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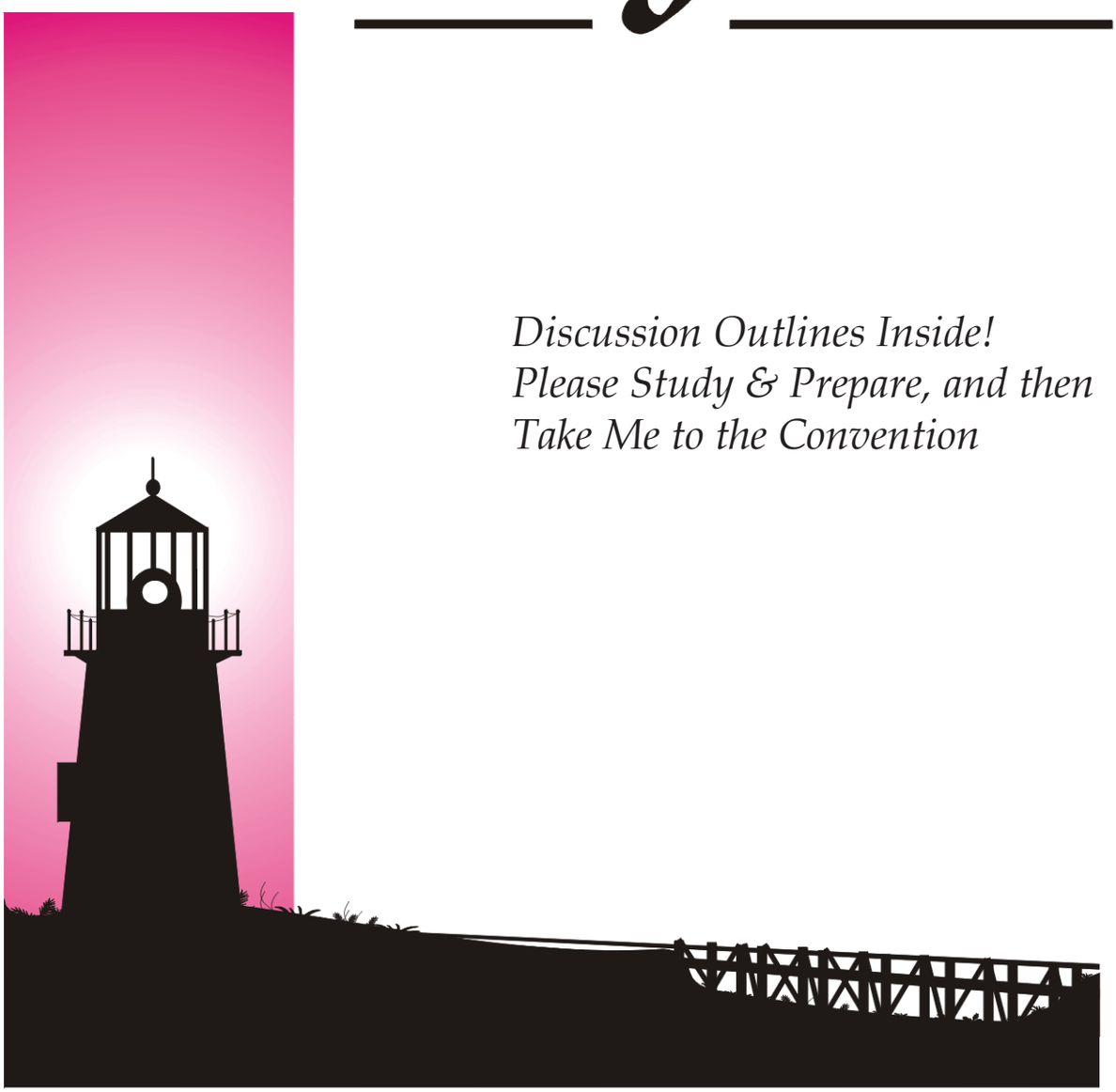

Discussion Outlines Inside!
Please Study & Prepare, and then
Take Me to the Convention

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Fighting for Truth in a Postmodern Age (1) A Warning for College and High School Students

by Ryan Barnhill

Parents and young people, we are engaged in a fierce battle. I am not talking about the battle against drunkenness, laziness, or the movies and music of this world, or even about the church's fight against false doctrine, although we war against those things. The enemy we face lurks in the colleges and universities, the news networks, radio programs, movies, and in certain churches. It dresses up in many different kinds of clothes, so you may not have noticed even if it slipped into your house through the back door.

Satan has been lying for six thousand years. The armor of the Church shows the wear and tear of heavy and toilsome battle against numerous lies throughout history: the heresy of Arminius, the deception of evolutionism, the ungodly philosophies of the Enlightenment period, and on and on. Now, one of Satan's lies is found in what is called postmodernism. As indicated by the word itself, postmodernism comes after the modern period. The modern period was largely brought on by the Enlightenment, and extended roughly to the early to mid-1900s. The modern period concerned itself with being able to come to definite conclusions. In that sense, truth was knowable, and certain conclusions could be made about reality. Then, increasingly more and more, postmodern thought crept onto the scene. While the roots of postmodernism cannot be exactly located, much of its beginning, especially in America, sprouted out of the tumultuous 1960s. During this time, and up until our day, facts and realities of this world have been questioned. What does it mean to live in a postmodern age? It means that people—specifically what people we will get to in these articles—question the ability to come to any conclusions about reality; it questions whether truth is actually knowable; it means asking many questions without having many answers. In this first article, we consider the postmodern threat in universities.

"So," you might ask, "why does this concern me as a parent or as a student in high school or college"? I am compelled to write this article because, just having finished university, I realize more than ever the threat that postmodernism poses in post-secondary education. Still, you ask, "so what"? This is why the matter is so serious: postmodernism, which attacks truth and the ability to know it, attempts to destroy our worldview which has for its very foundation the truth of God's Word.

Although postmodernism is a somewhat vague, mysterious force in the universities and colleges, we must not shy away from seeking to identify it so that we can know what we fight against. Let us identify some symptoms. If you are in college, or anywhere else for that matter, have you ever heard someone say, "I feel that…," instead of "I know that…," even on relatively clear issues? If you attend a Christian college, has your theology or religion professor questioned basic truths of Scripture, basing what he says upon the changing winds of popular opinion in the church world? If you attend a college or university, have you ever sensed the overwhelming acceptance of all kinds of ideas, behaviors, and opinions? If so - and the symptoms are certainly not limited to these—your school may be suffering from a violent bout of postmodernism.

I do not believe we live in a day yet in which professors try to stuff their agendas down students' throats. In our day of tolerance and political correctness (cousins, or perhaps daughters of postmodernism), I do not believe the classroom is a very intimidating atmosphere, even for Christians. If you talk about your Christian faith, a response you might receive from your professor is, "That is great you have such strong faith and commitment"! The problem is, the professor, whether forced by the university or not, must say the same thing to atheists, Buddhists, New Agers, homosexuals, and Muslims. Now, this may not be every student's experience. Maybe you have had a professor that has ridiculed you for your Christian faith. But by and large, in our day of tolerance, Christian students are still somewhat protected and able to voice their faith.

But the warm, inviting atmosphere and free acceptance of ideas in the college classroom is exactly what is so concerning. Tolerance born of the notion that truth is not really attainable is precisely why post-secondary education can be so dangerous. Worldviews are fanned out like a deck of cards. The "card-dealing" professor might acknowledge your truth, the Bible, but he also says, "consider all these other truths. You must not limit yourself. What, after all, is truth"? One author put it this way: "…in our daily experience we are in constant contact, at least at the level of knowledge, with other worldviews, lifestyles, and beliefs, and they tend to negate each other. They rub the corners off each other and make it seem highly unlikely that any one view is uniquely true."[1] It can be that a Reformed believer attends college, comes into contact with a great number of other belief systems and philosophies, and the result is that the waves of postmodernism gently but steadily lift his anchor from its foundation in truth. Before long, his boat is adrift at sea, facing the terrifying waves and storms of countless worldly ideas. To this student, that which he has been taught his whole life in the home, church, and school is not so unique anymore, and it is hardly believable when placed side by side with all the other worldviews. Perhaps you have seen someone close to you change drastically after college. He or she is much more critical of the truth of God's Word, and even completely unable to define or identify truth. That is a sad case, and it can be reality. This student tolerates, if not even completely accepts, these other worldviews and ways of thinking.

I do not want to leave the impression that we should not learn about other worldviews in college. Many of our teachers would recommend that students receive a rigorous liberal arts education. It indeed has benefits in that it teaches young people and young adults about the workings of God throughout history, and how He works in the world of science, philosophy, language, music, and so on. College turns out critical thinkers, better writers, and life-long learners.

Do not wait until college to start becoming serious about your spiritual life—by then, really, it is too late.

But the point still stands. Young people, are you ready for college? An important question! Parents, are your children, especially high school children, if they are college bound, ready for it? I am not asking about ACT scores, GPAs, and career counseling; rather, are they spiritually ready? Young people—and this is a question I too had to ask myself—are you using your high school years wisely so that you are firmly rooted in the truth of God's Word? The high school years are so critical. The world says these years are for partying, drunkenness, constant entertainment, and foolish behavior, but we know better. Do not wait until college to start becoming serious about your spiritual life—by then, really, it is too late. You are then like an immature plant leaving the greenhouse only to face the threatening elements. If you are blessed with a Christian high school, learn and listen closely to your teachers' wise counsel about college;

1 David Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-Lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008, 93.

grow in your understanding and appreciation for God as he reveals himself in the creation, and especially in his Word. Learn your doctrine well in catechism, and strive to live it out and love it; hold the confessions close to you; take in and be nourished by the preaching. Pray that God would make you to grow in the faith and love him more.

The Bible exhorts us often to be strong and to continue in the Word. The apostle Paul said to Timothy, a young pastor at the time, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."[2] And again, "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou has learned them."[3] Jesus highlighted the importance of truth and continuing in it in his ministry as well: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."[4] The Word of God is full of such exhortations.

Attend your post-high Bible study faithfully, seeking the godly advice of your leader and peers there.

The strong Christian, entirely by God's grace, is able to stand in the college years. A solidly rooted Christian knows where he or she stands, and never forsakes it. As you are in college, do not be afraid to ask your pastor, parents, past teachers, and friends questions about matters that bother you, especially concerning your experiences in college. Attend your post-high Bible study faithfully, seeking the godly advice of your leader and peers there. Stay connected with your Christian friends as much as possible. The years immediately following high school can be a time in which young people lose touch somewhat with their network of believers at church, so it is important to maintain that communication and fellowship, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together…"[5] God uses those means to keep you strong as you increasingly move from the shelter of home, church, and school to the worldly influences of post-secondary schooling.

