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# Beacon

November  
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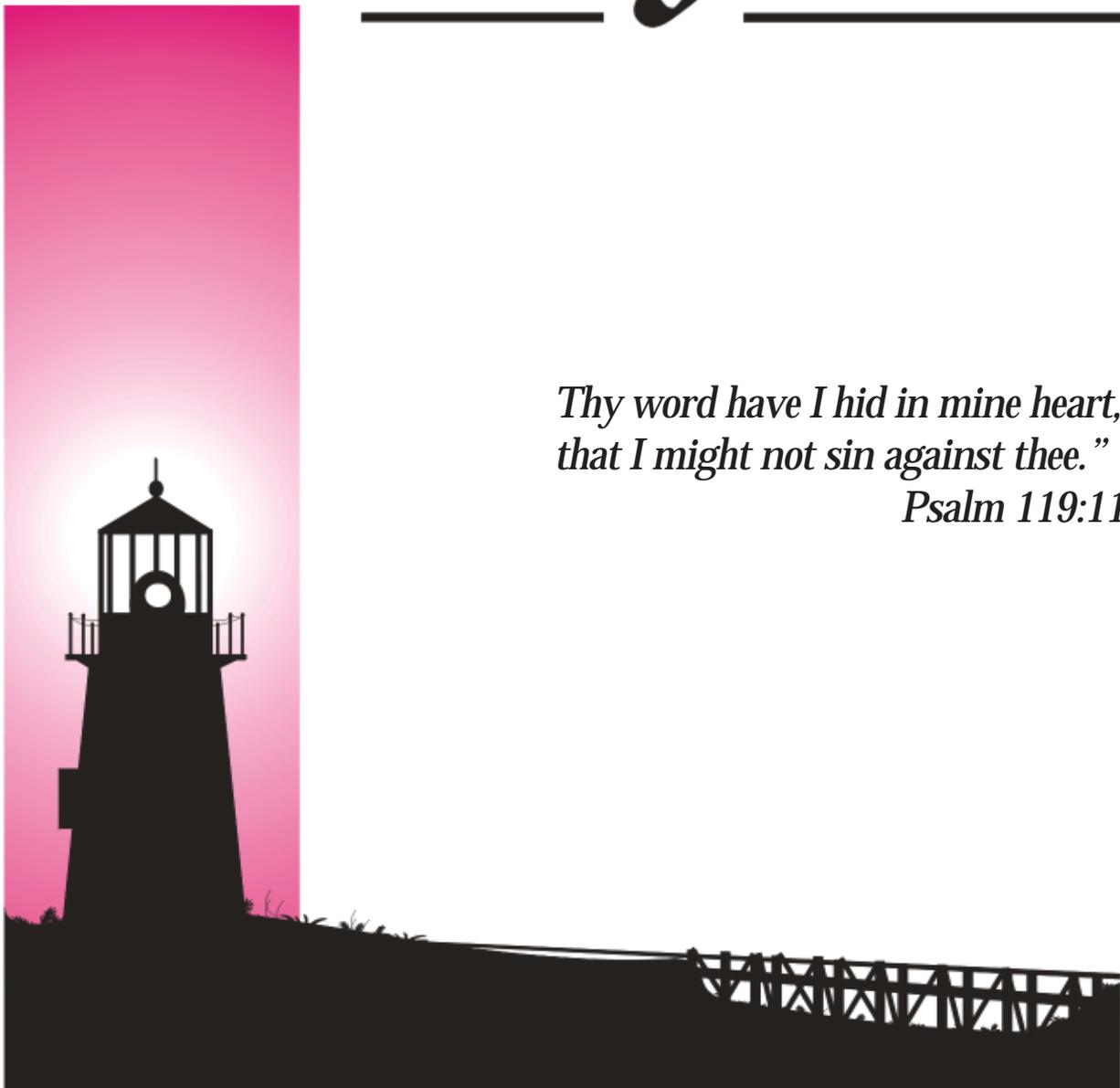
Volume LXIII  
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# Lights

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*Thy word have I hid in mine heart,  
that I might not sin against thee."*

*Psalm 119:11*



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# Soul Erosion

by John Huizenga



**S**lowly and steadily, imperceptibly, piece by piece, a rock is reduced to sand and soil. Waves pound incessantly, water seeps into cracks and splits the rock; acids eat away at the molecules and the rocks dissolve. The winds blow soil away, and heavy rain washes it into the rivers and sea leaving once rich soil to be barren wastelands. Sometimes erosion can occur quickly, but often it is a very slow process that is hardly noticed. Unless we recognize the power of erosion and work to prevent it, our treasured possessions eventually are reduced to rubble. So it is with the spiritual life of our soul: unless we recognize the power of Satan to destroy life and work to prevent it, we will eventually find our life in ruins.

The life of a mature child of God is a very beautiful thing. It is the reflection of the beauty of Christ: the beauty of holiness. He stands strong in every sort of trouble. He is a man or woman we can trust. He is the elder in the church who stands strong and yet is not severe. He is one who brings a calm and peace to scattered sheep. He is one whose faith is childlike, yet deep and profound. She is the woman who is humble and modest. She listens carefully and brings comforting words from the treasury of Scripture. She never spreads gossip but boldly stops it dead, unruffled by the scorn of the talebearer. One in whom the life of Christ glows has a spiritual life of strength and beauty. He bears that fruit of the Spirit which is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal. 5:22-26).

Such a man, woman, or child is indeed a rare gem. In fact, nobody will perfectly mirror this image of Christ while in this life of corruption. But this fact ought not discourage our striving for this goal. Nothing is more peaceful and joyous than living a strong life that bears abundantly the fruit of the Spirit. Nothing is more miserable than to live the life of our own sinful pleasures.

Do you consider yourself one who stands strong, like a spiritual rock in Christ? If you do, take heed to the warning of God in 1 Corinthians 10:12 where we read, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” Do you struggle to stand spiritually, and feel weak and vulnerable? One of the things we need to be aware of and struggle against is that meticulous, slow but steady erosion of the soul worked by Satan. Often the all out assaults by Satan only make us stronger in faith, but it is that slow erosion that goes unnoticed until we find ourselves weak and ready to be crushed.

The erosion comes in many different forms. Every aspect of a godly life is exposed. We are constantly pushed to compromise in our obedience to the commands of God. You young people are sometimes a key tool of Satan in a generation long process of erosion. Let’s look at a couple of examples. Your parents may have raised you with the conviction that it is the will of God that mothers give of their lives for their children and home, and not share it with a career or other personal goals. But as you grow up, you are faced with the idea that you cannot raise a family in today’s world without two incomes. You are given a spouse and children, and your employer makes it very difficult for the new mother to quit her job. Money and “needs” are dangled incessantly before your eyes, and you settle for some sort of compro-

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mise. Your parents are not real happy, but your arguments and the desire to avoid conflict begin to wear away at their convictions. Soon they are willing to baby-sit while mother works even more hours. The next generation may be willing to sacrifice their children to the Molech of worldly daycare centers. It is not until much later that you suddenly realize that those children missed out on that crucial 24 hour nurturing of a mother by her example and diligent instruction in God's word, and is therefore seriously at risk in this world of growing temptations. The same sort of slow erosion takes its toll on the areas of our toleration of divorce or homosexuality. Satan has a way of making these issues very personal and driving sharp wedges into our soul to weaken and crack our resolve.

But really such erosion is superficial. We become soft to all these issues we face because Satan has been busy wearing away that lifeline of faith that connects us to Christ. A few seconds here, a couple of minutes there; Satan chips away at the time spent with God's word and with God in prayer. Our prayers become shorter, devotional time become sporadic and then stops. We go to church twice, but then begin to fill the rest of the day with other things. Our mind begins to wander in church, and we conclude the sermons have become rather dull and hardly worth listening to. When our life becomes riddled with doubts, envyings, "vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another" we look to the worldly books to help solve our personal problems. Like the prodigal son whose riches slowly dwindled to the point where he suddenly, by the grace of God alone, found himself desiring the food of swine; we open our eyes and find our nose deep in the filthy fodder of this world.

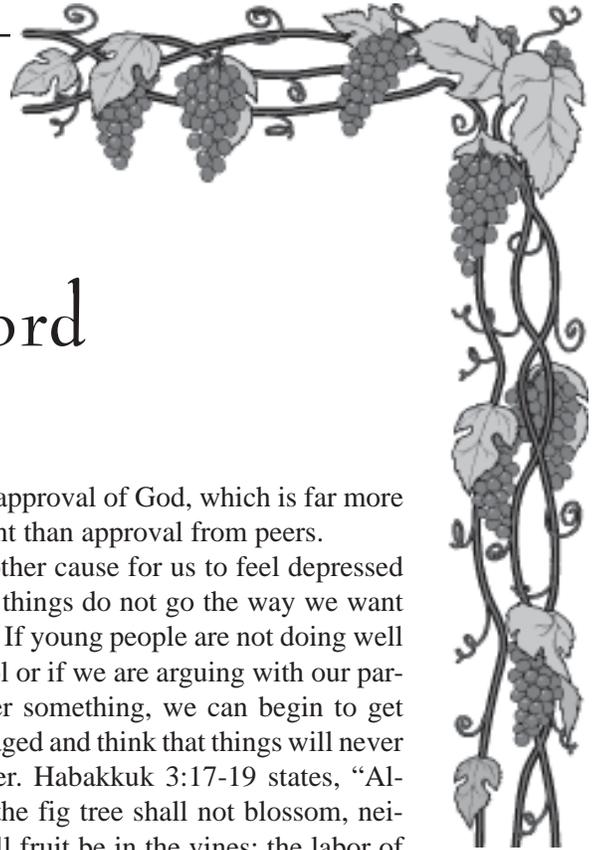
Where am I? Where is my Father? Where is that home where I never had need of anything? Oh, do I desire to hear the voice of my Father. I would love nothing more than to speak to Him. Yes, by the grace of God alone, we see that communion with God is so necessary to grow and replace what has been lost to the erosive work of Satan.

