

Beacon Lights

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*“use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh,
but by love serve one another.”*

Galatians 5:13b

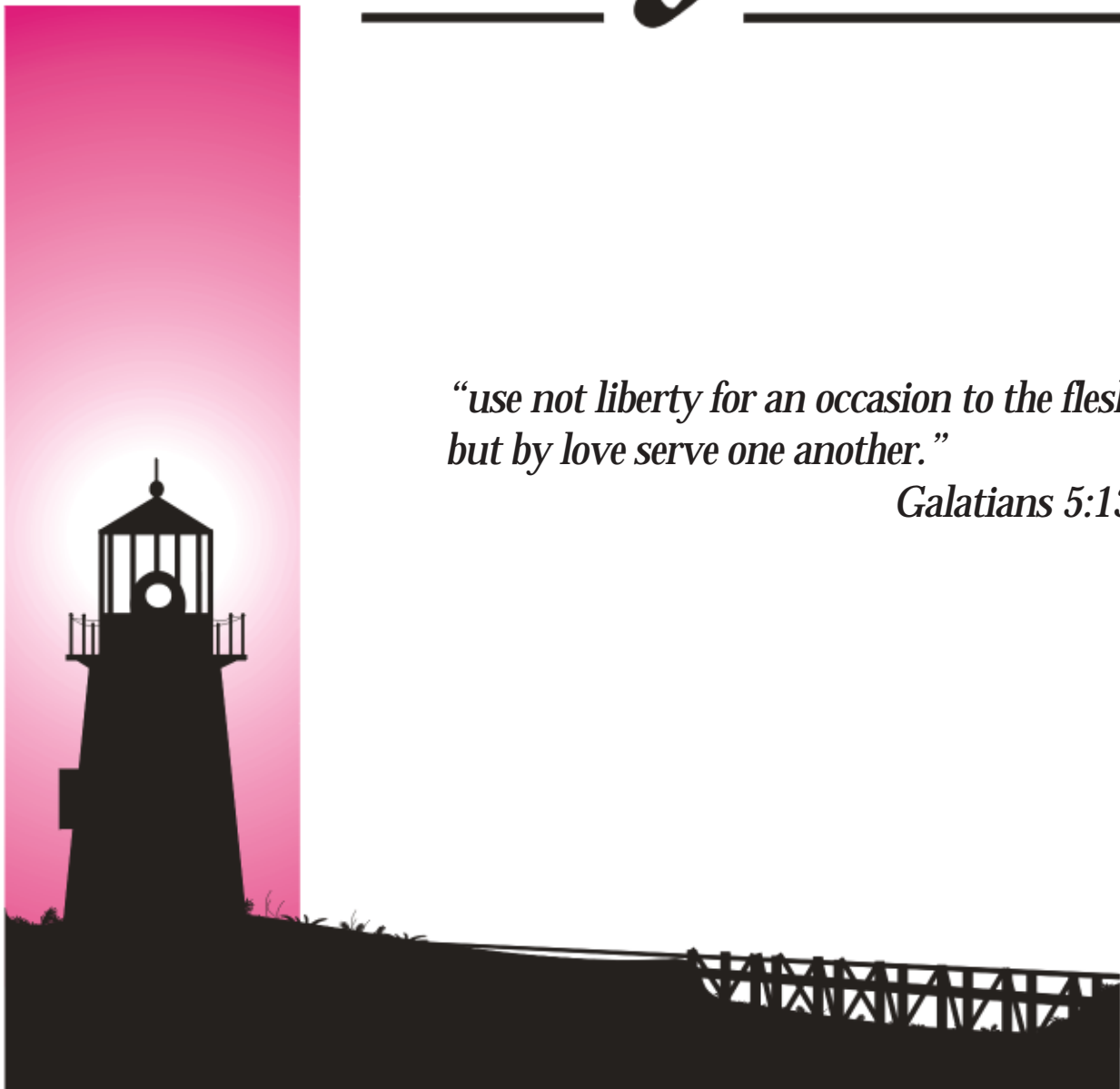


Table of Contents

- EDITORIAL
- 3 Mega-churches: A Manifestation of the Spirit of the Age (1)**
- FRUITFUL BRANCHES
- 5 Forgiving Seventy Times Seven**
- STORY TIME
- 7 Writing Contest Sampler**
- CHURCH HISTORY
- 10 George M. Ophoff (21): Professor of Church History**
- GEM OF THE MONTH
- 12 Death**
- DEVOTIONAL
- 13 Watching Daily At My Gates**
- FROM THE PASTOR'S STUDY
- 19 Unbreakable Scripture (2)**
- MINDING MISSIONS
- 20 Observing the White Horse in Beijing, China**
- 22 A Day with Dad—Our Eastern Home Missionary**
- MEMOIR OF REV. C. HANKO
- 23 Chapter 1: Herman and Jantje**
- 26 Church News**
- LITTLE LIGHTS
- 27 The Ploughboy (3)**

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Mega-churches: A Manifestation of the Spirit of the Age (1)



by Aaron J. Cleveland

There was in the February 12, 2005 edition of *The Grand Rapids Press* an interesting article on the front page of the Religion section with the title, “Do Mega-churches Bring Thousands To God, Or Let Worshipers Get Lost In A Crowd?” In the article, three Grand Rapid’s area mega-churches were referred to, Calvary Church, which draws 6,000 to Sunday morning services, Resurrection Life which draws nearly 8,000, and Mars Hill with an attendance of 10,000. The article pointed out several characteristics of mega-churches in general and showed how Grand Rapid’s three largest mega-churches exhibited these characteristics to one degree or another. Referred to in the article was a study on mega-churches done by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

A look at the study reveals much about the recent explosion in growth of mega-churches across America. In 1970, there were about 10 mega-churches in America. By 1990, there were 250. By 2003, there were approximately 740.¹ A mega-church is defined as a “congregation with an average weekly worship attendance of 2000 or more.”² Some narrow the definition by adding non-Catholic congregations, or more accurately non-Roman Catholic, with weekly attendance of 2000 or more. Notice the definition’s use of the word “attendance” and not “membership.” This distinction is important as we will see later. While many of the mega-church congregations have existed for nearly 50 years, most of the “tremendous growth has taken place in the past 25 years.”³

The study reveals many interesting things about the worship services of those churches that participated in the study. Among the nondenominational churches in the study, “75-80 percent” of them use “electronic keyboards and guitars, and drums” in their worship. “Forty-three percent include recorded music in the service” and “22 percent report they use dance or drama always or quite often” in their worship services. As to the elements of the worship services, the study reports that “worship always or often includes:”

- Sermons (100%)
- Organ and/or piano music (92%)
- String or wind instruments (79%)
- Time for people to greet each other (93%)
- Altar call for salvation (60%)
- Prayers for healing (45%)
- Speaking in tongues (17%)

While 67 percent of the churches in the study belong to a denomination, “only 37 percent thought the statement ‘Our congregation clearly expresses its denominational (or nondenominational stance) heritage’ described them very or quite well.”⁴ The study also points out that these churches are more likely to participate in joint worship services and social outreach with churches outside of their denomination than they are with churches within their own denomination. More than 10 percent of them report holding joint worship services and conducting social outreach with, as the study terms, “other faith traditions.”

It is important to remember when analyzing mega-churches as a group that we do not apply to individual churches characteristics which belong to the group as a whole. Individual mega-churches vary greatly. While some churches in the group may resemble the group as a whole, others may be quite different and not really fit the pattern for what a mega-church generally looks like. This rule will guide us in the rest of our analysis.

Having looked at some of the facts about mega-churches in general, let us look at some of the traits, which, to one degree or another, characterize mega-churches.

There are seven characteristics of mega-churches as a group which we will notice, some of them overlapping each other. These traits relate to mega-church 1) theology, 2) style of worship, 3) organization, 4) leadership, 5) membership, 6) outreach and evangelism, and 7) vision and purpose. As we look at each one of these items, we will evaluate them in the light of God's Word and our Reformed Creeds, particularly the Belgic Confession.

The first characteristic of mega-churches is the lack of a clearly defined system of doctrine. Many mega-churches advertise themselves as such. Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago, founded his church upon what people wanted in a church. In 1975, he, his wife, and others surveyed the neighborhood to see what people would like church to be. The answers he received—"shorter and more practical sermons, upbeat music, use of the contemporary arts and lots of classes on how to live the Christian life."⁵ Today, more than 17,000 worshippers a week pack Willow Creek to hear "practical sermons" on how to live the Christian life.

While it may be the case that a church has an official "Statement of Faith," it is also true that a document like this is meaningless unless its contents are consistently taught to the congregation and violations of it by members disciplined. In his analysis of mega-church members' beliefs, Dr. Scott Thumma writes,

These congregations and their ministries exhibit considerable pluralism. Although the official theology espoused may be orthodox conservative Christianity, a variety of opinions and practices are tolerated in relation to women's roles, sexuality, abortion, and political persuasions. In a cultural climate which emphasizes the self-construction of beliefs and spirituality, tolerance of a diversity of possible alternatives, unified under a common vision, is an asset.⁶

When one takes the time to examine a few mega-church websites, one is struck by the fact that it can be difficult to find exactly what doctrinal stances the churches take. The typical website is often elaborate, flashy, and loaded with information about church leaders, opportunities, programs, activities, events, and music performed during the worship services. If one finds a "Statement of Faith" or description of "beliefs", it is usually very brief and vague. There is a noticeable effort to push any kind of doctrinal affirmation into the background.

There is a reason for this. Doctrine is not appealing to the natural man. Sound doctrine is offensive. When the goal of a church is numerical growth, which many mega-churches freely admit, then every obstacle to that growth must be removed. The church must become an inviting, non-offensive, and casual place to meet in order to attract as many people as possible from the surrounding neighborhood. There will not be very many repeat visitors if the minister spends a considerable amount of time explaining doctrine, especially if he preaches sound doctrine.

Yet, it is exactly the preaching of the "pure doctrine of the gospel" which is the chief mark and calling of the true church in the world (Article 29, Belgic Confession). It is this kind of preaching which causes the most important kind of growth, spiritual growth among God's people. It is a manifestation of the spirit of the age when churches, leaders and members (attendees) alike, reject sound doctrine and replace it with whatever the man on the street wants to hear. This is exactly what Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote to Timothy in II Timothy 4:3, 4, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

Those who attend and become members of churches where sound doctrine is cast aside show that they do not really know what it is to “join” a church. Article 28 of the Belgic Confession, which sets forth the believer’s duty “to join himself to the true Church,” points out that one of the reasons one joins himself to a church is in order to submit himself to “*the doctrine and discipline thereof.*” Jesus Christ is pleased to rule His people in this way. To look for or join a church which willingly rejects God’s ordained way of ruling His people is sin.

The second trait of mega-churches which we will examine is their contemporary style of worship. It is a style of worship which flows directly out of their rejection of doctrinal preaching and their emphasis upon being a non-offensive and inviting community. This is where we will begin next time, Lord willing. ❖

Footnotes

¹ Luisa Kroll. (2003, September 17). Megachurches, Megabusinesses. *Forbes.com*, Retrieved March 5, 2005, from http://www.forbes.com/2003/09/17/cz_lk_0917megachurch.html.

