

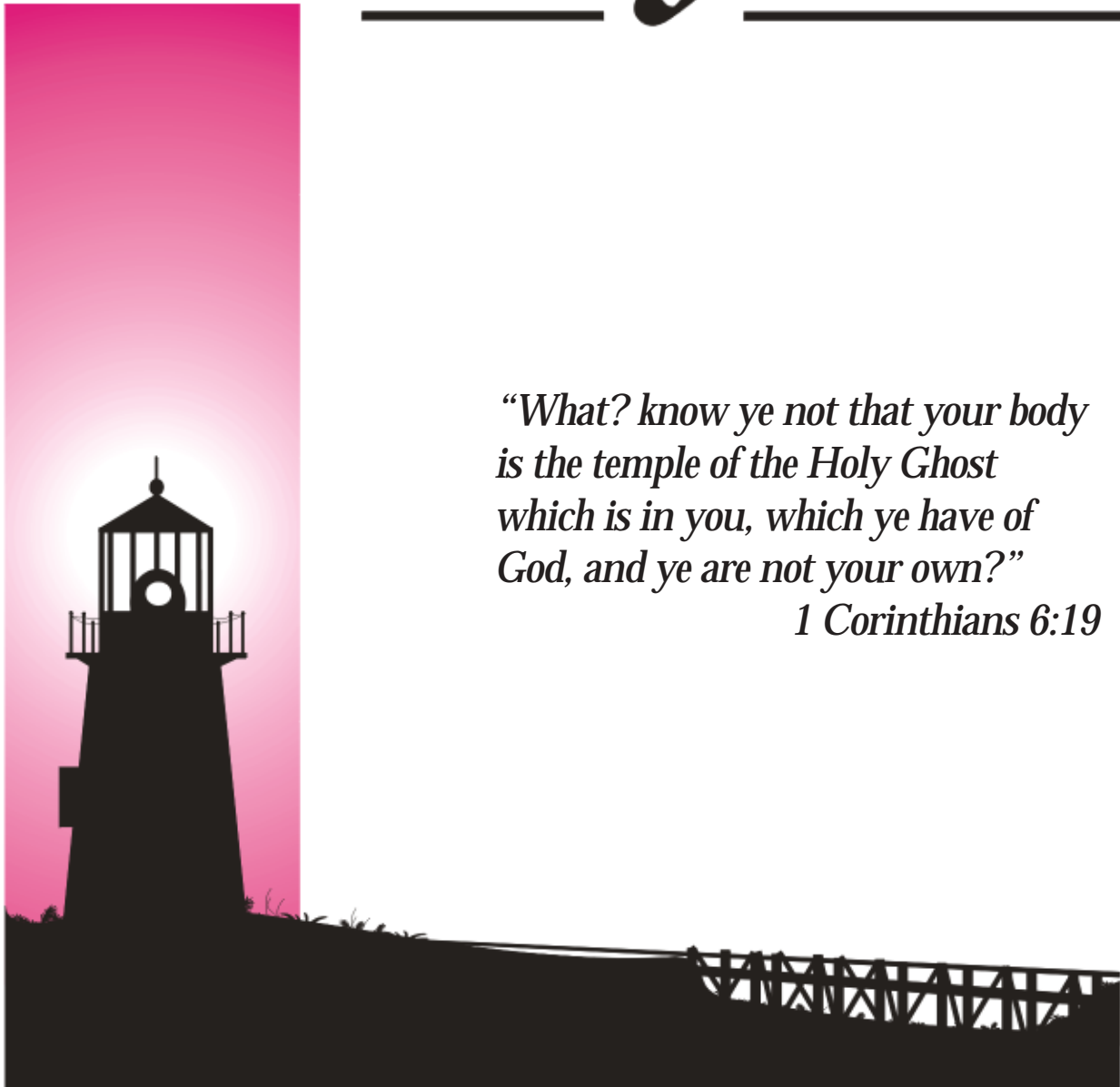
# Beacon Lights

April  
2004

Volume LXIII  
Number 4

*“What? know ye not that your body  
is the temple of the Holy Ghost  
which is in you, which ye have of  
God, and ye are not your own?”*

*1 Corinthians 6:19*



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# Affliction For Our Profit (1)

by Aaron J. Cleveland



**W**e sing in various *Psalter* versifications on Psalm 119 that affliction is for our profit. That affliction is for our spiritual good is a confession unique to God's people. In this article and the next, we will examine the theme of affliction in the light of God's word. We hope to answer a number of questions. Who controls affliction? What is affliction? What are the effects of affliction upon the godly and the ungodly? How do we profit from affliction?

Affliction is a reality in this life because of sin. When Adam sinned as the head of all men, death entered into the world and the creation came under God's curse (Gen. 3:16-19). Because of man's sinful disobedience he came under the power of death and his existence on this earth is one of suffering, pain, sorrow, and distress.

While we know that affliction is a reality in this life because of our own sins, we also confess that afflictions do not come upon us by chance. God rules everything, including afflictions. That God is sovereign over all afflictions, including the ones that come upon us, is the truth found in Psalm 119:75. There we read, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness has afflicted me." Naomi confessed God's control of her affliction when she asked, "Why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" (Ruth 1:21).

Many deny that God sends "evils" into this world and upon His people. Perhaps, they say, God *permits* evils to take place, but He certainly does not *send* them, and especially not upon His people. God only rules the good things which take place in the world. The evil is really outside of His control. The Heidelberg Catechism exposes this idea as a lie in Lord's Day 9, where we read that God the Father "*will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears turn out to my advantage*; for He is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing, being a faithful Father." God, our Father, controls all things, good and evil. "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things" (Isaiah 45:7).

Knowing that God is sovereign over all afflictions, we must distinguish between His affliction of the wicked and of His covenant people. God afflicts both. While the same afflictions come to both believer and unbeliever alike, God's purpose regarding both of them is different. There is also a radical difference in how the believer and unbeliever experience the affliction of God.

John Calvin, in his *Institutes*, distinguishes between God's "judgment of vengeance" and His "judgment of chastisement" (*Institutes*, 3.4.31). God sends the same judgments, or afflictions, to the believer and unbeliever. Yet, God judges the wicked in wrath to punish them for their sins. To the righteous, God's judgments come in love as chastisements to correct them.

The effects of God's judgments upon the wicked and the righteous are also vastly different. The wicked do not profit from them, but are only hardened in their sin. God's judgments do not change them for the better. Take, for example, unbelieving man's blatant violations of the seventh commandment.

Upon these violations God sends the judgments of broken homes, ruined families, strife, and disease. As obvious as it is that these judgments are in direct response to their sins, they refuse to turn from their sins and continue to plunge themselves deeper into disobedience. However, the righteous are corrected by the chastisement of God. By them their old man of sin is mortified and the new man in Christ is quickened.

Calvin is careful to point out how differently the righteous and the wicked experience these judgments. The wicked experience God's judgments as punishment from God the "Judge and Avenger" (*Institutes*, 3.4.33). They experience God's anger against them for their sins. The righteous, on the other hand, experience God's rod as dear children who are corrected by their loving Father. By the chastening of God they are led to sorrow for their sins and to repentance. They see affliction in their lives as the necessary correction of their Father who loves them.

Calvin gives examples from the Bible illustrating the difference between God's judgment of vengeance and His judgment of righteous. When the kingdom was taken away from Saul (I Sam. 15:23), writes Calvin, God "was punishing for vengeance. When he [God] took away David's little son from him (II Sam. 12:18) he was rebuking for amendment" (*Institutes*, 3.4.33).

This distinction is necessary for us to know as we live in a sinful world upon which God sends His judgments. It is impossible that we experience God's judgments as His penalty against our sins because our sins have been forgiven. The penalty for our sins has been paid by Christ on the cross. Under God's judgments the wicked, without the forgiveness of sins, receive a just punishment for their sins and "they already see afar off their eternal damnation" (*Institutes*, 3.4.32).

It is the afflictions of God's forgiven children that we hope to concentrate on as we continue in these articles. As one goes through the Bible examining the theme of the afflictions of God's people, it is amazing to observe God's complete sovereignty in them. God determines whom He will afflict. He determines when affliction is necessary. He determines what kind of affliction He will send. God determines the length of that affliction. He determines the severity of that affliction. He sovereignly uses affliction to bring about the effect that He intends. God's purpose may be to send affliction as chastisement for a particular sin. Or, God may use an affliction to cause us to grow spiritually in a certain area of our life. God also determines the manner in which we are delivered from our affliction. Every aspect of affliction God controls.

God's word tells us that "many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psalm 34:19). Therefore, being assured of God's sovereignty is a very important comfort in our afflictions. It is God's will that our way in this world be filled with difficulty. It is necessary for our salvation. We read in I Thessalonians 3:3 that we should not be moved by afflictions, "for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto." In Acts 14:22, we are told "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Often, when we are young, we do not yet fully see the difficulty of the Christian's life in this world of sin. We picture for ourselves a life of ease and comfort in the future. We want to be comfortable and at home in this world. However, as we grow older, we begin more to see our own sinfulness. We realize how easy it is for us to get caught up in the pursuit of things earthly. We see that we do not desire the heavenly as we should. Then, we understand how affliction is necessary in our life.

Calvin states that God afflicts us "to wean us from excessive love of this present life" (*Institutes*, 3.9.1). God instructs us about the vanity of this life "by continual proof of its miseries" (*Institutes*, 3.9.1). Affliction is an absolute necessity in our lives as long as we live in this world. Without it, we would soon stray from God and be swallowed up by the world.

