Beacon Lights

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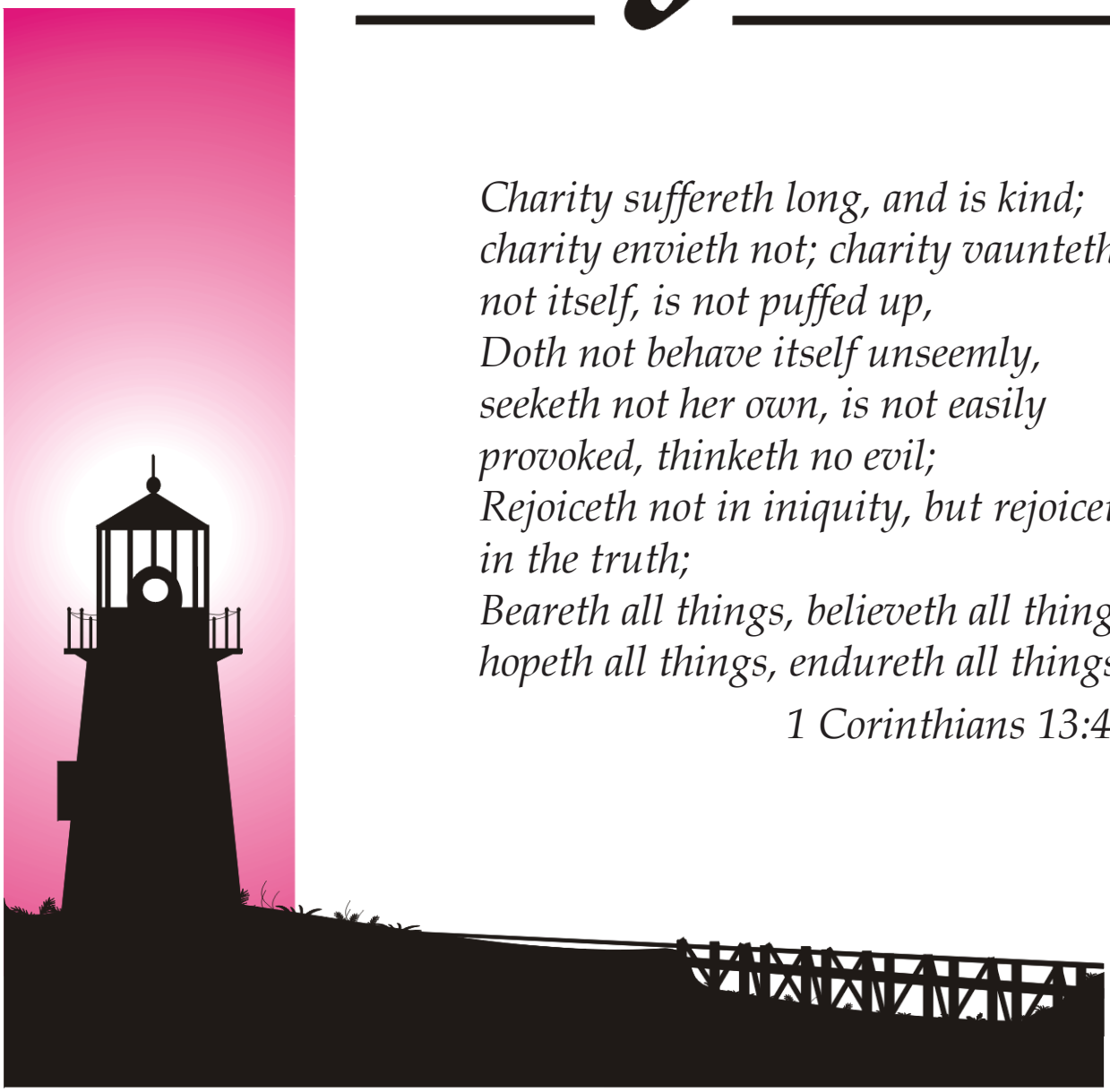

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,
Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;
Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;
Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

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The Body of Christ Under the Knife

by John Huizenga

The surgeon walks into the operating room bustling with activity and in full preparation for another surgery. He double checks to make sure all is in order and prepared, and there before him on the operating table under the bright lights lies a living body; unconscious, but with a beating heart, breathing lungs and an alert immune system. Nutrients are being carried to every cell, and waste products are being collected from each cell to be removed by the kidneys. But the harmonious workings of the body have to some extent been disrupted by a problem. Whether disease has begun to work in a particular organ or some injury or other condition is present, the future life of the whole body faces increasing pain, suffering, reduced functioning, or earlier death unless the threat is removed.

The surgeon takes a final look at the monitors and pictures, makes a few marks on the skin as a guide, picks up his scalpel, and begins the cut. The blade severs with ease the skin cells, and the opened capillaries and veins begin to spill the life blood. Soon the blade begins to sever muscle and other tissues and the body functions are thrown into emergency mode in an attempt to prevent infection and preserve life. The surgeon's blade has soon opened the body and so disrupted normal functions that the body on its own would quickly succumb, but the surgeon and his team have made provision to take care of breathing, loss of blood and fluid, and the body's own immune reaction. Every cut and every hour on anesthetic brings further damage and disruption to the body, but also brings the surgeon closer to removing the initial threat.

The church is also a body that is subject to constant attack and threats to its life. Cancerous growths of false doctrine, broken bones of malice and anger toward fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord, torn ligaments, malfunctioning organs of dead orthodoxy and ungodly living all disrupt the harmony of the body and at times can develop to the point where the only solution is a sharp blade to divide the flesh and remove the threat. God has such a blade which is never set aside. He may make little cuts each day within the body, but at times it is used for major surgery.

The body of Christ is under the knife every time it gathers for worship and hears the preaching of God's word. It is true: God's word is a lamp unto our feet, and it is food for our souls, but it is also "sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). The life of the body of Christ is under constant attack as Satan encourages human pride and the growth of false doctrine, anger and bitterness, and the idolatry of putting our hope and trust in the things of this world. The preaching of God's word cuts into the body to expose sin for what it is, "piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The cutting may temporarily divide and cause pain, but the end result is restored harmony and peace.

The church as the body of Christ experiences the knife of God's word not only as a local congregation, but also as it is manifest in denominations and federations of churches. There are times when the exposure of a particular sin can cut open an entire congregation or denomination and leave it, as it were, in intensive care for a time and bring years of painful healing. Large sections of the body may even be removed. The world may mock when it sees the church cut up, divided, and bleeding, but God uses his

word as a sharp blade to expose sin and error and restore life and fellowship to his bride. The church at last will be brought into heaven battered, bruised, and scarred, but through it all, the wonderful love of God and his healing mercies are made known for all to see.

A surgeon's work is a relatively short process. In a matter of minutes or a few hours the surgeon has done his work and is stitching and stapling together what he had to cut apart in order to expose the problem and correct it. The body, however, will require months of time to recover from the trauma. For a time, the body may even require help with breathing, and days under the intensive care of nurses and doctors with machines and medicines of support as the massive disruption to life stabilizes to the point where the body can function on its own. The body throws all the resources that it has into healing and is left weak and helpless. The hours of surgery require weeks and months of slow, painful recovery of strength to function as it did before.

When sin and lies are exposed and rooted out with the word of God, the process of mending disrupted relationships requires a great deal of energy and work in the days following. We experience this in our own personal lives, our relationships with family members, and our relationships with fellow members of the body of Christ. As a church denomination, we experienced this when the last tenacious roots of arminianism were exposed in the theology of a conditional covenant, and we have endured a long painful recovery since the surgery of the early 1950s. Some may think the division, pain, and suffering was unnecessary and pointless, but we who enjoy a deeper knowledge of our covenant God know that God sovereignly uses such experiences to bring us closer to him.

It is our nature to avoid problems in the church because we know that the correction and healing can be so painful. But little problems will only grow into bigger problems. We think we know better than to go humbly to God's word in prayer. We easily deceive ourselves and listen to the lies of Satan so that we imagine all is well. The body may appear to be functioning well, but if it is limping and harboring a condition that will prove deadly with time, what is broken must be mended, and what is diseased must be removed, or the body will die. Only the sharp blade of God's word will expose it.

God is always ready with the sharp blade of his word, but he also gives us the prescription for general church health. The church established in Corinth lived in a spiritually filthy environment and was very vulnerable to the diseases of division, strife and pride. Yet God was pleased to establish a beautiful church there. When Paul saw the signs of serious trouble in this church, God used him to exercise the blade of God's word, and also administer the prescription for robust health and prevention of disease: a strong dose of love (I Corinthians 13). He gave a final reminder at the end of this first letter, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity" 16:13-14); and then checked with them again to see to it that this regiment was being followed in his second letter. "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. Greet one another with an holy kiss. All the saints salute you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen" (2 Corinthians13:11-14).

We know how to maintain healthy spiritual church life, but our sin and folly often bring us to the operating table. Yet, even here God in his wisdom uses the blade of his word to lead us through deep dark valleys of suffering to the higher plateau of richer covenant life and fellowship. An earthly surgeon can only expose and remove corrupt flesh, but God with his word cuts into the soul and spirit to discern even "the thoughts and intents of the heart." In doing so, he also reveals to us the thoughts and intents of his heart toward us. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11). That end is a relationship of covenant fellowship we only begin to experience on this earth. (I Corinthians 2:9, cf. Isaiah 64:4). Let us willingly and humbly submit to God's word. ❖

Thankfulness for the Church

by Prof. David J. Engelsma

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God…Let mount Zion rejoice…Walk about Zion… Tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. Psalm 48.

Introduction

This past Reformation Day weekend—a few weeks ago—my wife and I were in Wittenberg, Germany. This is the historic city where, in 1517, Jesus Christ began the reformation of his church by the witness to the gospel of his great servant, Martin Luther.

In the Castle Church—the church on the doors of which Luther posted the 95 theses, or doctrinal propositions, the church in which Luther is buried, and the church in which Luther preached—was a bright, young, German man of about nineteen or twenty. His duty was to describe the glorious history of that church to the visitors.

When the young German had finished informing us of the history and significance of the church building, I asked him, "Do you yourself believe what Luther taught? Do you believe the truths of the gospel that the Reformation restored to the people of God?"

This was his answer: "I believe in God, and I believe in Jesus. But I do not believe the church."

What he meant was: "I am not a member of any church; I never attend church; I reject the church."

He then informed us that the large majority of young people in Germany do not even profess to believe in God and in Jesus. Of the few who do profess to believe in God, the majority, like the young man serving as a guide in the Castle Church, do not "believe the church," that is, have nothing to do with any church.

My first thought was that the warning Luther once gave his beloved Germans has come true. Addressing all of Germany (and Luther had the ear of the entire nation, and knew it), Luther cried out, "God has given you Germans his precious gospel. Treasure it, and hold on to it! If you do not treasure it, God will take it away from you, and Germany will never receive it back again."

My second thought was: "How contrary to the Apostles' Creed" (which, of course, expresses the faith of every true Christian)! Belief in God the Father and in Jesus Christ, the Son, is necessarily accompanied by belief in God the Holy Ghost. According to the Apostles' Creed, God the Holy Ghost works faith *concerning the church*: "I believe an holy, catholic church."

True faith in God and in Jesus always includes faith concerning the church.