² Scott Thumma, PhD. (2000). Megachurches Today: Summary of the Faith Communities Today material on Megachurches, Hartford Institute For Religion Research. Retrieved February 28, 2005, from Hartford Seminary website: http://hirr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_megachurches_FACT_summary.html.

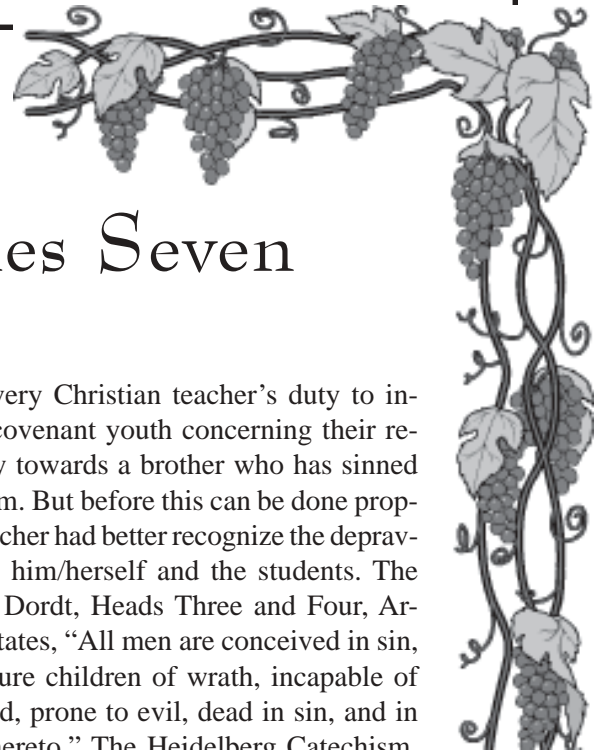
³ Megachurches Today.

⁴ Megachurches Today.

⁵ Chris Meehan. “Vibrant leader puts old message in new form.” *The Grand Rapids Press*, (March 5, 2005), Sec. E, pp. 1, 2.

⁶ Scott Thumma, PhD. (2000). Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: their characteristics and cultural context, Hartford Institute for Religion Research. Retrieved February 28, 2005 from the Harford Seminary website: http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article2.html.

Fruitful Branches



Forgiving Seventy Times Seven

by Deborah Key

Countless pages have been written by scholars around the world, who all have opinions about the “ideal” education. Books upon books can be read instructing teachers to recognize and eliminate prejudice, to teach conflict resolution, and to teach children to become productive members of society. Regardless of the credentials of the authors, there is one thing sadly lacking from such books, and from all modern education: the truth of God’s holy word. It’s no wonder that young people of the world turn to juvenile delinquency and violence to resolve conflicts. Because of the depravity of the human race, it is vital for the Christian school teacher to emphasize each day that we must love and forgive our neighbor as Christ also loves and forgives us.

It is every Christian teacher’s duty to instruct the covenant youth concerning their responsibility towards a brother who has sinned against them. But before this can be done properly, the teacher had better recognize the depravity of both him/herself and the students. The Canons of Dordt, Heads Three and Four, Article Two states, “All men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto.” The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 2, Question and Answer 5 also teach that we are prone by nature to hate God and our neighbor.

In order for true, covenant education to take place, a “child must, in the totality of his nature and in the development of every aspect of his nature, be spiritually nurtured... Sanctified children must be taught and disciplined to be holy” (Engelsma, 68-69). This means that when a stu-

dent has been sinned against by a fellow student, the godly teacher must teach him or her to respond according to the principles set forth in Scripture.

As I hope to be an elementary teacher, Lord willing, I have thought about this whole issue in regard to teaching young children. Contemplating how I might convey the truth of Scripture when a young student sins against another student, I believe there are three closely related principles to set forth. They are simple enough to be understood and carried out even by young children.

First and foremost is that of forgiveness. The Bible teaches a lot about forgiveness; therefore, we can teach children a lot about forgiveness. God repeatedly forgave Israel for falling into sin. Even the holiest of men, such as David, Solomon, and Paul, had to be forgiven of grievous sins. How much more are we and our children in need of forgiveness each day? In Lord’s Day 51, Question and Answer 126, we are taught: “Which is the fifth petition? And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; that is, be pleased for the sake of Christ’s blood, not to impute to us poor sinners our transgressions, nor that depravity which always cleaves to us; even as we feel this evidence of Thy grace in us, that it is *our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbors*” (emphasis mine). Years ago, Rev. Vos wrote an article entitled *Forgive* in the Standard Bearer. In it he stated, “We are at a loss to rightly evaluate our debt. It is endless. So we sing, “Endless is the love of God!”

Because God loves us, He demonstrates that eternal love by washing away all of our sins in the blood of Christ. “The Christian school teacher should be one who always lives in the conscious presence of the Eternal Source of grace and love” (Boerkoel, 475). We, as teachers, must constantly forgive the wrongs of our students, and also teach them to forgive one another. We may not just forgive someone when we feel like it; on the contrary, there is to be no end to our forgiveness, just as there is no limit to God’s love and forgiveness. Jesus taught Peter in Matthew 18:22 that the brother is to be

It is every Christian teacher’s duty to instruct the covenant youth concerning their responsibility towards a brother who has sinned against them.

forgiven seventy times seven—thereby implying that we must forgive over and over, not just a mere 490 times.

The second principle to teach children is that we must not only forgive, but we must forgive from the heart. When a student has been wronged by

another student, Christian teachers ought to teach the children more than just “I’m sorry” and “I forgive you.” It is too easy to spit these phrases out just for the satisfaction of our parents and teachers, and not because we really mean them. “If we forgive from the heart, that is, if Divine mercy flows through our heart to our fellowservants that sin against us, we will receive greater mercy” (Vos, 376).

Forgiving from the heart entails that the sin is dismissed and not held against the sinner. This is a demonstration of God’s love in us; if God held our sins against us, we could have no hope of life eternal. As Hebrews 8:12 teaches, God “will be merciful to [our] unrighteousness. and [our] sins and iniquities will [He] remember no more.” Likewise, truly forgiving our neighbor means that we do not hold grudges. We do not refuse to speak to the person for days on end. We do not speak badly of the person or refuse to have contact with them. Only by the grace of God can teachers and students see the mercy of God toward their own sins, and thereby extend mercy to our neighbors.

Because we may not hold grudges, we are to go the opposite direction and serve our neighbor.

The third principle that godly teachers need to demonstrate to their students has to do with Christ’s command to love our neighbors as ourselves. If a brother has sinned against us and we have forgiven him, we may not just stop at that. No. Because we may not hold grudges, we are to go the opposite direction and serve our neighbor. A wonderful reminder of this is found in Galatians 5:13-14, which states, “...use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Not only must stu-

dents be taught to forgive from the heart, but also, they need to serve each other—even if this involves actions as simple as sharing a glue stick, answering a question, or holding the door open.

In order to love and serve the neighbor, our covenant children must also learn from early on that they must not go around looking for faults in their neighbor. It is so easy for our human natures to see the shortcomings in others and not ourselves. Rather than running to tattle-tale to the teacher what so-and-so did, even children need to be taught to first look at the beam in their own eye. As Galatians 6:1-3 puts it, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.”

The importance of Christian schools and teachers can not be emphasized enough. As Prof. Engelsma wrote, “The activity of rearing covenant children in the nurture and admonition of Christ is only done by means of Scripture” (Engelsma, 22). Because depravity exists in teachers and students, it is necessary for teachers to rely on God’s infallible Word as the only guide for faith and

life. This means that when a student of mine has been sinned against by another, I will not just make the offender put his/her head down or write lines. I will teach the children to forgive each other willingly, and from the heart, as God has so willingly forgiven us. I recognize that I myself am weak and sinful; therefore, by daily prayer I will seek God’s mercy to carry out His task of instructing the covenant youth. And only in prayer will I rest assured of God’s forgiveness when I have not done so properly. ❖

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Deborah is a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan. She wrote this essay for the 2004 PRYP Scholarship.

Story Time

Writing Contest Sampler

by Lisa Baldwin

The following is a story that surpasses the 1600 word limit for the contest, but provides a good example of the type of writing we are looking for. Perhaps you tried writing a story earlier and then gave up. Now is a good time to take a fresh look at your work and give it the final touches.

Gunfire slaughtered the silence. Smoke swirled in the ocean breeze and the wind drove one lone kamikaze pilot across the water. Drifting through the haze, he fell unseen into the water. After quickly shedding his parachute and heavy flight suit, Tokushima pushed to the surface.

All around him planes smashed into the decks of immense aircraft carriers. As waves of water flooded over

the teen, guilt washed over him. “What have I done?” grimaced Tokushima. “I am a failure. I have brought dishonor to my Emperor and I have disgraced my vows. I abandoned my duty. But I just couldn’t do it.” Toku looked around him, seeing the destruction, knowing he should have been part of it. His thoughts continued. “Especially if Kurimori’s god is real. How could I face this god, knowing I killed all those people?”

The cold of the water began to seep into Tokushima’s muscles. His legs slowed, causing him to slip further into the water, but his mind raced.

“All my teachers said it was the ultimate honor to die for your country. But in this manner? It doesn’t feel like an honor. It feels... wrong. Especially after all

Kurimori told me. I never would have thought of those Americans even as *people* if Kurimori hadn't said anything."

Tokushima's doubt turned to scorn and self-derision. "Who am I but an ignorant seventeen year old barely trained kamikaze pilot? All those months training, wasted. And what for? Some god I don't even believe exists."

His brain didn't register the numbness spreading over his entire body. Even when waves pushed him under water momentarily, he took no notice. His mind wasn't there. He was in his home less than a year ago, bursting with ecstasy.

"Okaasan, Okaasan! You are looking at one of the newest fighter pilot trainees! In two weeks, I begin training. Those weak Brits and Americans don't stand a chance now that Tokushima Hoshikama has joined the Imperial Force!"

Toku only saw the look of pride that covered his mother's face. The tears she was working so hard to blink back were left unnoticed as he turned to his older brother.

"Kurimori! Did you hear? Isn't this an amazing day? I, Tokushima Hoshikama will contribute to the greatest fighting force in all of history- the army of Japan!"

Toku didn't even look to see his brother's reaction, but flew out the door to spread the news to all of his friends. He couldn't wait to see their looks of jealousy.

Japanese planes continued to slam into the decks of American ships, but Toku's mind had moved on to another memory, several weeks after his training had started. A memory that had consumed him, until it had become all he could think about.

"So, Toku, how's school going? What have you learned?"

"Brother, you have no idea what work is. They don't give us a break! From going to flight lessons to regular lessons, to studying about the Emperor! I love it though. I've learned so much."

"That's great! I've missed you though. We haven't talked in forever." Kurimori's expression turned serious as he changed the subject. "Toku, have you thought about what you are getting into?"

A look of confusion entered Toku's eyes, so Kurimori continued. "It sounds like glory now, but each person you kill, is just that, a person. They have a history. They have family at home waiting for them to come back."

"What are you saying? That I shouldn't fight for my country? That I should just let the Americans run us over?"

"No, that's not it at all. I just don't want the glory to blind you to reality. Never kill simply for the sheer joy of killing."

