

Beacon Lights

December
2008

Volume LXVII
Number 11

*"And in those days
shall men seek death,
and shall not find it;
and shall desire to die,
and death shall flee
from them."*

Revelation 9:6

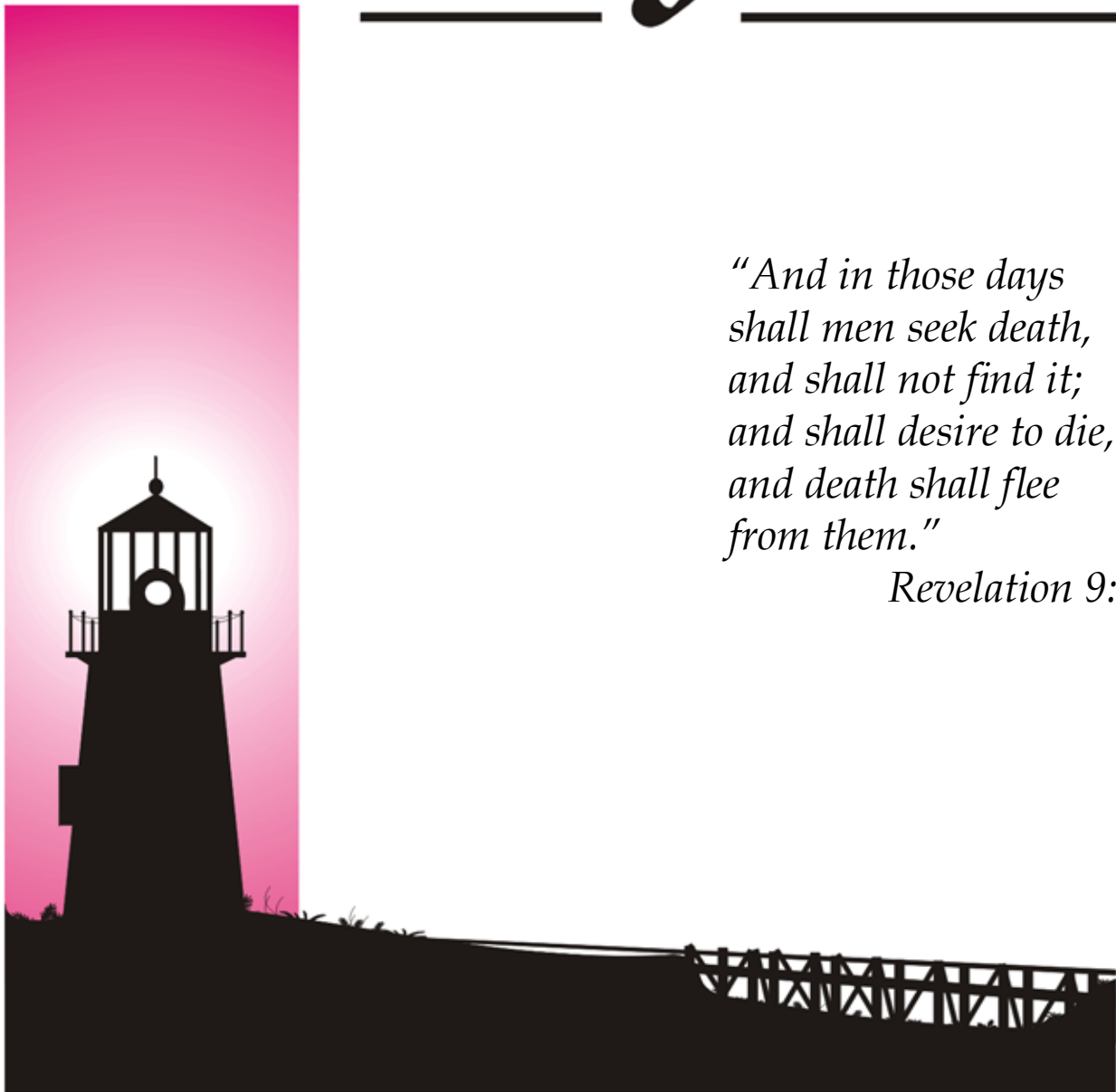


Table of Contents

	EDITORIAL
3	A New Balm for the Sting of the Locusts from the Abyss
	STORY TIME
5	Silent Night
	CREATION THROUGH THE SPECTACLES OF SCRIPTURE
7	I Am Fearfully and Wonderfully Made
	CHURCH FAMILY
9	Developing Friendships in School
	DEVOTIONAL
11	Watching Daily At My Gates— December 16 – January 15
	GEM OF THE MONTH
17	The Christian Hope
	OUR YOUNG PEOPLE'S FEDERATION
18	2008 PRYP Convention
	WHERE WE STAND
20	The Antithesis and Witnessing (6)
	CHURCH HISTORY
22	I Remember Herman Hoeksema: Personal Remembrances of a Great Man (3)
26	CHURCH NEWS
	LITTLE LIGHTS
27	A Gift

Beacon Lights is published monthly by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies. Subscription price is \$10.00. Please send all correspondence, address changes, subscriptions, and article submissions to the business office.

EDITORIAL POLICY

The articles of *Beacon Lights* do not necessarily indicate the viewpoint of the Editorial Staff. Every author is solely responsible for the contents of his own article.

The *Beacon Lights* encourages its readers to contact the business office with any questions or comments. Letters may be edited for printing. We will not publish anonymous letters, but will withhold names upon request.

If any material of *Beacon Lights* is reprinted by another periodical, we will appreciate your giving the source and forwarding the printed periodical to the business office.

BEACON LIGHTS

EDITOR

John Huizenga
Email: editor@beaconlights.org

CONTENTS COMMITTEE

John Huizenga
Tom Cammenga
Christiana DeJong
Trisha Haak
Kris Moelker

EXECUTIVE FEDERATION BOARD

Kyle Thompson (President)
Karl Dykstra (Vice-President)
Emily Hoekstra (Secretary)
Eric Pols (Treasurer)
Denise Kooienga (Librarian)
Leah Koole (Vice-Secretary)
Eric Pastoor (Vice-Treasurer)
Justin Koole (Youth Coordinator)
Rev. Garry Eriks (Spiritual Advisor)
Prof. David Engelsma (Spiritual Advisor)

BUSINESS OFFICE

Beacon Lights
Jeanine Huizenga
621 Williams Street
Randolph, WI 53956
Phone: (920) 326-6186
Email: subscriptions@beaconlights.org

BEACON LIGHTS ON THE INTERNET
www.beaconlights.org

BEACON LIGHTS ON TAPE

A free service to the legally blind. Contact
Brad Vander Veen
11395 Hunters Meadow
Allendale, MI 49401
Phone (616) 895-1904

CHURCH NEWS ANNOUNCEMENTS

Melinda Bleyenbergh
Email: DMBleyenbergh@tds.net.

BOOK SALES

Contact the Business Office

TYPESETTER

Robert Vermeer

PRINTER

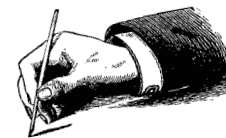
James Huizenga

MAILERS

Bill & Fran Leep

“And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.” (Revelation 9:3-5)

A New Balm for the Sting of the Locusts from the Abyss



by John Huizenga

As man seeks to live apart from God, he constantly tries to fill that spiritual void left empty at the fall of Adam with something other than God. But no matter how much wealth, pleasure, philosophy, religion, and self esteem he is able to acquire, he finds that it never really fills that void. Glittering opportunities and promises prove again and again to be empty of any real substance, and in fact end with the tormenting sting of pessimism. Individuals, as well as whole generations experience the sting, when promises of peace and security are shattered by war or economic recession.

In the book of Revelation, God reveals to John and to the church, a vision of locusts with the attractive face of power, victory, beauty, and security; but with tails that sting with an agonizing torment and leave men in such a state that they “seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.” (Revelation 9:6). Hoeksema in his commentary *Behold He Cometh* explains the sounding of the trumpet by the fifth angel and the resulting swarm of locusts from the bottomless pit as an enhancing and hastening of the world toward its destruction as we draw nearer the end of all history. He writes,

These same spirits who have incited the wicked world to plunge still more deeply in sin and vile transgression fill the hearts of men with the darkness of despair. They are the spirits of pessimism. And after men have followed their inspiration, they find that their end is more bitter than death itself. Just as the children of God have sometimes a foretaste of the pleasures of heavenly glory because they walk in the way of God’s covenant and of His precepts, so the children of the world, under the influence of these infernal locusts, are given a foretaste of the despair of hell. They follow their sinful ambition for power and victory to its very end. But despair follows in its wake. They give themselves to the satisfaction of their lion-like greed; but also this is immediately followed by a gloomy pessimism. The path of philosophy they tread to the end, only to look into the mocking eyes of the devil of despair and dissatisfaction. Art and pleasure and vile lust are worshipped as the saviors, until the dissatisfaction of them is proved and a gloomy pessimism is the result. Thus the purpose of these demons is to emphasize sin and all its pleasures and all its evil passions so that men follow them to the full, only to be tortured by them in the end by these same demons on the rack of pessimism and despair. (Chapter 21) (complete text of *Behold He Cometh* published by the RFPA can also be found at <http://www.spindleworks.com/library/hoeksema/intro.htm>)

In response to the increasing mental torment that the modern man suffers, we find a multitude of remedies. The religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age, etc., all promise relief and have served for ages to sooth man of the deadly sting. Western man has stared long into the face of the locusts and relished its glory and beauty, but in doing so grows more frantic with the turning away of that power, beauty, and security. Increasingly he feels the agonizing sting of its tail, and turns to anything but God for relief.

This past spring, an event occurred in which millions of suffering people from every religious background around the world from 139 different countries were able to sample and experience together a new

balm. Millions experienced profound relief as their minds were opened to a new knowledge and their souls awakened to a new life. This was possible with the cooperation of internet technology, the popularity of Oprah Winfrey (arguably the world's most famous woman), and her promotion of this balm that was formulated by a man named Eckhart Tolle. This new knowledge comes in the form of a new book entitled *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*. Just listen to a review of the book by Janet Boyer on Amazon.com:

Do you hate your body? Get this book. Are you plagued with thoughts that you're not "enough"? Get this book. Do you fear that if you lose something precious (money, spouse, youth, vigor, job, etc.) that your life will be "over"? Get this book. Is your attachment to "stuff" and striving to live up to the expectations of others wearing you out? Get this book. Do you want to heal from painful emotions and negative states of being? Get this book.

