may be physical or spiritual or may be due to some certain sin in our lives which takes away our assurance and peace. Then we must call for the elders of the church to pray for us, and if a certain sin holds us in its clutches, this must be confessed and thrust away. The Lord hears the prayer of faith and through this means assures us of His mercy, pardon and peace. Many people and churches wrongly interpret this passage to say that if we only have enough faith, the Lord will certainly heal all our bodily illnesses. Faith healing services are the norm today, deceiving many and drawing thousands of people. Don’t be misled, people of God, but pray to Him in faith, and if you cannot pray, the elders of the church stand ready to help you, for they care deeply for your souls. Sing Psalter 149:1, 5, 6.

January 29 Read Proverbs 28:11-13

James 5:16 How often do you pray for your fellow saints? Quite regularly, you may say, for which you are to be commended. How about confessing your faults to them if you have sinned against them as well? That may happen infrequently or perhaps not at all. Today’s text is closely related to the previous verse where the sickness spoken of is of such a nature that the sick person has no spiritual strength to pray. There is usually sin involved. If we have sinned against someone, we must confess that sin, and likewise if one has sinned against us, he must also confess it. We pray for each other then not with a trite or listless prayer, but an earnest and fervent one. We should all stand back and examine our prayer life. Do we sometimes mouth words but don’t pray from the heart? This is not pleasing to God. We read that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Let us pray for that fervency in our prayers that the Lord may mightily use them for His glory and our blessing. Sing Psalter 164:1, 3.

January 30 Read Psalm 17:1-6

James 5:17-18 We all know the story of Elijah the prophet who prayed that it might not rain in Israel because they had forsaken the worship of Jehovah. This certainly was a prayer put in Elijah’s heart by God, but through this means that amazing wonder took place. The example is given to show us that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elijah was a sinner as we all are, but his prayer was a righteous prayer and God heard it. We also read that he prayed again that it might rain and God answered with an abundance of showers. Elijah was very jealous for his God as we read in I Kings chapter 20. This motivated him to pray earnestly that God would take action to chastise His people and bring them to repentance. Let us be jealous for God with a similar desire to see that His holy name is honored and revered. Sing Psalter 339:1, 2, 3, 4.

January 31 Read Matthew 18:11-15

James 5:19-20 James brings this epistle to a close, fully realizing the possibility that some of the brethren would stray from the truth and walk in the way of error. Just look at the history of the church itself. One small departure from the truth leads to more, and this inevitably reflects itself in its walk. Its no different with the individual. Embracing an error in doctrine can lead to a closer walk with the world and eventually an outright denial of the truth. God visits these sins in the generations that follow with eternal consequences. Do you see one of your friends, young people, who is influenced by a smooth talking but false teacher or preacher? Do any of you know someone who is contemplating marriage to an unbeliever or divorced person? These are just a couple of examples of erring from the truth or walking in a sinful way. We must seek their salvation and God uses the means of admonitions from fellow saints to turn them back to a proper walk. May God be pleased that through the study of this epistle we may not be hearers only but doers of His Word. Sing Psalter 384:1, 2, 5.

A Christian's Prayer

by Angela Schipper

*O Lord my Father teach me
Lead me in the perfect way.
Guide each one of my footsteps
and from Thy path let me never stray.*

*Lord send to me Thy comfort
When the tears begin to fall
Help me to see the good in everything
Even if the good is small.*

*Lord help me to help others
When their way isn't always clear
And when my own struggles are too overwhelming
Please hold me up and hold me near.*

*I pray to Thee my Father
Bestow upon me what is Thy will
And when my heart is troubled
Help me to hear the words "Be still."*

*Lord be my guide in all I do
Help strengthen me when I am weak
And when times of anger roll around
Help me to watch the words I speak.*

*Lord my Father help me remember
And let me never forget
To never want what is upon this earth
But to have my heart on heaven set.*

*Lord please forgive my many sins
That have been done in word or deed.
Again, I ask Thee to guide my footsteps
And a Christian life let me lead.*

Amen.

Reverend George C. Lubbers (1)

by Agatha Lubbers

Rev. George C. Lubbers, member of the First Protestant Reformed Church, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, emeritus pastor, writer, father, grandfather, and great grandfather, became a minister of the gospel in the Protestant Reformed Churches 65 years ago.