"All I do is for the glory of the Emperor. Those Americans deserve what they get. Who do they think they are expecting to beat the most powerful empire in the world? With the most powerful Emperor? They must be crazy." Toku looked at his brother with disdain, and started to leave the room. Kurimori's voice stopped him.

"Just remember what I said. And I have something else I'd like to talk to you about. Something even more important."

Toku turned around and walked back. His eyes warily met Kurimori's, but Kurimori persisted. "A couple of weeks ago, I met this man. What he told me has really changed my life. And I need to tell you about what he told me."

Toku's reluctance to listen to his brother grew. "I haven't seen my friends yet, so could you make it quick?"

Kurimori sighed, but continued. "I don't know where to start. Toku, this man was different from anyone I've met. He told me things I'd never heard before, but he made so much sense. He told me about how I am a filthy sinner."

Toku looked confused, and Kurimori tried to explain. "What I mean is I am wicked. I do things wrong every day. Even my best works are tainted with selfishness and greed and pride."

Toku began to protest, but Kurimori cut him off.

"I mean, you know better than I do how horrible I can be." At his brother's reluctant grin and nod Kurimori continued. "And I know better than anyone else how terrible my thoughts can be. And for all my wickedness, there is little goodness. And my wickedness deserves death. Eternal punishment. Because I am so horribly wicked."

"Oniichan, big brother, are you okay? Everyone has faults. And you aren't that bad. Besides, even if you were, it wouldn't matter. It's not like anything is going to happen to you, anyways. Who is going to send you to 'eternal punishment?' You are just overdramatic," Toku derided.

"No, Tokushami. It's true. My sins have to be paid for somehow. All my badness deserves punishment. And there is a God that is going to hold me accountable."

"The Emperor?" asked Toku incredulously.

"No, a *real* God. A real God who created the Universe. He came to earth, and was the perfect sacrifice. He gave His life, taking the punishment for my sins. By

living a perfect life and then dying, He paid for my sins. The sins of His people. And if you don't believe in Him..."

"No, no, NO. Do you know the trouble you could get in if certain people heard you say that? You know the Emperor has spies everywhere to find people who undermine his authority."

"Yes, I know, but I am not afraid. I trust in this God. I know with all of my heart He is real. And I know that He has saved me. And now I am doing my best to live a life glorifying Him."

"The Emperor is god. We must obey the Emperor. All glory to the Emperor," Tokushami dully recited, his eyes glassing over as he spoke. "We must do anything for the Emperor. He is our god. We must obey him."

Kurimori stared at him and whispered, "What are they teaching you?"

Toku was shaken out of his trance. "I love you, but I know you are wrong. The Emperor is god. If you must

believe in your god, don't talk about him where anyone can hear you. It's too dangerous. I have to go. I can't hear you talk like this."

Toku left to go visit his friends, but he couldn't get the conversation with his brother out of his head. What if Kurimori was right? What if there was a god who held him accountable for what he did? Could he stand before this god?

Tokushima grew numb to the cold, and he did not realize that the water around him was pulling him down. He was still thinking, reliving another recent memory.

During Tokushima's last visit home before his mission, he had one more conversation with Kurimori.

"Toku, before you go, I have to tell you something." Toku looked suspiciously at his brother. During every other visit home Kurimori had squeezed in more about Christ and the Scripture, and Tokushima was tired of hearing about it. "I should have done this weeks ago. I'm sorry. I've been a horrible brother. I don't think I

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.

ever encouraged you. I knew how much you looked up to me, but I just tore you down. So, I'm sorry."

Tokushima was dumbstruck. His brother apologizing to him? He was about to tell Kurimori not to worry about it, but Kurimori continued. "I know you have gotten tired of listening about God. And after this, I'll stop talking about Him. But I can't let you go to the war and not say this. God is with you. Always. Talk to Him, Toku. He is always listening."

"I'll be fine. And there is no need to apologize. I'll miss you Kurimori," Toku replied while putting up a strong mask. None of his emotions showed.

"What if I never see Kurimori again," he thought. "With my training, I might die." Toku felt his guard slipping as he hugged his older brother. Tokushima felt a teardrop on his face and looked up to see Kurimori crying.

"He never used to show me he loved me. He used to be so impatient. Now, he rarely gets angry. Why has he changed?" Toku wondered. As soon as the thought entered his mind, he knew the answer. "That must be some god to actually change Kurimori."

As Tokushima's mind was drawn back to the present, he became aware of the struggle to stay above the water. His energy was running low, but that was not what controlled his thoughts. Conversations with Kurimori ran through his mind. "Never kill for the pure joy of killing... Each person you kill, is just that, a person... God is with you. Always. Talk to Him, Toku. He is always listening."

It was that last sentence of encouragement that drove Toku to pray to the God of his brother. The God he wanted to be his God. Completely unaware of the burning and sinking ships around him, he began to cry.

"I don't know how I know You are out there. But I do. And I know that I don't deserve a thing other than death. But I also know, that You have promised that if any seek You, they shall find You. So, God, I am seeking."

A wave washed over Tokushima and for several seconds he struggled to reach the surface again. He only managed to push himself part of the way up, but he continued praying without realizing that he was sinking further into the water. "I believe that You came to Earth. I know that You died, not only for Kurimori, but also for me. I don't know how bad I really am, but I do know that I am horribly wicked. And if I don't believe in You, I will spend eternity in punishment."

As Toku poured his heart out to God, he was oblivious to the cold wrapping around him. His legs were barely moving, barely keeping him above the water level. Waves splashed over him, but as he sank deeper into the water, he also sank deeper into his prayer.

"God, I am just so thankful that you have drawn me to You. Even now. It was Your hand that guided me to get out of my plane. It was You that gave me the strength to resist the power of the Emperor."

"God, I just can't wait to be with You. But please let Kurimori know somehow that I found You. Or rather, that You found me. God, I am coming." ❖

Church History

George M. Ophoff (21)

Professor of Church History

by Prof. Herman Hanko

In our last article, we wrote about the work which Rev. Ophoff did in the field of Poimenics, or, as it is sometimes called: Pastoring the Flock of Christ. We quoted briefly from his notes which he had prepared for his students. You will recall that our purpose in this was to demonstrate to our readers, not only the fact that the

professors in the seminary did a vast amount of work in teaching a large number of different subjects, but that they did original work in these fields. Even though they had to spread their labors over many different areas of study, they nevertheless became competent in these areas and prepared material of abiding value.

In this article, I want to make some quotes from an article in the *Standard Bearer* which has to do with Church History, and, more particularly, with the history of the Reformation. Rev. Ophoff did a tremendous amount of work in this field and, in fact, wrote three complete syllabuses: one each on Ancient Church History, Medieval Church History and Modern Church History. He also wrote extensively in the *Standard Bearer* on various aspects of the history of the church of Christ. He was thoroughly acquainted with his field, had read widely in it, and was competent to teach the courses.

But the reason why I am quoting from this particular article is not, in the first place, to demonstrate Rev. Ophoff's competence. The reason is somewhat different and, I think, more important. When Rev. Hoeksema and Rev. Ophoff took a stand against the heresy of common grace, they were aware of the fact that the heresy of common grace was not a matter of one or two isolated doctrines of Scripture which were in dispute; but they knew that this heresy was a principle departure from the truth which would have its effects not only upon the whole body of the truth, but also upon the entire field of learning and life. They could see the implications of this heresy in the whole of what we may call a man's "world-and-life view." When they took a stand for sovereign and particular grace, therefore, they saw also that this had implications for the whole of human endeavor and, more narrowly, for all the subjects taught in the theological curriculum in the seminary. They took it upon themselves to develop ideas in all the areas of learning which they had to teach, and show how the truth of sovereign and particular grace affected every subject.

The whole subject of the Reformation is a case in point. Though I have read many books on the relationship between the Reformation and the Renaissance, I have yet to find a book which deals properly with the relationship between these two movements which ran side by side in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Most, if not all, take the position that the two movements were essentially one, although differing in their unique emphases. The Renaissance was an intellectually awakening which freed Europe from the intellectual tyranny of the Dark Ages brought on by the Roman Catholic Church. The Renaissance itself was the intellectual side of the movement, while the Reformation was the ecclesiastical side of the same movement.

This is fundamentally the position of those who teach common grace. The revival of learning which swept Europe was brought about by a discovery of Greek and

Roman culture and learning in literature, art and architecture. The Reformation was the deliverance of the church of Jesus Christ from the tyranny of Rome and the return of the church to the truth of Scripture. It was led by Martin Luther, John Calvin and the rest of the reformers. Common grace takes the position that because the unregenerate are able to do good, the Renaissance produced much which was basically identical with the Reformation: one movement, two aspects to it.

One of the most lasting truths which I learned from Rev. Ophoff's Church History classes was that this is not the truth. He saw clearly the need to point out the truth of the matter from the viewpoint of sovereign and particular grace. The differences between the Reformation and the Renaissance, therefore, are due to and rooted in the antithesis, a doctrine destroyed by common grace. Here follow the excerpts of what he wrote on this matter in Vol. xviii, pp. 130-132, in which the antithesis comes out clearly.

The Reformation was a movement that exalted the Bible as the sole infallible source of doctrine. According to the literal meaning of the word, the Renaissance was a re-birth. It denoted the new zeal for pagan literature, learning and art, which sprang up in Italy toward the close of the Middle Ages... Of this movement the Reformation was neither a phase nor a product. The two movements...differed...

The subjective principle of the Reformation was the life of regeneration and true faith and love of the men of God by which this movement was represented. The objective principle of the Reformation was the truth as God's believing people possess it in Christ Jesus...

But these certainly were not the principles of the Renaissance...

The subjective principle of the Renaissance was unbelief, hatred of God and His Word, and positively, the love of the world, of the things in it.... Its objective principle was the lie, in particular this lie that the world passeth not away but abideth everlastingly, that this life is all that there is; that therefore the thing to do for man is to make the most of this life by improving it to the best of his abilities and by drinking deeply of its pleasures. And this verily was the theory of knowledge of the Renaissance, namely, that the source and criterion of man's knowledge of man, of God and of all things is man himself—his mind, reason, (rationalism); his feeling experience (mysticism); or his will (moralism), and that therefore the sole rule of life and all conduct is the will of this same man....

Death

*What can we say about the concept "death"?
It ends our life, it intercepts our breath;
No longer is there energy or thought;
Our pilgrimage is ended: come to naught.
Yet this is not the end, dear pilgrim friend;
It's but the start of new life without end.
Death is the passage that leads Christians through
From earth to heav'n: blest land beyond the blue.*

*We grieve to leave our fam'lies and our friends,
But here on earth all things must have their ends.
We leave this land of sin and grief and pain
And reach true bliss: unutterable gain!
For there on heaven's shore we stand and see
Our blessed Savior, Who has set us free
From sin's dominion. On His face we'll gaze
In ecstasy forever, sing His praise!*

Thelma Westra

The Reformation, it ought to be plain, was not a product of the Renaissance. Yet the two movements are being identified the one with the other. It can be expected that the Modernist student of history insists that at bottom the two are one and the same. The Modernists deny that there is a people—God's believing people—in whose essence and energy there operates a new and holy principle of life and that there are movements in history of which the only tenable explanation is that they are the function of this sanctified energy, and that the Reformation in distinction from the Renaissance was such a movement...