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Calvin states that God afflicts us "to wean us from excessive love of this present life."

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Let us thank God for His afflictions. Without them we would be one with the world and share in the world's condemnation. This idea is found in I Corinthians 11:32. "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." Says Calvin, God "afflicts us not to ruin or destroy us but, rather, to free us from the condemnation of the world" (*Institutes*, 3.8.6).

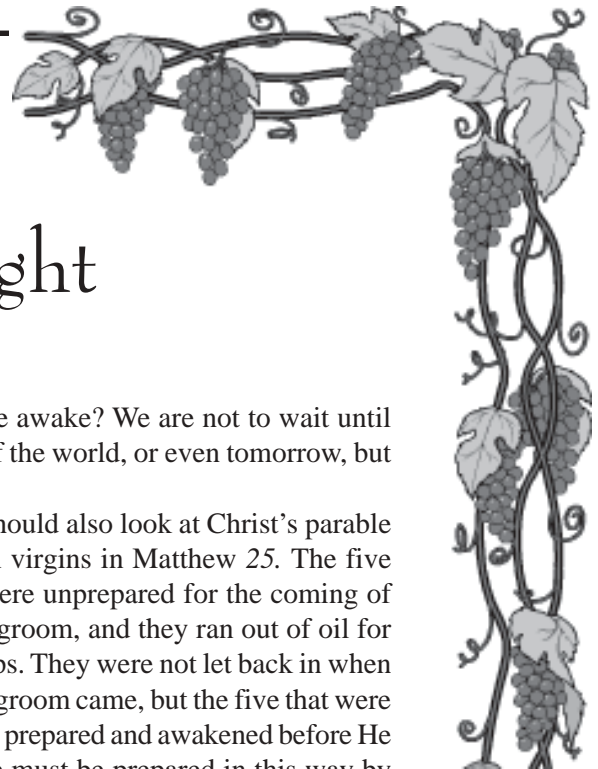
Next time, Lord willing, we hope to examine why we are afflicted, enduring affliction, and God's purpose in affliction. ❖

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

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Fruitful Branches



# Armor of Light

by Eric Pols

*"And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:11-14).*

**W**e as Christians are taught in Romans 13:11-14 that we are to awake from the sleep of sin. We must cast off our clothes for they also are of the night, and they should be thrown far from us. We are also instructed to walk as children of the day and teach those who have not heard or who need to hear again the word of God. We must be careful what actions we take part, because we are to take care of our bodies, and souls, and we must be a witness to the world around us. In order to be a Christian, we must throw off the old man of sin, and we must put on the robes of righteousness.

Many people in the world today assume there will be signs when the end of the world or the end of their life will come. In the last moments of their time on this earth, they will act as if they are and always were Christians. This is absolutely the wrong time to awake. Romans 13:11 states, "now is it high time to awake." When

should we awake? We are not to wait until the end of the world, or even tomorrow, but now.

We should also look at Christ's parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25. The five foolish were unprepared for the coming of the Bridegroom, and they ran out of oil for their lamps. They were not let back in when the Bridegroom came, but the five that were ready had prepared and awakened before He came. We must be prepared in this way by going to church, catechism, society; and we must take every opportunity that we have to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Bridegroom. We must not skip church because we do not feel like going, but we must go every time possible and listen to the best of our ability. The sermon on Sunday is Christ speaking through one of his servants to the sheep of the congregation.

In verse twelve, Paul says the night is far spent. This means that it is time for us to get dressed. In order to get dressed, we must put off our clothes that we wore in the darkness. These clothes are the works of the devil and sin. We should not take these clothes off casually, but with great force we must rip and tear them off. We should then put these clothes far behind us, because they are of the devil, and we are to be of the Light. We as Christians can not have anything to do with these dirty clothes. After

we have torn off the clothes of darkness and sin, we ought to embrace the robe of righteousness.

As it says in verse twelve, we must put on the “Armor of Light.” Christ calls us to be soldiers in the army of God, and we are required to defend what we believe. We should also put on the armor of the Lord Jesus Christ so that we can withstand the fiery darts of the devil. We must put off all the sins of the world and wear the new man that Christ has so freely given us with His death on the cross.

When in verse thirteen it says to walk honestly as in the day, this means that we should walk as children of the Light. We must act like we are Christians and do the things that God has called us to do, because the wicked are watching us, and they are going to say, “I saw Harry from your church doing this, and you are telling me that I am sinning.” We are not to show signs of the old man of sin such as going to movies or listening to rock music. But as Christians we must study the Word of God, and we must use the knowledge given to us to witness to those who still have the old man in their souls.

There are three pairs of sins that are brought out here. The first one is that we should not walk in rioting and drunkenness. We should stay away from the overeating and overdrinking, because in I Thessalonians 5:7 it’s stated that “they that be drunk be drunken in the night.” We must control ourselves when we eat or drink, because God has called us to treat our bodies as the temple of God. Becoming an overweight person is not caring for our body, because it puts us at a health risk.

Second, we should not continue in chambering and wantonness. This means that we should stay away from the lusts of the flesh and not delight in the thoughts of doing them. If we are at a party with people from work, for example, and they ask us to do something that is bad we should say “No.” Then we should tell them why it is wrong and why a believer should not be doing it.

Third, we should abstain from strife and envying. We must not envy things of this world because they are just that, things of the world, and they must not be in a Christian’s heart. We as Christians must be content with what God has given us and praise Him for it, even if we have just enough to make it to the next day. We ought to control our tempers when we get mad at someone because of something they did. If we do, we will be witnessing to them that Christ is in our hearts.

We as Christians are to care for the things that are necessities in God’s spiritual kingdom. The most important thing we must care for is our souls which God has

given to us. We must not abuse this great gift or any other one that we are given by God. We must also put on the “Armor of Light” so we can fight off the attacks of the devil and witness to the world around us. ❖

*Eric wrote this as a senior writing assignment at Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

## Gem of the Month

# Springtime

By Rena Mae Soodsma

*The calendar says it's Springtime  
You can smell it in the air.  
The scent of rain and fresh plowed earth,  
God's creation has new birth.*

*The trees are starting to bud  
Some with blossoms, oh so sweet!  
Soon their leaves will all be seen  
In the many beautiful shades of green.*

*The crocus are all up,  
And the hyacinth so blue,  
The tulips are poking through the ground.  
God's marvelous handiwork is all around.*

*The gold finch has his color back,  
The robin has returned  
With his chirping sound—so nice to hear,  
As he calls a mate, from far or near.*

*There's much new life upon the earth  
In the Springtime of the year.  
The beauty sent from up above,  
And through it all, God shows His love.*

*Rena is a mother and wife from Randolph Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.*

## When I In Awesome Wonder...

### Michigan's Golden Coast

# April Awakening

by Deane Wassink

**A**pril is my favorite month of the year on the “Golden Coast” of Michigan. After many months of apparent windblown desolation and dormancy during the winter the great spring plant wake-up occurs suddenly with many amazing changes.

The first thing I notice is the color green on the trees. The new leaves of the wild cherries, oaks and maples along with the beeches, service berries and dogwoods create a freshness in the color that cheers me up. The leaves may be no bigger than a squirrel's ear, but, collectively they brighten the woods.

The second thing I notice is the blooming of the many spring wildflowers. Though there are many I don't know, the Dutchman's breeches delicately pushing through the leaves catches my attention. Next, my breath is taken away by the sight of the sweeping drifts of my favorite wildflower, the queen of wildflowers, the white trillium. Everything about this flower is in threes: three leaves, three green sepals under the flower, and the three large pure white flower petals. The white will turn a delicate pink when they are older. Beautiful! I have heard a legend that holds that this flower represent the “Holy Trinity” because of its “threeness” and its white purity.

The third thing I notice is the sound of the breaking waves on the shore. Upon closer examination, I can see that the shore has changed greatly since I was on the site last fall. The low water levels have exposed more sand to the effects of the winter winds. Great drifts of sand are working back up the hill. The stones which once littered the beach are now completely buried by the sand. There are fresh things to find that have been washed up on shore: zebra mussels clinging to seaweed, driftwood, dead fish, and the ubiquitous party balloons released by some hopeful child.

The fourth thing I notice is the wonderful smell of spring. The strong breeze carries the scent of the lake, the earth and the life of springtime.

Finally, I notice the sound and activity of the birds and squirrels in the woods. If I stand quietly, the black

squirrel quits barking its warning. The variety of the birds is amazing. I hear a woodpecker in the distance. The crows also make their harsh sounds. Though it is too early for the purple martins to return, bluejays, mourning doves, wrens and robins can be seen setting up house-keeping and gathering food. Within a couple of days I saw a rufous-sided towhee and (I am almost sure) the crow size pileated woodpecker in flight. They were both relatively rare and beautiful. Shhh! A robin just landed two feet from my head. Wow, that is a thrill!

Indeed the Lord brings joy in the springtime. In the beauty of spring we can see that He is faithful to His promise to come again as He brings about the seasons until that time. Also, we are reminded of the new life He creates in us out of our deadness in sin when we are given new spiritual life in our risen Savior.

