
Beacon

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Lights

“Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.”

Isaiah 53:1, 2

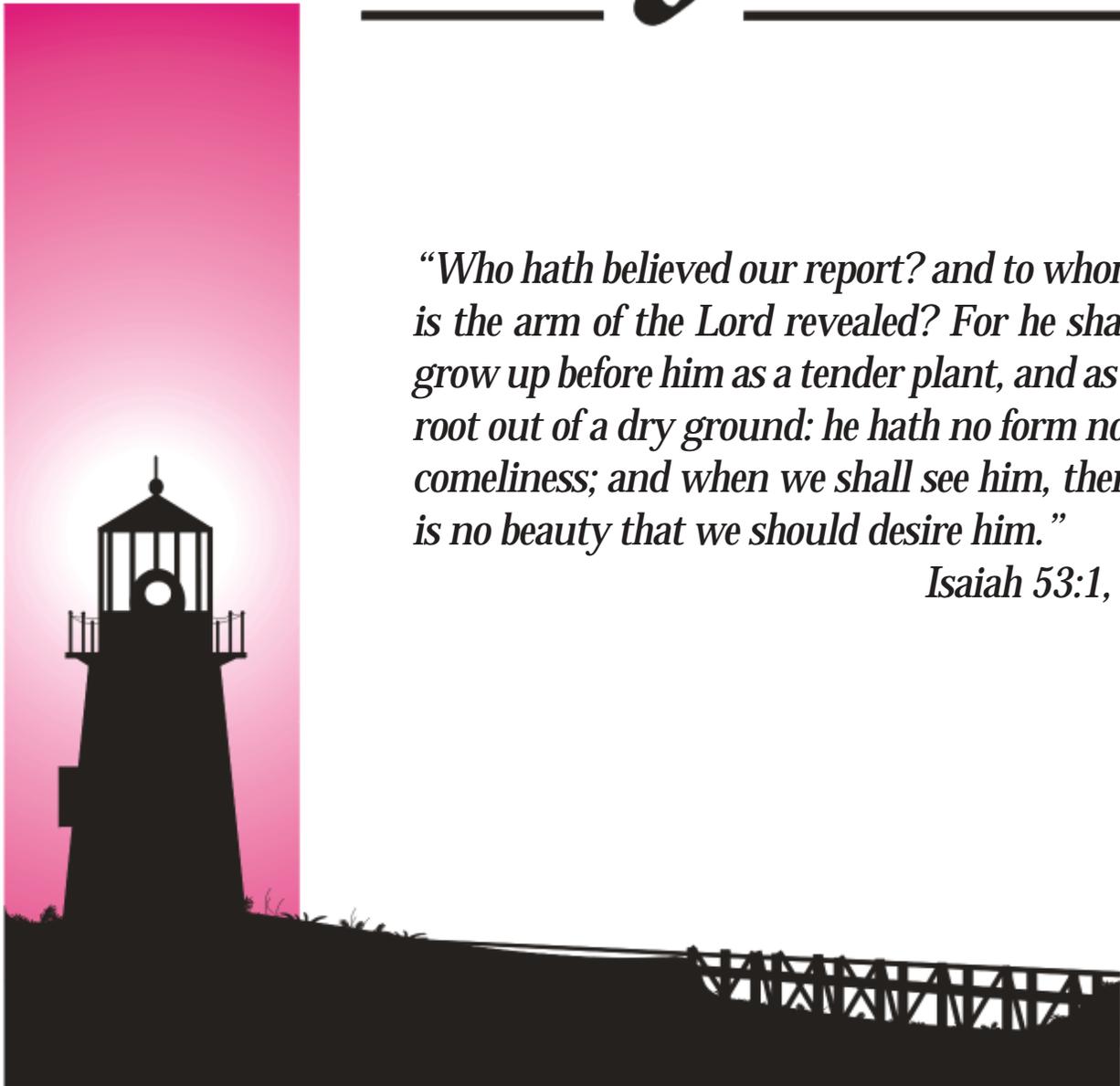


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Christmas on the Coast

by Deane Wassink

Have you ever been on the coast in the month of December? Most of us avoid it at that time of year. I have often worked in snowstorms on the shore right next to the lake. There is nothing like it. The waves crash and the wind roars and the lake effect snow blows parallel to the ground. However, as soon as you get past the lip of the dune in the woods, where the white pine and hemlocks form an arbor over your head, the heavy snow muffles the sound so that you feel like you are in your own private world, all alone. At this time you are required to pause, lie down in the snow, and let the giant flakes land on your face.

In line with the mood that is created at that time, I am going to list the aspects of the shore that speak to me of the coming and work of the promised Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The first aspect of Christmas on the coast is the silent solitude of the woods on the shore when the snow is falling through the trees, which I spoke of earlier. The world is hushed as I imagine the expectant creation was on the night when the Christ Child was born. That tranquility also speaks of the peace that was established between God and man through the coming and sacrifice of His Son. That peace belongs to the troubled heart that finds forgiveness and rest in the love of the Savior.

That love washes away all the sins that condemn us before the judgment seat of God and carries our guilt far away even as the waves sweep the shore. That same water enters a cycle in the atmosphere and returns as the pure white blanket of snow upon the shore turning everything into a sparkling purity; the purity of a soul that has been cleansed of its sins; the dazzling white purity of the robes of the saints who stand before the throne of God.

I feel the pulse of life that flows in the awesome interdependence of the ecosystem of the coastline: the relationships between the water, the wind, the sand, the dunes, the plants, the animals, and even man. This interwoven masterpiece is created and maintained by a sovereign God who rules moment by moment, breath by breath, the creation that speaks His praises. In the same way, our heavenly Father so governed all things so that the “fullness of time” should come: that time when the

Christ Child was born of the Virgin Mary. That birth, that miracle, is the central event of all time, the focus of all that is created. By it God realized His covenant of salvation that made sinners to be the friends and family of God.

These things are in my heart and mind as my memory takes me back to the many times I have sat on the golden shore in wintertime. My heart’s desire is that you, too, may know and love the great God Who sent His own Son as the Savior of sinners.

“Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, goodwill to men.”

A Savior Came That Day

*A Savior came to us that day,
In the hills of Judea, far away.
Not for Himself did He come,
But for His own, to save each one.*

*Born to a lowly virgin maid,
Into a cattle manger He was laid.
Wrapped in swaddling clothes, a king,
Angels in multitude of Him did sing.*

*He came to bring an end of shame.
Forgiveness and peace did He bring.
Redemption and mercy make the heavens ring.*

*If we on our own works rely,
In the judgment we shall surely die.
If we rest alone on His work always,
Before God our sins are washed away.*

*Rejoice, O sinner, loudly sing,
Praises to the Lord your King.
Thankful that a Child was born,
On that first, quiet Christmas morn. ❖*

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

Ephphatha

by Paula Brummel

Hi, my name is Kerri. I am a deaf and mute college girl who has learned to hear and speak. I want to tell you my story. It was a few years back now that I was attending the world's largest deaf-mute college in Washington, D.C. Having been there one year I was due back home to visit my family in Oregon. Besides being excited to see Dad and Mom I was thrilled because our home near the Pacific coast would be the site for our family reunion. Unfortunately my flight had many stops and layovers along the way.

On the second layover a girl about my age boarded the plane and sat next to me. She looked rather shy, yet she seemed interested in me. Her red hair curled gracefully and her face was rosy and freckled from the sun. Her blue eyes glistened as they looked at me. Before the plane lifted off she had discovered that I was deaf and mute. I could see the puzzle in her eye as she thought of a way to communicate with me. It didn't take long before a notepad and pen came out of her backpack. She introduced herself by writing: "Hi, my name is Betsy, nice to meet you! What is your name?" The rest of the trip we "talked" by writing back and forth.

We informed each other about ourselves, our families and our hometowns. We wrote about college and summer jobs and our favorite hobbies. I tried to explain what it was like to be deaf and mute. This whole idea of communicating without speaking seemed to amuse her. After much dialogue I noticed our discussion was becoming more personal and was going a new direction.

"Are you a follower of Christ?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"Where do you attend church?" she enquired.

"Well...I...haven't for years."

"Are you able to read and understand your Bible?" she daringly probed.

"I own a Bible...but...it is in a box in a closet in my parents' home. I should read it."

"You know, years ago I was deaf and dumb too," she wrote.

I looked at her in disbelief. "You couldn't have been," I scribbled back.

Then out of the blue she began writing about a story that she had read in the Bible. There was a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech. He was healed by Jesus, the Son of God. She wrote down a verse from Scripture: "[He] put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened" (Mark 7:33, 34).

Betsy said: "I could not hear God as He spoke through His Word. I had nothing to say about Him. He has changed all this. I read the Bible and understand the truths about Christ and my salvation. He has freed my tongue to talk about how wonderful He is. Has He performed that mysterious wonder in you?" she asked.

Now I could tell that she was after my innermost thoughts and beliefs.

"Well," I scribbled, "I'm saved. My parents never had any trouble with me. I get along with people. I never got involved in any of the bad things young kids do."

At that moment Betsy bent over and began fussing around in her backpack. I secretly hoped that she was hunting for some gum or a piece of candy to share with me. To my disappointment she came out with her Bible. She thought for a moment and then opened it to Ephesians chapter 2. She wrote down the eighth verse: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works: lest any man should boast."