> One who does not believe the church does not truly believe in God and Jesus.

One who does not believe the church does not truly believe in God and Jesus. How can one who does not believe the church believe in God and in Jesus? God loves the church and elected her to salvation. Jesus loved the church and gave himself for her. God is the God of the church. Jesus is the head and savior of the church.

My third thought was: "How contrary to the purpose, not only of Luther and all the other Reformers, but also of Christ himself, regarding the sixteenth-century Reformation." That purpose was not simply to uncover the truths of the gospel—justification by faith alone, and all the others. That purpose was not even simply that individuals would believe the gospel, and be saved.

But the purpose of Jesus Christ with the Reformation was the reforming *of the church*. Christ loved the church in 1517. Christ made *the church* beautiful and strong once again.

It was then and there—on the weekend of Reformation Day, in Wittenberg, Germany, as a young German was saying that he did not believe the church—that I made up my mind what my speech to you would be.

We too must love the church, as God loves the church and as Jesus loves the church. In this love, we must rejoice in the church, in the words of Psalm 48.

There is a danger that you young people have the same wicked attitude toward the church that that young German has.

You would not think of rejecting God and Jesus, but the church is another matter.

You can be severely critical of the church. You can easily postpone confession of faith, by which you become full members of the church. You can be quite indifferent

toward the church, taking the church for granted. Some even leave the church for purely selfish, carnal reasons.

This afternoon, I will bring you the word of God that calls you to be thankful for the church—the church of which you are members by the great goodness of God.

In this way, I combine the two purposes of this meeting, as I understand them.

One purpose is to celebrate Reformation Day, which was a few weeks ago. The other is to express our thanks to God for all his goodness to us and blessing of us in connection with Thanksgiving Day, which was only a few days ago.

The word of God that calls you (and me also, of course) to be thankful for the church and our membership in the church is Psalm 48, which was just read.

Thankfulness for the Church: What?

Psalm 48 is about the church.

Zion in the Old Testament—the name of the mountains where the temple of God stood, and the palace of the king—refers to the city of Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem was the church. It was the chosen people of God, saved by Jesus Christ, worshipping the one, true God, and governed by God's appointed office-bearers. Jerusalem was believers and their children, called out of an ungodly world to be God's holy people.

In Galatians 4:26, the apostle calls the New Testament church the true, spiritual Jerusalem—the "mother" of believers. Hebrews 12:22, 23 identifies "mount Sion, and…the city of the living God" with the "church of the firstborn," which is the true and "heavenly Jerusalem."

Psalm 48 describes Zion as the "city of God." As a city, it was the community of many people, grown-ups and their children, living together in an orderly fashion under rulers and laws. As the city of God, it was the community that God had formed for his worship and praise and in the midst of which he himself lived with his holy people.

The New Testament church is this city.

In his commentary on Psalm 48, John Calvin wrote: "Since Christ by his coming has renewed the world, whatever was spoken of that city in old time belongs to the spiritual Jerusalem…the Church."

You must think of your membership as your citizenship in the city of God.

You must think of your church this way: "the city of God."

You must think of your membership as your citizenship in the city of God.

The Church Institute

The reference in Psalm 48 is to the church institute, the congregation that gathers for worship on the Lord's Day, with a pastor, elders, and deacons.

The reference is to the church that you can see.

Psalm 48 is not extolling the church universal, or catholic—the church made up of all the elect, which is invisible. This too is the church, and sometimes when the Bible speaks of the church it refers to the entire body and bride of Christ, made up of all the elect, and only the elect, and gathered by Christ out of the world from the beginning to the end of the world.

In Psalm 48, as usually in the Bible, the reference is to the local congregation, to the church with a directory of members, in which is your name and mine.

It is important that you know this, because there is a danger that someone says that he loves and is thankful for the invisible church of all the elect, even though he does not care at all for the church institute and, therefore, does not have his name in any church directory. I have an idea that, if I had pressed him, the young German in Wittenberg would have said that he believes the *universal, invisible* church. He only rejects the *visible institute*. Thus, he rejects the church of Psalm 48.

Psalm 48 makes plain that it speaks highly, not of the invisible church of the elect, but of the visible institution of the church.

Jerusalem, or Zion, in the Old Testament was a visible city with towers that could be told; with bulwarks that could be marked; and with palaces that could be considered.

The church praised by Psalm 48 can be seen. You can see its beauty. You can take note of its strength. In it, you find refuge. It has enemies that assemble to attack it. They march against it. But when they see the church's defenses, they lose heart and flee.

Even these enemies of the church can see the church: "They saw it, and so they marveled; they were troubled, and hasted away" (Psalm 48:5).

The church is visible.

The True Church

But the church of Psalm 48 is not every religious organization that claims to be a church. It is not every institute that has a sign-board in the front yard, "Christian Church."

The Zion of Psalm 48 is a *true* church. A true church is one that confesses, proclaims, and defends God's name (Psalm 48:10), and God's name is the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, consisting of all the doctrines of the Bible. God's name was the beauty and strength of Old Testament Zion. God's name is the beauty and strength of the church today.

In Article 29, our Belgic Confession tells us that a true church has three, distinct marks, identifying it as a true church, God's New Testament Zion. The first and foremost is the preaching of "the pure doctrine of the gospel."

You can be sure, therefore, that Psalm 48 is referring to the churches of which you are members. They preach the pure doctrine of the gospel. Fundamentally, this pure doctrine of the gospel is the truth that Jesus Christ restored to his church at the Reformation: justification by faith alone; salvation by sovereign grace alone; Jesus Christ as the only, almighty savior.

The preaching of this gospel produces lives of obedience to the law of God.

The doctrine that is preached has as its ultimate purpose this confession by the church and its members: "Great is the LORD" (Psalm 48:1).

Thankfulness for the Church

For this church, you are to be thankful. You must rejoice in the church and be glad about it (Psalm 48:11). Your careful examination of the church's beauty and strength is, plainly, a joyful examination (Psalm 48:12, 13).

You must rejoice over the church, not only for what the church is in itself, but also for what it is for you. You are sons and daughters of Judah, that is, sons and daughters of the church (Psalm 48:11). What the church is, benefits you. It is the city of God for your benefit. It is beautiful with a beauty that makes you beautiful. By its strength, it is a refuge for you. In it God dwells, so that he can be your God for ever and ever (Psalm 48:14). The community of people that is the church affords friendship and help for you.

Your joy in and about the church is a form of thankfulness to God for the church. You are thankful to God for choosing the church in his gracious decree of election. You are thankful to God for establishing the church in the righteousness of the cross of Christ. You are thankful to God for gathering the church by his word and Spirit. You are thankful to God for re-forming the church in the sixteenth century. You are thankful to God for your own congregation.

You may not be like that young, German man who believes in God and in Jesus, but who has no use for God's church—*city of God.*

Rather, let mount Zion rejoice. Let the daughters and sons of the church walk about Zion with admiration and joy.

This is an exhortation to you young people—a divine command: Be thankful for the church. "Let mount Zion rejoice!" (Psalm 48:11). "Walk about Zion!" (Psalm 48:12).

Especially the children and the young people are in view: "Tell it to the generation following!" (Psalm 48:13). God wants the coming generation to know and be thankful for the church, because they are members of the church with their parents and grandparents by God's covenant grace and promise.

He commands the old generation to tell the beauty and strength of the church to the younger generation, so that the younger generation will be thankful. This is what I am doing this afternoon at your mass meeting. I am obeying the command of God to tell the beauty and strength of the church to you, the generation following.

Here are some of the reasons why you should rejoice over the church and be thankful, according to Psalm 48.

Thankfulness for the Church: Why?

The church has been created by God so that he may dwell with you. God established the church (Psalm 48:8). In the church, we have God as our God for ever and ever (Psalm 48:14). Dwelling with God is not only the highest privilege and the keenest pleasure. It is also salvation and eternal life. Outside the true, instituted church, ordinarily, you cannot have God as your God or Jesus Christ as your savior.

In the church, by the church's preaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments, you enjoy salvation. Salvation is *in the church*—salvation from sin; salvation from the devil; salvation from the ungodly world (which is not your friend, but your sworn foe); and salvation from death and hell.

Zion is our refuge. The enemies were dismayed and fled away when they saw Zion (Psalm 48:5-7). In Zion is God's lovingkindness (Psalm 48:9). In Zion, we are saved by God's righteousness (Psalm 48:10). In Zion, God guides each of us safely through life, even unto death (and the thought is that he then guides us safely through death) (Psalm 48:14).

In the church, we have the righteousness of the forgiveness of sins, the guide of the word and Spirit of Christ for a holy life, good hope with regard to death,

and protection from all our enemies.

In the church!

Not *outside* the church!

Be thankful for the church!

Another reason why you should be thankful for the church is that in and with the church you can participate in the most important calling of the child of God: public worship of God, especially on the Lord's Day. This is the main thing. This is how Psalm 48 begins: "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised" (Psalm 48:1). Psalm 48:1 adds at once, "in the city of our God." Only in the church is God thus praised. Not outside the church! Not apart from the church!

There are men and women in Europe today, who are miserable, beseeching God every day for the opportunity to worship God purely in a true church.

At the Reformation, men and women died, at the stake, for their work on behalf of true churches and for their insistence on worshipping God in and with a true church.

The Pilgrims, who began our national custom of an annual Thanksgiving Day, came to this country for the sake of a true church and for the sake of worshipping God rightly in a true church. They did not come to America mainly for plump turkeys. The "city on a hill" that they envisioned was a true church, the Zion of Psalm 48.

Your salvation is not the main thing. The main thing is the praise of God. And this happens supremely and fundamentally in the public worship of the church.

Be thankful for the church!

Thankfulness for the Church: How?

Genuine thankfulness always shows itself.

You will show your thankfulness for the church by being and remaining lively, faithful members of the church. Attend the worship services diligently! Make confession of faith in your church as soon as you come to know and embrace with a believing heart the doctrines that the church teaches! Do not leave the church, whether for a job, or for schooling, or for a wife or a husband!

You must show your thankfulness by becoming doctrinally knowledgeable, sound members of the church. The main calling of young people is not to travel hither, thither, and yon building houses for the homeless, alleviating poverty in society, or witnessing to the unbelieving. Build a house for the homeless, help the poor, and witness, as you have opportunity, but do not suppose that this is your main calling from God in your youth.

Your main calling is to be instructed in the doctrines of the Christian faith as we have them purely in our Protestant Reformed Churches. Your main calling is to know thoroughly the name of God, which is the beauty and strength of his Zion.

Tell this truth to the generation following! Psalm 48 commands me and my generation. Implied is the equally imperious command to you: Listen and learn!

Show your thankfulness also by appreciating the church of which you are a member, and speaking well of it to others.

Show your thankfulness also by appreciating the church of which you are a member, and speaking well of it to others. It is not perfect. It is not sinless. The reason is that you and I—its members—are not perfect and sinless. But it is a true church, with the three marks, especially, the mark of the truth.

Some are very critical of the church. Even parents and grandparents, who ought to know better, run the church down. It is not at all surprising, then, that their children and grandchildren leave the church, often ending up as members of a false church, or of no church at all. These parents and grandparents have told the "generation following" bad things about the church, and their generation has paid careful attention.