Erosion will never be prevented in this world, but even in the natural world we see that erosion is overcome only by the power of life. Living things grow and replace what is lost to the wear and tear of this world. So it is with the child of God. We are not dead and destined to decompose into rubble. We are living stones (I Peter 2:5). The life of Christ alone will restore the crumbling mess.

The heart of this life is the faith which God gives to each of his children. We do nothing to earn this gift; it is freely given by grace alone to the people that God has chosen from eternity. Faith unites us to the life of Christ. Faith gives us eyes to see the love of God for us and our salvation in Christ. Faith is the life that enables the child of God to grow and develop into that mature child of God who stands as a beautiful tree bearing fruit and standing strong against the withering attacks of Satan to destroy the works of God.

Nothing will ever uproot the child of God, but Satan will do what he can to leave you a tangled mess with your fruit scattered and spoiling. That Rock which is the cornerstone of the church will never be moved, but the people of God, the lively stones with which the church is built, are constantly exposed to the erosive power of Satan. This is our comfort and our hope.

That erosion would eventually reduce the church to rubble were it not for that life giving power that flows from Christ into every member. May our eyes be opened to that slow process of soul erosion? What does God demand that we do in thankful obedience to prevent this erosion? Our own works in themselves will not prevent it. God calls us to do only one thing: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes. 5:17). David knew this and repeats often in his songs, "As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice" (Psalm 55:16-17). Jesus makes this clear by way of a parable he told "to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). "And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). Nowhere does God tell his children to do anything other than pray and listen when it comes to the problem of soul erosion. Let us take heed and enjoy a taste of heaven. ❖



# Trust in the Lord

by Kelly Langerak

**W**ith all of the challenges and difficult decisions that Christian young people face today, it is hard for us to have an optimistic outlook on life at all times. Young people have to be careful in how we deal with the different pressures that are put on us from day to day. Through prayer and reading the Bible, we can learn to deal with the challenges we face every day in the right way and avoid falling into depression.

Depression can often be caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain that cannot be stopped from occurring. In these instances, it cannot be blamed on the individual. Young people must be especially careful so that we do not fall into depression because of worrying about things that do not really matter.

One way that we could fall into depression is because young people have more of a need to fit in and be accepted than any other age group. We believe that the only way to be happy is to have the approval of people our own age, even if those other people are of the world. Not fitting in can lead young people feeling lonely and can cause some to become severely depressed. This challenge often causes us to make the choice between what we know we should do and what “everyone else is doing.” Sadly, if we pick what is right, we are often looked down on by our peers. If we do not, we have to deal with our consciences and knowing that what we did was wrong in the eyes of the Lord.

Christian young people must learn to realize that we have to live our lives on this earth looking to our future and eternal life with God. Happiness does not depend on whether or not certain people think you are “cool.” In Professor Herman Hanko’s book, *Biblical Psychology*, he states, “True happiness, true genuine mental and spiritual well-being arises out of walking before God in good conscience. There is no other way” (47). Young people brought up in the church clearly know the difference between right and wrong and must strive to do what is right. By doing this, we might not be the most popular with everyone else, but we will have a clear conscience

and the approval of God, which is far more important than approval from peers.

Another cause for us to feel depressed is when things do not go the way we want them to. If young people are not doing well in school or if we are arguing with our parents over something, we can begin to get discouraged and think that things will never get better. Habakkuk 3:17-19 states, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength...” This text can also be applied to us as young people who are not satisfied with what we have and think that material things can bring us happiness.

The material things we gain for ourselves on this earth do not matter, and young people must especially realize this. The kind of car we drive or clothes we wear are not important and will not make us happy. These things might make us happy outwardly, but only for a little while. Material things cannot satisfy spiritual needs, which are much more important. Young people have to learn to focus on living lives that are acceptable to the Lord instead of trying to impress the world. I Timothy 6:6-7 states, “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”

Facing questions about the future often makes young people worry. Choosing the right boyfriend or girlfriend, getting married, having a good job, and paying off debts that we already have are all things that young people think and worry about. We have to realize that God has every aspect of our lives under His control and will provide everything that we need. Waiting patiently on the Lord is important to remember when thinking about the

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future. Philippians 4:19 states, “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” This is important to remember when caught worrying too much about the future.

Young people must always remember that everything is in the hands of the Lord, no matter how bad things may seem to be. The Lord will take care of us, and things will get better. As long as we put our trust in Him, we will have true contentment and happiness. ❖

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## The Reader Asks

# Holding to False Doctrine and Walking In Sin

by Rev. James Laning

### Dear Rev. Laning

What is the difference, if there is any at all, between one’s holding to false doctrine, and one’s living in sin?

Michael J. Vermeer

### Dear Michael

A person who is holding to false doctrine is sinning by doing so. But such a person may or may not be impenitently walking in sin, depending upon whether or not he is consciously aware of the fact that he is holding to false doctrine. Let us take a look at this a little bit more.

First of all, we must confess, over against the position of many today, that it really is a sin to hold to false doctrine. Many teach that it does not matter what you believe as long as you are sincere about what you believe. This is a common position that we emphatically reject. Sound doctrine is, after all, the knowledge of God. We believers desire to learn and defend the truths set forth in Scripture out of a love for God and a desire to glorify His Name. But there is another error that must be rejected. There are some who say that you can be a member of a true church while holding to false doctrine, as long as you do not teach that false doctrine. That is not what our creeds say. Answer 85 of the Heidelberg Catechism says that the following people should be disciplined by the church:

### Works Cited

Hanko, Prof. Herman. *Biblical Psychology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Federation of Protestant Reformed School Societies, 1984.

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*Kelly is a member of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan. She wrote this article as a Senior Writing assignment at Covenant Christian High School.*

those, who under the name of Christ, maintain doctrines, or practices inconsistent therewith, and will not, after having been often brotherly admonished, renounce their errors and wicked course of life...

Notice that it does not say that you can be a member of a true church while maintaining a false doctrine as long as you do not try to persuade others to hold to it. Rather it teaches, and properly so, that a person who impenitently maintains false doctrines should be disciplined. This has to be done in the proper way, of course, following the route set forth in Matthew 18. But that is another subject. Here we point out simply that such people are sinning and ought to be disciplined, when they are impenitently maintaining teachings contrary to Scripture and the Confessions.

This, then, leads us to the second part of the answer to your question. As I said above, whether or not a person is *impenitently* walking in the sin of maintaining false doctrine depends upon whether he is consciously aware that he is doing this. Answer 85 points this out when it says that the church gets involved in the discipline of such a church member only after he has been “often brotherly admonished” and still refuses to renounce his errors and wicked course of life. This point is also very important. In our dealing with a person in our churches who is holding to false doctrines, we must use Scripture to show him his error, and we must admonish him fre-

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quently, in a brotherly way, striving to bring him to repentance.

But what about those outside our churches or sister churches who are holding to false doctrine? At first, we do not know whether such a person is impenitently walking in sin or not. Maybe he has never been shown the truth of Scripture on the subject. It is only after showing him his error from Scripture, and doing it on a number of occasions, admonishing him in the proper way, that we come to see whether he is refusing to renounce his errors. In such situations it is good to come with a number of different Scripture passages, and to take the time patiently to answer his objections from Scripture. If a person is willing to be instructed on the matter, we must be willing to take much time to go slowly through different passages, striving to explain the truth of Scripture clearly and thoroughly. It is another matter, of course, if a person shows that he is not willing to be instructed. With such a person we do not labor very long.

Your short question was a very good one, and I thank you for sending it to me. May God grant us the grace to be faithful witnesses, and may He use our witness to glorify His Name and gather His covenant people.

Fraternally in Christ,  
Rev. James Laning ❖

**D**o 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:

Rev. James Laning  
1550 Ferndale S.W.  
Walker, MI 49544  
E-mail: jlaning@msn.com

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Story Time

## That Sudden Meeting

by J. P. deKlerk

**I**n the big, busy office building of the daily newspaper, *The New Observer*, in the capital of Canada, Ottawa, an energetic Christian journalist, Leo Eermans, sat behind his modern steel desk, and sighed with relief. He had again written his column about all that was going on in Europe, just in time for the printer. All he had to do before five o'clock was read some e-mail that had come in.

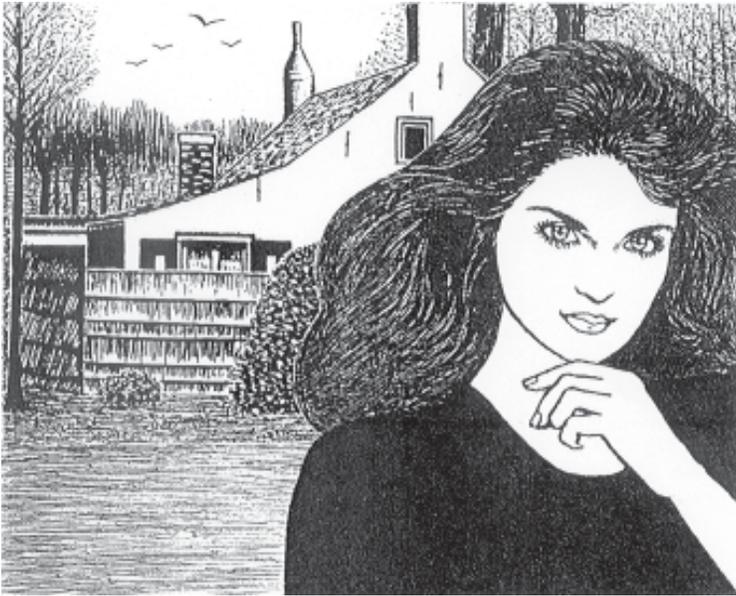
Outside it seemed to be earlier, because the spring-time sky was so clear and the sun so radiant. The window of his room at the third floor was still partly open and he heard a thrush singing his song of rejoicing; it seemed an endless repertoire.