She looked at me with hopeful and longing eyes to see if I understood. At the time the verse was just a jumble of words. I gave her a slight grin and nodded my head. “Whatever”, I thought. I could see that she felt impelled to explain this all to me. I tried to look away and show my lack of interest but she quickly slid the notepad my way again. “Grace is you owing a hundred thousand dollars to someone and they say that you don’t need to pay it back. This is God’s remarkable way of saving people. He doesn’t save you because you are so outwardly good, but because He is so good and gracious. Our sin indebts us much more than one hundred thousand dollars, yet God graciously takes our sin away through faith in Jesus Christ.”

I was annoyed that she looked at me as a sinner. I thought that I had covered up my dislike of people by acting kind, my selfishness by appearing liberal, my evil thoughts and words by silence. I was a hypocrite. If God was perfectly holy and required that of me, I was a guilty sinner.

To my delight the stewardess came by and pointed to the sign that had lit up in the front of the plane: “PREPARE FOR LANDING! PLEASE FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS!” I sighed in relief. I quickly put my pen in my bag and appeared anxious about getting off the plane. My “friend” and I gave one another a smile and we soon were parted in the sea of people at the airport.

At last I was on the final leg of my travels. I changed planes for the last time. This time I found myself on a flight with many unoccupied seats. I was able to sit alone for which I was glad. I tried to push aside the discussion and questions of the previous flight. I pulled a magazine from my bag and laid back in my seat to read. Trendy fashions and exotic perfume advertisements filled the pages. As I browsed through the colorful magazine the passage in Ephesians kept playing over and over in my mind.

Finally my plane landed. To my surprise my big brothers were already home and had come alone with Dad and Mom to pick me up. Glancing beyond them I noticed that two sister-in-laws had also come along to the airport. I couldn’t wait to get home and relax with them. The past semester had been a difficult one and I needed a rest.

I was ready to enjoy the lazy days of summer. The following days were busy. They were packed with visiting, laughter, stories, and the recalling of happy memories. Although the moments were full of wonderful companionship, I found myself somewhat miserable. I had

hoped that I would have forgotten the text that the red-haired girl had read me. How could it be that I still remembered it? I even recalled how the girl’s eyes looked when she finished writing and turned to me. I sat back in my chair and shook my head.

Suddenly I was tapped on the arm. My sister-in-law motioned to me with a smile. Using sign language she encouraged me to tell her what was wrong. Smiling I shook my head. I denied that anything was troubling me. I shuddered at the thought of telling her my personal feelings of guilt. Was there something wrong with how I lived in the past? Did my sinfulness mean that God did not love me?

As the bustle died down in the room I noticed that several family members had gone off to their rooms for the night. My mind was still hard at work. More thoughts of the airplane discussion rang through my head. Suddenly a surge of fear seized me. Was that girl implying that I was not saved by my own goodness? I tried to quiet myself by thinking about all of the good things that I had done for my family and friends. Again worry overwhelmed me. Maybe I had not always done those good things because I loved God.

“Nobody is perfect,” I told myself. Sure I had not been reading my Bible, but look at all of the nice things I had done. I remembered staying up all night to type a term paper for my roommate. On the one hand I felt that a gracious God could not find reason to be angry with me. On the other hand, I sensed my guilt before God and felt ashamed to stand before Him. These thoughts left me feeling confused and troubled. I sighed inwardly. I saw the eyes of my sister-in-law glance my way again. I felt my forehead and hoped that she would presume that I was tired. I slowly raised myself from my chair and headed upstairs to be alone. I walked up the flight of stairs and flopped down on my bed. I tried to close my eyes. “I am just tired,” I thought.

A slight breeze made me reach for a sheet to cover myself. I drifted off to sleep immediately. As dawn approached, I rolled over. My blurred eyes caught the top shelf of my bedroom closet. I pulled the box that held my childhood Bible from its shelf. Sitting on the edge of my bed, I opened my Bible to the index. I scrolled down the list of names until my eyes fell on the word “Ephesians.” I slowly turned page over page. There it was: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”

A gift. Not of self. Not of works! At that moment movement on the street caught my eye. I noticed someone dressed in a white shirt and dark pants climbing the steps of the church across the street. The building lit up in preparation for the morning service. I pulled my floral skirt and crisp white shirt from my closet. I showered and dressed. I quickly descended the steps, joining some family members at the breakfast table. After looking up and down at me my sister-in-law motioned with an inquisitive face as to where I was going.

She was dressed for church. "Are you going to join me in going to church?" she signed. Together with Bibles in hand we walked across the street. The pastor walked in and found his place. The congregation rose to sing. I read the words of the song. During the sermon I watched my sister-in-law's rapid hand movement as she signed the words the pastor spoke. The minister preached about the cross of Jesus Christ. He said that the only hope for sinners is found in the blood of Christ. When the mes-

sage came to an end the minister asked the congregation to rise and sing "Amazing Grace." The words he had spoken and the message of this song brought relief to my soul.

My heart was flooded with thanks to God for His wonderful and free salvation. No longer did I need to try to be good to please good. I saw the folly of that. I now understood that I was justified and declared righteous before God through faith in Christ. It was all of grace.

I bowed in prayer and asked the Lord to forgive my hypocrisy and my sins. Then it all came back to me how the girl on the plane had stated that she had been deaf and dumb at one time too. Now I understood. I felt like singing; "He hath done all things well: He maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak." ❖

Paula is a member of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church in St. John, Indiana.

From the Pastor's Study

The Seventh Pointer on the Spiritual Roadmap: Living Chastely

by Rev. Doug Kuiper



"Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).

"Flee fornication" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

"Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life.... But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul" (Proverbs 6:25, 26, 32).

Young people, flee fornication!

As one travels The Way of Thankful Obedience, the opportunities to commit fornication will present themselves. Satan will see to that. Every day, it seems, we come to an intersection at which we could exit The Way of Thankful Obedience and travel on Lust Lane.

I mean this literally. To commit fornication, one simply has to ask out the right (wrong!) girl, or go out with the right (wrong!) guy. If you don't know of such a per-

son, you can find them at the right (wrong!) place where the world gathers (bars or movies). Perhaps one needn't go far out of the way. At Christian high schools—even Protestant Reformed high schools—one can easily find out who are the “easy” girls or “eager” guys. Then, remembering that one fornication is a sin that one can commit in the privacy of one's home, while alone, and in one's heart, we remember that one need only turn on the television, rent a movie, buy a magazine, or merely lust after a woman, to commit fornication.

Because such opportunities will present themselves in our lives, and because our nature is to give in to them, God makes very clear what is our calling with regard to fornication. The seventh commandment clearly tells us that fornication is wrong; and the word of God in I Corinthians 6 says: “Flee fornication.”



Flee! Run from it!

The verb suggests that fornication is indeed a great danger. One flees from that which is in danger of capturing one. One flees from one's enemy. Fornication is an enemy.

It is an enemy, not because it might lead to pregnancy, or sexually transmitted diseases. It is an enemy, because one who commits adultery “lacketh understanding” and “destroyeth his own soul” (Proverbs 6:32). It is an enemy, because it brings one to hell, if one does not repent of it!

Certainly to flee is the opposite of to flirt. To get as close as one can to the danger is not to flee from it.

And one does not flee it by saying that God is not offended by it. Some young people, wishing to justify their fornication, say that having premarital sex is a matter of their Christian liberty! And they say that Paul, in telling the Corinthians to flee fornication, was only giving his personal advice, and that in an era and culture wholly different from ours. No serious minded young person should take these ideas seriously. Corinth was a wicked city—but no more wicked than our society. The era and culture of Corinth and of our society have much in common. Besides, Paul was writing by inspiration, for the law of God in the seventh commandment is an abiding law.

So the young person must flee. With all your spiritual might and energy, run from this danger!

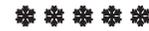
BEACON LIGHTS



An example of fleeing fornication we have in Joseph. He did not *seek* the opportunity to commit fornication, but the opportunity did present itself repeatedly, for Potiphar's wife repeatedly asked Joseph to lie with her (Gen. 39:7). And repeatedly, Joseph refused. Finally, when she grabbed him by his garment, he fled.

Why did he repeatedly resist? Because to lie with her would be sin against his master, and, more importantly, sin against God. Joseph knew this: “how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9).

He is an example for us. God meant him to be—for we know that he was a single, young person—like you! We know that ultimately it was God's grace that preserved him from fornication. At the same time, it is clear that by grace Joseph desired to please God, and willingly resisted the opportunities. Joseph lived chastely.



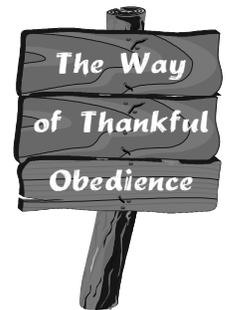
What does it mean to live chastely, and how does one do it?

Chastity is not simply a matter of abstaining from sex outside the marriage bond; it is purity of heart. Three times the word “chaste” is found in Scripture, twice with reference to women (Titus 2:5, I Peter 3:2).

In both instances, the Greek word translated “chaste” means pure, faultless. To live chastely, then, requires us 1) to refrain from any sexual activity outside the marriage bond; 2) to refrain from performing any activity, listening to any words, or watching any pictures, which would arouse our sexual desires; and 3) to keep our heart pure from all sinful sexual thoughts, by desiring to be pleasing to God in every respect.

