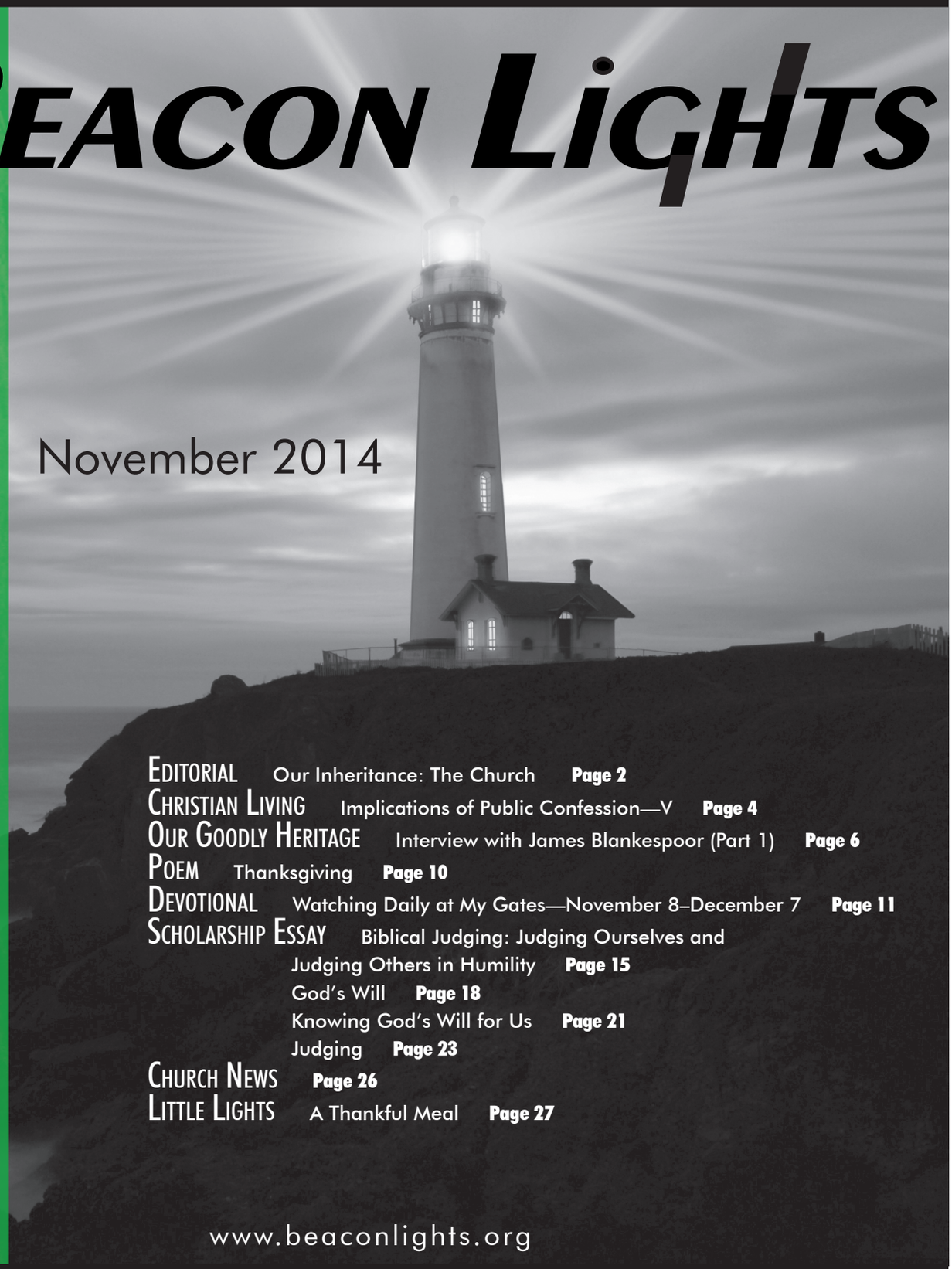
BEACON LIGHTS

Magazine of the Protestant Reformed Young People

November 2014



EDITORIAL Our Inheritance: The Church **Page 2**

CHRISTIAN LIVING Implications of Public Confession—V **Page 4**

OUR GOODLY HERITAGE Interview with James Blankespoor (Part 1) **Page 6**

POEM Thanksgiving **Page 10**

DEVOTIONAL Watching Daily at My Gates—November 8–December 7 **Page 11**

SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY Biblical Judging: Judging Ourselves and Judging Others in Humility **Page 15**