At that moment there came the voice of the editor through the loudspeaker of the intercom: "Leo, could you come and see me for a moment?"

That was how it started.

Mr. Martin Ellis sat down comfortably in his chair in the conference part of his room, with some colorful folders in his hands. *The Observer* was meat and drink to him and he had much appreciation for anyone who also liked to make something good of his newspaper, regardless of his or her private feelings. In his view Leo Eermans was an excellent journalist. He could count on him under all circumstances.

"Listen, my friend, I have thought out something special for you," he began. "I remember that your par-



ents were Dutch immigrants and that you can still speak that language, but you have not been in The Netherlands. Well, what do you think, if I send you to The Netherlands for six weeks, as a kind of working holiday?”

Leo was amazed and said, “That would be fantastic. What is the catch?”

Mr. Ellis laughed and explained. “It is simple. You take a notebook and your camera, and you travel up and down the whole country, talking with the people. So, not like an ordinary tourist gazing at historic buildings, statues and paintings, but traveling to the villages, the farms, the shops, meeting men and women anywhere. You can hire a car or take the train; that does not matter. The newspaper covers all your expenses. I hope you’ll speak with unspoiled people of different age groups, the trustworthy ones, so that we get some positive news. You know what I mean.”

Leo departed the next day and soon he could enjoy springtime tulips and Dutch cheese in the country of his ancestors. During the first two weeks he visited places in the western and central parts of the country and now he drove his hired sports car in the southern direction, where the dykes and bridges of the province of Zeeland were waiting. It was two o’clock in the afternoon. The wind brushed past his blond, curly head. A bumblebee sniffed curiously at his little moustache, but disappeared.

In front of him drove a farmer on a tractor. Leo did not think it fit to pass him by. He had the time of his life, taking in the view of the quiet landscape in all its simple beauty. He preferred it above the forests of high-rise

buildings in the modern cities he had seen; there was no room left for agriculture and smiling country people.

He drove along a wide ditch on a road bordered by willows. He noticed that there was a farm; a small house with a big shed behind it. He stopped the car next to a wooden bridge, without an entrance gate. There was a plate with the word “Meiendal” on it and a heraldic lion.

There was no watchdog, but he heard the sound of grunting pigs and cackling chickens. In the distance a cow lowed. Several sparrows romped in the high old poplars. He saw a path that went through a garden full of spring flowers, to the front door which stood open. There was no bell, no hall, so he simply called “anybody about?”

Jacoba Van Achthuizen heard Leo coming. She dried her hands on a towel, took her apron off and walked from her kitchen corner to the middle of the living room. Then she saw Leo framed in the doorway, and something happened. . . . A sudden shyness held her back half way. Kind of fascinated, she stared at him, not knowing what to say to the slender man immaculately dressed in a dark blue suit, with a camera in his hand. He noticed it, and they looked each other full in the eyes, in silent wonder. They had never met before, but they did not feel as if they were strangers.

Jacoba pulled herself together and walked towards him with an outstretched hand. She said, “Hello sir, I am Jacoba van Achthuizen, but everybody here calls me Coba Meiendal.”

He quickly took her hand, clutched it without being aware of it, but he noticed a tightening of his throat. Then he said, “Excuse me, that I come here unannounced. I am Leo Eermans. I am a journalist, 38 years old, unmarried, writing a series of articles about the people in The Netherlands for my newspaper in Canada. I search in fact for conservative Christians, which seems to be a dwindling race.”

Now they both smiled.

“Well, Leo, you are straight forward. I have been married, but I have barely known married life. It happened two years ago. The day after the festive occasion the Lord called my husband home already. That is a very painful experience. But, I am a member of the Reformed Church. Perhaps you saw that old building already standing near the dyke at the end of the road.”

“Sorry, I did not yet see it. However, I am also Reformed. But I had twice an unpleasant experience with a

girl; perhaps disappointing on both sides. I guess they lived with their heads in the clouds. I discovered that they presumed that I could offer a life in wealth and all that, but I have to work for my bread. I have obligations, I work hard. This journey for example I can not afford myself. It is a totally unexpected windfall my boss came with for the newspaper.”

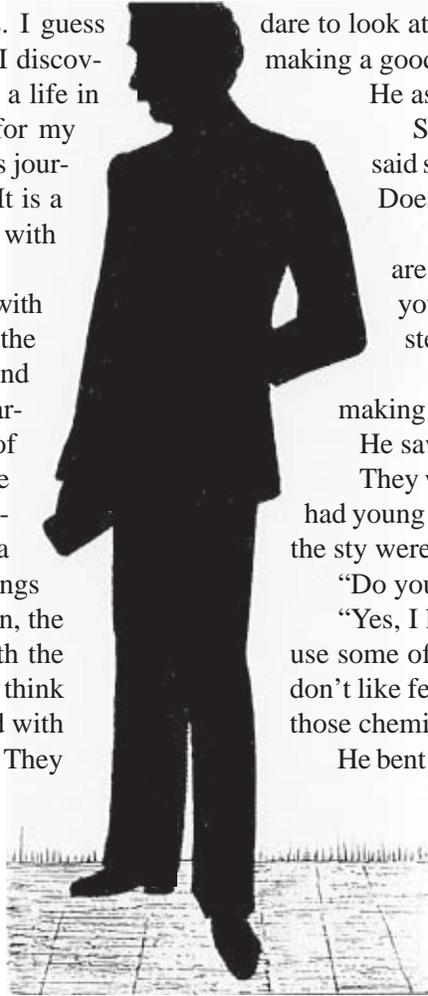
“Oh, and I see that you are quite happy with it. Delightful. Well, I will first show you the farm. It is not much, but I am used to this kind of work. I was born in Goes, where my parents had a bigger farm, but I am not much of a business woman. Two pieces of land I have let out on lease. An old man, who my husband knew very well, looks after this area around the buildings for me. He repairs things and so on. I look after the vegetable garden, the fruit trees, and the chickens. Together with the pigs and three cows I can handle it here. I think sometimes that many women got poisoned with false ideas of freedom and independence. They refuse to follow their vocation. I have always dreamt of a Christian marriage, and children, and caring for people around me who fell ill. Oh, sorry, my tongue is running away with me. I should not tell you all these private things.”

He grinned and laid briefly his hand on her shoulder.

“Coba, it is all right. I like to hear everything. You are... Wait, this shed is certainly very old. These big bricks, hand-forged iron hay racks, heavy beams, oak probably, and all these swallow’s nests against the roof, hundreds of them. How do they come in?”

“Look, Leo, up there seven holes were made, so that they can come and go all the time, feeding their young ones. They made the nests out of the clay outside and use them every year again. All the wood is oak indeed. This place was built in about 1500 and well maintained, I was told. I have here in the winter months some goats, two sheep, three cows and three horses, when there is much snow, rain or frost. There is always enough hay and straw available. Looking after them keeps you busy. Let’s have a look at the pigs. They are in that oblong building on the other side of the threshing floor, next to the strawberry field.”

Leo turned around and made quickly some photographs. When he directed his camera on her, she did not



dare to look at him, but his camera was quick enough, making a good picture.

He asked, “How old are you, Coba?”

She shaded her eyes with one hand and said softly, “Last month I became twenty-four. Does that sound young or old?”

He laughed in a boyish way. “Coba, you are just as young as you should be. I believe you are surprisingly unspoiled, trustworthy, steady, disarming.”

“You make me confused, or are you making fun of me?”

He saw that she blushed. “I meant it.”

They went further and Leo saw that all the pigs had young pigs with them. All the compartments of the sty were as clean as possible.

“Do you need to have a permit for this?”

“Yes, I have that. There are a few restrictions. I use some of the manure—also from the chickens. I don’t like fertilizer, because it is so artificial with all those chemicals.”

He bent down and looked at the strawberry plants which were in full bloom.

She said, “They look very promising again this year. Here in the heavy clay soil the berries are usually big and heavy. Quite a few women from the village come to buy them for conserving and making jam. Are you also fond

of them?”

“Yes, indeed. I say! Look at those broad beans! Dear, I love them. If I would live here...”

All at once he stopped startled by the sobbing sound she made and he saw that she turned round, not wanting to show her face. But he understood very well what the matter was.

Two people who had read the same message in each other’s eyes, and they both wondered: Was it God Who made them meet? Was this real? Was this the love He wanted? Had he prepared this day? They came from two sides of the world.

Leo asked God to give him wisdom, sighed and stood up.

With their arms linked they walked towards a piece of grassland, where the goats and the sheep were.

He noticed that her face was in a glow. When they stood still a goat came and pushed her snout in her hands. Then she stroked her head and caressed her. The sheep bleated.

Leo put his arms round her and said kindly, "Coba, life is full of surprises, and God knows how we now wrestle with our emotions, our feelings. We have to give each other the chance to process it all in our heads, as adults. I confess that I also got a shock, but I am not a man to be rushed into decisions. All of a sudden I have fallen in love with you and I am deeply moved."

She nodded and answered, "I know what you are talking about. I felt as if there was a flash of lightning, a bolt from the blue.... I still see you standing there on the threshold, the sunlight behind you. How often I asked God to help me, to give me strength, a new future... I didn't know He would bring you here."

"Coba, I can not ask you to give up a whole farm for me, and I can not all at once become a farmer. We have a problem!"

They gave each other a kiss and walked to see the cows and the horses that looked well-fed and healthy.

"Leo, I am not clever and not ambitious. I have not been to a university. I am just an old-fashioned housewife. Is that good enough for you, please, tell me. Whatever you do, let it not be a disaster for you, so that one day you will be as sorry as they make 'em."

"What I see and hear is all I want. Remember Proverbs 31. The value of a virtuous housewife is much more than the value of rubies," said he.

They looked into each other's eyes again.

After this day Leo used yet a week for visits to the province of Brabant and included Zeeuws-Flanders.