## April Wonder

*The breeze is cool as it blows,  
Touching my forehead as it goes.*

*The sound of a woodpecker taps out a rhythm,  
As bluejays scold me for the disturbance I've given.*

*The trillium in colonies add their white brilliance,  
To the shaded forest floor as the mayapples dance.*

*No insects, only birds, swell the air with songs.  
They have returned to the summer home where they belong.*

*A sweetness fills the air with its scent,  
The smell of earth, of humus, of winter, now spent.*

*The snow has melted slowly drip by drip,  
And icicles form from the sap of a snapped branch tip.*

*The beaches are lonesome and quiet to walk,  
A perfect time to reflect on the wonder He has wrought.*

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*Pray for the eyes and ears to take it all in,  
For a chance to pause and reflect once again.*

*If the Lord can take wondrous care of the shoreline,  
Then surely we know all things will be fine.*

*If such beauty surrounds us on our earthly quest,  
How much more the beauty of our new home of rest. ❖*

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

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## Pastor Profile

# Rev. Martin VanderWal

edited by Kris Moelker

**O**n August 5, 1964, Rev. Martin VanderWal was born in Zeeland, Michigan. He is the son of Henry and Janice VanderWal. He lived in Jenison, Michigan until he was five years old and then moved to Zeeland, Michigan.

Rev. VanderWal attended Borculo Christian School in Zeeland, Michigan, and then attended Allendale Public High School. He received his college education from Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

While he was growing up, Rev. VanderWal enjoyed music, fishing, hunting, collecting stamps and reading. Now he still enjoys music, reading, fishing and hunting.

As a teenager, there was always a peer pressure for Rev. VanderWal to conform to standards of dress and speech, though it was nothing patently offensive. Teenage humor was crude, and you were expected either to laugh or participate. He thinks the worst peer pressure is political conformity to whatever is the latest fad or trend, rather than encouragement to conform to God's law. Those peer pressures are always relevant and the greatest temptation.

During his childhood and young adulthood years, Rev. VanderWal was a member of Rusk Christian Reformed Church, a small church near Allendale. In late 1988, he became a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church. His wife, Tricia, played an instrumental role in his "conversion."

On June 23, 1989, Rev. VanderWal married Patricia Kraima. The Lord has richly blessed their marriage with a strong bond and dedication to spiritual discipline. They encourage each other to seek the glory of God in all of their life.

Early in his life, Rev. VanderWal was being prepared by the Lord for the ministry. The Lord gave him an in-



terest in spiritual things and a thirst for knowledge in many areas, especially literature. The Lord also gave him work which demanded development of personal aptitude and gifts of communication, leadership and teamwork. The hearing of petitions raised in congregational prayers for ministers led him to consider preparing for the ministry. He is most thankful to God for the positive reaction of his family and peers, especially the encouragement of his parents and the dutiful sacrifices of his wife, to support his desire to enter the seminary.



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Regarding his seminary training, the most memorable event for Rev. VanderWal was the advice from Prof. Engelsma who said that, despite what students might think of criticism liberally offered after practice preaching, the professors really did want them to excel at preaching!

Rev. VanderWal has been blessed by the Lord in his labors at Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Wyckoff, New Jersey from 1997 to 2002; and now in Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California from 2002 to the present.

Rev. VanderWal's most memorable experience with teaching young children in catechism is hearing them recite what they have learned of the wonderful works of God. In that way, he experiences the realization of God's covenant promise, Psalm 8:2.

As a minister, it is most rewarding for Rev. VanderWal to witness the devotion and dedication of God's people in the church to the truth of His Word. Rev. VanderWal also rejoices in those conversations where he learns that God's people have a solid knowledge of the truth.

Rev. VanderWal has this advice for young men who are considering the ministry of the Word to be their calling: "Make sure you have humility, patience and a burning desire to be faithful above all else. Labor diligently

to be called by a church, and therefore by Christ Himself."

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...display a far greater respect and reverence toward parents, teachers and all those in authority.

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There are changes Rev. VanderWal would like to see in the thinking, attitudes and behavior of our young people. "In their thinking, to be more biblically and confessionally minded. In their attitudes, to display a far greater respect and reverence toward parents, teachers and all those in authority. In behavior, to frame it after the Word of God rather than the patterns of the world."

It encourages Rev. VanderWal to see our young people's devotion to the truth, and their willingness to take up that form of worship which the churches of the Protestant Reformation have enjoyed for centuries. He is also encouraged that the vast majority of our young people have an abhorrence of contemporary worship. ❖

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

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Where We Stand

## Tattoos

by Prof. Herman Hanko

*Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the Lord (Leviticus 19:28). They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh (Lev. 21:5).*

The question which accompanied these texts reads: "Recently I was asked if it was OK for believers to have themselves tattooed. I was told by some believers that there is nothing in Scripture about this. What about these texts in Leviticus [above]? Further,

the believer's body is the temple of the Holy Ghost and we as believers are indeed priests: a royal priesthood and a peculiar people (I Peter 2:5-9). Am I right in this matter, or is there a better answer?" In my judgment the questioner is absolutely right in this matter. The whole subject is so important that it deserves more explanation.

The first point which needs emphasis is that many of the laws given to Israel were to forbid Israel to adopt the customs of the heathen nations who formerly lived

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in the land of Canaan, and some of whom continued to live in close proximity to God's chosen people (Judg. 2:1-5; 3:1-2). Repeatedly in the law God warned Israel against adopting practices common among the heathen nations. Most of these practices which Israel was forbidden to adopt were closely associated with and connected to heathen religions. This is evident from the text itself which forbade cuttings in the flesh "for the dead" (Lev. 19:28). But this is also evident from times of apostasy in Israel where these practices were, to Israel's shame, practiced (I Kings 18:28).

The nation of Israel was God's chosen people, the church of the Old Dispensation, the nation which received God's revelation of His truth and covenant, and the people from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (Rom. 9:4-5). Because they were God's people, they were commanded to live in spiritual separation from the wicked nations that surrounded them. They were to dwell alone, spiritually isolated from the wicked (Deut. 33:26-29). They were called to serve the living God and not idols. And they were called to serve their God in their whole life and by all they did—in distinction from the heathen whose idolatry touched on every part of their wicked life.

This is called the doctrine of the antithesis, and it is outlined in the New Testament for the New Testament church: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people... Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Cor. 6:14-16; 7:1).

It could be argued, I suppose, that the Old Testament laws are all fulfilled in Christ, and that, therefore, Leviticus 19:28 is also fulfilled. But is this argument valid? While we would certainly never deny that Christ has fulfilled the law for His church, it remains a fact that the question of the relevancy of an Old Testament law depends on the reason why it was given. It is clear that it was given to distinguish God's people from the world. This reason remains relevant today, and thus the point which the law makes – to live in spiritual separation from the world – remains relevant. In my judgment, it cannot

be argued that tattoos and body piercing can be used to glorify God in our calling to live lives of service to Jesus Christ. Why? The motive for tattoos and body piercing is very clear: to imitate the current fashions and customs of the wicked world in which we live.

There are two movements in western Christian nations today which go hand in hand. On the one hand, efforts are being made to erase all references to Christianity from national life; on the other hand there is a return to paganism. C. S. Lewis even argues that the entire feminist movement and especially the reference to God as "she" are a return to pagan notions of feminine deities. When people tattoo themselves and pierce their bodies they are reverting to pagan practices – even as pagan religions are becoming increasingly popular. "Christian" countries are becoming pagan once again. Tattooing and body piercing are defiant gestures against the true God and are indicative of a return to paganism.

As Christians, our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost (I Cor. 6:19-20). This gives further Biblical support to the Christian opposition to tattooing and body piercing. The argument is this. Because our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost, our bodies also belong to Christ. God saves our bodies as well as our souls. In question and answer 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism, the believer confesses that "with body and soul" he belongs to his faithful Saviour. Christ died to save our bodies. He will save them fully and perfectly in the resurrection of the body in the day of His coming.

We love our bodies, not as narcissistic body worshippers, but as those redeemed in body and soul. We love our bodies for God's sake, because they are loved by God, redeemed in the cross, and destined to be raised. Because of this, we treat our bodies with respect and are very careful what we do with our bodies. The believer respects the human body as a creation of God, saved in the blood of Christ. He cares for the body; does not unnecessarily endanger it; treats it with respect; and, when death comes, carefully buries the body in the earth in the hope of the resurrection. Body piercing and tattooing is, in reality, a thumbing of the nose at God by doing to our bodies what we want and by refusing to acknowledge that they are God's. ❖

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# Watching Daily At My Gates

By Cornelius Jonker

*The parables of Jesus will be the topic of our meditations this month and we will try to treat one each day. We realize that it is quite impossible to do full justice to them in this fashion. However, we will focus on the main thrust of each parable and if your interest has been stimulated, we recommend the book by H. C. Hanko, The Mysteries of the Kingdom available from the RFPA.*

## **April 1 Read Matthew 13:10-17**

As indicated in the above preface, we will study the parables, which were spoken by the Lord during His earthly ministry. First we must ask, what is a parable? And what is the purpose of preaching in parables? Many definitions have been given, but basically a parable is a type of instruction used by Jesus to compare or to contrast earthly and heavenly objects. A parable takes illustrations from the earthly creation that point to and make clear certain truths pertaining to the kingdom of heaven. The purpose is two fold, namely, to reveal the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven to God's children, but to hide them from the wicked and unbelievers in Israel. Oh the wicked could understand the parables in an earthly sense and even realize that Jesus was pointing to them, but because they were not given faith to receive that gospel, they reacted in hate and unbelief. God's Word always has a twofold effect. It hardens the hearts of the unbelievers, but softens the hearts of His children so that by faith they embrace the blessed gospel. May that latter effect be our reaction as we listen to the parables of our Lord. Psalter 99.