If there are serious weaknesses in your church, protest in an orderly way. Regarding other weaknesses, be determined to correct them. Improve what God may have done in and for his church by my generation.

But beware, lest you spit on the towers that God has erected, throw rocks at the bulwarks God has built, write graffiti on the palaces in which God dwells, and, generally, busy yourself in the foolish, fruitless labor of tearing down the city of God.

God does not say, "Walk about Zion to find as much fault with my city as you can."

Know the church! Love the church! Live in and with the church! Be thankful for the church!

You believe in God the Father and in Jesus Christ.

Believe also an holy, catholic church, as it takes form in the congregation of which you are a member. ❖

The text of a speech given to several hundred young people at the annual mass meeting of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies in Grandville, Michigan on November 27, 2011.

"The Lord Gave the Word": Commemorating the 400th Anniversary of the King James Version (7) The Golden Age of the English Bible (2)

by Jonathan Langerak, Jr.

Introduction

Our series on the significant 400th anniversary of the King James, or Authorized, Version of the Bible and on the history of the English Bible which gave birth to the Authorized Version (AV) has obviously continued past the 400th year landmark and into the 401st year. Anniversaries rightly celebrated recall the mind of the church to the victories which God has given to the church militant in history in her struggle against sin, the world, and the false church; to the lives of great men in the church, generals who have marshaled the troops, strengthened the defenses, and spearheaded the offensive against heresy; and to the continual hope of glory which belongs to every Christian soldier: the promise of the reward to come as a member of the church triumphant in heaven and complete, final, and everlasting victory over the enemy, which victory they have now in principle as they fight here on earth.

The 400th anniversary of the AV provides the opportunity for us to do this with regard to God's preservation of his Word in the Holy Scriptures. Specifically, as he has preserved it for his English-speaking elect in the whole history of the English Bible and the AV in particular. Our subject in this article is the third of the six English Bible translations produced in the period we may call the Golden Age of the English Bible. This is the Geneva Bible.

"Great are the Troubles of the Righteous" (Psalm 34:19a, Geneva Bible of 1560)

England at the time of the Reformation was a disturbed and often perilous place for the child of God. Henry VIII, the adulterous king of many wives, continually vacillated between allowing limited reform and violent reaction against reform in a return to Romanist doctrine and practice. He allowed the Coverdale Bible (1535), licensed the Matthew's Bible (1537), and promoted the Great Bible (1540, and the de-Cromwellized edition in 1541); then, in 1546, he proclaimed the possession or reading of any Bible translation of Tyndale or Coverdale to be treason against the king, and ordered all copies to be turned in for burning. While the smoke from the ashes of this Bible burning still rose to heaven, Henry died in 1549, and his son Edward VI, aged 10, succeeded to the throne.

Edward's fervent Protestantism was due to another of his father's religious mood swings. Henry had allowed the education of his heir to proceed under the tutelage of Protestant nobles and churchmen, with Archbishop Thomas Cranmer at their head. During Edward's reign, Bible reading was officially encouraged and facilitated by no less than 50 editions of the English Bible, in its current various translations. Cranmer issued in 1549 his *Book of Common Prayer*, which was placed in every English church alongside the Bible as the official service-book. Edward VI, his chancellor Lord Somerset, and Cranmer all corresponded with John Calvin, who offered continual advice and strongly admonished Cranmer to carry the Reformation in England further; that is, to carry it as far as the Word of God demanded.

But Edward VI was a sickly youth, and in 1554, after a reign of seven years and not even 20 years old, he died. And this boy king, whom many who were thirsty for reform in the English Church had hailed as the Josiah who would restore the glory of the right worship of God, was succeeded by a right Jezebel: his half-sister Mary Tudor, daughter of Henry VIII and his first wife Catherine of Aragon. Mary fervently embraced the Romanism of her Spanish mother and determined to return England to the papal fold. She unleashed persecution on her realm. John Rogers, translator of the Matthew's Bible, was the first of nearly 400 martyrs during the years 1555-1558. Among the martyrs who followed were the illustrious bishops Nicholas Ridley of London and Hugh Latimer of Worcester in 1555, and, on March 21, 1556, Archbishop Cranmer. Miles Coverdale had been made bishop of Exeter by Edward VI, and he too was imprisoned by Mary's regime. He would have been burned had not his wife's relative, who was court chaplain to the king of Denmark, brought Coverdale's plight to the attention of

that monarch. The Danish king intervened with Mary on Coverdale's behalf, and Coverdale was permitted to go into exile in Denmark.

But England lost far more citizens through exile than death. Thousands of Englishmen, known as the "Marian exiles," since it was Mary's persecutions which forced them into exile, left their homeland for the Continent of Europe. Among them went some of England's finest scholars. And the destination of many of these Marian exiles was Calvin's Geneva, regarded as a haven for the right worship of God and for the outstanding scholarship at the Geneva Academy.

Calvin's influence was not only felt in England, but *accepted, appreciated*, and *looked for* by those who claimed to support true reformation in the English Church.

You cannot miss the significance of this! In the first place, because it shows that Calvin's influence was not only felt in England, but *accepted, appreciated,* and *looked for* by those who claimed to support true reformation in the English Church. We have seen how Calvin wrote to nobles, to Edward VI, and to Archbishop Cranmer. And although his instruction failed to take root completely in the highest echelons of the Church of England (although Cranmer, at least, was certainly grateful for his guidance), Calvin's principles of a truly Reformed church—including that it must be Reformed in *church government* (which the official Church of England was—and is—*not*)—were embraced by those who later become known as Puritans. We shall talk more of the Puritans later, but for now it is enough to see that they were especially grateful for Calvin's leadership. When they were forced from England through persecution, they were drawn to Geneva like iron to a magnet.

Secondly, the Marian exiles, many of them at least, recognized the need, indeed demand, to belong to true, instituted church of Jesus Christ, even though cut off from their own land. Although they could see that the Church in their homeland was far from truly Reformed, they had remained in it (also, at Calvin's direction), praying and waiting on the Lord to bless their land with more perfect reform. During the reign of Edward VI, they were hopeful. Then Mary came with all her papist persecutions and drove them out. Where were they to go? Calvin's Geneva! There was a church where they could worship. Did they migrate there because they thought that the only road to heaven lay through Geneva? Nonsense. Rather, they recognized that by God's grace working effectually through the ministry of John Calvin, the church at Geneva exhibited all the marks of the true church (see Article 29 of the Belgic Confession), and moreover was a place where they would be free to worship Jehovah according to his Word. So, conscious of the demand to be a member of a true, instituted church of Jesus Christ, they migrated there. And it was in Geneva, in 1560, that a new English Bible appeared.

"But the Lord delivereth them out of them all" (Psalm 34:19b, Geneva Bible of 1560)

The Geneva Bible was without controversy the greatest and most popular of the English Bibles yet to appear. Tragically, it is little known to the average Reformed Calvinist today. In fact, the Geneva Bible is *the* point, the nexus, where the history of the English Bible met the Reformation in its Calvinistic strain. Scholars among the Marian exiles desired a new translation of Holy Writ, based entirely on the original languages of the Scriptures, as opposed to the largely Latin-based official translations in the form of the Coverdale, Matthew's, and Great Bibles. Nothing like this had been done since Tyndale in the 1530s. And, these same scholars wanted the text of Holy Writ interpreted for the readers according to the gospel of the Reformation, that is, according to the gospel which Scripture itself proclaims. They wanted Scripture interpreted with Scripture. Therefore, their aim was a faithful text of the Word of God surrounded by marginal notes interpreting the texts according to other texts and applying it to the situation of the reader.

To this end, in 1557, William Whittingham, one of the Marian exiles in Geneva, produced his own new translation of the Greek New Testament. He then worked in collaboration with the marvelous classicists Anthony Gilbey, Thomas Sampson, William Cole, and Christopher Goodman to produce the entire English Bible in 1560. This first edition is often nicknamed the "Breeches Bible" because of its translation of Genesis 3:7b: "And they sewed fig tree leaves together, and made themselves breeches."

The names of the men mentioned above perhaps mean nothing to you and are seemingly far away, floating abstractly in the mist of history. But they labored night and day with blood, sweat, and tears to render God's

Word faithfully for their fellow countrymen. When I say they were "marvelous classicists" maybe you are inclined to say, "Well, that's all right then, it was no big deal for them to whip out the Hebrew and Greek into English." But one who has actually worked with the Hebrew or Greek or both will know how time-consuming it is and how frustrating it can be—to the point of tears, in fact. Nothing of significance is "whipped out" of the language but drawn carefully by long patience and care which is fueled and nourished by love: love for Jehovah, whose Word it is; love for the Word, because it is of God; love for God's dear people, who belong to him by Jesus Christ in the covenant of grace and must hear—and read—his Word of gracious, sovereign love to them. This love the translators of the Geneva Bible and their assistants possessed in great measure. And it shows in their work.

> …they labored night and day with blood, sweat, and tears to render God's Word faithfully for their fellow countrymen.

As far as the text itself was concerned, the translators "paid meticulous attention to the Greek and Hebrew originals, and made use of the best of the most recent translations into Latin and French."[1] It may be reasonably assumed that they also consulted Tyndale's New Testament and perhaps, because Miles Coverdale (whom various circumstances in the providence of God brought from Denmark to Geneva) acted as sometime advisor to Whittingham and company, Coverdale's translation as well. It was the "most scholarly…and accurate English Bible yet to appear."[2] Some of the phrases introduced into biblical English by the Geneva Bible were: "smite them hip and thigh," "vanity of vanities," "except a man be born again," "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth," "Solomon in all his glory," "My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," "a cloud of witnesses," and "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."[3] We know these same phrases so well exactly because the King James men, unable to improve upon them, incorporated them wholesale into the Authorized Version of 1611.

But there was more in the Geneva Bible. It contained several features designed to enhance its readability: it was easily portable in the pocket of a shirt or in a purse, unlike the huge Great Bible. It was printed in roman type (now called "Times New Roman"), as Bibles are today, and not in the heavy "black letter" or so-called "Old English" type of earlier versions. It was the first Bible in which words that were inserted into the text for clarity, but not found in the original language, were put in *italic type*. And, especially, "for ease of reference the text was divided (for the first time, in English) into chapter and verse. There were also maps, woodcuts, elaborate tables, an appendix of metrical psalms, and a running commentary of explanatory notes. Some two thousand alternate readings and 725 literal renderings were packed into the margins of the New Testament alone."[4]

It was the "running commentary of marginal notes" that both endeared the Geneva Bible to thousands of Englishmen and aroused the ire of the Anglican hierarchy when they got wind of the new translation. These are where we see Calvin's greatest stamp upon the English Bible. Some say he and his successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza, personally authored some of them. Without doubt, when one who has taken even a pint at the well of Calvin's writings reads the marginal notes of the Geneva Bible, he will see and taste Calvin in them, not only in the clear and exact style, but as well in the doctrine they teach. Read this example, explaining Acts 2: 38, 39. The identifiers of the number and letter of the notes are in brackets.