Before he went to see the rest of The Netherlands he went one day back to Coba and they agreed they would seek to find practical solutions for the near future.

When he had finished the whole journey, he went quickly back to Canada, and delivered a successful series of articles.

He spoke almost daily through the telephone with Coba.

She took up contact with her two elder sisters, who were married with farmers in Aalten (in the province of Gelderland).

## Great Sin—Greater Love

*Dear Father, as I kneel in prayer to Thee  
Grant that my sin I may more clearly see;  
That I may be appalled by its immensity.  
The very best accomplishment of mine  
Stands not alone; but sin does e'er entwine;  
It chokes out righteousness as tendrils from a vine.*

*With Paul I must in humbleness confess:  
The good that I would say, I can't express:  
The evil which I hate breaks forth in wickedness.  
Then Paul asks how he can from this be free;  
The answer's found, O Lord, alone in Thee:  
The blood of Thy dear Son is all my hope and plea.*

*Forgive, O Father, every wayward thought,  
The words and deeds I have in darkness wrought;  
Help me to follow Thy commandments as I ought.  
Destroy my pride, my trust in Thee increase.  
The knowledge of Thy love makes unrest cease:  
Christ's righteousness brings me abiding peace!*

*Thelma Westra*

They came together and made an arrangement, that they would invite experts to say what the value was of Coba's place, and then they would buy it. He agreed and was willing to use the money for buying another existing property on the outskirts of Ottawa, which had a contract for daily delivery of milk, collected by a dairy-factory.

This was an excellent solution for the problem they had faced and they thanked God for it.

So, they married in Ottawa, and two years later Leo became the editor of a Canadian newspaper. The marriage was blessed with two healthy children; a boy and a girl. ❖

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

# Watching Daily At My Gates

by Skip Hunter

## November 1 Read Genesis 1:1-8

In the beginning...! What a powerful three words! In this book of the Bible we can find many beginnings. To name a few there are creation, marriage, sin, redemption, the covenant and there are many more. As we go throughout the Bible we can find many references that take us back to this powerful book. As we look at creation we can see the truths that are found in this book of the Bible. As we consider the stars, as we study the plant kingdom, as we see weeds in the soil, we are reminded of all the truths that may be found in this book. We are also taught about God. No, God does not begin in Genesis. He was before time. But in His creation we see Him in all His power and majesty. As we go through our lives let us look at the beginning and see that it was of God. Sing Psalter 287.

## November 2 Read Exodus 1:7-14

Ever since the announcement found in Genesis 3:15, we find evidence of that struggle of the seed of the woman and the seed of Satan. We see in this the struggle of the antithesis. Satan tries to tempt us in to saying no to the things of God and yes to his devilish plans. In doing so he tries to nullify the promise of the redemption wrought through Christ. This we see in Exodus. Egypt is a picture of hell and its king Satan. Even as the Egyptians tried to destroy the people of God, Satan is working against us today. We must see that this is a futile battle. God is in control. This is our comfort. Satan will not have the victory. His head was crushed at the cross, and he will finally be defeated at the end of time. Let God be glorified who gives to us the victory. Sing Psalter 128.

## November 3 Read Leviticus 1:1-9

One of the precious truths found in Scripture is the matter of worship. We are called to worship our God. We do this first of all by attending church on the Lord's Day and using that entire day for the worship of Jehovah. We do this by worshiping each and every day wherever we are. We worship when we open and close meals with prayer. We worship as we have family devotions. We must do this. We may not set aside God's worship for our own convenience. We also find we worship God by obeying His law. He has given us the law in order to show us what our sin is. He has also given this law to us in order to know how to walk lives of gratitude for the salvation He has given to us. We find in this book of the Bible in the Old Testament ceremonial and civil laws principles of how we must worship God. Let us do this each and every day. Sing Psalter 256:1, 2, and 5.

## November 4 Read Numbers 1:1-4; 17-10

Throughout the Bible we find many evidences God's covenant faithfulness. That is true here as well. As we see the names of the families of the children of Israel, we know that God has been faithful to all of His people and their names are written in the book of life. God has given His promise to our seed and us. What a blessed promise this is for us even as we go through the wilderness of this life. We are beset on every side by challenges in this life. But because God has established His covenant with us, we can be assured that it will prevail until the end of time. Let us see this in the children which God has given to us. Let us teach these children daily about the covenant. Let us show to them its blessedness in this sinful world. Sing Psalter 241: 1-5.

## November 5 Read Deuteronomy 1:1-8

In this the last book of the law once again we find instruction about the covenant promises given to His people by God. Moses was coming to the end of his life and his work in leading the children of Israel. In this book which contains his beautiful farewell song, he shows that it was because of the covenant promise that Israel was not destroyed. Within that promise was contained the promise of inhabiting the land of Canaan. That land was the picture of heaven. In His promise to us is the promise of inhabiting the new heavens and new earth. No matter what happens in our lives, we can be assured that we will inhabit heaven. Heaven is reality. It is the beautiful reality where we will experience the blessed fellowship not only with all the saints which have gone before us but also the friendship and fellowship with the triune covenant God. Sing Psalter 241:6-9.

## November 6 Read Joshua 1:1-9

People of God and beloved young people, how courageous are you? I do not mean will you face a bear or other wild animal? I do not mean will you face the hardships of this world with great courage? But, rather, do you have the courage of Joshua to fight the battles of the Lord? Is your faith strong so that you can wield the sword of the spirit against Satan and his race? Since this faith is the beautiful gift from God we can have it. It does not depend on us which is most comforting. Through faith we can gain the victory of sin, Satan, and all that in the world would seek to destroy us. We must exercise that faith by using God's Word in order that we can be courageous. We must pray unceasingly for this courage to face all the host of sin. Let us do this today and every day. Let us teach

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our children and young people how to be courageous. Sing Psalter 71:1, 4, and 5.

### **November 7 Read Judges 1:1-8**

As the child of God lives in this life, he is called to fight the fight of faith. This was true of the judges in Old Testament Israel, and this is true of the people of God in all ages. We have been given the armor as found in Ephesians 6, and we must use that armor both defensively and offensively as we travel through this life. The judges have to fight in this life. Their battles were both on the physical battlefield and the spiritual battlefield. They had to fight the enemy who was oppressing Israel because of sin, and they had to fight the spiritual enemy present within Israel. It is this second battle in which we are engaged. We must be ready to battle sin in all of its forms in this life. And we can do battle because we have been given faith by the captain of our salvation. Let us battle knowing that the victory is ours. Sing Psalter 317.

### **November 8 Read Ruth 1:1-5**

Young people, you are called upon to make choices in this life. You make choices concerning the subjects you take in school. You make choice about a life's calling and mate. You must also make spiritual choices. These are most important. Ebimelech had to make a choice. He choice was not spiritually correct. He brought his family into disaster in Moab. When we make life choices, we must make sure that they are spiritually correct. A good job or prestigious college will bring us nothing if we cannot attend a worship service where the Word of God is purely preached. A "popular" person chosen as a mate will bring us nothing if he or she leads us from the truth. Young people, these choices are not easy. Make them using God's Word as your guide. Pray and pray often about the path which you choose. Sing Psalter 40.

### **November 9 Read I Samuel 1:1-8**

The Biblical accounts of the births of Moses, Samuel, Isaac, and others of God's covenant children are a great source of encouragement to the child of God. First of all we see the promise of the covenant continued through our children. Secondly we see God's way of salvation in our children. Finally we see the enormous calling given to us in child rearing. As churches we must see the important calling that is laid upon us both individually and collectively. We must see the necessity of educating our covenant children in the fear of Jehovah. To do anything else with them is to walk into the gates of hell with them. As parents we must take our covenant responsibilities seriously in the home and the school. As churches we must take our corporate responsibilities seriously. Let us pray for children and let us pray for the grace to bring them up in the fear of the Lord. Sing Psalter 325.

### **November 10 Read II Samuel 1:1-12**

Israel had been defeated by Philistia. Even though this defeat meant that the throne would be his, David exhibited sorrow over this defeat. David's sorrow was godly in character. He sorrowed that the Lord's anointed had been killed. He sorrowed over the death of his best friend. He also sorrowed over

the fact that the people of God had been defeated by the wicked. We, too, must exhibit godly sorrow when the wicked triumph over God's people. And we must especially exhibit this sorrow when it is our sin which brings us into such a strait. Our sins both personal as well as corporate must cause godly sorrow to well up within us. And then we must turn to God in prayer for forgiveness of such sins. Let us pray for deliverance from trouble caused by our sins. And let us pray for forgiveness from such sins. Sing Psalter 170.

### **November 11 Read I Kings 1:28-37**

Ever since Genesis 3:15 God gave to the Old Testament church types of Christ in order to show them the way of salvation. This is true in our reading for today. David was one type of Christ-the warring Christ, and Solomon was another type of Christ-the glorious Christ. Each of the various types served to lead Israel to learn more and more about their redeemer. These types of Christ should serve to teach us more and more about our redeemer. For the Old Testament does more than lead the church unto Christ's first coming. It leads us unto His second coming and His glorious kingdom. We must study these types, learn from them, and know how to glorify God who gave them. Let us seek to know Christ by the types of Christ. Sing Psalter 198:1-5.

### **November 12 Read II Kings 1:1-8**

As apostasy grew in Israel the questions continued to loom. Is there a God in Israel? Today as apostasy grows even in what is called church the question must be asked, "Is there a God in Israel?" Of those who call upon the name of God, many do not call upon Him in faith. They call upon Him as a good luck charm or as greater than some other god. Is there a God in our churches? Is there a God in our schools? Is there a God in our homes? What is your answer, people of God? If the answer is yes, what kind of God is there? Is it the God of Scriptures or is it the god of the world's philosophy which is no god but rather the Antichrist? As we live in this world let us confess that Jehovah, He is the God. And let us rest assured that He will be our God even unto death. Sing Psalter 134.