## **April 2 Read I Corinthians 2:7-16**

Jesus declared that the purpose of parables was to reveal the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Mysteries in Scripture are not some unexplainable or impenetrable deep and dark secrets. Rather they refer to wonders of grace in the eternal counsel of God, which He is pleased to make known unto us. Therefore the parables are a revelation of the kingdom of Christ. When we speak of this kingdom, we speak of a royal commonwealth where Christ is the absolute sovereign of a kingdom bestowed on Him by the Father. The subjects are His elect people, the character of this kingdom is spiritual, and is realized in the cross of Christ. The reason that these mysteries are hid from the wise and prudent is not due to the fact that they were spoken in restrictive terms difficult to understand, for the language is unmistakably clear. Rather, their carnal minds were blinded. On the other hand, the ability to perceive and understand the mysteries of God is a gift of grace to His people. May God so speak to us that we may spiritually discern the glorious truths of His kingdom. Psalter 397.

## **April 3 Read Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23**

In speaking this parable to the people, Jesus introduced a manner of teaching that hitherto He did not use. Following the presentation of the parable, Jesus also gave the interpretation of it. This is important in order to grasp the principles that we must follow to

understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Space prevents us from treating all the aspects of this parable, but we may glean an important lesson at Jesus' feet. How do you hear the preaching of the Word, dear reader? Four kinds of hearers are described corresponding to the four kinds of soil. Only when the heart of the believer has been properly prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive that living seed which is the Word of God can it bring forth faith. Let us pray that the Spirit may so work in us that we may be diligent hearers of that Word in order that the seed of eternal life may be nourished in the fertile soil of our hearts. Psalter 214.

## **April 4 Read Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

Jesus also explained this parable, of the wheat and the tares, to His disciples upon their request. Not only did this parable give comfort and assurance to them as they were beset by the wicked Jewish church leaders of that day, but it also comforts, instructs, and warns the people of God today. The true church has always existed side by side with the false church since its inception for God has His purpose in that. If the church always lived an easy life, free from trials, heresy and opposition from the wicked world, she would become complacent and be easy prey for the enemy. So God placed enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and the church is called to live an antithetical life. Both must live and grow together until the harvest. Then the wicked shall be gathered and thrust into the eternal fires of hell, but the righteous shall "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Dear reader, do you have spiritual ears to hear the Word of Christ to maintain the antithesis? God grant us grace to hold fast that which we have. Psalter 287.

## **April 5 Read Mark 4:30-34**

In close connection to the preceding parables are the ones of the mustard seed and the leaven. We will look for a moment at the former and listen to Jesus as He compares the kingdom of heaven to a grain of mustard seed. This seed is Christ Himself as He is preached in the Word of the gospel. Just as the mustard seed is small and insignificant in itself, so the Word of truth has always been despised and ignored by the masses. Most desire a word that holds forth a promise of heaven on earth, and men strive ceaselessly to bring this about. But the seed of the Word dropped in the fertile soil of the hearts of God's people accomplishes great growth. It is never great in the eyes of the world for this is a spiritual kingdom. In this kingdom established by the righteousness of Christ through His cross, are forgiveness, unspeakable blessedness and peace with God. It is an eternal kingdom, an all powerful and glorious kingdom! Are you despised, dear reader, for your faith in that Word? Then "rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." Psalter 106.

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### **April 6 Read Matthew 13:33-35**

We saw yesterday that the kingdom of God in its outward manifestation is small and insignificant. Today's parable describes the marvelous increase and growth of that kingdom by means of the preaching of the Word as applied by the Holy Spirit to the hearts of God's people. The figure used by Jesus is that of a woman who places leaven (or yeast) in a batch of dough in preparation to bake loaves of bread. Just as one cannot see the hidden working of the yeast in the dough, so is the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the elect. The leaven is the same as the mustard seed, namely the application of the preaching of the gospel in the fertile soil of the regenerated heart. The nominal church makes a great show with its pompous liturgies and the world brings forth its scientific wonders to establish their own kingdom. But like the hidden leaven, the true gospel of Christ works silently yet powerfully by the Spirit until the entire church of God is purified and sanctified and the final manifestation of the kingdom of heaven is realized. Psalter 81.

### **April 7 Read Matthew 13:44-46**

These two short parables complement each other and both speak of something extremely valuable and costly. In the first, we see that the kingdom of heaven is likened to the treasure itself, whereas in the second, the emphasis is on the seeking of goodly pearls and the great cost involved when the flawless and incomparable pearl is found. The disciples had only an earthly concept of the kingdom as yet and must learn that the kingdom is spiritual and so precious that total sacrifice is demanded in the obtaining of it. Whether one has much earthly riches or few, he must be willing to give up everything for that treasure. That kingdom is essentially salvation itself and covenant fellowship with Christ. All its attendant blessings are bestowed on the citizens of that kingdom. In this life we find that treasure in the Church as she faithfully preaches the gospel of Christ. Are you willing to give all that you have, even your very life if necessary, for that treasure? Then great will be your reward of grace in heaven. Psalter 225.

### **April 8 Read Matthew 13:47-50**

We immediately see some similarity in this parable to that of the tares in the field. However in the former, the idea is that the devil plants the wicked among the saints and they grow up together. This parable instructs us that the kingdom of heaven is gathered by means of a net that is pulled through the sea of the world. This net is the preaching of the Word, given to the Church, and God uses this means to gather all His elect to Himself. This sea is not limited to the Jews only, as His disciples thought, but encompasses all nations wherever God is pleased to send His Word. Whereas both good and bad fish are found in the net, so is it the same in the sphere of the church throughout all ages. God is pleased to gather His church, not as individuals, but organically in the line of generations. But in these generations there is always a carnal element present. God visits the sins of the fathers by cutting off these apostate generations. When the last elect is born and the cup of iniquity is filled by the wicked, the last day arrives and the angels separate the good from the bad. The wicked are cast into hell, but the faithful remnant saved by grace shall enter eternal glory. Let us by faith embrace that Word and thank God for so great a salvation. Psalter 279.

### **April 9 Read Matthew 18:21-35**

This parable deals primarily with forgiveness. In response to Jesus' teaching earlier in the chapter, Peter asks how many times must he forgive his brother—"till seven times?" Jesus answers that we must forgive without limits. Then came the parable about the servant who had wrongly taken millions of dollars of the king's money for himself. Upon his request for mercy, the king cancelled the debt. This same man goes to his fellow servant and violently demands immediate payment of a loan of only a few dollars and unjustly sees that he is cast into prison. The lesson we are taught is that our debt to God on account of our sins is so enormous that we cannot possibly pay any or all of it, but that He forgives us for the sake of Christ. Having experienced this forgiveness, we in turn must be more than ready and willing to forgive our fellow saints and show them mercy when they sin against us. If we cannot or will not do this, we cannot expect to receive forgiveness from God for our own mountain of sin against His Most High Majesty. In the way of forgiving our repentant brother whether he comes to us or we go to him, we will experience God's grace and peace of forgiveness in our own hearts. As we commemorate the death of the Son of God on this Good Friday, may we stand in awe at the depth of God's love for us. Psalter 83.

### **April 10 Read Matthew 21:23-32**

This parable was occasioned by the question of the Pharisees to Jesus as to what authority He had to cleanse the temple. Jesus countered by asking them whether the baptism of John was from heaven or of men. They dared not answer and so Jesus pointedly spoke this parable about the willing and unwilling sons. He exposed their hypocrisy saying that when John proclaimed the way of righteousness, they did not believe. They religiously kept the outward aspects of the law but the essence, namely faith and repentance and love toward God and the neighbor, they rejected. The despised publicans and harlots who repented at the preaching of John would enter the kingdom of God, but not them unless they too repented. This was a shocking exposure of their self-righteousness and pride, and is a lesson for us as well. What is our response to the preaching of the gospel? Let us, by God's grace humble ourselves before the cross in the way of repentance and forgiveness. Psalter 363.

### **April 11 Read Matthew 21:33-44**

Jesus exposed the great wickedness of the chief priests and elders by this striking parable. The figure of a vineyard has often been used in Scripture to portray the visible manifestation of the church throughout history. In the old dispensation the nation of Israel was the nominal church and mostly wicked as the husbandmen in the parable. There was always a true remnant of the elect, but as the kingdom developed, sin developed with it. God's prophets were persecuted and slain throughout the ages until the unspeakable crime was committed of murdering the Son of God. Surely this too was the fulfillment of prophecy that the chief cornerstone would be rejected. But rejoice, dear reader, on this resurrection Sunday because "this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes." The grave could not hold our Savior. He took away our sins by His death and now reigns triumphantly. The wicked will all be cast into perdition, but God's saints will live forever in glory. Hallelujah, He is risen! Psalter 200.

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## **April 12 Read Matthew 20:1-16**

This parable has many facets and men have interpreted it in many ways. We will briefly try to uncover the gems of truth that Jesus spoke in answer to Peter's query about the disciples' reward for following Him. It is certainly clear that God is the householder who calls through the gospel. This is not an offer, but a command to repent and believe and to labor in the sphere of His kingdom. Some answer the call for their own purposes and glory, such as the Pharisees. Others, although insignificant in the eyes of the world, answer this call with a regenerated heart. These may occupy a humble place in the church, while others are called by God to serve in higher or more responsible positions. In the judgment day all receive proper rewards, even the wicked although theirs is one of condemnation. And the just will receive their reward in proportion to their works of faith, but it is all of grace alone. Let each of us strive to labor faithfully in God's kingdom in whatever place God is pleased to use us. Psalter 308.