Rev. Lubbers has been retired from the active ministry since 1978—now more than twenty years. Prior to his retirement he wrote for the *Standard Bearer* and *Beacon Lights*, served as a pastor in five different churches, and was a missionary for many years both in this country and in Jamaica.

Rev. Lubbers was born in Beaverdam, Michigan, on August 6, 1909. Beaverdam, an area between Hudsonville and Zeeland where he spent the first nineteen years of his life, was and is a farming community in Western Michigan. At the time of his birth, more than ninety years ago, Beaverdam was a small settlement of Dutch Reformed farmers.

Rev. Lubbers was baptized by Rev. Eldersveld in the Beaverdam Christian Reformed Church and attended the Beaverdam Christian School (1914-1922). He received all his catechism instruction during the first years (until about 1916) in the Dutch language. He vividly remembers the tolling of the church bells on Armistice Day ending World War I, November 11, 1918.

Because the church was not connected to a supply of electricity, he took his turn as a teenager in pumping the bellows that provided the air for the pipe organ in the church. Rev. Lubbers has always loved to sing and he reported that sometimes he would continue singing when the congregation had already concluded for an interval in the song.

The parents of Rev. Lubbers were Cornelius and Aggie (Van Putten) Lubbers. Although the families of his grandparents could trace their origin to immigrants from the Netherlands, both were native United States

citizens. They too had grown up in the Beaverdam area where they became acquainted, were married and reared their family of eight children. Half of the children in the family are now deceased. Two brothers John C. Lubbers, member of the Hudsonville PRC, and Henry C. Lubbers, member of the Holland PRC, are still living. One sister, Cobie Berens, lives at Sunset Manor in Jenison.

Rev. Lubbers was reared in a community and family in which an eighth grade education was all that was considered necessary. When he graduated from the eighth grade his formal education came to a conclusion for a period of time. Although an aunt thought he should go on to secondary school and then go to college just as many other young men growing up in the cities would do, he began to work on the farm of his father. He worked the clay fields of his parents' farm in Beaverdam with the team of horses—Frank and Mack, and often worked for other farmers in the community. He hauled many loads of gravel with the team of horses, because one of the important responsibilities of the taxpayers and farmers in that area was to haul their share of gravel from the neighboring gravel pits so that the roads could be properly covered.

When Rev. Lubbers was sixteen years old, the Synod of 1924 met. The members of the small Christian Reformed community of Beaverdam heard of the trouble in the Christian Reformed Churches, particularly in Grand Rapids. A young talented minister, Herman Hoeksema, pastor of the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, had been opposing the teachings of Abraham Kuyper regarding the theory of common grace. His opposition had stimulated the formulation of the infamous three points of common grace adopted by the Synod of Kalamazoo of 1924. Because of Hoeksema's opposition to the three points and because of protests against his teachings by members of

the Eastern Avenue CRC, Grand Rapids Classis East decided that Hoeksema must agree with these three points or be deposed. Because he would not agree, the Classis wrongly deposed him.

The events during this period of time (1924-1925) in the Christian Reformed Churches had a profound effect upon Rev. Lubbers. With his uncles and his father he attended lectures and church services in Grand Rapids and the Hudsonville area led by Rev. Hoeksema, Rev. Danhof and Rev. George M. Ophoff. He and other relatives became followers of the cause that resulted in the formation of the First Protestant Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan, later called the First Protestant Reformed Church. His mother would not associate with the movement led by Rev. Herman Hoeksema during these early days, although later she became a faithful member of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, organized in 1926.

During the years 1925-26 he heard Rev. H. Hoeksema lecture and preach in the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church. He heard a lecture given in the Dutch language on “Kerklijke Hierarchie” (Ecclesiastical Hierarchy). The first sermon he remembers preached by Rev. Hoeksema was on Matthew 11:11-12. “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” This sermon was in also in the Dutch language. Later he attended a worship service held in the St. Cecilia Building. The sermon was on James 3:1-2. The elders were to begin family visitation and they were charged not to be many masters, but to know their own weaknesses, also the weakness of their own tongue. It was a bit later that he heard Rev. G.M. Ophoff lecture on the “Error of Common Grace” in the Spoelman Barn in Hudsonville.