Do you want to experience peace that passes all understanding? Get this book.

I'll leave you with a quote from *A New Earth*:

“‘And I saw a new heaven and a new earth,’ writes the biblical prophet. The foundation for a new earth is a new heaven—the awakened consciousness. The earth—external reality—is only its outer reflection. The arising of a new heaven and by implication a new earth are not future events that are going to make us free. Nothing is GOING to make us free because only the present moment can make us free. Thus realization is the awakening...So the new heaven, the awakened consciousness, is not a future state to be achieved...What did Jesus tell his disciples? ‘Heaven is right here in the midst of you.’”

As a result of the ten-week worldwide interactive broadcast of the discussion of Oprah Winfrey with spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle, sales of his book quickly broke multiple records in sales. The book is now found in households all around the world including many Christians who belong to Reformed churches.

It is attractive to nominal Christians who don't know the Bible very well because it is filled with biblical quotes and references. In fact it picks up and absorbs some very profound biblical concepts. It claims to be safe and completely compatible with the Christian faith. After all, it targets one's state of consciousness and has no effect on one's spiritual beliefs.

It is powerful because it does more than just treat symptoms, it actually addresses the real essence of the sting of the locusts from the abyss. It directs its users to the fact that man's attraction to the power, beauty, and security found in earthly materialism, institutions and traditions is the source of the sting. It penetrates deeply into the areas of man that other balm can not reach.

According to Tolle, if enough people become enlightened to his truth, then humanity will finally be able to achieve worldwide peace and harmony—i.e., a New Earth populated by “a new species” of human being. Crime will be eradicated. Wars will cease. Selfishness and greed will no longer reign in our governments. *Awakening* is our only hope for survival, asserts Tolle, who believes that “[a] significant portion of the earth's population will soon recognize, if they haven't already done so, that humanity is now faced with a stark choice: Evolve or die.”

We are coming to the end, Tolle says, of all mythologies, ideologies, and belief systems—i.e., “A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH.” (Excerpt from *A New Earth, An Old Deception: Awakening to the Dangers of Eckhart Tolle's #1 Bestseller* by Richard Abanes. Bethany House.)

The balm is really just a reformulation of the same lie that Satan brought to the garden of Eden. Repeatedly in *A New Earth* we read things like this:

- The divine life essence,...recognize it as one with [your] own essence (p. 4).
- There is only one absolute Truth, and all other truths emanate from it.... Yes, you are the Truth. If you look for it elsewhere, you will be deceived every time. The very Being that you are is Truth. Jesus tried to convey that when he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life."...Jesus speaks of the innermost I Am, the essence identity of every man and woman, every life-form, in fact. He speaks of the life that you are (p. 71).

- The Presence that you are, the timeless I Am... (p. 105).
- Your true nature emerges, which is one with the nature of God (p. 184).
- God, the scripture [here, the Hindu Upanishads] is saying, is formless consciousness and the essence of who you are (p. 219).

It is the same old lie: “you can be as God,” dressed up in yet another set of clothes.

Has God allowed man to find a cure for this sting of the locusts? We read that the time of torment is limited to five months. We also know that such a cure would only be a preparation for the worship of the beast that comes from the earth. Time will tell. Whatever it is, it really does not matter to the believer because the locusts with their sting have power only over “those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.” We have no need of the balm offered by Eckhart Tolle and Oprah Winfrey. Being joined to God by faith, our hearts find rest and peace in Christ. We do not look to the power, glory, and security offered by the earthly treasures, governments and economies of this world. ❖

Story Time

Silent Night

by Trisha Haak

It started at eight o'clock on Christmas Eve morning.

First she needed to bake 3 pies. She needed flour, sugar, cinnamon, apples, butter, pumpkin filling. She preheated the oven, rolled out the dough and mixed the filling together. As the first pie was baking she prepared the pumpkin and the mince meat pie and then began the dough for the Christmas cookies.

As the pies were cooling and the cookies baking she then began to snip the green beans and peel the potatoes. She had to prepare enough for 25 people so she figured a couple of pounds each plus corn. Then the cookies were ready and she let those cool and she put more into the oven. Then she made the Jell-O for the fruit salad and started decorating the cookies that had cooled.

The turkey had been defrosting since Monday.

At one o'clock she went to the store. Not that she wanted to. She had started her Christmas shopping in September when the days were still warm and Christmas was months away. But now she had last minute gifts to buy for a husband who forgot and for unexpected relatives who had RSVP'd the last minute.

So she fought the crowds. While she was at the mall she saw greed, anger, rudeness and overall selfishness that now represented the season for the world more than Santa and his reindeer. She battled her way through the sea of people, mumbling excuse me and pardon me with an ounce of sincerity. She purchased what she needed

then she rushed back to her car and fought the traffic. It was the year end battle of humanity and she fought it as best she could.

She was home by three. She began the sweet potatoes and finished the fruit salad. She forgot the rolls at the store but she would have to go back for those later. Tonight they were going to her mother's house and she only had an hour to get the children ready. But somehow she did it. By five o'clock she carried the pie to the car. Her husband was ready and dressed in the pants and shirt she had chosen although he had wanted something more casual. She turned and looked at the children sitting in the back seat amid boxes and gifts. They were scrubbed, polished and cleaned as much as they could be. She was satisfied so off they went.

They then threw themselves into the bustle and chaos of her mother's house. All her siblings were there with all their spouses and children so the noise only increased over the course of the night. Presents were exchanged, food eaten, conversation made, more food eaten, then dessert. Finally it was a quarter to ten. Good byes and hugs were given and taken, coats put on, sleepy children gathered and carried to the car.

A half an hour later everyone was in bed, and then finally so was she. She drifted off to sleep after trying to figure out if she remembered everything for Christmas day. Then she dreamt of turkeys, pies that didn't turn out and not enough sweet potatoes to go around. Plus

the rolls. Where was she going to pick up the rolls? So it wasn't really sleep but a prelude to the next day where she would have to do it all over again. Hopefully then it turned out better.

So it was off to church the next day and she sat through the sermon. Where could she get the rolls? Who would be open on Christmas day? Maybe they could go without. She dragged her attention back to the sermon. Was Meijer open? She thought she read a sign saying they were open from nine to five on Christmas. Was he on the last point yet? Did she have enough Cool Whip? She needed it for the fruit salad and the pumpkin pie. Finally they sang the last Psalter number and the doxology. Off they were.

They stopped at the store and were home by 11:30. She had started the turkey before church and he was cooking nicely in the oven. She got the appetizers ready and turned down the crock pots. She set out the plastic ware and napkins, made sure the children were ready, and found five minutes to freshen up. Then it was back to the kitchen.

At one o'clock they started to arrive. Her husband's side of the family. They poured in with their coats, scarves and gloves, gifts and cards, desserts and dishes. For a brief moment she thought it was an invasion. Then the laughing and talking began, the eating and the tasting. She tried to visit with people when she could but for the most part she commandeered the kitchen. For dinner she had to start everything at the right time so that it would be done cooking at the exact time as everything else. No easy feat, but she accomplished it. People ate till they could hardly move. Then dessert was served.

At seven o'clock began the cleaning of the kitchen. Dishes, pots and pans, cups and silverware were piled like mountains as far as she could see. Helping hands made the work light but it was still work and so once again she put her hands in the sink and declared war on her entire kitchen.

She set the garbage by the door for her husband to take out but fifteen minutes later it was still there. She tried to ignore it but finally gave in. With a sigh she picked it up and stepped out the door.

She walked further from the house and gradually the noise of the people decreased till it was just a muffled buzz that the silence of the night drowned out. It must have snowed earlier. Funny how she hadn't noticed. The moon was a winter moon and she couldn't tell whether the moon reflected the snow or the snow reflected the moon. The air was clean, crisp, brittle cold. The snow was fluffy like cotton balls. It covered the earth like a

heavy blanket. It was beautiful in a silent unassuming way. There were no trumpets or parades to announce its beauty. No lights and ornaments from men. It needed none.

Before she came outside, before she stepped into the night, Bethlehem had seemed so far away. Thousands and thousand of miles away, across the ocean and the desert, over mountains and through valleys, back in the forgotten chambers of her memory. Sometimes there was a dense fog that covered the little town especially at this time of year. The fog was a swirl of holiday rush, Christmas shopping, family get-togethers. There was so much that she allowed to come between her and this tiny city that the prophets had spoken about so long ago.

I have not given her a name but really she doesn't need one. If you insist that she must have a name then call her Any Child of God. So often during the holidays we too find ourselves overwhelmed by all our commitments. All the parties, family gatherings, work parties and any other obligation become like the current of a rushing river. It sweeps us past the holidays causing this time of wonder to become nothing more than a blur.

So step out. The current, no doubt has a hold of you. So just step out of that current. Whether into a literal silent night or into the silent night of 2000 years ago when Salvation became flesh. Whether the holiday season is your busiest season or whether it is a relatively peaceful time let the current rush on without you. Set yourself to the task, to the temporal responsibility, but always remember to think on these things. Do not neglect the preaching, no matter how fast your mind is running. Do not neglect your prayer life, no matter how tired you may be morning and evening. These are the beautiful offspring of the season that belong to us because of the one Offspring that made himself of no reputation and humbled himself unto death.

But now we must return to the woman. We cannot leave her standing outside in the night. It's too cold out and besides, it looks like it's beginning to snow. So she steps back inside, into the noise and chaos of her home. She must return to her tasks and responsibilities. They do not disappear. They are, in this lifetime, ever before her. Gradually the volume increases until it once again it becomes a roar. But no matter. The noise may be in her ears and in her mind but not in her heart. Her heart is locked and sealed by the silent night. ❖

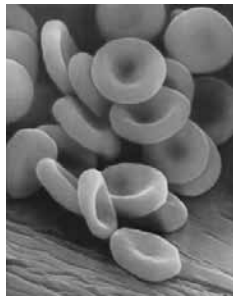
Trisha is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church in Zeeland, Michigan.

I Am Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

by David Warner

Psalm 139:13-16 "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."

