

Beacon Lights

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*“But whoso hath this world’s good,
and seeth his brother have need,
and shutteth up his bowels of
compassion from him,
how dwelleth the love of God in him?”*

1 John 3:17

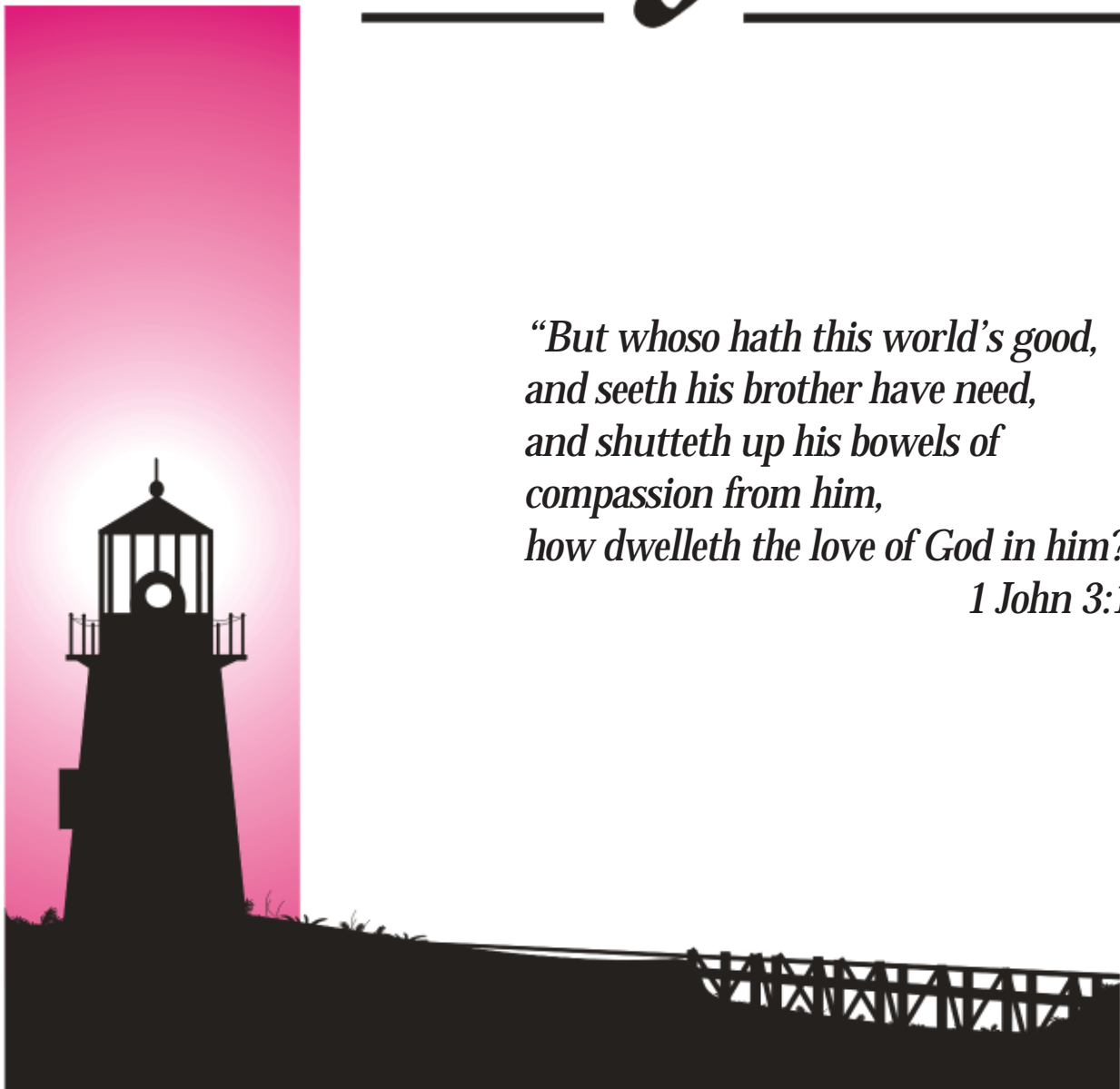


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Buy the Truth, and Sell It Not (2)

by Aaron J. Cleveland

We ended last time considering the various ways in which we are commanded to “buy” the truth. We found that the truth is most importantly the doctrines which we believe as they are found in God’s Word and summarized in our Reformed creeds. That we believe and love that truth will be evident by our godly walk of life in the midst of a sinful world.

There is one more aspect to buying the truth which we must still consider. We noticed last time that we must be willing to give up certain things for the sake of the truth, such as pursuing certain professions, jobs, friendships, and pleasures. But, one who buys the truth is willing even to suffer loss for the sake of the truth. This was a lesson which Jesus’ disciples found very difficult to learn. Peter, when taught by Jesus that “he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day,” replied to Jesus, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee” (Matt. 16:21-26). After rebuking Peter, Jesus went on to explain to His disciples that if any man would follow Jesus, “let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” Our buying the truth means that we follow Jesus in the way of denying ourselves. We will suffer loss for the sake of the truth. Some will hate us and separate us from their company and cast our name out as evil (Luke 6:22). In our own history as Protestant Reformed Churches we have the example of Rev. Herman Hoeksema who faithfully preached the truth of God’s sovereign and particular grace. He, along with those who loved that truth were hated, cast out of the Christian Reformed Church, and were lightly esteemed among the Reformed churches of the day, even as we are today. Yet, as those who “buy” the truth, we are willing to suffer loss and bear reproach for the sake of that truth.

When we, by faith, are “buying” the truth, we show this by submitting to that truth as it is proclaimed in the preaching. This means that we are to be members of a church where, according to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, the “pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein.” Our standard for evaluating a church is not the level of friendliness exhibited (although true friendliness certainly is found where the truth abides), the style of music, the number of activities for young adults, or the size of a church. Our standard for evaluating our own church membership is this “Where is the truth of God’s Word most purely preached?” One who “buys” the truth desires sound preaching. One cannot say before God that he is obeying this command if he willingly joins himself to a church where he knows false doctrine is tolerated or preached.

Now that we have an understanding of what it means to “buy the truth,” let us notice that God makes the command even more specific by adding “and sell it not.” When we sell something, we are parting with an object which we have in our possession. We exchange it for something else. For example, we may

sell a car we own for money. We then use that money to buy another, perhaps newer car. Throughout our lives we buy and sell things. We start out with a smaller house, sell it, and buy a bigger house to meet our needs. When we get older and no longer need a large house, we sell it, and buy a smaller dwelling. God says that we may not do this with the truth. We may only buy the truth and never give up possession of it in exchange for something else.

Why may we never “sell” the truth? The truth is the only possession we have which is of any lasting value. Our possessions of clothes, cars, homes, and money cease to be ours when we die. Further, they will all be destroyed with fire at the coming of our Lord. Earthly possessions serve the purpose only of sustaining our physical life on this earth. However, “the truth of the Lord endureth for ever” (Psalm 117:2). That truth is ours now and will be forever. That truth sustains our souls. By means of believing the truth God is pleased to save us. Therefore, to “sell” that truth or exchange it for something we consider “close enough” will lead to our spiritual death. Without exception God forbids we sell the truth.

There are many examples of how a young person may sell the truth or be tempted to exchange it for a corruption of the truth. A young man shows that he is willing to sell the truth when he dates a young woman who is not of like faith. He knows that if he is to marry her, it will mean giving up the truth, even if he does so little by little.

The Protestant Reformed young man who separates himself from the fellowship of the church and begins to attend or even join a church where the gospel is not faithfully proclaimed and where false doctrine is tolerated shows his willingness to sell the truth.

Young people (and sadly many of their parents) who listen to the godless music of this world sell the truth. It is not a harmless thing for children of God to listen to music which is antithetical to a godly walk in the paths of truth. Those who listen to this music begin to come under the influence of it. Their thoughts, language, dress, and conduct begin to reflect the values of the music they hear. If one continues to walk in the sin of listening to this music, one finds that he is more and more given over to greater sins of living out the sins which the music expresses. Perhaps they are sins of rebellion against authority, sins of fornication, or sins of taking God’s name in vain.

Watching the dramas of the world, whether on the television or at a theater, necessarily involves selling the truth. Prof. R. Dykstra, in a recent series of editorials in *The Standard Bearer* (Volume 81, Issues 6-9), demonstrates how the viewing of drama is harmful to a godly walk and hinders the believer in his fight against sin. Writes Prof. Dykstra,

You can be sure that this [viewing drama] affects a man’s life. Continued exposure to sin for the sake of entertainment wears a man down spiritually. Initially he and his family are shocked or at least uncomfortable when the children in the sitcom openly mock their “parents.” However, the discomfort wears off, and the disrespectful attitude rubs off. If this sin is not checked, similar insolent behavior will appear in his own home. By then, perhaps, he will shrug it off—all families are like that, the television reassures him, and the children will turn out fine. He takes sin lightly. ...The world’s drama cripples the new man within, hardens the heart, destroys covenant family life, and corrupts holy living (Vol. 81, Number 8, pg. 174).

One can also sell the truth by way of ignoring it and allowing it to sit like a dusty Bible, undisturbed upon a bookshelf. So much time can be spent with friends, at the mall, pursuing sports, working, and away from home. Little time is left for fellowship within the home, edifying reading, and understanding God’s Word in Bible study and how it applies to our daily lives.

A young man shows that he is willing to sell the truth when he dates a young woman who is not of like faith.

All of us, young and old, know that we fall short of obeying this command perfectly. When we examine ourselves, we can see how we do not buy the truth as we should. Perhaps we do not deny ourselves as we should and are not willing to suffer for Christ's sake. As soon as speaking the truth means confrontation and opposition, we back down. We also see that we can easily sell the truth. All of us know of sinful practices which we would rather not give up, even though we know they are contrary to God's Word.

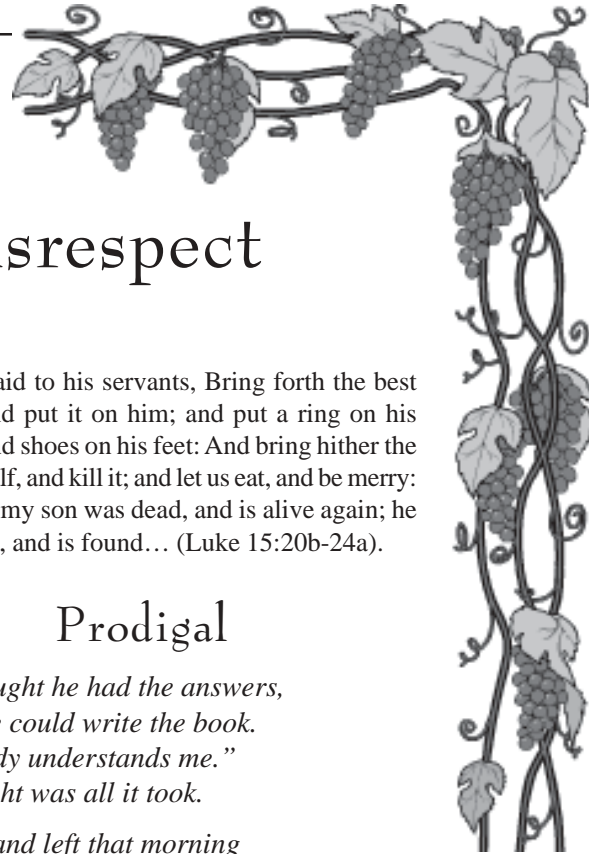
In the way of repenting of our sin of violating this command and asking God's grace to obey it, God's blessing rests upon us and our families. To continue in violation of this command results in God's judgment coming down upon us. It is frightening to observe God's judgment upon individuals, families, and churches that forsake the truth. Take, for example, the young father who separates himself, his wife, and young children from a church where the truth is faithfully preached. All seems to go well at first. However, as he progresses in this sin as time goes on, and as his children come to years of maturity, it becomes apparent that his children have become even farther removed from the truth than their father. This man's grandchildren, in spite of his wishes, fall farther away from the truth and walk in sins that he is ashamed of.