Next time, Lord willing, we will consider postmodernism as it is found in emergent churches of our day, partly taking a look at Rob Bell, the focus of recent media attention. ❖

2 I Timothy 4:16
3 II Timothy 3:14
4 John 8:31, 32
5 Hebrews 10:25

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

God is Good ... All the Time (1)

by Karen Daling

At Heritage Christian School of Hudsonville, Michigan, we have been privileged on one school day in each of the past two years to study various disabilities and conditions which affect many of God's children. It is our hope that as the students move on in class levels from year to year, they will also continue to

move on with their learning about various disabilities and illnesses. I have presented the disease Multiple Sclerosis to the 8th grade class for the past two years, concentrating not only on the process of the disease, but also on the emotional toll that MS and other serious illnesses can have on individuals and families. It is my hope that what I share about my experience and knowledge of MS will help the students in a small way as they mature emotionally as brothers and sisters in Christ. What follows is the Discovery Center of Heritage's introduction and then my presentation in words, written in first person as if I were speaking here on paper:

Today we will be learning about serious illnesses or chronic conditions that can affect you or your family. It is difficult to deal with these conditions, especially if your friends don't understand. Most kids are not intentionally being mean, they just don't understand because of a lack of knowledge. They haven't had the opportunity to learn about conditions that are very much part of everyday life for some people. These conditions are trials in the life of Christians. Some day God's purpose for these trials will be made clear to us, but until then we must take comfort and joy in knowing that God is in control. Understanding the trials of our fellow Christians will help us serve Christ in the way of serving his children here on earth.

Understanding the trials of our fellow Christians will help us serve Christ in the way of serving his children here on earth.

I will be explaining to you the disease Multiple Sclerosis, speaking first about the actual disease itself, including its symptoms, diagnosis process, and treatments. Then I will speak about my experience with the disease, both physically and mentally. Finally I will talk with you about how YOU can respond to someone with a serious illness and also to family members of someone who is struggling with a serious illness.

Disease Course

The most concise definition I can find for Multiple Sclerosis is as follows: MS is a chronic disease of the central nervous system, likely an auto immune disease. Breaking this definition down into pieces, it can be explained rather easily. The fact that it is a chronic disease means that there is (at this time) no cure for MS. Once people are diagnosed, they have the disease for the rest of their lives. MS is found in the central nervous system, which means it is in the brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves. The fact that MS is an auto immune disease means that a person's own body is the actual attacker, seeing its central nervous system as a disease that needs to be gotten rid of.

In the central nervous system of a person who has MS, the nerves are affected. Nerves of a healthy person are covered with a fatty tissue called myelin. This myelin coats and protects the nerves like a blanket, allowing the electrical impulses sent from the central nervous system to a person's body parts to travel freely and with lightning speed. But MS damages this coating, the myelin is eaten away, and the electrical impulses are interrupted and at times even disconnected completely. This damage to the myelin is called demyelination, a fancy word which describes the formation of scar tissue. Areas of scar tissue on the nerves of a person with MS are called lesions or plaques if the body is unable to "heal" the damage that has occurred. The scars formed are the source of the word sclerosis, which originates from a Latin term meaning scars. Persons suffering from MS will have many such scars in their central nervous system, and will at times go through periods (called relapses, flares or exacerbations) where they develop new lesions. They will also suffer from false flares (times when it *seems* a relapse is occurring, but it is actually a false alarm).

Research is being done on MS continually. Researchers have been able to define four different kinds of MS. The first kind, Relapsing Remitting MS, is the most common type. At any given time 55% of people who have MS have RRMS. A person suffering with RRMS has definite relapses, but then also periods of remission where their symptoms go away mostly or even completely. Secondary Progressive MS is the 2nd variety, affecting 30% of those who have MS at any given time. This type of MS is a progression from RRMS, characterized by the end of the remission periods that a person with RRMS had previously had and by the steady worsening of symptoms. At any given time, 10% of MS sufferers have Primary Progressive MS, a type of the disease where the person from diagnosis time on progresses steadily, and there are no relapses. The least common category of MS is Progressive Relapsing MS, suffered by 5% of those diagnosed at any given time. This type of MS is the most serious; the disease progresses steadily, and in addition to that, there is the development of many relapses and new symptoms.

Millions of dollars are spent researching MS and

other serious diseases, yet numerous questions remain. One such area of MS research that still has unanswered questions is the cause of the disease. Research has narrowed down the cause of MS to an interaction of four factors: infectious diseases, the immune system, genetics, and the environment. All of these work together in some way, creating a "perfect storm" for a person to develop MS. Some viruses in the human body "look" like a nerve cell. The immune system develops T-cells to fight this initial infection. Those T-cells, by the amazing design of God, stay in a person's body in order to fight off the virus, should it return. However, for some reason, they later "see" a nerve cell, and so fight what they mistake to be a virus. This is where a person's immune system becomes a factor, attacking the outer sheath of the nerves, the myelin. Then besides this, the genetic factor comes into play—everyone has a "chance" of developing MS, and there are many different statistics regarding genetics. One such collection of data suggests that for an average person, there is a one in one-thousand chance of developing MS. If, however, a parent or sibling has MS, that chance becomes one in one-hundred. The last factor in the cause of this disease is environmental. The farther south or north of the equator a person lives, the greater their risk of developing MS. Deficiencies of Vitamin D, produced by exposure to sunlight, are startlingly common in MS sufferers, and therefore may be involved in MS. All four of these factors work together, and studies of those who have MS are always being done to determine more about how this actually happens.

The symptoms of MS are extremely vague and can easily be explained away by any number of things, making the diagnosis process exceptionally frustrating. Symptoms come and go, especially in the early stages of the disease. Some common symptoms are fatigue, depression, numbness, tingling, pain, dizziness, vision problems, heaviness in arms or legs – all things that occur to any given person at any given time. To further complicate diagnosis, the number of different symptoms from which a person with MS can suffer is greater than fifty, and most are invisible symptoms (often even thought to be a figment of a person's imagination). In order to be diagnosed then, a person first has to find a doctor who will listen to him or her, given the vague symptoms that come and go randomly. This doctor, a neurologist, will do many exams and blood work and then will order an MRI to look for areas in the nervous system that are trying to heal. If these test results look suspicious for MS, a spinal tap will be ordered which looks for oligoclonal bands (antibodies in the fluid) and protein in the spinal fluid (a by-product of destroyed myelin). Finally a vision test called Visual Evoked Potential Testing is done to measure the brain's response to changing images, in effect determining if there is optic nerve involvement.

Treatment for a person diagnosed with MS varies. Immediately in a flare, the person will often have three to five days of intravenous steroids administered to calm the inflamed nerves, hopefully stopping any damage that is occurring. A newly diagnosed person must choose from several medications called Disease Modifying Drugs (DMDs) to reduce the frequency of new lesions. Those diagnosed are encouraged to begin strength training and aerobic training to prevent muscle spasticity and osteoporosis (a side effect of the steroids). All people with MS are encouraged to take many vitamin supplements, especially vitamins D and B^{12}. Life style changes are urged, changes such as avoiding extreme heat, tiredness, stress, and busyness as all these things often make MS symptoms worse.

We have a cute, old couple that lives next door to us. When I told them I had MS, the wife nearly collapsed. She instantly envisioned me in a wheel chair shortly and drooling soon after that (exaggerated imagination, but valid in her mind!). Thankfully, the prognosis for a person diagnosed with MS is no longer as grim as it was fifteen or more years ago. DMDs have greatly improved the statistics, have slowed the progression of the disease and have reduced relapses dramatically. Except in severe cases of MS, there is little effect anymore on a person's life span. All this has been made possible by the research that has been and continues to be done for MS.

This is MS in a nut shell, drastically simplified. I have only scratched the surface of the vast amount of information on this disease. (*To be continued.*) ❖

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

A Biblical Perspective on Reading

by Ben Rau

This new rubric, entitled "Hot Topics," is a new one for the Beacon Lights*. Writers are provided a prompt which is drawn from today's issues. This rubric is also designed to encourage discussion about such issues among* Beacon Lights *readers. We encourage you to email us your thoughts regarding these issues—we would like to hear your thoughts and feedback. Perhaps enough feedback on one issue, or an especially interesting response, might require further treatment in the magazine. Email Joe Holstege (joeholstege@yahoo.com) or Ryan Barnhill (ryjbarnhill@gmail.com) if something sparks your interest or you want to continue the discussion.*

The Prompt

Is it OK for a Christian to read books which include violence, inappropriate language, sex, etc.? Why do Christians tend to justify illicit content in books as opposed to movies? Specific authors for such books would include John Grisham and Jeff Shaara. Both of these authors include language, sex, violence, etc. in their books, yet they are read in the PRC. Can we justify reading these books? Can they be beneficial and edifying for the Christian?

I. Introduction

Young people, what kind of place does the activity of reading have in your life? Do you enjoy reading? Do you set aside time to read every day? Surely you read the Bible, but what other types of reading do you enjoy? Some of you might be so busy that you can't really sit down to read anything more than a few texts from friends during the day and your Facebook wall posts at night. Others might especially enjoy a certain subject at school and engage very thoroughly when reading that material. Whatever it is that you read during the day, I think that we can all agree that reading is an important and beneficial means of communication that we all couldn't live without.

Besides being an important skill to have if only to succeed now in school and Lord willing, in your future professional or home life, reading is a very important activity for the spiritual growth and development of the children of God. The fact that you are reading this magazine reveals that you are interested in reading in order to develop spiritually (hopefully because you desire it, or even just because your parents wisely require it). Look at the vast amount of Reformed literature we have been blessed with, even if you consider only what our ministers and church members have produced. The purpose for the existence of all of this good reading material is the growth and stimulation of your and my faith (which I will remind you is in part a "certain knowledge" of the truths of God's Word). God is glorified not only when we read good Reformed literature but I dare say even more so when we meditate on these truths and their proper application.

…reading is a very important activity for the spiritual growth and development of the children of God.

Reading was important for the saints of the Old and New Testament; we see witness of this in Scripture. Paul, while imprisoned, requested of his young fellow-laborer Timothy that he bring with him books and parchments, in order that Paul can continue to dwell on the words which had been written during his time of imprisonment (II Timothy 4:13). In Joshua 1:8, the Lord commands Joshua to read and meditate on God's law, in order that he can capably lead and direct the people. King David, in the Psalms, speaks of writing down and meditating on the great works of God that had been performed for his people. These few examples begin to illustrate how reading was used by God's people in both the Old and New Testaments. I hope you will agree with me, dear reader, when I conclude that reading is an important part of the "renewing of (y)our mind" that Paul mandates in Romans 12:2.

II. the Issue

How are we, the children of God, then to view the

work of authors such as John Grisham, Jeff Shaara, James Patterson, or Stephanie Meyer, author of the ever-popular Twilight series? These authors all have several things in common: they are all extremely popular, very widely read, and frequently appear on the best-seller lists that are produced. Their novels and romances have appeal to a wide audience, though especially to the teenage generations. The themes of the work of these and other similar authors (you may take your pick, as so many of them exist) vary widely: some deal mainly with "love" and romance, some with life and growing up, others with crime and law, and still others with war and conflict. In what light are the people of God to view works such as these? Can we read these books with a clear conscience, and ought we to do so? Should we encourage our friends to read these books, or should they have no place in our lives? It is exactly these questions that I attend to address in this article (or series of articles). It is my hope that you will read closely what I have written and offer your opinion or response as well.

III. The Viewpoints

In response to this issue, there are several different viewpoints that could be taken. Acknowledging the risk of over-simplifying these viewpoints, I have condensed all different viewpoints into three broad schools of thought, as I outline below. As you read, consider which of these viewpoints you believe is not only the most biblical, but also the most reasonable to you:

The first school of thought would say that Christians ought not to read any fiction that speaks of sex, violence, lying, or taking God's name in vain with profanity. If one from this school of thought was reading a book and ran into content such as this, they would stop reading that book and or author immediately. This group would likely argue, among other things, that since these sins are specifically forbidden in God's word, we ought not take pleasure in them or bring them to mind unnecessarily through our reading.