Rev. Lubbers began to attend activities at the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in 1926. During the fall of 1926, Rev. Ophoff came to teach the catechism class that he attended. Rev. Lubbers shall never forget the pointed and clear exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism teaching concerning “our only Comfort in life and death.” He was still a baptized member of the Beaverdam CRC, but he attended regularly the catechism classes and the divine worship services at the Hudsonville PRC instead of attending the services and catechism classes in the Christian Reformed Church of Beaverdam. Although Rev. Lubbers could not be a charter member of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church because he had not made public confession of faith, he was a

participant in all the activities during the early days of the church.

It was during these years that Rev. Lubbers and Mrs. Lubbers (Rena Schut) met and their courtship began. Both Rev. Lubbers and his future wife made confession of faith in the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in the spring of 1928. Rev. George Ophoff asked the questions both in the Consistory meeting and a few weeks later from the pulpit at the time of the public confession of faith. Rev. Ophoff preached on I Corinthians 6:20, “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit which are God’s.” It was a powerful message. For this reason we can say that Rev. Lubbers is a spiritual son of the Hudsonville PRC.

During the time that Rev. Lubbers became interested in the issues that resulted from the controversy of 1924, he came to the conviction that he should become a minister of the gospel. He decided that he would study for the ministry in the small Protestant Reformed Theological School that met in the lower level of the First Protestant Reformed Church, on the corner of Franklin Street and Fuller Avenue. He began to attend the seminary in September 1928, and here he spent the next six years of his life until his graduation in the spring of 1934. His professors were some of the advanced students in the school, Rev. Herman Hoeksema and Rev. George M. Ophoff.

The first two years were difficult years in preparatory studies for a young man who had left the classroom at the age of twelve and at the end of the eighth grade. He was required to study English grammar, Dutch grammar, Greek grammar and Hebrew grammar during his first year in the seminary. This was a rigid assignment—a good discipline to try the fledgling student to the utmost. It worked.

In August 1930, he married Rena Schut in a special Sunday evening service in the Hudsonville PRC. Rena was his faithful wife until her death in December 1998. Rev. Lubbers and his wife Rena became the parents of four children—Agatha Lubbers, Mrs. Garretta Newhof Cornelius Lubbers, and Lamm Lubbers. In covenant faithfulness God gave them thirteen grandchildren, many who have married. Now there are many great grandchildren as well, who are all members of the PR churches. *(Continued next month with the ministerial labors of Rev. Lubbers.)*

Agatha Lubbers is the daughter of Rev. Lubbers and is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Remember Now Thy Creator in the Days of Thy Youth

by Aaron J. Cleveland

There is a slogan which a certain company has promoted and which accurately reflects the spirit of the age and the lifestyle of the worldly youths today. “Just do it.” It is a simple phrase, yet packed with much meaning. This phrase could rightly be called the creed of the worldly youth because in it is found summarized their beliefs concerning everything necessary for their satisfaction and happiness in this life. This is the creed of the moral relativist. This is the creed of the person who says that there is no such thing as truth. Truth is what you want it to be, whatever happens to fit into your pattern of thought. No one has a monopoly on what is right and wrong. The logical conclusion of this kind of thinking is that every man does that which is right in his own eyes.

The Reformed young person immediately recognizes this relativist creed as opposed to God’s Word. There is truth. God is truth and He reveals Himself through Christ in Scriptures as the One Truth. No man can set up his own system of truth. All men will one day stand before the Judge to answer for everything they did contrary to His will. God will not allow any disobedience to go unpunished. We read in Answer 10 of the Heidelberg Catechism that God “is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins; and will punish them in his just judgment temporally and eternally, as he hath declared, ‘Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’” We confess this to be truth and oppose the creed of the world, “Just do it.”

Yet oppose this worldly creed as we might, we find that we still have that old man of sin within us which delights in that creed. Especially as young people, it can be difficult submitting to God’s will in all things and obeying His law. It is appealing to set up our own system of truth, our own set of standards. Two areas in which Reformed young people are especially tempted to follow the “just do it” creed of the world are with

regards to the proper use of their time and money. It is not uncommon to hear young people and parents in our churches espousing worldly wisdom when it comes to the proper management of the time and money of the young people of the church. “I am young yet, let me

It is not uncommon to hear young people and parents in our churches espousing worldly wisdom when it comes to the proper management of the time and money of the young people of the church.

have fun now, because when I get older the good times will come to an end,” says the young man. “Don’t worry about it,” says the parent, “he’ll grow up soon enough, let him have his fun now.” “Youth is the time to be enjoyed without cares, responsibility will come in its own time.” This is properly called worldly wisdom. It is not rooted in God’s Word. God’s Word has much to say about the proper attitude covenant youth ought to have towards things spiritual and the proper use of time and money. God’s Word opposes completely the notion that we ourselves determine what is good for us concerning how we use what God has given us. In that Word we find principles set forth regarding the proper use of what God has given to us.