There is also the familiar example of what has taken place within the Christian Reformed Church since they officially adopted the doctrine of common grace. Rev. Herman Hoeksema and others carefully set forth from God's Word and the creeds the truth that God's grace is always particular, always saving, and never common. The CRC Synod of 1924 rejected this truth and adopted the Three Points of common grace. Those who proclaimed the truth of God's particular grace and the antithesis between the church and the world were cast out of the CRC. At that time, and throughout his life, Rev. Hoeksema warned the mother church of the inevitable consequences of maintaining the doctrine of common grace. Even the CRC Synod of 1924 recognized the dangers of adopting the Three Points, and warned the churches of a misuse of it. They knew how easily their members could appeal to this doctrine to countenance worldly-mindedness. Sadly, Rev. Hoeksema's prophecies have come to pass despite the warnings of the Synod. While the consequences of maintaining this doctrine were not immediately apparent, the CRC's development along the lines of common grace is now plain for all to see. Evolutionism, Arminianism, unbiblical divorce and remarriage, blatant worldly-mindedness, and a host of other doctrinal errors and sinful practices now have their firm grip on the CRC. Let this be a testimony to us of the severe consequences of disobeying God's command to "buy the truth, and sell it not."

By God's grace, in the way of holding to the truth, God's blessing will rest upon us as individuals, families, and churches. One cannot help but think of Psalm 128 in this connection. For the individual believer there is blessedness only in the way of fearing the Lord, and walking in His ways. Husbands and wives and parents and children experience God's blessing only in the way of fearing the Lord. Parents who faithfully instruct their children in the truth see their children grow to be mature members of the church. God blesses them with grandchildren who embrace the same truths that they do. And when the truth is faithfully taught and lived within families, there is a strong church. God promises this. Let us, young and old, "buy the truth, and sell it not." ❖

It is frightening to observe God's judgment upon individuals, families, and churches that forsake the truth.

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



The Battle Against Disrespect

by Bonnie Boer

Sometimes it's hard as a young person to be submissive to my elders and respectful to those in authority, especially my parents. I don't know why I think I can get away with disrespecting my mom and dad—maybe it's because I'm closer to them than I am with my teachers and others, and I feel that disobeying their wishes can be kept more of a secret than if I were to be an unsubmitive troublemaker in the public arena. I know I'm not flying solo on this issue.

It's in our sinful natures to think we know it all. We don't want to follow a list of guidelines—we've got minds of our own, and we think that decisions involving our lives are ours to make. So often we all act out “prodigals,” disobeying the rules of our parents, and ultimately breaking God's holy law. We're stubborn in our ways and don't want anyone but ourselves running our lives. We leave our spiritual homes and try to break free from the chains we believe are tying us down. We rebel from our parents' wise instruction and defy Christ's command of obeying our father and mother.

The problem with this mindset is this: by being disobedient and disrespectful, we are not only dishonoring our parents, but we are also failing to bring honor to our heavenly Father. We forget that our lives are not our own—they belong to our faithful Savior. Decisions must be made according to His Word, not our selfish reasons.

Thankfully, we have a God who is loving; a God who throws our sins into the depths of the sea, forgetting the transgressions we've made. Our Lord's grace reaches out to us, His children, drawing us back into His fold and retrieving His lost sheep. We've been delivered from the bonds of sin—the only bonds that tie us down—and we have been given complete freedom in Christ Jesus. Whenever we struggle with questions in this life, God always provides us with answers, in His time and in His way. In Him the lost are found, the dead are made alive, and the prodigals return to their everlasting home.

...But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the

father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found... (Luke 15:20b-24a).

Prodigal

*He thought he had the answers,
That he could write the book.
“Nobody understands me.”
One fight was all it took.*

*He up and left that morning
Without a glance behind.
Gone out to make his own path
And follow his own mind.*

*He's all alone with nothing
Convinced he's got it good.
Living life just how he wants,
He's done everything he could.*

*At home his parents wonder,
“God, what did we do wrong?
Our precious son is missing;
He thought he didn't belong.*

*Please let him see we love him,
Lord, tell him that we care.
Bless him while he's far from home,
He could be anywhere!”*

*God's grace reached out, and that day,
The son saw his mistake.
Mercy drove him to his street
And led him to the gate.*

*“Our son returned, Blessed be God!
What once was lost is found!
Let's celebrate our son's new life!”
Oh, grace, how sweet the sound! ❖*

Bonnie is a member of Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois.

Sara and Her New Baby Sister

by Tini de Klerk

There was once a little girl called Sara. She had a dad and a mom. She had also a grandpa and a grandma—they were called Opa and Oma. When Sara was a baby, she was a very happy little girl. She jumped up and down on Dad and Mum's bed, and on Opa and Oma's couch. When she became older and could walk, she ran up and down the living room and screamed loudly out of sheer happiness. Dad and Mum and Opa and Oma loved her very much. She brought her toy animals to Opa who put them in a long parade. Oma cooked nice rice and chicken on Sundays, with apple sauce prepared in advance.

Sara really had a happy life. Now one day Mum told her that in a while they would have a new baby—a brother or a sister for Sara. Babies grow in mummies' tummies. Sara's mom showed that she was going to have a baby. Sometimes you could see the baby move inside Mum's tummy. Then a shadow fell over Sara's happy family.

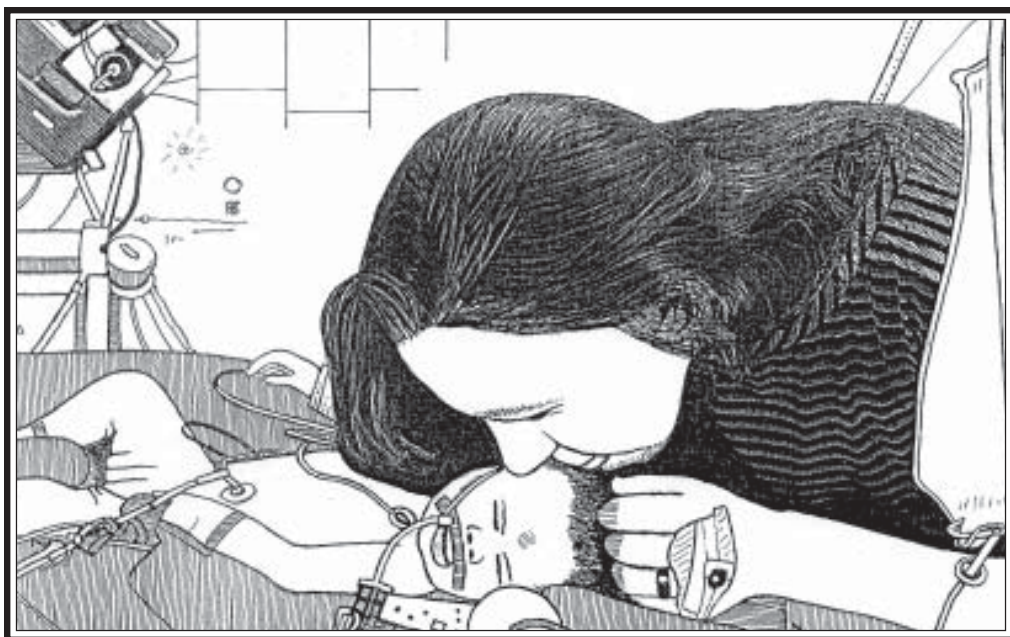
Dad and Mum were told that the baby inside Mum had something wrong with its little chest that could cause it to die when it was born. But Sara's mom and dad and Opa and Oma trusted in the Lord. They spent much time praying for the little unborn baby which they loved already even though they had not yet seen it. Everything seemed to be alright. Mum was in good health and very brave; she knew that something might happen to her baby.

Then three weeks before the baby was born, Mum had to go to the hospital far away. It was sad for Mum that she had to be so far away from Dad. And, oh, how she missed Sara. While Mum was in the hospital, Sara stayed with Opa and Oma who look after her. Sara was pleased to see Dad every day as his office was close to Opa and Oma's house.

Sara was still happy—playing games with Opa as she was swinging in the swing. She loved her german shepherd dog that was also staying at Opa and Oma's. Yes, Sara and Bruna had lots of fun together. Sara threw pine cones into the air and Bruna jumped high to catch them. It looked as if the two were performing in a circus.

Every night, before Sara went to bed, Oma sang an old Dutch song for her, that Sara loved. Although Sara was happy, she missed Mum very much.

In January the baby was born. A beautiful little eight pound baby girl called Joella. She was immediately taken care of by a staff of doctors and nurses. She was put into an incubator, a cradle which is kept at the right temperature. She had wires and tubes connected to her arms and legs. Dad and Mum could



only touch her with one hand. They were not yet allowed to nurse or cuddle sweet little Joella.

The baby responded so well to all the care that she could be operated on after six days. After that she had even more tubes and wires, plus a big scar on her tiny chest. Mum was constantly by her side, touching her and singing songs to her.

When Joella was a bit better, Dad and Sara drove to the hospital, and for the first time Sara saw her baby sister.

The Lord, who is a helper in time of need, helped Joella to recover at an amazing speed. Many friends of Dad and Mum and Opa and Oma prayed for Joella. After 5½ weeks she was allowed to go home with Mum.

Mum came to Opa and Oma's to pick up Sara. Mum, who in the past had so delightfully entertained Sara with books and games, was now very busy with Joella. Sara thought: "Why does Mum spend so much time with Joella? I get three meals a day, but look at the baby, who gets fed ever hour and a half. Not much room for me on Mum's lap any more"...

But Sara learned that Joella was so tired after her operation that she could only drink for a short time and then she had to sleep again. Still, sometimes Sara was a little sad. But she had to become used to having to share Mum with Joella.

When she saw Oma, she was worried that she might have to stay with Oma again, as Mum was too busy. But Sara found out that it was fun to have a baby sister. Joella started to make big smiles at Sara; she was pleased to see her.

Sara became happy again as she understood that she had not lost Mum at all. Mum loved her just as much as before.

Mum and Sara and Joella loved to walk. Sara had strong legs. Joella was happy riding in the backpack, looking down on the world from high up. Sara started to understand the Bible a little. She knew that the Lord God made her and Joella. Also their horse, Sultan; Buffel and Bill, the two little calves in the paddock; Bruna, the

dog; the chickens: Pippie, Henny, Magpie and Pickering; and the two guinea pigs: Oxalis and Tinus.