(Although the Renaissance had as its aim the destruction of tyranny in matters of faith,) it was moved by a hatred of all authority, whether as expressed in the decrees of councils, in the pronouncements of the popes, or in the doctrine of the Scriptures. Thus its aim was to emancipate the mind of man from the reign not merely of tradition and the dogma of

the church but of the Scriptures as well.... Humanism, therefore, was skeptical, rationalistic....

On the other hand, the aim of the Reformation was to emancipate the Scriptures from the reign of tradition and dogma and to subject human reason to the reign of the Scriptures. The Reformation loved the Bible. To the Bible it went back in the original languages....

But if all things work together for good to them that love God, must the stand not be taken that in some ways the Reformation was benefitted by the Renaissance? It was benefitted, but only negatively, thus in the same sense that Moses was helped by the pleasures of sin which he encountered at the court of Pharaoh. The sight of these pleasures turned him consciously and intensely against them. No true believer can revel in paganism. ❖

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Watching Daily At My Gates

by Cornelius Jonker

May 1 Read Matthew 4:1-11

For our meditations this month we will listen to the words of Jesus that He spoke during His early ministry on earth. One of the first instances is His answers to the devil, who tempted Him in the wilderness. The devil sought to undermine His earthly mission and to cause Him to distrust His heavenly Father. “If thou be the Son of God” was the devil’s challenge, wickedly setting before Jesus a way for Him without suffering. Resolutely, Jesus answers the devil “depart from me, for it is written.” What is your response, young people, as you encounter many temptations in your lives? It is easy to succumb to them and enjoy the pleasures of sin. When wicked thoughts enter your mind, do you dwell on them, or pray that they may be erased from your mind, and say “depart from me, for it is written?” May we all, by grace, follow the example of our Savior “who was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:15,16) Psalter 249.

May 2 Read Luke 4:16-30

Jesus began His earthly ministry by going to the synagogue in Nazareth where He read from Isaiah and preached the word. The listeners were surprised with His teaching and the gracious words that He spoke. But instead of believing that He Himself was the one of whom Isaiah testified, they said disdainfully “Is not this Joseph’s son?” Jesus pointed out that they were as guilty of unbelief as Israel was in the days of Elijah when he was sent to a widow in the Phoenician town of Zarephath. He also reminded them that despite the fact that there were many lepers in Israel, none were cleansed except Naaman the Syrian. The word of God always has a two-fold effect. It either hardens in unbelief or softens and comforts. Jesus’ audience rejected His word to their own condemnation. What is your reaction to the preaching of the gospel, dear reader? Are you one of the poor who are enriched, the broken-hearted who are comforted, the captive who is set free, the blind who receive sight, and the bruised that is healed? God grant to you in His grace that the preaching of His word may have these positive effects. Psalter 337.

May 3 Read Isaiah 57:13-15, Matthew 5:3

Jesus began His sermon on the mount by pronouncing that the poor in spirit are blessed for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. This is a statement that is incomprehensible to the mind of this world. Doesn’t the natural man crave riches and all that this implies, namely influence, power and luxuries? But the riches

of this world and those who imagine they are spiritually rich in themselves have no place in the kingdom of heaven. Only the poor in spirit, those who by grace alone realize that they are naked, and wretched and miserable, and who confess that with true contrition, are the blessed subjects of that kingdom. They are truly blessed already for theirs is the kingdom even now. This is a spiritual kingdom founded in the blood of our Savior, in which God in Christ is the King and all the elect are the willing subjects of that kingdom. It will come to its final glorious manifestation when Christ returns upon the clouds of heaven. Let us confess that we are poor in ourselves but paradoxically rich beyond measure as those who will inherit that blessed kingdom. Psalter 186.

May 4 Read Ecclesiastes 7:1-6, Matthew 5:4

By nature we do not like events or situations that cause us to mourn. The world about us loves gaiety and merriment and superficial laughter. We as God’s people are often prone to follow this course too, but what does God’s word say? “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.” And “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Surely there is enjoyment in our lives, and we are also told to rejoice. But true rejoicing and true comfort for the child of God comes only in the way of genuine sorrow and mourning because of our sins. In a life of sin there can be found no joy or satisfaction, for then we live apart from God. And to live apart from God is death. When God works in our hearts and makes us see our sins and how corrupt we are, we mourn as the publican who smote his breast with the cry “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” Experiencing forgiveness, we are comforted and blessed. In our imperfect walk on this earth, we daily fall short of our calling to love God and our neighbor with all our heart. But each day anew, our Father hears our prayers for forgiveness, and sends the Comforter to dwell in our hearts, assuring us of pardon. Psalter 144

May 5 Read Psalm 37:1-11, Matthew 5:5

A common misconception is that meekness is weakness. Moses was a strong leader who faced many a crisis with courage, led Israel with valor, yet he is described as “very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). Meekness is a spiritual power, a strength that enables one to endure injury and revilement with patience for Christ’s sake. By nature we are quick to seek revenge and strike back when we are reviled or wrongly treated. Exactly the opposite of that was our Savior Himself Who was the meekest of the meek. He trod a path of suffering, so deep and dark, was

reviled and hated, and although He could consume His enemies by the breath of His mouth, yet endured even the cross with meekness for our sakes. What an example for us to emulate! Meekness is a gift of grace. Oh we must fight a battle to be sure, as we live our lives on this earth. But we fight a spiritual battle with spiritual armor and our weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. The sure victory belongs to the meek and they shall dwell forever in the new earth where only righteousness shall dwell. Psalter 61.

May 6 Read John 6:28-35, Matthew 5:6

In this fourth beatitude, Jesus describes for us a certain spiritual quality of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. He tells us it is blessed to be hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Righteousness, as we saw in earlier meditations literally means to be right, or straight, as a straight line. God, Who loves Himself as the highest good, is the absolute standard of righteousness and what is just and good in harmony with His holiness. And in His merciful electing love, He gave His Son to obtain righteousness for us. In II Corinthians 5:21 we read, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Only those who are made spiritually alive by regenerating grace can hunger and thirst after righteousness. Dear reader, can it be said of you that you hunger and thirst after righteousness? Then you will not seek after the carnal pleasures of this world. This hunger and thirst will cause you to attend the worship services faithfully on the Lord's Day. It will cause you to pray daily and seek God's guidance through His word. Then you will be filled, now in principle, and one day fully and completely. Psalter 32.

May 7 Read Proverbs 14:21-31, Matthew 5:7

To receive mercy from God is a wonderful gift. Mercy can be compared to a flowing stream of water that is not plugged up or stopped, but receives continuously from its source only when it constantly gives. In the way of our showing mercy to others does God's mercy flow to us. This cannot possibly mean that our showing mercy is first, and that then we are rewarded with God's mercy. The very opposite is true. By nature we are not merciful, but selfish and hard-hearted. Only because God, Who is rich in mercy, loved us in Christ, and determined to lift us out of our misery unto eternal glory, can we in turn be merciful. The wicked may think that their programs of welfare and philanthropy are works of mercy, but the Bible tells us that the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. Only those who have tasted the riches of God's mercy bestowed in their hearts are the merciful that shall in turn receive mercy themselves. Let us then "be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32). Psalter 228.

May 8 Read Psalm 51:1-10, Matthew 5:8

How is it possible to obtain purity of heart? Our heart, according to Jer. 17:9, "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Out of the heart are the issues of life and from it spring forth all our plans, thoughts and aspirations. If something is to be pure, it must be chaste and genuine and free from moral fault or guilt or anything that would pollute it. This purity of heart is not something to which natu-

ral man can ever attain apart from the sovereign work of God based on the death and resurrection of Christ. When the Spirit enters our polluted heart and cleanses it from sin and corruption and breathes into it new life, it is principally pure. In this present life we see through a glass darkly, but one day we will see God face to face and know Him even as we are known. That will indeed be a most blessed prospect imaginable. The pure in heart in this life have not attained to perfection by any means, but they are pure in heart nevertheless because Christ lives in them and they have the desire to walk according to all of God's commandments. Do you find this desire in your heart, dear reader? Then you are truly blessed. Psalter 204

May 9 Read Ephesians 2:11-17, Matthew 5:9

In the previous beatitudes, we have seen various descriptions of the children of God in the world and this seventh and last beatitude fittingly calls those blessed who are peacemakers. As we pointed out last month, Scripture declares that there is no peace to the wicked for they are likened to the troubled sea that cannot rest. Even when the wicked sit at their peace tables, they cannot find peace for they seek it without the cross of Christ. God alone is the original peacemaker. He lives a life of perfect peace in Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in covenant relationship. And Ephesians 2 tells us that Christ is our peace, for we were strangers from the covenant promises, but He has reconciled us to God by the cross. Then we have peace in our hearts and it will be reflected in our thoughts and actions. As we bear the image of the true Peacemaker, we will be scorned by the world, for when we preach and witness to that way of peace and obedience to God, they will hate us. But they cannot separate us from our Father in heaven, for even as we are now His children by the Spirit of adoption, we shall, in the last day, be revealed to all the world as His own dear children, to live with Him forever in glory. Psalter 232.

May 10 Read John 15:17-27, Matthew 5:10-12

These verses deal with the persecution that not only the disciples must anticipate, but also all who are faithful witnesses in the world of God's word and of His righteousness. The history of God's people and of the faithful prophets proves that according to the measure that they were faithful, the world revealed its hatred of them. As long as you tone down the antithesis, speak of a God who loves all men, refrain from reproving those who sin, the world will tolerate you, for you speak their language. But when in the name of Christ you speak out for the truth, defend His holy name, and show by word and deed that your allegiance is to Him alone, you will experience persecution. The blessedness of which these texts speak does not find its cause in the suffering, for suffering of itself is not a reason for rejoicing. But the persecutions are unmistakable signs of God's work in us, of His love and grace. It takes grace to suffer for His name's sake. Without grace we would not be able to bear it. In that knowledge we have joy now, and we look forward to our eternal reward of grace in heaven where our rejoicing will be exceedingly great. Psalter 188.

May 11 Read Colossians 4:1-6, Matthew 5:13

In this text Jesus proclaimed to the disciples and the people who were gathered to hear Him "Ye are the salt of the earth." It

is an admonition to the citizens of the heavenly kingdom regarding their exalted position on the earth. Salt had various uses in Bible times including that of a preservative, medicinal purposes, or for seasoning food. Because Jesus spoke of salt losing its savor or flavor, He points out that it is that aspect of salt, namely its tastefulness, to which He refers. Just as salt enhances the flavor of food, so is the church called to be the salt of the earth, and through their presence, the earth in all its fullness is made palatable to God's taste. This implies a calling for us, dear readers, to be pleasing to God as we walk in obedience to Him on this earth. When we allow our sinful natures to influence our lives in the service of sin rather than God, we become distasteful as salt that has lost its savor. God never casts His children away, but through the hard way of chastisement restores us to usefulness again. Only through the power of Christ can we truly be the salt of the earth that is pleasing to God. Let us strive each day by His grace to fulfill that calling. Psalter 328.