> [8] Then Peter said unto them, Amend your lives, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins: and ye shall receive the Holy Ghost. For the [a] promise *is made* unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call.
>
> [8] Repentance and remission of sins in Christ are two principles of the gospel, and therefore of our salvation: and they are obtained by the promises apprehended by faith and ratified in us by baptism, wherewith is enjoyed the virtue of the Holy Ghost. [s] He goes from justification to sanctification, which is another benefit we receive from Christ, if we lay hold of him by faith.
>
> [a] The word [ie: "promise"—JL] that is used here giveth us to understand that it [ie: remission of sins in Christ, "ratified" by baptism—JL] was a free gift.[5]

1 Bobrick, *Wide as the Waters*, 175.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid, 175-176.
4 Ibid, 175.
5 *The Geneva Bible: A facsimile of the 1599 edition with*

> We may be far removed in time from the men who translated and contributed to the Geneva Bible, but we are one with them in doctrine, as members of Christ's catholic church.

We may be far removed in time from the men who translated and contributed to the Geneva Bible, but we are one with them in doctrine, as members of Christ's catholic church. And it must certainly be appreciated by us today, who see the controversy over the nature of God's covenant—whether it is conditional or unconditional—come to a head in the heresy of the Federal Vision. The promise of God is sure. No question about that! And the sacrament of holy baptism—administered also to infants—signifies unto believing parents that their children have this free justification in Christ and belong to him by faith through the operation of the Holy Ghost. And this is governed by God's eternal, sovereign, immutable decree of *election*: the *elect* children of believers only have this promise of God of justification by faith alone in Christ signified unto them. The elect children of believers alone are sealed with the Holy Ghost unto Jesus Christ. Therefore, this sign and seal are sure. Those who are saved are exactly those—and those only—whom God intended to save from all eternity. Calvin taught this; the men of the Geneva Bible believed this. And we today are the heirs of this glorious doctrine.

But I digress. The Geneva Bible became the household and travelling Bible of English Protestants and in eighty-five years (1560-1644) went through 140 editions. Sixty of these were during the 45-year reign of England's next monarch, Elizabeth I (reigned 1558-1603); in fact, the 1560 Geneva Bible was dedicated to Elizabeth. The Geneva Bible was the Bible of the English Puritans. The Pilgrims who came to America in 1620 were Puritans, and they brought the Geneva Bible to our own land. Perhaps the greatest testament to the Geneva Bible's outstanding quality as a scholarly and faithful translation and its great popularity in England is that in Scripture quotations in his great preface to the Authorized Version of 1611, Miles Smith does not quote the text of the translation which he is prefacing—that is, the AV itself—but rather quotes from the Geneva Bible. But he was an exception. The majority of the hierarchy of the Anglican Church disdained the Geneva Bible, chiefly because of its marginal notes and distinctly Calvinistic origin. Next time, we will consider the response to the Geneva Bible of the Anglican hierarchy with their own official translation, the Bishops' Bible. ❖

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undated Sternhold and Hopkins Psalms, 4th ed. (Ozark, MO: L.L. Brown Publishing, 1990; repr., 2000). The 1599 is the most common edition—facsimile or otherwise—of the Geneva Bible in circulation today.

Gem of the Month

First Snow

by Sarah Mowery

Whose child I am I think I know,
yet oft I long for Him to show
His face upon this wasteland, cheer
my dearth: and then He sends the snow

To cool my tongue. I bend my ear
to hear Him who holds this trembling sphere.
He whispers in each downy flake:
His still, small voice, it draws me near.

Just as my children gently make
a man of snow, so He doth take
my life. He means my soul to keep,
for on this one He's set His stake.

So though the miles be dark and deep,
though sin and sorrow o'er me sweep,
my Lord His promises will keep,
'til in His arms I fall asleep.

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Chester Hunter

February 9 Read Deuteronomy 14

The first part of verse 1 and all of verse two set the theme for the chapter. We are God's children. He has chosen us and set us apart from all the nations of the world. How do we live as God's children? In Israel's day, it was very evident that Israel was different. Is it evident to the world around us that we are different? We should be different not only in the worship of our God, but we must also be different in our lifestyle. Are we? Why are we different? The last verse gives the answer. May this be our desire as we sojourn in the land of our pilgrimage here on earth. Sing Psalter 30.

February 10 Read Deuteronomy 15

Among the many ceremonial and civil laws was an injunction that Israel do no harm to the poor. It was possible that in interpreting and carrying out the law of God that the poor be mistreated or ignored. This was possible in man's interpretation, not in God's. God commanded that the poor be cared for. Christ continued that command in the New Testament. Paul repeated that command in several of his epistles. How do we care for the poor around us? Is our care for them God-glorifying? Sing Psalter 13.

February 11 Read Deuteronomy 16

In this repeating of God's laws to Israel come the commands of observing the three main feasts. The people are reminded as they keep these feasts that they are to be cheerful givers to God. Then they are told to establish judges in the land that God would give to them. These judges were to carry out justice in a Godly manner. Finally Israel was warned to stay away from all the heathen practices in the world around them. We need these reminders as well. When we remember them God will be glorified. We can only expect his blessing in the way of faithful obedience to all of his commands. Sing Psalter 65.

February 12 Read Deuteronomy 17

Two injunctions are given by God for his people to follow in this chapter. First of all, God's church is to worship him in the manner in which he has commanded. In the Old Testament the church had to follow all the ceremonial laws which God had given to them on Mt. Sinai. In the New Testament age in which we live we are to worship him in "spirit and in truth." All of our worship must follow the regulative principle found in Scripture. Secondly, God knows that Israel will ask for a king. He gives principles by which that king must rule. We, too, must choose leaders who will lead us in the way of Jehovah. Sing Psalter 137.

February 13 Read Deuteronomy 18

Throughout the Old Testament there are sprinklings given of Christ and his great work. Here in this chapter we see that Christ will occupy the office of the prophet. As prophet he will speak a word. In fact, according to John 1, he is the Word. That Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. Israel had to look for that Prophet. We know that that Prophet has come; now we must heed the Word that he has given to us and look for him to come again. Are we reading the Word? Are we watching in prayer for Christ's return? Sing Psalter 327.

February 14 Read Deuteronomy 19

As Israel entered the Promised Land, various injunctions were given to them to promote brotherly love. First of all, cities of refuge were set up to provide a "cooling off" period in instances of accidental killings. Secondly, a law was given concerning the removing of the landmarks. Those markers set the boundaries between neighbors' lands. To remove them would be to take away from the neighbor that which God had given to them. Finally, there were various ordinances given that described the use of witnesses in daily life. Do we live in brotherly love with our neighbors? Do we obey the laws that God has given to us whether in his Word or through the authorities he has set up over us? Let us seek true brotherly love with our neighbors, and in it seek love with God. Sing Psalter 336.

February 15 Read Deuteronomy 20

Israel was to be a fighting nation when it entered the land of Canaan. In this chapter many interesting laws were given concerning going into combat and combat itself. We do well to read them and see what they have to say to us in our everyday lives. The church today is a fighting force as well. We belong to the church militant. God has given to us rules concerning this conflict as well. We must fight the battle of faith. We may not become one with the enemy. Let us heed his Word and fight this battle looking until the day we all become part of the church triumphant in heaven. Sing Psalter 36.

February 16 Read Deuteronomy 21

In this chapter we have several curious laws concerning happenings in every day life. We may well wonder about the significance of them all. One in particular is very instructive; that is the law of the rebellious son. What does this law say to us? How does the principal put forth in this law guide us in our child raising? But then there is that ordinance at the end of the chapter. Here we have an ordinance that points directly to Christ. Israel of old did not understand the full implications of such a law, but we should. Let us take heed to the death of Christ and what it means for us and our salvation. Sing Psalter 234.

February 17 Read Deuteronomy 22

As in the last chapter we find various laws concerning the rights of our neighbors. Some are very practical in natures as in the beginning of the chapter. Others give laws that were to depict the separation Israel was to have from the other nations. The final ones deal with the purity that Israel was to have within itself, and the punishments to be dealt out to those who violated that purity. Each of these laws has practical implications for us today. While we know that Christ has fulfilled the ceremonial aspects of these laws, the practical implications still hold in many instances. Let us seek to be separate from the world and be pure in our lives. Sing Psalter 24.

February 18 Read Deuteronomy 23

Here we find various laws that deal with purity of actions and of life. Israel was to be a holy nation. They had to show this holiness with a pure manner of life in many areas. In the last part of the chapter we see that they had to be pure as they dealt with a neighbor in vows as well as in use of his property. In the New Testament we are enjoined to be holy even as God is holy. Let us walk in a holy manner in all that we do. Sing Psalter 174.

February 19 Read Deuteronomy 24

The first part of this chapter is the reference to which Christ pointed when he mentioned "the hardness of your hearts." As the fifth verse in the chapter records, marriage is honorable and must be taken seriously. For a year a man was allowed to solidify his marriage that no need of divorce might enter into their lives. This is the positive keeping of the seventh commandment. As we live in marriage or seek marriage, let us know that it is really "until death do us part." Let us treat our spouses in a way that exemplifies fully the marriage of Christ and his church. Sing Psalter 360.

February 20 Read Deuteronomy 25

Once again we find several practical laws that governed Israel's everyday life. We might wonder why God went to such lengths in prescribing such laws and injunctions. The answer, I believe, is that in all of Israel's life they were to serve God. So when they had to apply God's law to even the slightest detail of that life, they were reminded that God was sovereign over their whole life. Do we acknowledge God's sovereignty over our whole life? Do we live in such a way that we know that he is king over all things in our lives? When we do, we will know how great our God is, and how great his care is for us. Sing Psalter 164.

February 21 Read Deuteronomy 26

Do we give to God in thankfulness for the good things he has given for us? Israel of old had many laws that directed them in their giving. The principle is still the same today. We give to the various kingdom causes in thankfulness to God for giving to us the kingdom. It is his and all that is in it is his. Let us be cheerful givers each and every Sunday as we know that God loves the cheerful giver. Sing Psalter 171.

February 22 Read Deuteronomy 27

As Moses prepares to say his last words to the people of Israel, he gives instructions to set up a table of the law as well as an altar. The people are to array themselves on two mountains and as the Levites speak the words of the law, they are to respond to them with resounding Amen's. Imagine if you can the scene that day. Imagine the hearts of the true Israelites as they heard the words of God's law read to them and their responses. We must do more. We must keep those laws so that the words of the final curse do not come upon us. Christ has fulfilled the law, and we keep it out of gratitude for his sacrifice. Sing Psalter 41.

February 23 Read Deuteronomy 28

This chapter, which continues the thoughts of the previous one, can be broken up into three parts: verses 1-14 contain blessings for those who keep the law, verses 15-44 contain curses for those who break God's law, and verses 45-68 give the prophecy of ruin for the disobedient. There are some chilling words in this chapter. All of them came true in Israel's later history. We, too, must strive to heed God's law so that his blessings rest upon us and our children as we wait for Christ's final coming on the clouds of glory. Sing Psalter 40.

February 24 Read Deuteronomy 29

Now Moses makes the reading of these laws more personal to those standing around him. He mentions them by name as he tells them about the covenant that God will establish with them. God tells those men that the sin that would cause the curses of his law to be enacted upon them would be the sin of idolatry. God is a jealous God as we know from the second commandment. When his people follow after other gods, he brings upon them the effects

of the curses written in the law. Do we try to follow other gods? Most of us will not become image worshippers, but do we put our trust in anyone or anything else besides the sovereign God? If we do, beware the punishments for such sins. Sing Psalter 38.