Others might take the stance that we may read books that contain material as listed above, but that the importance lies in our perspective: when we read, we must see the sins that are recounted or committed within the light of Scripture and evaluate them as God commands us to. Individuals in this group would likely contend that it would be harmful for children of God to read these materials unless they keep God's law in mind while they do so and renew their conviction to not fall into or reproduce these same sins.

A final group, representing the opposite extreme of the first group, would argue that as discerning Christians we have the ability to read whatever we choose. This group would likely point to the reasoning of Christian liberty as permitting this practice (interested readers can study I Corinthians 8:1–9:6 and Romans 14:9ff for a better understanding of Christian liberty). They would argue that a Christian who is strong in his faith should not have any negative spiritual effects from reading material that contains "objectionable" material.

IV. Scripture's Teaching

Understanding these basic schools of thought, I would like to outline further my convictions on this issue and the sources of these convictions in Scripture and our Reformed confessions. I do not claim to have all the answers on this topic, and as this is the case I would like to encourage responses and dialog on this issue from any engaged readers. To set the stage for what I intend to show, however, I will take a somewhat unconventional approach. I think it is meaningful for us to first look at a select few of the truths of Scripture that apply to our Christian walk. With this backdrop in our mind, we can then more easily understand the issue at hand.

Loving God means that in all that we do we desire to glorify him and do what is most pleasing in his sight.

It has always intrigued me that when a scribe questioned Jesus in Mark 12 on the first and great commandment of the law, Jesus replied in the most simple of terms that we are to love the Lord our God with all our soul, mind, and strength. This all-encompassing calling is our only command; all the rest of the commandments, including the second great commandment to love the neighbor, flow out of this first commandment. Loving God means that in all that we do we desire to glorify him and do what is most pleasing in his sight. It means bearing up our cross and putting aside all "weight," or distraction, which would slow us down in the "running of the race" which represents our walk of faith here in this world (Hebrews 12:1).

Further, by the power of God's grace he has taken those who were dead in sin and made them alive in Christ Jesus; this is the "quickening" referred to in Ephesians 2:1-10. As verses 3, 4, and 5 of this chapter teach, we have been delivered from the power of sin and made holy. Galatians 5:16-ff contrasts the "lusts of the flesh"

in which we walked over against the "fruits of the Spirit" in which we now abide; what a glorious deliverance has been given to us. With this knowledge of what we have been delivered from, and knowing the terrible anger of God against sin (Lord's Day 4 of the Heidelberg Catechism), we ought to shudder at the very thought of sin. God's hatred of sin is the driving force behind our hatred of sin; David says in Psalm 139:21-22 that he hates the sinful enemies of God (and by reason, their deeds as well) with a "perfect hatred." Sin offers no delight to the true child of God, and as I John 2:15-16 explains, the lusts of the world are not compatible with one who loves his Father in heaven.

Understanding what has just been explained, I believe that the chief criteria, or measurement, that we ought to use when judging what is proper reading material is the approach that a book's author takes when discussing sin. What exactly do I mean by that? One can tell a vast amount about the attitude and purpose of a writer in the way that one portrays and speaks of sin in his or her books. If the writer plays sin up as exciting and harmless, then this author has a fatally skewed perspective on the Christian life. If sin is portrayed as shameful and despicable, as it ought to be, then such a work helps us to better see the glory of God.

This is an applicable point to discuss an argument that is often used when discussing literature and what content God's people ought to enjoy. Some would say that we ought not put aside violent or offensive content in books because even the Bible contains accounts of such undesirable topics as rape, incest, adultery, extreme violence, and cursing. This argument does not have a basis, however, because the difference between the Bible and other books is the way in which these topics are presented and the reason for their inclusion.

In secular books, often the underlying reason that sin is shown is that this sin can be glorified: in the Bible, the primary reason is radically different. There, the providence of God in controlling even the sinful actions of men for his purpose is most clearly shown, in order that his people might not doubt that he truly is the ruler and creator of all things, and that all events and actions of men serve his purpose (see Lord's Day 9 and 10 of the Heidelberg Catechism, also Article 13 of the Belgic Confession). One needs to look no further than the lamentable fall of David into adultery with Bathsheba, which God used to continue the royal line to Christ via the glorious type of Solomon. The argument which states that we can't ban any content glorifying sin because of the Bible has no merit.

Others might claim, as was mentioned in the different viewpoints on this issue, that the concept of Christian liberty can be applied here. One who holds to this view would claim that those strong in faith can partake of these types of books without any detriment to their relationship with God, so long as they do not openly attempt to offend others within the body of Christ who may be "weaker" and cannot do such things because it offends their conscience (look back to the Viewpoints section of this article for a few excellent texts on this concept). Those who hold this are correct in that the concept of Christian liberty applies to areas where the Bible does not speak directly to a topic; however, there are many biblical principles that apply to sin and our hatred of it, as illustrated above. In light of this, we ought to avoid any works that emphasize the supposed "pleasures" of sin and attempt to hide God's wrath against it.

Finally, and on a very practical level, there is the fact that all men will be held accountable in the day of judgment for the use of their time, just as everything else that God has given to man. We ought to desire then to spend all of our time serving him, and not wasting our days with the vanities of this world (Solomon's laments of this life's vanity in Ecclesiastes come immediately to mind). Now, do not take my stance to mean I believe any recreation and activity of this earthly life should not be allowed. It is very possible to find books written by worldly authors that are not at all offensive and that can be enjoyed by the people of God. We are instructed in Scripture that we are to live in the world (though not of it), and this means that we are able to enjoy material, activities and other things produced by the world. However, we ought to always consider whether or not we could be spending our time reading something more profitable than the fluff that the world often puts in front of us.

V. Conclusion

My intention in this article and in the stance that I believe to be correct on this issue is not to discourage you to read as a young person. As I hope I have demonstrated, I believe reading to be not only a worthwhile but really a blessed activity. Rather, I want to help condition you to use your discernment when you read. Scripture warns us of this; remember the ominous warning of Romans 14:23, which states that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." The passage doesn't say that if it isn't of faith it probably isn't a good idea, or that if it isn't of faith we shouldn't do it too often. No, it goes much farther than that. If we can't do an activity out of our faith and for the strengthening of our faith, *it is sin*. How serious that is!

Further, as we have discussed already, our goal ought to be the glory of his name since we truly *love our covenant God* and desire to serve him more faithfully. That is the sole purpose for which we have been created (Revelation 4:11). Can we grow closer to God when we read material that is partially or completely objectionable? Do we glorify the name of our eternal father when we talk of these books with our friends and family? Do we present a godly witness to others when we read these books in the break room at work or on the college campus?

To help make this difficult topic a little more tangible and to help you in your personal struggle with this (for it ***is*** a struggle for us), I propose that you consider a book that you either would like to read or have read and enjoyed. Do the following as a quick test: could you recommend this book to a Christian friend? Would you be comfortable handing that book to your parents and saying "Read through this carefully: you will like it!" (I can assure you, to my shame, that many books that I have read in the past wouldn't pass *that* test!) Could you convince an elder at your church that this is a worthwhile book? Think about the plot line of the book and the purpose that the author had in writing it, if it is apparent. What is the book promoting?

Young people, I encourage you to think about these things. It may not be easy to give up a favorite author or series. This issue might not even seem like such a big deal to you that it is worth considering. Remember, however, that we have been "made free from sin" and have become "the servants of righteousness" by God's glorious work within us (Romans 6:17-18). Our awesome calling is to serve his name with joy! ❖

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

Your Thoughts

A Different Point of View

by David Noorman

Another society meeting. Another singspiration. Another mass meeting. When these events are announced in the bulletins, our eyes may subconsciously pass over them. After all, they are happening all the time. These periodic get-togethers may even annoy us. Do we *really* need another one of these?

It can often be a difficult task to recognize the many blessings that our churches have to offer. We sometimes take for granted the fact that we will hear the pure preaching of the Word of God on Sunday. We may not even realize how special it is to be surrounded by like-minded believers, especially other young people. We have been so blessed for so long, that we often fail to take advantage of the wonderful blessings God has given us.

In contrast, saints around the world are searching for a church with pure preaching of the gospel. Instead of mindlessly preparing for another Sunday evening service, some of our brothers and sisters in Christ are making preparations to move their family across the country, or even the continent, in order to become a part of a true church and live among God's people.

The Faith Young Adults' Society recently read and discussed various letters from Professor Engelsma's book, *Bound to Join*.

The Faith Young Adults' Society recently read and discussed various letters from Professor Engelsma's book, *Bound to Join*. Using this book as the starting point for our discussions proved to raise many interesting questions and insights. Because the letters in the book are clearly addressed to saints who reside in areas that do not

have a faithful church nearby, our society had to learn to see these important issues from a different perspective.

An important foundation for our discussions was identifying the marks of a true church as detailed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. These marks are the pure preaching of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the proper practice of church discipline. Thankfully we recognized these marks in our own church, but we also saw—through the testimony of the letters in Professor Engelsma's book—that this is not always the case. It is not uncommon for a child of God to be forced into difficult decisions and great sacrifices for the sake of becoming a member of a true church.

These discussions gave us the unique opportunity to take a different point of view; we took a careful look at our own churches and our individual lives. We recognized the magnitude of the sacrifices made by saints around the world to join the fellowship of God's people. Do we share the same desire to be active participants in our church life? Or, do we take for granted the many opportunities that come with living among God's people and even neglect them?

Those examples of great sacrifice should encourage us to respond by living a life as a shining light, a light so bright that it can only point to our Savior Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:16). We must take to heart the calling to "speak the truth in love," both in the church and outside of it (Eph. 4:15). We are so blessed! Let's take advantage of the many opportunities available to be active members of the church! ❖

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Church Family

Our Children's Education: A Covenant Necessity (3)

by Aaron Lim

III. The Evils of Public Education

If there is anything more responsible for the spiritual decline in our midst, I rank the public education of our covenant children as chief. The public education system has drowned our children in its seas of evil, and choked them with every sin imaginable. Untold damage has been inflicted upon them since the day they started school. The cause of God's covenant suffers tremendously as a result of the great evils in the system.

Let it not be mistaken that there is anything evil about education per se. Education is the necessary means of developing a covenant child into a spiritually mature and socially responsible adult. Indeed Scripture insists on educating our covenant seed. Train up a child in the way he should go, says the Preacher, and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Prov. 22:6).

As much as the public education in Singapore has reaped many benefits for our children, desperate evils exist within the system. So subtle yet powerful are these evils that they threaten to extinguish the flame of religion in our covenant seed. These evils are the deadly instruments of the devil, the roaring lion that seeks to devour our covenant young. They deserve not only to be exposed, but also due examination and condemnation in the light of holy Scripture. God's Word must be our guiding light in the sphere of a sinful public education our children live in today.

Public education is essentially wrong on four grounds. Scripture provides abundant evidence against these evils and has many things to say about them.

1. The Educator
2. The Content of Public Education
3. The Public School Environment
4. The Goal of Public Education

1. The Educator

The moment we enroll our covenant children into public schools, we are entrusting their education to the government. We entrust their upbringing to the government. We allow the government to shape their minds. We allow the government to construe their perspectives in life and their worldview. We allow the government, ultimately, to construct their characters.