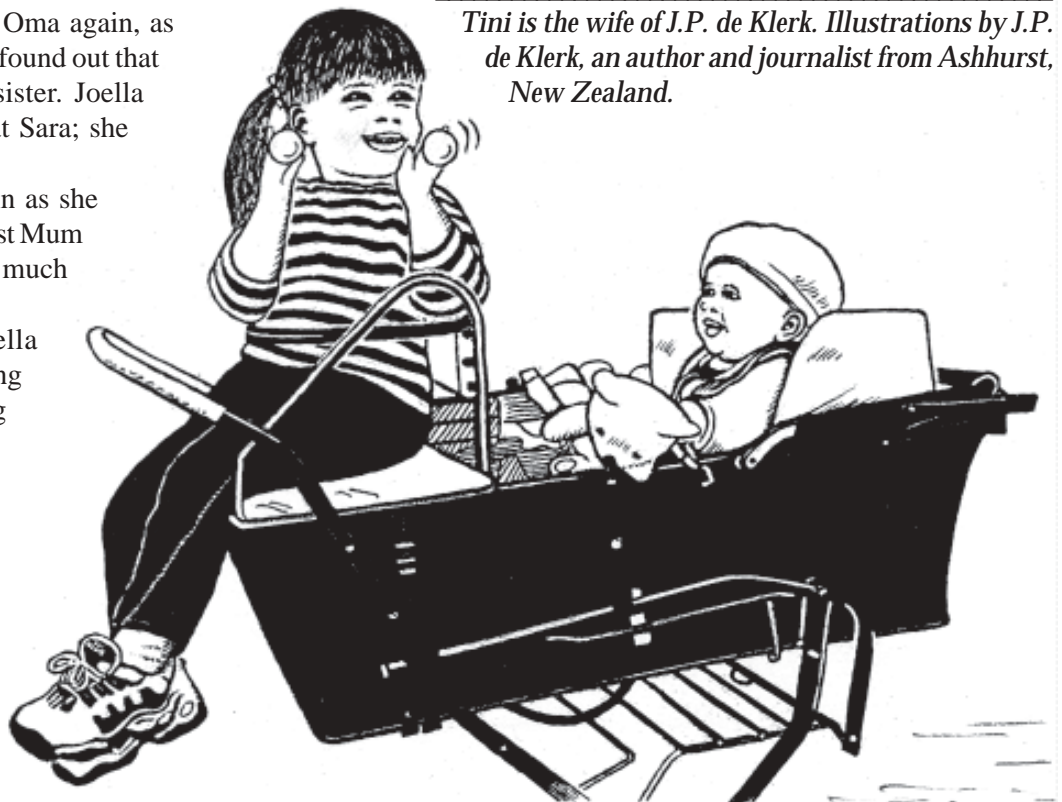
Sara stayed for a day with Oma. What a busy day that was! Together, Sara and Oma baked biscuits. Sara was a great help. She helped Oma fill the sugar bowl and watched the scales which showed how much flour, butter and sugar went into the mixture. When the biscuits were golden brown, she took a full container home for Mum and Dad.

Sara started to understand that the Lord Jesus, who is the Son of God, listens to our prayers. He even forgives our sins when we tell Him we are sorry. When we do something that is wrong, it is called sin. Boys and girls sin when they are naughty. Grownups sin sometimes, too, and the Lord forgives them if they are sorry for these sins, just like boys and girls.

Sara is now a big girl. She is two and a half years old. She loves food, and so does Joella. Mum spends lots of time preparing meals for them. Dad spends lots of time working hard to earn money so that Mum can buy the food.

Sara is learning that even though Dad and Mum work so hard for her and Joella, it is the good Lord who provides for them. That is why we have to thank Him for food and clothes and a house to live in. Oh, how good it is, to know that He cares about us. ❖

Tini is the wife of J.P. de Klerk. Illustrations by J.P. de Klerk, an author and journalist from Ashhurst, New Zealand.



When I In Awesome Wonder...

Michigan's Golden Coast

Sugartime

by Deane Wassink

It is nearing the end of February. One of the old timers I talked to the other day talked about starting to “hang out a few pails” to see if the sap is running in the sugar maples. Warming days and cold nights combined with the longer daylight hours trigger the flow of sap into the branches and buds of the tree, pumping the stored plant food from the roots to the top. Though many plants produce sugars, such as sugar cane and flowers, the harvest of the sap of the sugar maple is unique to North America. Once the season starts, the labor is intense and the excitement is catching. Lasting only a few weeks, the making of maple syrup and sugar is one of the most interesting of outdoor enterprises.

The tree at the center of all this activity is the sugar maple, *acer saccharum*. This tree is native to the north-eastern United States and Canada. In fact, it's leaf is pictured on the flag of Canada. It is known for its beautiful, hard and valuable wood as well as its glorious fall colors which range from orange to crimson. A woods where sugar maples predominate is called a “sugar bush.”

The making of maple sugar and syrup originated with the native Americans of the northeast who taught it to the early pioneers. This production has evolved into special industry. In the past, a hollow metal tube was inserted into the bark of the trees when the sap started to flow. A pail was then attached which would be emptied by hand on a daily basis into a tank mounted on a sleigh pulled by horses through the woods. I recently watched a syrup gathering competition where the horses did their work without reins; starting, stopping, and turning on voice commands while their masters carried buckets and emptied them into the tank on the sleigh. It looked like great fun—and hard work. Today, plastic tubes replace the metal ones. They are connected to a plastic line that carries the sap to a main collection point. This new method is much less labor intense and recovers more sap.

All of the sap is collected in a large vat next to the building where the “sugaring off” occurs called a “sugar

house” or a “sugar shack.” The sap is run across a long shallow pan with baffles called an “evaporator” with a fire under it, often fueled by wood. In this way the excess water is boiled off, reducing the sap to a thick syrup or hard sugar form. It takes 35 to 45 gallons of sap to produce one gallon of maple syrup. The quality of the syrup is greatly affected each year by the type of weather. As you know, in the United States and Canada we use the syrup on pancakes and waffles. The sugar is turned into candy. Today, most of the maple syrup we buy in the store is corn syrup with only a small percentage of the real stuff.

The experience of visiting a “sugaring off” is one that stays with you for a long time. Starting with a horse drawn sleigh ride under the towering trees and ending with the arrival at the sugar shack belching great clouds of steam and wood smoke. At the end you get to taste the sweet sugar and candy. Of course, there is still work to be done in the bottling, labeling and marketing of the final product.

What an amazing thing that the Lord has created the sugar maple in such a way that its sap, its life giving sap, can be eaten and enjoyed as a sweet treat by man. This happens at a special time when the trees break their winter dormancy to pump new life from the roots into the buds that become the leaves and new growth later in the spring and summer. In itself, that event reveals an all wise and good Creator, Who made even the trees of the woods to provide not only heat and building material, but also, sweet syrup for our enjoyment.

God's word often speaks of sweetness in the sense of His blessings upon His children. I am reminded of the sweetness of our new life in Christ when we are born again. We are ingrafted by faith as a branch to Him so that His life's blood, His sap, if you will, courses through our dead spirit so that we are made alive to grow in Him. Then we enjoy the sweetness of His love and fellowship. What a wonderful, blessed and “sweet” experience it is.

Read Psalm 19 and Psalm 104:33, 34.

Sugartime

*Oh the sweetness that flows,
From the foot of Calvary's tree.
A taste so sweet for him who knows,
The joy of forgiveness full and free.*

*Coursing through this dead spirit,
Tapped into the well of Jesus' love,
Flows a sap of sweetest merit,
Raising from death to life above.*

*Lord, fill me with Your sweetness,
Make me know Your love and grace.
Teach me humble and gentle meekness,
A reflection of my Savior's face.*

*What wonder fills this soul of mine,
That my God would love me so.
His grace amazing, His mercy sublime,
Sustaining, protecting from every foe.*

*This great tree a monument stands,
Of the wonder of Your hands.
Let me also a monument be,
Of Your mercy full and free. ❖*

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

Short Story Writing Contest

Eight Prizes Beginning with 6th Grade

Attention teachers, students, and anyone else who is willing to yield their pen to some prose. *Beacon Lights* is offering a writing contest that has been designed to work with your school writing instruction. Many of the teachers were introduced to some good strategies for writing stories at the last teacher's convention, and here is some incentive for prize-winning stories. A total of eight \$10 prizes will be awarded: one prize for each grade level (6th through 12th) and one for post high school entries. The prize winning entries may also be published in *Beacon Lights* as well as the second and third place winners. Please contact the business office of *Beacon Lights* for information regarding material for writing stories that was presented at the teacher's convention.

For this contest, we are looking for short stories having a distinctly Reformed perspective. Entries will not be considered for the contest unless they are between 800 and 1600 words, typed, double-spaced and postmarked by June 1, 2005. All entries must have the author's name on the first page along with the word count. The entries will be judged according to the following guidelines: originality, believable plot, character development, appropriate setting, and resolution of the problem.

We look forward to receiving your entry. Please mail it to the business office of *Beacon Lights* no later than June 1, 2005. Please follow the guidelines carefully! Start early and plan on doing lots of revisions to polish it and hone it down to the required length. Keep in mind that a typical double spaced page contains about 200 words and your word processor probably has a word count feature.

Federation Board: Current Affairs

by Jeff Van Uffelen

On behalf of my esteemed colleagues on the Federation Board I am pleased to shed some light on our labors. This operation seems to travel far under the radar; I assume most readers have little or no concept of what goes on behind our closed doors, so I will do my best to interest you with some of the matters we have poured over. It is my hope that the young people can comprehend what a special cause their dues support and appreciate what it takes to keep the Young People's organization smoothly afloat.

Part of our work is to organize singspirations and mass meetings. These allow for those of different congregations to come together and enjoy more communion of the saints. However, these are only "small scale" compared to the most important topic to the Young People, the convention. Every year a member of the Federation Board acts as a liaison between our board and the convention steering committee. This year I have been the one honored to attend some of these meetings. The time I spend there listening to the committed Faith Church steering committee has instilled in me one feeling about the upcoming convention: I wish I was young enough to go again. The convention is early this year, so all you privileged young people get your acts together and get those registrations in on time!

Our Faith congregation has been working diligently to put together the most exciting convention they can muster. For most of the attendees it is will kick off with an incredible scenic tour of the countryside from west Michigan to central Missouri. As if such a road trip was not enough, the conventioners will then be treated to a four night stay at the Windermere camp located on the shore of the Lake of the Ozarks. Here, they may sign up for events called The Edge, Aqua Jump, and The Cave, and may at times be able to engage in basketball, volleyball, mini golf, water skiing, pool, among other events such as The Barracuda Challenge. In addition to these physical activities, the conventioners will be stimulated by spiritual discussions on topics which affect all of our

lives. They will also enjoy, and be spiritually satisfied by, a few speeches directly focused on their age group. Highlighting the week will be the annual convention banquet with the theme, "Sunset at the Beach". Before all is said and done and the second leg of the road trip begun, each conventioner will have undoubtedly had a lot of fun and will have grown spiritually.

At this convention the delegates will meet on more matters concerning the Federation. This year they will be called upon to make a few extra decisions. The Constitution of the Federation, which is a document designed to keep the Federation's operation consistent through the years, has steadily lost its impact. Current practices reveal that we have wavered from many of the guidelines. So in the interest of avoiding further confusion, our board has prepared recommendations for the young people to vote on. These recommendations are to revise the constitution to fit some current practices and to clarify organizational standards needed to keep the Federation on a consistent track. Upon receiving the decision of the Delegate Board, the Federation hopes to operate fully inside these bounds and maintain these standards for the years to come.

Besides the convention affairs, the Federation Board operates loosely with the Beacon Light staff and the Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee. The Beacon Light staff continues to produce valuable material for everyone, but can always use more readers and supporters, as well as people offering articles of their own. As for the Scholarship Committee, the biggest tasks are just around the corner. They are soon to decide on and issue essay topics for future teachers and ministers who would like to obtain this scholarship. To those out there who are interested, take this as your first reminder to take advantage of this excellent opportunity. The committee will be eagerly anticipating your papers and hoping that everyone gives the paper their best shot.

We also deal with issues outside the Federation. One example would be the young adult (post-high) groups.

Throughout the country they tend to be a loosely knit group with no rigid structure or principal body to oversee its work. They hold retreats which sometimes run into considerable expenses. At times these groups look to the Federation Board for some help to defray costs in order to create interest and inspire more widespread participation. As a member of the Federation Board I feel compelled to give and give, but this does raise some alarms. Our members are stewards of the money given by our young people around the country as well as that raised by the churches which have held past conventions. There is a substantial amount of hard work and sacrifice at stake here, and we have to carefully consider how we hand out money. Although we are generally inclined to help such worthwhile events for young adults groups there are perhaps better avenues for them. For example, if each young adult group would hold one fundraiser for such events annually and pool their money, this could bring down prices for their retreats dramatically. With so little effort we could enable greater numbers to afford the retreats and make more of these retreats possible. We would like to help organize a way to make opportunities like this happen more easily. Any ideas on how we could assist in making a similar system work for our post high young people would be greatly appreciated.