God's Will **Page 18**

Knowing God's Will for Us **Page 21**

Judging **Page 23**

CHURCH NEWS **Page 26**

LITTLE LIGHTS A Thankful Meal **Page 27**

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Volume LXXIII Number 11

Our Inheritance: The Church

Open your favorite dictionary to the word "inherit". It will define the word something like: "to receive by legal succession or will." The word "inheritance" is defined somewhere along the lines of "something regarded as a heritage." What then is a heritage? Shuffle a few pages back to the word "heritage". What you find is something like this: "something passed down from preceding generations; tradition." It seems the words "inheritance" and "heritage" have much in common. A heritage is inherited. That one receives an inheritance implies that that person is part of a family, or at least has close ties to that family.

As members of the church of all ages, we are part of a family. We are inheritors. We inherit what God has given to us by means of the church. The idea of believers as heirs is brought out beautifully in Psalm 16. "The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Ps. 16:5, 6). The idea of lines that the text speaks of is rich with meaning. The lines spoken of here bring out the idea of measuring. Lines measure out our portion, and our portion is something remarkable, to say the least. Our portion is the Lord. God has given himself to us as our portion, our inheritance. The lines have fallen unto us in the pleasurable fellowship of God. In this blessed fellowship with God, we have knowledge of him and knowledge of the truth. We develop in this truth as a part of the church universal and more specifically in our own lifetimes as members of the church institute. Our inheritance then is the church and the history of the church through the ages. We confess that in

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Beacon Lights is published monthly by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies. Subscription price is $15. Please send all business correspondence, address changes, and subscriptions to the business office.

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

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

All submissions should be sent to the editor six weeks prior to the publication date and must be written in Microsoft Word format.

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

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the church is found truth. This truth has a value that far surpasses anything else we can receive in this world. This truth has a history that we can trace to the creation of time. We are called to develop in this truth as a part of the church universal. These ideas and more we will examine in the next few editorials.

What is the church? Article 27 of the Belgic Confession states, "We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by his blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost." Article 28 takes it a step further: "We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and out of it there is no salvation, that no person, of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it, maintaining the unity of the church; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof."

The true church has characteristics that distinguish it from the false church. These are given in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. "The pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein", "she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ", and "church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin". As a member of a true church, these marks are a part of your inheritance. God has preserved through the generations churches that have faithfully kept these marks and have passed them on to the following generation.

Let's narrow down more specifically to our background as believers who profess to be Reformed. The precious doctrines we hold to, which have come out of the history of the church, give us a Reformed worldview. Our Reformed worldview is the foundation on which we stand. Ultimately we stand on Christ, the rock of our salvation. The teaching of Christ was given to the apostles to be given to the New Testament church. This teaching was passed down to us in scripture as we have it today. The church formulated these teachings into doctrines contained in the creeds we still have today. Holding to these creeds is part of what makes us Reformed. Standing on the truth of the Reformed worldview is standing on the teachings of Christ. If this foundation is despised or destroyed, we will lose all. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Ps. 11:3).

How do we receive these doctrines except through the preaching of the gospel? Herein lies the importance of consistent church attendance. Removing ourselves from the preaching, the chief means of grace, is one of the most catastrophic things we can do. The preaching keeps us sharp. The preaching keeps us on our guard. The preaching gives us discernment. The preaching feeds us. The preaching gives us knowledge of absolute truth, something that is despised today. Purity of doctrine is despised because "it doesn't matter what you believe." Many in the Christian church today think that doctrine is bad. Doctrine is evil. Doctrine is the evil. Doctrine is what is sinking the ship. To "stabilize" the ship they jettison their purity of doctrine. This does not save the ship, but their plight ends up worse than before. She ends up being dashed on the jagged rocks of false doctrine and opened up to the world. Her children are helpless, floating in the tempestuous sea of everything this wicked world has to offer, drowning because they have nothing solid to hold on to. Wave after wave of temptation and false doctrine plunge more souls into the depths. Doctrinal preaching is seen not only as evil and divisive, but also just plain old-fashioned. Politically incorrect. Culturally insensitive. God created the heavens and the earth in six 24-hour days? God established marriage as a covenant bond between one man and one woman? For life? Sunday is not a day for yard work and recreation? You really still believe those kinds of things?

