

Beacon

Lights

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“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

Ephesians 6:13

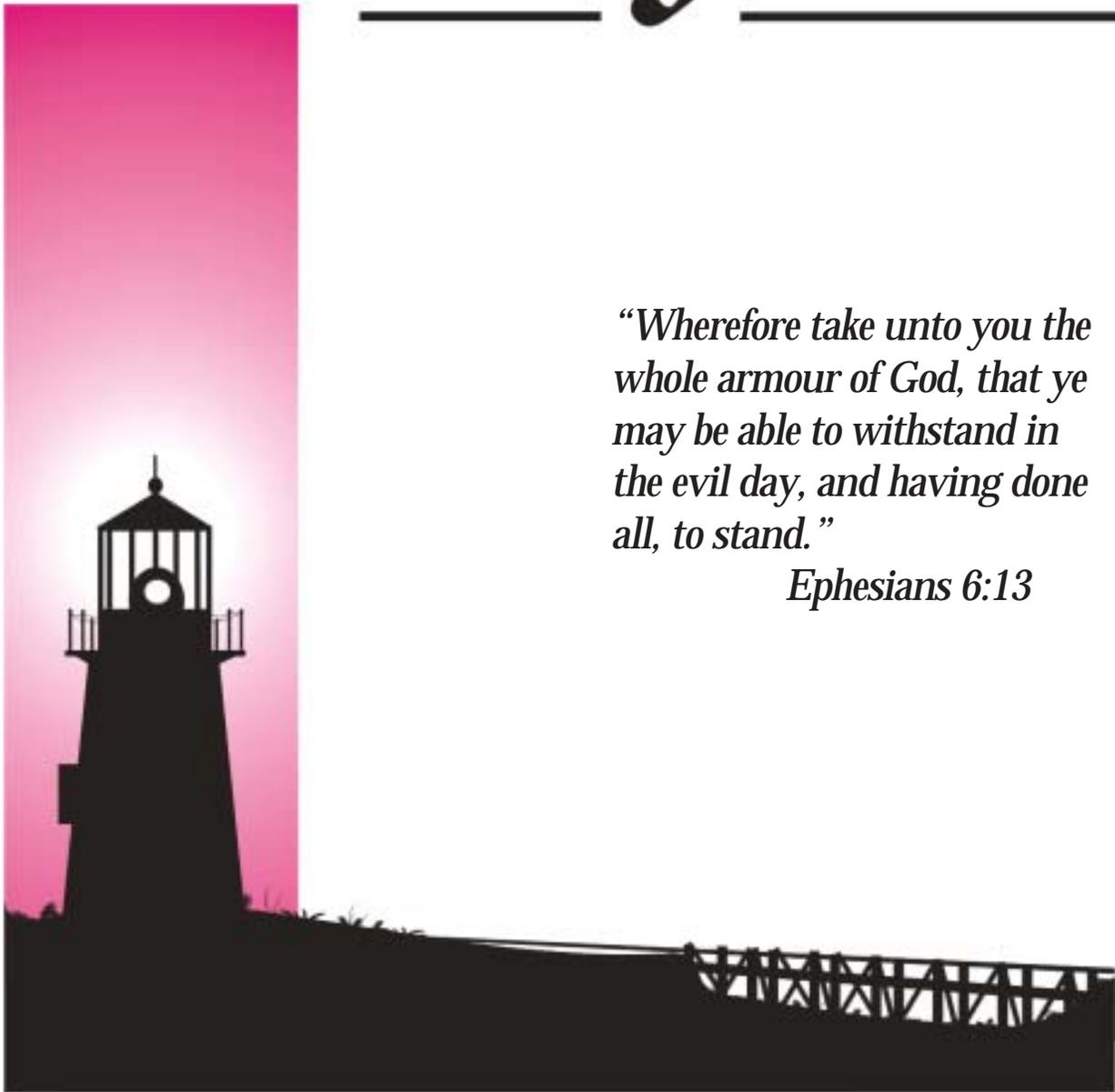


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BEACON LIGHTS

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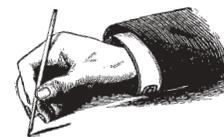
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Sharpen Your Sword!



by John Huizenga

Dear readers, let us be up in arms! Don't you hear the trumpet blast of our leaders? Don't you see the glitter of armor and cloud of dust, as once again a mighty surge of the enemy sallies forth to destroy the church? We look to be outnumbered, again, some one thousand to one; but never mind that, our Sword, when we use it, will never fail to slay and destroy the enemy. Let us not sit back and watch the battle, or still worse, grow bored and disinterested. The enemy rallies round the standard which now clearly reads "The Federal Vision."

The Federal Vision is the old heresy of works righteousness that has plagued the church through the ages. This time it comes in the cloak of the covenant. Yes, the covenant! The doctrine which God has been pleased to have developed in our own Protestant Reformed churches in all its beauty! The doctrine which forms the heart and soul of our homes, schools, and marriages is being used to clothe heresy. As such it threatens every area of our life.

The Federal Vision is a Trojan Horse that has infiltrated well nigh every church of the Reformation. Its progress is rapid, and little is being done outside of our churches to check its advance. It is only a matter of time before the conquered forget the freedom they once enjoyed under the gospel of grace, as the Federal Vision binds them body and soul to Rome.

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:13-19).

Our pastors and professors have led us, bearing this armor, to stand up against the foe. They are seasoned warriors and have become skilled with their Swords through constant use and struggle. They boldly charge with the shield of faith into clouds of fiery darts. You will find details of the battle in "The Standard Bearer," pamphlets such as "The Unconditional Covenant in Contemporary Debate" by Professor Engelsma (www.trinityprc.org), "Keeping God's Covenant" by the professors Hanko and Engelsma (www.britishreformedfellowship.org.uk) and a recent lecture by Professor Engelsma entitled "The Latest Attack on Grace in the Reformed Churches: Justification by Works" (www.prc.org) Perhaps you will not find yourself fighting in the front lines, but we must all be ready to fight when the gospel and our salvation is challenged in our reading, our conversation with the neighbor, school curriculum material, or even members in our own church who succumb to the enemy.

It is only a matter of time before
the conquered forget the freedom
they once enjoyed under the
gospel of grace, as the Federal
Vision binds them body and soul
to Rome.

Let us be up and follow. Watch and learn. Practice and fight with them. This is a call to our readers to join the battle in the way of defending a biblical doctrine of the covenant with writing in the *Beacon Lights*. We hope to publish many articles on this topic. Read books, listen to lectures, study the ways of the enemy, meditate upon God's word, and above all, pray "with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." ❖

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor

I appreciate the time and effort that individuals spent in not only reading my article ("Standin' in the Need of Prayer," October, 2006 issue), but also in contemplating and responding to it. In response to Carmen Griess' letter in particular (November, 2006 issue), I feel the necessity to address the valid concerns made by the writer, and to also clarify the original intentions of the first article.

First off, the letter stated that "...*the writer wants practical instruction from our pastors.*" While this assertion may be true, it is not directly addressed in the article. Instead, what's written states that "*Too often...lack of practical **application** resounds as a common criticism of the PR churches.*" While this may seem like a minor concept to differ on, the truth is that *instruction* and *application* don't mean the same thing and they shouldn't be used interchangeably. Instruction is imparted knowledge, or a lesson, while application is the act of putting something to a special use or purpose.¹ When it comes to the preaching, our pastors do a fine job of providing instruction, wisdom, and comfort in a doctrinally correct way. But when it comes down to addressing social issues of today's society and culture and acting on them, often times it seems that our pastors look the other way and pretend that the issues "of the world" don't really exist behind our church doors.

This may sound like a harsh judgment to call down on pastors, but reality shows us that serious issues exist in the world and in the church, and as a denomination, we are doing little to address them. Reality tells us things like 90% of 8-16 year olds have viewed pornography,

usually while "doing their homework."² Reality tells us about the "success" of MySpace, the blog that has over 87 million account users, adds approximately 270,000 users every day, and draws minors as 25% of its users.³ Reality tells us about the latest fads, including the one among teenage girls—the "bisexual chic"—that practices lesbianism to get the attention of their male peers.⁴ We don't have the luxury to look away and pretend that these evils don't exist, or to pretend that members within our churches aren't engaging in them.

In order to address evils in the church though, preachers must incorporate relevant application with biblical doctrine. By means of stories, examples, statistics, etc., the pastor can easily clarify any biblical text of Scripture. Jesus himself resorted to this, using parables over and over again, even refusing to *not* use parables when he taught. "*All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled by the prophet...*"⁵ Jesus knew the importance of capturing his audience, just as any speaker does, and the gospel message was so important for them to hear that he used stories to get their attention. It's of utmost importance to incorporate doctrine into preaching, but it's just as critical to equip your audience with real-life, relevant examples and applications for their individual ministries.