Ecclesiastes 11: 9 begins, “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth.” The preacher addresses the young man and continues, “and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in

the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” The preacher warns, live as you please, do as you want, but remember that God weighs your every action. The young man is not excused for walking in his own selfish ways because he is but a youth. The young man may not say before God, “but I was young, I cannot be held accountable for that.” David cried in Psalm 25:7, “Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions.” The sins that David had committed in his youthful days anguished him when he became older and more aware of his sinful nature.

In Ecclesiastes 11:10 the young man is admonished to “remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh.” Matthew Henry describes this “sorrow” as anger. He comments, “Young people are apt to be impatient of check and control, to vex and fret at any thing that is humbling and mortifying to them, and their proud hearts rise against everything that crosses and contradicts them.” What it means to “put away evil from thy flesh” we easily understand. In other words, the young person is admonished not to live in the “ways of thine heart” or by the “sight of thine eyes”, but according to the ways of the Creator (chapter 12:1).

”Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,” reads the beginning of the next chapter. This is positively how covenant youth are to walk. “Remember now thy Creator” when it comes to how you spend the time God has given you. “Remember” when it comes to how you spend the money God has given you. We note what the preacher does not say also. He doesn’t say, “Wait until you grow up, and then remember.” Nor does he say, “There will be time enough to put away the evil of your flesh when you get older.” Remember now, when you are teenager, thy Creator.

God’s Word has recorded for us the lives of three of His faithful servants: Samuel, David, and Daniel. All three of these men, from their youngest days remembered their Creator. We begin with Samuel. In I Samuel 2:18 it is written that “Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod.” This service of Samuel is even more striking when we consider that at this time Hophni and Phinehas (Eli’s sons) were profaning the true worship of God. Samuel was surrounded by disobedience, yet he did not use this as an occasion to sin. One cannot read the history of Samuel and not be struck by the amazing devotion of his mother, Hannah. Hannah, fulfilling a vow she had made, “lent” Samuel to the Lord as long as he lived. We can be assured that

every bit of time and every piece of instruction that Samuel received from his mother was devoted to preparing him for His lifelong service to God.

David also is a remarkable example of a young man who remembered his Creator in His youth. When reviewing the history of David and Goliath we recall that when David told Saul that he would go fight Goliath, Saul replied, “Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth” (I Sam. 17:33). David’s reply to Saul indicates how God had used his younger days as a time of preparation for the future. We read, “Thy servant kept his father’s sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock; And I went after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God” (I Sam. 17:34-37). God used the lowly job of shepherding his father’s sheep to prepare him for the great task of leading God’s people.

Finally, Daniel provides for us another example of a young man who remembered God in the days of his youth. Shortly after he had been taken into captivity it is recorded of him that he “purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat” (Daniel 1:8). Even as a very young man, and away from the authority of his parents, Daniel purposed in his heart that he would serve God. Before Daniel was placed a very great temptation to eat the king’s portion, yet Daniel submitted to the will of God, seemingly to his own hurt. From the exploits of Daniel and his three friends in their adult years we see how God used the instruction and preparation in their youth.

From the lives of these three men we are reminded of the great blessings of God upon those who use their youth as a time of preparation for the service of God. Samuel, David, and Daniel all were used by God in special ways during very important times during the history of the church. None of them would have been prepared had they lived their younger days in the service of themselves. None of them would have been ready had they not lived the confession, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” By God’s grace they did confess this and so do Godly young people today. ❖

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

The Office of Deacon

by Rev. Ronald Hanko

* *Reprinted from the mission newsletter circulated in the UK by Covenant PRC.*

The office of deacon is one of the most neglected offices in the church of Jesus Christ. Many churches do not have deacons, or if they do, the deacons do not perform their Biblical function in the church.

In most churches that have deacons the deacons do the work of elders, ruling the church. In other cases they merely take care of the financial affairs of the church, something for which ordination is not necessary.