February 25 Read Deuteronomy 30

First of all, we see in this chapter a manifestation of God's wonderful grace. Even when his people are taken into captivity because of their sin, he will bring them back to the Promised Land. In verse 6 we see that he will work in the hearts of his people to turn them to him. God's grace is near to us as well. Christ has come and has given himself for us. The work of regeneration and calling has been accomplished through faith alone. All of the other blessings of salvation have been applied to us through Christ. We will be preserved until our final glorification with those saints who make up the cloud of witnesses in heaven. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift. Sing Psalter 125.

February 26 Read Deuteronomy 31

This chapter marks the beginning of the last charge which Moses gave unto Israel and its leaders, Joshua and the priests and Levites. In this charge he urges them to have courage. They had a task ahead of them which might seem impossible by man's standards, but as we know, all things are possible with God. He reminds them to keep the law. They are to read that law at set times in their history so that they do not forget it. Finally, he once more implores them not to fall into idolatry as its consequences were great. We, too, should heed the admonitions of Moses as we walk in this life looking for our entry into the New Canaan. Sing Psalter 35.

February 27 Read Deuteronomy 32

Here we have Moses's farewell remarks which are given to Israel in the form of a song. Faithful renditions of Scripture and its truths are good for God's people. They give to them a means of remembering all the goodness God has shown to them throughout history. They also are a way to remember the truths of Scripture that we may grow in them and teach them to our children. In this song God and all his goodness to his people are recounted for Israel. It ends with the promise that God in his mercy will save his chosen even when they plunge themselves into sin. Let us sing the songs of Zion, and let us learn from them about our faithful God and his goodness towards us. Sing Psalter 251.

February 28 Read Deuteronomy 33

Before Moses ascended Mount Nebo, he spoke blessings to each of Israel's tribes. First Moses pronounces a blessing upon Israel as a whole and then upon each tribe individually. These blessings are God's blessing upon his beloved or upon Jeshurun-the beloved one. Several commentators explain this name as God's pet name for his people much as a father has a pet name for one or more of his children. The chapter ends with a reminder of what God is to his people. It also shows how God's favor upon them will lead to eternal happiness. May we read these instructive words and take them into our hearts. Sing Psalter 237.

February 29 Read Deuteronomy 34

Before God took Moses to heaven in death, he shows to him, by a miracle, all of the Promised Land. Moses was given a glimpse of the land for which he had struggled to lead the people over the past forty years. Moses was only a type of Christ just as Canaan was only a type of heaven. The day will come in which all of God's people will be led over the final Jordan into the New Canaan where the New Jerusalem will be found. We have many Moseses to lead us. May we see God's goodness to us in giving to us faithful shepherds to lead and protect us through this valley of the shadow of death. May we look forward to living in his house forever. Sing Psalter 28.

March 1 Read Joshua 1

Moses was dead, and Israel had mourned for him for thirty days. Now God commands Joshua to take up the work for which he was ordained. This work was the typical leading of God's people into the New Canaan. Joshua is the Hebrew equivalent to Jesus-Jehovah Salvation. Just as Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land, so Jesus leads us into the Promised Land of heaven. Joshua had to be a military leader just as Christ must lead us in the fight of faith on this earth. We must be ready to fight even as Joshua admonished all of Israel to be ready to fight God's battles. Sing Psalter 20.

March 2 Read Joshua 2

Just as Joshua used accepted means of warfare to take the land of Canaan for God's people, so we must have at our disposal means of war to fight the battle of faith. We can find the weapons, armor, and methods in his Word. We, like the New Testament church to which Paul wrote, must be commanded to put on the armor and use the weapons. We learn the manner of warfare as we attend church each Sabbath Day. Our children learn war as they attend catechism, listen to the Bible stories at home and at school, and learn from their parents. May we be ready to fight so that we can demolish whatever Jericho is placed in our way. Sing Psalter 322.

March 3 Read Joshua 3

Just as Joshua told Israel the way in which they would enter Canaan, so has our leader told to us the way we will

enter heaven. The ways are similar. They are by faith. As Israel stood by the seemingly impassable Jordan, so we stand by our seemingly impassible Jordan-death. But we have a way. That way is Christ as he told us in John 14:6. He is the way to the Father whose throne is in heaven. May we be instructed by the Old Testament accounts as we make our way to our eternal-resting place. Sing Psalter 289.

March 4 Read Joshua 4

In the old dispensation Israel was given many pictures to remind them of God's work on their behalf. Here we have the account of stone memorials which were set up to remind Israel and to serve as a springboard for instruction for its children in the years to come. We have memorials as well. We have our sacraments to remind us of the work wrought on our behalf by Christ. We remember his work as we partake in them. We also should use them to teach the covenant seed about that work. Let us not just view these accounts as history; let us use them to help us appreciate the work of salvation Christ has accomplished on our behalf. Sing Psalter 276.

March 5 Read Joshua 5

After crossing the Jordan River Israel camped for several days in what would become their home base, Gilgal. This was not an idle time, however. First of all, Joshua had to perform that separation ceremony, circumcision upon all those who had not been circumcised in the wilderness. Secondly, they celebrated the first Passover in Canaan. Thirdly, he had to prepare them for the cessation of manna. God would now feed them from the fruits of their new home. At the end of the chapter the captain of God's host, the Old Testament manifestation of Christ, appeared to Joshua to encourage him in the arduous work which he had to carry out. May we follow that captain as we fight the battles of faith placed before us. Sing Psalter 273.

March 6 Read Joshua 6

Here we find the familiar story of the fall of Jericho. The children's song and spiritual "Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho" has it all wrong. This was God's battle and his victory. The manner that Israel conducted the battle leaves no doubt of that fact. This was plainly a miracle wrought by God no matter what unbelievers may say. Not only was Israel given an important victory, but the way of salvation was continued as we find a great, great, … grandmother of Christ saved in the win. Rahab was rewarded through the faith wrought in her by almighty God. This reward was not for her alone but for all God's elect. Sing Psalter 266.

March 7 Read Joshua 7

Israel had to learn that the way to victory was to be found in the way of obedience. This is a theme found throughout the Old Testament. It is a lesson that we, of the new dispensation, must learn as well. Achan disobeyed God and took of God's spoils. The treasures of Jericho were to be devoted to God and used in his service alone. For his sin not only was Achan killed, but also his whole family as the way of corporate responsibility was shown to Israel and to all of God's church. We must learn this lesson as it is God's way for his people. Sing Psalter 101.

March 8 Read Joshua 8

Now that the sin of Achan had been removed from their midst, God gave to Israel a complete victory over Ai. Now Israel may claim the spoils of war and use them in their lives. After the victory Joshua led the people of God to Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. On those mountains Israel set themselves to listen and to respond to the law of God as they kept the commandment of Moses given before his death. Israel would only win other victories by the way of obedience. Let us allow their obedience to be a model for us as we live in this world. Sing Psalter 334.

March 9 Read Joshua 9

The armies of evil led by their general Satan do not give up. They try all sorts of ploys to defeat the church. Sometimes they gather together into a great host to fight against God's people in an open matter. Other times, like the inhabitants of Gibeon, they resort to craft and guile to try and defeat God's people. Israel forgot an important principle when they dealt with Gibeon. They forgot to ask God for instruction on what they must do. When we depend on our own skill and intelligence we, too, will fall. Let us seek God's guidance in all things in this life and in that way defeat the wiles of the devil. Sing Psalter 165.

March 10 Read Joshua 10

We have a king who will lead us in the battle of faith against Satan and his hosts. This king will lead us not only in the battle but will also lead us to victory. The Lamb will reign victorious in heaven and through him we will gain our rightful place in God's kingdom, which is not of this earth. While we may not experience miracles the way Israel did on the battle field that day, we have gained the victory through the greatest miracle of them all. That miracle is the incarnation of God's Son who came to this earth and crushed the head of Satan by dying on the cross. May we see these miracles for what they are and not dismiss them as idle tales as the unbelievers do. Sing Psalter 158.

Drawing Nigh to God

by Rev. Rodney Miersma

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:7-10).

James asks the church, which includes its young people, why there are wars and fightings among themselves. For young people this certainly would include harassment and bullying. James informs us that it is because we lust after the world which is spiritual adultery. Hence, friendship with the world is enmity with God. Therefore, he calls them to be friends with God.

In order to do this we must humble ourselves, for it is only to them that God gives grace. We are not equals with God for he is the Creator and we are the creatures; he the redeemer and we the redeemed. Beginning with vs. 7 James shows us what true humility is. He does this with ten different admonitions. The central and positive admonition is in vs. 8. "Draw nigh to God."

This is an essential idea seen throughout history. God dwelt in the temple in the midst of his people. Enoch walked with God. Abraham was the friend of God. Moses spoke with God face to face. That essential idea remains in the New Dispensation although the types are gone. God's temple is the body of Christ. It becomes so through the cross and the resurrection: through the state of humiliation and resulting glory.

God dwells in Christ, for through the Spirit of Christ we are attached to that body and become that body. In this way we come nearer to God and to the brethren. We see, then, that drawing nigh to God is not a mere physical act, but a spiritual-ethical act of faith. We emphasize this, for God in the spiritual-ethical sense can be far away. We are sinners and sin is departure from God, called spiritual fornication. The sinner banishes God from his thoughts, walks in his own way, afar from God. In addition, God resists the proud. He is angry over the sinner and gives him over to his sin. His curse rests upon his house and he says, "Depart from me, I know thee not".

To be spiritually-ethically near to God we do not have to go physically to Mt. Zion. To be near God is the conscious awareness of his presence in his favor. It is to walk step by step in the consciousness of his guidance and dependence. It is to experience in life all the blessings of salvation through Christ. That includes all his love, mercy, and favor. It means to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. It is to be God-conscious in all that we do. As the Psalmist says in Psalm 16:8, "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." One must commit his way to him in constant prayer. We walk, as it were, hand in hand, serving and confessing him, experiencing his guidance, approval, and fellowship.

We do this, first of all, by resisting the devil, that slanderer who slanders us before God as he did with Job and as he slanders God to us as he did with Eve in paradise. As an adversary he is formidable for he has thousands of demons to assist him in his wicked work who are in absolute subjection to him. He has vast and great powers himself for he was an high angel and did not lose his powers. He has the whole world on his side, direct access to our thoughts, desires, and inward life. He has vast experience in the work of destroying the church and purpose of God. As our foe he is utterly ruthless, never vacations, never ceases fire, and is always busy. Our sinful flesh is fertile ground and a good ally for him.

James admonishes us to resist the devil. That is an essential impossibility because the ally is in our own flesh. Jesus' temptation in the wilderness set a pattern for resistance. One weapon which the devil can not stand against is the Word of God. One must always quote the Word of God to him; it is the sword of the Spirit, the whole armor of God. We can not resist him in our own strength. Christ has principally defeated him on the cross. The devil can do nothing without the will of Christ for Christ rules sovereignly. Therefore, we can resist and stand only by faith. If you so resist him and do so properly

he shall flee from you. The devil is by us until death, but after each confrontation he will flee away defeated. Each time we resist him will give us added strength to meet the next attack. If we do not resist, then we are weaker until finally there is no resistance at all. Resisting the devil is the antithetical side of submitting to God.