## **April 13 Read Matthew 22:1-14**

What a graphic picture of the call of the gospel that is described for us today. What a powerful effect it accomplishes in the course of history. God the King through His servants issues both the external and internal call to faith and repentance. This is not an offer but a command from a sovereign King. To this external call, most respond by rejecting it and they stand without excuse. The internal call, however, comes by the Spirit irresistibly into the hearts of God's people and the result is that they bow before the cross in repentance and faith. The Jewish nation was first called but they rejected Christ. In the New Dispensation the Church is gathered from both Jews and Gentiles and the elect are gathered as both the bride of Christ and the wedding feast guests. Mention is made of a man who did not reject the call but came without a wedding garment. The wedding garment, which is the righteousness of Christ alone, was cast aside, for this man was determined to enter based on his own merits. This is still so prevalent today. What a comfort to know that salvation is all of God and therefore we can look forward to being partakers of that glorious wedding feast all because of Christ. Psalter 211.

## **April 14 Read Matthew 25:1-13**

Are you watching for the return of Christ and are you prepared for His return? The disciples were surprised and perplexed when Jesus foretold the destruction of the temple, and so they asked Him pointedly when that would happen and what would be the signs of His coming. Jesus responded by telling of the impending judgment and spoke the parable of the ten virgins. He used the figure of a wedding and the custom of the bride and her maidens to await the coming of the bridegroom. Then ten virgins symbolize the church as manifested in the world and the oil in the lamps as preparedness for Christ's coming. Many in the church pretend that they desire the return of Christ, but their lives depict the opposite. In contrast, the faithful church lives in hope and expectation of that blessed event and therefore heeds the command "Watch therefore." Although it may appear that He tarries, yet He is surely coming. The foolish and wicked will hear Christ say, "I know you not", but He will take His beloved Bride to Himself in unspeakable glory. Let us by His grace watch and wait and be prepared for His coming. Psalter 403.

## **April 15 Read Matthew 25:14-30**

As each of us looks with introspection at our place in the kingdom of God, what do we find and what is our attitude regarding it? We were exhorted in the previous parable to watch for our Lord's return. Now Jesus explains that during this period of waiting, we must be busy and labor faithfully in the calling and station given to each of us. It is true that God in His wisdom gives each of us our own gifts and abilities to be used in His service, but the point of the parable is that God assigns to each person his own place in His kingdom and he is called to exercise these gifts properly. Whether we are a mother in the home, an elder in the church, or a common laborer, each man's calling fits his abilities. There are those in the church like the wicked servant in the parable who in pride refuse to labor in their calling. They will receive their due punishment, but the labors of the faithful will be gloriously rewarded for they enter into the joy of their Lord. What an incentive for you and me to pray for grace to labor faithfully in our calling. Psalter 251.

## **April 16 Read Luke 10:25-37**

"And who is my neighbor?" This is the question that was put to Jesus by a Jewish leader who had sought to trap Jesus in His words. Jesus had already told him the principle of the law, namely to love God and the neighbor. Then followed the parable which actually pointed out to this self-righteous man that he should really have said "to whom am I a neighbor?" This question comes to you and me also and we would do well to see what is involved in loving our neighbor. This love must be displayed on our part to whomsoever God places in our path. This love, rooted in true compassion, must be shown to friend or foe alike. And it must never be done for self-glory but always be motivated and rooted in love for God. Let us look to Christ as He describes the "Good Samaritan" and then heed His words, "Go, and do thou likewise." Psalter 326.

## **April 17 Read Luke 11:5-13**

"Lord, teach us to pray", said one of Jesus' disciples to Him. Jesus responded with the perfect model prayer that we know so well, and followed this with a parable about the friend at midnight. Not only did Jesus teach them how to pray, but by means of this parable gave them the assurance that their prayers would be answered. The man in the parable truly needed food from his neighbor to set before his famished guest and, despite a flat refusal at first, persisted until the neighbor complied with his request. We are not only exhorted to pray but to persevere therein for God is our Father and we are His children and He is delighted to answer us for the sake of His beloved Son. We must not pray prayers for things to satisfy our carnal desires but for our daily bread, that is whatever God in His wisdom has determined is good for us today. Then Jesus went on to say that if an earthly father gives food to his son when he asks this of him, how much more will our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. Pray, people of God. Seek and you will find; knock and it shall be opened to you. Psalter 186.

## **April 18 Read Luke 12:13-21**

Upon what do we set our affections in this life, dear readers? Is it primarily in the acquisition of earthly goods and a stubborn determination to provide for a long and comfortable retirement? We hope this is not true, for then we are like the rich fool in the parable who was engrossed in the sin of covetousness. This man in his sinful folly boasted to his soul that by his own strength he

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gathered all his earthly riches. He failed to realize that these things were really not his at all but given him to be used in the service of God. How easy it is for us to fall into this same sinful thought. Jesus warns us that a man's life does not consist in an abundance of earthly possessions, but it does consist of faithful stewardship. It consists of heavenly treasures that will last eternally. Essentially this treasure is Christ and all the benefits He bestows upon us by His Spirit. Shall we not then by His grace seek these riches? Then when our soul is required of us, we stand naked in ourselves, but fully clothed with the righteousness of our Savior. Psalter 383.

#### **April 19 Read Luke 13:1-9**

After hearing Jesus speak in the previous chapter of judgments that men rightly receive for their sins, some Jews related to Jesus the monstrous crime of Pilate who murdered certain Galileans in the temple. We may rightly assume that their purpose was to condemn these victims as great sinners, while smugly imagining themselves as far better. Jesus deflated their ego immediately by declaring that unless they repent, they too were as guilty. Then follows the parable of the barren fig tree that points to the nation of Israel. All through their history they were wondrously led by God who continually led them, delivered them, fed them, and preached to them. But the majority repeatedly rejected God in wicked unbelief. God always preserved a remnant, but the nation as a whole brought no fruits of repentance and made themselves ripe for judgment. In perfect justice this barren fig tree will be cut down when their cup of iniquity is full. They knew what God justly demanded but they despised His word and hence are without excuse. May we by God's grace not rebel but walk in daily repentance and experience the mercy of God's forgiveness in Christ. Psalter 366.

#### **April 20 Read Luke 14:7-11**

Is there anyone who is not guilty of the sin of pride? The dictionary defines it as inordinate self-esteem. We may think that this does not apply to us, but we had better think again, for pride is really at the root of all sin. The Pharisees in the parable were singled out as being particularly proud. These vain men prided themselves in keeping the letter of the law and considered themselves better than the average person. We can and do so easily fall into this sin as well. Jesus points out how grievous this is by saying that whosoever exalts himself shall be abased. Then in mercy He adds that he who humbles himself shall be exalted. How can we do that? Only by the power of regenerating grace and prayer can we strive to humble ourselves and plead the merits of our Savior who humbled Himself even to the death of the cross for our sakes. Psalter 141.

#### **April 21 Read Luke 14:16-24**

This is the second parable that Jesus spoke during the ceremonial meal at a Pharisee's house. The first dealt with the pride they displayed by desiring the chief seats. Now Jesus points out their purely selfish motive in inviting their kinsmen and rich neighbors to dine in order that they might receive an invitation in return. This parable points to the glorious banquet feast in heaven. God through the call of the gospel commands all men to faith and repentance. That some come and others refuse is due to the two-edged effect of the sword of the Word. The rich and mighty of this world have no use for the Word and make all sorts of excuses and refusals. God has chosen the poor and despised remnant and mercifully compels them to come to the table by His efficacious and sovereign grace. He justly banishes the wicked from this feast but

makes room for those who come by the way of the cross and who are poor in spirit. Do you hear this call of the gospel dear reader? Come to this supper in heartfelt sorrow for sin and you will be assured of a place even now. Psalter 7.

#### **April 22 Read Luke 15:1-7**

This is the first of three parables that deal with the finding and restoration of the lost sinner. All are similar, but different in emphasis. Because the gospel of Jesus attracted publicans and sinners, the Pharisees were only too glad to see this. It gave credence to their judgment of Jesus as an imposter for what type of a Messiah, which they pictured, would seek and receive such people as these. Jesus responded with the parable of the lost sheep and the shepherd who sought it. Without elaborating on all of the elements in the parable, we see that the Pharisees and scribes were the ninety and nine sheep who in their own opinion needed no repentance. But the publicans and sinners who represent the elect of God heard the Savior's words and realized their lost condition. In Isaiah 53:6 we read, "All we like sheep have gone astray." How true this is for all of us. But Jesus, the Good Shepherd, seeks us, finds us, and brings us back into the fold. Then there is joy in heaven and in our hearts. Psalter 55.

#### **April 23 Read Luke 15:8-10**

Whereas the former parable emphasized the seeking shepherd, this one deals with the repentant sinner. It was directed primarily at the Pharisees who in their own estimation needed no repentance. Were they not the leaders of the people and devout keepers of the law? But Jesus exposes their hypocrisy. This short parable speaks of a woman, a lost coin, a broom and a candle. These elements very likely refer respectively to the instituted church, a lost elect sinner, and the preaching of the gospel which is a shining light and which stirs up the sinner's conscience. God works through means and the preaching of His Word always has an effect. It hardens the reprobate but softens the heart of the elect sinner by the preaching or by the elders. Just as the coin represents a great amount of value to the woman, so each member of the church is of great value to that body. Repentance once again restores fellowship. Repentance involves a sincere sorrow for sin, a conscious turning to God and a confession based only on the cross of Christ. Then there is joy in heaven, joy in the heart of the sinner, and joy in the church. How wondrous are the ways of God, unfathomed and unknown! Psalter 318.