To understand the office of deacon it is necessary to turn to Acts 6 where the story of the first deacons is told. Now, it true that word translated “deacon” in Scripture is simply the Greek word for servant and Scripture uses it to describe anyone who serves in any capacity in the church or among believers (Jn. 12:26, Rom. 16:1). Nevertheless, Acts 6 makes it clear that some are “servants” in a special sense.

Acts 6 teaches us, first, that the office of deacon is an *office* to which one must be *ordained* (vs. 6 - cf. also Phil. 1:1 and I Tim. 3:10, 13). This implies already that the office is more than a matter of keeping the church’s books. It also implies that certain spiritual qualifications are necessary (vs. 3, cf. also I Tim. 3:8-13).

Acts 6 also suggests (and I Tim. 3:8-13 confirms it) that deacons, like elders and ministers, should be men. This follows from the fact that it is an ordained office involving the exercise of authority in the church, though not the same ruling authority that the elders have. Churches that have women as deacons are as much in disobedience to God’s Word as those that have women elders and preachers.

We also learn from Acts 6 what the office and function of the deacons is. Their business involves especially the care of those who are in need, in Acts 6 the Grecian widows. That this involves more than the care of widows and waiting on tables, however, is clear from Acts 4:35. There we see that the “business” which the Apostles turned over to the deacons involved collecting for and distributing to all who were in need.

We would emphasize, too, that in doing this as ordained officers of the church called by Christ Himself, their work is more than mere charity work. It must follow that having been ordained in Christ’s service to this work, they are responsible for helping in Christ’s Name and for His sake: “It is very beneficial, that they do not only administer relief to the poor and indigent with external gifts, but also with comfortable words from Scripture” (*Form of Ordination of Elders and Deacons* of the Reformed Churches).

In doing this, they are fulfilling a certain priestly function in the church. Like the OT priests, theirs is an office of mercy, in that they receive the gifts that are brought and “offer” them in the service of Christ and His people.

We believe that they must follow the rule of Galatians 6:10 in their work, but that their office first and especially is for the church. When their office is restored then it will be true in the church: “Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Ps. 37:25). ❖

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

An Old Church in Scotland

By J.P. de Klerk

The Reformed Church of Scotland was founded in 1560.

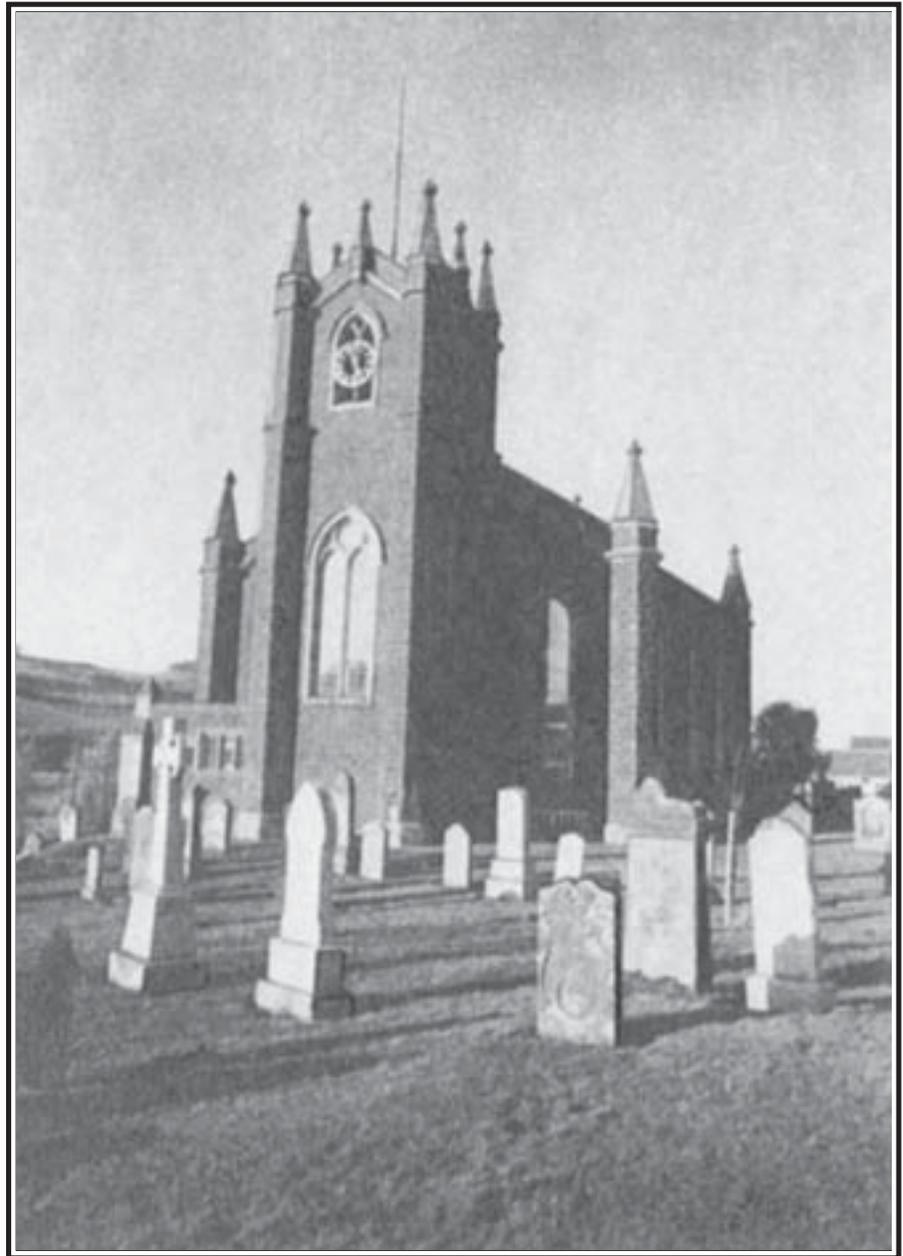
Here you see their Church in Yetholm, built in 1836. There had been a church at this place already, which was destroyed by fire. Only the bell was left and hangs now in the tower (made in 1643, in the city of Middelburg in The Netherlands).