How does one do this? Only by grace; that is certain. Sinful sexual thoughts and desires come naturally to young men and young women—naturally, I say, because our natures are depraved. Grace alone can overcome the power of sin and temptation.

But do you seek this grace, young people? God gives His grace graciously and freely—we know that; but the young person who does not *seek* God's grace will not



experience God's grace. Do you pray for this grace? Do you pray for it, sincerely wanting it? And do you sincerely want it, because above all, you know that to commit fornication is great sin against God? What better reason can one find for desiring God's grace, than that one desires to please Him?

In desiring this grace, the young person should remember that God does not forbid all sexual activity always. He permits it—even requires it—within the marriage bond. And it is generally His will that young people, upon maturity, and in the way of depending on Him, find a godly mate to marry. Young people, most likely you will get an opportunity to enjoy sexual activity in a God-glorifying way. But to desire to enjoy prematurely the earthly pleasure of sex, in violation of God's command, will surely bring you a guilty conscience before God.

This grace is worth seeking! And it is given to all who seek it, for Christ's sake, by the Holy Spirit!

But even those who sincerely seek it are presented with opportunities, as Joseph was. Then, the word of God to us is: Flee—run! To run away from the opportunity to sin sexually will be the only way to show, at that point, that you are truly chaste! Would you do that, young people?

People would think you are silly, if you ran! What a missed opportunity, they would say! But such who would think and say that, are those who are not regarding God. The young person who regards God, and desires His grace, will flee from sexual temptation, in order to maintain his or her chastity.



Why is it the calling of the young person to live chastely?

First, because God commands us to continue walking steadfastly on The Way of Thankful Obedience. He requires us to be pure as He is pure, faithful as He is faithful.

Second, because in this way the power of God's grace is magnified for all to see! Even the world understands that one who willingly waits to have sex until marriage, and especially because one believes God requires that, is "different." The difference is nothing to be ashamed of—it is due to God's grace!

Third, because in this way the young person shows gratitude for the salvation God has graciously given him in Christ.



That young person who has not lived chastely to this point in his or her life, can begin to do so now. Virginity cannot be restored; once lost, it is gone forever. But chastity can be restored, by God's grace. The way to turn from sexual lust to chastity is the way of...true repentance, in sorrow for sin, and...finding forgiveness in Christ, and...desiring anew the grace of God.

Do that, and you will again be on the road which glorifies God, the narrow way which leads to heaven!



Rev. Kuiper is pastor of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

The Reader Asks

Question Request

Do you have a question that has been on your mind? Something that came up at school or during a discussion with friends or co-workers? You can be sure that there are many more people reading these words who have had the same question and are looking for answers just like you. Rev. Laning of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan is waiting to answer them. Don't worry, if you would rather your name was not published with your question, we will honor your request. We do, however, ask that your name and either your home or email address be included so that Rev. Laning can respond privately if need be.

Please send your question to:

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Study Proverbs This Society Season

Study for Week #13:

Stewardship

Texts from Proverbs: 3:9, 10; 3:27, 28; 10:4, 5; 11:24-26; 12:11; 12:27; 19:6, 17; 22:9; 27:23-27; 28:27

Questions to help “the word of Christ dwell in you richly:”

1. About Stewardship:
 - a. What is a steward?
 - b. How are *we* stewards? (does God give us more than *money* that we are stewards of? For example, see Eph. 4:16)
 - c. How would you define *Christian* stewardship?
2. About Christian giving:
 - a. What does Christian giving have to do with stewardship?
 - b. What are the characteristics of true Christian giving?
3. Give examples of how young people, who don't have large financial resources, can give and exercise proper stewardship. (is the YPS convention planning and money raising an example? others?)

Study for Week #14:

Work Habits

Texts from Proverbs: 6:6-8; 10:4, 5, 16; 12:11, 14, 24, 27; 13:4, 11; 14:23; 16:3, 26; 18:9; 20:11; 22:29; 24:27; 27:18, 23; 28:19; Col. 3:23

Questions to help “the word of Christ dwell in you richly:”

1. What is our motivation to work?
2. Is the fourth commandment only a command to rest?

3. Are we called to be “ambitious”? Does ambition create a possible problem that we become rich and have the temptations of the rich?
4. How can you tell the difference between: *contentment* and *laziness*?
Or: *hard work* and *greed*?
5. Who taught you your work habits? (or how did you learn them?)
6. How do you feel after you:
Studied hard and received a good grade?
Helped someone all day and didn't get paid?
Played hard and won a game?

Study for Week #15

Respect for Our Parents

Texts from Proverbs: 1:8, 9; 4:1, 2, 10-12; 6:20-23; 10:1; 13:1; 15:5, 20; 17:6; 19:26; 20:20; 23:22-25; 28:7; 30:17

Questions to help “the word of Christ dwell in you richly:”

1. How do you judge yourself when you read 15:5?
2. Why is it so hard for teenagers to treat their parents with respect? Are they too restrictive? How can this be changed?
3. Should parents be more relaxed in what you can do, when you can do things, etc? Would this help with the parent/teenager relationship?
4. In the context of the parent/teenager relationship again, how can this relationship be made stronger? It always seems that in some families teenagers and parents are always fighting about something.

5. Do any of you think that your parents do not treat you with respect and therefore you have a problem with treating them with respect?
6. What will motivate young people to honor their parents (see verses like 15:20; 23:24, 25) Does this motivate you? Why or why not?
7. What do you think changes in young people when they get older, to make them say, "Why was I so foolish towards my parents when I was young?" What would it take to have that change now?
8. What was the OT punishment for those who did not respect their parents? If you were a king today, and were able to make laws, what punishment would you make for children who dishonored their parents?

Study for Week #16:

Self-Control

Texts from Proverbs: 16:32; 18:13; 21:17; 23:1-3; 25:8, 16, 27, 28; 29:20

Questions to help "the word of Christ dwell in you richly:"

1. What is "self-control?" (which of the texts gives a good definition of it?)
2. Is it *possible* for a person to control himself? (what does LD 33 have to do with this subject?)
3. What *different areas* of our lives must come under our control?
4. Discuss each of these areas. Ask the question: which is the most serious lack of self-control among us, and why?
5. What are the dangers of not controlling ourselves in these areas?
6. What is the root of self-control? That is, where does it begin?
7. Why does a Christian want to exercise self-control? ❖

Isaiah 53

*Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief,
Despised, rejected of men,
Even His death as a common thief
Speaks to us ever again:
No fault of His, 'twas **our** sins He bore,
For our transgressions, slain,
For **us** the crown of thorns He wore;
In **our** place suffered pain.*

*Isaiah said we all like sheep
In sin have gone astray;
The Lord's commands we do not keep
But turn to our own way.
Yet God upon His Son divine
Iniquity has laid-
Corruption that was yours and mine
Upon the cross was paid.*

*Yet through this agonizing way
Christ as a lamb was led
In silence; God He would obey
As His life's blood was shed.
It pleased the Father so to bruise
His sinless Son. His plan:
For us God chose to so implant
Christ's righteousness in man.*

*His holy seed thus justified;
Prolonged shall be his days;
God's righteousness is satisfied;
We shout aloud His praise!*

Thelma Westra

Watching Daily At My Gates

By Chester Hunter

December 1 Read John 4:46-54

As we come into the month in which we celebrate the greatest miracle of all—that of the Incarnation, let us spend a few moments pondering this miracle of healing. Do we have the faith of the nobleman? Do we continue in prayer daily for our needs? Is hearing the Word enough or do we want signs and wonders? Do we not see the signs and wonders which God has placed in creation for us? Let us pray for the faith which allows us to grasp the wonder of grace whom God sent into this world for us. May this be our focus as we celebrate Christmas this year. Sing Psalter 29.

December 2 Read John 5:1-9

Once again we see the results of faith. A man unable to walk listens to a perfect stranger and got up on seemingly powerless legs and walked. Do we have that faith? Do we have the faith to believe that a baby was the Son of God—Immanuel made sin for us? Or are we all caught up with the worldly season around us that we leave the baby in the manger and never go to the cross? Let us go to the cross and see the Lamb of God. Let us see that through that Lamb is the only way into the eternal Sabbath in heaven. Sing Psalter 221.

December 3 Read John 5:10-16

The man of yesterday's miracle was visited by Jesus once more. This time he heard the blessed words that his sins were forgiven. Not only had Jesus made his body whole but Jesus had also made his soul whole. Many people will sing Christmas carols this year. Many people will think that they have found joy. But their joy is only in a baby who makes no crying. They wish to deny the complete human nature of Jesus. We must not do that. We must confess that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Only in that way will we receive the assurance of our salvation. Let us sin no more. Let us walk the holy walk of sanctification and thank God for sending His Son to this earth for us. Sing Psalter 24.

December 4 Read John 5:17-23

People of God, do you confess that you are quickened by the Son? Do you honor that Son? In this season of the year many appear to honor Jesus. Look beneath the shallow words which they sing. Are they honoring Jesus and His Father, or are they just honoring themselves? What about us? Do we honor Jesus? Are we more interested in the presents and parties and all that has come to mean Christmas? Maybe

we need to put away our earthly celebrations and tune ourselves better toward the heavenly reality. Let us make this time a time of real joy and thank Him from whom all blessings flow for the joy of the quickening of the Son of righteousness who came to save us from our sins. Sing Psalter 310:1-4.