May 12 Read John 3:18-21, Matthew 5:14-16

This is the second description of the church in Christ's Sermon on the Mount. "Ye are the light of the world," He exclaims, and compares her to a city set on a hill that cannot be hid. Some would say that we must be conspicuous in the world by seeking political office and striving to make this world a better place. But this is not the calling of the church. By emitting the true light of the word and testifying to all about them by an antithetical walk, the church will not fail to draw attention to itself. When their light shines, the world that loves darkness rather than the light becomes enraged and seeks to snuff out that light. How the world hated the prophets who shone their light, and look what they did to Christ, the Light of the world. However, the church may never hide that light for it attracts as well as it repels. All for whom Christ died will be drawn irresistibly by that light to Him, and they alone will glorify God. Each of us personally is called to let our light shine and the world will watch us intently. Let it never be said of us that we brought shame to the cause of Christ by our actions, but rather walk in humble obedience. Then our light will shine and the holy name of God will be glorified. Psalter 71.

May 13 Read Luke 16:13-17, Matthew 5:17-19

With these words Jesus speaks a word of admonition and warning to those who were the church of His day. They must not have the mistaken idea that He came to make the law of none effect. The law and the prophets of which He speaks had reference to all that is written in the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the law of God in our lives including the moral, civil and ceremonial laws. The law of liberty that Jesus preached did not suggest that He came to disannul the law, as some might conclude, but to fulfill every aspect of it. Every prophecy concerning Him, down to the last judgment and final glory of His kingdom will be fulfilled to the letter. He further warns us against not taking seriously the breaking of these commandments, and especially directs this word to every preacher and teacher. In their professional capacity they are called not to break even the least of these commandments or teach others to do so. The positive aspect of keeping God's law and teaching

others to do so is the promise that those will be great in the kingdom of heaven. May we by grace strive to keep God's commandments and "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free." (Gal. 5:1). Psalter 41.

May 14 Read Matthew 23:25-33, Matthew 5:20

What a shocking statement this was when Jesus announced that except the righteousness of the people exceeded the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees; they could in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven. The Pharisees and scribes were highly esteemed in Israel, the Pharisees as those who diligently kept all the Mosaic laws plus the traditions of the fathers, and the scribes who were the theologians of the day by studying and interpreting the law. However, their so-called righteousness was completely void of love towards God and the neighbor. Theirs was a self-serving righteousness to gain the praise of men and to promote their own selfish goals. They even believed that by this outward keeping of the law, they would be rewarded with eternal life. But Jesus called them whited sepulchers, attractive on the outside, but rotten within. True righteousness must be grounded in love, love toward God and love toward the neighbor. This is our calling, dear reader, as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We must first of all honor and obey God rather than be concerned with our own desires. When we seek God's glory, then we will also be concerned for the welfare of our neighbor. Only this genuine righteousness, based on the righteousness of Christ alone and imparted to us by grace, is acceptable to God. May God be pleased to grant that to us. Psalter 385.

May 15 Read I Peter 3:8-15, Matthew 5:21-26

In this passage, Jesus instructs us as well as the people who were present as to the correct meaning of the law in general, and of the sixth commandment in particular. The Jews interpreted the law in a catalogued fashion with greater and lesser and least commandments, but were blind to the real essence of the law, namely, "Thou shalt not covet," which stresses that not the least thought contrary to any of God's commandments ever rise in our hearts. Jesus points out the absurdity of their approach to the law when He cites the three examples of hatred and curses hurled at a brother and the accompanying punishments. Against their perversion of the law, Jesus makes plain that the very thought of hatred and revenge is already murder. He further points out how impossible it is to truly worship God at His altar or in His sanctuary, especially in prayer when we have offended a brother or harbor unconfessed sins in our heart. No rest and peace will be truly ours until we reconcile with our brother and have our slate of sins wiped clean by humble confession and repentance. May each of us by the grace and mercy of God in Christ strive to keep this commandment, as well as all of them, motivated by loving our God and our neighbor with all our heart. Psalter 24.

May 16 Read Proverbs 6:20-26, Matthew 5:27-32

Jesus is speaking to His hearers regarding the proper understanding of the seventh commandment. Notice that He lets the text of Ex. 20:14 stand just as it was given on Mt. Sinai, however, He gives a very different interpretation of this commandment from what the Jews practiced. They simply made this

commandment refer to the physical act of adultery. Jesus points out that this commandment is broken already when sinful desires arise in our eyes and hearts. Lust is powerful and appealing. Her victims are many. Giving in to lust can cost one his self-respect, his family, his relationship to God, and even his life. Jesus addresses this admonition to the man, as a representative head, but it does not exclude women as participants of these desires. Is the remedy to be taken in the literal sense, namely the actual plucking out of the eye and the cutting off of the hand? No, but we believe that the eye and hand are the instruments that the heart employs in this sin. We must turn to the Lord in sincerity and ask Him to remove these sins from our heart and make it pure. Jesus then emphasizes the principle of life-long holy wedlock. The Jews interpreted the words of Moses in such a way that it gave them much room for divorce and sinful practices. Jesus points out that one may put away his or her mate only for the case of fornication, and any remarriage of either party is adulterous. May we by God's grace live chaste and pure lives and pray that we may not succumb to the lust of the flesh which is so prevalent in the world today. Psalter 384.

May 17 Read James 5:9-12, Matthew 5:33-37

Jesus addresses another perversion of the law on the part of the Jews and that has to do with the swearing of oaths. Jesus is not contending with Moses' statement in Number 30:2, but points to the evil practice of the Jews who saw in these words a general permission to use all sorts of oaths, concluding that those which did not directly name God had no binding force. Here again they corrupt and distort the oath to their own destruction, not seeing the spiritual meaning that we "perform our oaths unto the Lord." To do that implies that the truth dwells in our hearts and that we hate the lie. Jesus goes on to explain that the oaths of the Jews, regardless whether they swore by heaven, or earth, or Jerusalem, or their own heads, were true oaths even though they used them with the understanding that they were not binding. Behind everything stands the Creator, and all things live, move, and have their being in Him, so it is folly to swear by the creature as they did. We, as God's people who live from the principle of the new life in our hearts, need not swear at all, but with hearts pledged to truth, our lips will find no need to add anything to our "yea" and "nay." Psalter 68.

May 18 Read I Peter 3:8-12, Matthew 5:38-42

Jesus is establishing a principle in this passage that we are not to live by the motive of retaliation or revenge for wrongs that are done to us. He refers to the teaching of Moses that "if a man cause a blemish in his neighbor; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; ...eye for eye, tooth for tooth..." (Lev. 24:19, 20). Does this pose a contradiction when Jesus places His teaching over against Moses? On the contrary, for Jesus is not talking about the execution of justice by the proper authorities, but a personal revenge by the Jews against those who may have wronged them. We must not do to others as they have done to us, but rather treat them as we would have them do to us. To illustrate His point, Jesus gives four examples by which He would show us proper conduct over against them

who do evil to us. By turning the other cheek when smitten, the other man is put to shame; by giving up our cloak in addition to our coat, we are calling attention to his evil but not adding another evil over against it; by going the extra mile, we endure hardship and give full measure; and when one comes to borrow from us, we show liberality and mercy. These are the principles that must guide us as children of the kingdom who are meek, merciful and peacemakers. Let us strive to so live that these virtues may be displayed in our lives. Psalter 24.

May 19 Read Romans 12:14-21, Matthew 5:43-48

In this rather well known and controversial passage, we are called upon as citizens of the kingdom of heaven to love our enemies, pray for them, and be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. This idea of perfection is not that we obtain perfect sinlessness in this life, but as it were a ripe and fully developed fruit. It is not without defects, but it has reached its potential in ripeness, flavor and color. God's love is perfected in us and fills our minds and wills. Who is our enemy and how must we love him? We all know that loving our neighbor as ourselves is one of the main principles of the law. Our neighbor can be our enemy as well as our friend. So our neighbor is anyone whose life touches ours. And the pattern given for that love is God's providential dealings in creation with good and evil, and with the righteous and unrighteous; as God deals without discrimination, so too must we deal with the neighbor. The proponents of common grace consider the gifts of rain and sunshine as an attitude of favor and grace toward the reprobate. These gifts are certainly good, and they are blessings for the elect, but are always curses for the reprobate. Loving our enemy means we return blessing for cursing and good for evil. We admonish and reprove him when necessary and seek his salvation. We must not love only our friends as the publicans did. Let us walk in obedience to Christ's teaching and experience His blessings. Psalter 370.

May 20 Read Mark 12:38-44, Matthew 6:1-4

The opening verses of this chapter describe one instance of the false piety of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus warns us of their hypocrisy in the matter of alms giving. These men took great pride in their self-righteousness, and as a result chose public places to show off their charities. God's glory was not their concern. They delighted in the praise of men and that was their reward. Contrasted to this manner of giving must be our motive and method. To be absolutely free from the praise of men, Jesus uses a figure of speech to describe how our giving must take place, namely that what the right hand does in the giving of alms, is to be done so secretly that the left hand may not find out. True giving is a matter of the heart. It must be done to please God and glorify Him. How many of us give to kingdom causes with that attitude? Actually, with respect to God, we are only stewards and that implies much. We don't possess a hair of our head, not a minute of our time, not a slice of bread, not a drop of water, not a penny of our money. All is God's and is placed in our trust. We may not do with it as we please, but constantly ask, "What is God's will with respect to my possessions?" Let us be fully conscious of our duty as faith-

ful stewards who must one day give account to God for the goods entrusted to us. Psalter 97.

May 21 Read Luke 18:9-14, Matthew 6:5-8

This passage relates another example of false piety of the scribes and Pharisees in regard to their prayers. In keeping with their pride and self-righteousness, they found occasion to stand in the synagogues and on busy street corners in order to make a display to men and receive their glory. Now it is not wrong as such to want men to see us worshipping God and calling on His name in sincerity. However, these hypocrites wanted men to see them praying because they were glorying in themselves and not in God. Jesus not only condemned this action, but also the vain babblings which their lips uttered. An example of such praying is the priests of Baal during the time of the prophet Elijah, who from morning to noon repeated over and over “O Baal, hear us.” And Catholics with their rosaries, fall into this same category. In contrast, Jesus instructed them to retreat to a private room and commune with their Father in prayer. Then they must not use vain repetitions or seek the things on earth, but the Father’s glory and honor. They are assured that for the sake of Christ, He will hear them and reward them. That reward is a reward of grace, and will culminate at the appearance of Christ, when openly before the eyes of angels, men and devils, all will see that in their prayers, they gave God all the glory. Psalter 312.

May 22 Read John 14:11-16, Matthew 6:9

After warning us in the previous verses that prayer must not consist of outward show, but rather a heartfelt communion with God, Jesus taught His disciples and us how to pray in the words of the beautiful and well known Lord’s Prayer. As we have seen, God is revealed to us by many names that tell us much about Him. Here, Jesus is teaching us that when we pray, we must begin with a form of address. How we address God is important because that will determine our attitude as we pray. Therefore Jesus instructs us to say “Our Father.” Only a true child of God can really address Him as “Father.” This implies a loving relationship, much like the earthly bond between a child and his father or mother. In a godly family there is respect for the authority and position of parents. With childlike faith then, we pray to our Father and add “which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name,” which immediately impresses upon us His glorious majesty and our unworthiness. But because of Christ, we approach this triune God in confidence for He has made us His children, and although this is a mystery, yet we believe it and are assured of His love and mercy. Let us pray then as children of our heavenly Father with the assurance that He will surely hear us for the sake of Christ. Psalter 278.