The quote from Marvin Kamps' pamphlet emphasizes a good point on doctrinal importance: "*Without right doctrine every practical directive for our life is then perverted and corrupted. We must have doctrinal preaching therefore, if we are going to have preaching at all.*"

Finding a church with pure doctrine is critical for every Christian and not a light matter. The gospel message cannot be compromised under any cost for the sake of comfort. But on the other hand, pure doctrine in a church cannot characterize its entirety. The church must be so compelling by its outreach that it draws outsiders to her. The church in Thessalonica did this and Paul himself commended them for it. “*And you became followers...of the Lord...so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place.*”⁶ Thessalonica was a huge city (200,000+) in Macedonia, yet everyone knew about the church there by the examples set by the members of that church. I’m not so sure the PRC is known quite like Thessalonica was.

Another key aspect of church life is its unity, as pointed out by the writers reference to Ephesians. The writer noted that “*By the end, I wondered if the writer implied that we should unite with other churches within a local religious community.*” While I do highly recommend fellowship with Christians outside our denominations, my focus in the article was not primarily on this topic. Instead, the intent pointed to the lack of unity within our own churches, mainly because we do not pray together. And there is much to be learned from other churches in their practices, and we cannot haughtily dismiss their methods because we don’t agree with all their teachings. It’s like refusing to play tennis with someone who’s better than you (even though it would make *you* better) simply because he can’t read. There is much to be learned from other churches, and we only hurt ourselves when we label them “apostate” and refuse to listen to what they say.

It is this that I refer to when I claim that we often “*cling...obstinately and unbiblically to tradition*” in our PR circles. Too often do we look at other churches and point out what they do wrong, rather than focusing on what they do right. While it’s important to understand the differences between churches, and to stand up for them, it’s just as important to realize...that many of them are in the same boat we are...fighting an evil culture with the truth of the Word. Our traditions keep us from leaning on saints from other churches because they “don’t have as pure form of doctrine as we do.” We can incorporate new traditions...like praying together...without compromising our doctrinal differences.

With new traditions, though, always come valid concerns, like whether they are necessary or biblical. In re-

gards to unity and prayer, it’s abundantly clear from Scripture that both are necessary and biblical, and that we are called to learn from other Christians. We don’t get to pick the people or denominations Christ calls his people from for us to learn from. As the lyrics of a well-known song in Christian music expresses, “*Jesus paid much too high a price for us to pick and choose who may come, and we are the Body of Christ.*”⁷ We cannot naively overlook doctrinal differences of other churches, but we cannot overlook their works for the kingdom either, and we must learn from them.

In that light, I agree with the writer that we must continue to pray, and continue fighting for doctrine. We must also share our burdens with each other, so we know what to pray for. And we must also encourage our pastors to address real issues of society, so that we are an informed people and so we know the battles we are up against. Let us be a praying, engaging church of the 21st century, a church like Thessalonica.

Under the Cross,
Rita De Jong

Endnotes

¹ *American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000

² http://www.familysafemedia.com/pornography_statistics.html

³ Granneman, Scott. “MySpace, a Place without MyParents.” 2006-06-30. <http://www.securityfocus.com/columnists/408>

⁴ http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=36642

⁵ Matthew 13:34-35

⁶ I Thess. 1:6-8

⁷ Casting Crowns: “If We are the Body” ❖

Correction

We did not give proper credit to an article in the October issue. The article on Southwest PRC was written by Roseanne Van Solkema.

When I In Awesome Wonder...
Michigan's Golden Coast
Christmas on the Coast

by Deanne Wassink

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

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

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

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

I feel the pulse of life that flows in the awesome interdependence of the ecosystem of the coastline. The relationships between the water, the wind, the sand, the dunes, the plants, the animals, and even man. This inter-

woven masterpiece created and maintained by a sovereign God who rules moment by moment, breath by breath, the creation that speaks His praises. In the same way, our Heavenly Father so governed all things so that the "fullness of time" should come. That time when the Christ Child was born of the Virgin Mary. That birth, that miracle, is the central event of all time, the focus of all that is created. By it God realized His covenant of salvation that made sinners to be the friends and family of God.

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

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

A Savior Came That Day

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

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

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

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

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

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

Current Issues

Senator Foley Fallout: What We Should Be Noticing

by Scott Van Uffelen

In 2006 it is apparent that man truly is a lover of the flesh and revels in that which is unseemly. As Christians we antithetically strive to remove ourselves from the lusts of the world only to have it shoved down our throats by every mass media enterprise. The latest and “greatest” that is being dished up for us to choke on originates within the esteemed halls of our Congress. More specifically, it flashed across the computer screen of Senator Foley (R-Fla.) as he sent sexually graphic electronic messages to one of his pages (volunteer helper). While the media, and his spokesperson, continue to paint the picture for us with every garish color on their palette, we must remove ourselves from the front line and take notice of what is going on surrounding this whole circus. In particular we need to focus on seven aspects of this story that are conveniently being ignored, discarded, and watered down.

1. Psalm 81:12 reads “So I gave them up unto their own heart’s lust: and they walked in their own counsels.” Without knowing, or needing to know, all of the details of this case, it is clear that Senator Foley (and many associated with him) is actively walking in the way of his own counsel and desires. As a senator he has been elected to serve the people of his state and to represent the core democratic ideals of his party within the legislature. His job is to be a servant of the people. Within this context it should strike us as to how powerful and persuasive Satan is in the hearts of men who reject the living God. Senator Foley became so wrapped up in his own lustful thoughts that he rejected his position as a servant of the people and began to use his workplace, and time, as an instrument for his desires. As I Timothy 6:9 prophesies “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful

lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.” Here the Word of the Lord makes a startling distinction for us. Those that desire to be rich and have power will fall. Why? Because they have rejected the Lord and are following after their own counsels. Senator Foley is no more depraved than you or I, but by God’s grace we have not been given over to the desires of our heart nor allowed to drown in perdition. Our prayer should be for the Spirit of Christ to work within him according to His will to release him from the snares of this world. We should not feel empathy for the man who has given himself up to his own sin, but we must give thanks and rejoice in the fact that outside of the grace of God we too would be ensnared in our own folly.

2. The fallen nature of man is predictable and consistent. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, Senator Foley is seeking an excuse for his sin outside of himself, and like unto Pilot he is attempting to wash his hands of responsibility for the consequences that have transpired. “I’m an alcoholic.” “I was sexually abused as a young man.” “It is the Church’s fault!” How many more excuses can he come up with in the next few days? The progression of the excuses mirrors that of our society. Each excuse gains a foothold within the empathetic hearts and minds of more and more Americans. From that position, first as an alcoholic, he is able to get some to empathize with him because of his addiction, and then more for his abuse, and finally he is able to bring in hatred against others, the Church, for making him be this way. And Americans buy the excuses and blame. Why? Because as a whole we prefer not to stand in judgment of individuals whose faces we see, whose faces closely mirror that of ourselves; we are more content to cast blame on society, or an organization at large, that is

abstract, non-descript, or can be labeled with a single word. For anyone to evoke the judgment of the Word against the actions of the senator is perceived not only as an affront to Senator Foley's past experiences, but also the American psyche.

3. Perhaps the excuse that is most disheartening for the Church to hear is no excuse at all. "He was 21 at the time!" Instead of focusing on his sin, I mean error in his judgment, all must be swept under the rug now because it was all legal. The young man was an adult and therefore there was no impropriety on the Senator's behalf. How carefully crafted is Satan within this whole process that the sting of God's Word is removed from the equation because the laws of the land allow such conduct. The number of the young man's days now dictates that the sexual lusts and homosexuality were not sin and Senator Foley is innocent of wrong doing.

4. Stepping back still further we see the frenzy that has been created within the rest of Congress itself. Politicians, using the media, are capitalizing on someone else's misfortune. Now his actions can be called a sin again, not because the Word of God says so, but because it is to the political advantage of others 30 days before another election. These too are the modern day Pilots who are washing their hands of impropriety in fake innocence. While the spotlight is on someone else, they desire to gain a political advantage and deny their own temptations and snares that they are entangled within. Juxtaposed to the man of God who is continually humbled in the sight of sin and made more aware of our sinful natures, these men become bold in themselves. Rather than appealing to God's grace and mercy to save us all from our sinful natures they bellow out "Vote for me!" because I have not done that sin (at least not that you are aware of) and I can save this country. In man's shallowness they appeal to the truth of the Word by correctly calling these actions sins, but they pervert it for their own ends.

5. Expanding upon the last point we can not forget about how corporate responsibility is being ceremoniously dragged into all of this. As Christians we understand the nature of being part of the body of Christ and the responsibility that comes from such membership. We have a duty to work together and to hold one another accountable before God. In a perversion of this idea we see the broad strokes of corporate responsibility being painted for political gain of an entire party. Overnight Senator Foley became the spokesman for the entire Republican Party and mainstream Christians. All Republi-

cans are under attack because they belong to the same party as him (this is the same tactic oftentimes used against the president's party when his poll numbers are low). Rather than challenging the individual, this has resulted in an attack on the entire party. True, responsibility is there for those that knew about this and did nothing, but do not be fooled for a moment that this responsibility is defined by party lines. Furthermore, responsibility for "sins" should be demanded at all times, not just months before an election cycle.