There are numerous topics I could yet go into, but I believe I have covered the highlights. As always, questions, concerns, and suggestions for the Federation should be voiced. As civil servants of the Protestant Reformed Young People it is our goal to establish a spiritually healthy environment for everyone. We thank you for your constant support and for the support of the other associated groups. We pray that God may continue to bless all of our work together and to allow it to provide spiritual enrichment for our young people.

Tsunami—A Sign

Tsunami:

*A word striking terror into the heart;
Devastation so great, in scope so broad,
Destruction and flooding and gruesome death;
We creatures of earth simply overawed.*

*The hand of our sovereign God we see;
A hand raised in judgment, a warning hand
To signal the end, as was prophesied.
All people take heed, on sea and on land.*

*God said there'd be wars and rumors of war—
Nation rise up against nations in strife—
Plagues and diseases and famine abound;
Even the strong ones will fear for their life.*

*Earthquakes increase, as do windstorms and hail,
Betrayals, and many with love waxing cold;
False prophets accomplishing wonders and signs,
And Satan's aggression so brash and so bold.*

*And then—words of comfort, giv'n by our Lord:
He that endures to the end shall be saved.
And we **shall** be saved: promise is sure—
His mercy and grace will give what we craved.*

*We may experience trials and loss,
But with Christ as our refuge so sure,
He strengthens our weakness; makes us to stand—
To the end we shall truly endure.*

Thelma Westra

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Watching Daily At My Gates

by Cornelius Jonker

April 1 Read Psalm 86:12-15

We often come across the terms longsuffering and forbearance in Scripture. Both of these words as they stand by themselves are neutral, having in common the idea of restraining oneself or holding oneself in check. Therefore they can refer to a restraining of oneself either in anger or love. However, Scripture is plain that longsuffering is an aspect of mercy to the elect, whereas forbearance is an attitude of wrath against the wicked. We would describe *Longsuffering* as that attribute of God whereby in divine love for His people, He regards them in mercy and restrains His desire to save them out of their present afflictions because all the elect must be born and gathered before they enter the portals of glory. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise... but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish...” (II Pet. 3:9). He is speaking to the church, to you and I, as we trod this vale of tears. Cling to that promise by faith “and account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (II Pet. 3:15a). Psalter 363.

April 2 Read Psalm 92:5-11

Yesterday we saw that the longsuffering of God in Scripture denotes an activity of divine restraint towards His people in love. Contrasted to this is the *Forbearance* of God whereby He restrains His desire to destroy the wicked because their cup of iniquity must first be filled and because they too must serve His purpose in gathering the elect. We might be tempted to contemplate as did Asaph in Psalm 73 about the prosperity of the wicked or consider the necessity of raising up a Pharaoh who mercilessly oppressed God’s people. But Scripture tells us that they were raised up that God might reveal His power in them. And then consider those wicked men who nailed the Son of God’s love to the accursed tree. In God’s forbearance He endured that vile act not because He loved them or would give them time to repent, but because He loved His people who were saved through the blood of His Son. Knowing that God will surely judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous, we have the peace that passeth all understanding. Psalter 201.

April 3 Read Psalm 25:1-10

“What is truth?” said Pilate to Jesus. Oh, Pilate knew in an earthly sense what it was, but his eyes were blinded to the fact that before him stood the very essence of truth itself—God manifested in the flesh. God is *Truth*. We may speak of truth in the subjective, objective, or logical sense of the word, or simply define it as the presentation of reality. God alone is for us the only truth because He alone is the absolute reality. Christ

is the revelation of the truth as are the Scriptures, for in them the Lord has made Himself known to us. These same Scriptures, we are told in I Timothy 3:17, “are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Young people, always speak the truth, live the truth, confess the truth and study the truth. Be ready and able to refute the lies that Satan constantly promotes even under the guise of truth. May it truly be said of you, which is the fervent desire of every godly parent and pastor: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (III John 4). Psalter 325.

April 4 Read Isaiah 46:5-11

A doctrine that we believe and confess is the *Counsel* of God. This is such an overwhelming and profound truth that no comprehensive explanation of it can possibly be made in a few sentences. To maintain the truth of God’s counsel is of great comfort to us as believers. The counsel of God refers to the eternal thoughts, knowledge, and wisdom of God whereby He sovereignly determined all things, events, and development in the entire creation. This counsel of God precedes all things and embraces all things. He is eternally active, before, during and after the creation and will ever be so. As creatures we are limited to change and time. The Lord has determined the habitations of all the people of the earth and set the bounds of their lives. And this is never done arbitrarily, but in perfect wisdom and justice. It includes the sinful deeds of men even as we read in Acts 2:23: “Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” This is a precious truth, a comforting doctrine, and a great incentive to walk each day in thankful obedience to God for saving such sinners as we are. Psalter 404.

April 5 Read Isaiah 45:1-6

One of the decrees in the counsel of God is that of sovereign predestination which concerns the eternal destiny of all rational, moral creatures. This is not a doctrine that is popular in the nominal church, nor of any who embrace Arminian theology. But it is the heart of the gospel. It consists of both Election and Reprobation. *Election* is God’s eternal good pleasure whereby He determined to save a certain number of persons, redeemed in Christ, out of mere grace, and bring them to everlasting glory. Those persons, though fallen and undeserving by nature are drawn irresistibly by His Spirit and Word unto faith and sanctification. These are the ones described in Scripture as hungry and thirsty for righteousness, as poor in spirit,

as meek and merciful, as pure in heart, and as those who mourn because of their sins. How about you, dear reader, are you sorry for your sins and do you sincerely desire and pray for forgiveness? That is the fruit of the Spirit in your heart and you may rest assured of your election and that nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Psalter 86.

April 6 Read Romans 9:10-17

The truth of Divine Election not only implies *Reprobation* but it logically demands it. To maintain one means that we also emphasize the other. Reprobation is that eternal and sovereign decree of God whereby in contrast to those whom He has elected, He justly leaves the others in the misery of their sins which they willingly embrace as enemies of the truth, and to whom is reserved eternal perdition. These two doctrines are not equal in significance and importance, for Scripture testifies that reprobation serves election as tares exist for the wheat. The child of God must never and can never gloat in the fact that he and not his neighbor was and is the object of divine compassion and mercy. All things serve for the gathering of the Church that God loves and for whom alone Christ died. Let us then fall on our knees in thankful wonder that we are the objects of His love through no merit of our own. Psalter 146.

April 7 Read Isaiah 45:5-12

There are two terms with which many are familiar when we speak of the counsel of God, and they are *Supralapsarianism* and *Infralapsarianism*. Space does not permit doing justice to these views, but we should know what they stand for. The prefix “supra” and “infra” mean “above” and “below” respectively. The word “lapsis”, common to both, means “fall.” Therefore, the former means: above the fall and the latter: below the fall. The Infralapsarian presents the following order in the counsel of God: creation—fall—election and reprobation. The Supralapsarian presents this order, also in the counsel of God; election and reprobation—fall—creation. Many arguments are raised in defense of both viewpoints and you may wish to explore this for yourself, but we believe and maintain that Supralapsarianism is truly Scriptural and the only consistent setting forth of the decree of God’s predestination. To reveal God’s own eternal glory, Christ the covenant head of the elect church was first in His counsel. “For who hath known the mind of the Lord?... For of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:34, 36). Psalter 211.

April 8 Read Psalm 145:8-13

As we have mentioned before, many of God’s virtues are closely related to each other. Such is the case with His *Dominion*. Dominion has to do with rule and power. He is the supreme Ruler and Authority over all the works of His hands. Psalm 72 portrays Solomon as a type of Christ who would have dominion from sea to sea. The apostle Peter uses this term when he breaks out in a doxology of praise: “that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever” (I Peter 3:11). There is also an earthly reflection of dominion given to the creature.

After Adam was formed by God, he was given a charge to have dominion over the fish, the fowl, and every living thing that moved upon the earth. We too have that calling. Never may we abuse it, but always exercise it properly as stewards of God’s creation until our Lord returns upon the clouds of heaven as King, Judge, and Savior. Psalter 200.

April 9 Read Psalm 150

Scripture often speaks of God’s *Excellency*. This is a word that means an outstanding and valuable quality. God alone is the only and highest possible standard of excellence. In Job 37:2 we read that the Almighty is “excellent in power,” and Psalm 81 begins “O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” The apostle Peter, in referring to the transfiguration of Christ, said he heard a voice from the excellent glory. The apostle Paul in Phil. 3:8 exclaims “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of God.” Dear reader, can you make this same confession as Paul, even to the cost of your life? Life is a precious gift and we must respect our bodies as the temple of God. Therefore we care for our bodies and do not willfully expose them to danger as exhorted in the Heidelberg Catechism. The excellency of the knowledge of God is more precious than life itself. Strive then to grow in that excellent knowledge of our God and experience the assurance and joy of your salvation. Psalter 174.

April 10 Read Psalm 90:13-17

Our God is a God of *Beauty*. The dictionary defines beauty as the “qualities in a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit.” When we think of beauty we picture a scene or an object of loveliness, charm, or comeliness, with nothing to detract from it. Only God is truly beautiful because He is pure and holy with no imperfections. Beauty is reflected in creation, but because sin reared its ugly head, this beauty is marred. Beauty in Scripture is often mentioned in connection with the worship of God in His house. Today we have that privilege and obligation. Listen to the psalmist who states that the desire of God’s people is to “behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple” (Ps. 27:2). Because your minister proclaims the good tidings of salvation, their feet are described as beautiful (Is. 52:7). And the message of salvation is described as “beauty for ashes” (Is. 61:3). Let us never neglect this privilege and never cease to thank our God who will one day change our vile bodies like unto His glorious body. Then we shall behold Him in the true beauty of holiness. Psalter 349.

April 11 Read II Timothy 2:8-13

To be considered faithful, one must be loyal, firm in adherence to promises and steadfast in affection and allegiance. Our God is that not only, but so much more since He alone is the sole faithful One. God’s *Faithfulness* is extolled abundantly in Holy Writ. The prophet Jeremiah in bitter anguish lamented the destruction of Jerusalem, but still he exclaimed, “Great is thy faithfulness” (Lam. 3:23). In Psalm 89 the Lord repeatedly points out how His people are reproached and how often they forsake His law, and though He will visit their sins with His

chastisement, yet He will keep His covenant and not permit His faithfulness to fail. This affords great comfort to the church. People of God, we are called to be stewards of the mysteries and the manifold grace of God. Do you know what is required of stewards? It is that they are found faithful. Can this be said of us? Pray that when the Lord returns we may by grace hear Him say “Well done thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt. 25:21). Psalter 241.

April 12 Read Micah 7:18-20

What a great and wonderful benefit is God’s *Forgiveness*. Psalm 103 begins by calling us to bless the Lord and not forget all His benefits. The very first benefit mentioned is the forgiveness of our iniquities. No blessing is more important than this, for in forgiveness, salvation is begun. Do we realize how awful sin really is? When we sin against the most high majesty of God, we are saying that we refuse to have Him rule over us, and therefore disobey His holy laws. God’s justice demands satisfaction and we know from our Heidelberg Catechism that there is only one way we can be delivered from our sins. God in His great mercy provided that way. His only begotten Son who became flesh took on Himself the guilt of our sins and paid the price of our pardon on His cross. Through Him we have forgiveness, full and free. Woe unto us if we lightly regard God’s forgiveness and think that we may be careless about our sins or continue in them. Rather, in sincerity of heart let us pray, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me,” and partake of the forgiving mercy of God. Psalter 83.