May 23 Read Luke 22:14-18, Matthew 6:10

In this verse we are taught to pray for the coming of God’s kingdom and for obedience to the will of God. It is only by grace that we can utter these words and truly desire their accomplishment. This kingdom of God is a spiritual commonwealth in which Christ is King. It consists of willing subjects who serve this King and love Him and these subjects experience His dwelling in their hearts. This kingdom will finally be

realized in all its perfections when Christ returns in glory. Are we so attached to this world sometimes that we do not long for this Kingdom to come? When life is pleasant and free from problems, we may place this petition in the back of our minds, but when sickness ravages our bodies, or trials overwhelm us, our outlook tends to change. God sometimes uses these means to bring us to our knees in order that we may truly desire His Kingdom to come and also that we may be submissive to His perfect will. May we by grace utter these petitions to our Father in heaven with the confidence that He will hear us for the sake of Christ and give us His peace. Psalter 395.

May 24 Read Psalm 132:13-18, Matthew 6:11

This petition in the prayer that the Lord gave us is short and simple, yet necessary and instructive for the child of God. What does it mean and why should we pray for daily bread? First of all it shows to us that we are earthly creatures with bodies that must be nourished in order to exist and function. How can we hallow the name of God, or seek His kingdom, or obey His will without a body and all it requires? So this petition certainly includes more than mere bread. It presupposes that we require shelter, clothing, and money for necessities of life. Although in our present day modern life, we have many luxuries, these are not included in this petition. It means exactly what it says, “Give us what we need for this day.” The Lord knows what we need better than we do. It may be that what we think we need, we shouldn’t have, and so the Lord withholds that from us. And sometimes the Lord gives to us in His wisdom what we don’t wish for, but it is good for us nevertheless. Let each of us ask for our daily bread in childlike faith, “Give unto me this day, dear Father, that which Thou knowest is good and necessary for me in order to live my life on this earth in such a way that my trust may be alone in Thee and that Thy holy name is glorified.” Psalter 56.

May 25 Read Matthew 18:23-35, Matthew 6:12

This petition assumes, and rightly so, that we have acquired debts; and debts require that they either must be paid or cancelled. In the gospel of Luke, the word “sin” is used in the place of “debts,” and in the Heidelberg Catechism we read of our transgressions and depravity. That is a picture of our heavy load of guilt as we lift our voices in prayer for pardon to our Father in heaven. We know that He is terribly displeased with all sins and since we are unable of ourselves to pay these debts, we have only one recourse left. That recourse is a sincere petition that God will dismiss these charges and forgive our sins. We must note here that Jesus adds to our prayer for forgiveness a limiting clause, “as we forgive our debtors.” This clause certainly cannot mean that this must be a ground for our plea for forgiveness, but that God grants us the grace of forgiveness as we forgive one another. We must be sure that we hold no unforgiving attitude toward anyone when we ourselves plead for forgiveness. Our Father, Who is rich in mercy, then beholds us in Christ and grants us pardon for His sake. Psalter 83.

May 26 Read I Cor. 10:11-15, Matthew 6:13a

As long as we are in the world we are going to be surrounded by temptation. We battle constantly with the old man of sin that dwells in our flesh. We live in a world that always beckons us to join them in their sinful pleasures, and we are enticed by the devil to forsake the difficult way of godliness. Every day we fight this battle in varying degrees. The world readily embraces all sorts of evil and corrupt pleasures on their headlong journey to destruction. Without fervent prayer for divine intervention by the Spirit, we would be overcome by temptations. Only the regenerated child of God by the grace and power of that Spirit is deeply conscious of his weakness to stand firm, so he prays that when he meets temptations, he may not be led into them. People of God let us pray every day “deliver us from evil,” until that blessed day when we and all of God’s people will obtain the final victory over sin through the merits of our Savior Who became sin for us. Psalter 385.

May 27 Read Psalm 103:19-22, Matthew 6:13b

This concluding doxology to the Lord’s Prayer is beautifully expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism as follows: “all these (things) we ask of thee, because thou, being our king and almighty, art willing and able to give us all good; and all this we pray for that thereby not we, but thy holy name may be glorified forever.” (Q.128) This is a fitting exclamation and tribute of praise to God and is closely connected to the last petition. Because God is the supreme and sovereign king, all power and glory belong to Him, and this is the motive and ground for the entire prayer. Not only does the kingdom belong to God now, but it is His forever. The same is true for His power and glory. Let us learn then, to whom we must pray, how we must pray, for what we must pray, and in humble gratitude be assured that our prayers will be heard and answered. Psalter 267.

May 28 Read Isaiah 58:1-8, Matthew 6:16-18

Fasting in Scripture signified a state of humility before God because of sin. It often accompanied prayer and usually involved abstinence of food. Many instances of fasting are recorded in the Bible, although the observance of this practice is now abolished among us, “yet the truth and substance of them remain with us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have their completion” (Belgic Confession, Article 25). There were private fastings by individuals as well as periods of fasting by the Jewish nation. Jesus in this passage refers to private fasting and condemned the Pharisees who practiced it hypocritically to gain the applause and praise of men for their outward form of piety. Jesus does not introduce a new law regarding fasting, but forbids all outward displays of this practice. True fasting is done in secret before God with a sincere and contrite heart. Have you ever fasted? We aren’t advocating a regular regimen of fasting, but there might be times in our lives when we could profitably abstain from some things for our spiritual benefit and draw ever closer to our God. Psalter 112.

May 29 Read Proverbs 19:14-17, Matthew 6:19-21

Jesus turns to a subject that is prevalent and in many cases, all consuming throughout the world. In accord with man’s covetous nature, he is obsessed with the gaining and retention of

wealth and possessions. Acquiring wealth is in itself not wrong. However, it is a rare person who is not affected in a negative manner when wealth becomes great. Jesus points out that treasures that are stored on this earth are of short duration and subject to corruption and loss. It follows that the happiness that these riches afford the owners is also of uncertain and short duration. In contrast, we must treasure other types of riches that are not subject to destructive forces or loss by thieves. Jesus speaks of these in verse 33, “the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” This is a matter of the heart and the treasures laid up in heaven are secure forever. People of God be good stewards of all that the Lord gives you, but “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth... For when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” (Col. 3:2, 4) Psalter 135.

May 30 Read Isaiah 29:13-15, Matthew 6:22-23

What a marvelous organ of the human body is the eye. It is the agent of physical sight that we are endowed with by the Creator. Jesus points out that the light, or lamp of the body is the eye. Without becoming too technical, we might say that a man’s physical or rational eye corresponds to his spiritual eye. The natural man with an unregenerate heart can rationally see the light, but he is spiritually blind. He sees God in creation, can hear His word, and can read it, but he despises God in his heart and holds the truth in unrighteousness. Hence the light in him is darkness, and even more, it is great and absolute darkness. But when God is pleased to transmit to our spiritual eye the radiance of His Being, the wonder of the cross, and the pure and holy light from His throne, then we have a single eye that fills our whole body with true light. Our eyes that once were full of darkness have been healed and we are new creatures in Christ. Let us pray for grace to walk in that light to His glory. Psalter 236.

May 31 Read Matthew 6:24-33

In this passage Jesus points out how various anxieties in life cause unnecessary worries and concerns in the lives of men and that their Heavenly Father knows all of their needs. Then He directs them to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. This kingdom, as we have seen, is a spiritual kingdom realized first of all in the hearts of His people and finally realized in perfection when Christ returns. Seeking the kingdom means we must be members of the true church of Jesus Christ, and confess the truth with fellow believers. We do not relocate to an area where there is no such church despite the allurements of a lucrative job. Young people, bear this in mind when choosing a college or a career. Seeking the kingdom includes purity of life, seeking a godly mate, establishing a Christian home, bringing forth covenant seed with all of its attendant responsibilities. It means fervent in prayer, ready to suffer loss for the cause of the gospel, and maintaining an antithetical walk in the midst of the world. The reward is of grace alone. Of ourselves we are unworthy; but thanks be to God who is faithful, who guides us by His counsel, and will take us to glory. Psalter 203.

Unbreakable Scripture (2)

by Rev. Angus Stewart



Last time we considered the fact that the phrase, “I said, Ye are gods” (Ps. 82:6) is a poetic hyperbole from an otherwise obscure portion of the OT. If this statement “cannot be broken” (John 10:34-35), then surely no Scripture can be broken.

However, there is an argument against this interpretation—an argument even made by some leading evangelicals—which would nullify this testimony to the inerrancy of Scripture from Christ’s words in John 10:34-35. They say that when Jesus said, “the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35), he was making an *ad hominem* argument. That is, they say that Christ did not *personally* believe in the inerrancy of Scripture or at least that He was not affirming it here. Rather, they say that He knew that *His Jewish opponents believed in the inerrancy of Scripture* and (while He did not believe it Himself) He used this against them.

This interpretation fails for two main reasons. First, where Jesus disagreed with the Jews and their religious leaders, He told them plainly. He did not evade issues or let them pass. He spoke clearly against their erroneous understanding of God’s moral law (Matt. 5). He opposed their view of divorce and remarriage (Matt. 19). He rejected their earthy views of the Messiah (John 6). Against the Sadducees, He asserted the bodily resurrection of the dead; and against the Pharisees, He explained that the Christ was David’s son *and David’s Lord* (Matt. 22). Fearlessly, He told the unbelieving Jews that they were not sons of Abraham but sons of the devil (John 8). If the Jews were wrong in believing the OT to be inerrant, would not Christ have corrected them?

Second, we know that Jesus did not say “the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35) merely as an *ad hominem* argument, because He always wielded the Scriptures as God’s unbreakable Word. “For verily I say unto you,” He declared, “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall no wise pass from the law, till all be

fulfilled” (Matt. 5:18). His confession of Scripture was “thy word is truth”—all of it, absolutely (John 17:17). In the wilderness He triumphed over the devil with the Scriptures as His final, unassailable authority (“It is written;” Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). How could He have said these things if He believed that the Bible contains errors? How could He have said these things if He did not believe that God’s Word is inerrant?

You can rest on its promises for
your hope beyond the grave.

Saints of God, we have a wonderful gift from our Father: the unbreakable Scriptures! You can trust its proclamations for your salvation. You can rest on its promises for your hope beyond the grave. Place your full confidence in the Holy Bible and in the glorious Saviour whom it presents!

John 10:35 teaches us the origin of the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. This doctrine did not begin in the last 100-150 years with the Princeton theologians, such as Charles Hodge or B. B. Warfield. Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican theologians have been teaching it for centuries. How could you square the *Westminster Confession’s* (1647) statement about the “entire perfection” of Scripture (1.5) with errors in the Bible? The *Belgic Confession* (1561) does not allow for mistakes in the Word either (4, 5, 7). Quotes too could easily be produced from Luther, Augustine (354-430) and many, many others for the inerrancy of Scripture. This is simply the doctrine of the prophets and the apostles. But our text teaches that *Christ Himself* taught this: “the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). We even know the time

and place of Christ's proclamation: one winter at the feast of dedication in Jerusalem (22).