6. Broadening our scope even more we must be impressed, and yet tremble, at how the realities of our economic age are being exposed. What got Senator Foley in trouble? His Instant Messaging posts that he was writing from his personal computer, late at night, years ago. The electronic and digital age is truly revolutionary, especially in the amount of information that can now be stored and collected. Our every stroke on the keyboard can be monitored and recorded. How easy it will be then for anti-Christ to find and persecute the Church, and even much easier to cut us off from how we communicate one with another. It is not so much that we are being watched now as it that we can be watched right now three years into the future. Hopefully such knowledge will extrinsically encourage us to live antithetically and be careful with what e-mails we send, what pictures we post, what blogs we respond to, what sites we "visit", and how much general time we dedicate to the worldwide web. May the Lord use even this to admonish and restrict us in our daily walk.

7. As Christians the most troubling aspect about this whole ordeal (and it is being made into an ordeal) is the complete denial of God's judgment. Sin is accursed in God's sight and He will deal justly, burning them up leaving neither root nor branch (Malachi 4:1). Just punishment is not a slap on the hand, a well-timed resignation, or even defeat at the polls, but rather an eternity in hell-fire. The iniquity of man makes this event an ordeal as men laden with their own sins attempt to deal with fellow sinners in a mock display of justice. As God's children we may not so casually dismiss God's righteous judgment in this, and against all those that actively tolerate such wickedness. Rather than having a cavalier attitude towards this sin may we pray that the Lord's judgment be done and be done quickly. As for ourselves we rest assured in the saving knowledge that our sins of youth He remembers not (Psalter #217) as they are washed clean through the blood of Christ.

In the days and weeks ahead more news will continue to be force-fed to us as it is “uncovered”. While it is being so, may we not lose the spectacles of scripture,

nor the view of the whole picture and its context within the depravity of man. ❖

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

Church Family

Hear My Words, O Lord

by Trisha Haak

“**W**hat’s in a word,” they say? What’s in a word? You couldn’t imagine your life without them. It would be so lonely. Unable to communicate, unable to express your thoughts. So much frustration, so many walls built all because you couldn’t say what was on your mind.

Words are so essential in how we communicate with one another; yet sometimes we can place too much emphasis on them. Yes, they can define us, they can help us and they can build us up. They can do so many things. But the words that we speak, the ones that come from our own lips, can never save us.

The one area of our lives where words are such a blessing is in the life of our prayers. It’s amazing that we who are so unworthy can come before the throne of God with our petitions and requests. Prayer is a joy of the covenant, and the fact that God has chosen us for such should amaze us every day.

It’s important that we come to God in the right attitude and the right frame of mind. We must come in humility and therefore bow our heads. We must come fully focused and therefore we close our eyes and fold our hands. These things keep us from distractions. There is a purpose to these actions. They are not meaningless rituals or empty gestures. There are habits that we form in order to get us in the right state of mind when we pray.

It follows then that we are careful with the words that we use. We don’t throw any random word in. We avoid those words that sound disrespectful or nonchalant. We use words that reflect our awe of God’s majesty. Using pronouns like “thee” and “thou” help us separate God from the ordinary, the mundane and the vulgar. Such language come from a time when people were slightly more respectful of their peers and elders. The use of thee and thou reminds us that we are not talking

to a friend, a spouse, or any other human being. Instead we are speaking to the Creator and Sustainer of life.

If there is ever an opportunity to give God more respect we should never deny it. The use of thee and thou is such an opportunity and can become a healthy, meaningful habit. It will condition us to realize the glory of God and the unworthiness that is inherent to us. It will help us to mentally divide the common from the holy and speaks to us “Remove your shoes for this, this is holy ground.”

Yet we may never assume that there is righteousness in these words. They do not make us holier or bring us closer to heaven. Christ and the sanctifying work of His Holy Spirit do that. The words of depraved sinners can never buy any salvation on their behalf. We may enter boldly before the throne of grace yet Christ intercedes every prayer and brings it to the Father. The Father hears the sweet voice of His Son as He brings the prayers of those that the Father has given to Him.

God is pleased by prayers that come from a sincere heart. He is not pleased by the sacrifices on the altar. He is not pleased by the empty rituals of man, by what is ostentatious and showy. Christ rejected the prayer of the Pharisee as He rejects all prayers that have a self-seeking motive.

Christ knows His own and mediates for all His sheep no matter how well trained in praying they might be. He mediates for the young child learning to pray. He mediates for the learned professor who has been praying for years. He tries the heart to see if His people pray in faith whether they use thee and thou or whether they don’t. We can not judge what is heard by the Father although we can judge what is disrespectful and displeasing to God. Some prayers blatantly mock the holiness of God such as the prayer of the Pharisee. We therefore pray

that God gives us the grace to never pray in such a manner.

The publican did not lift his eyes when he prayed. He knew that he was unworthy to be in the presence of God. So it must be with us. Our prayers are not worthy to be interceded by Christ. We are not worthy in and of ourselves to have our petitions brought before the Father. Yet in His amazing love, He does hear our prayers. There is no need for you to lift your eyes when you pray to see if heaven will respond or man will see. Always

remember that God hears and sees the heart and He knows every beat. So in faith find your corner where it will be conducive to pray. Choose the best words of your heart, words of love and respect because this is to communicate with the One who caused you to speak, who caused you to say Abba, Father when you were still in your sin. Fall upon your knees and say, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." ❖

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

Gem of the Month

The Incarnation

by Mrs. Betty Ekema

*Again our hearts are filled with joy
As, in a special way
We celebrate our Saviour's birth,
Well known as "Christmas Day".*

*Our thoughts are drawn to Bethlehem
The place of Jesus birth.
The Son of God, incarnate
To dwell upon the earth.*

*He left His home in glory
In flesh here to abide.
Obedient to His Father
God's will He satisfied.*

*For man had deeply fallen
From his perfection state.
No longer was he free from sin
As him God did create.*

*For God is just and holy
He's righteous, He is light.
He can have no communion
With sin that's dark as night.*

*Sin cannot go unpunished
For God is truly just.
He's righteous and He's holy
So to punish sin He must.*

*But, God had a chosen people
Elect 'ere time began,
From eternity He loved them
So, salvation was His plan.*

*He promised our first parents
That from their seed would rise
A Saviour, a Redeemer,
Who truly justifies.*

*The prophets too foretold it
That Christ would come some day.
That He must suffer much, and die
To take our sins away.*

*Expectant parents used to hope
Their babe would be a boy.
For he might be the promised Christ,
The thought filled them with joy!*

*And then, four hundred years went by
Without a single word.
It looked like David's line ran dead.
It seemed nothing was heard.*

*But, God is always faithful;
His covenant shall endure.
He never fails His loved ones.
His promises are sure.*

*For an angel came to Mary
And told her of God's plan.
She asked, "How shall this be
For I know not a man?"*

*Conception by the Holy Ghost,
A miracle takes place!
Then, virgin birth, God's Son in flesh.
A wonder of God's grace!*

*The shepherds heard about it
As they watched their flocks that night,
From an angel, then a chorus,
Oh what a wondrous sight!*

*It seemed the heavens opened
As their song rang through the air,
"Glory to God in the highest",
It echoed everywhere!*

*They hastened to the manger
Where baby Jesus lay.
'T was there the shepherds saw him
Upon a bed of hay.*

*Reprinted from the December,
1974 issue of Beacon Lights.*

Watching Daily At My Gates

The Song of Zion

"A Psalter–Psalm Devotional of Praise to Our Sovereign Covenant God"
by Skip Hunter (Reprinted from December 1997)

December 16 Read Revelation 14:1-7

Psalm 40:3a One of the blessings of salvation is the blessing of a new song in our hearts. In principle we have that song now. In glory we will have it in perfection. Are we singing that new song daily? Are our songs those songs in which God delights? Or are our songs those which magnify man by exulting over his sin like the song of Lamech? Or are our songs the insipid songs of Arminianism which make Jesus a weak and ineffectual savior dependent on our help? What are we singing, people of God? Is it the songs that cause angels to weep with joy or sadness? Sing Psalters 108:3 and 111:2.

December 17 Read Matthew 5:12-16

Psalm 40:3b The second part of this verse gives the reason why God calls us to sing His new song. This reason is that He uses our feeble efforts to show others His ways. This is the testimony of our Heidelberg Catechism's exposition about good works. This is the testimony of Scripture. He has set us as lights in this world to glorify His name and that He may use us to bring others to Christ. Notice this is much different from those who sing about "this little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." This is the truth of the gospel of salvation by grace alone. How do you see the Christ of Christmas? Is He the sovereign one who causes all to happen to His will? If so, then sing the songs of Zion so that His name might be glorified and His church gathered. Sing Psalters 108:4 and 111:2.

December 18 Read Isaiah 26:1-8

Psalm 40:4 The redeemed child of God is the happy (blessed) child of God. He is happy because he trusts in Jehovah and bases the activities of his life upon the Word of God. As he lives in this world he does not bow to peer pressure and do what pride would have him do. He does not worry about the "in" crowd. He delights in obeying the law of God. He does not give into deceit and lying, but rather he speaks the truth and is truthful in all of his activities. People of God of all ages, are you blessed ones? Are you happy? If not, upon whom do you put your trust? If it is placed upon man and his ways, you will never be happy in this life or the life to come. Sing Psalters 108:5 and 111:2.