The cell is the smallest unit of life. Some organisms, such as the amoeba or bacteria, consist of only one cell. However, many organisms that we think of today are comprised of many cells. This allows different cells to be specialized, meaning that they have different forms and shapes to serve different functions and purposes. When many cells work together, they are organized into tissues. Several tissue types make up organs, which form the organ systems that make up the organism.



The church is known as the body of Christ. Ephesians 5:30 says, "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." It is made up of many individual people, the cells. These people are from every tribe, tongue and nation, and have different strengths and weaknesses. Romans 12:4-5 tells us, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." However, each one is valuable and necessary to the body as a whole. They must work together in harmony to serve the body, and those who rebel will be cast off and destroyed. This is taught in Ephesians 4:16, which says, "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

The Bible speaks in many places about the human body, or its different parts. Many are found in the Psalms and the book of Job. Scripture mentions bones, skin, heart, hands, arms, hair, sinews (tendons and ligaments), for just a few examples. In verses 12, 18, and 25 of I Corinthians 12, we read that all parts of the body

are different, but are part of one body, as the members of the church are of the body of Christ. God has placed each believer in their specific spot as it pleased him, and has given them the abilities to carry out their functions. It is necessary for the members to love and care for one another, for "there should be no schism in the body." The different parts of our own bodies are also interdependent on one another. The relationships between the skeleton, muscles, nervous system, and skin reflect the relationships that the body of Christ has among itself, with its head, and with the outside world. Let's begin at the framework of the body.

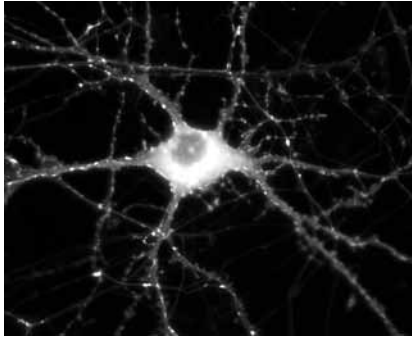
In bones we see the basic hard frame that protects vital organs and gives shape and support to the body. This is much like the doctrines and truths found in Scripture being the skeleton holding the church in its proper form and protecting it, with the creeds and confessions being the cartilage of additional strength and support. Perhaps we would rather not have bones so that we could move more flexibly or to be able to squeeze through tight spots.

However, the truth is that we need bones to stand, move, or even just to sit up. Bones protect our heart, lungs, brain, spinal cord, and other vital and delicate organs. Bones aren't restricting our abilities to move, but instead are giving us the liberty to move. The same can be applied to the Ten Commandments. Some people think they are unnecessary rules and boundaries, but they in fact give the church structure and the life of freedom to serve God. Many people outside of our churches might think that our doctrines are dead and old fashioned. Oh, but bones are not dead! Bone is continually growing, repairing and replacing itself. Bone marrow itself is the factory that produces blood cells in our bodies. The truths of the gospel have continued to grow and develop throughout history. The blood cells necessary to keep the rest of the body's cells living could be compared to the faithful saints in the past who brought the great news of the word to those who needed it. Think of Martin Luther (the blood cell) who shared the doctrine of justification by faith alone (which came from the bones of Scripture). The relationship between bones and blood is often overlooked by many, but it is an important one to remember.

Motion comes from the coordination of the nervous

system with the muscles of the body. A muscle must be exercised in order to grow strong and remain healthy. The body of Christ must act in love and exercise its faith and works of thankfulness to God, or muscular dystrophy (shrinking and inability to contract) will occur. Just as the nervous system works to balance any spasms or unnecessary contractions by muscles in the body, so the members of the church are controlled by the head. The brain is constantly sending impulses throughout the body as it receives various stimuli from the five senses and regulators in the body. It needs to decide which stimuli to ignore as it responds to others. For example, someone who lives near the train tracks will eventually be able to sleep through the night peacefully. This is because your brain has become accustomed to the sound, and even though nerves impulses are still coming from the ears to the brain, the brain has recognized that that train whistle is not important for the body to be warned against. At this point in time, the body doesn't need to prepare to fight or flee from the outside object making that noise, so the brain seemingly ignores this stimulus in order to take care of more important ones. Christ, as head of the church, regulates in a way which stimuli or issues the body responds to, and which are "ignored." For example, the big issues in the early church had to do with Jesus Christ and his divine and human natures, leading to our Creeds. In the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance period the issue was more focused around the way of salvation, leading to the Reformation. Today the issues could range from our view of war, politics, homosexuality, and the end times. That being said, the muscles of faith cannot be moved unless they are anchored to the bones of the truth of the gospel, and they must be stimulated by the communicating nervous system of Christ and the ministers whom he has called to preach the gospel. Communication must occur between the cells, as the church has by means of the fellowship and communion of saints. Communication must also occur between the head and the body, as the church has with Christ through singing praises, prayer, and the reading and preaching of the word. Without communication, there is no growth or movement of the body.

The skin that clothes the body is one large sense organ. It is a continuous sheet, yet displays such a range of variety. The skin of the lungs and lips are very thin so that blood can be near the surface, yet the skin on the heel of the foot is very thick due to constant rubbing and abra-



sion. Different areas of the body's skin have varying amounts of hair (compare your head to your arm to the palm of your hand), sweat glands (under your arms, your forehead, your palms sweat more than your elbows or ankles), patterns (compare the swirls, loops, and whorls of fingerprints to the wrinkled knuckle or the back of the hand), and color pigments (freckles and moles are darker for

this reason). Even though skin diversity is so vast on a human being, it serves its purposes. The main one I will focus on is that it always reveals whether or not there are problems underneath. Rashes, bug bites, paleness, and bruises all tell the body and the outside world that something's wrong inside. But what is the skin of the church, the body of Christ? That would have to be the witness of the believers. The outside world first sees and can begin to see any problems in the inside of the church by detecting the signs in the Christian walk that has gone awry. Skin must be strong and united to be a defensive barrier against the attacks of abrasion, viruses, bacteria, and other foreign chemicals and substances. That is why blisters come off in sheets, not cell by cell—they are strongly bonded. Believers must be united by their faith in Christ in order to be effective defenders of the truth against heresy, even if it means becoming martyrs. God will call new saints to take their places, just as skin continues to renew itself in layers. Skin transfers warmth and love into, out of, and throughout the body. The warm love of Christ clothes the church, and that love radiates from the believers.

We needn't go to the four corners of the world to find some untouched wilderness to see the greatness and beauty of God. Yes, if we do go to the heights of heaven, or depths of the sea, or the ends of the earth, God is there, but it should not be necessary to go to such extremes in order to be amazed by his handiwork. We need only to look at ourselves, the beings created in the very image of God, to stand in awe before our maker. Saint Augustine once wrote, "Men go abroad to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering." A simple look at the human body is enough to make one say, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made!" ❖

David is a member of Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois.

Developing Friendships in School

by Joshua D. Engelsma

The doctrine of the covenant lies very dear to the hearts of Protestant Reformed people. It is a doctrine that distinguishes us from most other denominations. It is a truth that we defended fiercely in 1953 in the face of much opposition, because the covenant is not a doctrine that can be compromised. And it is a truth that we must still defend and proclaim today. This covenant truth which the Protestant Reformed Churches have defended and maintained establishes the basis for our good Christian schools. Our good Christian schools, built upon the sweat and tireless labors of our parents and grandparents, are an essential aspect of friendship and fellowship in this covenant.

One cannot speak about friendship and fellowship in the covenant without first speaking about the Trinity. Within the triune God there is eternal, perfect fellowship and friendship, something we lowly sinners cannot even imagine. There was no necessity that required God to create man and establish a covenant with him. There was no lack or want in the Trinity that demanded the creation of Adam. God has perfect harmony within himself for all eternity.

It was only by his mere good pleasure that he created and only by his mere good pleasure that he elected certain people to be saved in Christ Jesus. By his death, Christ paid for the sins of the elect and drew us into the perfect fellowship of the Triune God. He brought us into that harmony. His death earned for us the right to be in the covenant. As the Canons 2nd Head, Article 8 says, "...it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem...all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given him by the Father." This covenant then is that everlasting relationship of friendship between God and his people in Christ Jesus. The elect people of God are united as one in the Body of Christ.

As one Body, we are called to live as one in communion and fellowship. The covenant is not a group of elected individuals; it is these elected individuals united

as one. Therefore, we must live as one, striving to put off all jealousy, hatred, and anger one towards another. We are called to "love the Lord thy God" and "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:37-40). In its treatment of the sixth commandment, the Heidelberg Catechism states clearly that "he (God) commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves; to show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and all kindness towards him, and prevent his hurt as much as in us lies; and that we do good, even to our enemies."

But, where do we learn to live like this? How are we able to imitate the fellowship of the Triune God? The answer lies in our good Christian schools. It is in these Christian schools that our covenant children learn to live in fellowship with other believers. They are taught from a very young age to live peacefully one with another. They develop close friendships with other students that last a lifetime, friendships that are vital to life in the church. Without the friendships amongst believers, life in the church would become unbearable. Members would dread coming to church and having to face other unloving members.

It is the calling of a minister, and the elders along with him, to promote these good, Christian friendships. The minister must encourage the young people in the church to seek out God-fearing friends. He must ask the young people who they are friends with and what things they do on weekends. He must admonish the young teenager who is looking for unbelieving friends of the world. The minister must steer the young man or woman toward the Christian friends that are found in our schools.

In our good Christian schools the children of believing parents learn many things, but most importantly for the life of the church they learn confession of sin and forgiveness. Children (and adults for that matter) tend to argue and fight with one another. One child doesn't get his way and attempts to get back at his schoolmate. A young girl might be friends with another girl one day and then be talking behind her back the next. Our children are not perfect; they, have an old man of sin

just like we do. One might argue then that our children should be removed from this atmosphere, that it would be better if they avoided the mocking and backbiting all together. However, our children must not be removed from our schools. The sins of our children provide an opportunity for us to teach them confession and forgiveness, fundamental aspects of fellowship in the church. We must teach our children to confess their sin to the classmate they wronged and ask for forgiveness. We must also teach them to forgive the sinful classmate in love. We teach our children to pray “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Our heavenly Father forgave us much and made a covenant with us, even though we are completely undeserving of his favor. So too then we can and must forgive our brothers and sisters the small amount which they have harmed us.