God's Word is extremely clear that this is wrong. The education of covenant seed belongs solely to the responsibility of covenant parents. A clear teaching of this is found in Deut. 6:4-9:

> Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

Thus we see that the education of covenant children is the full-time responsibility of parents. This responsibility is exclusively theirs. And the one goal of such an education is the love of Jehovah.

> …the one goal of such an education is the love of Jehovah.

Rev. Ronald Hanko is incisive on this point:

> This calling does NOT belong to the civil government, but to parents. Search the Scriptures and you will not find even one passage that suggests that the civil government has any calling to instruct the children (Christian Education, http://www.cprf.co.uk/pamphlets/christianeducation.htm).

Commenting on the duty of covenant parents in child rearing, Prof. David Engelsma writes:

> On the one hand, this instruction of their children is one of the outstanding covenant responsibilities of parents, that is, one aspect of their calling as God's friends-servants to love, serve, and glorify God. On the other hand, it is the means by which God brings the reborn covenant child to spiritual maturity so that he or she becomes a developed man or woman of God, capable of a life of good works (pg. 6, *Reformed Education*).

A godless educator is essentially an ungodly one. He denies that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). In all of his instruction he teaches that knowledge begins with and ends with man. God is not in all his thoughts (Ps. 10:4). To such a person we certainly may not entrust the upbringing of our children.

2. The Content of Public Education

I have often wondered in the years of my public schooling: Where is God? Where is God in the history of Singapore? Where is God in the biology of the human anatomy? Where is God in the logical laws of mathematics?

It is precisely this point that makes public education so evil. God is not in it. The fear of Jehovah is not in public education. Not only is he absent, he is disregarded, despised and spat upon. Public education assumes that God does not exist. It assumes the form of the fool who says, There is no God (Ps. 14:1). Consequently, all public education gears towards a secular form. Man decides the content of our children's education, not God.

Prof. Engelsma's forceful characterization of the public schools is apt:

> The exclusion of Scripture makes the public education of today not merely non-Christian but antichristian. This is the reason why God-fearing parents find the public schools unacceptable…To banish the Word is to banish God, and to banish God is to invite the devil (pg. 21, *Reformed Education*).

One clearly sees the devil behind such an education. Evolution is the accepted explanation for the origin of this world because most scientists agree on the theory. Moral standards fluctuate according to the times. Fornication and abortion are merely social evils that can be treated with sex education. Homosexuality must be accepted as an alternative lifestyle in the modern world.

Rev. Carl Haak echoes the same sentiments:

> To exclude the Bible from any subject is not only to teach the lie about that subject; it is to teach weakness, to teach knowledge that has no power or meaning to it. This is exactly the weakness of the public schools. They go about leaving God out and the result is that the instruction is weak, empty, and vain. Only when God's word is seen in every subject is true knowledge attained (pg 11, *Perspectives in Covenant Education*, 1983).

A key, but spiritually fatal principle running through secular education is the principle of relativism. This principle has done grave damage to the minds of our covenant young. According to this principle, there is no such thing as absolute truth since the world is constantly changing. As cultures and social perceptions undergo change, so must our children be willing to adapt their thinking according to the times. History leaves God out and can be interpreted in boundless ways so long as there is a rational line of reasoning. Science and technology can be advanced in countless ways as long as a pragmatic justification is given. Questions on morality have no certainty because everything in this world is relative to the individual's moral judgment. This kind of education reminds us of the time of the Judges, where every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6).

This kind of education reminds us of the time of the Judges, where every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

What is so dreadful about the principle of relativism is that it denies absolute truth, and, consequently, an absolute God. Relativism forces our covenant children to make subjective judgments. Our knowledge of God is relative to the society we live in. The Scriptures are relative to the individual's interpretation. Sin and evil are relative to one's moral judgment.

Even if public education were to admit that God exists, he would be thrust into the realm of subjective religious knowledge that has little or no meaning. The idea of God as taught in the public schools expresses itself in the various religious groups of Singapore. One is taught the main teachings of each religion but there is no need to subscribe to them. To the public educator (the government in this case), religion is merely medicine for the masses. Knowledge of religions only serves to protect the religious harmony of the land. There is little substance and use for religious knowledge in a pragmatic world.

No education, however, can be purely secular without running the risk of developing immoral children. Even the government realizes the need for a moral education in the public schools. There is a need for civility and good order in society. This is especially true in a multi-religious and multi-racial society like Singapore. The slightest upheaval in social harmony can have devastating consequences on the nation. Moral education must therefore serve to protect this social fabric.

A moral education also serves to instill moral values in our children. Family values are emphasized because the family is the building block of society. Values of patriotism are instilled in young minds to teach them loyalty to the country. Racial and religious harmony are strongly promoted by the schools to steer the students to be sensitive and tolerant citizens in a land of great diversity. One is educated to be a responsible and productive citizen.

Should we as covenant parents not then be satisfied with this moral education that our public schools offer? After all, such an education will train our children to be morally upright and law-abiding citizens. They will learn how to live righteously in the midst of this world, obey the government and live peacefully with their neighbors of differing races and religions. Are we too extreme in insisting on a covenant education since the public education takes care of our children's moral upbringing?

The answer is an emphatic NO. Scripture insists that covenant children be raised in the fear of Jehovah alone. They must learn Jehovah's standards of holiness, not man's moral standards. They learn to live righteously in this world because of the righteousness that Christ imputes to them. They learn to live in peace and harmony with their neighbor in this world because Christ has given to them the peace that passes understanding through his cross. Prof. Cornelius Van Til wisely writes that the Christian must "maintain without any apology and without any concession that it is Scripture, and Scripture alone, in the light of which all moral questions must be answered" (pg 71, *The Defense of the Faith*, P&R Publishing Company, 1955).

Public education negates, in fact, despises the truth that God must be the center of all education, for only his truth is sure. Knowledge apart from God is the devil's lie.

Prof. Engelsma writes:

> Knowledge apart from knowing God, all activity not motivated by the love of God and directed to Him, and life itself lived apart from God and away from God are vain (pg 86, *Reformed Education*).

Thus the very essence of public education is rebellion against God. ❖

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Watching Daily At My Gates

by Chester Hunter

June 7 Read Psalm 108

One of the blessings of living a Christian life is the opportunity to have devotions not just every day but throughout the day. We should start out the day in praise to our God. We continue through the day with that same theme, and then we can end the day in thanksgiving for all that he has done for us. This is what we see in this Psalm. We praise the God of mercy and truth. When we end the day, we look back on all that he has done for us, and give to him thanks for that help. We truly may say that our help is in Jehovah's name. Man's help is nothing unless it is based in Jehovah's help. Let us call upon God's name and let us do that throughout the day. Sing Psalter 298.

June 8 Read Psalm 109:1-20

This part of this Psalm of David is imprecatory in nature. As you read through it, did you note to whom David directed these remarks and that they were prophetic in nature? It seems obvious that David penned these words concerning the treachery of Ahithophel his advisor after Ahithophel had gone over to Absalom's side during his son's rebellion. It is also evident that these words point ahead to the treachery of Judas Iscariot. David had his enemies; Christ had his enemies; and we have ours. All of them stem from the hatred of Satan against God. Let us be comforted by the words of Psalm 2: "He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh." Sing Psalter 300:1-10.

June 9 Read Psalm 109:21-31

After David brings his needs concerning his enemies to God in prayer, he prays for help from the only helper he can trust. This must be our reaction in times of trouble. Even well meaning friends cannot provide the help and assurance of our Friend of friends. God knows our needs and cares for those needs because he causes those needs. He causes them for his glory and our good. Because he is the sovereign God, he can do all things. And not only can he do all things, he will do all things for his people. Let us, like David, praise God in both private and public. Sing Psalter 301.

June 10 Read Psalm 110

This Messianic Psalm speaks of two of the three offices held by Christ. He first of all is a king who defeats all his enemies. These enemies are also the enemies of his church. Therefore, he is a king whom we must revere. We must be willing subjects to our great king and worship him in the beauty of holiness. Secondly, he is a high priest like none other as he is after the order of Melchizedek. This is an eternal priesthood. As priest he offered himself on the altar of the cross for our salvation. Let us be thankful for this work of our Savior, and let us show that thankfulness with lives of true holiness. Sing Psalter 302.

June 11 Read Psalm 111

Do we ever stop and think of the multitude of God's works? When we do this, we must not just think of his many works in nature, but we must also think about his works in which he extends to us some of his attributes. We see truth and uprightness mentioned in this Psalm. We also see the work of his covenant that he has established with us. In considering his covenant we must see that it is not an agreement between God and us, but rather it is a bond of friendship and fellowship with him. Let us consider all his works and give unto him the honor due to his most glorious name. Sing Psalter 304.

June 12 Read Psalm 112

This Psalm, like the one before it, has an alphabetical scheme in the Hebrew. After starting with the word Hallelujah—translated Praise ye the LORD in the KJV, each of the first eight verses have two phrases that begin with successive letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The last two verses have three such phrases. While the previous Psalm dealt with God and his works, this Psalm deals with the God-fearing man and his works. These, of course, are not works of merit, but rather works of thankfulness. Notice the number of times giving to the poor is mentioned. Let us walk in these works as we praise our covenant God. Sing Psalter 305.

June 13 Read Psalm 113

This Psalm begins a section of the Psalms known as the Hallel or praise Psalms. These were used during the

feasts, especially that of Passover or Tabernacles. Jesus and his disciples sang one or more of these Psalms before they left the upper room on the night in which Jesus was betrayed. In this Psalm we see the majesty of God is to be praised. Even in that majesty God has come to this earth and helped those who were not helped by any man. The poor are lifted out of their poor estate, and the barren woman is given children. The God who has done this has also given to poor sinners a great salvation. Hallelujah! Sing Psalter 306.

June 14 Read Psalm 114

Here in this Psalm of praise, we see several noteworthy thoughts. First of all, Israel is called to praise God who delivered them from the bondage of Egypt into the Promised Land. This is a picture of our deliverance from the bondage of sin and deliverance into the Promised Land of heaven. Secondly, we see that all creation is full of joy for this salvation and waits until the final culmination of deliverance that which brings creation into the new heavens and new earth. Finally we are called to experience the joy of our salvation in our life on this earth and to look ahead to that final joy in the sanctuary of the most high God. Sing Psalter 307.

June 15 Read Psalm 115:1-8

How many people in today's world or even today's church practice the words of verse 1? It is human nature to say I or me and praise our works and ourselves instead of God and his works. Notice the result of such an attitude. Those around us wonder who our God is, and that brings despite to God's holy name. When we praise our works, we are no better than those who have God's of this world's materials. Let us trust our God who made heaven and earth. Sing Psalter 308:1-3.

June 16 Read Psalm 115:9-18

There are two works of great meaning for the child of God in this Psalm. First of all, we see the word trust. We need to stop often and ponder the meaning of this word. Once we have not only its denotation but also its connotation fixed in our minds, we must contemplate its meaning in our lives. Do we put our complete trust in our covenant God in all things? Do we trust him more than others or ourselves? Secondly, we see the word bless. When we are blessed by God, we can feel a quiet calmness come over our souls. This blessing may not be physical, in fact, sometimes it is better if it is not. But we need the spiritual blessing from him continually washing over our souls. May this be our condition as we live our lives on this earth. Sing Psalter 309.