December 19 Read Revelation 15

Psalm 40:5a People of God, do we stop and consider the works of God's hand around us? Do we look at nature through the "spectacles of faith" and see that our God is a great and wonderful God? As we consider the incarnation, do we truly understand the greatness of this thought of God on our behalf? God gives us the wonders of creation so that we can in a small measure understand Him. We must be constantly looking for those things which teach us of His greatness. We must do it in things large and small. We must do it in things pleasant and unpleasant. Why? Because our gracious God has given them to us for our benefit to His glory. Sing Psalter 108:6.

December 20 Read Isaiah 55:6-13

Psalm 40:5b Yesterday we spoke of God's works and their wonderfulness. The rest of the verse looks at His thoughts and their greatness. Do we really realize how great God is? Do we confess this in our daily lives? It is easy and tempting for us to bring God down to our level. We do this when we pray in a wrong manner. We do this when we use His names or attributes in vain. Our speech must reflect God's greatness. This must be evident in every prayer that we utter. God is great; there is none other. How do we pray to Him—in reverence or as an equal? God is great; there is none other. Do we take His name in vain daily as we talk to our friends and companions. Let us pray for the grace to glorify our great God in our speech each and every day of our lives. Sing Psalters 108:7 and 111:3.

December 21 Read Psalm 40:6-10

Psalm 40:6 Once more we prepare to enter God's house, the Lord willing. What is our attitude as we go to church? Are we doing it grudgingly or out of custom or habit? Is it our delight to attend the House of our God? In today's verse the Psalmist realizes that it is not the outward act of worship which is required of our God; it is the obedient inward act of submitting ourselves before His throne of grace. In every part of the worship service today, we must worship in spirit and in truth. We must sing from the heart and not just from the lips. Our prayers must be holy and reverent to our God. We must attend faithfully to the preaching and hear

the word of him who speaks, "Thus saith the Lord." In doing these things, we will please our heavenly Father and worship Him in a right way. Sing Psalms 109:1 and 111:4.
December 22 Read John 1:1-14

Psalm 40:7 We have in the next few verses evidence of the type of Christ that David was. In this verse we see Christ's obedience to His Father in coming to this earth for our salvation. It is good for us to consider this thought at this time of the year. Why do we celebrate Christmas? For what reason do we attend many programs? Why do many ministers preach a "Christmas series"? Why do we join together to sing the Christmas carols that so many of us love. Are we celebrating the birth of Him who came to this earth to die on the cross for our sin? Is the source of our joy the cross? This is what Christmas is all about! It is little of a baby in a manger; it is much of Christ dying on the cross! Christ was obedient to His Father for our sake. Thanks be to God for this gift. Sing Psalm 109:2.

December 23 Read Hebrews 10:1-10

Psalm 40:8 Today's reading is the New Testament proof of the Old Testament prophecy. The Jewish Christians had to be convinced that Christ had come and that He had died on the cross. The writer of Hebrews turns to the today's texts for such proof. Do we delight to do the will of God no matter what it means for our earthly life? That's what Christ did. He humbled himself and suffered the shameful and painful death of the cross in obedience to His Father. In doing so He confesses that God's law was in His heart? What about us? Is God's law in our hearts daily. Is it a delight to do the will of the Father? Do we knowingly pray, "Thy will be done?" Let us do this in our hearts and by our actions not only now but every day. Sing Psalm 111:4.

December 24 Read Luke 4:16-27

Psalm 40:9 During Jesus's life on earth He preached often in the synagogues of Galilee. On one occasion early in His ministry He preached in Nazareth, his hometown. He preached knowing that his audience would not like what He said. He told them that they were sinners and that He was the only way of salvation. He did not mince words; He did not hide part of the truth being afraid of the consequences. Is this our experience? Are we bold to speak the name of Christ before those who would mock us or even do us hurt. Can we say with confidence, "I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest"? Let us pray for the grace to proclaim God's name and worth to the people with whom we come into contact. Sing Psalm 109:3.

December 25 Read Luke 2:8-20

Psalm 40:10 The passage that we read for today is the familiar Christmas story as experienced by the shepherds. Young people and children, what is your speech going to be full of in the next few days? Are you only going to talk about the presents you received? Or are you going to speak

of the great salvation that you have been given through the way of the baby in the manger? The shepherds went home praising God and telling all that they saw about the Christ. Are we witnessing to those around us? Are we praising God for His goodness toward us? Do we faithfully proclaim the loving-kindness shown to us by God? That is what our verse for today says that we must do. Let us pray for the grace to be truly Christlike and spread the word of our salvation through the blood of Christ. Sing Psalms 109:4 and 112:1.
December 26 Read Psalm 40:11-17

Psalm 40:11 When we are bold enough to proclaim the greatness of Jehovah, we find that we are nothing in His sight. We find that of ourselves there is no good in us. Therefore we, too, must pray the prayer of verse 11. We must ask God for mercies to sustain us in our daily lives. The only way we can go through this life, no matter what our age, is by the loving-kindness and truth of God. Notice that truth is part of our assurance. It is by way of knowledge of God and His ways that we are sustained by Him. Are you studying, people of God, to learn that truth? Are your Bibles well-worn from seeking to find God's truths? Are you a familiar fixture in the society room discussing the Word of God? By doing these things God will give you blessed assurance of your salvation, not because of your worth but of His grace and mercy. Sing Psalms 110:1 and 112:2.

December 27 Read Job 14:14-22

Psalm 40:12 We all should be familiar with the hardships of Job. Job's faith was tested by God in order to bring him to the realization that God was God. David, too, felt the hand of God upon him and felt that there was little worth in him. What about us? Do we realize that the hardships of this life are for our profit? Do we know that God is refining us by His holy fire making us pure? Sometimes our heart is heavy because of the sadnesses of this life. Many of God's saints have had this experience. It is the way that God uses to bring us to glory so that He receives the glory. As we look to the end of this year and the beginning of the next, let us see that our God cares for us even when all appears to be dark and gloomy. Sing Psalm 110:1, 2.

December 28 Read Jonah 2

Psalm 40:13 Yesterday we saw the depths of despair to which David was plunged by God. Today we see his response. Instead of complaining or moaning about bad luck he immediately turns to God and asks for deliverance. Notice that he asks God to make haste to deliver him. He does not want to wait and see if he can pull himself up by his own bootstraps. David knows that if he tries to escape his trials in his own strength, he will fail. This should be our reaction to the trials of this life. We should run to God in prayer and ask for help and deliverance. As we close another year and look at the uncertainty which may arise in

the future, let us rely upon our heavenly Father to give to us what we need. Sing Psalter 110:2.

December 29 Read Genesis 11:1-9

Psalm 40:14-15 Part of David's trials in this life were the wicked which were against him. We see here again David as a type of Christ. Just as David was afflicted by Saul and other reprobate so Christ was afflicted by Satan and his army. David reacted to persecution in the only way a child of God should. He does not retaliate. He does not take up the sword against them. He does not call them names. Rather, he prays this imprecatory prayer to God. He asked that God remove his enemies from him. He does this because he knows that God will protect Him. He knows that God never lets one of His saints be afflicted by Satan. The truth of preservation of the saints is a glorious truth that we have. Through it we have the confidence to pray to God for help and protection. Sing Psalter 110:2.

December 30 Read Philippians 4:1-10

Psalm 40:16 From the congregation of the wicked David goes to the congregation of the righteous. David now prays for them. He asked that the elect can feel the goodness of God's presence. He prays that they may rejoice in that goodness. As we look back over the year past, are we able to say, "The Lord be magnified"? Are we glad in the way that Jehovah has led us for the past year? Do we see His hand in

our way and are ready to rejoice and to be glad in that way? Do we love the salvation that God has wrought for us by His Son's death on the cross? Young people, how about you? Is the way God has led you though church and catechism pleasing to you? Are you happy about the means of grace He has provided for you? Let us rejoice in the God of our salvation and thank Him for His many blessings. Sing Psalters 110:3 and 112:3.

December 31 Read Isaiah 41:10-20

Psalm 40:17 David closes this Psalm on a personal note. He confesses that he is poor and needy. This is not a physical financial statement. This is a spiritual financial statement. He examines his life and sees his deficiencies. He realizes that he is nothing and has nothing to offer. In spite of his condition, David knows that God thinks about him. From past experience he knows that God will help him and deliver him from all his woes. As we stand at the end of another year, let us take stock of our spiritual financial condition. Do we have anything to offer to God? Or do we need God to help and deliver us from all our woes? Let us truly make the last part of this Psalm part of our prayer at the year's end. Make no tarrying, O God, deliver Thy people from this vale of tears and take us to our eternal home in heaven. Sing Psalters 110:3 and 112:4.

Watching Daily At My Gates

The Song of Zion

"A Psalter-Psalm Devotional of Praise to Our Sovereign Covenant God"
(Reprinted from January 1998)

Devotionals for January 1-6
by Beth De Vries

January 1 Read Psalm 41

Do we sometimes think of ourselves as the poor on the earth? As we start a new year may we remember that God has blessed us with many blessings on earth and more importantly spiritual blessings. The Lord speaks in this Psalm of blessing those who remember the poor. We are called to assist the poor as we are able and this may be through prayer or our gifts. May we remember this as we begin and think on the year to come. The Psalm then speaks of how the Lord will bless and care for those who assist the poor during time of trouble. Jehovah will be at our side to assist in

whatever difficult situations He sends to us in the coming year. Sing Psalter 113:1.