This is so beautifully set forth in Ephesians 4 where the life of the church is described. The section ends in verse 32 by saying, “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Our children must learn to forgive in order to live in peaceful communion when they are older and the leaders of the church. If they are taught at a young age to forgive, they will forgive when they are older. Only with confession of wrong and the forgiveness of a brother can there be peaceful relationships in the church of Christ.

Our good Christian schools teach this to our children. A minister must also teach this to them. In preaching on the Heidelberg Catechism, a minister begins with the subject of our great sin and misery and how we must confess that sin. The next part of the Catechism deals with forgiveness: how Christ forgave us and how we must forgive one another. A minister must proclaim both together. Only with confession can there be forgiveness.

Our good Christian schools play another vital role in the establishment of covenant relationships. In our schools, we gather together young men and young women of like faith. There are few better environments in which a young man might seek out his wife and a young woman might find her husband.

This is one of the deepest desires of God-fearing parents: that their children grow up in the Lord and marry someone of like faith. Our father Abraham had the same desire thousands of years ago. He would not have his son Isaac marry an idolatrous Canaanite woman, so Abraham sent his servant back to his homeland to find a God-fearing wife (Gen. 24). His desire then is our earnest desire today.

The covenant relationship between Christ the bride-

groom and his bride the church is pictured by our earthly marriages. Our marriages are to be a reflection of that one heavenly marriage. As Christ loves the church, so also a husband must love his wife. They must live in a covenant relationship, in covenant communion.

Our schools are the proper place to look to establish these relationships. A child that does not attend a good Christian school will have a more difficult time finding a God-fearing spouse. They will be tempted to look elsewhere to find a mate. And when they look to the world for a spouse, they will be sorely troubled just as Israel of old was in the time of the judges. The Israelites took wives of the idolatrous nations and God sent his judgment down upon them. This must not be the case with our children. They must not look to the world for a spouse. In our good Christian schools they will find God-fearing husbands and wives with whom covenant relationships can be established.

A minister must see to it that the young people are looking for a spouse in the right places. He must encourage them to seek a mate from amongst the many God-fearing classmates at our Christian schools. The minister must warn against the dangers of marrying an unbeliever. He must see to it that they are developing relationships that are God-centered and are edifying to life in the church.

Our good Christian schools are the result of great labor on the part of our forefathers and we cherish them deeply. The reason we cherish our schools so much is that they are based on a doctrine that we as Protestant Reformed people cherish so much: the doctrine of the covenant. In our covenant schools, our children are brought up in the fear of the Lord and are taught to live as a united body of believers. They begin to establish lifelong relationships of friendship that mirror the relationship we have with God in the covenant and that are essential to life in the church.

As a minister, one must support and promote our good Christian schools. He must preach the Christian school as a “demand of the covenant” (see Prof. David J. Engelsma’s book *Reformed Education*). When the minister whole-heartedly supports our schools and preaches their vital importance, then there will sprout up relationships of godly friendship and fellowship that are essential to life in the church of Christ. ❖

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

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Sarah Mowery

December 15 Read Psalm 8

Who Am I?

The vast expanse of the sky never seems bigger than on a clear winter night. As one gazes at the stars and the smoky trail of our galaxy, he cannot help but feel insignificant, and if that one is believer, he cannot help but marvel at the greatness and the glory of his God. For although the sky may seem limitless, we know that the heavenly bodies are but creatures of our God, who spoke them into existence by the word of his power. Though we may be in awe at the distance of the stars or the beauty of the moon, we know our God to be infinitely more glorious and far above these works of his hands. Such wonderful knowledge causes us to exclaim with the Psalmist David, “Who am I, O Lord, that thou art mindful of me?” And yet, by faith we believe that this excellent God, the creator and sustainer of all things, does take thought of us, his elect. More amazing still, his thoughts toward us are thoughts so gracious that he who is exalted above the heavens stooped to redeem sinners whom he made from the dust of the earth. By grace, this great, transcendent God is our Lord. Praise him, young and old! Sing Psalter 14, vs. 1, 3, 4, and 7.

December 16 Read Psalm 51

I Acknowledge My Transgressions

With each new day, the ungodly around us revel more and more openly in sin. Their blatant immorality poses two threats to the Christian person: the first threat is the possibility that the child of God falls into their sin. The second danger is that he becomes immune to his own sins, many of which are “private” or seem mildly offensive when compared to the world’s wickedness. In order for the child of God to rejoice in the birth of Jesus Christ, he must first recognize his need for a Savior. The Heidelberg Catechism refers to the human state in relation to God as a state of misery. When you examine yourself, do you see that you stand before the transcendent, holy God as one who is miserable? When the Lord visited King David through the prophet Nathan and accused him of his sin, a contrite David penned the repentant Psalm 51. Our Father comes to us through the preaching and the reading of his word, convicting us of our transgressions. We must strive to know the Scriptures, for God uses his law to open our eyes to our miserable state and bring us before him with this confession, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.” Sing Psalter 142.

BEACON LIGHTS

December 17 Read Genesis 3

Thou Shalt Surely Die

The ninth question of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, “Doth not God then do injustice to man, by requiring from him in his law, that which he cannot perform?” and its answer begins: “Not at all; for God made man capable of performing it.” Adam and Eve were created with a free will: they were able to serve God perfectly, but they turned against him, enslaving themselves and the human race to sin. They, who had thrived in perfection, clearly saw the shame of their sinful condition. They, who had been the friends of God, were now his enemies. Man’s will was no longer free, but bound to sin. The child of God faces the bitter evidence of the warfare between his old nature and his new man in Christ each day. And yet, God showed mercy to Adam and Eve and to us, for in promising the victorious Seed of the woman, he promised to restore his friendship with all of his people in eternal perfection. How wonderful will God’s heavenly kingdom appear to us whose earthly lives are plagued with sin and sorrow: “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us!” (Romans 8:18). Sing Psalter 243, vs. 1, 6, 13, 14, and 15.

December 18 Read Hebrews 11:8-16

Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth

Yesterday we were reminded that Adam’s fall into sin marred man’s relationship toward God; today we consider the life of Abraham, who is identified throughout Scripture as God’s friend. God called Abraham to live as a pilgrim and a stranger, commanding him to leave his family and his home to reside in the foreign land of Canaan. Abraham obeyed God and visibly lived his life as one who understood that this earth is nothing more than a temporary dwelling place. Abraham understood that as God’s friend he was to live separately from the seed of the serpent, for God had put enmity between them. Child of God, does your life manifest the antitheses? Like Abraham, we, God’s elect, are called to live among the ungodly, and yet we must maintain spiritual separation from those who live their life in defiance of God. In contrast to the reprobate, we live our lives to the glory of God, working for the benefit of his church and his eternal kingdom. And yet, how easily we can be consumed with distractions here below! Pray for God’s grace that you may go about today mindful that you are a citizen of Christ’s

heavenly kingdom, aware that this earth is not your home. Sing Psalter 327.

December 19 Read Genesis 22:1-10
He Gave His Only Begotten Son

A parent loves his or her child with a fervent, enduring love. Such love causes a father or mother to seek the well-being of his or her child no matter the cost and who fear any harm that might come to their child. How true this must have been of Abraham with regard to his son Isaac, the promised child for whom he had waited many long years. And yet, “by faith Abraham... offered up his only begotten son... accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure” (Hebrews 11:17-19). The great faith that God gave Abraham seems almost unbelievable to us, who hearts tremble at the thought of hurting a child, especially if that child is our own, even when commanded to do so for our just God. And yet, Abraham’s willingness to offer up his son is only a dim picture, for God loves his son, who dwells with him even before the foundation of the world, as no earthly parent has ever loved his child. But God gave his beloved son to the death of the cross for the sake of sinners who ridiculed and crucified him. Thanks be to God for his great love toward us! Sing Psalter 243, vs. 1, 5, and 15.

December 20 Read Genesis 32:22-32
Thy Name Shall Be Called Israel

Jacob is greatly distressed. He is returning to Canaan with his family and all of his possessions, and tomorrow he will meet Esau, the brother whom he has not seen since the time that he tricked his father into obtaining the birthright blessing. Esau is marching toward them with four hundred men, and Jacob fears for his life and the lives of his family. He gathers a great present of animals for Esau and then sends his family across a brook while he spends the night on the other side of the stream alone. The Angel of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, comes to Jacob there and wrestles with him until the breaking of day. And, by faith, weak, pitiful Jacob has power over the Angel, and prevails, and pleads with him for a blessing (Hosea 10:12). The Angel of Lord responds by changing Jacob’s name from “a deceiver” to “Israel,” which means “God’s Prince” or “God’s Contender.” And so, Jacob learned that night that the tricks that he used to try to obtain God’s favor did not get him anywhere. But God, who chooses the weak things of the world to confound the things that are strong, in his grace elected Jacob the deceiver to be his prince, his adopted son. The rising sun shines upon Jacob as he limps over the brook, reminding him of his Father’s blessing and encouraging him as he prepares to meet his brother. So, too, child of God, our Father chose us, while we were yet sinners and undeserving of his favor, and he gives us the sunshine to hearten us and remind us of his tender care of his elect. Sing Psalter 400, vs. 1, 3, and 7.

December 21 Read II Samuel 7:1-17
A House Established Forever

Proverbs 16:9 reads, “A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.” There are times in the Christian’s life that he plans for the future only to learn in the providence of God that God’s counsel has determined a different course for his life. Such was the case with David, who earnestly desired to build God’s temple. Although David’s desire stemmed from his love of God, the Lord did not intend for David to be his house builder. He comes to David through the prophet Nathan and promises that not David but his son would build the temple. Furthermore, God declares, “You want to build Me a house, David? Instead of you building me an earthly house, I intend to establish for you a house that will last for ever.” David responds to this promise of God by exalting him and acknowledging that he is unworthy of such blessing. And so we, too, when we do not understand why the Lord leads us in the way that he does, humbly confess that his ways are higher than our ways. By faith we look beyond the earthly, to the eternal, confessing that all of our trials work to prepare for us our place in that “building of God.” Sing Psalter 367, vs. 1, 3, 4, and 5.