April 13 Read Psalm 36:5-9

A fountain is commonly known as a source from which something proceeds. And most of us then picture in our minds a gushing stream or sprays of water. Our God is known in Scripture as a *Fountain* of living water. This is a beautiful and descriptive term that rightly views God as a source. In fact He is *the* source of all things. And just as water is indispensable for us to maintain earthly life, so that living water which He reveals to us in His Word is absolutely necessary for us to live spiritually. The apostle James compares our mouths to a fountain when he states that out of the same mouth proceeds both blessing and cursing. He chides us with the words “these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet waters and bitter?” Let us beware that this may not be said of us. Instead, let our words be acceptable in the sight of God and let us be thirsty for the water of life that proceeds from Him alone. Psalter 94.

April 14 Read Psalm 138:1-5

When we speak of the *Glory* of God we picture a wonderful display of splendor, honor, and awesome majesty of the Most High. Those who beheld the glory of the Lord displayed in biblical history experienced an event or appearance so awesome that it instilled great fear and dread in their hearts. God’s glory appeared at various times when a sin of great magnitude was committed. Isaiah had a vision of the Lord’s glory that caused the seraphims to cover their faces and feet, and made Isaiah cry out “Woe is me for I am undone.” At the momen-

tous occasion of Jesus’ birth, the glory of the Lord shone round about the shepherds and they were sore afraid. At the last day the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father and every knee shall bow before Him. Let each of us, whether young or old be reminded again of our daily calling: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (I Cor. 10:31). Thanks be to God that one day by His grace we may be partakers of His glory. Psalter 15.

April 15 Read Psalm 145:1-6

The word “*great*” is certainly a familiar word in our vocabulary. The Bible very often uses this word or various forms of it. One of its uses is to describe a virtue of our God. Listen to the opening words of Psalm 48: “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.” The word “*greatness*” means markedly superior, predominant in quality, or large in measure. These are human definitions, but in our limited way describe how great is our God. Psalm 77:3 asks the question “who is so great a God as our God?” The obvious answer is that there is no God like our God, nor can there possibly be. And the psalmist then goes on to describe the great wonders that God wrought in the realm of nature and in the care of His people. The virgin Mary magnified the Lord saying, “he that is mighty hath done to me great things” (Luke 1:49). Dear people of God, let us also join in that refrain of praise for that greatest gift of all, namely Immanuel, God with us, Who redeemed us from the guilt of our sins and made us heirs of salvation. Psalter 399.

April 16 Read Isaiah 58:6-11

It is a frightening experience to be lost. Imagine yourself stranded in a large strange city where danger lurks and you have no map or anyone to show you to your destination. Or picture yourself in a jungle or forest, hopelessly lost with no compass or guide, or, worst of all, trying to find your way in the sea of temptations, the paths of sin, the wilderness of carnal pleasures, the mountains of self-righteousness and the valleys of death without a proper guide. That is the situation of those who in their pride claim that they are the masters of their fate and the captain of their souls. Oh let that never be true of us. God, Who is a God of grace to His people, is our *Guide*. Even as He led His people Israel from the bondage of Egypt to the promised land of Canaan, so He leads us day by day on our pilgrimage to the heavenly Canaan. Jesus promised the church that the Spirit of Truth would come to guide them into all truth and even now He dwells in our hearts. God has also given us His Word that is a lamp to our feet and light to our paths. He has also promised that He will be our Guide even unto death. Blessed Guide and blessed pathway that leads us to glory. Psalter 203.

April 17 Read Psalm 70

All of us require help of some sort during our lifetime, and it is safe to say that each of us has helped others also. To help means that we render necessary aid or give support and assistance to someone or to a cause that requires it. There is physical help by willing hands, financial assistance or moral support, to name a few. However, unless this is done with a proper godly motive, such help is in vain. Our God is often called our

Help or *Helper*, and this is a protecting, loving and perfect help. This doesn't mean that we are always spared from trials and sorrows, but He gives His helping grace to His children according to need, always knowing what is best for each of them. In the Psalms especially we read how God's children plead for His help and deliverance knowing that He will surely hear them. Let us always be ready and willing to help those in need as the Lord places them in our path, for Jesus said "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). Psalter 352.

April 18 Read Psalm 91:1-7

Another descriptive name of Jehovah that we frequently see in Holy Writ is the *Most High* God. When someone or something is defined as high, we determine that it has an elevated status, that it is advanced in development or that it has an elevated character. These are but feeble descriptions of the Lord Most High. He is not higher or even the most high among other gods. He is God alone, the only true and living God Most High. Psalm 47:2 states that the "Lord most high is terrible." This means that He is awe-inspiring in might and splendor. We also find this term used where God is portrayed as a protector and refuge of His people. Who can possibly snatch away even one of His children when He as the *Most High* covers them with His wings, protects them with His shield and delivers them from the arrows and plagues of the devil? Nothing can separate us from His love. Are you troubled and afflicted with the cares of this world? Are you perhaps suffering from a serious illness? Does your cross seem too heavy to bear? Listen to God Who says "when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). Psalter 259.

April 19 Read Zechariah 1:12-16

Did you know that we serve a jealous God? Among His many and glorious virtues, God's *Jealousy* is very real. To most of our minds, this term does not have the best connotation and for good reason. We usually interpret jealousy as meaning an envious or intolerant attitude toward our fellow man suspected of enjoying an advantage over us. This is a sin that we must prayerfully avoid and discontinue. Jealousy can also mean a guarding of a possession with jealous vigilance. We read in Exodus 34:14, "For thou shalt worship no other god; for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." God will not tolerate the worship of any idol gods nor will He allow the profaning of His name for He declares in Ezekiel 39:25, "I will be jealous for my holy name." The prophet Elijah in the depths of discouragement said twice to the Lord: "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts...and I, even I only, am left" (I Kings 19:10, 14). But the Lord responded that He reserved to Himself seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal. Be truly thankful, people of God that we are preserved unto all eternity by a faithful God who cares for us with godly jealousy. Psalter 95.

April 20 Read Psalm 24

"God is King forever: let the nations tremble." Most of us are familiar with this versification of Psalm 99. That God is *King* is a fact that is attested to throughout all Scripture. When we speak of a king, we also speak of a kingdom, as well as subjects of that kingdom, and the sovereign authority of that king to rule over these subjects. As king, God is the supreme Sovereign over all the universe. This kingdom is also Christ's as bestowed on Him by the Father, Who has put all things under His feet. This kingdom is spiritual, an absolute monarchy, and all the elect are the subjects of this kingdom. This king also rules in every realm of nature, providentially determining the rise and fall of civilizations, and making all things subservient to the cause of His kingdom. What a privilege that we may be a part of this kingdom and be willing subjects under the rule of this glorious King. The final aspect of this kingdom will come when the "heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat" (II Peter 3:10). The church of all ages will then inherit the new heavens and earth, and dwell eternally in unspeakable glory. Let us pray fervently "O Lord, Thy kingdom come." Psalter 266.

April 21 Read Psalm 95:1-6

Closely related to God as Creator, is God our *Maker*. We are reminded of this in the very first chapter of Genesis when God said "Let us make man in our image." "Make" means to bring into being by forming or shaping, or causing to happen. By His creative word all things came into existence in their proper order. Man, in distinction from the beasts, however, was made after God's image, and as such he is a rational, moral creature, accountable to God. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, we read that God made coats of skins to cover them that opened the way of sacrifice and pointed to the perfect atoning sacrifice of Christ. From the beginning to the end of Scripture, God tells us what He does as our Maker, He makes us His own sons and daughters; He makes His face to shine upon us; He makes us willing in the day of His power; He makes a way to escape when we are tempted; Christ makes intercession for us before His Father; and finally God will make all things new. Let us consecrate our lives to this glorious Maker, and pray "thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God" (Ps. 40:17). Psalter 269.

April 22 Read Romans 2:13-18

Men everywhere seek peace. In a world filled with unrest, tension and war, the desire for and the emphasis is on peace. What is peace? One can say it is cessation from hostilities, quietness, and harmony, but is that really the essence of peace? The ungodly desires a form of peace and seeks out its worldly counselors and spends millions on organizations such as the United Nations, only to see their efforts crumble in failure time and again. The reason of course, is found in Scripture: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Is. 57:21). True peace is this: "Be careful (anxious) for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and mind

through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6, 7). Young people, you are faced with many decisions, temptations and problems as you are becoming adults. Don’t try to solve them in your own strength, but go in prayer to the God of *Peace* and ask that His will be made known to you. Only in this way will you be blessed and find true peace. Psalter 7.

April 23 Read I Peter 2:5-10

Today we will not discuss a specific virtue of God, but rather the preciousness of His relationship to us and our relationship to Him. We would define the term “*precious*” as something of great value, something deeply cherished and held in high esteem. God is very precious to us, the value of which cannot be described in earthly terms such as money, gems, silver or gold. To have God love us is priceless! He tells us in His word that His precious beloved Son is the chief cornerstone of the church and that He is likewise precious to those who believe (I Peter 2:6, 7). We, as God’s people are precious to Him, both in life and death. We read in Is. 43:4 “Since thou wast precious in my sight...I have loved thee;” and in Psalm 116:15: “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” We do not like to think about death, especially as young people, yet the Lord in inscrutable wisdom sees fit on occasion to reach down and take to Himself someone in the vigor of youth. Let each of us, whether young or old, lay hold by faith to God’s precious promises that He will be our guide even to death. Psalter 311.

April 24 Read Matthew 10:28-32

The *Providence* of God is such a vast subject that it cannot possibly be fully examined in a few sentences. The word itself literally means: to see beforehand, and to make provision accordingly. The term providence only appears once in Scripture and it is used with respect to Felix, an officer of the Roman government. But the idea appears abundantly throughout Scripture and is the generally accepted term to denote divine preservation and government. It is the almighty power of God whereby He executes His counsel and directs all things so that without exception they work together to attain His sovereign determinate counsel. We encourage you to read Lord’s Day 10 of our Heidelberg Catechism and also Art. 13 of our Belgic Confession which beautifully define God’s providence. This doctrine affords us great comfort to know that all things that happen in the realm of creation, or in our personal lives, come not by chance, but by the hand of our heavenly Father. Then we do not despair when sorrows beset us or panic unreasonably when tornado warnings or other calamities threaten us. We trust our God with the confidence that nothing can separate us from His love. Psalter 296.

April 25 Read Philippians 4:4-8

Our God is the standard and very essence of *Purity*. To be pure, someone, or something must be chaste and genuine, and be free from moral fault or guilt or anything that would pollute or weaken it. God’s purity is reflected in His Word. We read in Psalm 12:6 “The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.” Psalm 119:140 states: “Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.” God also requires that our hearts must be pure, for the

psalmist asks in Psalm 24 “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place?” The answer is “He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.” Out of the heart are the issues of life and it is the inner spiritual source which gives direction to our entire spiritual life. A pure heart is a regenerated heart that sorrows because of sin and seeks forgiveness at the cross, and strives by grace to lead a holy life. The promised blessing of the pure in heart is that they shall see God. There is nothing more wonderful than that! Psalter 42.

April 26 Read Isaiah 48:12-17

“I will sing of my Redeemer, and His wondrous love to me.” So goes the first line of a familiar hymn. What a wonderful reason to break out in a song of praise and thanksgiving to God Who is our Redeemer and Savior. Redeem means to buy back, to pay a ransom for one in captivity, or to free from the consequences of sin. This surely is a picture of us who were conceived and born in sin and utterly corrupt by nature. Without a mediator or redeemer to deliver us from that bondage, our cause would be hopeless. But God, Who is rich in mercy, provided a *Redeemer* who paid the price of our ransom. And that price was not gold or silver or precious gems, but the very lifeblood of His own dear Son, Jesus Christ the Righteous. All the bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to Him, and Job, even in the midst of severe trials and sufferings, could boldly say “I know that my redeemer liveth...and in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25, 26). Make this your confession also, dear reader, and rejoice with thanksgiving to God for His wonderful redemptive grace. Psalter 280.