June 17 Read Psalm 116:1-9

There is great hope and comfort in this Psalm. The author starts out with the simple declaration that he loves Jehovah. He gives the reason that Jehovah hears him. Is this not what we want from an earthly friend? We want one who will listen to us and our troubles. God is such a friend; he is much more. He is our covenant friend. No matter what afflicts us on this earth, we can have the confidence that we will be with him in heaven as stated in the last verse. We can rest because God has helped and will help us in any situation. To him be all praise and glory! Sing Psalter 310.

June 18 Read Psalm 116:10-19

Sometimes we speak too quickly even when we may be stating that which is true. Even then God will care for us and give to us many benefits. For those benefits we must bring works of thankfulness. We pay all of our vows to God. We frequent his house with the rest of the body of Christ. In the middle of this section is the beautiful truth that the death of the saints is precious. Those saints have been redeemed and are now being brought home to Jehovah. Death is that passageway to life and glory from them. When all is said and done there is but one word left, Hallelujah! Sing Psalter 311.

June 19 Read Psalm 117

This shortest of Psalms has a multitude of truths. First of all, all nations are called to praise our God. If all nations are called to praise him, then it must be the church's duty to publish his name in every place. Secondly, the reasons for his praise are because of several of his attributes. We see especially named his mercy and his truth. We see that his mercy is great. That greatness is more than we can comprehend. Then we see that his truth endureth forever. God will not change in his love for his people. Let us praise him while we have breath. Sing Psalter 314.

June 20 Read Psalm 118:1-9

First of all, we see the refrain "for his mercy endureth forever." Do we include these words in our prayers often? Do we stop each day to consider that God's mercies are "new every morning"? Our experiences, like those of Israel, should cause us to make this a daily confession. Secondly, we see the Psalmist confessing his trust in Jehovah. Is this part of our daily confession and experience? How often must we be forced to say that our trust is in the Lord? How often do we put our trust in ourselves only to find that the object of our trust is weak and sinful? What more do we need than Jehovah who is on our

side every minute of every day? Let us trust in Jehovah whose mercies endure forever. Sing Psalter 317.

June 21 Read Psalm 118:10-18

There are two things of note in this section of the Psalm. First of all, the Psalmist recounts afflictions that he endured in his life. There is no title to tell us but this sure seems like a Psalm of David. David constantly reported that Jehovah was his helper. Even in troublous times David would confess that God was his strength, song, and salvation. Is this our experience and confession? Secondly, the Psalmist knows that these afflictions do come from God. Do we? Will we continue to declare Jehovah's works no matter what our state in life? We must bow daily to our God in prayer, confess his name, and look to him to bring to us salvation and comfort. Sing Psalter 318.

June 22 Read Psalm 118:19-29

There are several short verses in here fraught with meaning for the child of God. Which is your favorite? Let's look at verse 23 once more. I see two meanings that are comforting to the child of God. The first is that God in both the states of the mediator has ordained every act of Christ so that we may have salvation. Each step on the way to the cross and to final glory is significant for us. But we can also see that all things in our lives are Jehovah's doing as well. There are no accidents or "lucky breaks." All things are ordained by our sovereign God and are for our good. What a joy and comfort this is! Sing Psalter 320.

June 23 Read Psalm 119:1-8

The word blessed can also be translated happy. So in verses 1 and 2 we see that the happy ones are those who walk in the way of the law of God. This long Psalm lays out for us the way that we should walk either young or old. The Psalmist realizes that he cannot walk in God's law on his own. We see this in verse 5. We, too, must depend on the Holy Spirit to guide us in the proper way. May we make that part of our daily prayers. When we walk in God's law we will praise him with our whole being and we will have the assurance that he will not forsake us. Sing Psalter 321.

June 24 Read Psalm 119:9-16

This section of Psalm 119 is full of gems. Young people must start out with verse 9. There is only one right answer to the question posed at the beginning of that verse. It is not multiple choice or true/false. Verse 11 continues to give wise counsel for God's people of all ages. Do you want to know why you must memorize God's word? It is not so that you can win trivia games, but so that you may flee from sin. And then in verse 15 we see the object of our devotions. They are not so that we can exalt ourselves, but so that God can teach us the right way. Ponder these things, people of God, and seek his Word always. Sing Psalter 322.

June 25 Read Psalm 119:17-24

It should be our testimony that we are strangers on the earth. This Psalmist testified to that truth. The writer of Hebrews 11 also states that as he describes Abraham's family's life. Do we live that way? Or do we join with the world in all sorts of activities and events, and no one knows that we are different? If we live the life of a stranger and pilgrim, we will need God's law every day. We will need that law to keep us through the onslaughts of the wicked. With that law at our side and in our hearts, we will know what to speak and how to act at all times. Let that law be your delight and counselor. Sing Psalter 323.

June 26 Read Psalm 119:25-32

The Psalmist realizes that a sin that besets him and all of us is the sin of lying. In that sin we repudiate God's law in all that we do. When we lie, God's law is cast aside like an old rag. When we choose the way of truth, which is living in accordance to God's law, then God will enlarge our hearts, that is, make us to live a life pleasing to him. As we go through life, let us seek God's law, understand that law, and talk of that law to all that are around us. Sing Psalter 324.

June 27 Read Psalm 119:33-40

As we read in Hebrews 12, life can be compared to a journey or a long race. What will make it so that we can finish the race? The answer is found in verse 33. We need to run the race in the way of God's law. When we have learned that law from the mouth and hand of the Great Teacher, then we can keep that law to the very end of the race. In that keeping we will finish the race and be able to receive the prize won for us by Christ. As we observe that law, we must turn away from all types of wickedness. Let us long after that law and in that way be made alive in righteousness now and in eternity. Sing Psalter 325.

June 28 Read Psalm 119:41-48

Are we ready to speak of God's Word and law before all kinds of men? Do we speak of it daily in the workplace, at school, or where we are enjoying recreation? This part of the Psalm says that we must be ready to speak of that Word before kings. We may not let whom we are talking to dictate of what we speak. Even before those whom God has placed in authority, we must speak of God's Word. If we cannot or will not do it now, we will not be ready for the trials that will come upon us in the

last days. We must learn that law, love that law, and be ready at all times to give an answer for the reason of the hope which lies within us. Sing Psalter 326.

June 29 Read Psalm 119:49-56

The Psalmist recounts the comfort he had in times of affliction. He may have been tempted to lose hope in God. He was afflicted in many ways. The wicked were out to do him harm and were openly breaking God's law. He also needed help at night. He received comfort in all these afflictions. What was the way of that comfort? That way was in the keeping of God's law. We, too, can have that kind of a comfort. We, too, can be comforted when it appears that afflictions from any and every corner press in upon us. That comfort is found when we keep all of God's law. Let us daily pray for the grace to find that comfort in this way. Sing Psalter 327.

June 30 Read Psalm 119:57-64

There are two ideas on which I wish for us to focus today. First of all verse 59. There the psalmist says that he turned his feet to God's testimonies. Our feet are the vehicle which take us places. If we allow our feet to take us places unfit for the child of God we have not turned them to his law. Secondly, reread verse 63. Who are our companions? Are they those who fear God's name? Are they those who lead us in places that our feet should not be? As we go through life we must make choices. We should let the law of Jehovah be our guide and lead us onto paths where we find fit companions. Sing Psalter 328.

July 1 Read Psalm 119:65-72

Does God do "bad" things to his people? The answer to that is an emphatic no! Take a minute to remember Romans 8:28. Look it up; ponder it; savor it. In this portion of Psalm 119 we see more proof that "bad" things are for God's peoples' good. Those afflictions, as they are called here, help us to keep God's Word, and they also help us to learn God's Word. Verse 68 tells us that not only is God good but he does good. Would he not do good unto his people? We might not always understand the why of those afflictions, but we can trust that they are for our profit. As we go through life, we can always know that God loves us and does good for us. Sing Psalter 329.

July 2 Read Psalm 119:73-80

Notice verse 74. Here is a statement that we do not focus on very much or very often. Are God's people glad to see us because we hope in his Word? Does the fact that we hope in his Word bubble out of us so that the saints are made glad by our appearance? There is a connection between that verse and the next one. The connection is that even though God has afflicted us, we still can hope in God. This is not a light matter. This matter is only one that can take place by faith. Only by way of God's lovingkindness is his law our delight. Let us make verse 80 our daily prayer so that we might show forth God's faithfulness to us each day of our lives. Sing Psalter 330.

July 3 Read Psalm 119:81-88

We see many evidences of the troubles that the Psalmist was experiencing. The writer was no different than any of us. We, too, have afflictions in this life. It does not matter what our age or what our station and calling in this life is. We have afflictions. God does not leave us alone. He brings to us his Word. In that Word and especially in that law, he gives to us all the comfort necessary to live as we await the day of rejoicing. We are being made ready for heaven. Like the caterpillar that unfolds into the beautiful butterfly or moth, we are being made ready for a beautiful life of glory. May God's Word sustain us. May we, like the Psalmist, not forsake the law of our gracious God. Sing Psalter 331.

July 4 Read Psalm 119:89-96

What a beautiful thought it is that God's Word is settled in heaven! The idea of settled is established. But it is an establishment with comfort. That Word comforts us each and every day of our lives. It also gives to us the comfort that our covenant God who made the heaven and earth is in control of all things so that nothing happens by chance but all is carried out by his fatherly hand. Because we are his, we can have the confidence that all things work together for our good and his glory. As we read God's Word, and as we live out of that Word, we can have the assurance that it gives to us spiritual life now and through all eternity. Sing Psalter 332.

July 5 Read Psalm 119:97-104

The Psalmist has experienced the benefits of knowing God's law and seeing its profit in his daily life. He then breaks out in the song of praise "O how love I thy law." Is this our experience? Do we see how God's law is applicable in our lives, and how it gives to us the true wisdom? God is the best teacher with the best subject material. When we immerse ourselves in the study of his law, we learn what is most important in this life. God's law will taste better than any earthly food as it will be our food for eternity. Let us learn that law, live out of that law, and hope in that law forever. Sing Psalter 333.

Just A Job or A Calling?

by Rev. Rodney Miersma

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called (Ephesians 4:1).

With these words the Apostle Paul begins the fourth chapter of his letter to the saints in the church at Ephesus. Paul divides his letter into two major parts, a doctrinal part and a practical part. The first three chapters are doctrinal in nature as he looks at the church in her beauty as the body of Christ, emphasizing her oneness or unity in the Lord.

Beginning with Chapter four to the end of the letter he exhorts the church at Ephesus and the church of today on how we are to put that doctrinal truth in practice in our daily lives. It is not the purpose of this article to tell you how to live your life in all its various spheres. Rather it is to draw your attention to your vocation that you are now considering or should be. It is not to draw attention to any particular vocation, but to the idea of vocation, i.e., what you will be doing during your lifetime.

> …whatever occupation that we choose, it is a calling, an assignment from God to do a certain thing.

To begin with we all know that we must work. God has commanded that. We read in II Thessalonians 3:10, "that if any would not work, neither should he eat." The point to be made is that "work" is a calling. That is what the word vocation means. The word vocation comes from a Latin word which, when translated, means calling. This in turn means that each of us has a calling. Traditionally we have spoken of a minister or a teacher having a calling to preach or to teach. This, of course, is true, but certainly not limited to these two occupations. We all have a calling to do something. Thus, whether minister, teacher, doctor, nurse, farmer, gravedigger, housewife, or any other number of occupations, it is a calling. A calling varies and is different from person to person because God has given us different and varying gifts. An example of this is the different members in one's body. Each member has a specific function which benefits the body as a whole.