December 22 Read Psalm 72
Who Only Doeth Wondrous Things

David wrote Psalm 72 for Solomon, the son who would inherit his throne and build God’s temple. In the psalm David prays that God will bless his son with wisdom and establish his kingdom with peace. The psalm is not only prophetic of the splendor and the prosperity that characterized Solomon’s reign, but also, and more importantly, it is a Messianic psalm that celebrates the glory of Christ’s kingdom and exalts him as Lord of all. He is the One who was born a helpless human infant, but he is also the One to whom all rulers and governments are subject, the One who will defeat all those who live in defiance of him. Did you read about yourself in this Psalm? You and I are mentioned along with all of God’s elect in verses 13 and 14: “He shall spare the poor and the needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence...” The climax of the Psalm is a doxology that is familiar to many of us: “Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen!” Resist the tendency to sing this doxology mindlessly Lord’s Day after Lord’s Day. Instead, sing from the heart praise to him who worked the most wondrous work of your salvation! Sing Psalter 195.

December 23 Luke 1:26-38
Behold the Handmaid of the Lord

The period that preceded the birth of Jesus Christ was a difficult time for the people of God, a time characterized by waiting for the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises.

It was a time when the Jews chafed beneath Roman rule, and the leaders of the visible church had split into sects that distorted the gospel and exploited God's elect. It was at that time when the angel Gabriel appeared to young Mary, hailed her as one "highly favored," and revealed to her that God had chosen her to be the mother of his son. Mary's humble reaction to the angel's astonishing message exemplified her faith in God and her acceptance of his will: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." No doubt Mary faced scorn when it became apparent that she who was unmarried was with child; no doubt she battled fear as she endured the pangs of birth on a crude stable floor; no doubt she experienced tremendous grief as she watched her firstborn son suffer untold agony and die a shameful death. And yet, by grace, Mary esteemed the praise of God more than the approval of men. We live at a difficult time for the true church of Jesus Christ. Ours, too, is a time characterized by waiting for the coming of our Lord. It is a time in which the kingdom of the Anti-Christ gains power at unprecedented speed and the visible church grows increasingly apostate. At this time our God comes to us in his word, salutes us in Jesus Christ as those who are highly favored (Ephesians 1:6), and calls us to walk the path that he has chosen for us, no matter what the cost, for his name and kingdom's sake. It is by grace that we respond, "Here I am, thy servant, Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word." Sing the Song of Mary.

December 24 Read Isaiah 11:1-10

Glorious Rest

It is the time of the year when the world makes much ado about promoting peace and good will. It is the time of the year when even those who deny the birth of Christ feverishly occupy themselves with gift-giving and merry-making. Indeed, at no time of the year are those around us busier than during the "holiday season." Strikingly, it is also the time of the year when people are most likely to suffer depression, to commit suicide. The Christian, looking through the spectacles of Scripture, understands the reason for the hopelessness experienced by so many, for the gods of possessions, food, family, or holiday cheer are unable to fill the void in the heart of a man, nor can they instill in him the joy and the security for which he longs. And yet, you and I, who are God's people and know his grace, are not immune to sadness, even as we commemorate our Savior's birth. Perhaps your heart is aching from the loss of a loved one, or maybe your body is weary with age or disease. You may be downtrodden by the demands of day-to-day life, the difficulties of your vocation, or the burden of anxious cares. To you, dear child of God, comes the promise of the kingdom of our Messiah, that root of Jesse, and his glorious rest. For there God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither

shall there be any more pain: for the things of this earth will have passed away (Rev. 21:4). Sing Psalter 198.

December 25 Read John 1:1-14

And The Word Was Made Flesh

In simple language the inspired apostle John unfolds the profound mystery of the incarnation. Jesus Christ, the Word, is God, and he was before the beginning, and in the beginning. The word was promised at the Fall when man became darkness, and that Word shone in the darkness of the Old Testament types and figures, prophecies and promises. The Word is the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham; he is the one who alone is able to change us who are deceivers to spotless children of the King. The Word is the one who has established the house and the throne of David forever, the Offspring of Jesse who grants his own glorious rest. And the Word is the firstborn son of the young virgin, Mary; he is God, made an infant. God, come to dwell in the world that he created and that he upholds only to be rejected by its inhabitants. Child of God, are you filled with wonder at God's grace today? The mighty God who spoke the universe into existence was made flesh! The son of God became the son of man, that the elect children of men who were darkness might also become the sons and the daughters of God. Stand in awe today as you behold the glory of the Word. Sing Psalter 289:1-7, 18.

December 26 Read Isaiah 44:1-8; 21-23

Beside Me There is No God

Many mainstream churches today follow the trend that promotes tolerance of all faiths. Indeed, there are even some who call themselves Christians but concede that other religions—Islam, for example—are legitimate and even admirable. We believe God's word that beside him there is no God, and we confess that apart from Jesus Christ there is no hope of eternal life. And yet, we also make idol gods. How easy it is for us to love money and to devote ourselves to obtaining more and more material possessions. Then, in times of economic instability, we are tempted to turn to the government to help us maintain our standard of living. When we or one that we love is sick, we can be prone to place our trust in modern medicine. We indulge in self worship when we pursue our own desires, disregarding God's law and hurting our neighbor. In addition, there is a tendency among our own circles to worship the god of family, for how often do we not expend ourselves for the welfare of our blood relatives while neglecting God's church or failing to show hospitality to other saints in our own congregations? In Matthew 10:37 Jesus declares, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Our God Jehovah must be our only God, for it is he who has formed us and blotted out our transgressions. Pray that you will walk worthy of your Lord today! Sing Psalter 233:5 and 6.

December 27 Read Hebrews 1:1-12**Let All the Angels of God Worship Him**

Several days ago we considered a passage in which the angel Gabriel appears to the virgin Mary, and more than likely you have recently heard or read Luke 2, the chapter in which the angels appear to the shepherds, announcing the birth of the Savior and praising God in chorus. We, who are earthly, can be fascinated by angels. What does the Bible teach us about angels? Angels are not the cheery, haloed creatures that perch atop Christmas trees and adorn holiday greeting cards. They are the servants of Jesus Christ, who are sent forth as messengers to execute God's divine pleasure. How humbling to read that God uses the powerful, intelligent angels to serve us, who, although sinful, are the heirs of salvation (Verse 14). Angels rejoice at the conversion of the sinner, and it is they who bring the souls of believers to heaven. Angels are holy, but they are not all-knowing or all-powerful; therefore, they, with us, praise God and worship his son. Perhaps God reveals little to us about angels because he knows that we might be tempted to make idols of them. This was the apostle John's response in Revelation 22: "And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God." Today, God's angels continue to fight for the cause of his elect. Why do they not come unto us with messages from above? Because God in these last days speaks unto us by a far superior means: by his son, through the preaching and the reading of his word. Give praise to him! Sing Psalter 405.

December 28 Read Galatians 3:7-16**In Thee Shall All Nations be Blessed**

We who are members of the Protestant Reformed Churches are familiar with God's covenant promise to Abraham as it is recorded in Genesis 17:7: "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee." What a beautiful promise God has given to us who are believers and to our children! How can we, who are not physical descendants of Abraham, claim that covenant promise as ours? Through Jesus Christ, who is the seed of Abraham. For by faith we are justified and redeemed by the death of Jesus Christ, through Whom the blessing of Abraham comes upon God's elect from all nations. Even before Isaac had been born, God promised Abraham, "A father of many nations have I made thee." Notice, God speaks in the past tense, for in eternity he chose a church composed of people from all nations and throughout all of history. He chose you, and he decreed your race and the culture and the time in which you live to his glory. And

so also, he saves his children from the Philippines, from Singapore, from Africa, from India, from Mexico... Praise him in whom all nations of the world are blessed! Sing Psalter 399:1, 2, and 4.

December 29 Read Matthew 2:1-11**There Came Wise Men from the East**

Several weeks from today, a new president will take the oath of office in the nation in which we live. As immorality increases in the United States and throughout the world, we may become troubled as we speculate what might happen in the years that lie ahead. Our God calls us to rest in the knowledge that he is in control of all of the course of history, and he will see to it that all rulers perform his pleasure (Isaiah 44:28). What is the pleasure of the Lord? As we saw yesterday, he is pleased to gather unto himself an elect people from all nations and from all time periods in history. At the time when Jesus was born in Palestine, great civilizations thrived in the East, in China and India. We might wonder, what was the purpose of God with these millions of people who followed a false religion and seemed to live in total darkness, even as his son walked upon the earth? And then we read in God's word, "There came wise men from the East..." Do not fear for the church of God as the end of time draws closer and sin and sinful men abound. Though God's people be nothing more than a remnant, all kings and all nations are but tools in the hand of the Lord to bring his elect to salvation. Sing Psalter 200.

December 30 Read Revelation 22:1-5; 12-17**Let Him That Heareth Say, Come**

Yesterday we briefly considered God's purpose with the nations of the earth in which we live; today we read about that eternal kingdom where Jesus Christ sits on the throne. There the curse of God that came upon creation in the Garden of Eden no longer exists, and the presence of God remedies all former sorrows and sicknesses. In the year that now has almost passed, the purposes of God in the building of his kingdom have been accomplished, for never is his will thwarted. Always his counsel is fulfilled. In all that happened in the year gone by, Jesus Christ was marching, for he comes quickly to judge the works of men and to establish his kingdom. The prayer of the Holy Spirit and of his bride, the church, is that he come. Is that your personal prayer, child of God? Does your day-to-day life witness that you are not a citizen of this world but that you desire that your Lord come? We know from God's Word that Christ's coming is heralded by difficult times for the Church and unsurpassed misery in creation. God will use that persecution and tribulation just as he uses the sorrows and the trials that we face already today: to work in our hearts a more fervent desire that his kingdom come. And so, let our prayer today and every day be: "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!" Sing Psalter 302.

December 31 Read Psalm 90

So Teach Us to Number Our Days

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, the ungodly around us will usher in the new year with reveling and drunkenness. How foolish they are to celebrate, for the passing of another year only brings each man closer to the day in which he will stand before the living God and give account of all that he has done. What a terrible moment that will be for the reprobate, but for us, who are redeemed in the blood of the Lamb, what a glorious moment that will be, the moment in which we are changed in the twinkling of an eye from death to glory. And so we, too, celebrate today. We celebrate, and we come before God with the humble of prayer of Moses in Psalm 90, "So teach us to number our days." We come before God with that prayer, for we know that he is the one who has determined the length of our days. In his wisdom he has determined the number of days necessary to prepare each of one of us for our place in glory. That time for our life may be less than a day, or it may be a year. It may be sixteen years, fifty-one, or ninety-five. But no matter how long we might live, our life is like the grass, which flourishes and then quickly withers away. "We spend our years as a tale that is told." And so, our prayer is that God will make us aware of the brevity of our life, that in each and every day that he gives us, we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. Sing Psalter 244.

by Chester Hunter

January 1 Read Jonah 1:1-10

There is much instruction to be found in this book of prophecy. Here we see that God will show us the way we must go. We also must see that we must listen to him. God will also use us to testify and witness to the heathen about his sovereignty. That sovereignty is one of his greatest attributes, and it is one that men wish to ignore. As we go through this new year and life, let us see God and bow before his power. Sing Psalter 255:1-3.