This building is made from rare bricks, sawn out of centuries old lava from a volcano that had been in that area; they are black with red veins in them. The windows are made of stained glass, given by the elder Andrew Blythe, who had been a gypsy.

Next to the entrance the names of many ministers out of the history of this Reformed Church are mentioned, like Thomas Aitken (1578-1585), Joseph Leck (1731-1785), John Baird (1829-1861).

Around Yetholm there have been several Roman Catholic churches which have been destroyed during the many battles that have been fought out there in the 14th and 15th centuries, between armies of England and Scotland. In those days 287 towns and villages were burnt down.

To the left of the church you find the hills with the famous Cheviot sheep. To the right is the Bowmont River with a bridge which was built in 1834, thanks to an initiative of Rev. John Baird, which is still in use by the tourists who come to visit Scotland. ❖



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

Church News

BAPTISMS

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

Mark 16:16

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

Nicholas, Lauren, Daniel and Makenna, children of Mr. & Mrs. Ray Doherty—Bethel, IL
Erin Lee, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Henry Ferguson—Edmonton, Alberta
Kayla Suzanne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Doug Tolsma—Edmonton, Alberta
Nicholas J., son of Mr. & Mrs. Randy Dykstra—Faith, MI
Jacob Dean, son of Mr. & Mrs. Rick Elzinga—Faith, MI
Blake Titus, son of Mr. & Mrs. Titus Kamps—Faith, MI
Braden Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Philip Kuiper—Faith, MI
Roseanna Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Bomers—Hope, MI
Cole William, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brian Kalsbeek—Hope, MI
Dorothy Jean, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. William Langerak—Hope, MI
Caden Gaeb, son of Mr. & Mrs. Seth Vis—Hull, IA
Daniel John, son of Mr. & Mrs. David Kooiker—Hull, IA
Jori Anne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Phil Baas—Southwest, MI
Ethan Anthony, son of Mr. & Mrs. John Kamps—Southwest, MI
Joshua David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Marc Kuiper—Southwest, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

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

Romans 10:10

Public profession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

Joshua Meurer—Bethel, IL
Laura Reyenga—Bethel, IL
Bethany Haak—Bethel, IL
Kendra DeVries—Byron Center, MI
Kevin VanBaren—Byron Center, MI
Dan Vandenberg—Edmonton, Alberta
Anne Decker—Faith, MI
Kent Deemter—Faith, MI
Heidi Flikkema—Faith, MI
Vance Grasman—Faith, MI
Jennie Griffioen—Faith, MI
Leigh Heyboer—Faith, MI
Kirk Karsemeyer—Faith, MI
Ben Petroelje—Faith, MI
Mark VanDyke—Faith, MI

MARRIAGES

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

Matthew 19:5

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Nathan Aardema and Miss Tami Scheibout—Doon, IA
Mr. Joel Holstege and Miss Lanae Bleyenburg—Faith, MI
Mr. Wesley Fisher and Miss Ronda Karsemeyer—Faith, MI
Mr. Joel Brummel and Miss Belinda Bylsma—Hull, IA
Mr. Matthew Velthouse and Miss Amanda Ondersma—Southeast, MI

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

Tulip (6)

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

"More ice-cold lemonade, Jamie?" Mother asked.