December 5 Read John 5:24-31

People of God, are you ready for the judgment day? Some might say that this thought is too dreary for the Christmas season. But if you read closely the words of today's passage, you will see that Jesus was sent by His Father as a judge. Are you listening for the voice of your Savior? You will not find it in the world's celebration of Christmas. You will not hear it in Christmas songs which espouse a theology of Christ coming to save all men. You will only hear His voice if you know and believe His Word. By studying the Bible you will learn to hear and love the voice of our Savior. Let us do this and let us ask for the grace to hear the voice of Jesus calling us to come unto Him. Sing Psalter 403.

December 6 Read John 5:32-38

As we prepare to go to church tomorrow are we ready to hear about Christ? If Christ's servant speaks to us are we ready to receive it? If he says something that we do not like because it takes away our pleasures are we quick to discredit the minister? The Jews of Jesus' day did not like what John the Baptist had to say to them. Are we much different from them? As we listen to the sermon tomorrow are we ready to confess that we hear Christ speaking to us? Let us pray for the ears of faith to hear what God triune says to us in not only this Sabbath day but also all Sabbaths as we await the eternal Sabbath in heaven. Sing Psalter 328.

December 7 Read John 5:39-47

What a command we have in verse 39! How do you search the Scriptures? Do we just read a few verses at mealtime and call it good enough? God was not pleased with that attitude in the Old Testament Jews and He will not be pleased if this is our attitude. We must look at the words of the Bible, learn what they mean, and use them in our lives. If we are searching for something precious, we will leave no stone unturned in order to find that precious thing. Is not eternal life precious? Let us search the Scriptures and see what our heavenly Father is saying to us. Sing Psalter 333.

December 8 Read John 6:1-7

After spending time in Jerusalem where He was not well received at all, Jesus returned to Galilee. There crowds of people followed Him to be healed from their diseases and to hear Him speak. After a long day of healing and speaking, Jesus, filled with compassion, asks His disciples how they would feed this great crowd of people. Jesus does this for two reasons. First of all, He will teach the people that He has come to give them spiritual bread and not merely earthly bread. The second reason is to try the faith of His disciples in order to prepare them for the work that they would later do. We need to notice Jesus' compassion for these people. He has the same compassion for us when we "hunger and thirst after righteousness." He will fill our hungry souls even as He filled the hungry stomachs of this crowd. Let us hunger and thirst after the Word. Let us do that during this season; let us do that by studying the Word daily. Sing Psalter 40.

December 9 Read John 6:8-14

Young people, do you remember to give thanks for the food God has given you? I do not mean just once in a while. I do not mean if a teacher or parent leads you in giving thanks. I mean all of the time. Do you do that in a restaurant when you are with your friends? Do you do it at work when your coworkers are looking on? If Jesus felt the need to thank His heavenly Father for the food provided in this miracle, how much more must we give thanks for the food that God provides for us. We have so much food. We must be very thankful. Sing Psalter 169.

December 10 Read John 6:15-21

When we sing the familiar "King of kings and Lord of Lords" this Christmas, what kind of a king are we singing about? Is it the king that this world celebrates at Christmas? This is the king that those fed by the earthly bread wanted. We need to be looking for the king who calms our spiritual fears with the blessed words, "It is I; be not afraid." What more do we need than this king? Why should we place our trust in any other than the king who will still all storms of doubt within us? Let us fall on our knees to worship the king whose simple words will lead us into the safe haven of heavenly glory. Sing Psalter 266.

December 11 Read John 6:22-27

For what type of bread do we labor? Is it the earthly bread of riches, earthly fulfillment, and ease? Or is it the bread that is found in heaven that perisheth not? Jesus is that bread. Living out of the calling to follow Him must be our goal in this life. We will not find this bread if our goal in school is to learn all we can in order to get the best possible job. We will not find this bread if our goal in life is to be number one in the world's eyes. There is only one way to get this bread. That is to serve God and keep His commandments.

People of God, is this your goal in this life? Are we laboring for the meat that endureth forever? Sing Psalter 325.

December 12 Read John 6:28-35

Jesus continues to speak about the bread that never perishes. As we read these verses we see that He was speaking to both believers and nonbelievers. The unbelievers were looking for a sign. This is from people who had just witnessed a feeding of five thousand from a little bit of food. Finally Jesus says to them very plainly that He is the bread of life. Do we sometimes fall into this sin? Do we ignore the words of Scripture and want a sign? Do we wish salvation in another way? Let us partake of the bread of life today and everyday. Let us pray for the grace to be satisfied with Jesus the bread of life. Sing Psalter 334.

December 13 Read John 6:36-40

People of God, here we see proof for the doctrine of perseverance or preservation of the saints. Take some time to read the last head of the Canons of Dordt. What precious and comforting words are found there. This doctrine gives to us a comfort that cannot be found anywhere else in this world. Here we are told that we will never be cast out of the Father's hand, we will have everlasting life, and we will be raised up at the last day. What a blessing this is! Let this be our focus as we go through this Christmas season. Sing Psalter 234.

December 14 Read John 6:41-51

The discussion continues as the more unbelieving crowd exposes their unbelief. Now they doubt the divinity of Christ as they call him "only" the son of Joseph. Jesus exposes their unbelief and teaches us that He was prophesied of from old and that there are many signs of His coming. Do we believe? Do we believe in the Christ of Scripture or the Christ whose birth is celebrated by a majority of the so called "Christian" world of today? Who did we worship today? Were we satisfied with the bread of the Word of God or do we want the leeks and garlic of Egypt? Let us examine ourselves daily and see whom we believe Christ to be. Sing Psalter 251.

December 15 Read John 6:52-59

As Jesus completed His teachings in the synagogue, He introduced the whole idea of the meaning of the body and bread of Christ. This was too much for most of his audience that day as we shall find out. They were not ready for this much of the meat of the word. What about us? As we left church yesterday were we "chewing" the meat of the word or chewing out the preacher because we did not like the word which he brought. We of the church of the poured out Spirit have much responsibility to digest the meat of God's Word. Do we like meat? We had better because this is the way to eternal life. Sing Psalter 311.

December 16 Read John 6:60-65

People of God, read verse 65 again. Have you ever had a discussion with someone who espouses the view of the free-will of man? Were you prepared with this verse? We need to know our Bibles well. We need to read them over and over again to find the clear teachings of Christ concerning our salvation. Yes, this is a hard saying. Yes, this may cause division in our families. By the quickening Spirit, however, we must know God's Word, we must believe God's Word, and we must be ready to use God's Word. Let us be zealous in using God's Word daily in our lives. Sing Psalter 368.

December 17 Read John 6:66-71

As we finish this long chapter we should make it our goal to reread it sometime soon. There is much for us to learn in it. There are many doctrinal truths which our Savior gave us. We need to embrace it as the words which give to us eternal life. Let us make Peter's confession our confession. Let us be ready to defend that word against those who wish a different Christ than the Christ of the Scriptures. Oh, this may bring hard times to us and our families. But we have the blessed assurance that Jesus and our heavenly Father will give to us the Spirit and will sustain us in all of these hard times. Let us remember this each and every day. Sing Psalter 362.

December 18 Read John 7:1-9

Is it time yet? This is a common refrain in many households. Jesus had to wait for the proper time in His life. His Father had ordained a certain way of salvation. This way of salvation was the way of the cross. Jesus was not to be pushed over a cliff, not to be drowned in a lake, nor was He to be killed in secret. No, the Old Testament was to be fulfilled. Why was this so? It was this way for us. It was only through the way of the cross that our salvation would be accomplished. Jesus had to fulfill all things for us. Thanks be to God for this unspeakable gift. Sing Psalter 47:1-4.

December 19 Read John 7:10-19

Many words were spoken about Jesus while He was on this earth. Some were very strong. "He deceiveth the people." Others said that He had a devil in Him. Others said that He was a "good man." Now, we would probably never be guilty of openly saying the first two (though we might by actions), but what about the last one? Was Jesus merely a "good man?" If that is all that we can say about Jesus, we would be better not to say anything at all. A "good man" does nothing to capture the extent of all Jesus was and is! He is God; He is our Savior. Even in this time of the year many would say that the baby Jesus turned into the "good man" Jesus. What about us? What do we say? Sing Psalter 58.

December 20 Read John 7:20-31

As Jesus come to the end of His discourse in the temple, we once more see the twofold effect of the Word. Many

believe; others are ready to kill Him. It is a great comfort for us to know that God's Word never returns unto Him void. The Word preached always has some effect. This effect is ordained by God for His sovereign purpose. We must preach the Word wherever God gives to us opportunity. The results of the preaching are not dependant upon us but rather on God. This is both a reason to continue preaching and a comfort in preaching. As we prepare to enter God's house tomorrow let us remember this as we attend unto the preaching of the Word whether we are the preacher, the elders, or those in the office of believer. Sing Psalter 349.