January 2 Read Jonah 1:11-17

In this passage we see God's sovereignty in nature. Man could do nothing against the storm God had sent upon them. God calmed the waves and sent a fish for the sake of his gospel. As you study the human body remember that God prepared that body as a temple for our souls. Disease, a picture of sin, can only do to that body what God wills. Even as we marvel at God's wonders in the outside world, we must take time to wonder at his wonder the human body. We were curiously made. How is speech possible? How can we learn to sing different parts? As the Belgic Confession in article two states, we are taught by the creation. Man is the crown of that creation. Sing Psalter 241:1-3; 7-9.

January 3 Read Jonah 2

Today's passage is a little longer but it needs to be read in its entirety. It is a beautiful prayer uttered by one who has seen his sin and has repented. Read it again really see its depth. And then remember to pray without ceasing. Sing Psalter 209:1-4 and 11.

January 4 Read Jonah 3:1-5

The word of God never goes away from him void. We do not know how the preaching affects everyone. We do not know how our responses affect those with whom we come into contact daily. But God will use even those contacts for his glory. We must continue to stand for the truth and receive God's blessing. Jonah did not like what happened to Ninevah. But it was God's will, and with Christ we must say, Thy will be done. Sing Psalter 195.

January 5 Read Jonah 3:6-10

As I said yesterday God's word does not return unto him void. He heard Jonah's prayer and he heard the cries of Ninevah. Of course this does not mean that every one was saved. But every one of God's people was. God is gracious to us; that we must remember. He will care for us in every situation. Sing Psalter 187.

January 6 Read Jonah 4:1-5

God was not finished with Jonah's education yet because Jonah was not ready to learn. Jonah did not want Nineveh to repent. Jonah thought he knew what was best. If Nineveh was destroyed, God's people would be safe from attack. But this was not God's way. Israel needed the correction that would be supplied by Assyria and there were God's people to be found in Nineveh. We too must learn to wait on Jehovah. We must not make our ways his ways, but we must make his ways our ways. This takes grace and we must pray for it. Sing Psalter 73:1-3 and 6.

January 7 Read Jonah 4:6-11

As we finish this short book, we must remember that it is prophecy. It is not just a nice story. It is not just some interesting history. Christ used this account to show that his resurrection was possible. The Jews of his day did not believe. What about us? Do we cling to Christ and the truths about him, or do we still want to do things our way. Let us not have to learn as Jonah did; let us learn by faith in God and his son our Lord Jesus Christ. Sing Psalter 308.

January 8 Read Malachi 1:1-5

Malachi is an interesting book. It was the last written during the Old Testament times. It was written to a people beset with wickedness especially among the class of the priests. But there was a faithful remnant. And there are some gems written to them and for them. We have such a gem in verse 5. Jehovah's name will be magnified when Christ returns. All shall see him and must confess that he is God. This is

comforting for us to know. We can look for his return in faith and know that he is God. Sing Psalter 398.

January 9 Read Malachi 1:6-14

Malachi, in this part of chapter one, lays out one of the evils in Israel. They were not honoring Jehovah in their manner of worship. God has clearly laid out in Scripture how he is to be worshipped. Even as we show honor to earthly leaders, we must show honor to God. Even as there is a certain protocol to follow with earthly leaders there is a protocol to follow with God. Now we do not have the ceremonials as the Old Testament Jews did, but nonetheless there is a certain “way” to worship God. That way is in the way of reverence and following what he has prescribed in Scripture. We call that the regulative principal of worship. God took his worship away from the Jews and gave it to the Gentiles as we read in verse 11. He will do the same to us if we do not honor him in worship. Sing Psalter 246:1, 2, and 5.

January 10 Read Malachi 2:1-6

While these verses are directed directly at the priests, they apply to all believers. We, in the office of believer, occupy the priestly office. God’s covenant of life and peace is found with us. It is a covenant in which we are called to walk in a certain way. We are enabled to walk in that way. By walking in that we find life and peace. It is not a condition to walk; it is a commandment. We must walk with the law of truth in our mouths. This has many implications for us in our daily walk. Let us consider how we must walk and then let us walk in truth. Sing Psalter 336.

January 11 Read Malachi 2:7-12

Verse 10 explains to us why the church must be multicultural. We have one Father. God created all the races. Out of those races he gathered a church, the body of his dear Son. As we live in this world we must not shun or ignore others because they are different than we are. This is hard for us. By nature we wish to only associate with those who are like us. I am glad that we have been part of a family that for a long time has done this. We truly must live this way since we are part of the “holy catholic church.” Sing Psalter 176.

January 12 Read Malachi 2:13-17

Divorce is ugly. God shows this to us over and over in the Bible. The picture of Christ and his church is evidence of this as well. Christ will never divorce his people. But some that appear to be his people for a time, definitely divorce him. He is faithful to us and we must be faithful to him. In this negative passage we see the beauty of marriage. God has made two, one. In that unity is the beautiful picture of Christ and his church. Look at verse 17 once more. Here we see a snapshot of today’s world. Every one decides what is good and evil. They do this about government, about life, and especially about marriage. Let us honor our bridegroom with a holy attitude toward marriage. Sing Psalter 360.

January 13 Read Malachi 3:1-6

There are several interesting verses in this passage. The first three deal with both John the Baptist and Jesus. For a stirring rendition of this text listen again to the “Messiah” versification. It really makes you think about life on this earth. Then, we see in verses 4-5, Christ’s work for us. He loves us, cares for us, and makes us pleasant in God’s eyes. Finally we have the verse of hope in verse 6. God will not change. Even our most sinful acts will not change his love for us. Thanks be to God. Sing Psalter 403.

January 14 Read Malachi 3:7-12

We see in this portion of Scripture that Israel was like us. We, too, can think only of ourselves and not of what God has commanded. We quickly can think that we do not have anything to give to the church collections. We need to think about verse 10 again. In thinking about verse 10, we will see the blessedness of our heavenly Father from whom all blessings flow. God’s people do not want, of that we must not doubt. We also have the promises of verses 11-12. Sometimes it is hard for us to see where he is leading us in earthly things, but we must remember that the true path is to heaven. Sing Psalter 24.

January 15 Read Malachi 3:13-18

Once again we see a passage divided into two parts. It is the second to which I wish to call to your attention. First of all verse 16. God’s people are called to speak to one another. This may be personally which was the only way in Malachi’s day. Today, however, it could be by email, texting, Facebook, or any of the other means. This should not take away the personal, however. Also the text refers to the study of God’s word. Our contact must include this. We have many more opportunities to do this. Even these short missives would qualify. Then there is verse 17. God’s people are his Jewels. He is making them up into his crown even as a jeweler would fashion gems into a crown. What a blessed thought that is for us! Let us live lives of thankfulness for being made jewels in the crown of the King of Kings! Sing Psalter 349.

January 16 Read Malachi 4:1-6

The book of Malachi ends with this beautiful chapter. For the people of Israel, it was 400 years later until Gabriel appeared to Zacharias. We, too, wait for the next word from God. That Word which will be the return of Christ. Like Israel of old, we must watch for the signs. They are all around us. As we wait for the Son of Righteousness to come again, let us watch daily. Let us live lives in expectation of him and let us remember the Law of Moses. Sing Psalter 29.

The Christian Hope Blessed Are the Dead Which Die in the Lord

"With Christ—which is far better" Philippians 1:23

*F*allen asleep in Jesus!
How precious is that word!
Enjoying now for evermore
The presence of the Lord.
This is not death! 'tis only sleep;
The Lord doth now thy loved one keep.

*T*he earthen vessel's broken,
The Treasure now has flown,
The Lord hath taken back again
What is by right His own.
But when He takes what most we store
It is that He may give thee more.

*T*hou wouldst have gladly kept him
A little longer here,
To soothe, and nurse, and cherish,
And make his wants thy care.
But He, who doeth what is best
Hath called him to Himself to rest.

*A*s members of one body
In sympathy we weep—
And yet rejoice—because we know
In Jesus he doth sleep.
For all his pain and suffering's o'er'
And joy his portion evermore.

*'T*is not "Goodbye", beloved,
"Tis only just "Farewell."
A little while—a "moment",
We too with Christ shall dwell:
And so we dry the falling tear,
Because we know the Lord is near.

O, may the God of comfort
His richest grace impart!
Himself fill up the aching void,
Bind up thy broken heart;
And give thee now to look above,
And rest in His unchanging love.

In Christian Love,
Sadie Buitter
(submitted but not authored by Sadie Buitter)

The Antithesis and Witnessing (6)

by Prof. Herman Hanko

The antithesis is closely related to witnessing because the most powerful form of our witnessing is a godly life; and a godly life is an antithetical life. When one lives a godly life one says by his actions: “I hate sin; and I love to do what God commands in his word.” That hatred of sin and love for God’s commandments is what the antithesis is all about.

A godly life is a powerful witness for two reasons. People in “Christian” countries know quite a bit about Christianity and the Bible. They may not pay very much attention to it, but they know in a general way what the Bible says. When they see that there are people who live according to what the Bible demands, they know that that is the right way to walk.

All men have consciences. Their consciences tell them what God has to say about their actions. God always testifies in the consciences of every man whether what he has done is pleasing to God and has his approval, or whether what a person has done is wicked and therefore incurs God’s fierce anger. That conscience is God’s voice in a man, but through the Scriptures. In “Christian” countries most people know the ten commandments exist—somewhere. They know too that the ten commandments are God’s standard of right and wrong. They hear, therefore, the voice of God in their consciences telling them that they are doing what God hates and that God will punish them with dreadful punishments.