"Yes, please!" he said as he held his empty glass out for more. It was a warm afternoon.

"I'll pour it for you," Krystal volunteered, "besides, I'd like some myself." She liked to practice being hostess, too. "Would you like some more lemonade, Dad?"

"Yes, tha—."

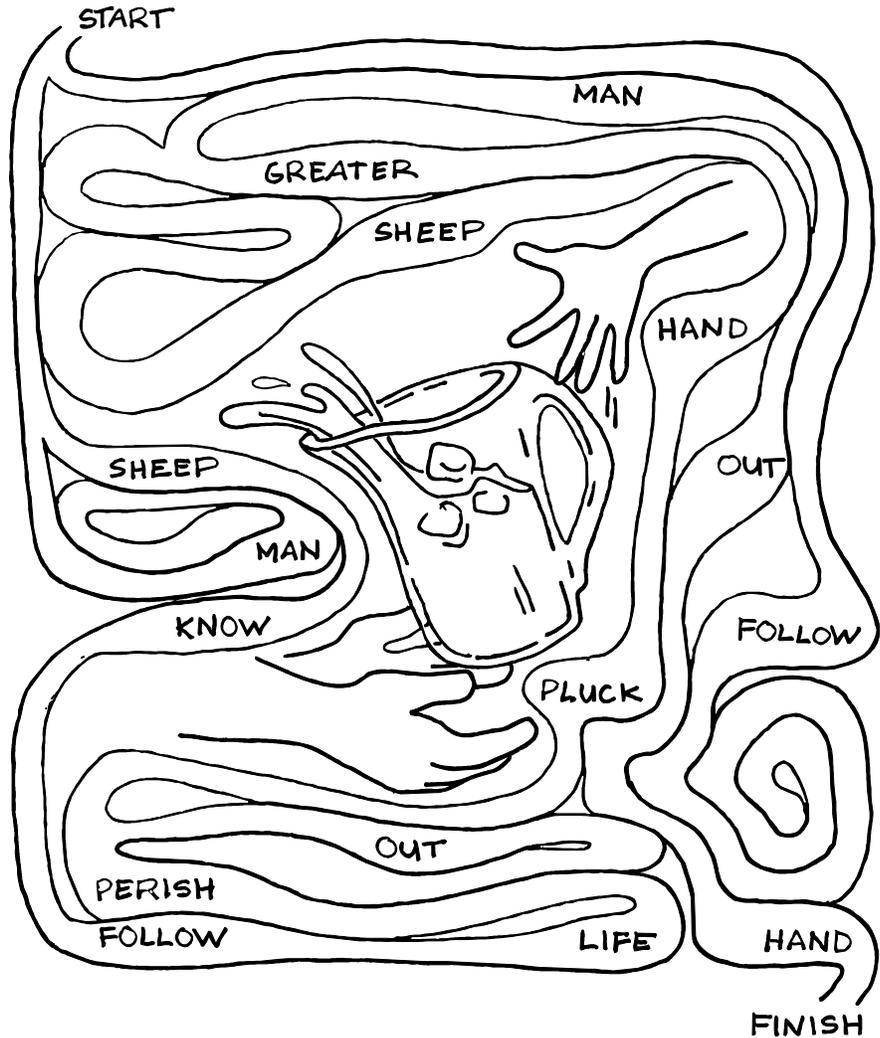
But that was all Father was able to say before Krystal shrieked with alarm. In her eagerness to help, she forgot how slippery and wet a cold pitcher of lemonade would be on such a warm day. The pitcher slipped through her fingers and would have crashed to the floor—if Father hadn't caught it just in time. Some of the lemonade splashed onto the floor, but the pitcher along with most of the beverage was saved.

"That was close!" exclaimed Jamie, who was very grateful to still have more lemonade available to drink.