### **November 13 Read I Chronicles 1:1-28**

Some of you as you approached this reading wondered about the necessity of reading all these names. To do this is to question the mind of the Holy Spirit as the One Who inspired these words. Even though we may not read these names often, we should read them occasionally. To read them is to have the covenant rehearsed in our ears. Even though we do not depend on the oral repeating of the genealogies as Israel did, we still profit as they did by hearing the names of these saints. The covenant is real and must be remembered as such. These names serve to remind us of God's covenant faithfulness to us through the line of continued generations. Let us thank Him for such faithfulness today, tomorrow as we enter His house of worship, and in all the days of our lives. Sing Psalter 213:1-4.

### **November 14 Read II Chronicles 1:7-12**

If God would come to us in the night and grant us a request, would we do as Solomon and ask for godly wisdom? But yet

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He does come to us daily. He comes to us through His Word and by His Spirit. What is our request? Do we wish the comforts of this world? Do we wish to be spared from spiritual warfare? Do we wish that our children do not have hard times either spiritually or physically? Let us ask as Solomon did. Let us ask for the wisdom which comes from Jehovah. The wisdom which will lead us into the green pastures of the new Jerusalem should be our desire. The world may look upon us strangely if they knew of this desire. But we know that this request will be pleasing to God. Let us ask for this wisdom now and in each prayer that we pray. Sing Psalter 242.

### **November 15 Read Ezra 1:1-6**

For seventy long years Israel had endured captivity in Babylon. The very young were returning as very old. The new generation did not know Canaan and Jerusalem. That they were returning to their homeland was all that they knew. They would learn about the blessedness of being in Zion from faithful men such as Ezra, Nehemiah and the prophets that God would send them. They would see the temple raised and worship at its altars. They would learn of the sins that had taken them away from the promised land. As we live in this world, does the church prove to be resting place in this world? Do we look to it as an oasis in this dry and thirsty land? Do we seek the solace found within its doors? Young people, do you seek to be enfolding in its comforting arms or do you seek to leave it and the safety that it affords? Let us look unto the church as our home in this life and the way to eternal life in heaven. Sing Psalter 164.

### **November 16 Read Nehemiah 1:1-11**

People of God, do you share Nehemiah's concern for fellow church members and for the church of God? Even as Nehemiah remained in Babylon he was concerned about Jerusalem. When his brother and others brought back bad news, it caused him distress. He then did what all children of God must do. He turned to God in prayer. People of God, do we go to God in prayer for the personal needs of others? Do we by name take others' concerns and cares? Paul encourages us to bear one another's burdens. That is what Nehemiah did and that is what we must do. Let us remember others in prayer throughout the day. Sing Psalter 369.

### **November 17 Read Esther 1:1-9**

This is a hard book to understand. The stories may be easy and even thrilling, but we must answer the question of the lack of God's name being found in this book. But yet one of God's attributes shines forth like a beacon on a cloudy night. Throughout this book we see the providence of God. We see how God cares for His people even when their lives may not show that they desire such care. We know that our God works through the deeds of the wicked. This is shown in this book. Let us thank God for His providence and know that He will care for us each and every day. Sing Psalter 94.

### **November 18 Read Job 1:1-5**

Almost all in the world who have some knowledge of the Bible, know of the patience of Job. This is also the testimony

of James. But what kind of patience does Job exhibit? This patience is a godly patience. That is what we must exhibit as well as we go through this life. We must have the patience to wait for God to act and to show to us the way that He will have us to go. This is true no matter what age we may be. The very old must exhibit that patience as they wait for God to deliver them from this valley of the shadow of death. The very young must be patient as they wait for Jehovah to show them what path they will take throughout this life. Patience is a learned virtue and there is no better place to learn it than in the house of the Lord. Let us wait with patience for His way for His way is best. Sing Psalter 95.

### **November 19 Read Psalm 1**

This second book of the poetry section of our Bibles deals with Zion's praise of Jehovah. Psalm 1 is an introduction showing to us the way of the righteous man. Throughout this book we are instructed that this way is a way of praising Jehovah for all of His goodness. This praise is antithetical in nature as we even see in this first Psalm. This way is the way of self-denial and the way of glorifying God alone. There is a Psalm to fit every mood and every situation. There is no way of finding out which will serve our purpose unless we spend time daily reading the Psalms. Let us make this one of our goals from now until eternity. Sing Psalter 2.

### **November 20 Read Proverbs 1:1-9**

This well-known book contains the wisdom of Jehovah. This is not the world's wisdom, but rather the wisdom that only comes from our covenant God. This is a type of wisdom that not everyone in the world can use. Jehovah's wisdom is for His people and His people alone. Reading through this book will give to us many ways that will lead us through our lives. Chapter 8 shows us that Christ is the source of all wisdom. This is another book of the Bible which must not be neglected. We need to read it often for our benefit and edification. Sing Psalter 336.

### **November 21 Read Ecclesiastes 1:12-18**

Here in this less-often read book we find the wisdom of the preacher. This preacher is Solomon who was a type of Christ. This is the experience of a man who went through life with everything imaginable but was forced to realize that everything is nothing without God. Are we tempted to seek the things of this world? Do we become more and more unhappy with each thing we gain? If this is so, we need to learn from Solomon's experiences. The preacher gave to us an account of his hard learnings. Let us read them for our spiritual profit so that we may learn to walk in the way of Jehovah. Sing Psalter 97.

### **November 22 Read Song of Solomon 1:1-9**

Here is another book that is little read and less understood. But here is a book that opens to us a beautiful picture of Christ's love for His bride the church. Woven throughout its chapters are various poignant expressions which show to us the greatness of this love. This love is not the silly superficial love of the world. This is the deep meaningful love that only can exist

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between two who are one. As we live within our marriages or as we seek marriage this must be the pattern for us to follow. God has given to us marriage as a picture of the love Christ has for His bride. Let us seek that love with our beloved. Sing Psalter 125:1-5.

### **November 23 Read Isaiah 1:1-9**

Throughout Israel's history God gave prophets to bring to her the word of God. Sometimes this word was a word of rebuke. Other times it was a word of the blessed future events in the kingdom of God. Isaiah gives to us both kinds. Two days ago we went to hear our New Testament prophets. Did we listen? Did we heed the words of admonition that were brought to us? Were we comforted by the words brought to us about the coming kingdom of heaven? Godly prophecy is not a mystical science. Godly prophecy is the true preaching of the Word to the church. Let us embrace the prophets of Scripture as well as the prophets in church. Sing Psalter 334.

### **November 24 Read Jeremiah 1:1-9**

People of God, do you have a calling in this life? Children, do you have a calling? Young people, do you have a calling right now? What about you aged saints, what is your calling? Each of us has a certain calling. It may be that of a student, a mother, a father, a factory worker, a son or daughter, or it could be the high calling of one of the offices in the church. What do we do when we are called? Do we run from our calling? Do we insist that we are not good enough for this calling? In this first chapter of Jeremiah we find a prophet with a calling. It was not a pleasant calling. He was not wanted by those to whom he was called. But yet God called him, and he like us must obey that call. Let us seek to go where we are called knowing that God will equip us with what we need. Sing Psalter 398.

### **November 25 Read Lamentations 1:1-7**

Young people, are you preparing to sow your wild oats this weekend? That is all right, isn't it? After all you must have fun in your lives. That is what Israel of old thought. They wanted to play like the heathen. God's ways did not give to them much fun. As Jeremiah watched Israel being killed and herded toward Babylon, all that he could think of was that God was punishing them for their sins. Their days of fun had brought severe consequences. Our days of evil fun will also bring severe consequences. Oh, they may not be so evident as Judah's, but there will be consequences. Let us remember that when we wish to partake in the world's fun. Let us seek God whose mercies are new each morning. Sing Psalter 380.

### **November 26 Read Ezekiel 1:1-14**

Readers, did you understand the vision that you just read? Did you see the meaning of its various facets? This is one of those books of the Bible which is not well known to us. Yes, we probably know about the vision of the dry bones and the two sticks, but what about the other visions? In reading these first few verses of this book, we find that we have a necessity of Bible study. This is not something that we may put off. We must study at home so that we can lead our families in the understanding of God's Word. We must join with others and

study with them God's Word. His Word is his letter to His people. Let us study it and see what the Spirit is saying to the church. Sing Psalter 333.

### **November 27 Read Daniel 1:1-8**

Young people, you like the four young men, live in a world of sin. Are you prepared for such a world? Parents, have you taught your children and young people to be "ready to give an answer to hope that lies within them?" This is a serious business. And it must be treated seriously by young people and parents alike. Elders, you, too, have the burden to see to it that our young people are prepared for the spiritual captivity that they may enter in this life. Take this calling seriously and be watchmen on the walls of Zion for our young people. Daniel and his three friends were prepared. Are you, young people? Sing Psalter 119:4-6.

### **November 28 Read Hosea 1:1-7**

One of the great bywords of the Reformation was "Salvation by Faith Alone." This we find in this minor prophet. This doctrine was not new during the Reformation, but the reformers went back to the Bible and using Scripture taught the truths of Scripture. This battle continues today. There are those who still want salvation on their own terms or by their own power. This is against the clear teaching of Scripture in both the Old and New Testament. What a comfort it is for us to know that salvation is not of sinful us but rather only by the grace of God! Sing Psalter 352.

### **November 29 Read Joel 1:1-7**

Once again we come upon a chapter which warns us of the consequences of sin. Solomon was right when he proclaimed that there was nothing new under the sun. Adam and Eve had to learn this lesson, Noah had to learn this lesson, and many others of the leaders in Israel had to learn this lesson. Finally the whole nation was taught this lesson as first the ten tribes and then Judah were taken into captivity. What about us? Have we learned this lesson? Do we need to face its painful reality often in order to learn it? Let us learn from those who have gone before that there are consequences when we sin. Let us flee sin and pray for God to help us to avoid it. Sing Psalter 83.