Even in countries that are not “Christian,” people still have a conscience. They do not hear the voice of God speaking through the Bible, but they hear the voice of God speaking through creation. And creation says the same thing as the Bible, only in a much softer and less complete way. Paul tells us this in Romans 1:18-23. Paul tells us that God makes himself known through all the things that are made so that the whole creation speaks of God’s “eternal power and Godhead.” In revealing God’s eternal power and Godhead creation says two things: 1) God alone is God and all idols are the work of men; and, 2) God alone must be served.

Because creation says these things, Paul can say in Romans 2: 14, 15 that the wicked shew the works of the law written in their hearts. They do not do the works of the law, but “their conscience also [bears] witness and their thoughts” accuse or else excuse one another.

Now, whether it be someone in “Christian” countries or whether it be someone in “pagan” countries, these people see the godly walk of the believer. Because those in Christian countries do not know all that much about Christianity, and because they have persuaded themselves that sin is far more fun than keeping God’s commandments, they find it strange that there are people who do keep God’s commandments.

The same is true of pagans. They cannot imagine that there are people who do keep God’s commandments; that is, who actually do not do what God condemns.

In both instances, these people “ask a reason for the hope” that is the believer’s heart, and that is made evident by the believer’s walk. Peter says (and this is also witnessing), we must be ready to make a defense of our hope. That is witnessing at its most powerful, for that is witnessing that follows the directives of Scripture.

* * * * *

**True witnessing is always
a display of meekness and
fear.**

We must, Peter goes on to say, give a defense of our hope “with meekness and fear” (I Peter 3:15). Meekness and fear. True witnessing is always a display of meekness and fear. In fact, I think it is true that any witnessing that is not done with meekness and fear is no witnessing at all. The way we defend our hope is also part of our witness.

Meekness does not mean timidity. It does not mean hesitancy and awkwardness. It does mean a reluctance

to tell someone that he is wrong, dead wrong, and that what he believes and what he does puts him in danger of God's wrath in this life, but also in hell.

Meekness is the opposite of pride. It is dangerously possible to defend our hope in such a way that we leave the impression that we know far more than the one with whom we are talking; that we are far holier than they are; and that we look down our long noses at them with pity and disdain. I know sometimes people say to us, "You think you are holier than we are; you think you are the only ones who are going to heaven; you think that you have a corner on the truth." Maybe sometimes we do actually leave that impression with people. That doesn't do much good for defending our faith.

Meekness means that, in our defense of our hope, we make it very clear that we were very sinful, as sinful as anyone else, that we still are sinful and do things that everyone in the world does, but that we are sorry for our sins, are saved by God's grace alone and are given something very great and very precious even though we have never deserved it. We do not need to say all these things immediately, but we do need to witness in our defense of our hope in such a way that we point, not to ourselves, but to God who has given us this wonderful hope for the future and who asks us to live in such a way that our lives express our hope to go to heaven some day.

Witnessing is never a demonstration of our own holiness.

Witnessing is never a demonstration of our own holiness. It is not a statement of our own skill in debate. It is never in any way a pointing to ourselves. It is always a pointing to God. It is a living and verbal testimony of God's greatness, glory and grace through Jesus Christ. It is a sharp and unmistakable statement that such blessedness as we possess comes from faith in Jesus Christ, and the one(s) with whom we are talking must also believe in Christ, for it is God's command; and that believing they will join us in our walk toward heaven.

* * * * *

But, Peter says, we must also make our defense of our hope with fear.

Very obviously, Peter does not mean "terror." How can we witness if we are terrified to witness? We are terrified—frequently. We do not want to say anything to someone sinning because we are afraid that the person

will become angry, call us bad names, frighten us with threats, push us away from him, and make our life miserable in some way. I guess we like to be considered nice guys, or, nice gals.

But Peter is talking about the fear of God.

Even we Christians can and should be afraid of God. We should be so afraid of God's anger against us that we do not want to do anything that we know is displeasing to him.

In a way, we are afraid of God. Even we Christians can and should be afraid of God. We should be so afraid of God's anger against us that we do not want to do anything that we know is displeasing to him. We are like a young girl who tells her friends that she will not go along with them to a dance because she knows her parents disapprove, and she does not want to do anything that makes her parents angry with her.

There is, in the life of the Christian, room for a holy terror.

And real fear always has in it that idea of terror that I just described. It is true that we in the defense of our hope are to be careful that our witness is a correct witness of God's truth. We surely must not misrepresent God. We must not say something about God that is not true. We must not deny our faith because we are ignorant of it, or because we are afraid to "tell it like it is."

We would do God terrible injustice if we did that. It would be like telling someone who spoke evilly of our parents, that these evils of which they speak are partly true. It would be like failing to tell the one to whom we are witnessing only a part of what our parents are like, because we do not want to offend. It would be like leaving the impression that the slanderer of our parents is partly correct at least, and our interest in defending our parents' integrity is drowned in terror of what the slanderer might say or do.

Fear in our witness is to say what is, as a matter of fact, the case. It is to be so afraid of offending our God (who hears all we say) that we would not do anything that would bring harm on him whom we love; we would not do anything of which he disapproves; we would not say anything about him that is offensive to him. The fear

of which Peter speaks is born out of love. It is our love for God that gives us fear.

God says that no one who is a drunkard, or an adulterer, or a blasphemer will go to heaven. We must, if we are to witness, say the same thing. God says that any one who says that we are capable of doing something ourselves that will help us go to heaven will not go to heaven. Fear means that we say that all (yes, all) our salvation is in the cross and is the gift of grace so that God alone may be glorified; any other doctrine is accursed (Galatians 1:8, 9).

Fear does not say, “There are many good things to be found in other churches from which we can learn and which ought to make us tolerant of these churches.” Fear does not say, “It doesn’t really matter what a man believes, as long as he is sincere.” Fear does not hide our membership in the Protestant Reformed Churches; fear says that we are members in the Protestant Reformed Churches because we believe that in these churches the truth is preached more clearly than elsewhere in this country. Fear says, without equivocation and hesitancy, that the truth is the truth of God and his glory and that

we need that to keep our feet on the straight and narrow path that leads to heaven.

Rev. De Wolf said in his sermon in which he was condemned by Classis East that he did not like people who wore “Protestant Reformed” on the lapel of their coats (although this was not the statement for which he was condemned). Well, I am not sure I like them either—especially if people think that mere membership in a PR church will guarantee a reserved place in heaven. But I don’t like people either who are afraid to stand up for and defend our churches, who hesitate to reveal their church membership, and who are not careful to insist that believers belong in the true church (and that the Protestant Reformed Churches are the true church in this country.) If we do not believe that, then the question is: Why are we members here?

We fear, you see, that we misrepresent God. ❖

Prof. Hanks is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.

Church History

I Remember Herman Hoeksema: Personal Remembrances of a Great Man (3)

by Prof. David J. Engelsma

Arminianism in the Covenant

Even more dramatically than Hoeksema’s prophecy of the consequences of common grace, if this is possible, has his warning about the doctrine of a conditional covenant been realized. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Protestant Reformed Churches endured a grievous schism. The doctrinal issue was the nature of the covenant of grace with believers and their children. Ministers introduced into the Protestant Reformed Churches the covenant doctrine of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”).

This doctrine teaches that God graciously promises his covenant and its salvation to all the physical children of believers alike and that he actually establishes the covenant of grace with all the children alike at their baptism, so that all the children alike are in the covenant and begin to enjoy its benefits. However, the covenant promise and the covenant itself are conditional. Whether the promise is fulfilled in the everlasting salvation of a child and whether a child remains in the covenant depend upon conditions the child himself must perform. The covenant is conditional, that is, dependent upon works



The Revs. Hoeksema and Ophoff in their last days in the seminary. Picture taken from Therefore Have I Spoken by Gertrude Hoeksema.

of the child, namely, faith and faithfulness. The covenant is conditional, because the covenant and covenant salvation are not governed by God's eternal, unconditional election.

With other Protestant Reformed ministers, notably Professor G. M. Ophoff, Hoeksema opposed this doctrine of a conditional covenant. Over the course of several years, from the pulpit and lectern, in the church papers, and then in the church assemblies, Hoeksema contended that this doctrine of a conditional covenant is "Arminianism in the covenant." Just as Arminianism teaches that the preaching of the gospel, which Arminianism conceives as a "well-meant offer," is grace to all hearers, so the doctrine of a conditional covenant teaches that the promise is grace to all the children.

Just as Arminianism teaches that the salvation of the sinner depends upon a condition he must fulfill, namely, faith, so the doctrine of a conditional covenant teaches that the salvation of baptized children depends upon conditions he must fulfill, namely, faith and a life of faithfulness.

Just as Arminianism teaches that one can fall away from Christ and lose his salvation, so the doctrine of a conditional covenant teaches that children who are in the covenant and united to Christ can fall out of the covenant and fall away from Christ.

Just as Arminianism teaches that God's grace in Jesus Christ is wider, *much* wider, than only those who finally are saved, so the doctrine of a conditional covenant teaches that God's covenant grace in Jesus Christ is wider, *much* wider, than only those children in the sphere of the covenant who are finally saved.

Just as Arminianism denies that God's saving grace is governed by an eternal decree of unconditional, double predestination, so that grace is for the elect only, so the doctrine of a conditional covenant denies that God's saving, covenant grace in Jesus Christ is governed by God's eternal predestination, so that this grace is for the elect children only.

Just as Arminianism violently denies that God's eternal decree of reprobation determines that some sinners are excluded from grace and are hardened by the

preaching of the gospel, so the doctrine of a conditional covenant violently denies that reprobation determines that some children of believing parents are excluded from covenant grace and are hardened by their baptism and by the word.

Just as Arminianism teaches that a universal grace of God depends for its saving efficacy and result upon a condition performed by the sinner, so the doctrine of a conditional covenant teaches that the covenant grace of God is universal in the sphere of the covenant (towards, for, and in every baptized child), but depends for its saving efficacy and outcome upon conditions that the child must perform.

Just as Arminianism teaches that God's grace in Christ is resistible, so the doctrine of a conditional covenant teaches that the covenant grace of God in Christ is resistible.