Krystal had felt warm and flushed from the heat of the day, but now her face was markedly red. "I'm so sorry! I'll get a rag." "I think this is a good time to talk about the letter P—," Mother said as she and Krystal began to wipe up the spilled lemonade, "perseverance of the saints. God preserves us, His children, no matter what. It might seem as if we are falling for a time, but He is always in control, always holding us in His hand. It is impossible that any of His children be forever lost. He makes that plain in Scripture."

"Yes," added Father, "What a comfort this doctrine is!" *(to be continued)* ❖

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



Puzzle

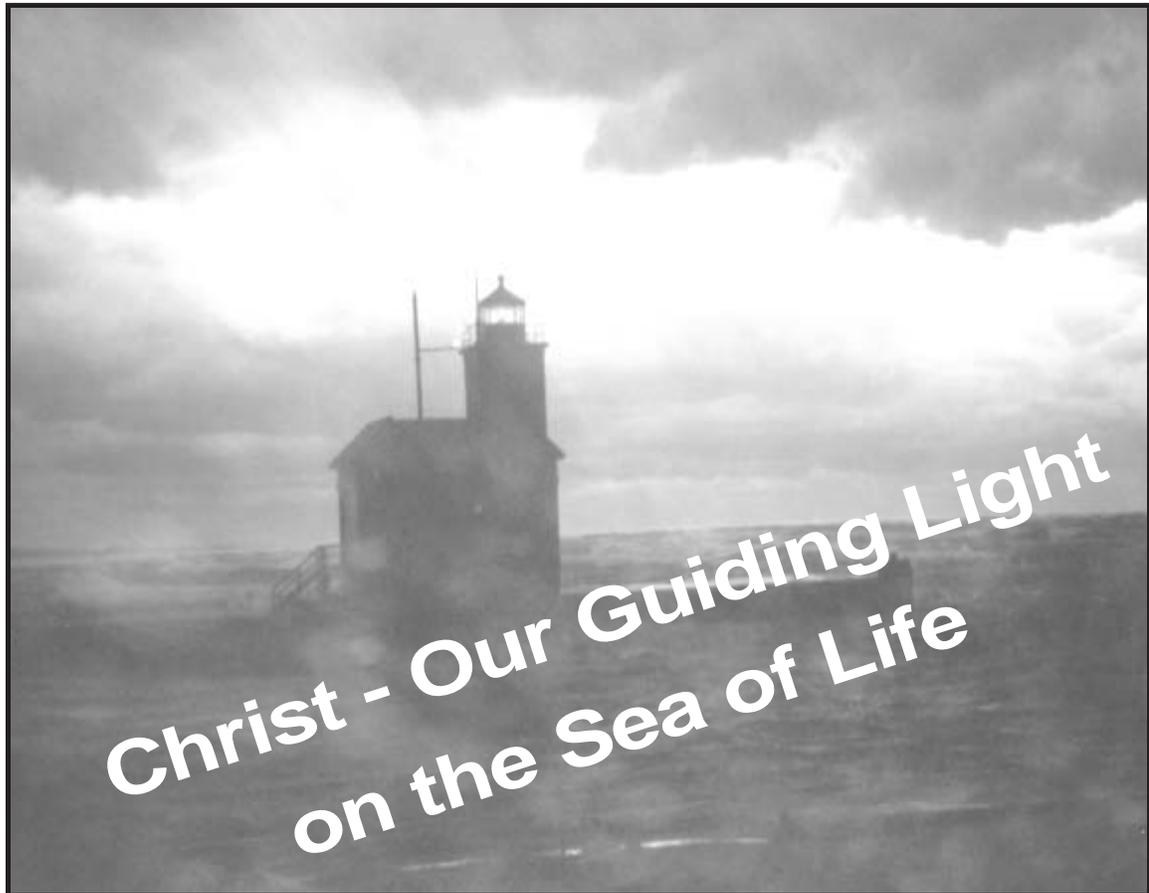
Find the missing words from the following Scripture text by following the maze. You will be able to insert the words in the order you come to them in the path:

"My _____ hear my voice, and I _____ them, and they _____ me: And I give unto them eternal _____; and they shall never _____, neither shall any man _____ them out of my _____. My Father, which gave them me, is _____ than all; and no _____ is able to pluck them _____ of my Father's _____." John 10:27-29.

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