April 27 Read Psalm 62

If you are caught outside in a howling storm accompanied by torrents of rain or if you are in a small boat and the waves threaten to overwhelm you, what would be your reaction? Undoubtedly you would strive to find refuge and shelter where you would be safe and protected. Scripture ascribes this comforting characteristic of *Refuge* to God in many passages. Listen to Psalm 46:1 “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Although God can, and does protect us according to His will in our daily lives, yet this is a spiritual refuge. When the storms of temptation surround us, when the waves of doubt overwhelm us, when Satan hurls his fiery darts at us, or we are buffeted by the winds of persecution, don’t seek to find safety in our own strength, but by grace turn to the eternal God who is our refuge and whose everlasting arms are underneath us to carry us to His bosom. He will thrust out the enemy that threatens our souls. We trust and pray, dear reader, that this God is your refuge where you will be eternally safe. Psalter 128.

April 28 Read Psalm 61

Closely related to the truth of God as our refuge that we saw yesterday, is God Who is our *Rock*. Whereas the former is pictured as a shelter, the idea of a rock is that of a firm and immovable foundation. Near the end of his life, Moses recounts the faithfulness and mercy of God to the people of Israel and breaks forth in a song: “He is the Rock, his work is perfect”

(Deut. 32:4). We are all familiar with the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount where He contrasts the foolish and wise men who built their houses upon sand and upon a rock respectively. Jesus Christ is the spiritual Rock upon which we must build our homes. That is the only sure foundation. Any other will crumble and fall as a prey to the evil one. We sometimes sing: "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord". How true it is that the Church must be founded upon the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. The gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Let each one of us by God's grace, love that truth, hold to that truth, and never forsake it. Psalter 111.

April 29 Read Psalm 98

Our subject today is that totally wonderful gift of God, namely *Salvation*. Salvation means that we are loved eternally by God and chosen unto eternal life. Implied in salvation is first of all, deliverance from the lowest possible depths of misery, which is the plight of every child of God as he is conceived and born as a natural child of Adam. It further implies that he is raised to the highest possible good and that he is safely preserved in that state. No one can possibly pluck him out of the hand of God for it is His sovereign work in Christ. Salvation cannot be offered as something that anyone can accept or reject as it may please them, for it is God's work from beginning to end, and the way of salvation is the way of sin and grace through the cross of Christ whereby we are justified and sanctified through His Spirit. By faith we believe all that God reveals to us in His word, by faith we are kept in that

truth, and by the power of God we receive the end of that faith, even the salvation of our souls. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord" (Ps. 116:12, 13). Psalter 331.

April 30 Read John 10:11-18

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." These are familiar and well loved words and are often the first Bible verses that little children commit to memory. The symbol of God as our Shepherd is a beautiful one. He feeds the sheep. He leads them, and He protects them. The character of sheep is that they wander away. They cannot find proper pasture and do not know the way back to the fold. This description fits us for we read in Isaiah 53:6: "All we like sheep have gone astray." Sheep are also defenseless, so the shepherd must defend them from wolves even unto death. Only a true shepherd, and not a hireling would do that. God as our *Shepherd* does indeed watch over and protect His precious flock. In John 10, Jesus declares: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." God in the flesh did exactly that. No one took His life, but He voluntarily laid it down in atoning death for all the elect sheep of all ages. We are fed with the living word so that all our needs are supplied. And when we must walk through the valley of the shadow of death, even there we need not fear, for our Shepherd is there to take us to our heavenly fold where we may experience His goodness and mercy forevermore. Psalter 55.

Minding Missions

Current Events: North Korean Struggles

by Bruce J. Koole

R*ajin, North Korea:* From the *Times* Newspaper of London in the January 30, 2005 edition, Michael Sheradin reports on the current strife between the United States, China, and North Korea.

The four-page article reminds the Christian not only of the end times, but also of Christ Jesus' instruction unto his disciples, when he sent them out two-by-two to preach the gospel and perform miracles. In Matthew 10:34 Jesus directed his earthly-minded disciples unto heaven by informing them about what would be the re-

sults of their preaching. He told them, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." One product of their, and all, preaching, then, is that nations fight against each other, so as to focus their power on destroying the other, rather than the church.

In the article entitled "*Chairman Kim's dissolving kingdom*", Sheradin begins with the following:

Far across the frozen river two figures hurried from the North Korean shore, slip-sliding on the ice as

they made a break for the Chinese riverbank to escape a regime that, by many accounts, is now entering its death throes.

It was a desperate risk to run in the stark glare of the winter sunshine. We had just seen a patrol of Chinese soldiers in fur-lined uniforms tramping along the snowy bank, their automatic rifles slung ready for action.

Police cars swept up and down the road every 10 or 15 minutes, on the look-out for refugees. A small group of Chinese travellers in our minibus, some of whom turned out to have good reasons to be discreet, pretended not to notice.

Telling us that the people's 'Dear Leader', Kim Jong-il is losing control of his border, country, and corrupt secret police, Sheridan gets to the spiritual meat of his article on the second page. Unintentionally proving that all nations, tribes, and tongues shall hear the gospel before the Savior returns, Sheridan writes,

Word has spread like wildfire of the Christian underground that helps fugitives to reach South Korea. People who lived in silent fear now dare to speak about escape...

The regime has almost given up trying to stop them going, although it can savagely punish those caught and sent back. "Everybody knows there is a way out," said a woman, who for obvious reasons cannot be identified, but who spoke in front of several witnesses.

"They know there is a Christian network to put them in contact with the underground, to break into embassies in Beijing or to get into Vietnam. They know, but you have to pay a lot of money to middlemen who have the Christian contacts."

Yet North Koreans confirmed that they knew that escapers to China should look for buildings displaying a Christian cross and should ask among Korean speakers for people who knew the word of Jesus.

Seemingly squeezed without an earthly friend between the Chi-coms in the North and the South Korean/Americans in the South, the citizens of North Korea seek help, and receive it, from Christians and their churches. Although poverty, starvation, and Communist indoctrination are the rule of the day, not even this hot spot of warfare and death can quench the light of the gospel. It is strange to our human reasoning why the Christians would risk torture, dismemberment, and death to help just one member cross the border, but Scripture informs

us otherwise in Matthew 25:35-36: "For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." Out of love for Jesus, we love our neighbor as ourself.

Sadly, there is still tragedy, torture, and death in Kim's realm, but hope springs eternal. Sheridan continues,

The regime is fighting to save itself from subversion. Its agents kidnapped Kim Dong-shik, a South Korean missionary, from the turbulent Chinese border town of Yanji in 2000. Last week the South Koreans demanded a new investigation: the clergyman has never been seen again.

The secret police cannot staunch the word of the gospel. Two of our party [on the minibus] turned out to be Christian businessmen who had come from China carrying wads of cash. Korean-language Bibles have been smuggled in by the hundreds...

Paranoia and brainwashing remain the regime's most effective tools. Yet even as it tries to fight off God it has made its peace with Mammon... Only a casino is open.

Reread that phrase, "The secret police cannot staunch the word of the gospel." There is hope in those words. There is happiness in that phrase, and there is thanksgiving to the King. What Jesus promised to his disciples about the sparrow and man, oh so long ago, He still fulfills. Using Christian businessmen hiding large amounts of cash or Bibles camouflaged in carts, Christ brings the peace that passes all understanding. Pray for the North Koreans.

The rising and falling of Kim's nation, we leave to the newspaper reporter, radio commentator, and news camera. A Christian concerns himself with the spiritual nature of things and events. The history books will remember the result of Kim's choices, but here on this page, we take note of the spiritual implications. Jesus is coming and we must be urgent in our use the day, ere night fall and...

The entire 1/30/2005 *Times* of London article is available at the following web address: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2089-1462207_1,00.html.



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Unbreakable Scripture (1)

by Rev. Angus Stewart



So far we have seen that God's hammer (Jer. 23:29), the "more sure word" of Scripture (II Peter 1:19), has its origin in God and not man (II Peter 1:21) for it is God-breathed (II Tim. 3:16). Because Scripture is God-breathed, it has certain perfections or characteristics, one of which is inerrancy.

The inerrancy of Scripture has been a battleground between conservatives and liberals for the last 150 years. Controversies have raged in churches, missions, theological seminaries and religious societies often bringing disruption and division. A large number of books, pamphlets and sermons have been spawned by the inerrancy debate and even some heresy trials. Today the majority of instituted churches and professing Christians don't even see it as an issue worth considering. Evolution and higher criticism, they believe, have made it impossible for modern man to confess the inerrancy of Scripture. They say, "Sure everybody knows that there are mistakes in the Bible. And anyway whether you believe the Bible is inerrant or not doesn't make any real difference to the Christian life." Thus inerrancy is both intellectual suicide and spiritually unnecessary.

But these are just the slippery words of compromisers who have been conformed to the world. Jesus did not believe that inerrancy was intellectual suicide, for He urged it in a theological debate with the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus did not believe that it was spiritually unnecessary, for He used it in defense of His claim to Deity. These are the words of the incarnate Son of God: "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

Christ had been teaching that He was the Son of God (36): "I and my Father are one" (30). The Jews rightly understood Him to be claiming Deity (33) and so they are about to stone him (31). Jesus uses two arguments against them. First, He states that His good works sustain His claim (32). Second, He reasons from the OT Scriptures. He quotes Psalm 82:4: "Is it not written in your law, I SAID YE ARE GODS?" (34). Then he identifies the ones addressed as "gods:" "he called them gods unto whom the word of God came" (35). Finally, he

makes a deduction: "If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, *and the scripture cannot be broken*; say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?" (35-36). Note the linchpin of the whole argument: "the scripture cannot be broken" (35). Do you quote all Scripture's declarations with absolute confidence? Those who deny inerrancy can't for they don't believe that scripture cannot be broken. This is *Christ's* way of wielding God's hammer; it must be ours.

Do you quote all Scripture's declarations with absolute confidence?

According to the Son of God, the OT declaration, "Ye are gods," cannot be loosened, undone, dissolved, annulled, subverted, done away with or in any way deprived of its authority. Just as surely as God "*cannot lie*" (Titus 1:2) and a man "*cannot see the kingdom of God*" except he is born again (John 3:3), so it is absolutely and utterly impossible for this statement to be invalidated: it *cannot be broken*! And why can it not be broken? Because it is *Scripture*: "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

If this Scripture cannot be broken, then no Scripture can be broken. (1) Psalm 82:6: "I said, Ye are gods" is an otherwise obscure portion of the Bible. It is not found in the Decalogue or in a Messianic prophecy or in a popular Psalm. If it were not quoted by Jesus in John 10, we would otherwise have paid little or no attention to it. Yet if this obscure verse cannot be broken, surely no verse can be broken. (2) The words, "I said, Ye are gods," are found in poetic, hymnic material designed to be sung. Someone could argue, "But can you base an argument on a song written by Asaph in glowing lyrical verses?" Yes, we can, for the Son of God did so in John 10 and He said that this Scripture cannot be broken. If poetic

material cannot be broken, surely explicit teaching material cannot be broken. (3) Someone could also say that the declaration, “Ye are gods,” is a hyperbole, an overstatement. It is true that the judges in Israel were not gods in the sense that they possessed divine attributes or were to be worshipped (cf. Ps. 82:1-8). Rather they were called gods in the sense that God gave them the office of judge to exercise His righteous judgment according to the standard of His Word (John 10:35). So these words, “Ye are gods,” when correctly explained, have binding, unbreakable force. Thus other Scriptural statements, especially those in clear and literal language, are unbreakable too. (4) If Psalm 82:6 had read, “Ye are *judges*,” and not “Ye are *gods*,” it wouldn’t have served Christ’s argument. Christ here is teaching us *plenary* inspiration, namely that God breathes every word of Scripture. This is necessary for Scripture to be *inerrant*, without any

mistakes. If even one word of Scripture was not breathed forth by God, then it could be broken. And if not even one word of Scripture can be subverted or annulled, how much more verses, or chapters or books?