God gives grace to the humble, therefore, submit. This is not natural at all for a young person, but this is the commandment of God.

Thus we turn to the positive admonition to submit yourselves to God. Here the whole concept of humility is implied. God gives grace to the humble, therefore, submit. This is not natural at all for a young person, but this is the commandment of God. To submit is to arrange and group yourselves under the commander. A subordinate must obey. To do this under God means that you arrange yourself under His law, recognize His superiority and do this with your whole life.

Next we have "cleanse your hands, ye sinners." This is a reference to the Old Dispensation priests who had to wash their hands before they might come before the Lord. Hands are expressive of outward conduct. It does not mean that we are authors of our own salvation and can come only after being perfect. It does mean that we must wash our hands in the blood of Christ. He only can ascend the holy hill of Mt. Zion. The only way to God is through Christ. Sinners miss the mark, for they shoot in the opposite direction of the target.

"Purify your hearts, ye double-minded" refers to our inner life. To be double-minded is to halt between two opinions. We want God and the world. We want to be saints and sinners. We seek forgiveness but cherish secret sins. Thus, purify your hearts in the blood of Christ. Forsake your two-mindedness at the foot of the cross for you can not serve God and mammon.

Next is a trio of closely related admonitions. James says be afflicted, that is, labor heavily, endure hardships, therefore, feel wretched and miserable. Secondly, we are to mourn, which is an inward sorrow not manifested outwardly. Thirdly, we are to weep, a visible and external weeping, sobs. As mentioned these are closely related. To be afflicted results in mourning and in weeping. This comes from the heavy labor of carrying the burden of sin and guilt. It is to know sin in a personal and experiential way. We realize how horrible sin is, that it is committed against the most high God. The man who knows this mourns, which is soon manifested in outward expression. This is the only way to draw nigh to God for it leads to the cross. We must come with a broken and contrite heart which leads to confession and repentance, which is not once in a life time, but daily.

Then, let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness, both of which are brought on by the former three admonitions. By laughter is meant the laughter of the world, the silly laughter which tries to cover up deep and profound misery. It is a laughter which mocks holy things, obscenities, and life's tragedies. It is often cold and ruthless meant to cut, hurt, and destroy. For the child of God it comes from down in the heart. It is rooted in peace with God and spiritual well-being. True happiness arises by first mourning, for in mourning we go to the cross where we find forgiveness and salvation. By joy is meant the joy of the world; the joking of sin we turn to sadness.

The final admonition is humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord. It is to make very low, which refers to our spiritual attitude of ourselves. As creatures we are very low in relation to God who is almighty and sovereign Lord over all. This is a spiritual knowledge through faith.

Heeding these admonitions there is blessedness. He will draw nigh to you. He draws nigh to us in Christ through the cross, the resurrection, and the pouring out of the Spirit. The future tense indicates that we will not have this conscious experience of his favor unless we turn to him. This is not on the basis of our turning, but the way. This is a promise. We need this promise in the consciousness of our sins. We need not be afraid for he will draw nigh. His covenant life engulfs us so that our life is filled with joy and peace.

The second part of this blessedness is that He shall lift you up. This is exaltation from one's lowliness. He raises us from a prone position before him to our feet and onto a throne beside him. In so doing he takes us into his fellowship. He forgives and pardons, making us taste of his blessedness. The final exaltation will be when we are brought to glory. This is the promise of God himself which can not fail and which shall surely be fulfilled. ❖

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Life Is Hard, but God Is Good

by Chelsea Kamps

A testimony of God's goodness through my struggle with depression and suicide

A true story

The city lights flash by quickly as I struggle to keep my eyes open. I'm so tired, my body hurts, my mind hurts, and my life hurts. The bright red lights declaring EMERGENCY come into view and the feelings of shame and embarrassment harass me once again. I can't look at the nurse's face as she asks me why I am here. I just want to yell and scream at someone or something, no one understands my hurt. As I tell her I overdosed and I get that look, a look of pity, and disgust, the whispers begin amongst themselves: I need to be put on suicide watch. I know I'm crazy; you're not the first to think so. As I lower my tired, frail body into a wheelchair the stark white halls and smell of antiseptic make me feel alone and all the more hopeless. Just let me go, please, I'm too tired to go on. Anger fills my being as they tell me I didn't take enough to do serious harm, a few more pills and I would've been in worse condition. Teary, pity filled eyes sit near my hospital bed, I can't look at them, I've messed up their lives enough, I've hurt them, confused them, I'm so sorry. If my mind would only stop spinning, if I could just eat and not feel guilty, if I could just feel in control and make it all go away, if life wouldn't be so hopeless and if I could make it stop hurting, I wouldn't be here. I pray in frustration, "Where are you God? Why is this happening to me? Please make my hurt go away!"

Being diagnosed with depression and an eating disorder is not something a little girl dreams about. I was 18 and had wonderful plans for my life. I had graduated from high school. I had a wonderful boyfriend. I was ready to get married and start a family. And then I was diagnosed with a mental illness, and suddenly my dreams were gone and in their place were nightmares.

The road I was about to travel would be the hardest I have yet to face in my earthly journey. With each step I took I felt blindsided by a myriad of emotions, anger and doubt accompanied by frustration, embarrassment and confusion. This was not what my life was supposed to be like. How did it come to this? Why?

As I stared this trial in the eye I knew this trial seemed to be "unplanned" but it wasn't. Written somewhere in God's story for me, he planned this phase in my life. He knew that I would need to carry this cross at this particular time and for a particular reason. (Psalm 139:15-16: "My substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.") I know that "my life in all its perfect plan was ordered ere my days began" (cf. Psalm 139). In his sovereign control, he knew which events would lead each of us to where we are today. God wrote my story and he knew in his infinite wisdom that by allowing this trial in my life, my faith would be "tested" and strengthened. James 1:2, 3: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience."

God's way for me was hard, but I have come to pray that his way would give me the opportunity to help and encourage others. (Psalm 119:71: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.") I have prayed throughout this writing process and I believe that sharing my story is the best way to be a light, a light to mental illness, but more importantly to the wonderful grace of our heavenly Father. This is for anyone who may be struggling. Although our stories may be different and we each have our own crosses to carry, the struggles of this earthly life are all alike and they all are from a loving Father's hand. (I Cor. 10:13a: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.") This is also for the body of Christ as a whole as we all travel a journey to heaven and strive to bear up one another's burdens. May my words be an encouragement and an example of the mighty God we serve. He is a sovereign God who alone deserves the praise, glory, and honor for me writing this and I pray that I do this as I share myself with you.

Psalm 18:30a says, "As for God, his way is perfect." In his perfect plan, he sometimes chooses for his children to experience life in a hard way. The hard way he planned for me was to place wounds in my life as a young person; these wounds hurt me deeply and seemed to turn my life upside down. Wounds, whether emotional or physical,

need attention and medicine to help heal. A mother whose little one has fallen and scraped his knee or gets a cut on his finger knows that wound needs care. She washes the wound, applies ointment, and watches for infection. Anyone who has had a wound knows how painful it may be to clean that wound and let it heal but we know the importance and benefit of preventing infection to achieve complete healing. As physical wounds need care so do emotional wounds.

As a young teenager, I didn't give my wound proper care. I tried to cover it so that on the outside it appeared as if nothing had ever happened. At times it would fester and the scab would break open a bit but because I didn't know how to handle it, I'd again cover it, ignore it, and push it away as best I could. But it never did go away and eventually it became extremely infected. It became puss-filled and painful. It was so big, deep, and ugly that I could no longer cover it or hide it. God knew my wound needed to heal and as much as it hurt to rip open the scab, he uncovered it and began to heal it.

I hated how hard it was to begin to heal. I had tried to ignore my wound for years, and if I had a choice I would have left it that way. As God began healing me I had a difficult time dealing with the pain that came along side. I couldn't understand why God placed this trial in my life and why it seemed he was hurting me so deeply. I doubted his love for me, concluding that I had done something to deserve the hurt, that it was my fault and God hated me. With that mindset, life was no longer worth my trying. I became hopeless and sad, and if God hated me, life was no longer worth living.

Depression

Depression is like falling into a very deep dark pit with no visible way out. Not only is this pit deep and dark but it's cold, lonely, and scary. It can also be disorienting, confusing and frustrating. When I fell into this pit I was all of those things and more. It's hard to capture the essence of depression because it is a severe hurt that resides deep inside one's mind and that can be a very hard place to go. Within the confines of depression there is a will at times, a determination, to work so hard to climb out, but only find yourself deeper in that pit. There are times when I was desperate to find answers, to get out. The more I tried the further I fell. I was overcome by hopelessness and sadness that there wasn't an easy way out and the light at the top seemed too dim to keep trying. There were countless moments of exhaustion when I tried so hard to grasp some source of deliverance, and instead felt defeated.

Depression is a lonely place to be. It can be especially confusing for Christians. We serve a God who loves us and we know he blesses us so tremendously that we find it difficult to understand why someone cannot be happy or content with life. We must understand that depression isn't a state of discontentment; it is not that easy. Depression is an illness of the mind. It is a result of the fall into sin. Many struggle with depression, often suffering in silence. It is an illness that is often aggravated by the lack of understanding of what it is.

We must understand that depression isn't a state of discontentment; it is not that easy

One of the main causes of depression can be life circumstances which are not handled properly. When we do not respond to God and what he is doing through these circumstances they become too much for one to handle. They can be a combination of past and/or present difficulties; it is as if the body and mind overheat and can't handle the stress. The chemicals in the brain can actually become imbalanced due to emotional and physical episodes that have happened or continue to occur. Sometimes many different stressors over a period of time can deplete the brain of its ability to work properly. The chemicals in the brain can be severely altered leading to depression. When the mind is not working properly it brings feelings of tiredness, sadness, and hopelessness.

During my depression life became painted an ugly shade of gray. There were no colorful flowers to enjoy; all I could see was a field of grass, no longer green and lush, but black as if a wildfire consumed it. I woke daily to this picture, and it tired me not only mentally but physically. I had no desire to go about normal daily activities or to interact with others. I wanted to sleep, not just because I was so tired but because sleep was my only respite. When I was awake the thoughts and the battle of my mind were many times unbearable, never ending. This mental battle made functioning seem impossible. I was more than battle worn: I felt defeated. Hopelessness that life will always be like this brought emotional breakdowns and panic. Many times I wished I could be swallowed up and be done.

Living everyday life wearing the label of depression was a frustrating feat for me. I was relieved that my feelings of sadness could be explained but I was continually

frustrated that I was depressed. I tried to no avail to "fix" my situation, to make myself undepressed. I wanted so badly to be a normal teenager. But this was not God's way with me. He wasn't just going to relieve me from this right away, no. I would need to work through this, face obstacles, and fall and get back up. Many times it seemed impossible. I admit that in my sin I wanted nothing to do with working through this. It hurt to look at my wounds and I hated how out of control I felt. I grew angry and confused and kicked at the healing process God was leading me through.