#### **April 24 Read Luke 15:11-32**

What a beautiful picture of God's unchanging love is revealed in this last of three parables directed at the Pharisees who were angered when Jesus received the repentant sinner. The wayward son and his elder brother were both brought up in the church. However, the elder son represented by the Pharisees, only outwardly observed the law and were so zealous that they believed themselves righteous and in no need of repentance. The younger son forsook the church for a time and is a picture of the publicans and sinners who repented at the preaching of Jesus. Where do you and I stand, dear reader? How often do we not stray from the paths of righteousness and if it were not for the sovereign electing love of God, who irresistibly draws us back to the fold of the church, we would perish. Just as the father in the parable receives his prodigal son, so our Heavenly Father receives us with joy when we bow in humble repentance at His feet. How is this possible? Only because Christ took away our sins on the cross. We cannot begin

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to fathom the depth of God's forgiving love, but we may humbly believe it by His grace, and look forward to the heavenly banquet prepared for His beloved church. Psalter 280.

**April 25 Read Luke 16:1-12**

Jesus continues to condemn the proud life-style and earthly goals of the Pharisees and they undoubtedly understood the thrust of His parable, for we read in verse 11 that they heard and derided Him. Commentators however have many problems interpreting this parable. Jesus, by saying that we must make friends of the unrighteous mammon, emphasizes by contrast, our spiritual calling to be good stewards. The steward in the parable, who was responsible for his master's goods, wasted them, but before he was dismissed he made his master's creditors indebted to himself by his foresight so he would be provided for. The world in its quest for a paradise on earth will pursue this goal with total dedication. We are stewards too. We are stewards of all that God has entrusted to us. Do we have total devotion for the true riches? Jesus sets before us the example of the world that we must emulate, not for the same goal they strive for, but the enthusiasm they manifest in the attaining of their goal. The reward of the faithless steward was undoubtedly assured when his position was terminated. Our reward as faithful stewards is a reward of grace. Pray for grace to be faithful to our calling. Psalter 36.

**April 26 Read Luke 16:19-31**

In response to the derision of the Pharisees, Jesus spoke this parable to them that pointed to their deserved punishment. We are all familiar with the rich Jew who, though in his own eyes was a shining example of a righteous law keeper, yet he despised the basic principle of the law to love God and his neighbor. Poor Lazarus, who lay at his gate in dire need of food and help, was intentionally ignored. Death came to both. The rich man awoke in hell but Lazarus was carried to Abraham's bosom by angels. Although the language is figurative, yet important truths are spoken. Two requests are made to Abraham by the rich man in hell; the first for a drop of water from Lazarus to cool his tongue and the second that Lazarus be sent to his brethren on earth which would convince them to repent. Both requests were denied. His brothers had the gospel that pointed to Christ. God binds Himself to this means, and this Word either softens or hardens. The wicked in hell must confess that God is just, but His people who are persecuted and despised in this life are the ones who by grace believed the gospel of Christ and have fled for refuge to His cross and are forever comforted in heaven. Psalter 113.

**April 27 Read Luke 17:7-10**

Jesus shows us in this parable how we are duty-bound to use every moment in our lives in complete service to our Creator. He possesses total control over our entire being and labors. All that we have and are has been received from Him. Jesus speaks of a master who owns a servant. This servant is not a hired hand, but literally a slave who is the master's property and owned by him completely. His duty is to serve his master obediently and willingly, putting forth all effort to accomplish this. Jesus compares this master-slave relation to God who has the right to demand the same from us. We must remember that our person, our life and our labors are all the property of God who demands that we bow before Him in love. We are called to willingly serve Him and confess that even if we performed our calling perfectly, yet we are unprofitable servants who merit nothing. This is a humbling word, but it

causes us to realize that we are nothing, that God is everything, and that the only merit we have is that which was merited for us by Christ on the cross. Psalter 107.

**April 28 Read Luke 18:1-8**

A great incentive to pray fervently and not to faint is given to the church by the Lord in this parable. Even as the widow continually cries to the earthly judge for vindication from her adversaries, so the church, which is beset by many enemies from within and without, cries to God for protection and deliverance. We have here a comparison made between the earthly judge and the righteous Judge of all the earth, but we also have a sharp contrast between the two. The earthly judge was evil and did not care one whit for the widow's plight, but because of her tireless and persistent cries, he avenged her of her adversaries. The heavenly Judge loves justice, will always do what is right, and is deeply concerned with the prayers of His beloved church. Jesus said that if an earthly judge would avenge the widow, how much more would not God deliver His church from their enemies. Although it may seem that God does not answer, yet He is longsuffering and assures us that we will emerge from our trials purified and ready for our place in glory. Psalter 387.

**April 29 Read Luke 18:9-15**

How simple was the example, but how profound the message that Jesus spoke in condemnation of the proud and justification of the humble. The sin of pride reached its culmination in the Pharisee who entered the temple to pray. God must be pleased with him he thought, since he could keep every aspect of the law and more. Surely he merited salvation. A despised publican also entered the temple, but he went to an obscure corner. The Pharisee extolled himself in front of the people. The publican, unable to articulate a prayer, could only whisper to God for mercy. Oh, the publican wasn't free of the sin of pride any more than we are, but by the grace of God he realized his sin and in faith pleaded for forgiveness. The Pharisee willfully ignored the heart of the law to love God and the neighbor. He loved himself and therefore hated others and really God as well. Jesus condemned this sin and told of the consequences, but stated that the publican went home justified. What a glorious blessing! Justification speaks of sins forgiven and peace with God through Christ. Let us also each day anew pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Psalter 140.

**April 30 Read Luke 19:11-27**

The disciples as well as the people expected that now Jesus was going to establish His earthly kingdom. To correct this misconception, He spoke this parable of the nobleman who was going to a far country to obtain a kingdom and then return. Prior to his leaving he distributed a pound apiece to his servants in order that they might trade or invest them until he came back. Jesus is this nobleman who went to heaven to establish His spiritual kingdom and will return when all things are ready. This cannot occur until the last elect is born and converted and the cup of iniquity is filled by the wicked. The pound signifies His Word that He gives to the church with the calling to use and be faithful to that Word. The faithful in the church speak of it and make good use of it in their church, homes, schools, and wherever they go. There are others in the church that may outwardly profess a love for that Word, but hide it and never speak or use it. May we use that Word diligently until our Lord returns, and in the measure of our faithfulness expect a reward, not of merit, but by sovereign grace alone. Psalter 337.

# The Tenth Pointer on the Spiritual Roadmap: Contentment

by Rev. Doug Kuiper



*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's.* Exodus 20:17.

*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* I Timothy 6:6-10.

**Y**oung people, you know that a freeway is a divided highway. Two strips of pavement lie parallel, separated by a concrete barrier or a grassy median. The two strips look identical—they have the same number of lanes, the same kind of markings to keep traffic in its own lane, the same kind of road signs. Because they look identical, it might seem to you that it does not matter which strip you travel on. And yet, it does matter, doesn't it: for traffic on each strip travels in opposite directions. You are either on that strip in which you make progress toward your destination, or you are on that strip in which you travel farther and farther away from where you really want to go.

That is like life. Outwardly, my life and the life of an ungodly unbeliever are not so much different. We perform the same outward actions—eat, drink, buy, sell, work, sleep. We do so in the same community or society. We wear similar clothing, live in similar houses, and drive similar cars.

But, while the roads we are on appear to be the same, the fact is that we travel to exactly opposite destinations!

The two destinations, we remember, are ultimately eternal life or eternal destruction. We travel toward the one destination by living in obedience to God's law to God's glory; toward the other, by disobeying God and living for ourselves.

But exactly because the strips of pavement look alike, we might be tempted to go in the other direction for awhile. And doing so, we might think, this strip of pavement traveling in disobedience toward hell is no worse than the one traveling in obedience toward heaven! If anything, it is nicer, wider, easier (Matt. 7:13).

Covetousness often makes us say such things.

To covet is to desire. In itself, desiring is not wrong. The apostle Paul twice tells the Corinthians that they should covet, desire, spiritual gifts: "covet earnestly the best gifts" (I Cor. 12:31); "covet to prophesy" (I Cor. 14:39). Notice that in both instances, Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, not earthly possessions; therefore, the way to get these gifts would be to pray for them. One shows he covets spiritual gifts by praying for them, and resolving to use them to God's glory.

But often we desire that which is not ours. We desire our neighbor's possessions—his wife, servants, animals, or house. Or we desire his way of living, his way of enjoying life, his apparent happiness with life in the service of sin.

At such times, we are looking at those traveling on the other side of the median, heading in the opposite direction, and saying of them: "I wish I was like them. I want to be on that side of the highway."

This God forbids: "Thou shalt not covet." Also those who are covetous, God tells us, will not inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:10). And, I Timothy 6 reminds us, those who will be rich (that is, who want to be rich) fall into temptation, and a snare, and are in danger of being drowned in perdition (the destruction of hell).