So not just Psalm 82:6 or John 10:35, but *all* of the Scriptures are unbreakable and inerrant. Why? Because all Scripture is God-breathed and the breathed Word of God is true and omnipotent. This is the confession of true, saving faith. ❖

Rev. Stewart is a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches to the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Northern Ireland. This series is being reprinted with permission from the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship website, <http://www.cprf.co.uk/> Volume IX, Issues 11 & 12.

Church Family

For the Want of a Dollar...?

by Rev. William Langerak

Covenant members must take heed to many important details in the kingdom of heaven. One of them is that prospective teachers and preachers receive adequate financial resources to complete their education. This is not merely the responsibility of the students themselves, but it is a covenant obligation. It is an important covenant obligation. If neglected, it could result in a dearth of preachers and teachers, which would be devastating to the cause of Christ’s kingdom in the community of Protestant Reformed Churches and our Christian schools.

An old proverb warns that entire kingdoms can be lost for want of a simple nail. It comes from something the American sage Ben Franklin once wrote: “For the want of a nail, the shoe was lost; for the want of a shoe the horse was lost; and for the want of a horse the rider was lost, being overtaken and slain by the enemy, all for the want of care about a horseshoe nail.” His point was

rather simple: a little neglect creates far-reaching and devastating consequences.

Like many other earthly proverbs, the point of this one holds true also for the spiritual realm. The reason is not that rascals like Franklin had deep insight into the heavenly kingdom. It is due to the fact that God created

the physical as a picture of the spiritual; that the horses of Rome needed shoeing illustrates that a myriad of details require attention in the kingdom of Christ. These details are significant and necessary. They bring to perfection that glorious king-

dom, and unless they are attended to, the kingdom would be lost. This is precisely why God takes heed to them all and warns His covenant people, likewise, to take heed.

How numerous and significant are the details that require attention in the kingdom of heaven! The Father must send His beloved Son into the world to be crucified, raised from the dead, and given all power in heaven

a little neglect creates far-reaching and devastating consequences

and earth. The children of His kingdom must be born, regenerated, called, justified, and sanctified by the power of His grace. By that same grace, they must be preserved, and, after this life, raised to glory in a new heavens and earth. And our Father neglects not one detail.

Then there are the host of spiritual nails and horses concerning which the Father makes us take heed. Long before *Poor Richard's Almanac*, God commanded us to take heed to ourselves (Luke 21:34), pay attention to wisdom (Prov. 4:1), be careful to maintain good works (Tit. 3:8), watch unto prayer (I Pet. 4:7), give attendance to doctrine (I Tim. 4:13), take heed to give alms (Matt. 6:1), and beware of false doctrine (Matt. 16:12). We are even told to remember our feet when strapping on spiritual armor (Eph. 6:13-17). How important it must be, then, that none of these details be neglected!

Surely also the dollars used to fund the work of the kingdom comprise one of the nails concerning which the members of the covenant must take heed. It may not be the most significant nail that is driven into the shoes of the white gospel horse (Rev. 6:2), but a nail nonetheless. Consider only the money required in the cause of the kingdom among the Protestant Reformed Churches. Each year, Jesus Christ provides, then collects and distributes millions of dollars from this little band to support a sound seminary, lively domestic and foreign mission programs, 28 robust congregations, 40 active and retired ministers, 14 flourishing Christian schools, and some 120 dedicated teachers for those schools. And God takes heed to it all. By His grace, the people of the PRC take heed.

Included in such monetary necessities is the support of prospective school teachers and preachers. That need is great. Consider only the substantial sum of money required to become a pastor. Increasingly, men are entering seminary older, married, and with children. There may be benefits to this trend, but the downside is that they have more expenses. They must buy food, clothing, and supplies for an entire family, keep a vehicle running, and pay for utility bills, rent or mortgage, Christian school tuition, church budget, doctors, dentists, and the occasional emergency room visit. Most students have no health insurance, so the cost of medicines, surgery, or the arrival of a baby can be burdensome. As far as income is concerned, most students are limited to lower-scale, part-time work. Federal loans do not exist for religious training. Bank loans are usually denied. So, students must rely upon the generosity of the covenant community to bridge the gap between income and expense.

If obligations are not met, the student has one recourse: pack up the books, get full-time work, and be content that the Lord has made it clear he was never called to be a pastor or teacher.

Thanks be to our attentive Father, the Protestant Reformed community indeed heeds this little nail. Parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and siblings often give generously, provide furnishings, cars, or personal loans. Home churches may conduct grocery showers at Christmas. A few congregations take collections, which they distribute directly to students. Individual brothers and sisters in Christ also play a considerable role. I well remember that, more than once while I was pondering how to buy groceries or fill the gas tank that week, some lovely saint—often someone whom I did not even know very well—would send a substantial check with which to pay the bills. Other times, widows or others, who themselves were probably financially strapped, would slip “a little something” into my coat pocket at church, or have me pick up “some extra food they had lying around”—although I sometimes suspected this was also an opportunity for them to enjoy some fellowship over a cup of hot tea.

The covenant community has also taken heed to this responsibility through two organizations. One is the Student Aid Committee of our synod. Early on in our history, this committee was formed to carry out the mandate of the Church Order, Art. 19, which recognizes that the need for ministers is related to their financial maintenance. The article states: “The churches shall exert themselves, as far as necessary, that there may be students supported by them to be trained for the ministry of the Word.” Applicants must be enrolled in the seminary, pledge their intention to become ministers in the churches, and submit, annually, documents to demonstrate financial need. Funds come directly from the synodical budget (assessments). This year, \$44,000 was budgeted for the five seminary students, which works out to be \$25 for every Protestant Reformed family.

The other organization engaged in this work is the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People (FPRYP). Long ago, they also recognized the necessity of supporting students financially. So, in 1960 they established the Scholarship Fund on this simple premise: “There is a need for Protestant Reformed ministers and teachers.” Since then, they have actively sought donations and asked the churches for collections. Through the FPRYP Scholarship Fund, monies are granted to any college student who is studying to be a Protestant Re-

formed minister or teacher, and who meets certain qualifications, including scholastic ability and financial need. In the past four years, the FPRYP Scholarship Fund distributed over \$100,000 to prospective preachers and teachers. And last year alone, over 22 young men and women received much-needed assistance.

Although the Protestant Reformed community indeed heeds the financial support of future pastors and teachers, each of us should take a personal interest in this cause. There are only two avenues of organized support for seminary students (one for teachers), and these organizations have limits to what they can give. Funds from the Seminary Student Aid Committee are currently limited by synod to \$10,000 per student. Grants from the FPRYP Scholarship Fund are limited by the amount donated to the organization and the number of applicants. Despite this generous assistance, the students still often come up well short of what they need to continue their studies. Therefore, they must rely on private assistance from us. But the problem is that the student has no avenue of making his or her need known to the community.

Therefore, do not assume someone else is taking care of these students, but be informed. Know what collections are taken in your own church for this cause. If collections are taken only for the FPRYP Scholarship Fund, consider asking your consistory to take collections for seminary students—several churches already do this—but such funds must be distributed directly to the students. When conversing with a student, do not limit your inquiries to his grades and health, but every now and then ask if he has enough money; offer to help. Students do not bring up the subject themselves. Nor should they. On the one hand, they must learn to wait on the Lord. But on the other hand, we should know their situation and be ready to help in the Lord's name.

Although the support of future ministers and teachers should be the concern of everyone in the churches, especially those who are young adults should take heed to this matter. Many of these students are your peers. Many of you have the means to help; you live with your parents, are single, hold down good jobs, and have few financial burdens. You may have determined that you are not called to be a teacher or minister. That is fine.

But at least consider those who are working hard on your behalf, and upon whom you and your own children will someday depend. Then, give generously to this cause.

Finally, everyone should consider an immediate donation to the FPRYP Scholarship Fund. It is the only existing means to make incognito, tax-deductible donations to both future ministers and teachers; it is the only fund that supports prospective teachers; and the need is urgent. The Scholarship Fund is currently depleted, and unless some \$30-40,000 is raised soon, few scholarships will be granted this year. That would be devastating. Check your deaconate collection schedule to see when the next collection will be taken for this fund. When the

plate passes (or *bags* in Canada), empty your wallet. Donations can also be sent directly to the Scholarship Fund, c/o Mr. Trevor Kalsbeek, 954 Colrain St. SW, Wyoming MI, 49509.

I cannot speak to the immediate need for future teachers, but some 1,500 people in our vacant churches can testify to the urgent need for ministers. There may be many reasons for any such lack precisely because there are many details that re-

quire attention in order to receive them. There are the details about which we can do nothing: God must give us future ministers or teachers, make their place in the world and His kingdom, call them to their work, and endow them with intellect, spirituality, and a host of other gifts. Then there are the details in which God engages us: We must pray for them; loving mothers must raise them; dedicated fathers must instruct them and lay before them this calling; schools and seminary must hone their skills; once received, they must be paid, encouraged, utilized, and honored; and, if we are to have them, they must be supported liberally during their schooling. There may be many reasons why we might lack teachers or preachers. Please, let it not be for want of a dollar! ❖

Although the support of future ministers and teachers should be the concern of everyone in the churches, especially those who are young adults should take heed to this matter.

Rev. Langerak is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This article was also published in the March 1 issue of the Standard Bearer.

George M. Ophoff (20)

His Work as Professor of Poimenics

by Prof. Herman Hanko

Last time we talked a bit in general about the work of Revs. Hoeksema and Ophoff in the seminary. In this and a couple of other articles, I want to talk a bit more specifically about some of the work which Rev. Ophoff did.

You must understand that in a seminary where there are only two professors and where a full seminary curriculum is taught each professor must teach an enormous number of different subjects. In most larger seminaries (and colleges) a professor teaches in one specific field. He may, e.g., be a professor of history; he then teaches only history courses and sometimes specializes more narrowly and teaches, for example, only Latin American History. He can then concentrate his attention upon this field to the exclusion of others. This was not (and is not now) true in our seminary. Generally speaking, Rev. Ophoff taught in the areas of Practical Theology, Old Testament studies and Church History. Although the professors received some help from other ministers (Revs. Vos, Heys, Schipper and Veldman taught one or more subjects in seminary from time to time) this meant that Rev. Hoeksema taught something like twenty-six different courses and Rev. Ophoff something like twenty. They did not, of course, teach all these courses every year; but the point that needs to be made was that they had to become competent in a number of different fields of study. Rev. Ophoff, for example had to become expert in Hebrew Grammar and Hebrew Exegesis, Church History, Church Polity, Old Testament History and Practical Theology with included: Poimenics, Catechetics, and Church Polity. This involved an enormous amount of studying and development.

There are advantages and disadvantages to being responsible for teaching a large number of different subjects. The disadvantages are that, with a limited amount of time available to a professor, he is unable to become

thoroughly and completely master of a field of knowledge. But the advantages, in my judgment, far outweigh the disadvantages. One can, when specializing in one area of knowledge and devoting all his studies to it, become so narrow that he is unable to see the organic connection between his field of expertise and the whole area of a theological curriculum. If, for example, he is a specialist in the history of doctrine, he may know the field thoroughly, but fail to understand and see how the history of doctrine is related to church history, a study of the confessions, and Dogmatics. This lack would sharply curtail the effect of his teaching. Indeed, as his field of specialization grows narrower, he might concentrate on the history of the Dutch Reformed Churches at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, and be totally unaware of the Marrow controversy which troubled the Presbyterians Churches in Scotland in the beginning of the eighteenth century.