This means that whatever occupation that we choose, it is a calling, an assignment from God to do a certain thing. Our labor is an assigned labor. In light of this it follows that we must work as a citizen of the kingdom of God. We are God's people working in God's world using God's tools, all unto the advancement of his kingdom and unto his glory. This has certain limitations in that there are certain occupations that we may not do. One should not even consider professional sports, for all of them are breakers of the fourth commandment which commands us to keep the sabbath day holy. We should not even be watching them on the Sabbath Day. Nor should we work in a location which would prevent us from attending God's house on the Sabbath Day. That job in a distant location may be ever so attractive, but if it takes us away from our church then we must avoid it. I put in this same category voluntarily joining the armed forces when we know that it will take us away from the means of grace and place us among those whose lifestyle is a complete contrast to the life of a faithful child of God. At one time the government had what was called the draft. It would call one to mandatory service for a certain period of time. In obedience to those whom God has placed in authority over us one would heed the call. But the draft is no longer in use. However, to do so willingly, voluntarily, is another matter.

Furthermore, our calling must be in harmony with our abilities. We must have the ability to do something. If you are afraid of heights, then you would not seek the work of a window washer on a skyscraper. Or, if you get sick or faint at the sight of blood, then to be a doctor or nurse would not be the best of choices. On the other hand, if we have the gifts to do a certain legitimate job, then we must not waste God's gifts by not using them.

With all this in mind we can see that the matter of a vocation is a serious matter because a vocation is a call-

ing of God. It is more than just "getting" or "having" a job. Therefore it must be given serious thought. What is God calling me to do?

How is it that we are called? How do we know what is God's calling for us? It will not be boomed out of the sky nor whispered in your ear. God uses you. With the mind and senses that God has given you, you must follow the signs that God sets before you. It is a matter of self-assessment, of taking stock of yourself. What kind of person am I? What gifts has God given to me? What kind of person does it take to fulfill the requirements of a specific task? You must know what certain vocations are like. What is expected of one? When you have evaluated yourself and the various vocations, and when you have brought these before the throne of God's grace in prayer, then he will guide you to your life's calling.

Now a parting word to you young ladies. Many of you will consider various types of work and higher education. Higher education is certainly to be commended. In today's society an educated wife and mother is practically a necessity. However, do not forget the calling to be a housewife and mother. Have you ever given thought that being a housewife and mother is a life-calling? Modern society would have you think otherwise. They say that you must find fulfillment in your life in the workplace, in a career. But stop to think for a moment. To be a housewife and mother is really the calling of the woman. To be a help meet unto her husband, the mother of his children, to bring forth the seed of the covenant that God's church may be brought forth and gathered, is the greatest fulfillment. Thus, do not over-emphasize the so-called necessity to work outside of the home. A far higher calling is to bring forth the children of the covenant and nurture them in the fear of the Lord.

…do not over-emphasize the so-called necessity to work outside of the home. A far higher calling is to bring forth the children of the covenant and nurture them in the fear of the Lord.

Therefore, "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," for there God commands his blessing. ❖

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Church History

"The Lord Gave the Word": Commemorating the 400th Anniversary of the King James Version (2)

"Open to the Understanding of Simple Men"[1]: John Wycliffe and the Beginning of the English Bible (1)

by Jon Langerak

Introduction

The 400th anniversary of the King James Version (KJV) provides an outstanding opportunity for the members of the PRC to marvel at the covenant faithfulness of Jehovah with respect to his gracious gift to them of the Bible in their mother tongue, in English. That it is a gift implies on the face of it that the members of the PRC have not labored, toiled, bled or died to receive it, but

rather have done nothing to deserve this gift, as indeed the members of the PRC confess that they have done nothing to deserve this gift. That it is gracious means that God has bestowed it upon our churches according to the covenant favor and delight he has for us in Jesus Christ. God brought his written Word out of the bondage of the Church of Rome's suppression of his Word not only in the Latin language of the Vulgate, but chiefly in Rome's forbidding of the preaching of Scripture in the language of the common people; indeed, Rome's forbidding of the preaching of it at all! In freeing his written Word, Jehovah in the first place restored the glory of Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh, and the absolutely free justification by faith alone that the elect have in his cross, to its supreme place in the church. Secondly, God freed his elect remnant in England, and later in the sixteenth-century Reformation in all Europe, from the ignorance and superstition of apostate Rome and made them to lie down beside the streams of living waters in the green pastures of his Word (Psalm 23: 2). Jehovah began this mighty work with the "morning star of the Reformation," John Wycliffe.

Horrible Darkness!

How extremely dark for the truth of Jesus Christ and for the true church of Christ was the ecclesiastical situation in England before the years 1382-1395 AD! The potent and apostate Roman Catholic Church overshadowed all Europe with its church political tyranny of papal hierarchy which had its source in Rome's spiritual tyranny—the most depraved tyranny that man can exercise over his fellow human beings—of the Semi-Pelagian doctrine of justification partly by the grace of God and partly by the will and working of man.

This Semi-Pelagian doctrine worked out in the corruption of Rome's ecclesiastical practices. The Bible would have to go, because the Roman hierarchy could not afford the risk of the members seeing how corrupt the church really was by reading the Bible in their own language. Therefore, they withheld Scripture from the common people in their own tongue. They declared the Latin Vulgate to be the only permitted copy of the Bible, and then permitted it only to academics, theologians, and the higher clergy, who were individuals over whom the hierarchy had the most direct control. Most village priests did not even own a copy of the Bible, and were almost as frighteningly ignorant as the illiterate hordes of peasants over which they held complete control. Moreover, the prevailing version of the Vulgate at this late date of the Middle Ages was a far cry from the masterpiece crafted by Jerome from the best Hebrew and Greek manuscripts available to him and published in 405 AD. The Vulgate of this period was a corrupt revision made by a gaggle of Paris printers in the 1100s to turn a quick profit.[1] Those who were caught attempting to free the Bible from the Latin into the language of the people could expect immediate and merciless imprisonment, torture, and execution.

This was not the worst. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council of the Romish Church issued the following decree, which decree not only forbids any Scripture translation into the vernacular but implies also a prohibition of exegetical preaching of Holy Writ to the common people: "The secret mysteries of the faith ought not to be explained to all men in all places…For such is the depth of divine Scripture that, not only the simple and illiterate, but even the prudent and learned are not fully sufficient to try to understand it."[2] Cloaking with a false show of humility their altogether devilish desire to slay their members spiritually through ignorance of God's Word, the Romish Council of 1215 locked God's Word into the hands of only the highest levels of learning and government in the church and banished edifying, Christ-centered preaching from the pulpits of England and all Europe. With the Bible out of the way, the church could plant and nourish the doctrines of devils in the hearts and minds of the common folk.

Rather than on the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the gospel, the people were led to rely more and more on the Roman Church, and in particular on its seven sacraments, administered by the army of Romish clergy, as the only way to heaven. (For the Roman Church, by the way, "church" did not mean—and still today does not mean—the entire body of believers united in Jesus Christ as their head, but only

1 This phrase is part of Wycliffe's declaration, that, although some passages may be hard to grasp, as a whole "the New Testament is…open to the understanding of simple men…as to the points most needful to salvation…[For] Christ did not write his laws on tables, or on the skins of animals, but in the hearts of men" qtd. in Benson Bobrick, *Wide as the Waters: The Story of the English Bible and the Revolution It Inspired* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 50.

1 See Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 56.

2 qtd. in Derek Wilson, *The People's Bible: The Remarkable History of the King James Version* (Oxford, UK: Lion Hudson, 2010), 8.

the clergy of the Roman hierarchy, united in the Pope as their head.) The minds of the people were directed away from faith in Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation, and into idolatry. In the absence of preaching, images, holy pictures, and stained glass windows developed as the "books to the laity," condemned by our Heidelberg Catechism.[3] Dramatic plays and skits, most having some trite moral lesson, enacting biblical stories or apocryphal occurrences in the lives of saints canonized by the church were encouraged. For an exorbitant sum, which for a common English peasant was a couple of gold coins, thousands of years could be bought off of purgatory through the granting of an indulgence, a slip of paper declaring the forgiveness of a man's sins by the Pope. The clergy championed relics as means to actually impart the grace of God through physical contact with the mere remains of some saint or holy person of the past. Awful, horrible excesses sprouted, such that some ignorant persons "scooped up and even ate dust which had gathered on the tombs of the saints…[and] took away phials of water which had been used to wash the tombs. Twelfth-century visitors to Bury St. Edmund's Abbey [in England] had to be restrained from biting off pieces of gilt from the shrine of the martyr."[4] Some church officials denounced such abuses. They did not condemn the root evil of idolatry and proclaim that the Bible should be put in the common tongue and that the "lively preaching of [God's] Word"[5] should be heard everywhere in England.

In these days of awful darkness, God raised up a man known now as the "morning star of the Reformation" to begin the real work of bringing his Word to his English elect in their own tongue. This man was John Wycliffe.

Wycliffe, the Champion of Holy Scripture

Wycliffe was born in 1324 or 1330 (both are given as the authentic date) in a village of that name in Yorkshire, England. At age 15-16, when most young people are in their sophomore year of high school, the brilliant Wycliffe entered Oxford University, the most prestigious center of learning in England and in all Europe. But Oxford, although a great center of learning, was infested with swarms of corrupt and ignorant monks and travelling friars who lived in the cloisters and convents surrounding the campus. Through their ignorance and ungodliness, Wycliffe saw how desperately apostate and God-dishonoring the Semi-Pelagian Roman Church had become. If there would be reform, he believed it must come with the Bible being placed in the common tongue and being preached to the laity. "[John Wycliffe] had a very rugged perception of the free Bible as mighty under the hand of God to the pulling down of the strongholds of error and had a burden for their availability in the language of the people."[6]

In 1378, from his parish in the village of Lutterworth, Wycliffe authored a marvelous treatise entitled, in Latin, De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae, and in English 'On the Truth of Holy Scripture,' in which he described Scripture as "the law of Christ…the sole authority for the faith" and declared that "just as a true Christian will be one who finds his faith in the light of Scripture, so a true shepherd of Christians will be one who feeds his flock on the Word of God."[7]

Almost 200 years before the Reformation, Wycliffe declared "Sola Scriptura!" Scripture alone! Declaring one 'Sola', he declared them all: Faith alone through grace alone in Christ alone as revealed in Holy Scripture alone to the glory of God alone! John Wycliffe has been called a 'pre-Reformer.' In fact, he was a Reformer. The "morning star"! As a Reformer, Wycliffe:

> …taught the truths of sovereign election and reprobation. Wycliffe opposed the doctrine of transubstantiation…[and] he taught a spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, although he was not very clear on what this meant. He repudiated the practices of Rome such as indulgences, the merit of pilgrimages, penance, etc. He denied that the church had the power to forgive sins and insisted that forgiveness came only from Christ.[8]

Wycliffe did not just teach these doctrines that we now know and love, especially that heart-beat doctrine of the church: divine predestination. He practiced them as well. ❖

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3 See the Heidelberg Catechism LD 35, Q/A 98 in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: PRCA, 2006), 126.

4 Wilson, 13-14.

5 Heidelberg Catechism LD 35, Q/A 98 in *Confessions and Church Order*, 126.

6 C.P. Callihan, *The Authorised Version: A Wonderful and Unfinished History* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 2010), 9. The book can be downloaded from www.trinitarianbiblesociety.org/site/articles/A124.pdf.