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Maybe you noticed that this commandment seems to repeat all the previous commands, especially those of the second table of the law. We may not covet our neighbor's house or possessions—but the eighth commandment taught us that, too. We may not covet our neighbor's wife—but the seventh commandment taught us that. We may not covet our neighbor's position in life—but the sixth commandment taught us that. Why does the tenth commandment seem to repeat the previous commandments?

First, remember that repetition is always good. The ten commandments, given at Sinai (Ex. 19), were repeated to Israel (Deut. 5). And throughout Scripture there are many reminders of the need to keep the law generally, or individual commandments in particular. We need reminders because one warning does not always register with us; or, because we so soon forget.

But second, the tenth commandment is not mere repetition. The sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments forbade certain *actions*—those of killing, committing adultery, and stealing. But the tenth commandment regards our *heart*. It reminds us that the keeping of the law of God is not only something we do with our hands and feet, eyes and ears, but also with our heart itself.

Traveling The Way of Thankful Obedience requires that our obedient actions proceed from a heart that truly loves God.

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### A heart which truly loves God is a heart which is content.

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A heart which truly loves God is a heart which is content. Not to covet is to be content. Contentment is the opposite of covetousness.

One is content who sincerely says, "I have enough. I do not need more." One does not covet his neighbor's house who says, "The house God provided me is sufficient." One does not covet his neighbor's wife who says, "I sincerely love my wife." One does not covet his neighbor's possessions who says, "I am genuinely content with my own possessions."

Contentment proceeds from a realization that God, in His providence, cares for us. In caring for me, He has given me certain things—a certain wife, and certain possessions. These are the things which I need to serve Him in the cause of His kingdom. To my neighbor He has given other things—for my neighbor needs them to serve God in the cause of His kingdom.

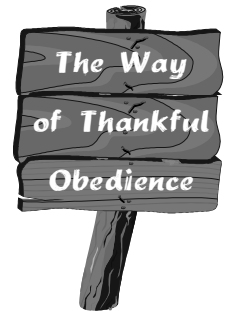
Young people, are you content with what you have, and with your position in life?

You are single. One must be content in singlehood. That does not mean one does not hope for a spouse, and even pray for a spouse. But at the moment, one realizes that God is not pleased to give a spouse—and one is content.

You do not have many material possessions. Compared to other young people in the world, in fact, you *do* have much. But others have more than you. Are you content? One day God might give you to own your own car, or house; but at the moment, you must realize that God is not pleased to give you such, and you must be content with that.

Such contentment does not come easily. It is not our nature to be content. But God provides it in His grace. Pray for contentment! God answers that prayer over a period of time, and through the experiences of life. The apostle Paul was not so young anymore when he was able to say, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11). Notice—he had to *learn* it. But God will cause His people, even His *young* people, to learn contentment; He will give that grace to those who seek it of Him.

When one has the grace of contentment, one is happy to be traveling the Way of Thankful Obedience. To travel on the other side of the median is not as great a temptation to us who are content. Then we will realize that, even with little in the way of earthly possessions, we will still reach our destination!



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Let us covet the ability to glorify God in the position He has placed us, and with the gifts He has given us.

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But let us covet spiritual gifts. Let us covet the ability to glorify God in the position He has placed us, and with the gifts He has given us. Let us covet the ability truly to love God and our neighbor, to serve our fellow saints, to rejoice in the knowledge of the truth. Let us covet the gifts of faith, hope, and love!

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We cannot steal these gifts from our neighbor; we cannot even steal them from God.

We must pray for them.

And God will give them! He will give them to us who sincerely desire to please Him, and are sincerely thankful for the gifts He has already given us. That is,

He will give them to those who travel The Way of Thankful Obedience. ❖

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

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Our Young People's Federation

## Federation Board Activities

by Brad Vander Veen

The purpose of the Federation Board is to guide and unite the Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies in order that they may continue to grow in faith and doctrine. The members of the Federation Board meet on the first Sunday of each month, and often discuss means of pursuing this goal. I would like to share with you some of the matters the Federation Board has discussed throughout the last year.

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One issue the Federation Board has discussed lately is the apparent decline in the age of young people active in their local society.

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One issue the Federation Board has discussed lately is the apparent decline in the age of young people active in their local society. It seems that through the organization of Young Adult's Societies, many of the "older" young people (19-24 years of age) have become disassociated from the Young People's Societies.

This is a concern of the Federation Board from a congregational, as well as a denominational point of view. The younger, high school age young people need the spiritual leadership and mature example that can be given them by those who are older and already out of high school.

The Federation Board members have offered some practical suggestions. One is to incorporate the Young Adult's Societies into the Federation Board. A letter was

sent out to the Young Adult's Societies asking them to consider this; however, no responses were received. The Federation Board would appreciate responses to this suggestion, as well as other suggestions that could improve the current scenario.

Other suggestions have been given as well. These include having Young Adult's Society members become involved in the Young People's Society, either as leaders or mentors. Another suggestion was to have the Young Adult's and Young People's Societies have activities and outings together, providing both groups with fellowship essential to the Christian life.

Another issue the Federation Board has entertained is the possibility of purchasing property that could be used, among other things, as a permanent site for the PRYP Convention. This issue was brought to the table by a member of the Federation Board who has been asked by members of our denomination about the possibility of having our own camp. Driving the importance of this issue is the rising cost of conventions, as well as the difficulty of finding a camp suitable for the PRYP Convention each year.

A committee of Federation Board members, along with a few local businessmen, was assembled to take a detailed look at the possibility of having our own camp. The committee discussed a few scenarios—from purchasing land and buildings at full cost, to receiving a partial donation, to receiving a donation of property free and clear. Even if we owned the property free and clear, it was decided that we are still better off continuing to do our conventions the way we have been (renting a camp for a week), because the cost to run and maintain a camp

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would still be greater than the lodging expenses of the last few conventions.

The Federation Board is also busy with the annual duties of preparing for the upcoming Young People's Convention. Although the steering committee of the host church does most of the planning, the Federation Board oversees the work and assists the steering committee whenever necessary. This year the convention is being hosted by Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, and will be held at Covenant Hills Camp in Otisville, Michigan from July 12-16, 2004. The theme for the convention is "Drawing Nearer to God."

Other matters that the Federation Board has been busy with are: nominating new Federation Board members, collecting dues and fundraisers from the churches in our denomination to support the annual PRYP Con-

vention, overseeing the work of the *Beacon Lights* and Scholarship Committee, and organizing Young People's mass meetings and singspirations.

The Federation Board considers these issues to be of great importance. We hope you consider them to be equally important, and would ask that if any of the readers of the *Beacon Lights* have any questions, concerns, or ideas relating to the welfare of the Protestant Reformed Youth, that they feel free to write any of the members of the Federation Board (listed inside the front cover of this magazine). The Federation Board covets your prayers, and looks forward to hearing from you. ❖

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*Brad is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan. He is the current treasurer of the Federation Board.*

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Church History

## George M. Ophoff (14b)

by Prof. Herman Hanko

Classis Grand Rapids West was almost indecently eager to censure Rev. Ophoff for his opposition to the decisions of the Synod of 1924 on the doctrine of common grace. Some quotations from the minutes will reveal this.

Classis began its meetings Tuesday morning, January 13, 1925, in the La Grave Avenue Christian Reformed Church. It did not actually get to the problem of Rev. Ophoff until Friday morning. The problem came to Classis by way of overtures from eight Christian Reformed consistories, six of which requested Classis to deal with Ophoff's teachings on common grace by condemning them; and two of which requested Classis to refrain from any decisions on the matter. It is striking that the six overtures which asked Classis to deal with Rev. Ophoff by condemning him were, apart from incidentals, almost identical in content—even to the very wording which was employed. This certainly was more than coincidence.

We quote here from one overture to give the reader some idea of their character.

The consistory of \_\_\_\_\_ requests the classis to ask the consistories of Hope and Kalamazoo I (Rev. Henry Danhof's consistory, HH) whether they have asked their respective ministers to declare themselves in agreement yes or no with the "three points" of the Synod of Kalamazoo. In case this has not been done the consistory requests classis to require such a declaration of their respective ministers and requests classis to take all further steps as conditions may demand, that shall guarantee unity of doctrine in our classis and proper submission to the doctrinal deliverance of Synod.

Grounds:

- 1) Ample justification for such a request to minister or consistory is found in the Formula of Subscription.
- 2) The "three points" of Synod are automatically binding on all the ministers of our churches. See Art. 31 of our Church Order.
- 3) The editorial policy of the *Standard Bearer* is that of plain and open insubordination to Synodical authority.

4) The peace of unity of the church demands decisive action in this matter.

It was rather strange that the overtures asked Classis to ask only the consistories of Hope and Kalamazoo I whether they had confronted their pastors with the question of their agreement with the “three points.” The grounds indicate that these two men were under some suspicion because of the *Standard Bearer*; but the possibility existed that there were other ministers in the denomination who, although they had not written anything publicly, were also in disagreement with the decisions. A request like this, one would think, ought to be made to all the consistories within Classis Grand Rapids West, and ultimately in the entire denomination.

Further, this matter of the editorial policy of the *Standard Bearer* is rather a strange ground. When the overtures were prepared, only one issue of the *Standard Bearer* had been distributed, and Rev. Ophoff had no article in it. His name did appear on the masthead, and apparently the Classis decided that was enough for his consistory to confront him with a question concerning his submission to the decisions on the “three points.” It seems as if Classis was being advised to hold Rev. Ophoff responsible for the opposition to common grace expressed by Revs. Hoeksema and Danhof in the very first issue of the magazine.