The Protestant Reformed ministers who were enamored of the doctrine of the conditional covenant vehemently denied Hoeksema's charge of Arminianism. They insisted, as did the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated"), whose covenant doctrine they were promoting, that this doctrine of a conditional covenant only emphasizes the "responsibility of man," and is in harmony with the confessions (although the "Three Forms of Unity" nowhere teach conditional salvation and explicitly condemn as heresy the notion that salvation is conditional and the teaching that faith is a "condition"). These ministers convinced two thirds of the membership of the Protestant Reformed Churches that Hoeksema's warning was wrong.

**These ministers
convinced two thirds of
the membership of the
Protestant Reformed
Churches that Hoeksema's
warning was wrong.**

Many of the Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in North America took note of the controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches. They rejected Hoeksema's warning that the doctrine of a conditional covenant as taught by K. Schilder, B. Holwerda, C. Veenhof, and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated") is "Arminianism in the covenant." Their rejection of the Protestant Reformed theologian's warning is not surpris-

ing. These churches themselves were open to, if they did not embrace, the doctrine of a conditional covenant.

To their mortal peril!

The Coming of the Federal [Covenant] Vision

At the present time, stunning events are taking place in many of the reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches. In these churches, including the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America, and the United Reformed Churches, has appeared a doctrine of the covenant that calls itself the "Federal Vision." "Federal" means "Covenant." This doctrine is, and claims to be, the development of the doctrine of a conditional covenant taught by Schilder and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ("liberated").

Openly, the Federal [Covenant] Vision denies justification by faith alone. Openly, it denies every one of the doctrines of grace confessed by the Canons of Dordt. Openly, it denies these great truths of the gospel in the sphere of the covenant with particular reference to the baptized children of believers. The Federal [Covenant] Vision is an open, all-out attack on justification by faith alone—the heart of the gospel—and on the inseparably related "five points of Calvinism" with regard to the covenant.

**The Federal [Covenant]
Vision is open, blatant
Arminianism regarding the
doctrine of the covenant.**

The Federal [Covenant] Vision is open, blatant Arminianism regarding the doctrine of the covenant.

It is not my purpose here to demonstrate the heresy of the Federal [Covenant] Vision, to give the history of the movement, or to document the actions and refusals to act of the denominational assemblies with regard to the heresy. I have done this in a recent book, *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers: Sovereign Grace in the Covenant* (RFPA, 2005), to which I refer the interested reader.

Suffice it to say concerning the actions, or refusals to act, of the churches mentioned above that all of them have been forced to deal with the doctrines of the Federal [Covenant] Vision at their ecclesiastical assemblies. Although some have condemned certain aspects of the Federal [Covenant] Vision, particularly the teaching of justification by faith and works, none has taken hold of

the heresy at its root, namely, the doctrine of a conditional covenant. None of the churches is willing to take hold of it at its root. None can.

The Federal [Covenant] Vision is genuine, logical, necessary, inevitable development of the doctrine of a conditional covenant as taught by Schilder, Holwerda, Veenhof, and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”). If universal covenant grace is conditioned by the faith and faithfulness of the child, justification in the covenant is by works, and the doctrines of grace as confessed by the Canons do not apply to the covenant. If the doctrines of grace do not apply to the covenant, the errors condemned by Dordt do apply to the covenant. And the reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America approve, if they are not committed to, the doctrine of a conditional covenant.

At the same time as these astounding events are unfolding in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America—*churches bound by solemn vow to the Canons of Dordt or the Westminster Confession of Faith*—theologians of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”) are openly criticizing the doctrine of predestination as confessed by the Canons of Dordt. They are criticizing predestination because it does not harmonize with the doctrine of a conditional covenant as held by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”). Spokesmen of these Churches are now publicly admitting that leading theologians of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (“liberated”) have been criticizing the doctrine of predestination as confessed by the Canons from the very beginning of the “liberation” in the 1940s, and that Klaas Schilder was well aware of the criticism.

As Herman Hoeksema warned.

The doctrine of a conditional covenant is “Arminianism in the covenant.”

And Arminianism detests the doctrine of eternal, unconditional election as the source and standard of all salvation (whether in the covenant or on the mission field) by particular, sovereign grace.

Hoeksema was no prophet, of course, by special revelation. But he was a prophet as Scripture enables every sound minister to be one. Seeing clearly into the grand truths of the Bible, and believing these truths with all his heart, he could foresee the certain consequences—the judgments of God—for churches that forsake these truths.

And, then, he was not afraid, whether on account of calculating self-interest, or on account of mistaken “ecumenicity,” or on account of sheer cowardice, boldly

to warn others of the evil of their doctrinal way.

Is it not always the test of the true prophet that his prophecies come true?

A Small Stage

The smallness of the place God gave him might seem to gainsay Hoeksema’s greatness. His place in the church was small, very small. Expelled from the Christian Reformed Church, at that time a powerful, influential denomination among the Reformed and Presbyterian churches worldwide, Hoeksema was ostracized his life-long by the entire Reformed community of churches. His place became still smaller after the schism in the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1953. Only a few thousand members of his own denomination remained.

How small his place was, I myself experienced. For the first two years of my seminary training, I was his only student. There we sat, in one narrow, cramped, and unattractive basement room of First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan—the two of us. Other theologians of lesser abilities, to say nothing of their orthodoxy, were teaching scores of students in fine facilities.

The smallness of his place was not the measure of the man.

Hoeksema wrote somewhere that the church has men who are every bit as great as the greatest men of the world. The difference is only that the great men of the world have a bigger stage on which to play their role. (The church’s great men will have a big stage in the world to come.)

In the life and ministry of Herman Hoeksema, it pleased God to give one of his great men a small stage. With his place, Hoeksema was content.

Of this man, I have some remembrances.

Members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, who honor this man for the truth’s sake, may appreciate these recollections.

In the events may even appear something of the true greatness of the man. ❖

(to be continued)

Prof. Engelsma is professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.

Church News

BAPTISMS

"He is the LORD our God: ...He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations."

Psalm 105:7, 8

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

Leia Alexandra, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Gareth Halliday—Ballymena, N Ireland

Derek Arie, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matthew den Hartog—Faith, MI

Joanna Elaine, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron Lehrman—First, GR

Colin Anthony, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chad Corson—Grandville, MI

Jakob David, son of Mr. & Mrs. David Rutgers—Hope, MI

Ely Philip, son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin Miersma—Hope, MI

Joseph Thomas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Scott Oosterhouse—Hope, MI

Joelle Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mike Cnossen—Hudsonville, MI

Devin Jaydon, son of Mrs. Mary Tolbert—Redlands, CA

Owen Robert, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel Smits—South Holland, IL

Makayla Beth, daughter of Miss Tammy Butler—Southwest, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end." Psalm 119:33

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

Nicholas Elzinga, Laura Hekstra, Sara Pastoor—Byron Center, MI

Chase DeGroot, Chad Hoekstra, Michelle Keizer, Krista VanDenTop, Beth VanMaanen and Eric Westra—Calvary, IA

Kelsey Ferguson—Edmonton, AB, Canada

Nathan Holstege—Hudsonville, MI

Robert Birkett, Derek Bruinsma, Jessica Kamps, Erica Lenting, Lauren Lenting, Mary Regnerus, Rosalyn Stouwie, Hayley Swan, Joy Van Baren, and Todd Zandstra—South Holland, IL

Casey Baas—Southwest, MI

Andrew VanSolkema—Southwest, MI

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. Mike and Mrs. Leah Booth—Byron Center, MI

Mr. Mike and Mrs. Katie Boverhof—Hudsonville, MI

Mr. Randy Veldman and Miss Heather VanOverloop—Hudsonville, MI

Mr. Seth Griess and Miss Alison Noorman—Southeast, MI

Family Conference 2009

Hosted by

First PRC of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

July 2-5, 2009

"Calvin & The

Christian Family Life"

Join in a week of uplifting
Christian Fellowship

Speakers:

- Prof. D. Engelsma
- Prof. B. Gritters
- Rev. J. Marcus

Visit our website: EdmontonPRC.org

www.edmontonprc.org

A Gift

The snowflake floated
and fell on my arm.
It melted
and caused no harm—
but a small kiss
of cold and wet.



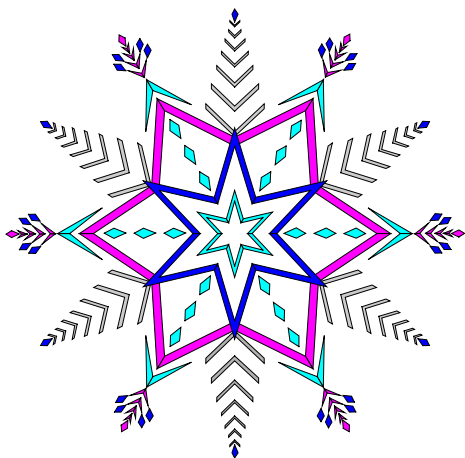
I watched as another
and more and more fell
in designs
of glitter and lace.
Each one fell
into its place.

Could this be
a picture of grace?

“Washed whiter than snow”
is the picture we know,
and it’s true—
in sunshine
the drifts are so bright!
What a comfort
becomes then this sight.
A gift—
a gift of His might
and mercy and love
does this show.



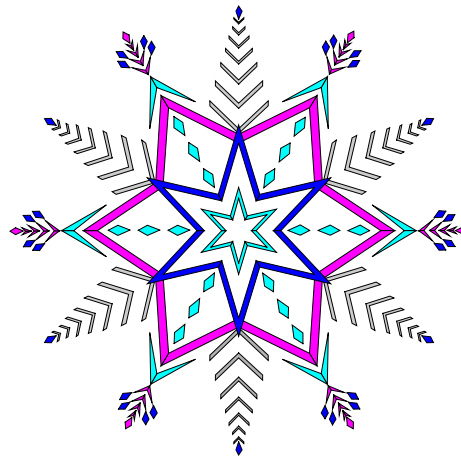
Yes,
a gift is this snow.



"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine !

by Connie Meyer



Find the underlined words of the following text in the puzzle below:

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Psalm 51:6,7

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

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

BEACON LIGHTS

621 Williams Street
Randolph, WI 53956

Periodical
Postage
paid at
Jenison, MI
(UPSS046-840)

2009 Young People's Convention

The Universal Church



Hosted by Trinity PRC

Aug. 17-21, 2009

Lake Williamson, IL

Speakers: Rev. Rodney Kleyn, Rev. Jai Mahtani, and
Rev. Angus Stewart

www.prcconvention.org