The most confusing and frustrating part of the process was my inability to make my mind or body work like I wanted. It took everything I had to just get ready for the day without wanting to crawl back under my covers and die. When I worked, I was barely with it; I couldn't perform even the easy tasks. I was in therapy or counseling at least once a week and these sessions would tire my emotions and my body. I had no desire to be with friends. I was confused by what my brain could or couldn't handle and I could no longer see normalcy. I literally lived as if I was watching someone else. And oh how I wished I was someone else. Life had become a deep black hole and I became so engulfed by my depression and so blinded by the pain of life that I became defeated and hopeless. I became suicidal.

Suicide and the Devil

In the midst of depression it is hard to see that life is a blessing or consists of anything good. Life often comes with experiencing the pain of past or present life circumstances. Some turn to drugs or drinking, or self harm to numb the pain. Each seems to be an easy solution to forgetting the pain but in reality it comes back, so extreme and so very real that it lingers like the stench of a dead animal. When one cannot deal with living, she begins to give up and longs to be relieved from the emotional pain. The realness of this pain and hopelessness can turn into a longing to leave this life.

I reached this point just after my 19th birthday. My feet were heavy from dragging the weight of my pain for what seemed like forever and I could see nothing but relief in the arms of death. I drove recklessly, not caring if I got in an accident. I exercised during the hottest time of the day, not caring how it affected my body. I developed an eating disorder, slowly starving myself to death. I would empty a bottle of one of my countless medications into my hand, wondering how many I had to take to kill myself.

And eventually, in a moment of complete hopelessness, I overdosed and tried to end my life once and for all.

If depression is hard to understand, suicide is even more difficult to understand and explain. Edward T. Welch explains the relationship between depression and suicide in his book, *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness*. "For one who is depressed there is a rocky relationship with death. You want it, but you fear it" (195). In most cases that fear is enough to persuade one to not take their own life. But, fear is not lasting and in some cases a moment of desperation can overrule it" (195). Facing the hopelessness of depression and of life's circumstances can be overwhelming to the point of not knowing how or not wanting to handle it.

Many times in these moments God seems to be hidden or nonexistent. It's hard to understand why God would let one endure such pain, and one thinks God has forgotten them. Welch says "There is *some* truth in suicidal thinking. When life is examined apart from God, thoughts of death make perfect sense" (196). When one contemplates taking her life she can only think one way and see one thing. She is desperate and when depression and pain seem to overtake life and every thought and action seems to circle around that, it's hard not to feel desperate for a way out. Welch says "suicidal thinking only sees part of the picture—the part that will confirm its interpretation of reality. If you have thought about suicide, its logic is clear and simple, but it is irrational" (196). In suicide there is a lot of over rationalization of things and everything seems worse than it really is.

About 34,000 people die from suicide every year. Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death among young adults age 15-24 and 60-75% who committed suicide were majorly depressed (http://www.afsp.org). Although these statistics are alarming, it is a wakeup call to us that suicide does happen, and it's a scary reality that I faced head on.

It's so easy to judge when we do not know the answers to why or how could this happen. We often wonder what may have caused that push over the edge or easily judge that person's life. We may never find a clear answer, but we can look at the facts stated and try to understand. There are many who seem to know the answer and it may seem clear cut to those who do not struggle with depression or suicidal tendencies, but please know that this battle is not easy for one who is mentally ill. There are so many different reasons one contemplates or commits suicide, and many times they are specific to that person. But realizing the pain, hopelessness, and desperation that is always behind suicide gives us a glimpse and a slight understanding of one's thoughts and actions.

In the moment when I attempted suicide, nothing

mattered. My body was tired of fighting, and my mind was numb from the ongoing emotional pain. I honestly thought I could no longer handle life and carry the cross God gave me to bear. I was filled with anger and frustration. I was angry at my loved ones for not understanding, I was angry at myself for not having the strength to bear the pain, and I was angry at God. In sin I doubted him, and in my sickness I couldn't understand his way with me. As angry as I was with God, I also had been taught from infancy what heaven was and I knew the promise of everlasting life. I know for many who face pain in life, the thought of heaven and being in perfection is so inviting. The same is true for emotional pain. I know that many who have suffered with mental illness have sought relief, yearning to be with Jesus. I, too, had this desire. I felt so strongly the hurt of this earthly life, but in my sin I was not trusting God with my life, and in sin I wanted to take it into my own hands.

Although we may struggle to find answers to the questions of suicide and as confusing as it may be, we know that behind it stands the devil, clapping and cheering. The devil's antics and games can rule our life and thinking especially in times when it's hard to see the goodness of God. That demon is all too visible in the mind of a suicidal depressed person, and in the moments of extreme pain, he's hard to shut up. (I Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.") For me, that was all I could see. My anger toward God was too great, and I hated him so much for what I was going through that I was willing to lay my life down for the devil. I know many of you know how close the devil can get to us or how close we can get to the devil, and it gives me shivers just remembering how I nearly took his hand and forsook God. I felt his breath, and for me that was too close for comfort.

The devil's hands may be visible in times of great struggle but we have the reassurance that the devil is never in control. By God's grace, he takes our hands and leads us to himself. With this assurance we know that we have no authority or ability to take control of any part of our lives including our own death. This life is filled with painful wounds and hardships that God allows in order to heal us and to strengthen us. Our lives are full of sin, and the evidence of our enemy the devil is plainly seen as he uses his demons to make us fall in any way he can. Depression is a very real illness that is not the exception to sin. With every trial we face we have temptation, and in those trials the temptation to sin is even greater. The devil tempts us by using depression to find our weakness and to make us fall. He'll dig his nasty fingers in and work to make us doubt our God and think we can take control of our destiny during these moments. The devil makes us think that we are at our wits end and we have no choice but to give up. The devil is real, our sin is real, and when one contemplates or commits suicide, it grieves God. But, again, he is always in control and his plan is evident.

Knowing that God is in control and has a plan brings comfort to all aspects of life, and when one commits suicide or has a loved one commit suicide, we know that we don't have to wallow in hopelessness. I feel this is important to emphasize because suicide is sin but God is also a God of hope. We hurt deeply when we experience the devil so closely and intimately through suicide but we know that God has a perfect will. Many who have lost loved ones to suicide don't know where to find peace, but we know that in everything we serve the God of peace. We don't condone suicide but look to God who is always in control. He foreknew and he ultimately still is the giver and taker of life. Job confesses this after Satan's first assault on his faith. Job loses everything and confesses that God is in control of life itself, Job 1:21b: "The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord." God knew the moment, the method, and the thoughts. If he foreknew that child to be his own, he welcomed that child to his heavenly home. We cannot judge one who commits suicide, for we are not perfect in our actions ever, and God alone is the perfect judge. We have assurance of the forgiveness of our sins and as God hates our sin and the devil, he also loves his children and understands our temptations and our hurt. He is a God who forgives and loves unconditionally. We don't deserve this love or forgiveness but he still gives it to us in his perfect will. Only God knows the heart of his child and he will forgive. (I Samuel 16:7b: "for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.") (Ephesians 1:7: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.") This doesn't take away our duty to strive to put away our sinful natures and resist the devil, but we can find comfort in our forgiveness and in our loved ones forgiveness.

The Enemy's Hold

Ephesians 6:12: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

When I took my eyes off from God and doubted his will in my life the devil rejoiced.

As one who has faced depression and suicide I realize how real and close the devil is. He found my weakness and knew my doubts and frustrations, and in that he found a foothold to tempt me and help me fall. When I took my eyes off from God and doubted his will in my life the devil rejoiced. In my struggle I was constantly looking horizontally, at all my problems, at everything going wrong in my life, when I should have been looking vertically. God knew what he was doing in my life. He planned it perfectly before I was born, I realize now, but in the midst of struggle I was lost in my own world. God was seldom part of that picture. I did a lot of listening to the devil during this time, especially when I attempted suicide. I was very sick, but also my sinful nature made my decision very selfish. I cannot say that I wasn't in a lot of pain emotionally and that life wasn't hard, but because my focus was in the wrong direction that pain and my life felt as if it was unbearable. It felt unbearable because I was ignoring God, I even hated him, and I doubted every aspect of his plan for me. I neglected to find his evidence in my life and lived in pure disobedience toward him. My hurts were painful but they became excruciating when I chose to hate God.

Turning my face from God also meant that I failed to see the pillars he placed in front of me, people in my life who were trying to help me by bringing me to Jesus' feet. In selfishness I thought everything I was going through belonged to me, I was the one who was hurting, I was the one who was wounded, I was the one who had to face weeks of therapy, and I was the one who had to go through this. I had closed my heart and my ears to those around me and was wallowing in my selfishness. God placed so many wonderful pillars to speak truth into my life, but for a time I didn't want to hear it. I couldn't hear it. The devil had his hold on me and was constantly speaking lies into my life when my face should have been facing God and those he placed as pillars in my life.

I carry many scars; they are all a little different. I carry the scars of my wounds, the scars of suicide, depression and an eating disorder, and I carry the scars of the devils claws. All of my scars have their stories, as do each of your scars. They are ugly and hard to look at sometimes. The scars I hate are the ones the sin and the devil left. I am not proud of the way I chose, I hate my sin, and I cringe at how I so hated God. Each path the Lord takes us down, we have the ability to turn our face by his grace toward him, take his hand, and let him lead us, or take the hand of another, or go on our own way. I didn't take God's hand right away; it took many scrapes and bruises of falling and getting back up. But, by his grace God always has a way of bringing us back to himself and covering the lies of the devil with truth. By his wonderful grace I took the hand that had always been there and was set free from the enemy's hold.

The Truth Shall Set You Free

Galatians 5:1: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

Truth, God's truth, is the only way to true freedom. I chose to believe lie after lie that the devil and his demons dangled in front of me and found myself imprisoned to the enemy. This is somewhere I hope to never be again. It's beyond frightening to feel such bondage. We all are aware of such bondage to sin and the devil at one point or another in our lives and it's a place we care not to visit. We also can say with joy that we are captives set free, and dance and praise God as the Israelites did after their deliverance out of the slavery of Egypt. Exodus 15:1b, 2 says, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him." God has and always will have the victory, and his plan is always perfect even when it's hard to see that victory banner in sight. Paul in Philippians 3: 14 says, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The freedom and victory, we know, only comes when we see the truth God so vividly lays before us. It's easy to find truth, but it's another thing to know and believe truth. This is not an easy feat when the race laid before us is difficult. The journey is full of wounds and hurts, and dark times and valleys, and tears and sorrows. God never promised that life would be easy, but he did promise he would never leave us or forsake us. He promised to love us no matter what and to grant us grace sufficient for each moment. (II Corinthians 12:9: "And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.")

This life is full of moments when God is teaching his children how he is fitting us into our place in heaven. He is also teaching us about himself. It's not easy thanking God for giving these times in our life; in fact at times I would rather live life cut and dried, but these times are God's way of defining our character. Ephesians 3:16: "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." His story for us was perfectly designed and predetermined before we were conceived. He saw each aspect and knew that each moment, especially those hard times would make us more and more ready to be with him. II Corinthians 4:17: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

As we face each hardship and carry the cross God determined for us, we in our sinful natures so easily question God's reasons and his way. But we must know that these times are his way of showing to his beloved who he is. God is unfathomable. (Romans 11:33: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!") We won't ever know the full scope of who he is until we sit at his feet in heaven, but he continues to reveal himself to us daily. His evidence in our lives is unmistakable, even in those times that he seems far off. As I look back at where God brought me from, I see times when God was so clear and was refining me and teaching me about who he is. In my rebellion God never took his hand from me; he was showing me his love and providing grace for those times. His touch wasn't always gentle, sometimes it was hard, but it was always in love, and that is many times the way God brings his children to himself.