Thus the doctrine of inerrancy does not rest merely on inferences such as the following. The Bible is God's Word; God is wholly true; therefore His Word is wholly true and free of error. The Bible is God breathed; God's breath is perfect; therefore the Bible is perfect and contains no errors. The Bible was written by the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit does not make mistakes; therefore there are no mistakes in the Bible. Inerrancy is taught by Christ's *direct statement*: "the scripture cannot be broken."

Inerrancy then is not merely some philosophical construct ("foundationalism"), as some supposedly evangelical scholars (e.g., Stanley Grenz) say. It is not a philosophical but a theological doctrine, taught by the Son of God: "the scripture cannot be broken."

This means that the doctrine of inerrancy rests upon the exact same basis as all other biblical doctrines, such as blood atonement and sovereign grace. The basis for all doctrines is the teaching of Scripture, and the Bible says, "the scripture cannot be broken."

The doctrine of inerrancy is foundational to all other Christian doctrines. How do you prove that Jesus is God? You quote the Bible. But if the Bible is not entirely trustworthy, how do you know that what you quoted is not an error? And if the Bible's teaching of inerrancy (John 10:35) is false, why trust its teaching on heaven and hell?

Thus those who reject biblical inerrancy are guilty of heresy. Those who cannot say "the scripture cannot be broken" contradict the testimony of the church, the creeds and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Moreover at this point the rejectors of inerrancy are less orthodox than the Pharisees and Jews of Jesus' day who received this doctrine! Thus to oppose inerrancy is to reject the clear testimony of Scripture, to walk contrary to the Spirit and to call Christ a liar. ❖

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 13 & 14.

Minding Missions

Observing the White Horse in Beijing, China

by Bruce J. Koole

The White Horse rides today in Beijing, China. The Gospel spreads. Persecution, famine, and death follow soon thereafter. Such events, while not physically occurring with great frequency here in the United States of America, do happen today in such seemingly faraway places as the mist-enshrouded Orient. Come, let us turn now to the Red Dragon of the East, the land of Geisha girls, yin & yang, Communism, and Buddhism.

While in the East, let us penetrate the cool, morning fog, and travel to Beijing, China. Here a little rest is required whilst a brief consideration of its size takes place. This bustling city has a population of 14,560,000 living in an area of 6,490 mi². By way of contrast the city proper of Grand Rapids, MI (USA) has a population of 197,800 and these people are spread over an area of 47.3 mi². (not counting the suburbs). Beijing is, then, not small at all.

But, enough of geography, there are schools for such things. Let us analyze the spiritual nature of affairs in China. In the January 31, 2005 edition of *National Review Magazine* (a semi-monthly), Jason Lee Steorts, a free-lance writer, reports on the persecution currently being experienced by the 80 million Chinese Christians. The four-column article serves to remind the Christian of the blessings he experiences here in the USA.

Steorts begins by meeting two Chinese women, Qiu Yue and Yang Jie, at an unremarkable diner in Beijing. The restaurant was mundane, the names are pseudonyms, and they e-mailed in code: 'B' for Bible and 'C' for Christian for the reason that if careless, both Qiu and Yang could be caught, persecuted, and killed. Turning to their religion, Steorts notes that they are members of house churches, which are Protestant Christian assemblies that have refused to register with the government and join the Communist Party's Umbrella Protestant Organization, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). There is also the Communist Party's Roman Catholic organization, the Patriotic Catholic Organization, which does not recognize the Pope's authority. Who knew the Communists could actually do something right?

Turning to the doctrines of the TSPM, Qiu explains that TSPM denies the Virgin Birth, the Deity of Christ (he had an earthly father), and the Second Coming. TSPM also lionizes Lei Feng, a Chinese peasant made into a national hero by Mao Tse Tung. Lei Feng, a legend now believed to be a lie, did no great deeds by which he was remembered, but taught the people how to be happy with what they had, obey the Communist Party, and let the Central Committee, or better still, Mao himself, do their thinking for them.

Mao is China's equivalent of George Washington, the difference being that from the Glorious Revolution of 1949, the year the Communists took power and swept out Chiang Kai Shek, unto Mao's death, the Chinese Communist Party killed some 30 million citizens. These people, murdered at Mao's behest, were killed for disagreeing with him about political philosophy and religious doctrines. Mao's 'moderate' successor, Deng Xiaoping, murdered a piddling 8-9 million. Mao's gospel is that, like Feng, the Chinese will go to heaven only by serving the government or die.

What does happen to those Chinese Christians who believe in salvation by Christ-crucified alone? The re-

sponse varies, but finds its best description in Moses' burning bush. The Chinese Christians are injured but not consumed. While Qiu reports that she has witnessed about her beliefs to the public school children that she teaches, she counsels against preaching out loudly in Tiananmen Square. Then, the governmental policy of benign neglect will become a raging inferno of oppression.

However, not all are so physically well off. Yang's house preacher Cai Zhuohua (his real name), his family, and some other printing-press associates were arrested by China's Security Bureau for distributing Bibles and tracts. The government has charged them with being "counter-revolutionaries." Contact with any of them since their arrest is nil.

This persecution is but the tip of the iceberg since the government carries out many more arrests, persecutions, and deaths. Yang's response to the whole oppression is "That we are able to continue under the circumstances shows that God is with us." Qiu adds "At my work, they told me, 'Don't speak about Christian ideas to the students; it will be dangerous.' ...But God has given me courage to speak." The other response is that 3-4 new members per week receive the Baptismal Sacrament. Steorts concludes that "Christianity's history demonstrates that it is able to flourish even under the most extreme forms of persecution."

What ought your response to be, in addition to praying for those persecuted? Spread the truth. Help distribute and garner new subscriptions for this magazine and the *Standard Bearer*. Currently the *Beacon Lights* has less than 1000 paid subscribers and it makes for an excellent birthday, graduation, or confession-of-faith gift. The price is very reasonable and the material, timeless. Subscribe also to the *Voice of Martyr's* (VOM) magazine for another at www.persecution.com. It is free and is a 21st Century version of *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. It is a magazine dedicated to showing the persecution of saints with pictures more than words.

Finally, be aware that the Jesus is coming and rapidly at that. While it is still day let us pray and be earnest in our work, ere night fall... ❖

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

A Day with Dad— Our Eastern Home Missionary

by David Mahtani

It was our first day of spring break when Dad got my brother and me up at the crack of dawn to go out for breakfast. Well, what began as breakfast turned out to be a wonderful day with him at work.

I trudged my sleep deprived body downstairs at 8:30 a.m. (No, not exactly the crack of dawn, but it seemed like it. It was spring break!) only to see my father typing with rigorous concentration. “Oh, just a few emails,” I thought to myself. However, he barely offered me a glance as I stepped in to say good morning. “Must be some *real* important emails,” I thought to myself.

After my numerous efforts to wake Jon from his spring hibernation, he too was finally revived. We drove to Toby’s Restaurant for our two buck breakfasts while talking about Dad’s recent call to Edmonton.

“You know, it’s real cold up there,” exclaimed the owner of Toby’s, “but yeah, that’s alright though. There’s a Toby’s up there. Just make two lefts and a right, and you’ll see it.” Dad is a frequent customer at Toby’s, and it seems like the owner and his wife had already heard the news. On a regular basis, Dad eats breakfast here with one of the men on the steering committee. The wife, who is also the lone waitress, claims to be a Christian but has not visited our mission yet.

After our hearty breakfasts, Dad bargained his way into two free cups of coffee, and then we headed to his office for what was supposed to be “just one hour of work.”

Dad didn’t turn out to be the most organized person in the world and so required some of our help in his search for some old sermons. He needed one for his trip to Allentown that he was making the next day and twelve for a series on the Reformed Witness Hour. While Dad worked on a speech which he was planning to give in Bethel and prepared for his Bible study for that night, we looked for those sermons.

After the hard copies were discovered, Jon began his search for the sermons on the floppy disks while I sought to write out an explanation that the word “world”

in John 3:16 doesn’t mean everyone without exception. Dad wanted to see the simple explanation I might come up with because a contact in Allentown wanted the argument recounted to him.

Amidst Jon’s groans of frustration resulting from his little success in his search, the phone kept ringing every few minutes. A few calls were from a member of the group who was having some difficulties that needed pastoral attention and prayer. Dad talked to him and his wife for awhile and then offered a visit which was declined. However, after moments of encouragement and advice, Dad hung up seeming assured that things were well.

After Dad described to me an email from a couple who was planning on returning after months of absence from the mission, he got back to his speech and Bible study preparation.

No sooner had he began, however, when a single man who had been coming to the mission semi-regularly walked in. “I was in the area for a job interview and thought I’d just stop by,” he replied. Dad could tell that he had something on his mind, and so asked if he wanted to talk. Soon, they had gone on a long walk, leaving Jon and I to man the mission office.

Before their walk, the young man, a teacher, had actually chatted with me while Dad was finishing up another phone call. He lives about an hour away and was looking to move closer to the mission. It turns out that on his walk with Dad, he expressed his desire to become a confessing member at the mission. Starting this coming Sunday, he would be coming to both services and mid-week catechism classes.

Since we were fully engaged in the work we were doing, it was a quarter ’til 3 before we realized. We were interrupted by a phone call from Mom reminding Dad of an appointment that he had at the high school at 3:30. “How about Hunan Palace for lunch, boys, as a reward for all your hard work?!” Dad exclaimed.

So, at 3:00, the three of us headed to the Chinese restaurant down the street for chicken, soup, rice, and

squid. Of course, Dad knows the owner and waitress at that restaurant too, and so they served the food with gusto. As usual, my dad shoveled his food down with gusto as well. “When are you gonna come hear me preach again?” my dad usually asks between bites. The waitress serving us actually has visited the mission a couple times and does go to Ladies Fellowship.

During lunch, we conversed about the mission, all we did that day, and how we could use more members at the mission to help in the work. “If just one family from Michigan would move down, they could help in so many ways,” I remarked. My father didn’t have much to say about that comment. All I got was a sincere nod accompanied with the raising of his eyebrows. And I don’t think it was because his mouth was full of delicious substance.

After his quick lunch, my dad rushed off to his 3:30 appointment, and that’s the last I saw of him until dinner that night. Before he left, however, he made sure the bill was right—accurate and with his usual 10 percent discount! Don’t ask me—I don’t know how he does it.

Early the next morning, Dad left for Allentown. Jon dropped him off at the airport, and Titus, my youngest brother, went along as well because it was his birthday. Somehow, my dad was able to get a free sandwich at a restaurant there because it was Titus’ birthday.