### **November 30 Read Amos 1:1-8**

Throughout Scripture we find that Satan's seed is punished for their deeds against God's people. Though they may seem to "get away" with their sin, God will help His people. This should not fill us with glee; this should make us fall down and worship the God who loves His people and will care for them at all times. Every child of God can take comfort in that those who do evil will be punished either in this life or the life to come. And then every child of God should strive to flee all evil and walk an antithetical walk. This is what we must do and this is for what we must pray. Sing Psalter 300:1, 9, 11, and 13.



# God's Hammer

by Rev. Angus Stewart

“**W**hat think ye of *Christ*?” (Matt. 22:42) is an oft-quoted and penetrating biblical question. We could make a second, similar inquiry: what think ye of the *Bible*? Pause for a moment to answer this question honestly in your heart before God.

Do you consider the Scriptures dry and tasteless? Or do you confess with the psalmist that they are “sweeter...than honey and the honeycomb” (Ps. 19:10)? Is it frequently the case with you that Bible reading is a chore? Or can you say with David that God’s Word is “more to be desired...than gold, yea, than much fine gold” (Ps. 19:10)? Or with Jeremiah, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jer. 15:16)?

And what do you think of the Bible’s *power* or lack of it? Is the Bible a tame book, as harmless as a damp squib or a child’s toy? Or is it merely *moderately* powerful? Never! As if the Word of the omnipotent triune God could be anything other than almighty! The psalmist knew well its mighty works: “converting the soul... making wise the simple...rejoicing the heart...[and] enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:7-8). And what similes or pictures does God use to convey the awesome power of His Word? What images come to *your* mind? The prophet Jeremiah would have answered immediately, “God’s Word is like a fire and a hammer.” For it is written, “Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jer. 23:29).

This fire is not the sort of fire that burns in a grate or a fireplace. It is a powerful conflagration like a raging forest fire or a refiner’s fire in a massive furnace. Whoever dies in their sins will experience God’s powerful word of destruction in the “everlasting burnings”

(Isa. 33:14). On the other hand, the fire of the Word works constructively and not destructively in the believer. Jesus said, “Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth” (John 17:17). We are sanctified through believing study of the Bible. God’s “fiery law” (Deut. 33:2) exposes our sins, and the gospel too comes to us as fire (cf. Luke 12:49). Thus we experience God’s fiery cleansing of us as we read the Scriptures.

The Bible is not only a fire; it is also God’s hammer. It is not the sort of hammer that drives in nails or tent pegs. It is like a blacksmith’s forge hammer or a rock-breaking hammer. God’s Word is a long-shafted, heavy sledgehammer. This hammer pulverizes the wicked forever in hell, whereas believers experience God’s hammer as it smashes our stubbornness and hardheartedness. It breaks our hearts and enables us to live after the new man.

A book by a human author may have many fine qualities. It may be interesting and exciting so that you turn its pages eagerly and cannot set it down. But the Bible, as well as being interesting and exciting, is also powerful, divinely powerful, for it is a mighty hammer that breaks the rock in pieces.

It is not only the Bible that is God’s hammer but the preaching of the gospel is also God’s hammer, as the context of Jeremiah 23:29 shows, and as we shall see later in this series (D.V.). ❖

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*Rev. Stewart is a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches to the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Northern Ireland. This series is being reprinted with permission from the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship website, <http://www.cprf.co.uk/>.*

# Modesty

by Alicia Spriensma

**A** sexy body, skimpy clothes, and tons of makeup cover magazines, television shows, advertisements, and almost every other area where we look. The idea of appearing good is a very popular concept in the world, even more so today than it was in Bible times. One cannot help but be bombarded by the “image” of what one is supposed to look like and act in order to be accepted in today’s world. It is this major misconception, the immodesty of the times we live in, that needs to be looked at from a Christian standpoint.

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**Modesty is a spiritual gift wherein we are called to order ourselves in a morally upright way which will then give account of our humble and godly hearts.**

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What is modesty? Modesty does not just refer to the way that one dresses but also implies how one speaks, one’s gestures, and one’s actions. These are all included in modesty. Modesty is a spiritual gift wherein we are called to order ourselves in a morally upright way which will then give account of our humble and godly hearts. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way: by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Ps. 119:9). This verse implies that not only do immodest temptations come from the sinful world around us, nor only from the devil, but from our own sinful flesh. We need to cleanse our way and our life. The only way to cleanse it is by taking heed to God’s word. By grace may we say, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes” (Ps. 119:11, 12). The Lord must teach us how to walk in modesty.

The Bible admonishes us to walk in Christ, which includes the way that we conduct ourselves. The basis of this walk in Christ is the fact that we have received Christ and partake of Him by faith. We have full forgiveness and atonement for sins, covenant fellowship, friendship with God, and the spiritual rule of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This means that where ever Christ is, so we are spiritually. We have the mind and life of Christ and thus become more and more like unto Him through our lives, receiving Him in increasing measure. While currently our possession of Him is imperfect because of sin, we do have Christ principally in fullness. Therefore we are called to walk in Him.

II Corinthians 6:14-18 teaches us the antithesis and thus calls us to walk the correct way. We are told not to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers” and how we dress, speak, gesture, and act may either associate us with God or with Satan. We are called in this passage to “come out from among them, and be ye separate.” Verse 16 also describes our body as being the temple of God. Therefore, since it is God’s temple, shouldn’t we make it resemble His sanctuary, the place where He dwells, rather than that of the world? Another passage calling God’s children to walk in Christ is Colossians 2:6-7 wherein we are told to be “rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”

Although there are other ways to depict modesty in a person, the most common way is according to how one dresses. It is common in our day and age for short skirts, tight pants, and low cut shirts to appear on young women. The victims of dressing immodestly usually are the women. They use this means to try to lure the men with their bodies, using their bodies as if they were simply an object. This is not only completely wrong but also degrading. I was so disgusted with this way of thinking and how it showed up in all the stores a couple of years ago. Even Kohl’s, the “family store,” got pulled into this way of thinking which could be seen with their shorts,

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all of which were too short to wear in public, and shirts running two sizes too small so that the clothes were designed to give the clingy look. This angered my friends and me, and we talked about it at some length because we didn't want to start dressing like that. It seemed to be all the stores were willing to sell.

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**It seemed to be all that the  
stores were willing to sell.**

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The Bible reflects the need of Christian women to fight against the world's idea of dress and life. It is not a new thing that only women in the twenty-first century have to deal with. In I Timothy 2:9, the Apostle Paul gives instructions to young Timothy regarding the life of members of the church in his day. The question came up of how the women should conduct themselves. God's word demands that "women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array." The correct way is given in verse ten of this chapter wherein women are told to array themselves instead "with good works." This idea is reiterated with the teaching of God's word in Proverbs 31:30 which states that "favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." This is a very important concept, which everyone must still learn. While it is still common for women to apply makeup and worry about their waistline and other petty stuff, the Bible teaches that this stuff does not matter because it will all fade away. This not to say that young women have no right to try to make themselves pretty but the important question is how, and for what reason? Women must question whether they realize what true beauty is in God's eyes. Another passage implying this idea is I Peter 3:2-5 telling the women how to correctly adorn herself, not with the outward but rather the "hidden man of the heart." The only thing with lasting value is the things you do, the way you live your life. Living a godly life allows one to touch so many people in so many different ways, leading and guiding by example. God seeks this to give Him glory, rather than the outward appearance of a person.

Our confessions summarize the teaching of the Bible regarding a chaste and modest behavior in the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 41. Question and answer 108

states: "What doth the seventh commandment teach us? That all uncleanness is accursed of God; and that therefore we must with all our hearts detest the same, and live chastely and temperately, whether in holy wedlock or in single life." The next question and answer 109 gives more instruction on this idea by saying: "Doth God forbid in this commandment only adultery and such like gross sins? Since both our body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, He commands us to preserve them pure and holy; therefore He forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever can entice men thereto." These questions and answers evidence the important fact that the consequence of immodesty is usually lust and other perverse sexual sins.

While women may be victims to the immodesty of dress, it is the men who are most commonly the victims of immodesty concerning behavior and words. They give in to the woman's desire to be flattered and begin to boast about their person and their actions. While the women are trying to make the men lust with their clothes, I believe that more often than not, women do not realize how large of an influence their dress has on men. Men who already have a harder time with sexual desires as evidenced by history, find it all the harder to resist the normal temptations when a women's conduct and dress all but invite him to act on his impulses.

While the Bible repeatedly warns against the sin of lust, the Bible also tells us how to flee and fight this sin. The Biblical calling for us is self-control or temperance. This is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:2ff says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." The world will use various means to lure to wickedness, but we have to be aware of it and be prepared to stay one step ahead of them. The Bible tries to prepare us by repeatedly telling us over and over again of the wicked and the methods they might use. The Bible tells us that Christ reconciled us "in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight" (Col. 1:22). This big and hard job just evidences to us that we need daily conversion. We need to put off "fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry...anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth" (Col. 3:5, 7). We also need to put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meek-

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ness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another..." (Col. 3:12, 13).

One Bible passage seeking to warn us of the methods that the ungodly use to entice us to their lifestyle is Colossians 2:8. God says to us as Christians, "beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Paul is here warning us that the world will try to spoil us. We are, after all, in a spiritual warfare wherein the world is trying to capture us to their dress, speech, gestures, and action. They seek our heart, mind, and soul to bring under the captivity of evil. Their method uses the philosophy of men rather than the Word of God. They warn us to keep up with the times and accuse us of not living life, but rather staying in our shell. This is a common insult hurled; one I experienced everyday whether at my lifeguard job at Jackson or when I didn't participate in the dances and drinking and "fun" that college life has to offer. These people who try to bring us to their way of thinking, these deceivers follow the principles of the world. They seek after pride, rebellion against God, lawlessness, lust of the flesh, and the "eat, drink, and be merry" philosophy. These are the type of people that we as Christians must be on guard against, those who oppose our walk in Christ and seek to turn us from our life of faith. The most important thing to remember is that Christ must be first in our lives, rather than having fun or worrying about what others might think of us. Only then will we be established in the faith and able to walk modestly. Then, the praise, honor and glory must go to God, whose example we pattern our own lives after, and gives us the desire and power to live this antithetical lifestyle.