January 2 Read Psalm 41:2; Psalm 18:30-50

God will protect His people and preserve them from the enemy. The foe may attack us with many evil things and attempt to take us from God's hand, however; he will never succeed. Even on this earth we receive the blessings of God when we do His will and care for the poor. This does not mean that the Lord will never give us trials or allow the devil to attack us, but He will not allow us to be overcome by these attacks. This is the preservation which is promised to all of God's people and is emphasized even more to those who take care of those in need in Psalm 41. May we re-

member that all we have is not ours but God's gifts to us and may we use them to glorify His name. Sing Psalter 113:2.

January 3 Read Psalm 41:3; II Corinthians 4:8-18

God gives much suffering and sickness to some of His people. When in these times we are not to question God but to know that He will care for us through it and sustain us. Those who are strong are called to help and care for these who are in need. II Cor. 4:16 reminds us that as the body may fail outwardly God renews our inward man. We often learn to wait patiently on God and to live day by day. As we fulfill our calling to care for those in need so God will also care for us in our times of need. The people of God must constantly encourage each other not for any earthly reward but because it is what God demands of us. We should remember that helping the needy is not always their physical needs but often times also spiritually. A kind and encouraging word can be a far greater gift than thousands of dollars. Sing Psalter 113:3.

January 4 Read Psalm 41:4 Psalm 61

When in distress we are to call upon the name of our God for He hears our prayers and answers them. He is always available when we earnestly seek Him and He will show mercy to us. Many times we are overwhelmed in our sins and find ourselves far from God yet He is ever faithful. It is an amazing thing that He hears our prayers and cries for help because we offend Him constantly and are so undeserving. God's grace forever upholds and encourages us in the way we are to go. God does promise to give an extra measure of His grace to those who help and care for the poor. May we not help the poor to make us feel good or to earn something from God but rather in gratitude to God for what He has done for us. Sing Psalter 113:4.

January 5 Read Psalm 41:5; Luke 6:20-26

David in Psalm 41 now turns to the attacks of his enemies and their attempts to harm him. We are often ridiculed by those in the world as they attempt to separate us from God. When we are faithful witnesses of the truth the wicked will hate us and use all manner of evil to destroy us. Luke 6:22 speaks of the blessedness that is promised to those that are taunted by the wicked. We should be grateful that the wicked separate us from themselves. The devil seeks in every way to pull us from God and His care but he is not able because of God's faithfulness. May we not become discouraged when the world attacks us but turn our hearts to God for He will strengthen us according to our needs. Sing Psalter 113:5.

January 6 Read Psalm 41:6; Psalm 12

Many times we are led to speak evil against God and our neighbor, this is our ever present old man of sin. We convince ourselves that it is harmless and it makes us feel better about ourselves because it is not us that has done the

evil which we spread. God reminds us in Psalm 12:4 that our lips are not our own and we must guard them from speaking evil. The sins of the tongue afflict God's people greatly and we must fight against it. Our enemies seek to be our friends that they may find evil to spread about us and bring our ruin. This should encourage us to make friends in the church and not in the world that we may build each other up and glorify God. Sing Psalter 113:6.

Devotionals for January 7-13 by Mike Feenstra

January 7 Read Psalm 41:7-13; Psalm 41:7

James writes that the tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Oh, how we can see this truth in David's enemies! While David was laid low with sickness, his own friends jumped at the opportunity to destroy him with their evil words. Their deception obviously grieved David deeply because they had been trusted as fellow believers. When he was in the time of need, instead of helping him, they hurt him. Yet, in that time of great difficulty David thanked God for not allowing his enemies to triumph over him. How could David have said that when it was clear that he did not have the physical victory? The answer is that David was saved in the cross of the promised Messiah. His salvation was his victory! And that salvation was due alone to God. This was David's confession in verse 12 when he gratefully sang, "Thou settest me before Thy face forever." As New Testament believers, we must join in David's song of praise for God alone has also given us the victory through the finished work of Jesus Christ. Sing Psalter 113:7.

January 8 Read Proverbs 26:20-28; Psalm 41:7-8

David recounts the penetrating whispers of his enemies, "...He shall rise up no more." Although these enemies do not say it explicitly, their words are filled with pernicious thoughts of murder that pierce deep into the innermost parts of David (See Prov. 26:22). We can easily follow in the footsteps of these enemies of David by slandering, backbiting and insulting our neighbor. We all have been doing this all our lives, beginning in childhood. We all have included ourselves in the mockery of an unsuspecting classmate. But at the same time, we all know by experience the pain of ridicule by former friends. These vivid memories of childhood should motivate us to love our neighbor as our Lord commands in Luke 6:31 which is, "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." Sing Psalter 113:7, 8.

January 9 Read John 13:1-30; Psalm 41:9

"Yea, mine own familiar friend,...hath lifted up his heel against me." Here David cries on his bed of suffering that even his own trusted friend with whom he may have had "sweet counsel" has now turned to crush him in the dust (See Psalm 55:14). What a traitorous act this was! It only

can remind us of the ultimate betrayal, that of our Lord Jesus Christ by Judas Iscariot (See John 13:18). Yet, Christ wasn't only betrayed by Judas and the wicked world, but also by us! Only by the grace of God are we forgiven of this sin. Praise Jehovah for His forgiving grace through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! Sing Psalter 113:8.

January 10 Read 2 Samuel 15:31-37; Psalm 41:10

Today's verse records for us a prayer of David that he might be raised up so that he could "requite" his enemies. Was it right for David to pray this prayer? To answer this question we must remember that in this passage David typifies Christ as the King of Israel. Like Christ, David desired to execute righteous judgment on the wicked so that Israel would be purged of sin. This is our desire too, although we must not requite our enemies but overcome their evil with good as Paul states in Romans 12:21. Our desire then must be that our King, the Lord Jesus Christ, will judge them because in their judgment we are saved. Sing Psalter 113:9.

January 11 Read Exodus 15:1-13; Psalm 41:11

As God's people on our pilgrimage in this world below we encounter much persecution by the wicked world. This was also the case with Israel as they began their journey to Canaan. Their mighty enemy from Egypt boasted against them saying, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil" (Exodus 15:9). But God would not allow Egypt to triumph over His people. He saved Israel by drowning the Egyptians in the Red Sea so that they, "sank as lead in the mighty waters" (v. 10). God saved David from his enemies too by not allowing them to destroy him spiritually. This spiritual preservation was proof to David of God's love and mercy. And that assurance of God's favor brought great joy to David in the midst of his enemies' jeers that God was not for him. When we are persecuted now and in the latter days, let us also be assured of God's love because in the cross He has given us the victory over our enemies. Sing Psalter 113:10.

January 12 Read Exodus 15:14-19; Psalm 41:12

Exodus 15 records for us the joyful Song of Moses following the deliverance at the Red Sea. Here Moses exultantly praises God: "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O LORD, which Thy hands have established." Notice that Moses praises God for the covenant that He alone established. David echoes this truth in Psalm 41:12 when he says, "Thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before Thy face forever." It is God alone who set David in covenant communion with Himself, and the same is true for us. God has delivered us from the forces of darkness and has set us before His face. And soon He will take us to the final reality of that friendship, the eternal bliss of heaven. Soli Deo Gloria. Sing Psalter 113:11.

January 13 Read Heid. Cat. Q & A 129; Psalm 41:13

"Amen!" What does this word mean? Is it just to tell us that the congregational prayer or the sermon is over? Or is there a richer meaning to this word? Certainly, the practice of placing "Amen" at the end of prayers, sermons, or epistles is biblical. Psalm 41 illustrates this practice well because it is the end of the first of book of the Hebrew Psalter. The concluding Psalms to the other 5 books are Psalms 72, 89, 106 and 150. All of these concluding Psalms end with "Amen", except Psalm 150. Although this is true, we must see that we do this because by saying "Amen", we express our faith in the promises of Jehovah. In fact, we are really saying to God, "Thy promises will truly and certainly be!" What better way is there to end our prayers than to boldly express our faith in the I AM Who will more certainly hear our prayers than we feel in our hearts that we desire our petitions of Him. Sing Psalter 113:12.

Devotionals for January 14-15

by John Huizenga

January 14 Read Psalm 42 & 43

In the Psalms before Psalm 42 the most frequent name for God is "Jehovah / LORD." Psalm 42 begins a new section of Psalms which uses the name "Elohim" which is translated as "God." The name "Jehovah" emphasizes the covenant faithfulness of God and the name "Elohim" emphasizes the majesty and greatness of God over all. It is a name which distinguishes Him from man and all other creatures. He is the One who upholds all things every moment of the day and supplies the child of God with spiritual life. In this Psalm David gives expression to a life in which he is cut off from the source of spiritual life found in the house of God. Pray for our churches and ministers. Pray that God never deprive us of faithful preaching. Sing one of the Psalters 116-118.