Somehow, my dad and Jon also managed to strike up a conversation with a lady at the information booth about marriage and divorce. She was complaining about the divorce rate and recommending that Jon not get married until he was at least 25. This gave Dad a chance to enlighten her on the scriptural truths about marriage. She was grateful, accepted Dad’s business card, and gave Titus a free coloring book. I don’t know how Dad does it, but I earnestly pray that I, as well as many others in our denomination, may grow more and more mission-minded. ❖

David is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan and attends the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Mission where his father labors as a home missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Memoir of Rev. C. Hanko

Rev. C. Hanko

edited by Karen Van Baren

Editor’s note: *Since his retirement, Rev. Hanko wrote about his life and work in various unpublished documents. These include one on his mother, some on his own life, and some on the history of the PRC as seen through the eyes of this charter member of the denomination. With my grandfather’s permission, I have attempted to merge all these documents into one. At times this required footnotes, background material, and transitions. However, most of the words in this and subsequent articles are his own.*

Rev. Hanko begins his story with his own birth in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1907. He then takes us back to the Netherlands as he explains the circumstances in which his parents, Herman Hanko and Jantje Burmania, were born and raised. The Netherlands that his parents

knew was one in which the State Church held sway religiously and class divisions governed social life. His narrative continues with his parents’ separate immigrations to this country, their meeting and subsequent marriage. The childhood of which he tells in Michigan must be understood in the context of turn of the century America, where the common American did not yet enjoy the luxuries of electricity, modern sewer and water, and automobiles. Life for these immigrant families was often hard; still it was a step up from the grinding poverty they had suffered in The Netherlands. Their need for community was satisfied by life in the closely-knit Dutch enclaves of Grand Rapids, most of whose members worshipped in the Christian Reformed Church. And so, his tale begins.

Chapter 1

Herman and Jantje

It seems to me that my earliest recollection is of a small, dark bedroom with a bed in a corner. The shades were drawn, but the afternoon sun shone through the pin-holes in the green shade.

As I sit here probing into the past, it seems like a long time ago that this happened. They tell me that I was born on Pentecost Sunday, May 19, 1907, soon after my dad returned from the morning service at Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI. And I have no reason to doubt it.

To provide a little context for the story, let me go back a couple of generations. Friedrich Wilhelm Hanko, my grandfather, was born in Prussia, married there and later moved to 't Zandt, Groningen, the Netherlands. Friedrich was a tinsmith by trade. My father told me that Grandpa had made the silver candlestick that stood in the Roman Catholic Church in Stadt Groningen.

Grandpa raised his family in the Hervormde Kerk (the State Church) in the Netherlands. From every impression we received, the family did go to church, but were not very spiritual. Herman Hanko, my father, was born into the family on August 4, 1861. Grandpa was of the better class, since he had a business of his own, and was insistent that my father should learn a trade, namely painting and decorating, but did not seem overly concerned about the spiritual welfare of his family. Having been away from home and in the service, my father had not had much opportunity to grow spiritually. This may explain why he was accustomed to using vulgar language. This language was a great offence to his second wife, my mother, and he gradually learned to avoid it.

At age 27, my father married Jeltje Schriemer. They were blessed with the birth of two girls before they immigrated to America.

My mother was born on November 22, 1872 near Harlingen, Friesland, to a poor farm hand, Cornelis Burmania. She and her three sisters were very young when their mother died of tuberculosis. Cornelis married again and had five more children with his second wife.

As the family increased the food became scarcer. My mother spoke of getting a piece of rye bread for supper with a small piece of pork. The girls would push the

pork to the end of the slice, so that the last bite would taste the best. Then they were sent to bed, holding their stomachs so that the hunger pangs would not keep them awake.

Mother's family belonged to the Afscheiding, the Secession of 1834, which was led by Hendrik De Cock. As poor as they were, her father sent the children to the Christian school. Mother told how they passed the public school on the way to their own school and were mocked as "fijner" (pure ones) or "doe akelige Cockseanen" (you hateful followers of De Cock.)¹

But when mother turned eleven, her father could no longer support her, so she was taken from school and put to work. She found a job in Leeuwaarden with a rich family. If I am not mistaken, he was the mayor of the town. The mayor lived in a large three-story house. The water for washing, cooking, baking and baths had to be drawn from the canal. Mother ruined her back by hauling water all the way to the third floor, and suffered as a hunch back for the rest of her life.

Her uncle, Doeke Bouma, showed deep concern for her spiritual welfare and often visited her. When he came to see her she was told by her employer that she could visit with him, but had to keep on ironing. On Sunday she prepared the whole family for church. They then stepped into the coach while she hurried to get dressed and run to church. They sat in the rented seats. She often had to stand throughout the service.

At first my mother worked only for room and board, but as she grew older she received wages which she frugally saved for the day when she could get away to America.

At about the age of twenty she did manage to get to America even though it meant that she had to travel third class in the bottom of the ship. When they arrived at the port of Hoboken, New Jersey she had to be deloused along with the others. She never cared to go back to the Netherlands, not even for a visit, for as she said, "I never experienced anything there but poverty."

She stayed first at her sister Lizzie Goeman, who lived in a house along Chicago Drive, between Zeeland and Hudsonville in Michigan near 62nd street. She quickly began looking for work. She needed to support herself,

but also wanted to save money so that she could get her parents and her other full sister to move to America.

Here we see the amazing hand of providence. My father, who as I mentioned had moved to America with his wife and daughters, had then settled in Grand Rapids to set up his painting and decorating business. The Hankos had not been in this country for long when Jeltje died, shortly after the birth of their third daughter. Father needed someone to take care of the house and children, so he hired Jantje, my mother, as a housekeeper.

Jantje soon became attached to the three Hanko girls, Jennie, Maggie and Henrietta so that after a year or two, and at least one rejection, Herman convinced her to marry him. Rev. Svensma, minister in Eastern Ave. Christian Reformed Church, married them. Being a Friesian himself, he told my mother that in her case it was too bad that she had to give up her maiden name to take on a German name!²

Fred, Sena, Lucy, Corrie and I were born to this union within the next nine years. Meanwhile, the Cleveland Panic had struck.³ My parents lost their home and were forced to move elsewhere. Because of bad economic times and the lapse in the home decorating business, Father had to work at cutting ice on Reed's Lake, near present day Calvin College, for a dollar per day. This ice was then stored in shacks to be sold for use in the preservation of food. Mother took in weekly washings to supplement the family's income.

It was not strange for us to have outsiders in the home with us. My Dad often referred to our home as always having the welcome sign out. In fact, a young man stayed with us for a number of years prior to and after I was born. He was a gloomy fellow whose gloom deepened whenever he failed at business or love. Eventually, he did marry and move out of our home. Another regular visitor was my aunt Lucy who had eleven operations and each time recuperated in our home.

In her younger days, my mother was also neighborhood midwife. She was called on from time to time to deliver a baby, for which she received little more recompense than a thank-you. She sometimes jokingly referred to a ten cent set of salt and pepper shakers for which she had worked all night.

An expectant mother, for whom my mother acted as midwife, died soon after her baby was born. On her deathbed she asked my mother to take the baby, since she wanted it to have a good home. My mother consented, although she already had seven children to raise. After about six months, long enough to become strongly attached to the child, some relative came and demanded

the baby on the basis that they had more right to it than my mother had. Since no adoption proceedings had begun, my mother could only turn over the child.

Mother was also known for ability to make coffee in large quantities. In those days coffee was made in a wash boiler. To make the grounds settle to the bottom a dozen eggs were added. At society banquets, or even at neighborhood weddings, my mother was asked to make the coffee. We sometimes received a free invitation to the wedding because of my mother's ability to make good coffee.

My father was quick-tempered and often impatient. I actually did not learn to know my father well until I was old enough to paint with him in the summer. Then I was sorry that I had not learned before to know his inner kindly nature, his understanding, and also his generosity. The latter went far beyond my mother's who always feared the wolf of poverty at the door.

And so the family lived happily together. Especially Mother strongly exerted a spiritual influence. She knew how to comfort in times of distress, but she also knew how to admonish in no uncertain terms. She was very matter-of-fact, very down to earth. Her stern disapproval of all that was wrong, her quiet admonitions, and above all her exemplary walk of life could not pass unnoticed. One sees that marvelous work of God in gathering His church in the line of continued generations. As a parent works out his or her salvation with fear and trembling a mark is left upon each child either as a blessing or a condemnation, but a mark that is never entirely erased.

A mother who was given only the most basic of educations can nevertheless be used by God to gather, defend and preserve his church from generation to generation even as the promise came to Abraham.

A mother has not lived in vain when in the great day of days she can say, "See us, Lord, and the children thou hast given us, for we are Thine." ❖

Footnotes

¹ These schools were not the same as our public schools. They were actually supported by the government but operated by the State Church.

² Burmania was a noble Dutch and Friesian name going back beyond the Reformation.

³ The Cleveland Panic (1893-1897) is so named because Grover Cleveland was president when a recession hit as a result of the country going off the gold standard.

Karen is a member of Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois, and a granddaughter of Rev. C. Hanko.

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

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:
Paige Rene , daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jason Taylor—
Byron Center, MI

Eli John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Grant Klein—Doon, IA

Caleb Jonathan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan Kamps—
Hope, MI

Mason James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Schimmel—
Hope, MI

Taya Etta, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Thom Moore—
Loveland, CO

Tanner Fritz, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mark Moore—Lynden,
CO

Kayla Sue, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mark Kuiper—
Southwest, MI

Brieanna Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jayson Alsum—
Trinity, MI

Jonathan Isaac, son of Mr. & Mrs. Craig Kuiper—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:

Lai Yin Wong—Byron Center, MI

Michael VanDyke—Faith, MI

Amy Kaptein—Faith, MI

Derek & Anna VanDenTop—Hull, IA

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. Nathan Gallagher and Miss Charlene Wierenga—
Lacombe, Canada

The Ploughboy (3)

The church, the pope, the cardinals, the bishops, the king of England—they all wanted one man. They wanted him stopped and they wanted him dead.

Bibles and more Bibles were pouring into the hands of Englishmen. For centuries Rome had conducted her services in Latin—a language the people did not understand. Many priests understood it no better. But no matter—the more who were ignorant, the better. Steeped in Rome's superstitions and lies, the people paid dearly to rescue themselves and their loved ones from hellfire. That's all they knew. But now the people were beginning to read and study the Scriptures in their own tongue. Now they could see that salvation was not in works or in paying money to the church—it was in Jesus Christ alone. When they saw this, the money stopped. And Rome—was furious.

But the man who dared to translate the Scriptures into English was very, very hard to find. God had gifted him with extraordinary abilities in language to be able to translate the Bible so well and so quickly. Indeed, he had little time before he might be caught. He knew how to work and to hide.

Born in England around 1494, he finished school at Cambridge where a Greek translation of the New Testa-

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

ment was available for study, and where the teachings of Martin Luther could be discussed. He liked the ideas of Luther, but he followed no one man—he followed only where the Scriptures led him.

He stayed in a manor where he preached in its small chapel. He was a very serious, studious, well-mannered young man. The lord and lady of the manor were very thoughtful as well. They invited many rich and influential traveling clergy to dine and discuss the issues of the day. It was at one of these dinners that the way the Scriptures were leading their young preacher was made known. In a heated debate, one of the visiting guests exclaimed that people would be better off with the pope's laws than with God's. Such a statement demanded a response, for indeed, this was the view of the whole Church of Rome: man's word was more important than God's.

Though low in station and office, the answer came from the young priest's heart: "I defy the pope and all his laws; if God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth a plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost."

That man was William Tyndale... ❖

Who was wiser than his enemies, had more understanding than all his teachers, and understood more than the ancients—and why was this so? Read Psalm 119:97-104 for the answer!

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



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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



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