December 21 Read John 7:32-39

Notice the progression in the words of these chapters. In the beginning He spoke about their unbelief. Then as the Word was more clearly seen He made Himself known to His people. Now in today's reading we see that He begins to speak about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This was a doctrine that was little treated in the Old Dispensation. This is a doctrine which was prepared for the church of the New Dispensation. Today a church shows itself by how it has received the work of the Holy Spirit. Some churches have gone dead because they refused the Holy Spirit. It is the poured out Spirit who gives life to the church. Let us not forget Him even as we prepared to celebrate the birth of the Son. Sing Psalter 286.

December 22 Read John 7:40-44

Some in Jesus day knew their Scriptures well. This is evident as we read verse 42. They knew the Scriptures and as they saw the evidence God gave to them they confessed that Jesus was the Son of God. As we celebrate His first coming are we searching the Scriptures to find about the signs of His second coming? Are the signs in the world around us preparing us for Him? There were faithful in Israel such as Simeon and Anna who eagerly awaited Christ's coming. Are there Simeons and Annas among us today? When Christ shall return, will He find faith among us? Sing Psalter 336.

December 23 Read John 7:45-53

In these verses we find the effect of the preaching upon those who do not believe. We might be wondering why they did not? They were the ones who studied the Scriptures. Should not they have known that this was the Christ the Son of God? Here we see the truth of the words, "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." As we celebrate Christmas, I again ask us to examine ourselves and see whose Christmas we are celebrating. Is it to give God the glory or man? Is it the Christmas of sovereign salvation or that of works righteousness? Let us ponder these things even in the few days before Christmas. Sing Psalter 291:1-4.

December 24 Read John 8:1-11

What blessed words we read here! Some would say, "How are these blessed words?" But the child of God grasps hold on the words "Go and sin no more." He grasps those words because they bring utmost comfort to him. This comfort is not in the person himself. The woman could not turn from her evil way on her own. It takes He who speaks these words to give them the desired effect. We must hear Christ say these words. Here in these few verses we have the whole salvation story summarized. Let us listen to this story and listen for the Son of God to say, "Go and sin no more." Let us pray for the Holy Spirit to cause these words to enable us to live the life of sanctification in thanksgiving for such a wonderful gift. Sing Psalter 140.

December 25 Read John 8:12-20

Here on this blessed Christmas day we have the beautiful words, "I am the light of the world." There are many who have spent much on lights this season and little on the Light. What about us? Do we seek the Light of the world? Do we seek Him who gives to us light and salvation? Do we long for the light which chases away the fears and evil that rises up against? Christ is the light. Let us embrace Him and not seek after the darkness. Let us come to the Light of life today and everyday. Then let us like the shepherds glorify and praise God as we tell others about the Light which gives eternal light. Sing Psalter 71.

December 26 Read John 8:21-32

Notice in these discourses that Jesus is leading the people of that day and us to see that He is the Christ who will die and did die on the cross for the sins of the people. This is what the prophets had published in the Old Testament. This is the truth. Do we know that truth? Do we seek to find the truth? No, not the world's truth. They say they have plenty of truth. But when that truth is held up before the fire of God's truth it is burned as impurities are burned from precious metals. We must seek the truth as it is revealed in the Scriptures. This is the truth that will make us free from sin and the harmful effects of sin. This is the truth which leads into everlasting glory. Let us see the truth and truly be free. Sing Psalter 339.

December 27 Read John 8:33-42

Are we as blind as those of Jesus' day? Do we say we are elect because of our family or national background? This is not the truth of the covenant. God saves in the line of covenant generations. What does this mean? Do we see that being in the covenant is to be one who is chosen by God to be a friend with God? We must never interpret the covenant as these wicked people did. We must listen to He who speaks the truth even as He lives in covenant fellowship with the Father. Christ was sent into the world to find His people. Christ will come once more into the world and gather His people unto Himself. Are we ready? Sing Psalter 187.

December 28 Read John 8:43-51

Notice those words "verily, verily" in verse 51. Jesus uses them quite often as He speaks to the people. They mean truly or it shall be so. Do we believe the words that follow them? If our ministers use those words today, how will we receive them? What do we think of the voice of Christ even as we hear it today? Do we ignore it even as we sit in the pew? Do we forget it as we walk out of church? Do we forget the truths heard because they are not convenient in our daily life? When Jesus says, "Verily, verily," let us hear the voice of the one Shepherd who knows His sheep and will lead them into the fold of everlasting life. Sing Psalter 53.

December 29 Read John 8:52-59

How many stones have we taken up to throw at Christ today? Have we been honest in all of our business dealings? Have we shown love within our families, the family of God, and others who are around us? What about in the past year? Have we denied Christ at home, at work, at school, or at play? If we are guilty of any of these, we have taken up stones against Christ. Those of Jesus' day did not want His brand of salvation. What about us? Is it justification by faith or by works? Do we love God and our neighbor? Only in doing those things will we put down the stones and bow before Christ the Son of God. Sing Psalter 64.

December 30 Read John 9:1-7

Are we guilty of the disciples' sin? Do we seek to find fault with others and in doing so ignore the glory of God? Everything in this world has a purpose, and that ultimate purpose is God's glory. Yes, God does ordain events and circumstances to convict us of our sins; this is true. But even in those things He brings glory upon His name. Jesus would use this incident to teach those around Him more of God's truths. We, whose eyes have been open, must not be spiritually blind. Let us by the Holy Spirit see Jesus, and in seeing Jesus, let us glorify our heavenly Father. Sing Psalter 402:1, 4-6.

December 31 Read John 9:13-22

As we come to the end of another year we must ask ourselves if we dodge hard questions in order to be men pleasers. We have had many opportunities in the past year to confess Christ. Have we done it? Do those around us know what Christ we confess? We must confess Christ as He has shown Himself in His Word. We must do this as we await Him to confess us before His Father. This confession of Christ must be done in both word and deed. Let us ponder these things as we come to the end of another year. Let us rejoice that we are one year closer to the return of our Savior. The truth of Christ is precious; let us never hide it. Sing Psalter 51.

By Fire

by Melissa Van Baren

The fire is inescapable. It laps at my skin. My head is screaming for help but no voice escapes. My throat is dry and parched. My mouth is pasty. I try to scream again. Again there is nothing, no voice, no sound, nothing. My stomach is reeling because of the pain that surrounds my body. The fire keeps licking at my skin. The pain is excruciating. I stoop down and curl up to get away from it but it keeps coming at me. The smoke fills my lungs. I can't even cough anymore. The flames and the fire surround me. I cannot run and hide. There is no one around to help. I cannot even cry for help. My skin is charred. I ache even for just a drop of water or just a small amount of relief. Yet, there is nothing.

What is this? What am I talking about? Where am I headed with this? Does this remind you of anything? No, no, not hell. This is something that every believer needs to go through. This is something that David experienced. It is something that Job went through. Also, it is something that Paul, Esther, and Adam endured. It is probably something that you went through and it's something that I went through. Yet, we've all been through this in varying degrees. Do you know what I'm talking about yet? Do you have a clue?

I am talking about *our* trial by fire. It is about our refining process. This is what every believer must go through. The trials and temptations God sends our way to test us and cause us to grow more and more, leaning towards God. We see this in our trials don't we? How we must lean towards God our only help and see that He has sent all things for our good. God has sent trials to help us grow. "Affliction has been for my profit, that I to Thy statutes might hold, Thy law to my soul is more precious than thousands of silver and gold" (Psalter 329, vs. 4). It is amazing that God uses what He does to make us dependent upon Him and to make us recognize who is omnipotent.

God sends each of us different things. To some, He might send an illness. Others, He sends death of a family member. Yet still others, He sends desolation, poverty and pestilence. It may be even something so simple

(or so it seems to others) as no friends or the fact that at the time we have to struggle through school. We each have our own trial by fire. "Heavy is my tribulation, sore my punishment has been; broken by Thy indignation, I am troubled by my sin. With my burden of transgression, heavy laden, overborne, humbled low I make confession, for my folly now I mourn. Weak and wounded, I implore Thee: Lord, to me Thy mercy show; all my prayer is now before Thee, all my trouble Thou dost know. Darkness gathers, foes assail me, but I answer not a word; all my friends desert and fail me, only Thou my cry hast heard" (Psalter 102, vs. 2-5). We know what our trial is. We cannot escape it no matter what we do. We *must* go through them. "For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried" (Ps. 66:10).

David knows the sorrow of pain. He knows the complete emptiness. We can see this and become familiar with it in the Psalms that we sing. It is *only* in the Psalms that we can both reach the depths that David does and also in the same song to reach the exaltation as well. Isn't it amazing that we can descend into the depths of sorrow and ascend into the heights of glory all in the same song? God gave us these songs so that these things become familiar to us. Just take a look at all of Psalm 13. David is continually questioning God about being forsaken then at the end David says "I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me" (Ps. 13:6).

We know that when we read the Bible and when we sings the Psalms that we are not alone. We know that the trials sent our way were sent by God. May we be able to turn to the Psalms with a better understanding knowing that it is a balm for our charred skin. It is God that understands our depths and that through turning to Him we are able to be exalted on high. May we always remember "To live apart from God is death, 'tis good His face to seek, my refuge is the living God, His praise I long to speak." ❖

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Arminianism (10)

God's Efficacious Grace

by Aaron J. Cleveland

We are now up to the latter portion of the Third and Fourth Heads of the Canons. In the previous article we dealt with the doctrine of man's total depravity. Now we will move on to man's conversion to God and the manner thereof. It is not surprising that just as the Arminians have exalted man in their explanations concerning predestination, the atonement, and man's corruption, they also exalt man as being decisive in his own conversion.