7 Ibid, 23.

8 Herman Hanko, *Portraits of Faithful Saints* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association), 108.

Defending the Truth of 24-Hour Creation against Current Heresies

There are several reasons why we need to understand Genesis 1, and how to defend 24-hour creation. First, Genesis 1 begins with "in the beginning." This is the beginning of God's sovereign plan of salvation which he would work through his son for his people. Secondly, it is likely that we will be exposed to a creation heresy, if we have not yet been—in a non-PR high school; in college; or in the work place. Finally, it is important for young people to understand the truth that has been held to in our churches, because some of you will be the future pastors, elders, and deacons; and more of you will be mothers and fathers who must teach the truth to your children today.

1. What is the theory of long-day creation? Why is it important to believe that God created all things by his spoken word? Why do many people of the Reformed faith believe this theory of long day creation? How is 2 Peter 3:7-9 (a text commonly used to support this theory) correctly interpreted?

2. Unbelieving scientists think animals lived and died on this earth for thousands of years before man lived. What is the problem with the idea that these animals died before Adam even lived on this earth? The Bible says that death is God's punishment for sin, was that not only for man since he it was that sinned?

3. Did God create all things as an undeveloped or mature creation? Find as many verses as you can from Genesis 1-2 which support your answer.

4. What is the teaching of theistic evolution? How do Romans 1:20 and Hebrews 11:3 indicate that this teaching is wrong? Do our Reformed creeds indicate that Reformed believers may not hold to this teaching?

5. What is the difference between theistic evolution, and atheistic evolution (to which most unbelievers hold)?

6. When we are in school how do we deal with text books that talk about the world being millions and millions of years old? How about a teacher that teaches an old earth?

7. Some say that our view of creation does not affect our salvation; so we should not spend much time discussing our disagreements. Do you agree?

8. Creation scientists attempt to prove from nature that creation is a better option than the theory of evolution. Is this a valid way to defend the biblical doctrine of creation?

9. How must the church watch for and guard against such heresies? Matthew 16:19, John 20:23, Matthew 18:15

10. What ought we say to members of churches that tolerate theistic evolution, and do not discipline those who teach this heresy? 2 Corinthians 6:14,15

11. Martin Luther took a stand against the whole church. He knew the church of that day was wrong, and all by himself he had to stand for the truth. How about us? Would we be able to stand all by ourselves for the truth? ❖

Friendships and Dating with Others outside the PRC

God created humans to be social creatures; we need relationships with others. Friends are God's gift to his children. But what kind of people are our friends? How do we treat our friends? How do we expect our friends to treat us? Do we apply the principles of the covenant and the antithesis to our friendships?

FRIENDSHIPS

1. Why do we have friends—what purpose do they serve? (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10; Proverbs 27: 17; Genesis 2: 18).
2. What is the basis for our friendships? (Amos 3:3)
3. What kind of persons should be our friends? (Psalm 119:63, Proverbs 13:20, 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, 1 John 2:15-17)
4. CAN you share your faith with your friends? DO you? (Proverbs 27:17)
5. Do you encourage your friends to obey God's law, even rebuking them in love when necessary? When our friends want us to join them in doing things we must not do, how do we react? (Proverbs 27:5, 6)
6. Is it OK to sow wild oats with our friends while young, seeing we are baptized, and will probably settle down someday? (Psalm 26: 1, 5)
7. What is expected from you as a friend? (Matthew 25:14-30, especially 21-23; Joshua 1:7, 9; Proverbs 13:20).
8. What lessons can we learn from the friendship of David and Jonathan? (1 Samuel 20: 17)
9. How do you treat those who appear to have no friends?
10. Discuss how each of these scenarios would affect our friendship:

    – Both I and my friend are members of a PRC.

    – I am a member of a PRC. My friend is a godly Christian from another denomination.

    – I am a member of a PRC. My friend is a professing Christian; however, he/she does not know much about doctrine, and is not so concerned to live a distinctively godly life.

DATING

11. What is the difference between friendship and dating?
12. What is a godly, proper reason for dating? May we date just for fun?
13. Must we be even more concerned with whom we date, than with whom we are friends? Why, or why not?
14. Do you think that you can change the weaknesses you see in the one you are dating?
15. What sad results can and often do follow when a believer marries an unbeliever? (Nehemiah 13:23-27)
16. How involved should parents be in our dating - regarding whom we date, and where we go on dates? Are your parents overly concerned about you in this area? How do you receive their warnings?
17. Discuss how each of these scenarios would affect your dating relationship:

    – Both I and my date are members of a PRC.

    – I am a member of a PRC. My date is a godly Christian from another denomination.

    – I am a member of a PRC. My date is a professing Christian; however, he/she does not know much about doctrine, and is not so concerned to live a distinctively godly life. ❖

Godly Esteem of Self and Others

Many of God's people have either a poor self-image, or proud self-confidence. At the same time, we often use a wrong standard when evaluating others. Our goal in this discussion is 1) to promote proper self-image and godly confidence by learning to see ourselves as God sees us, and 2) to promote a godly way of viewing spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ.

SELF

1. Our Lord's Supper form tells us to abhor and humble ourselves. What are we to hate, and what are we to love, about ourselves? (Ephesians 4:22-24)

2. Are we to hate anything about ourselves besides our sins? (Psalm 139:14)

3. Compare/contrast what God values about his children vs. what man's fallen human nature values. (Proverbs 31:30, 1 Samuel 2:30b, Jeremiah 9:23-24)

4. How does evaluating ourselves according to the world's standards lead either to pride or a poor self-image?

5. How does focusing on our sins, rather than God's grace, affect our view of ourselves? How does believing that God has forgiven us lead to proper self-love?

6. How might our self-image be affected if our goals for ourselves do not correspond to God's will for us? (Consider both the over-achiever and the under-achiever).

7. If others devalue us by their speech or actions, what sort of response will please God, promote a proper self-image, and seek the good of the one who devalues us? (Matthew 5:44, 1 John 4:15, Ecclesiastes 7:21-22, Matthew 18:15)

8. Read 1 Corinthians 15:9-11, and answer the following:
   a. Does Paul exaggerate or underestimate his sinfulness?
   b. Does he have a right view of his accomplishments?
   c. Does he boast or take credit for what he has done?
   d. What was his goal?

OTHERS

9. No two people are alike. Are the "more gifted" members more valuable than the "less gifted" members, in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 12:15-24).

10. Why does it sometimes happen in the church that some are esteemed more highly than others? What must we do to guard against this? (1 Samuel 16:6-7, James 2:1-4)

11. How does focusing on the sins of others, rather than God's grace, affect our view of them? How does believing that God has forgiven them, lead us to love them? (Ephesians 4:32)

12. We are to esteem others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3-4, 2 Corinthians 10:12, 1 Corinthians 12:22-23). What does this mean, and how must we implement it?

13. Should we encourage people by using phrases like "I believe in you" or "Have faith in yourself"? Why or why not?

14. What goals should we encourage others to have? (1 Corinthians 14:14, Hebrews 10:24)

15. How else must we show our love for, and esteem of, all the members of Christ's body? ❖

Honoring Authority

As creator of all things, God has the ultimate authority and he has given this authority to men to accomplish his purpose and good pleasure. This authority of man is always subject to God's authority, and this is found in the Bible as God's revelation of himself and his will for our lives. Read these Bible passages: Romans 13:1-7 and Ephesians 6:1-9. Some areas of authority to discuss would be:

AUTHORITY OF PARENTS

1. Discuss the way in which Jacob viewed and treated his sons.
2. Give some examples of differences between how Jacob's sons respected and obeyed him.
3. Is preferential treatment by a parent just cause for rebellion? Why or why not?
4. Ephesians 6:1-3, Colossians 3:20, Exodus 20:12 Discuss what these passages tell us about parental authority.

AUTHORITY OF TEACHERS

5. In a Christian school, if teachers stand in the place of the parents, does the teacher have the same authority as the parents? How about in the public school, college, or university?
6. What if you have a teacher or professor who teaches something that contradicts the teaching of the Bible? How would a Christian student respond appropriately while still honoring the authority of the teacher?

AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

7. What authority is given to the church in Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:15-18?
8. Discuss the authority of preachers. What gives preachers and elders the right to tell me what to do? Discuss Luke 9:1-2 and Titus 2:15.
9. What does I Timothy 2:11-13 tell us about authority in the church? Does this apply to 2011? After all, women are much more educated today and many women seem to have gifts that would be valuable in the offices of the church.
10. If Joseph shaved and changed his clothes when he was called before Potiphar, who had civil authority, what is our responsibility for how we appear in God's house?

AUTHORITY OF THE GOVERNMENT

11. Read and discuss I Timothy 2: 1-2.
12. What if a Christian feels compelled to protest a government policy like abortion or same-sex marriage? What action could you take without being guilty of rebellion or dishonoring civil authority?

AUTHORITY IN THE WORKPLACE

13. Discuss what Colossians 3:22 and Titus 2:9-10 tell us about honoring authority in the workplace.
14. Explain how we "adorn the doctrine of God our Savior" by a good work ethic.
15. Give examples of how Joseph was a godly servant under Potiphar.
16. What about labor unions? Don't we have the right to negotiate a fair wage? What makes unions bad? Would Jesus have joined the carpenter's union?
17. Finally, is it ever right to disobey those in authority over us? If so, when and how?
18. Give examples of how we show honor for authority in all areas of life with our speech. ❖

Proper Judging in a Time of Tolerance

To judge is to make a pronouncement of what is right or wrong. The common view today is that we may not judge, but rather are to show tolerance. We must accept homosexuality as a viable lifestyle, abortion as a personal choice and drunkenness as a fun past time. The world openly embraces all manner of sin and shows no shame. Anything goes, except God's truth and calling sin for what it is. Many churches also promote tolerance, going so far as to allow homosexuals in the ministry. Sin is no longer called sin. They teach we must love each other and look for the good in people, not the bad. Scripture teaches that we must judge. "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). In Philippians 1:9 we read "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment."

1. Many churches promote tolerance of sin as the way to show love towards each other. Does tolerance express brotherly love? Explain why or why not. (I Cor. 13:6).
2. How does proper judgment show Christian love?
3. "Judge not that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). This passage is often used to justify tolerance. If one reads the following verses, one sees that it is not judging altogether that is forbidden but the manner in which we judge. What do the following passages teach about how not to judge? Matthew 7: 1-5, Romans 2:1-3, Romans 14:1-3, James 4: 11-12 and John 7: 24
4. What matters are we to judge? (Heb. 5:14)
5. How ought we determine what is right and wrong?
6. How ought we to judge ourselves? (Lam. 3: 40)
7. How ought we to judge other Christians? (Mt 18: 15-17, I Cor. 5)
8. How do we judge the world? (Eph 5:11-13, I Cor. 5:12-13, I Cor. 6:2)
9. What is the positive fruit of proper judging?
10. May we keep silent about what we have judged to be wrong?
11. I Cor. 10:15 & I John 4:1 speak of judging the preaching. How are we to do this properly and why must we?
12. How does tolerance towards sinful deeds of others affect one's own spiritual life & Christian walk?
13. Do you recognize the need for others, such as parents, to judge your actions? How do you respond when they do? ❖

The Christian and Facebook

Some statistics:

- 54% of teens between the ages of 13 and 14 have a Facebook account.
- On average, teens between the ages of 15 and 17 spend 20 hours a week on Facebook.
- From April 2008 to April 2009, total minutes spent on Facebook increased from 1.7 billion minutes to 13.9 billion minutes–an increase of 700 percent.
- *The New York Times* (Dec. 20, 2009) reported that the 350 million members of Facebook spend a total of 10 billion minutes on Facebook every day.