January 15 Read Ps. 42:1 Psltr. 116:1-4; Isa. 35:1-10

Why was David cut off from worship in the house of God? Saul was chasing him through the mountains as a lion stalks a deer and prevents the deer from drinking at the watering hole. Every child of God needs to drink regularly of the Word preached. After a week of work in the world, we are ready for the refreshing word of God. Do you thirst for God's Word or would you rather drink of the pleasures of this world? Spiritual thirst is a gift of God. We give thanks to God when we and fellow members of the church hunger and thirst, but that hunger and thirst turns to pangs when we are unable to drink. Pray that God give us thirst and continue to bring us the faithful preaching of His Word. Sing Psalter 116:1.

Study Guide on the Book of Judges (5)

by Rev. Douglas Kuiper

Week 18

Judges 17:1-13: Image Worship in a Family

With chapter 16, the chronological history of the judges is finished. Chapters 17-21 are an appendix to the book of judges which demonstrate the appalling ungodliness of Israel, and her desperate need for a king. Notice the recurring phrase in 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25. This appendix is divided into two sections—chapters 17 and 18 show that Israel was given over to the sin of idolatry, and chapters 19-21 show Israel was given over to that of fornication.

We must not suppose that every Israelite was so wicked; surely God preserved a remnant in holiness. But the situation in Israel was bad. Sin was not only committed, but also tolerated, approved of, and encouraged.

So it is in the church, in the last days before Christ returns. How badly we need Christ—not only for the atonement and forgiveness of sins, but also as our King to work in us perfectly to obey God's law! As the faithful remnant in that day must have yearned for a king, so must we today yearn for the return of Christ, to make His church perfect and sinless.

1. From Judges 18:30, do your best to explain about what time during the period of the judges this incident happened.
2. Of what sins was Micah guilty—and how are we guilty of the same?
3. Did Micah indicate genuine sorrow for his sin?
4. What does this chapter indicate about the corruption of family life—and how does this apply to us?
5. How does the chapter indicate that all involved in this sin were callous to sin? How are we like this?
6. How does Micah manifest his false confidence in the Lord's blessing on him? Does God bless us when we

pursue a path of sin? If so, how are these blessings manifest?

7. What does this chapter teach us about Jesus Christ?

Week 19

Judges 18:1-31: Image Worship in a Tribe

Continuing to teach us how the sin of image worship pervaded Israel, Judges 18 speaks of a development in this sin, over what we were told in Judges 17. Not only a man and his house, but now a whole tribe give themselves over to image worship!

How applicable this is to today. Not only individual people and families, but whole churches are departing from the right worship of the true God, to worship Him as they think best, and even to worship other gods!

This sin begins, not with a conscious decision of Dan to serve images, but with a conscious decision of Dan to expand their territory beyond that which God had given them. They are not happy with the lot that fell to them! Being discontent regarding God's will, and unhappy with their place in the promised land, they are vulnerable to this heinous sin of image worship.

1. Was it wrong for the tribe of the Danites to seek an inheritance to dwell in, verse 1? And related, but different: was it wrong for them to take it from the Zidonians, verse 7-10, 27-29?
2. How are verses 5-6 instructive regarding the activity of false prophets? Was it not true that God did prosper their way?
3. Does the chapter give any indication that God's people knew better than to worship images?
4. Of what other sinful actions on the part of the Danites does this chapter speak?

5. What does verse 30 tell us about the timing of this event?
6. How do these events explain what we read in Judges 2:10?
7. What does this chapter teach us about Christ? Will Christ as king be like David, who enforced outward obedience to the first table of the law? Or will Christ be even greater than David in this respect? (Jeremiah 31:33-34).
8. What attribute of God is extolled by the understanding of this narrative?
9. How are we to manifest our contentment with the lot that fell to us—the place God gave us in His covenant?
10. Read Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 35. Discuss what is involved in the proper worship of God, and how it is possible for the church today to avoid the sin of image worship.

Week 20

Judges 19:1-30: Gross Fornication!

With this chapter begins the second illustration of Israel's wickedness in the time of the judges, and the second illustration of her need for a king. The sin this time is against the seventh commandment, instead of the second. And it is performed by members of a different tribe—indicating that gross sin was not limited just to a small part of Israel, but was widespread. But the sin is among the most heinous of sins that mankind could ever commit—men with men burning in their lust toward one another, and working that which is unseemly (Romans 1:27)!

Today sexual sins are rampant in the church, and even this basest form of sexual sin is tolerated in the church. Here is a good opportunity to ask what we can do to keep our churches of sexual sin in all its forms.

1. How many instances of fornication are recorded in this chapter? Of them, which is the worst? What does Romans 1:24-27 teach about why this sin is found among men?
2. Why did the Levite not lodge in the nearer city, but keep traveling until he came to Gibeah (vss 11-15)? What does this fact underscore about the sins of the men of Gibeah?

3. Why did the old man invite the travelers into his home (vss 16-21)?
4. Verse 30 speaks of the reaction of the people of Israel to this sin. Was it right for the people to be angry, or not? Does this reaction indicate that this was really the worst sin committed since Israel came out of Egypt, or are the people self-righteously ignoring their own sin, as they condemn the sin of another?
5. What is the relationship of the sin recorded in chapters 19-21 to that recorded in chapters 17-18?
6. In light of God's law and warning in Leviticus 18, what explains the fact that so soon after settling into the land of Canaan, Israel became guilty of such heinous sins?
7. Is the church today like Israel of that day? If so, how? And what can we do to oppose the sexual filthiness which the church tolerates?
8. Specifically regarding the sin of homosexuality: what must be our view of this sin? Can those who commit this sin be saved? If so, what must happen for them to experience that salvation? (I Corinthians 6:9-11).
9. What, again, does this chapter say about Jesus Christ?

Week 21

Judges 20:1-48: Benjamin Chastised for Tolerating Gross Sin

If God judged the Canaanites for their great wickedness by destroying them, and giving their land to Israel, then surely God must also judge Israel for committing the same sins that the Canaanites committed. This chapter illustrates that God hates sin and punishes those who commit it, even though they be outwardly in His covenant.

That God hates not only sin, but also sinners, and that God punishes sinners, is not a popular idea today. Some might say that whereas in the Old Testament God did so, He does not in the New, because Christ has come. Rightly understood, though, this chapter shows that God will always judge those in His covenant who sin, who tolerate sin, and who are not sorry for sin.

God executes this judgment through His church. Even in the Old Testament, sinners were stoned to death by other Israelites. So today the church must pass judg-

ment on sinners in her midst. If she does not, God will bring judgment on the church!

Our God is a consuming fire! To fall into His hands is a fearful thing! (Hebrews 10:28-31). Let this motivate us to avoid sin and obey His law. But even more, let us be motivated by gratitude to Him for saving us in Christ, and a desire to be holy and enjoy fellowship with Him.

1. Verses 1-13: how is it evident that Israel loved justice? Explain that even the way in which they conducted this trial was just.
2. Verses 14-17: what do these verses indicate about Benjamin's view of sin? How might we manifest the same view?
3. Verse 18-48: was it right for Israel to fight against Benjamin?
4. Verses 18-25: what was God's purpose in causing Israel to be defeated twice, before destroying Benjamin? (Does I Peter 4:17-18 shed any light on this?)
5. Verses 27-28: about when did this incident happen?
6. Verse 15, compared with verses 35, 46, 48: what is the end result of Benjamin? How did this affect all of Israel? How did this "jeopardize" (from a human viewpoint) the salvation of all Israel?
7. Perhaps we think that, because Christ died for us and bore our sin, God is no longer angry with the sins of the members of His church. In light of this chapter, discuss: Why cannot God tolerate sin in His church? Why must He judge sinners in His covenant? And how does He manifest this judgment?
8. What must be our attitude toward those in the church who commit gross sins and are not sorry for them? May we be their friends, because they are in the same church? What is our calling as individuals regarding these people? And what is our calling as a congregation regarding them?
9. How are we to deal with those in the church who, although not guilty of impenitence in sin themselves, are friends with others who are impenitent in sin?

Week 22

Judges 21:1-25: Benjamin's Restoration

Many think that because God is merciful, He sets aside His justice. Because He loves all men, He will not

punish any. But chapters 20 and 21 demonstrate that it is not so. Chapter 20 clearly illustrated God's justice towards sinners in His covenant—Benjamin is chastised. Chapter 21 illustrates God's mercy toward those in His covenant—Benjamin is restored.

Let us not overlook the order. First God's justice must be satisfied, *then* God's mercy will be shown! So it is for us too. We can experience God's grace and mercy only *after* His justice is satisfied. This means that God's mercy is shown only to those for whom His justice was satisfied—only to His covenant people for whom Christ died. And God's mercy is shown to us *on the basis of* that satisfaction. Every token of God's love and favor which you and I receive from Him is evidence that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was for *us*, and was *complete* for us.

Here, then, is the gospel: in the way of judgment, God restores sinners to fellowship with Him! Let us see how this was true for Benjamin, and discuss how it is true today as well.