Remember, in the Arminian scheme of predestination, it is man who must fulfill certain conditions in order to be elected. And man also, according to the Arminians, is the one who has the power to accept or reject the merits of Christ's atonement. Further, as we considered last time, the Arminians have corrupted the truth of total depravity to the point where man is not really dead in his sins, but is capable of repentance and is able to desire righteousness and life of himself. Now, when we come to the doctrine of man's conversion, the Arminians are completely consistent in their heresy by insisting that it is man who initiates his own conversion and by declaring a grace of God that is resistible. The Arminians are wrong, but at least they are consistently wrong. That is more than can be said for some who call themselves Reformed.

Various elements of the Arminian position concerning God's grace and man's conversion can be gleaned from their writings. First, we quote the Fourth Article of the Remonstrance of 1610.

4. that this grace of God is the commencement, progression, and completion of all good, also in so far that regenerate man cannot, apart from this prevent or assisting, awakening, consequent and cooperating grace, think, will or do the good or resist any temptations to evil; so that all good works or activities which can be conceived must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ. But with respect to the mode of this grace, it is not irresistible, since it is written concerning many that they resisted the Holy Spirit.

Acts 7 and elsewhere in many places (*Essays in Commemoration of the Synod of Dort*, pp. 208, 209).

We also quote from two opinions found in the Opinions Of The Remonstrants. The first is Opinion C.5. which states,

The efficacious grace by which anyone is converted is not irresistible; and though God so influences the will by the Word and the internal operation of His Spirit that He both confers the strength to believe or supernatural powers, and actually causes man to believe—yet man is able of himself to despise that grace and not to believe, and therefore to perish through his own fault (*Essays*, p. 226).

The second is Opinion C.6., which states,

Although according to the most free will of God the disparity of divine grace is very great, nevertheless the Holy Spirit confers, or is ready to confer, as much grace to all men and to each man to whom the Word of God is preached as is sufficient for promoting the conversion of men in its steps. Therefore sufficient grace for faith and conversion falls to the lot not only of those whom God is said to will to save according to the decree of absolute election, but also of those who are not actually converted (*Essays*, p. 226).

The two errors which are immediately apparent from a quick reading of these opinions are a grace of God that is both general and resistible, and an ability of natural man to either accept or reject this offered grace. These errors and others, as well as the Reformed position as set forth by our fathers, we will notice as we briefly go through various articles of the Third and Fourth Heads of the Canons.

We begin with Article 7 which clearly sets forth the Reformed truth that those to whom God reveals Himself in no way depends upon their worthiness. The Arminians argued that people or nations could make themselves worthy recipients of the preaching by their right use of the "light of nature." In other words, the Arminians taught that some could make themselves to differ in such a way

as to make themselves more worthy of the gospel in the eyes of God. Article 7 contradicts this lie and makes known the truth that God causes the gospel to be preached to whomever He in His good pleasure desires. Neither men nor nations are able to make themselves more worthy of receiving the gospel.

Article 8 refutes another Arminian error concerning the preaching of the gospel. The Arminians maintain that the preaching of the gospel is a general promise of eternal life to all who hear it. This is consistent with their teaching that God desires the salvation of every person. Article 8 makes clear the Reformed position that the gospel is to be the general proclamation of a particular promise. God *does* promise eternal life and rest “to as many as shall come to Him, and believe on Him (Article 8). This article clearly condemns one of Rev. DeWolf’s statements at issue in 1953 that “God promises to every one of you that, if you believe, you will be saved.” That general and conditional promise was clearly Arminian and it ought to remind us how the rejection of Arminianism is part of our own history as Protestant Reformed Churches. Any Protestant Reformed person who says that Arminianism is not a threat and that it is not important that we know and detest that lie either does not know or appreciate their church history.

Article 10 refutes both the Arminian heresies of man’s free will and a general grace of God. It is not the case, as the article states, that some are converted by “the proper exercise of free will, whereby one distinguishes himself above others, equally furnished with grace sufficient for faith and conversion.” That natural man has no ability to perform any spiritual good is made abundantly clear in the first portion of the Third and Fourth Heads. Related to this is Paragraph 5 of the Rejection of Errors. Here the Arminian error of a “general grace” is rejected. In no way, declared our fathers, does God on His part “show Himself ready to reveal Christ unto all men” and apply to all “sufficiently and efficiently the means necessary to conversion” (Par. 5). God reveals Christ only to His elect and He alone brings about their conversion. Natural man is the slave of sin and has no free will to “choose” God or distinguish himself above others.

How our conversion is accomplished is more clearly set forth in Article 11. It is obvious as one reads Articles 11 and 12 that God accomplishes all and we contribute nothing. This does not mean that we are inactive in our conversion. We certainly are not. However, it does mean that our activity is only because of the work of God’s

grace within us. Article 11 points out that God causes the preaching to go to His elect, illuminates their minds, opens their hearts, makes alive their will and “from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.”

It is in connection with this portion of the Canons that we must notice the “efficacy” of God’s calling. When God desires something to take place, it surely will take place. When it is God’s good pleasure that a man is to be converted, that man will be converted. God’s calling and grace are efficacious. God’s grace always has the power to produce the effect God intends it to have. To say, as the Arminians do, that God’s grace is resistible, is to say that God Himself is not able to accomplish what He intends to accomplish. And if this is true, God is no longer God. Man, because he can resist God, really becomes God.

The Reformed position concerning the operation of God’s efficacious grace in the conversion of man is further developed in Article 12. When we are regenerated, we are resurrected from the dead and made alive, a work which God works in us “without our aid.” To argue that man somehow cooperates in this work would be as foolish as arguing that Adam cooperated with God in his own creation, or that dead, stinking Lazarus cooperated with Jesus in his resurrection. Yet the Arminians do just this.

Article 12, with memorable words, describes this powerful work of God within us with the following words,

but it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation, or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture inspired by the author of this work declares; so that all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner, are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe.—Whereupon the will thus renewed, is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active. Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received.

The end of this article points out that, while God powerfully accomplishes all, man as a result of this work becomes active. Man’s renewed will acts. Man believes and repents. This article repudiates the Arminian charge that in the Reformed view, God treats men as “senseless

stocks and blocks” (Art. 16). Quite the opposite is true as our fathers state. When God regenerates a man, He causes the will to sincerely obey. God does not work in such a way that His grace is forced upon a man and that man is reluctantly dragged along. No, when God converts a man, that man willingly obeys God.

One final error of the Arminian conception of conversion deals with their definition of faith. Arminians will say, “Yes, we believe that faith is a gift of God.” But, when you begin to question them about how this is possible when, on the other hand, they believe that man initiates his own conversion, you will find that they deny faith as God’s gift. Prof. H. Hoeksema explains in what sense the Arminians teach that faith is God’s gift. He writes,

He [God] helps man to believe. He removes the hindrances of the darkness of man’s understanding and the irregularity of his affections, *and thus He makes it possible for man to perform the act of believing* (emphasis, AJC) (*The Voice of Our Fathers*, p. 602).

Faith according to the Arminians is nothing more than an “act” performed by man. Article 14 makes clear that faith is much more than this. Faith is something that is “conferred, breathed, and infused” into man by God.

Later in this article it is stated that God works in man “both the will to believe, and the act of believing also.”

Even though the Arminians accuse the Reformed of believing proud doctrines, the opposite is true. Arminians teach that man is able to make himself more worthy than others in the sight of God. The Canons teach that in no way does God reveal Himself to some because they distinguish themselves. Merely in His sovereign good pleasure does He reveal Himself to some and not others. Arminians teach that man of himself has the ability to believe in God and convert himself. The Reformed teach that God produces the will to believe and the act of believing. The Arminian doctrines do not produce a spirit of humility before God and fellow man, rather, they produce a spirit of self-righteousness and pride. The doctrines of the Reformed faith produce in the objects of God’s grace humility before God and an acknowledgment before men that they are the unworthy recipients of God’s unmerited grace.

Next time, Lord willing, we will examine the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints as it is explained in the Fifth Head of the Canons. ❖

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

Church Family

Perspectives on Preaching

by Jonathan Brands

It is the case that, in virtually anything, reality can be viewed from multiple perspectives. A banker or businessman traveling Eurorail from Amsterdam, Holland to Berlin, Germany might have viewed the magnificent tulips and saw dollar figures. President Bush trying to clear his mind of the Palestinian peace problem, might have viewed the gardens as cathartic forces. No doubt D. L. Moody would have been spiritually electrified and calmly motivated when awed by another representation of God’s creation.

People view things differently. Different people see different things. This especially finds application in theology, only on an even grander scale. Theological dis-

course essentially has only two perspectives, divine and human. There is somewhat of a “validity [for] multiple perspectives in theology,” as Poythress asserts in *Symphonic Theology*, but it is my contention that God sees things in only one way. The immutability of God can be applied to His perspective on reality, thus eliminating an ultimate multiplicity of divine vision. What Poythress was attempting to get across has to do with the contextual diversity within the Bible. The Bible pictures itself from many different cultural, social, linguistic, and even theological viewpoints. It is multifaceted—in a way to enable us to appreciate its richness. But, it almost goes without saying that God communicates to His people

one message, simple and clear. By faith men and women lay hold upon *the way God sees things*, and live out of that consciousness.