1. Is it a sin to use Facebook or other social networking sites on the internet?
2. What principles must govern our use of social networking? (1 Peter 1:13-16; I Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 5:17).
3. Discuss some of the moral issues that we confront when using social networking.
   a. To what degree should your parents supervise your account?
   b. What do your profile and your profile picture say about you?
   c. Why would you put your favorite music, books, movies on your profile page?
   d. Who are your "friends"? Do these people encourage you in your Christian walk?
   e. When you click the "like" button, are you approving of something sinful?
   f. Are you so busy with Facebook that you procrastinate with your chores, schoolwork, bedtime, devotions, and other things?
   g. Are you careful not to post gossip or unkind comments?
   h. Before posting information, do you stop, think, and judge whether it is appropriate?
   i. Are you willing to take a stand against the slander/backbiting of others, or point out to them that what they just did or said was wrong?
   j. The book of Proverbs often warns against sloth. Does how much time we spend on Facebook indicate that we are lazy?
   k. Social networking can be habitual and addictive. If you went on vacation and had no access to Facebook for a while, would this bother you? Upon returning home, do you feel you must check Facebook before doing anything else?
4. Discuss some of the implications for our future, and for others, of what we post on Facebook.
   a. Could the things you post on Facebook be considered public?
   b. Could your civil government charge you with crimes for what you wrote?
   c. Could your consistory require a public confession from you for what you wrote?
   d. Could a future employer preview your page before hiring you?
   e. Let's say someone was interested in joining your church. They became your friend on Facebook and saw that you enjoy movies, sinful music, and partying. Would it bother you if, for that reason, they decided that your church isn't for them?
5. Discuss some positive, godly uses of Facebook. ❖

Federation Board Nominee Profiles

By Annie Zuverink

Spring is here with summer quickly trailing behind! For some young people the reality of graduation is starting to set in while others anticipate the simple words "school's out!" With summer getting closer and closer that also means that this year's convention is right around the corner.

At convention each year a delegates meeting is held with two representatives from each church's Young People's Society who gather to vote for new officers to be part of the Board of the Federation of the Protestant Reformed Young Peoples Societies (Fed Board). These officers were nominated by the Fed Board in January and those elected will take up their position beginning in September.

The Fed Board meets every first Sunday of the month, meaning that it is necessary that all its members be from the West Michigan churches. This unfortunately means that many of the young people from the West do not know these nominees. For this reason, the Fed Board would like to take this opportunity to introduce the nominees to all the societies.

The nominees for the office of Vice President are Brian Feenstra and Nate Bodbyl. Brian is twenty years old and attends Trinity PRC. He is currently a student at Grand Valley State University and also works on a blueberry farm during the summer. Brian's goals for the Fed Board are to serve the young people of the church. As the next generation of the PRC, it is important to him that the young people are instructed and raised in Reformed teaching, especially in a way that is applied to the contemporary world. It is important to him that the young people, through the direction of the Fed Board and individual Young People's Societies, are able to see today's society through the eyes of Scripture. In effect, the ultimate goal is to grow the health of each young person in our churches.

At age 23 Nate Bodbyl is a member of Grandville PRC and currently works as a sales development representative at UTS. His goals for the Fed Board are to encourage the Young People in their spiritual growth and involvement in church activities, as well as continue providing edifying reading material through the *Beacon Lights*.

The nominees for Vice Treasurer this year are David Noorman and Jared Bosveld. David is twenty years old and attends Faith PRC. David is currently a full time student at Calvin College. His goals for the Fed Board are to increase young people's awareness of the Fed Board and its activities. He would also like to encourage the young people to take advantage of the *Beacon Lights*, by either reading or writing for the magazine.

Jared Bosveld is nineteen and attends Hope PRC. He currently is a student at Grand Rapids Community College pursuing construction management. His goals for the Fed Board are to encourage the young people to be aware of their responsibilities in the church, especially in the wickedness and temptation of today.

The two nominees for Vice Secretary this year are Kylie Mulder and Monica Koole. Kylie is eighteen years old and attends Faith PRC. She is currently a full time student at Grand Valley State University and also works part time as a receptionist at River Town Honda. Her goals for the Fed Board are to help young people realize the vital role they carry in the church as our future leaders, and encourage them to attend society and conventions.

Monica Koole is twenty years old and attends Hope PRC. She works as a secretary at Kleyn Electric. Monica's goal for the Fed Board is to continue to benefit the young people, encouraging them to live as Christians in this world which is corrupted by sin.

The two nominees for Librarian are Erika Schipper and Rachel Kamps. Erika Schipper is nineteen years old and is a member of Southwest PRC. She is currently a student at Davenport University and will be graduating soon with a degree in Medical Assisting. Her goal for the Fed Board is to assist in the work of helping the young people of our churches grow in their spiritual lives. This work is very important in our day and age because our young people face many temptations in a world that is increasing in its wickedness.

Rachel Kamps is eighteen and attends Southwest PRC. She is a student at Kendall College of Art and Design and also works as an office assistant at Wonderland Tire Co. Rachel's goal for the Fed Board is to serve the young people by helping organize conventions and singspirations.

The two nominees for Spiritual Advisor this year are Rev. Haak and Rev. Holstege. Rev. Haak is currently the pastor at Georgetown PRC and Rev. Holstege is the pastor of First Church of Holland.

We, as members of the Fed Board, feel as though all these nominees are able to carry out their work with the Protestant Reformed Churches and our Young People's Societies. We ask that each of our young people prayerfully consider each nominee for their specific office on the Federation Board. ❖

Church News

BAPTISMS

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

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

Bristol Quinn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Gise VanBaren—Crete, IL

Broklyn Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tom Huizinga—Hope, MI

Ella Carolyn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Justin Miersma—Hope, MI

Ryan Thomas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tom Wigger—Hudsonville, MI

Joelle Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Caleb VanBaren—Randolph, WI

Lauren Alyda, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chase DeGroot—Sioux Falls, SD

Adalyn Brooke, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Carl VanDenBerg—Southeast, MI

Gweneth Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dan Kooienga—Southwest, MI

Adult baptism was administered to Mr. Fred Johnston—Spokane, WA

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established." Proverbs 4:26

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

Joel VandenToorn—Byron Center, MI

Caleb Meulenberg—Grace, MI

David Thomas—Grace, MI

David Rozeboom—Hull, IA

Christine Tolsma—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN

Steven Tolsma—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN

Melissa Span—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN

Tammy Soodsma—Randolph, WI

Catherine VanderWal—Redlands, CA

Jason Bauman—Southwest, MI/Pittsburgh, PA

MARRIAGES

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Proverbs 3: 5 & 6

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Joe Reed and Miss Emily terAvest—Grace, MI

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine !

An Everyday Present

by Kirsten Gustafson

"O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day."
(Psalm 119:97)

Waking up with a start, the sun peering through the window blinds, Titus jumped out of bed and ran for the stairs. "Mom! It's my birthday today!"

"I know it is Titus. I had to remember," Mom said with a smile. "What do you want to do today?"

"Open presents!" Titus exclaimed, looking at his mom in shock that she even had to ask.

"You know Titus, birthdays aren't all about presents."

Shyly Titus replied, "I know Mom, but it sure makes them fun."

"Opening presents is fun, Titus. It is like opening God's word. Each time we open the scriptures we receive a new present from God."

Titus, slightly confused, asked, "But Mom, what's the present? The Bible is too small to hold anything."

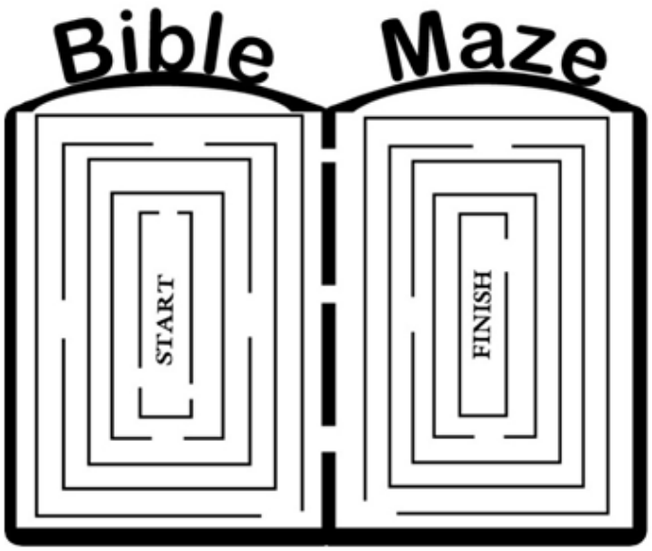
"Oh child, the present is the verses we read like we do before bed each night. God wrote those words to show you how much he loves you and what he did to save you, although you didn't earn or deserve it at all. Just like grandpa and grandma are giving you a present today because they love you even though you didn't earn a present from them or deserve a present from them."

"But remember God's word is one present that will never get old or fade with time. It might fade in the hearts of some but not in the hearts of God's most special children."

"Like me, Mom?" Titus asked.

"Yes, like you, Titus," Mom said with a smile as she ruffled his hair.

Remember this, dear child in the Lord. God has given us his Word. Men have committed their life to translating it into our own language so we can understand it. Never take it for granted. We must never leave this present unopened, collecting dust. Go and pick up your Bible. You will find a verse, a new present, from our heavenly Father. What a special gift God gives us. You don't even need to have a birthday to receive this gift, because every day you are born again in Christ and made able by his Holy Spirit to understand the Bible as you read it. We are unworthy children of God and are unable to save ourselves, but God reveals his love to us through his word, the Bible. So young child of the Lord, thank the Lord for this word and this glorious present he has given you that you can open each and every day of your life.



Kirsten is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan.

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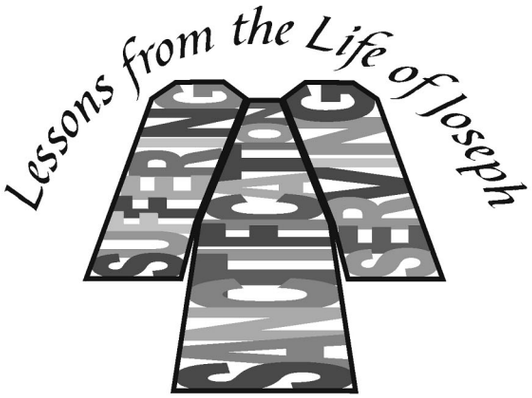
Convention time is coming soon.
Let's prepare ourselves as best we can.
Read and study the outlines given.
So when discussion time is finally here
In you mind, it will be quite clear.



Hope to see you at the
2011 PRYP Convention!
August 8-12, 2011
Green Lake Conference Center
Green Lake, Wisconsin
Hosted by Randolph PRC
Check out www.prcconvention.com
And you can find the
convention on Facebook

We're looking for music in all of you;
Can you think of a number you could do?
If you have a number you'd like to perform,
contact Kent and Sandee Hoksbergen at sandeealsum@hotmail.com