This idea of modesty is especially important to preachers and teachers because their lives especially, must be lives of moral purity, above reproach, and free from unethical works of darkness, lying, dishonesty, cheating, lust, covetousness, evil speaking or false representation. The Church Order, Article 8, especially sets this idea out for us by giving a list of exceptional gifts that we must be assured young men have who seek the ministry. What are these gifts? They include godliness, a genuine piety and consecration to God in the fear of God. There is also humility, a humble heart and grace to forget oneself and set desire entirely on God. Third is modesty, a well balanced and well controlled life which is virtuous in moral and ethical judgment. Fourth is common sense, an intellectual sharpness so that by one's own reading and study one is advanced beyond others. A fifth

spiritual gift is that of spiritual wisdom, a discretion, sound judgment and ability to discern truth and error, right and wrong. The last spiritual gift spoken of is that of public address wherein one is given the ability to express oneself, preach, speak publicly, and develop thought logically. While this article is laying out the gifts to be seen in persons who desire to enter the ministry but have not pursued the regular course of study in preparation for it, by way of implication is laying down the gifts that ought to be found in all ministers of the word. And of course I bring up this article of our confessions because one of the gifts that is necessary is modesty. So this could also be applied to teachers. While the preacher is a role model for his congregation, a teacher is a role model for the children that he/she teaches. The modesty which appears in one's dress, speech, gestures, and actions must therefore be correct and serve as an example for the students rather than being a hindrance. One can only imagine, especially in an older classroom setting, if a young teacher, male or female, dressed seductively. The male students would not think of their studies but rather would entertain or fight against lustful thoughts of the teacher. The young women would be tempted to try to imitate or even outdo the teacher to gain the attention of the young men. I have witnessed this kind of distraction in the classroom. It is the responsibility then, of these role models to act accordingly, as role models ought to behave themselves and most importantly with the honor and respect that their position accords to them.

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In conclusion, modesty or immodesty is the battle one faces as one tries to live one's life. This decision governs how we conduct ourselves and therefore deserves the highest consideration. The world seems to be pulling at us from all sides encouraging it daily, but God by His Spirit and His word, the Bible, is also pulling on us, demanding that we walk in modesty, by walking in Christ. This is the conflict that we experience everyday,

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whether we are shopping at the mall, seeing advertisements, or in our day-to-day contacts. Will we listen to God or Satan? Will we try to please God or our sinful flesh? Will we live as flowers of Christ or pleasers of men? This is something that we need to not only pray about but also study God's Word and what it has to say on this matter. In studying the Bible one can clearly see that the walk that we choose to live must not be that of the world, but rather a walk *in* Christ. This idea is especially important for Christian teachers and ministers because their movements and actions are scrutinized more.

This life of modesty cannot be done in our own strength for if left to ourselves we would follow our inclinations and live the easy life. We are weak and sinful, but this life can be attained by grace, looking to the author and finisher of our faith, our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the ultimate example. ❖

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*Alicia is a member of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan. She wrote this essay for the Protestant Reformed Scholarship.*

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Church History

# John Calvin's Institutes and Ottawa County

by Bruce J. Koole

The following essay was written in response to a scholarship offer made by the History Department of Grand Valley State University in Ottawa County, Allendale, Michigan. The scholarship demanded that in 2000 words or less, the student must explain what his or her favorite history book is. Owing to the fact that I did not win scholarship, I have edited the content contained herein.

My favorite book is John Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion*. The reasons why this book and its numerous editions have become my favorite are threefold: first, for its helping in the development of my world-view and historical method; second, for its teaching and doctrines whereby it has served to edify the church and true religion; and, third, for its impact upon Western Michigan.

Regarding the first ground, I discovered upon reading Henry Beveridge's translation of Calvin's *Institute's* a kinship of belief, finding that many of the author's beliefs and doctrines agree with my own, particularly in regard to his systematic explanation of the Reformation's Five Solas: *Soli Deo Gloria* (To God Alone be the Glory), *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone), *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone), *Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone), *Sola Xristos* (Christ Alone). However, only after I examine the different editions of Calvin's *Institutes*, *Commentaries*, *sermons*,

*tracts*, *treatises*, and *letters* do I define the doctrines of Calvin and relate the narrative of his life.

I view history through the spectacles of church v. world conflict. By world I understand as those atheists, agnostics, and unbelievers who seek to harm the church through whatever possible means, be they persecution, false doctrine, or temptation via avarice licentiousness. Be Hence, via St. Augustine the rise and fall of nation-states remains the handmaiden of the Reformed Christian Church's structural and doctrinal progress.

Therefore, I apply the historical method as gained from faith's reasonable knowledge and hope, taking my start from I Peter 3:15, "*be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*" This aim, based on Scripture, necessitates no forsaking of the historical method as first posited by Thucydides, the father of historical method, who described it thus:

And with regard to my factual reporting of the events of the [Peloponesian] War [which took place between Sparta and Athens in 431 – 404 B.C, and his beloved Athens lost], I have made it a principle not to write down the first story that came my way, and not even to be guided by my own general impressions; either I was present myself at the events which I have described or else I heard of them from eye-

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witnesses whose reports I have checked with as much thoroughness as possible.<sup>2</sup>

Just as Thucydides, I remain interested in finding more than one viewpoint on certain issues.

With regard to the aforementioned second ground, the treatment of the book itself commences. Calvin's development of thought contains an eminent traceability from his first edition of the *Institutes*, published in 1536, unto the final edition of the *Institutes* published in 1559.<sup>3</sup> As Dutch Reformed Theologian Herman Bavinck states

Calvin's theology had already assumed firm shape in the first edition of his *Institutes* (1536). There is expansion and development but not change.<sup>4</sup>

A historian can compare the deliberate development among the editions and see how the teachings impacted or were impacted by the various events in his life. Further, a study of each successive edition yields important details necessary to the telling of the Reformation narrative.

In Book I, Chapter 1, Calvin treats "The Knowledge of God and That of Ourselves are Connected: How They Are Interrelated." The interrelation adheres to the manner, *Soli Deo Gloria*. God requires from us a knowledge concerning Himself and ourselves "by which we not only conceive that there is some God, but also apprehend what it is for our interest, and conducive to his glory, what in short, is befitting to know concerning him" (I.ii.1). One of Calvin's main themes is, then, know yourself and know God.

Book Two explains that true self-knowledge originates by admitting to being dead in trespasses and sins owing to Adam's original sin. Calvin defines total depravity as "a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all the parts of the soul, which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God, and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh" (II.i.8). Then in II.ii.10 Calvin writes "he who is most deeply abased and alarmed, by the consciousness of his disgrace, nakedness, want, and misery has made the greatest progress in the knowledge of himself." In II.ii.25 Calvin approvingly quotes Augustine, "Of our own we have nothing but sin.

Mankind will find his only path to salvation from deserving destruction in the steps of Christ's self-humiliation and glorification, or *sola Xristos*. His humiliation is his incarnation, the unjust trial, crucifixion, death, burial, and descent to hell. His glorification is His resur-

rection, ascension into heaven, sitting and ruling at the right hand of the Father, and his return to judgment (II.xvi.5-17). The result of Christ being our redeemer alone is "we see that whole sum of our salvation, and every single part of it, is comprehended in Christ" (II.xvi.19).

In the momentous third book Calvin defines and explains that great Reformation truth developed from the very onset by Luther, justification by faith alone, or *sola fide*. Calvin's doctrine of justification *by faith alone* is "a man excluded from the righteousness of works... by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous" (III.xi.2).

Also contained in the important third book is the theological doctrine for which Calvin has achieved a thankful supremacy in conservative circles and pariah status in liberal circles: double predestination as revealed in election and reprobation. More than Luther, Zwingli, Menno Simmons, or any other reformer Calvin expounded the doctrine of double predestination. Since Calvin defines election as the predestination of some to salvation, he conversely defines reprobation as the predestination of the rest to damnation (III.xxi.1).

He defines predestination as

the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation (III.xxi.5).

Calvin's spiritual disciples, in response to the Arminian controversy in the Netherlands, codified his development of predestination at the Great Synod of Dordrecht, 1618–1619, in five Canons, These Canons achieved mnemonic status for the five points of Calvinism, i.e. TULIP: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irrresistible Grace, and, Perseverance of the Saints.