Desire to preach, therefore, can be explained with numerous human insights, but really only from two spiritual planes, God's view and ours. The former is known from the Bible, God's *Word* to us. The latter can be explained by different people in different ways, depending on the individual vantage point. Peter Y. De Jong says this: "Life has become so complex and closely interrelated that no question can be faced in isolation." (DeJong, 11)

We really need to consider every human insight, thought, and impression to get the most accurate human perspective. But from the omniscient God, in Whom is all knowledge, we look for yet another view: *His*.

We must keep a distinction between God's view and ours. We are not God! We are creatures, limited and lowly. Our visions are humble, God's is exalted. But God does show us a glimpse of His view. God views ministers as sacred, set-apart, as we learn from the handling of the Levitical tribe. God views the desire to preach as urgent, important, and unavoidable. God insists that Moses lead the Israelites, despite Moses' objections. The same with Jonah. We get a sense of God's *passion for souls*, as it were, His profound interest in reaching His people with His message of love. God desires to see His people convicted of their sin, to serve and love Him, and experience Him. Therefore, He is demanding and forceful in the calling of His servants to proclaim His message. God lays it upon men, as Paul: "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for *necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!*" (1 Cor. 9:16). We see control and sovereignty in God, yet we also see His deep love—an immense, overflowing, intense focus and dedication of God to see His people brought from their misery to delight in Him.

Human testimonies and experiences do speak, in a way, about God. It might be possible to infer a truth about God from His ruling powers upon an individual. If not, the divine view just given still would stand from other exclusively divine words, however. But our intention at this point is to sketch the human end of the concept. How have humans historically responded to the call, and what has motivated them to genuinely desire to preach?

It doesn't seem altogether difficult to trace reasons why one might be hesitant to pursue the ministry. Numerous challenges need to be confronted and fought. These challenges might be able to be categorized as *in-*

tellectual, biblical, physical, and personal. They are somewhat interrelated and overlapping, as the case may be.

The intellectual challenge encountered might be a main deterrent. The rigorous academic curriculum established for ministers of the Word who need to master foreign language requirements such as Greek and Hebrew is often tremendously daunting. Intellectual aptitude is, however, essential for a minister to rightly handle the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). Much direct consequence in the spiritual lives of members of the church may be traced back to the preaching and instruction received.

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however, essential for a
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word of truth.

In addition to being intellectually qualified, one must meet the biblical requirements. One must meet the eligibility requirements of 1 Timothy 3, and Titus 1. One must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, etc. Many an individual may be discouraged from entering the ministry due to spiritual inadequacies along these lines.

Not to be omitted, the woman can find no biblical identification for preaching. Nowhere does the Bible validate the ordination and preaching of a woman. Rather, 1 Timothy 2:12 bars women from preaching or exercising authority over a man; she must be positionally lower.

There also may be physical limitations which prevent one from maintaining openness to these career choices. Understandably, if one lacks gifts of speech necessary for preaching, one cannot preach. To preach one must possess adequate articulation, verbal power in projection—thus conveying the message of the cross dynamically, powerfully, and vibrantly. To teach and instruct, one must also be equipped with abilities to effectively communicate knowledge to students.

Another criterion in determining one's eligibility to preach is whether or not one's personality type is compatible to the nature of minister. A popular career book, entitled *Do What You Are*, states:

[T]he secret of career satisfaction lies in doing what you enjoy most.... most of us are caught in a kind of psychological wrestling match, torn between what we

think we *can* do, what we (or others) feel we *ought* to do, and what we think we *want* to do. Our advice? Concentrate instead on *who you are*, and the rest will fall into place (Barron-Tieger, 5).

One must be suited in temperament to preach. Preaching must be something you can feel energized by, appreciated and respected in, and view the future optimistically through (Barron-Tieger, 3).

The fact is, if one is able to move beyond the challenges to the ministry, one must also be moved to preach. As asserts R. B. Kuiper:

[I]f one has a desire to bring the gospel to the unsaved, a desire which is not weak but compelling, not ephemeral but persistent in spite of seemingly insuperable obstacles and an irrepressible sense of one's unworthiness of, and insufficiency for, so glorious and so exacting a task, it is perfectly proper for him in the interest of his own satisfaction and happiness to yield to that desire (Kuiper, 6).

Often an interest in, or serious consideration of the ministry finds precedence in the Christian family and church home. In a family where father and mother emphasize the importance of godly instruction, in a church where minister insists on the centrality of biblical preaching—by these means is often developed an overwhelming desire to preach. The young believer initially responds to the gospel of grace with fervent acceptance, grows steadily to spiritual maturity and can do no otherwise than publicize his impressions. This radiant enthusiasm does not, of course, necessitate preaching, but occasionally the Lord may stir the heart of one inwardly to dedicate his life specifically to this vocation. But apart from the regenerating power of God and the embrace of ecclesiastical doctrine one ought not set aside his life to preach. Godly motives to pursue and desire preaching must be God-given, church-inculcated, and home-cultivated.

Godly motives to pursue and desire preaching must be God-given, church-inculcated, and home-cultivated.

Often children are encouraged more to remain in the family business than to aspire to teaching or preaching. For example, Martin Luther's father intended to make him a lawyer (Beza, 54). Calvin also first aspired

to the legal profession (Beza, 139). Fact is, the world does not esteem any position promoting the Christian truth.

Precisely how much worldly ideologies influence the people of God is, however, hard to calculate. We need to admit we are continually vulnerable to philosophies of the world. The book, *101 Careers: A Guide to the Fastest Growing Opportunities*, reveals the fastest growing occupational areas, but also reveals something about worldwide spirituality. No increase in educational careers is projected; religious vocations are not even mentioned. Another evidence our world is in spiritual jeopardy!

Although difficulties might generate despair, God will cause the faithful and called to persist.

We could never take into account every perspective or insight, but we should be aware by now that the desire to preach is a personal compulsion, conscientious conviction, and an irresistible urge. Although difficulties might generate despair, God will cause the faithful and called to persist. He will blend their unique and needed gifts with His grace and given passion. He will bless them, if indeed they trust in Him. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Ps. 127:1). ❖

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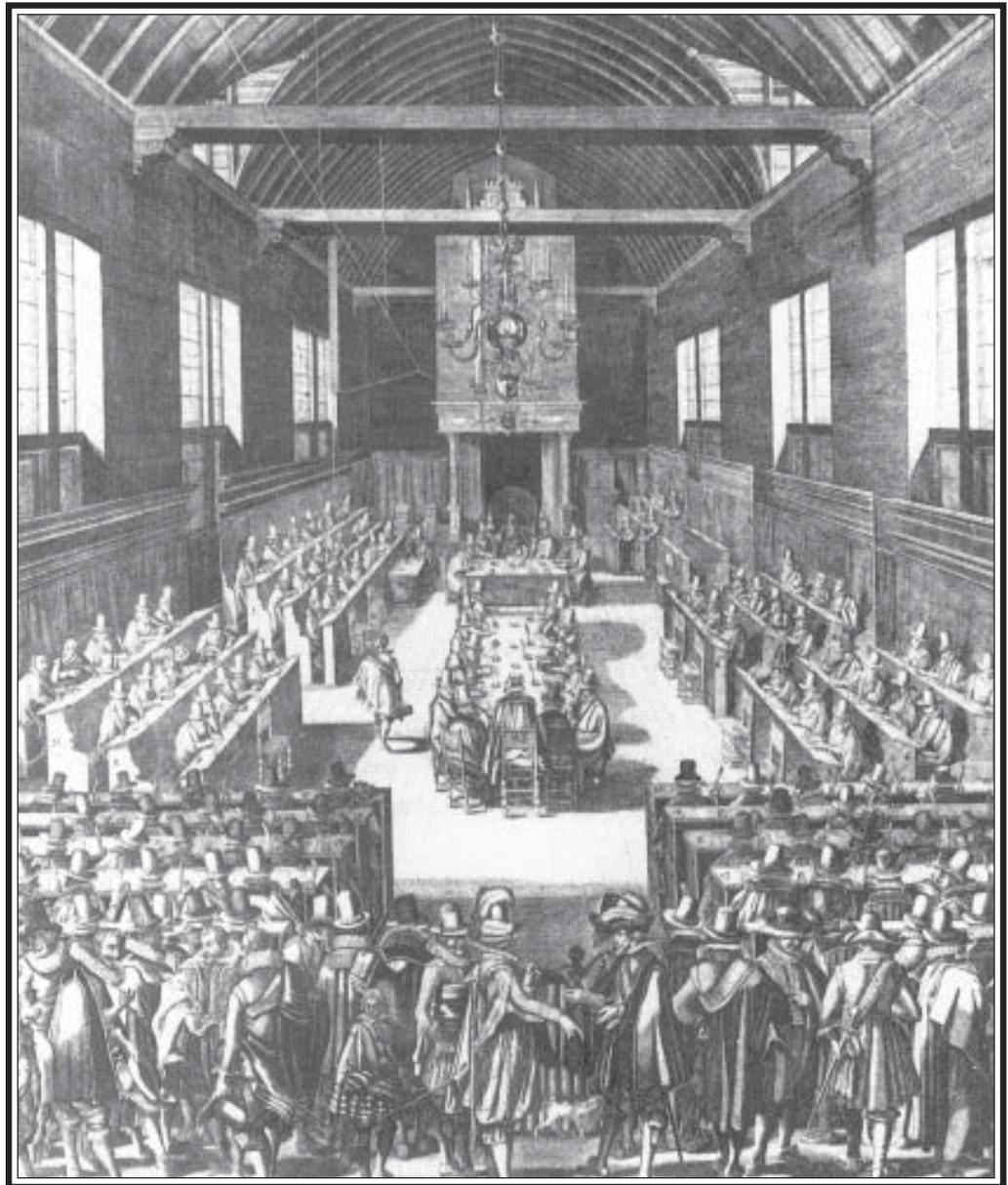
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Jonathan is a member of South Holland Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois. This article was written as a scholarship essay.