1. Verses 1-7: what is Israel's great concern for Benjamin? Why is this her concern?
2. Verses 8-24: Israel used two ways to try to provide for Benjamin's need. What were the two ways? Did Israel act rightly in this regard?
3. Why must Benjamin be restored?
4. On what basis can Benjamin, wretchedly sinful as she is, be restored?
5. What does this teach us about the restoration of sinners in the church of Jesus Christ—what kind of sinner may be restored? On what basis may he be restored? How may he be restored?
6. In your own life, have you experienced the same thing—that in the way of sin you were separated from the experience of God's love; and that in the way of turning from sin, trusting in Christ's complete sacrifice, and submitting to God's judgments upon you for sin, you were restored again to His favor?
7. What, now, is the main point of Scripture in Judges 19-21? What lesson was God teaching Israel and us regarding Christ? And what lesson was He teaching Israel and us regarding the consequences of sin and the consequence of obedience? ❖

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

Rev. C. Hanko

Chapter 18

A Time of Growth

edited by Karen Van Baren

Editor's Note: In the following chapter, Rev. Hanko relates some of the history of our other churches. His original desire had been to be a missionary, and so the work that he did in organizing some of these churches was especially dear to his heart.

I had some experience in mission work in our churches. I also discovered how difficult and discouraging this can be, even when working among Reformed people. I was present in Orange City when Rev. Hoeksema spoke a series of lectures, which on the last night, drew about 500 people. At that meeting an announcement was made that an organizational meeting would be held the following night at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Katje. Seven families, mostly elderly couples, were present for organization.

Nevertheless, the period from 1930 to 1939 was a period of growth for our churches. In 1932, Creston Church was organized on Leonard Street in Grand Rapids. That same year, Rev. Hoeksema made a trip to Redlands to organize a congregation there. Another congregation was organized in Los Angeles, which later became our Bellflower church. In 1936, Grand Haven congregation was organized. In 1937, Edgerton came into existence through the labors of our first missionary, Rev. Bernard Kok. Rev. Kok labored there and was told that as soon as he had twenty families who were willing to be organized, we would come out for the occasion. He had nineteen, and before the meeting was still struggling to bring in the twentieth. Deeming this sufficient, the mission committee proceeded to organize this congregation. In 1939, he also saw the fruits of his labors in the organization of a church in Manhattan, Montana.

Allow me to mention a bit of history in connection with the organization of a congregation in Redlands, California. A request had come to Rev. Hoeksema from a few families who were unhappy in the CRC. A lecture was planned and there was a good turn out. But many

who came were very suspicious that this man from the east was just another rabble-rouser, who was seeking his own interest. They were present as it were, with tongue in cheek. Rev. Hoeksema took for his point of approach, two verses out of Isaiah 50, namely, verses 4-5, "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth my ear to hear as the learned. The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back."

Particularly one man in the audience thought, "There you have it. He is nothing but a proud self-seeker." Yet as Rev. Hoeksema continued it became evident that he was expounding the Word of God, not as referring to himself, but to the promised Christ. This man and many others became extremely interested, with the result that we still have a flourishing congregation in Redlands today.

In 1940 our churches held their first synod meeting in First Church, Grand Rapids. For some time now the churches had met in one classis four times a year. But now it had been decided that the churches would be divided into Classis East, consisting of all the churches east of the Mississippi River, and Classis West, consisting of all the churches west of the Mississippi, with a meeting of synod once a year. This same year, the first young people's convention was held in Oak Lawn. Rev. Hoeksema was the main speaker and continued to serve in that capacity for many years. The following year the Young Men's Society of First Church in Grand Rapids started a radio broadcast over WFUR. Rev. Hoeksema was the radio minister, and, even after the synod started funding for the RWH, he continued in that capacity for many years. His first radio message was entitled "God Is God," making his messages thoroughly God-centered.

In the early 40s, efforts were made to organize a congregation in Randolph, Wisconsin. There was one

subscriber to the *Standard Bearer* in Randolph. The mission committee asked me to go to Randolph and investigate whether there was any prospect of doing work in the area. This original contact, I think, was Auke Douma. Upon being contacted, he said that he enjoyed the *Standard Bearer*, was very interested in a PR church being established, would do all he could to help, but would never himself join. He was at all our services, but he never did join. The reason was that his wife was an invalid and depended on him for transport. But she was opposed to us.

I was instructed by the mission committee not to start services until I had ten people or more. Auke Douma gave me a list of names and I set about visiting people. I finally managed to get ten people who promised to come.

I set about looking for a place to worship, but was frankly told by everyone in Randolph that there were enough churches, and that they did not want any more. I finally went to Vriesland where I talked with the mayor. The mayor told me the same thing I had heard in Randolph. I mentioned to the mayor, "If I asked for a meeting place to hold a dance, you would find me a place. But when I ask for a place to preach, you refuse." The mayor responded, "That is correct."

I finally found a place. It was a pavilion in the park in Randolph. I held services there and many, many people came. Auke Douma came too, but he said to me, "There is nothing here with which to start a congregation." I asked why, and he said, "These are all people from the Reformed Church in town, a church which is vacant, and they are only here out of curiosity. They will never join the PRC." And so it turned out.

The fourth Sunday, Dewey Alsum came.¹ Auke Douma said to me, "Now you have someone. Go and visit him." So I went to visit him and Dewey helped me from that time on with names, contacts and suggestions.

Soon we were able to rent the congregational church in town, which desperately needed the money, and would sometimes ask for an advanced payment because they were so short of cash. On a visit to the minister with Rev. Hoeksema, we learned that they had only six or seven people who were attending, although more were supporters. Rev. Hoeksema said to that minister, "Do you know what we do with supporters? We cut them off." "Yes," said the minister, "I heard that you were very strict. But if I would do that, I would not have a congregation left."

The mission committee asked Rev. Hoeksema to preach, lecture and make contacts there for a period of

three weeks. Since I was in Oak Lawn at the time, and had done some work in Randolph, the mission committee suggested that I accompany him.

On a Monday afternoon we started out together for Wisconsin. The trip was very enjoyable, especially because much of the time was spent in animated conversation. I recall that we talked particularly about prayer as an intimate covenant fellowship with God. We mentioned the fact that the few words, "Thy will be done," actually expressed all our needs. If we can pray that in all sincerity, then we are assured of perfect peace, come what may. Yet we both felt that this was not enough. After a bit of a pause one of us remarked, "Yet we can and must make *all our needs* known in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving." Thus the afternoon soon passed and we arrived in Waupun, Wisconsin.

That night we stayed in a hotel in Waupun. When I bid Rev. Hoeksema good night to go to my room he said, "But aren't we going to have devotions together?" From then on, whenever possible, we had evening devotions together. Later, to save money, we stayed with my wife's relatives in Waupun, who were more than eager to have us lodge with them, enjoying Rev. Hoeksema's company, banter and hearty guffaws.

Rev. Hoeksema preached on Sunday and gave lectures during the week. The rest of the time, we made contacts with many people who showed interest. Many times we were invited to some home for noon dinner or supper.

A couple who regularly attended our meetings and services and later became members of the congregation, invited us for supper. I had always regarded them as elderly and therefore referred to them as "the old Westras." I told Rev. Hoeksema that "the old Westras" had invited us for supper on a certain evening. While we sat at the table Rev. Hoeksema asked Mr. Westra, "How old are you?" to which he received the answer, "Fifty-seven years." Then turning to Mrs. Westra he said, "And how old are you?" Again the response was, "Fifty-seven years." It so happened that Rev. Hoeksema was about that same age. He gave me a look with a scowl and afterward said, "I suppose you go around referring to me as 'the old Hoeksema.'"

Every Saturday afternoon Rev. Hoeksema brought me to the train, so that I could preach in Oak Lawn on Sunday. As I was ready to step into the train I received the admonition, "You be sure to be back Monday morning. I'll be here waiting for you."

We also had an invitation for noon dinner at one of the farmers. When the time arrived we drove into the farmyard, but noticed that all the curtains were removed from the windows. The house looked like the people were moving out. When we came to the door, we saw the man's wife sitting in the middle of the floor busily packing pots and pans in a box. Rev. Hoeksema remarked: "I thought we were to come here for dinner." To that she responded, "Our minister is just as good as you are." He countered, "I doubt that." But it was useless to waste any more words there, so we quietly withdrew. As we were about to drive off, the man came sheepishly out of the barn to tell us that his wife did not want us to come. To which Rev. Hoeksema responded, "We noticed that." We had our lunch in a restaurant.

The three weeks sped rapidly by and it was time again to return to our churches. On our return trip, the closer we came to Oak Lawn, the less Rev. Hoeksema spoke. It was obvious that, as we were coming closer to home, all the work that awaited him in Grand Rapids

began to weigh heavily upon his shoulders. When we reached my home, my wife invited him to come in for a cup of coffee, but he refused. Almost without another word he started his car and drove off. My wife said, "How could you spend three weeks with a man as sober as that?" I tried to impress on her that our experiences together were quite different.

By the time I left Oak Lawn in 1945, our denomination had grown from three churches to twenty-three. I had always desired to get to know as many of our churches as possible in my ministry, and so our family headed west to Manhattan, Montana. ❖

Endnote

¹ Dewey Alsum was the grandfather of Judy Abel and Jackie Hoekstra of our Randolph church.