Whatever had been their reasoning, the Classis was correct in its conclusion. Rev. Ophoff did oppose the “three points.”

All the overtures were given into the hands of a committee to serve Classis with advice. The report submitted by the committee is quite lengthy; we quote only a part of the advice.

Your committee advises classis to request the consistory of Hope to inform classis whether it has required of its minister that he declare himself unequivocally whether he is in full agreement, yes or no, with the three points of the Synod of Kalamazoo.

This advice was adopted and Article 63 of the minutes reads:

The chair now asks the delegates of the consistory of Hope church whether or not they have asked their pastor if he agrees with the three points adopted by the Synod of 1924 in re the Common Grace question.

Elder DeJong of the Hope church is unable to answer this question since he has been a member of this consistory for but a short time. Rev. Ophoff, however, states that this question has never been asked him by said consistory.

As a result of this answer of Rev. Ophoff, a letter was sent to the consistory of Hope which read:

Dear Brethren,

This Classis Grand Rapids West hereby requires you to require of your minister:

1) That he declare himself unequivocally whether he is in full agreement, yes or no, with the three points of the Synod of Kalamazoo.

2) An unconditional promise that in the matter of the three points he will submit (with the right of appeal) to the Confessional Standards of the Church as interpreted by the Synod of 1924, i.e., neither publicly nor privately propose, teach or defend either by preaching or writing any sentiment contrary to the Confessional Standards of the Church as interpreted

## The Reader Asks

# Question Request

**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: [jlanning@msn.com](mailto:jlanning@msn.com)

Rev. Laning is temporarily unable to devote time for responses. Questions are still welcomed and will be answered when he is able to do so.

by the Synod of 1924 and in case of an appeal that he in the interim will acquiesce in the judgment already passed by the Synod of 1924.

The Classis further requests you to furnish the Classis by 10:00 A.M, Wednesday morning, Jan. 21, 1925, with a definite written answer of your pastor to the two-fold requirement of the Consistory.

Fraternally yours,

The consistory presented its answer in time, and Rev. Ophoff read the answer of the consistory; but this document is not included in the minutes. ❖

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*Prof. Hanko is a professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Seminary. This article is reprinted from the March, 1977 issue of Beacon Lights.*

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## Of the House of Orange

by J. P. de Klerk

**T**his photograph was made in the Dutch royal palace (Noordeinde), The Hague, on February 7, 1926, the day that Queen Wilhelmina was mar-



ried 25 years with Prince Hendrik van Mecklenburg-Schwerin. Their daughter, Princes Juliana is the mother of the recent Queen of The Netherlands, Beatrix.

The Prince died in 1934; the Queen in 1962. During the five years of World War II, when The Netherlands was occupied by the armies of Nazi Germany, she lived in and governed in London and was known as the “mother of the Resistance” (the underground movement which tried to protect and save people sought by the S.S. fanatics of Hitler; especially the Jews, but also Christian ministers and politicians in hiding). She gave spiritual and moral support to all those who had fled and escaped to London, leaving behind everything, willing to fight for the liberation of The Netherlands. Out of them a “Princes Irene Brigade” was formed, which became part of the Allied forces who landed in 1944 in Normandy, France, under General Eisenhower. As soon as the southern part of The Netherlands was free again, she went back and stayed in Tilburg, till the rest of the country became free on May 5, 1945.

On May 12, 1948 she stepped down from the throne and her daughter Juliana became Queen. She then went to live in the palace “Het Loo” in Apeldoorn in the eastern part of the country.

They all were strictly State Reformed. Queen Wilhelmina had her own “in house” palace minister. (He blessed the marriage of Princes Juliana in the Jacobs Church in The Hague.) ❖

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



# The Oude Kerk

**T**his big Dutch Church of the State Reformed Congregation of Amsterdam was built in 1306. It was followed, a century later, by the “Nieuwe Kerk” which became more important because it was close to the Royal Palace (built by Jacob van Campen in 1648–1655).

Amsterdam began in the thirteenth century as a fishermen’s village until 1240 when a dam was made in the river Amstel. It became an important city in 1300 and a very busy commercial center in the days of the German Emperor Charles V, who, in fact, owned The Netherlands. The traders delivered and bought goods all over the world. The city got a council with four mayors.

The Reformation was not appreciated by the majority of the inhabitants but was allowed to develop until 1566. Then the Reformed people had to gather secretly in private houses. But in 1578, Prince William I of Orange announced that he wanted freedom of religion in The Netherlands. So the Reformed Church came out in the open, and the first ministers were Rev. Johan Kuchlinus and Rev. Peter van Hardenberg, who came both from the German city of Emden. Remember, Prince William was also of German origin (Nassau-Dillenburg). Later there were difficulties with the Roman Catholics as well as the Remonstrants, so that the Reformed Church was forced to defend itself all the time. ❖

## Church News

### BAPTISMS

*“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”*

*Mark 16:16*

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

Cristyn Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron Gunnink—Byron Center, MI

Caleb Arthur, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jim VerHey—Edgerton, MN

Ava Madison, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jan Zeldenrust—Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Ashley Charmaine, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joe Van Gelderen—Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Alex Steven, son of Mr. & Mrs. Scott Lubbers—Georgetown, MI

Jordan Mark, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mike Hoeksema—Grace, MI

Grant Marcus, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dan Hanko—Grace, MI

Grace Laray, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jason Vander Meulen—Grandville, MI

Caleb Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Peter Boverhof—Grandville, MI

Abrielle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jim Schimmel—Holland, MI

Jacob, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brian VanderKolk—Holland, MI

Lydia Yvonne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Carlyle Miersma—Hope, MI

Grace Lynda, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brian Kalsbeek—Hope, MI

Isabel Clare, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy Lubbers—South Holland, IL

Sohpia Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel Smits—South Holland, IL

Madison Jamie and Morgan Riley, daughters of Mr. & Mrs. Matt Bennett—South Holland, IL

Madalyn Hope, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Todd Groenendyk—Southwest, MI

Joshua Steven, son of Mr. & Mrs. John Ophoff—Southwest, MI

### CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

*“...and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”*

*Romans 10:10*

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

Sarah Booth—Byron Center, MI

William Booth—Byron Center, MI

Carrie Gunnink—Byron Center, MI

### MARRIAGES

*“...and they twain shall be one flesh.”*

*Matthew 19:5*

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Doug Feenstra and Miss Rachel Kuiper—Hope, MI

Mr. Henry Westhuis and Miss Valerie Engelsma—Trinity, MI

# "LITTLE LIGHTS"

*... let it shine!*

by Connie Meyer

## One Man Against the World (5)

In the summer of A.D. 325 the Council of Nicea brought men of the church together from all over the world. Their task? To write a creed stating the true nature of Jesus Christ. It would be a creed that would stand for centuries as basic doctrine of the church of Christ everywhere. It is a creed we still hold to today. But it was a creed not easily born.

A few said Jesus was indeed God. Most said He was not really God, but only like God. Maybe the solution would be to compromise. "Let us word the creed in such a way that all the council can agree," was the cry. They had already been meeting for weeks. It was time to finish the work. This sounded good to the men.

Then one of the council members pointed out that these words could mean whatever they liked. They could believe anything about Jesus and still say they held to this creed. How convenient! How nice!

How terrible. Then the creed would mean nothing at all. Even worse, it would allow all sorts of errors and lies to be confessed. Archbishop Alexander knew the creed must be specific and perfectly clear—Jesus is God; Jesus is begotten; Jesus was not made. Alexander's young secretary and deacon, Athanasius, was quick to see the work of the devil in this evil compromise.

"Indeed," explained Athanasius, "the Son of God made all things! How then could He be made Himself? And how could He atone for our sins except He be God in the flesh?"

The bishops could see the truth of these things. Finally they wrote a creed that would express the true nature of our Lord. The Nicene Creed was penned and signed. An important victory had been won.

But the outspoken young Athanasius was now a marked man. Soon he would be Archbishop in Alexander's stead, a high and blessed calling. Yet he would spend the rest of his life hated by those who loved not the truth. The battle was not over by far, but the groundwork had been securely laid. The truth of Jesus Christ had been set forth. And God used one man against the world to do it.

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

Unscramble the following words taken from the Nicene Creed, a creed which can be found in the back of the Psalter:


"I \_\_\_\_\_ ...in one LORD JESUS CHRIST, the \_\_\_\_\_ Son of God, \_\_\_\_\_ of the  
 liveeeb \_\_\_\_\_ nyol tobeengt nlotegteb  
 Father, \_\_\_\_\_, God of God, Light of Light, \_\_\_\_\_ God of \_\_\_\_\_ God, \_\_\_\_\_,  
 reefob lal slowdr \_\_\_\_\_ rute etur gentobet  
 \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ the Father; by \_\_\_\_\_  
 ton adem nibge noe ceesnse hiwt \_\_\_\_\_ mowh lla snighth reew  
 \_\_\_\_\_"  
 deam

—The Nicene Creed

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THEME **Drawing  
Near to GOD**

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

PSALM 73:28

*Covenant Hills Otisville MI.*  
JULY 12-16

*Ministers:*  
Rev. R. Cammenga, Rev. A. Kleyn,  
Rev. W. Langerak.

Web site: [www.PRCconvention.com](http://www.PRCconvention.com).