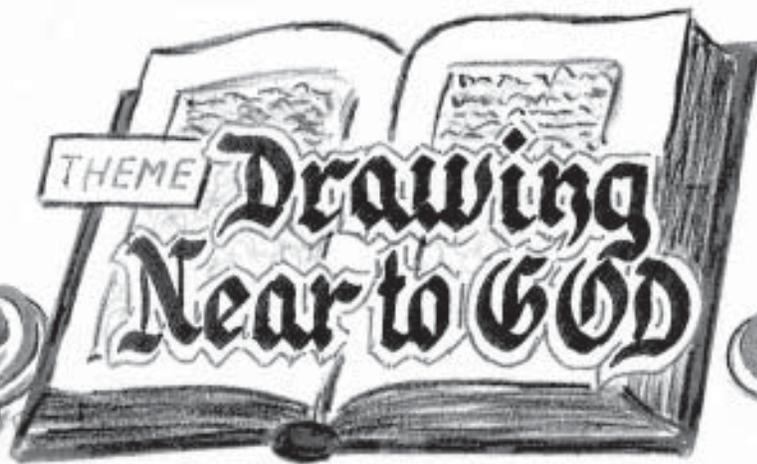
The Synod Of Dordrecht

by J.P. de Klerk

This picture is probably the best one made of the day of the opening of the Synod of Dordrecht, on November 13, 1618. It is an engraving made by F. Schillemans, who carefully reproduced the clothing, faces and behavior of all those who were there together. Among them were 26 theologians from other countries and places, like the Palz and Hessen (Germany), Basel, Bern, Schaffhausen and Zurich (Switzerland), and a number from England transported by the Dutch Navy. There were also representatives from the “Eglises Wallonnes des Pays-Bas” (French speaking churches in The Netherlands, in fact Huguenots). There were professors from the theological academies in Leiden, Franeker, Groningen, Harderwijk and Middelburg. The gathering didn’t take place in a church, but in the “Stadsdoelen” on the first floor. They were wearing their hats and coats because it was cold. Prince Maurits of Orange-Nassau, however, had strongly recommended to start May 1, 1618, but there were too many problems to overcome for the organization. On May 29, 1619 the Synod was closed, after 180 meetings. ❖



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



But it is good for me
to draw near to GOD:
I have put my trust in
the Lord God, that I
may declare all thy works.

PSALM 73:28

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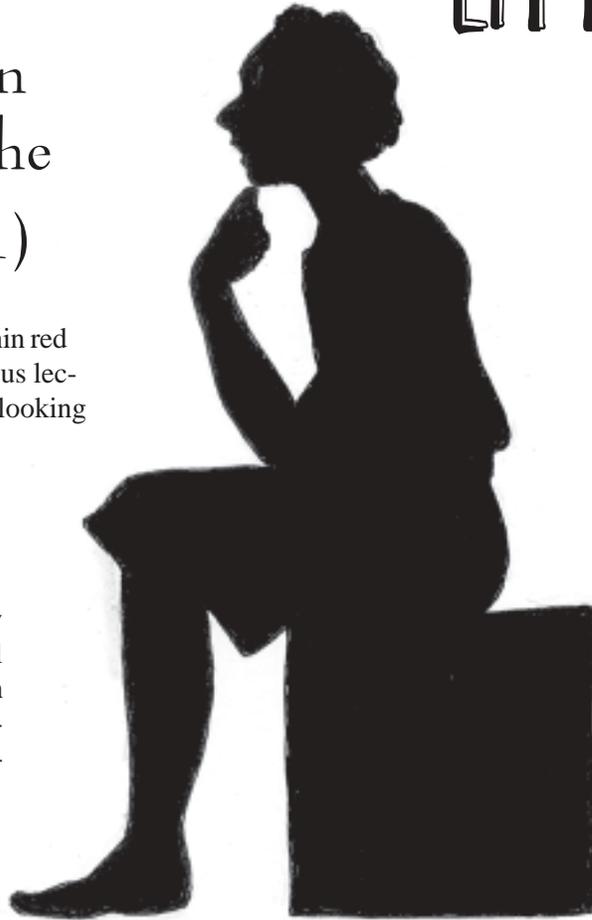
"LITTLE LIGHTS"

One Man Against the World (1)

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

A short young man with thin red hair found a seat in the spacious lecture hall. Though an unlikely-looking fellow, Athanasius' eyes watched the stage with all seriousness. Others crowded in around him until there was no room left. It seemed as if the whole city had come out for the special debate! Indeed, at this time in the early 300s, the city of Alexandria was intensely interested in all things religious, even to the point of violence. And the question today was of utmost importance—who is Jesus?



not really God! Surely he was a heretic. Surely he deserved to be disciplined. But he was a very popular priest. There could be riots. It was a very difficult situation.

What would his beloved Archbishop do?

(to be continued) ❖

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

The crowd grew quiet. Athanasius sat on the edge of his seat. There on the stage was his close friend and teacher, Archbishop Alexander. At seventy-five years of age, Alexander was an old man, yet his mind was clear and sharp. His opponent was guilty of heresy and Alexander needed to prove it. He quoted from the lies and false teachings of this man.

Finally it was the turn of the accused priest to speak. Arius stood tall and thin wearing a simple black cloak, hair down to his shoulders, and a red scarf around his neck. He knew how to enthrall a crowd. He knew what he had to do now. He accused Alexander himself.

But Alexander knew what to do as well. He asked Arius exactly what he believed.

“Do you believe the Son is not eternal?”

“Yes.”

“Do you believe the Son cannot know the Father perfectly?”

“Yes.”

Athanasius studied the man who so answered. Even the crowd was amazed. Arius was saying that Jesus was

Unscramble the letters to discover these words of Jesus concerning Himself and His Father:

“...tub I wonk mih: nad fi I hulldo asy,
“-----:-----,

I oknw mih ton, I lashl eb a rail
-----,

eilk toun uyo: utb I nowk hmi, dan
-----:

peke sih yingsa” (John 8:55).
-----.”

“Livery, reyliv, I yas nout ouy,
“-----,

Feebro Mahraba saw, I ma” (John 8:58).
-----.”

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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:

Seth Brain, son of Mr. & Mrs. Henry Ferguson—
Edmonton, Canada

Gordon and Henry, sons of Mr. & Mrs. Todd Voshell—
First, MI

Justin Allen, son of Mr. & Mrs. David Steenwyk—
Georgetown, MI

Ethan Luke, son of Mr. & Mrs. Sam Copple—Grace, MI

Evan Christian, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason Engelsma—
Grandville, MI

Kirsten Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jack Brands—
Grandville, MI

Carter Allen, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan VanderKolk—
Grandville, MI

Lauren Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Seth
Bushouse—Holland, MI

Levi Bruce, son of Mr. & Mrs. Bruce Klamer—Hope, MI

Jedd Mitchell, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dan Kalsbeek—Hope,
MI

Jaimie Beth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Kamps—
Hudsonville, MI

Joseph Lee, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Andringa—Hull, IA

Mackenzie Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Rodney
Wierenga—Lacombe, Canada

Carlyn Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Craig Poortinga—
Loveland, CO

Serena Alexis and Trent Anthony, daughter and son of
Mrs. Mary Tolbert—Redlands, CA

Madeline Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Terry Kaptein—
Southeast, MI

Garrett James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Hoving—South-
east, MI

Carly Brooke, daughter of Miss Robin Huizenga—South
Holland, IL

Zachary Alan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Rick Gritters—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

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

Romans 10:10

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

Todd and Jami Voshell—First, MI

Anna Kamps—Georgetown, MI

Brent Bomers—Grandville, MI

Laura DeVries—Grandville, MI

Steve Huizinga—Grandville, MI

Bob Alsum—Randolph, WI

Mike Oosterhouse—Randolph, WI

Dan Regnerus—Randolph, WI

Ethan Tamminga—Randolph, WI

Tom Buiter—Southwest, MI

MARRIAGES

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

Matthew 19:5

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Ross Wassink and Miss Erin Bykerk—Holland, MI

Michael DeJager and Miss Kim Keizer—Hull, IA

Mr. Nathan Dykstra and Miss Melanie VanBaren—
Peace, IL

Mr. Roger Brooks and Miss Cassie Pitts—Peace, IL

Mr. Travis VanderKolk and Miss Katie Regnerus—South
Holland, IL