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

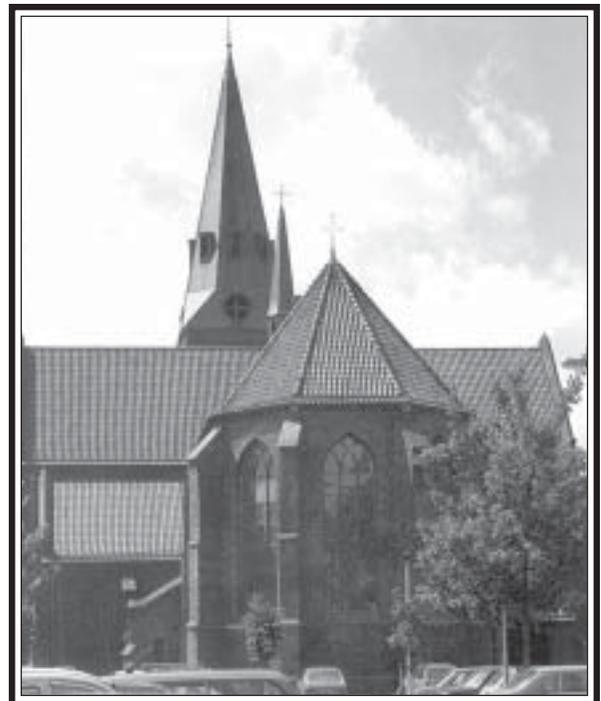
Church History

The Johannes De Doper Kerk of Wageningen

by J. P. deKlerk

This State Reformed church is named after John the Baptist. This big church is a so-called cruciform church, a late gothic style used for the first time in 1280, made of bricks and roofing tiles. In 1517 the city council of Wageningen decided to enlarge this building with a transverse nave and a choir stall. The Reformation quietly took the church over. In 1940 and 1945 this church was completely destroyed by bombs and grenades. It was rebuilt exactly as it had been—part of the tower was made of tuff from the original one. In 1963 a carillon of 47 clocks was hung in the tower, including a big one made in 1542 by Johannes Tolhuis (weight 1500 kilograms) which was a gift of the city council of Utrecht (where it had first been in the "Buurkerk" tower). The whole church was restored in 1979. ❖

J.P. de Klerk was a writer and journalist in Ashhurst, New Zealand.



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:

Brady John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason VanderMeulen—Byron Center, MI
Melinda Rose, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Phil Doezema—Byron Center, MI
Willem Jay, son of Mr. & Mrs. BJ Mowery—Doon, IA
Matthew Evan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brent Boon—Doon, IA
Jonah Dale, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel Brummel—Faith, MI
Emma Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Peter Byker—Faith, MI
Reed Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jay VanBaren—Faith, MI
Ashlyn Brielle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Titus Kamps—Faith, MI
Caleb Lucas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joe Kleyn—Faith, MI
Emily Kate, daughter of Rev. & Mrs. Andy Lanning—Faith, MI
Bryce Aaron, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron Knott—First, MI
Alliana Mari, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Julian Escamilla—Georgetown, MI
Jaxon Reece, son of Mr. & Mrs. Eric Bouma—Georgetown, MI
Luke Ryan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Wes Fisher—Georgetown, MI
Luke Anthony, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brad Langerak—Grace, MI
Levi Mitchell, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mitchell Kamps—Grandville, MI
Ella Heidi, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Andy Baas—Grandville, MI
Stefan James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Michael Rau—Hope, MI
Aiden James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kelly VanVoorst—Hull, IA
Levi Joe, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joe VanGeldereren—Immanuel, Lacombe, Alberta, CAN
Blake Christopher, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jay Kalsbeek—Loveland, CO
Brennen David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jack Kooienga—Loveland, CO
Logan James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Greg Bruinsma—Peace, IL

Melody Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan denHartog—Redlands, CA

Alex James, son of Mr. & Mrs. James Ophoff—South Holland, IL

Rebecca Joelle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric Ophoff, Jr.—South Holland, IL

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:

Chelsea Hassevoort—Byron Center, MI
Beth Hunter—Doon, IA
John VanBaren—Faith, MI
Kyle Thompson—First, MI
Gary Slopsema—First, MI
Julian Escamilla—Georgetown, MI
Russ Morris—Holland, MI
Chad Wassink—Holland, MI
Carl DeJong—Holland, MI
Aaron DeJong—Holland, MI
Kevin Koole—Hope, MI
Nicholas Engelsma—Hope, MI
Kelly VanVoorst—Hull, IA
Erin VanVoorst—Hull, IA
Trisha Heys—Loveland, CO
Lee Wiltjer Jr.—Peace, IL
Lori Vermeer—Peace, IL
Courtney DeJong—South Holland, IL
Maggie Lanting—South Holland, IL
Kara VanderMeulen—South Holland, IL

MARRIAGES

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

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Joseph Ophoff and Miss Audra Kamminga—Hudsonville, MI
Mr. Keith Feenstra and Miss Holly Lotterman—Hudsonville, MI
Mr. Joel VanEgdom and Miss Michelle DeJong—South Holland, IL

Martin Luther (3): Another Strike

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine !

by Connie Meyer

The monastery reverberated with the chants of the strictly ordered Augustinian monks. A special ceremony was on schedule for the day—a new monk would say his first mass. Becoming a monk was one sure way to be certain of going to heaven. This suited the new monk, Martin Luther, very well. Even though a lightning strike had helped him decide to enter the monastery, he was consumed with being sure he was saved. The Church of Rome taught that this was the surest way.

Luther had been selected to be a priest shortly after becoming a monk. The day of performing his first mass had been postponed to allow his father to be present for the occasion. Now the day had come. Martin's father was extremely angry with his son for becoming a monk. He and his wife had planned on Martin earning a good living to support them in their old age. Still, as was the custom of parents in those days, Hans Luther came to witness this significant event in his son's life.

And significant it was. The mass is a drama and ritual in which it is believed that Christ is brought down from heaven to earth. Just as a magician might change a scarf into a live rabbit, by saying just the right words the priest changes the bread and wine into the physical body and blood of the Son of God. This is no small feat. Martin Luther, as a conscientious new priest, was well aware of the power that was now in his hands.

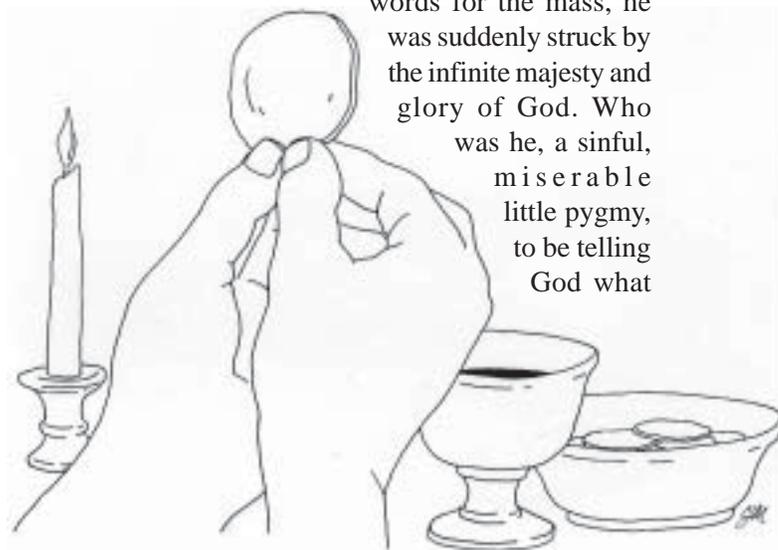
As Martin recited the words for the mass, he was suddenly struck by the infinite majesty and glory of God. Who was he, a sinful, miserable little pygmy, to be telling God what

to do? Come down now, God, and become this bread and wine! A bolt of lightning had earlier knocked him to the ground. That experience was not unlike the sense of God's holy majesty that struck him now. He trembled at the thought.

Somehow Martin Luther finished his first mass. For a time he would become accustomed to performing the ritual, but the thought of God as God—and man as man—had truly been impressed upon his soul. The effects of this strike never left him.

Indeed, in time Martin Luther came to see the idolatry of the Catholic mass. Other Reformers saw the same errors, and more. Proper teaching about the mass is made especially clear in Lord's Day 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Find the following underlined words from the conclusion of this Q & A in the puzzle below:

"...so that the mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry."



Y	R	T	A	L	O	D	I	A	B
T	S	A	C	R	I	F	I	C	E
D	G	Y	O	F	F	D	S	C	A
S	G	N	I	R	E	F	F	U	S
O	T	E	I	N	C	L	N	R	L
D	N	A	I	H	M	A	S	S	K
O	V	A	H	M	T	B	R	E	S
C	L	M	O	T	T	O	B	D	N
S	M	O	I	T	H	A	N	E	R

Connie is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

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"Living Sacrifices of Thankfulness"

Romans 12: 1-2

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

August 13 - 17, 2007

Temptation

We must put on the whole armor of God, seeking grace to withstand temptation; not conforming to, but rather standing fast in a corrupt world.

Prayer

Prayer is the chief part of thankfulness.

Victory in Christ

Our Christian walk must be as shining lights and a godly witness in this corrupt world.

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