The lessons that God has taught me in my life so far are so valuable and have changed me. I could write so much more, but I think I've exhausted my time already. If I could share one more thing with you it's that although life is full of valleys, God is still good. He is worthy of all praise and glory for choosing us to be his own. His way in our lives is always good no matter how bad it may seem. I don't know what he has in store for me yet on this earth, but he has taught me even in the time of writing this that his goodness is there even if I believe with blind faith. His goodness is in healing wounds and teaching us to trust him even when life hurts. His goodness is in restoring, receiving and being one who forgives. His goodness also may mean that his way isn't what we expect. He may take to himself a little one we never got to hold and we may not understand it, but we still know that he is good and that he is always faithful. Wherever God has placed us, at whatever stage of life we are in, we humbly thank him and praise him. We trust in the promise that although life is hard, God is still good.

Heidelberg Catechism Question 1: "What is thy only comfort in life and in death? Answer: That I with body and soul, both in life and death am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ Who, with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth to live unto Him." ❖

Chelsea Kamps is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Christian Living

Developing Love

by Rev. R. Van Overloop

The title of this article raises a question. How can we develop love, when it is a fruit of the Spirit?

When love is called a fruit of the Spirit, then the implication is clear that the Holy Spirit is the divine agent who works in us the blessings of salvation as merited by Christ upon the cross. This work of the Spirit in us produces fruit which becomes evident in every aspect of our lives.

But the sovereignty of God does not deny and has never denied man's responsibility. "Walk in the Spirit,

and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16, 23).

We cannot give ourselves love nor can we give it to others. It is the fruit of the Spirit of Christ. But we can encourage or discourage this love which is within us. We can develop the fruit or we can quench the fruit of the Spirit (I Thess. 5:19).

But we, of and by ourselves, cannot even develop the fruit after the Spirit bestows it upon us. That too is the work of the Spirit. And this the Spirit does through the use of means. He does not treat us like so many pieces of rock, upon which he works. He uses us consciously, for the growth of our graces.

* * * * *

Prayer is an indispensable means which the Holy Spirit uses to develop love in us consciously. God would have us pray to him for the grace to grow in love.

"God will give his grace and Holy Spirit to those only, who with sincere desire continually ask them of Him" (Heidelberg Catechism).

Ezekiel 36 is a chapter of the Bible which most strongly states the sovereignty of God in our salvation. Yet this same chapter also states explicitly the necessity of prayer. Start reading this chapter at verse 21. Underline every time the words "I will" appear, just to emphasize to yourself the sovereignty of God. The conclusion is "I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it" (vs. 36b). But this sovereignty of God is harmonized beautifully with the Christian's responsibility when prayer is commanded in verse 37. "Thus saith the Lord GOD, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them."

So the development of love, as a gift of God, is through the divinely-appointed means of prayer. So start by praying to God that he will give us love and that we may grow and increase in this fruit of the Spirit.

Who is the object of this love?

God is the first object.

It is also love of Christ.

Saints are also the object of this fruit.

Other objects of this love are the house and worship of God, and the truths of the gospel.

And, in a sense, is not any man, as our neighbor, to be the object of our love?

There can and may not be any doubt but that God is the central object of this love. Because we are given love for him it follows that we will love Christ, fellow saints, the church and the truth. And loving God is not only why we can, but also how we can love our neighbor.

* * * * *

From the above it is clear that if we are to speak of developing this fruit of the Spirit, then we must concentrate on developing our love for God. For, having improved our love for God, we will, at the very same time, be improving our love for the other objects of our love.

When we are loving God, we are loving the truth, our fellow-saints, and our neighbor. And we are loving them in the right way.

* * * * *

What is the way by which our hearts may be made to love God? I John 4:19 ("We love him, because he first loved us") shows the method of the Holy Spirit. He reveals the love of God to the heart, and then the heart loves God in turn.

If you desire to grow in love to God, use the method of meditating upon the great love of God to man. Meditate on God's love as described in John 3:16. Consider that it is such a vast love which gives salvation, in which the only thing required of us is that we be nothing and trust Christ to be everything (and even that trust he gives us as a gift of his Spirit).

If you want to repent, do not consider your sins as much as the love of Jesus in suffering for your sin. If you desire to love, contemplate (until it breaks your heart) the great love of Jesus Christ in laying down his life for his worthless foes.

One preacher put it this way. " 'Faith cometh by hearing,' and love comes by contemplation; it flows out of a sense of the love of Christ in the soul even as wine flows from the clusters in the wine-press. Go to the fragrant mystery of redeeming love, and tarry with it till in those beds of spices your own garments are made to smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia. There is no way of sweetening yourself but by tasting the sweetness of Jesus Christ; the honey of his love will make your whole nature to be as honeycomb."

If we wish to sustain the love we have received, we must do the same thing. Feed love on love. God's love for us is the best food for our love for him, for the truth, the church, and our fellow saints. If we neglect this contemplation, then our love will die out as quickly as a fire without wood. The God, who gives us the life of love, must keep us alive in it or we become loveless and lifeless.

And if our love has grown somewhat cold, we must do the same. We do not revive our love for God by doubting his love to us. Believe in God's love, for doubting is the death of love. Only by faith can love be nourished. Believe that God loves you still. Believe in the mighty power of Christ towards sinners and trust yourself with him. And then his love will come flooding in our hearts.

Dwell upon the love of God to you, so you may feel intense love to God!

* * * * *

By the way, there are also many practical implications here as far as the manner of our love is concerned.

If you love God, then show it as God showed his love to you. God loved the worthless; do likewise. God loved in Christ practically, so you and I must love not in word only, but in deed and in truth. God loved to self-sacrifice, so must we.

Therefore let us love him as he loved us. Let his love be both the model and motive to us. ❖

Reprinted from the January 1985 issue of Beacon Lights.

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:

Elle Rika, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kevin Deemter—Byron Center, MI

Caleb Joel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dan DeJong—Faith, MI

Addalyn Rose, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric Doezema—Faith, MI

Teagen Fynn, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jim VanBaren—Faith, MI

Hannah Kay, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Phil Miersma—Grace, MI

Will David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Everett Langerak—Hudsonville, MI

Joshua Everett, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dustin Boven—Hudsonville, MI

Hendrik, son of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Linker—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN

Connor Wade, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kelsey VanBemmel—Loveland, CO

Jarod Mark, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matthew De Jong—Peace, IL

Sally Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. James Kooiker—Randolph, WI

Dana Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan Postmus—Redlands, CA

Juliet Paige, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Darin Gritters—Redlands, CA

Blake Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Michael Pols—Southeast, MI

Annabeth Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy Essenburg—Trinity, MI

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:

Jordan Newhof—First, MI

Gerrit Ter Avest—Grace, MI

Ranae Boonstra, Ashley Brummel, Thomas De Jong, Emily Gritters, Maria Korver, Daniel Van Den Top, and Hannah Van Maanen—Hull, IA

Emily Feenstra, Adrian Gaastra, Carol Hopkins, Charlie Hopkins and Brad Potjer—Redlands, CA

Roxanne Kamps—Southwest, MI

Nathan Vander Woude—Southwest, MI

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. Zack Start and Miss Kelsey Jenkins—Georgetown, MI

Mr. Will Slager and Miss Gina Overbeek—Georgetown, MI

Mr. Caleb Meulenberg and Miss Sandra Hoekstra—Grace, MI

Mr. Brandon Feenstra and Miss Breanna Meelker—Redlands, CA

Mr. Jared DeVries and Miss Cassie Boer—Trinity, MI

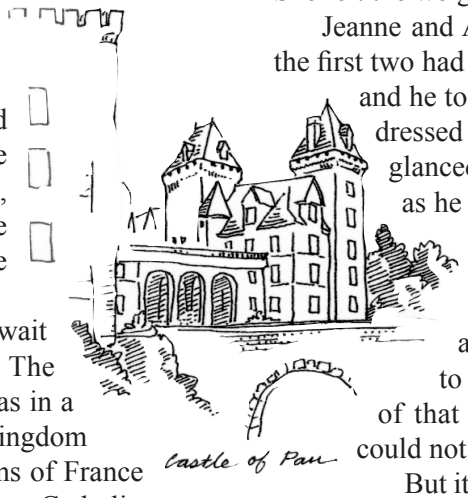
"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine !

by Connie Meyer

A Royal House (1)

Bells rang. Banners flew. People shouted for joy. A royal house—the castle in the city of Pau—saw a crown placed upon the head of a new queen. Her name was Jeanne. She was only twenty-seven years old. The year was 1555. The month was August. As the season promised another time of harvest, the people of Pau and the kingdom of Navarre looked with expectation on the promise that this new queen would bring.


Castle of Pau

Her father, Henry II of Navarre, had died in May. Now his daughter, Jeanne d'Albret, had to take the rule of Navarre, along with her husband, Antoine de Bourbon. Jeanne's mother, Marguerite of Navarre, had died some years earlier.

The people of Navarre had reason to wait with expectation on their new queen. The times were dangerous. All of Europe was in a state of change. Navarre was a smaller kingdom sandwiched between the larger kingdoms of France and Spain. Both of those countries were Catholic. Many people in Navarre were not. Many had embraced the Reformed faith. Luther had nailed his theses on the door of the Wittenberg church some thirty-eight years earlier, and the truth had spread—including to Navarre.

Including to Jeanne's mother, Marguerite. Marguerite had already done much for the cause of the Reformed faith. She had welcomed persecuted Huguenots into her land. Marguerite's brother was Francis I, the king of France. Francis was Catholic and he was behind much of the persecution of Protestants there. Yet he loved his sister dearly. She was able to set many an imprisoned Protestant free by requesting the mercy of Francis for them. She had written letters to John Calvin, and he to her. She had been interested in all things doctrinal. But times were dangerous, even for her. She had had to be careful.

And now, so did her daughter, Jeanne. Marguerite had seen to it that Jeanne had been taught well in the new doctrines of the Reformation. And Jeanne believed those doctrines. But she was cautious. She had the crown of Navarre now, but she could lose it. Was the truth worth the price of a kingdom?

Though of changeable character, her husband was more bold than she. He refused to have anything to do with the idolatrous mass. But that was one reason why she had been happy to marry him, for he was a Protestant as she was. Yet Jeanne planned to attend both kinds of worship, just to be safe. Spain and France were watching. She felt the weight of the crown on her head.

Jeanne and Antoine had had three sons so far, but the first two had died in infancy. Henry alone survived, and he toddled with his nurses on this occasion, dressed in his fine, small royal robes. Jeanne glanced at the little boy. His eyes were wide as he wondered at all the finery around him. Jeanne took a moment to soak in the scene herself. The true knowledge of the Lord had begun to fill her kingdom, and her subjects looked for the freedom to be able to be filled with more and more of that knowledge. They looked to her. She could not disappoint.

But it was such a small, difficult, and treacherous beginning.

Find the underlined words in the puzzle below:

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid….the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:6–9).

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

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

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Age Group:	How many people per age group in the subscribing household?	How often does this person read BL (every issue, a few times a year, or never)?
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50s+		

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