In Book Four, Calvin concatenates the nature of the Sacraments. Upon consulting both the 1536 edition and the 1559 edition, to which Calvin gave his imprimatur as the 'official' edition, he reveals a progress in his understanding of the Sacraments. In the 1536 *Institutes*, chapter four, section one, Calvin defines a Sacrament as "an outward sign by which the Lord represents and attests to us his good will toward us to sustain the weakness of our faith... [or] a testimony of God's grace declared to us by an outward sign."<sup>5</sup> By the time of the 1559 *Institutes* Calvin had resided for about three years

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(1538–1541) in Strassbourg with the eminent Sacramental Reformer, Martin Bucer, and thereby amended his former definition. The 1559 *Institutes* define a Sacrament as

an external sign, by which the Lord seals on our consciences, his promises of good-will toward us, in order to sustain the weakness of our faith, and we in our turn testify our piety towards him, both before himself and before angels as well as men (IV.xiv.1)<sup>6</sup>

With regards to the final, aforementioned ground the effect of Calvin's book upon Western Michigan surpasses that brief description of Ottawa County by the *Reader's Digest* magazine. That magazine relates that the Ottawa County planning department made a scratch-and-sniff patch of manure odor in order that city-slickers might preview the pungent smell emitted by some Ottawa County farms.<sup>7</sup>

The *Institutes'* impact can be traced back not only to Rev. Albertus. C. Van Raalte's 1849 immigration to Holland, Michigan, but also further back to the 1831 conversion of his Van Raalte's spiritual mentor, the Dominee Hendrick De Cock, minister in Ulrum, Gronigen, The Netherlands. Hendrick's son, Helenius, later wrote a history of the Afscheiding,<sup>8</sup> wherein he began with a brief biography of his father, and described his father's conversion via Calvin thus:

[Father] first learned with understanding of the *Institutes* of Calvin in the year 1831. It was by Dominee Wormnest in the city of Warfhuizen. At his house there were speeches about the doctrines of faith, and while father and Mr. Wormnest had differences of meaning, the latter said this: "Let us at once consult father Calvin about this." This occurred and there at the student-cabinet of Mr. Wormnest father was acquainted for the first time with the work of this great man. Immediately he found so much agreement with Calvin that he begged Mr. Wormnest to be allowed to take along this work. The *Institutes* of Calvin was that which he then diligently and prayerfully examined, and in the midst thereof his eyes were opened. Then, he learned with understanding that man is dead in sins and offences; that salvation occurs alone out of grace without any merit from the side of man; that faith alone can make one righteous before God, and that Kuipenga had formerly spoken the truth, when he said: "If I too must impart but one sigh for my salvation, then it is lost for eternity."

From this time on, the teaching of the truth was cherished by him...This had a discernable influence upon his preaching. The truth, which had certainly been proclaimed for himself, he also began unmasking equally to the Ulrum district.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, Calvin's *Institutes* were the means through which Dominee De Cock was converted and came to believe in those Reformation truths summarized by the five *Solas* and Kuipenga's sigh. Then, taking those Reformation doctrines, he transformed his preaching, emphasizing not man but God's all-sufficiency in salvation. Eventually, his teaching conflicted with the doctrines of the officially sanctioned State Reformed Church (De Hervormde Kerk) and he submitted to abuse, slander, and a nearly year-long banishment from his pulpit.<sup>10</sup>

On October 13, 1834 two elders, three deacons, and Hendrick De Cock signed the *Act of Secession*,<sup>11</sup> by which the above and some 268 other members separated themselves from the apostatizing State Reformed Church. They named themselves the Afscheiding. One year later in December 1835, Candidate Van Raalte seceded, and in 1836 the fledgling group of Afscheiding churches admitted him into the gospel ministry.<sup>12</sup> Ten years later, in 1846, Van Raalte departed from the Netherlands leading a sizable portion of immigrants to the shores of Black Lake, now known as Lake Macatawa.

After the immigrants settled down, Calvin's *Institutes* continued to influence the immigrant's daily lives. Classis Holland, meeting at Zeeland on October 7, 1856, made a two-fold resolution in Article 23 concerning the denomination-wide promotion of a new printing of Calvin's works. They resolved, first, that each consistory had the freedom to promote the books in whatsoever manner they deemed, and, second, via the local newspaper Rev Van Der Meulen would exhort the local populace to purchase the materials.<sup>13</sup> Just over two months later, December 17<sup>th</sup>, at the examination of Rev. John Van Vleck, Rev. Kershow, as written in Article 10, orally examined him in Systematic and Polemic Theology, "and especially in the Five Points [of Calvinism] against the Remonstrants."<sup>14</sup>

After a few years passed (1857) there arose out of these Dutch Calvinists the denomination of the Christian Reformed Church, their college, *Calvin College*; and out of the CRC, the Protestant Reformed Churches, my denominational home. Thus, a direct link exists between Calvin's *Institutes*, from its doctrines converting one man, unto many of the current Western Michigan citizens and churches of Kent and Ottawa Counties and me.

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In the end Calvin's Institutes is my favorite book because it has shaped my historical method such that I view history through the eyes of church-world conflict. I also treasure the book for the edifying doctrines contained therein. Last, the book was part of the origin from whence many of the Dutch Reformed Immigrants settled into the Western Michigan area. ❖

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Translated by Rex Warner. (London: Penguin Books: 1972.), 48.

<sup>3</sup> Editions differing by content were published in 1536, 1539, 1543, 1545, 1550, 1553, 1554, and 1559.

<sup>4</sup> Herman Bavinck. *Reformed Dogmatics: Prologomena*. vol. 1. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. translated by John Vriend, & edited by John Bolt. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: 2003), 178.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, John. *1536 Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated and Annotated by Ford Lewis Battles. (The HH Meeter Center for Calvin Studies: Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.), 87.

<sup>6</sup> All quotes taken from Beveridge's translation.

<sup>7</sup> "That Sweet Country Smell." *Readers Digest: Only in America*, November 2003, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Dutch word meaning "secession."

<sup>9</sup> Helenius De Cock. *Hendrik de Cock: First Afscheiding Preacher in Netherlands: Considered in Life and Activity*. (Delfzijl: Jan Haan: 1886.) 20–21 (my translation).

<sup>10</sup> The Faculty of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. *The Reformation of 1834: Essays in Commemoration of the Act of Secession and Return*. Edited by Peter Y. De Jong and Nelson D. Kloosterman. (Orange City, IA: Plum Publishing, Inc.: 1984.), 25–26.

<sup>11</sup> Herman Hanko. *For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches*. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association: 2000.), 421–423.

<sup>12</sup> *The Reformation of 1834*, 30–31.

<sup>13</sup> *Classis Holland: Minutes A.D. 1848–1858*. Translated by a Joint Committee of the *Christian Reformed Church* and the *Reformed Church in America*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: 1950.), 226.

<sup>14</sup> *Classis Holland*, 231.

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*Bruce is a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.*

# "LITTLE LIGHTS"

## What Am I?

*... let it shine!*

by Connie Meyer

Aaron burnt the incense,  
A special blend of spice,  
Offering for Israel  
A sincere sacrifice.

So you need to learn me.  
Disciples learned me, too.  
Luke eleven: thirteen  
Will show you what to do.

Tabernacle, temples,  
In heaven and on earth,  
Closets, caves, and castles—  
In all these I have birth.

Morn and noon and evening—  
Unceasingly ought I  
In your mouth and mind be.  
Now tell me, what am I? ❖

I am made in secret  
And sometimes openly.  
Either way is proper  
In deep humility.

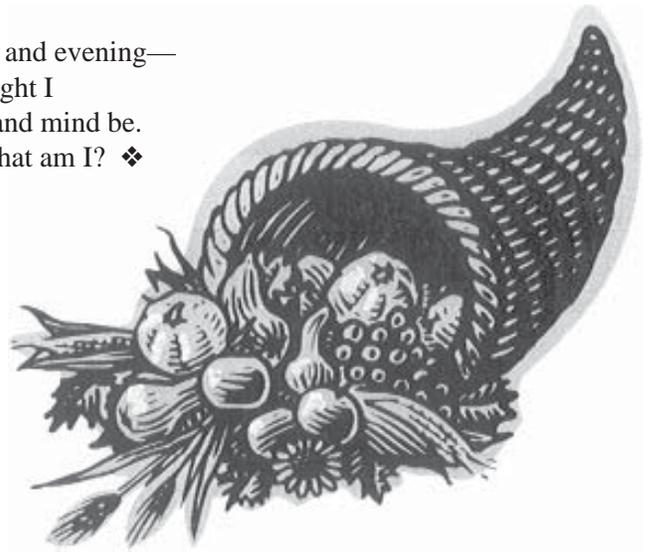
Not a drunken cantor,  
A womb would fill one day.  
Three of me—the answer  
Was that the thorn must stay.

Pharisees proclaim me  
And make me but a lie.  
Publicans, breast-smitten,  
Will go home justified.

Requisites to hear me  
Acceptable are three:  
Who, and what, and how to—  
His promise and your need.

How can you—unworthy—  
Uplift me all alone?  
But there's One Who for you  
Does make continual groan.

I am necessary  
As every Christian's art,  
To express thanksgiving  
I am the chiefest part.



**Starting to count at the letter pointed out by the arrow, copy every third letter in the blanks below. What does it spell?**



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

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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:  
Josiah, son of Mr. Sean Hanley—Ballymena, Northern  
Ireland

Tyler Joel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Block—Byron Center,  
MI

Laci Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jared Kooienga—  
Faith, MI

Anthony Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jon VanOverloop—  
Faith, MI

Mason Ross, son of Mr. & Mrs. Travis Vander Kolk—  
Grandville, MI

Lauren Sue, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brian Kuiper—  
Grandville, MI

Carson Jon, son of Mr. & Mrs. Corey Terpstra—Holland,  
MI

Lydia Niicole, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mark  
VandenBerg—Holland, MI

Anthony Tyler, son of Mr. & Mrs. Shon Griess—Hope, MI

Eric David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Andy Lanning—  
Hudsonville, MI

Blake William, son of Mr. & Mrs. Andy Moss—Hull, IA

Cody John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Steve DeBoef—Hull, IA

Elizabeth Joelle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. John Moore—  
Loveland, CO

Reuben Martin, son of Mr. & Mrs. Rick Span—Lynden,  
WA

Jonathan Francis, son of Mr. & Mrs. John Huizenga—  
Randolph, WI

Caleb Samuel, son of Mr. & Mrs. James Kooiker—  
Randolph, WI

Samuel John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Glenn Feenstra—  
Redlands, CA

### 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:

Joshua VanOverloop—Grace, MI

Rosanna Hanko—Lynden, WA

Rhonda Zandstra—Lynden, WA

### MARRIAGES

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

*Matthew 19:5*

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Brent Wynia and Miss Shari Klein—Doon, IA

Mr. Travis Van Santen and Miss Ronna Brands—  
Edgerton, MN

Mr. Rich Jabaay and Miss Lisa Moores—Georgetown,  
MI

Mr. Mike VanderVeen and Miss Corri VanBaren—  
Randolph, WI