The advantage to being required to teach a large number of subjects is that the professor becomes much broader in his knowledge of theological subjects, is able to relate knowledge of one field to another, and thus enrich his studies, and gives his teaching a breadth that it could not possibly have if he was more specialized. It is my own personal judgment that this is also of benefit for the seminary because the professors, each of whom has a knowledge of the field in which the others labor, can work together in unity of doctrine for the greater cause of the preparation of men for the ministry of the Word. The history of our own seminary is proof of this.

In this article and a couple of others I want to quote from some of Rev. Ophoff's writings. There are several reasons why I am going to do this. One is that, quotations from some of these writings will show that these men did become masters in their fields. Another reason is that brief quotes from these writings will also show

that they did their own work in their fields. They developed their subjects along distinctively Reformed lines and in areas where development had not taken place before. They did original work which remains of abiding value to the Church. The final reason is that I have some hopes that at least a few of our readers will, having tasted slightly the flavor of these writings, will be persuaded to do more reading in all the excellent material that was produced.

Poimenics is a study of the principles of pastoral work. It concentrates especially on that aspect of the minister's labor which is of a pastoral kind: family visitation, sick visitation, personal counseling, etc. We have noted before that Rev. Ophoff's strengths were not in pastoral labor in the congregation. Nevertheless he produced a syllabus which was extremely worthwhile. In fact, several years after I was in the ministry, I still re-read Rev. Ophoff's notes simply to refresh my mind. I would often read the section of family visitation before this work was begun in the fall of the year. (This old syllabus is no longer in print. Prof. Decker has prepared a new syllabus. But this is based on the work of Rev. Ophoff and can be obtained from the seminary. It would perhaps be wise if all our elders purchased this work.)

Here are a few quotations from Rev. Ophoff's syllabus on Poimenics.

Family visiting should lay hold on the whole of life—civil, economic, family and church life, and personal religious life. The last mentioned is of chief importance. If it is well with a man's soul, all is well. But it is not advisable to begin with the spiritual, personal life, to set out, for example, with questions such as these: "Are you assured that you are a child of God?" or "Are you a Christian? And do you believe you are?" And if the answer be in the affirmative, to continue with a question of "why". These are difficult questions and often prove confusing. They should be reserved for a later point in the conversation, to which the conversation should lead.

The thing to do is to put those visited at ease by natural, easy spiritual conversation. The confidence of the sheep must be won. It must be made easy for them to speak about themselves, about matters that concern them personally. The pastor must make it easy for his sheep to open their hearts to him. He must remove the distance that separates him from them; he must truly draw nigh unto them and they to him, in order that there may be spiritual contact between pastor and sheep.

To be sure, so much depends upon the pastor in the achievement of this purpose: we may name the following. 1) The approach of the pastor. 2) His deportment in the family circle. 3) The tone of voice, even, in which he speaks. 4) The expression on his face. The pastor should be mindful of these things; he should speak in a well-modulated tone. His voice should be free from harshness. His person should radiate true kindness, sympathy, understanding, of which the fear of the Lord is the source. The sheep must be able to feel that the pastor is genuinely interested in them, that he wants to help them in a spiritual sense, if only they will let him. It means, of course, that the pastor must truly love his sheep, i.e., love the work of Christ in them. And this means that he himself must be a true child of God. The latter must certainly be added.

Even after Rev. Ophoff gave full time to the work of the seminary, he nevertheless still labored in the work of family visitation, for he was, for many years, elder in the congregation of First Church and there had the opportunity to put his own principles into practice. My father, while minister in First Church, frequently worked with Rev. Ophoff during his terms as elder. He enjoyed having Rev. Ophoff with him on family visitation and said that with Rev. Ophoff the work was always easier.

To quote but one more brief paragraph: Rev. Ophoff writes in connection with "the importance of true knowledge of human nature for the preaching and the preacher."

It will spare (the minister) many surprises and discouragements as he contacts and moves among the members of his flock; and sees them in their daily living. Knowing what man is apart from grace, and knowing that God's redeemed people in this life have but a small principle of obedience, and that in their flesh there dwelleth no good thing, he will know what to expect from his sheep, and what not to expect. He will certainly not look for perfection in them. As armed with this true knowledge of human nature, the pastor will not stand amazed at the rioting of sin in his flock. When he sees a good man fall into sin, as did David, he will not be astonished and confused. The many infirmities of God's people will not discourage him, and he will be on his guard against the "pious" people in his flock. ❖

Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Church News

BAPTISMS

"For the promise is unto you and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Acts 2:39

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:
Travis Scott, son of Mr. & Mrs. Greg Holstege—Faith, MI
Thomas Ryan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brandon VanOverloop—Hudsonville, MI
Kelsey Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chad Uittenbogaard—Hull, IA
Jayden Grant, son of Mr. & Mrs. Rodney Wierenga—Lacombe, Canada
Seth Richard, son of Rev. & Mrs. Richard Smit—Lacombe, Canada
Ethan James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Sam Carson—Loveland, CO
Callie Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. John Heys—Loveland, CO
Grace Louise, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bill Moore—Loveland, CO
Seth William, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ed Hoksbergen—Randolph, WI
Brenna Lanae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle VanBaren—Randolph, WI
Gabrielle Diane, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Larry Leoni—South Holland, IL

Silas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Phil VanBaren—South Holland, IL
Kayla Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric VanBaren—South Holland, IL
Logan Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mike Holstege—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6

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

Daniel DeVries—Grandville, MI
Timothy Key—Grandville, MI
Chad Looyenga—Grandville, MI
Amy Westing—Hudsonville, MI
Tina Zuverink—Hudsonville, MI
Jennie VanMaanen—Hull, IA
Manuel Montalvo—South Holland, IL

MARRIAGES

"For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death." Psalm 48:14

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:
Mr. Bob Alsum and Miss Jenna Bos—Randolph, WI
Mr. Ben Zandstra and Miss Teresa Kuiper—Southwest, MI

The Reader Asks

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

We do, however, ask that your name and either your home or email address be included so that Rev. Laning can respond privately if need be.

Please send your question to:

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

The Ploughboy (2)

Water lapped the sides of the ship as it docked in England's busiest port. Fog had settled in nicely with the darkness to provide a murky blanket of cover. And cover was what they needed.

"Roll main sail! Drop anchor!"

Sailors bustled over deck and pier to bring the great hull of the ship safely into position for unloading. Though few of the men knew it, the cargo they brought to English shores this night was priceless—more precious even than gold.

In short order the sailors had dozens of barrels of wheat stacked onto the pier. A normal voyage and a normal cargo ought to bring little attention from the authorities. But agents of Henry VIII, king of England, were likely to be close at hand when foreign banners blew into the coasts of his majesty's realm. The mist of night-fall might at least give them some extra time.

"All accounted for, sir," reported the secretary of goods from the pier below. The captain of the ship nodded his approval and gazed into the murky haze. Fog hid ships—and inspectors. He held his breath, for indeed, out of the gloom emerged two agents of the king. Obliging the secretary gave the men his ledger. The inspectors opened one barrel, another, and then another. All wheat. Life-giving, basic, bread-making wheat. Finally satisfied, the officers disappeared into the fog.

The secretary could not help but smile as he saluted his captain from the pier. The captain, too, was clearly relieved. Barrels stacked on the right were marked for wheat. So were barrels on the left—except for one small extra line beneath each mark. The inspectors had only opened barrels on the right.

Without delay the barrels with the extra mark were brought to a warehouse at the edge of the shipyard. Hurriedly opened, the wheat was spilled onto the floor. But along with the wheat came something else—real life-giving Bread. The Bible in England's own tongue!

More barrels and Bibles would slip through this port, using not only wheat for cover, but also imports such as cotton and wine. More Englishmen would read the Word of God for the very first time in their lives. And more men would be burned at the stake for owning such precious pages.

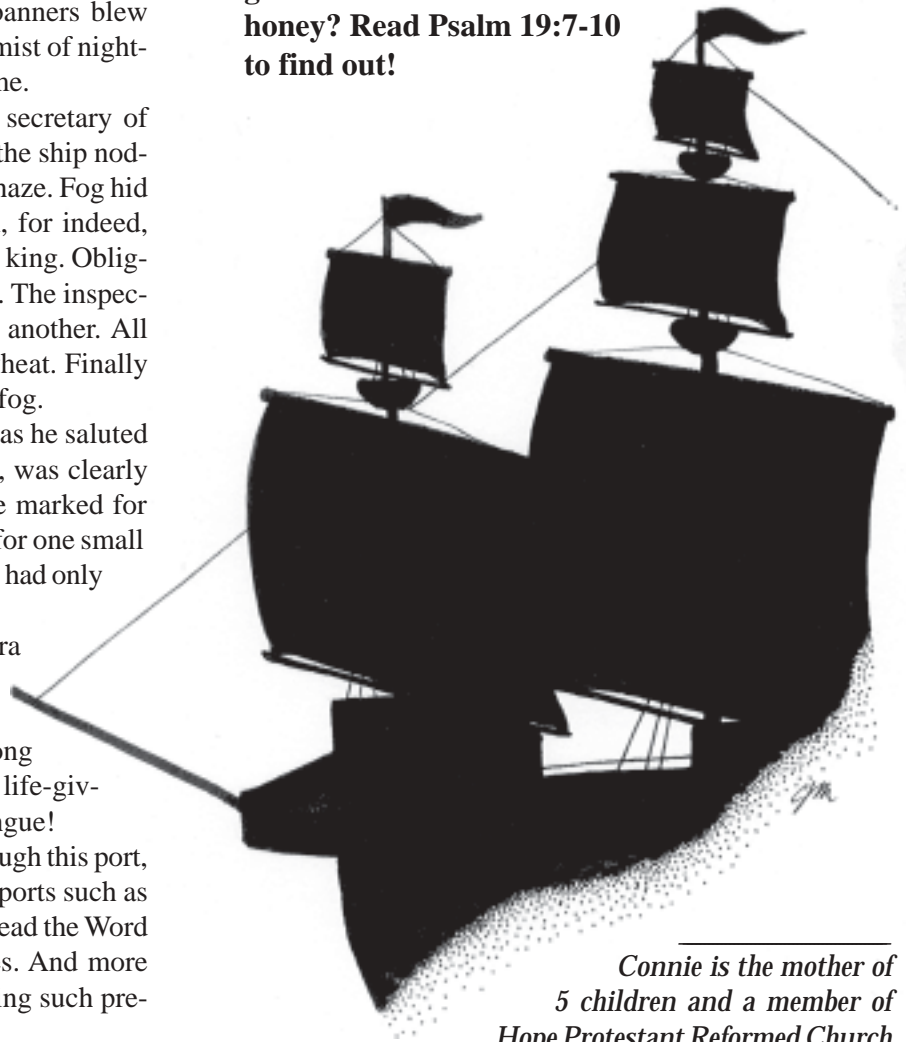
"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

But where were these Bibles coming from? Who dared to translate and print them? Someone who loved England dearly. Someone who loved the Word of God more than his own life. Indeed, someone who was in grave danger of losing it even now... ❖

What makes the simple wise, rejoices the heart, endures forever, and is more desirable than gold as well as sweeter than honey? Read Psalm 19:7-10 to find out!



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

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Located on the Lake of the Ozarks



Royal Citizens in the Kingdom of God

1 Peter 2:9: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Rev. VanderWal—The Kingdom and Its Royal Citizens
Rev. Mahtani—Our Worship of the King
Rev. Spriensma—Our Kingdom Allegiance



This camp is located on the Lake of the Ozarks. The many activities at the camp available to us will include the following:

The Edge	2 Tennis Courts
High Element	Sand Volleyball
Leap of Faith	Outdoor Basketball Court
Zip Line	Hiking Trails
High Swing	Miniature Golf
Low Element	Field Games
Cave Tour	Outdoor Pool
Aqua Jumps	Hydro Bikes
Barracuda Challenge	Kayaks
Gym	Pedal Boats



Hosted by Faith PRC. Go to www.prcconvention.com for more information, updates, and pictures of the camp!
Registration Deadline: April 15, 2005

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