These are all things we believe and hold as a precious part of our faith in God. These are all things that may strike a discordant note with some of our coworkers or college classmates. Will we give in to their staunch denial of these aspects of our faith? Or will we guard our inheritance as Naboth did? When God divided the land of Canaan between the tribes of Israel, each tribe was given a portion of the land. The families of each tribe had a part of that portion that was passed down through the generations as an inheritance. They valued their portion and would not give it up. Why would they? Remember Naboth's stand against Ahab. He would not sell his family's portion. So important to him was his portion that he stood up to the king. Would we, when subjected to great pressure as Naboth was, hold on to our inheritance of truth? Naboth by the grace of God stood up to a king. Will we stand up to our coworkers or peers at school?

We have received a spiritual inheritance far greater in value than any earthly goods we might be given. Will we give that inheritance up? If we give it up or despise it, we don't value our inheritance, and we dishonor the giver.

Next month we look at the beauty and great value of church history in order to gain a better appreciation of our inheritance.

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Editor's Note — Mark H. Hoeksema

In this issue *Beacon Lights* presents four articles from the annual scholarship competition.

Christian Living — Abraham Kuyper

Implications of Public Confession

V
Knowing God's Works

"The praises of the Lord."
Psalm 78:4

Men have studied for making confession as long as Christ's church has existed. That is perfectly natural. You would not need to study if you had been present personally when God revealed himself through the prophets, through Christ, and through the apostles. But God's works and God's revelations were not completed within the scope of one man's lifetime. They occurred long before you lived, and they needed several epochs to be fulfilled. Because of that, and because of that only, it is necessary that you study for making confession.

If you are to know anything about the history of your own country, you must study it. You know what is happening around you in your own time without having anyone tell you of it. But you have not this same firsthand information concerning what happened in the days of William Penn, of the Redcoats, of George Washington, or of Abraham Lincoln.[1] Of that you were not an eyewitness. Accordingly the history of those days has been written into books so that you may read of it.

Because God accomplished his mighty deeds in bygone ages, and because he made his significant revelations long before you were born, it pleased him to have the record of them preserved for you in written history. He provided that all of his "praises," as Psalm 78 calls his mighty deeds, would be available for you to read. But if these praises are not to remain foreign and unknown to you, you must put forth a conscious effort to acquaint yourself with them.

It is for purposes of such study that God endowed you with a memory, that marvelous faculty that enables you to carry a photograph of the past with you in your mind. Because of memory, bygone epochs can become palpably real and genuinely meaningful to you. By means of it you can relive the experiences of an earlier generation.

That does not mean that you may use your memory only for familiarizing yourself with the "praises of the Lord." You may use it to bless your daily, public life also. Yet you may never forget that your memory is employed for its highest function only when you use it as a means to make the deeds and the revelation of God part and parcel of your own consciousness. You do well to remember that you must love the Lord your God with all your faculties. Memory is not the least of these.

1 Names taken from American history have been substituted for those borrowed from Dutch history by the author. —Translator

Your attitude is not to be commended if in study you concentrate all your powers upon the several sciences and arts, and never once undertake to enrich the rising generations by a knowledge of God's deeds and by the science of his revelation.

The value of study as a preparation for confession may therefore not be underestimated. Yes, even the task of committing matter to memory is an invaluable one. The strenuous efforts that must be put forth in such study form a part of the "sweat of the brow" by which alone we are to eat bread. You may think that you are manifesting love for your children by sparing them exertions required for such study, but such misdirected pity makes you guilty of a brutal want of sympathy for them. Your children must study, even if the exertion demanded from you and from them be ever so exacting. The faculty of memory meets fewer obstacles in exercising itself in children than it does in adults. The age of childhood accordingly is the appropriate time for memorization.

One caution is in order, however, in urging that children be compelled to memorize the historical truths narrated in the scriptures. It is this: Never suppose that a well-supplied memory equals piety, or that an encyclopedic mind alone can ever foster religion. When a man has gathered stones into a heap, he has not yet built a house. An aggregation of kernels is not yet a loaf and will stay no man's hunger. So too the facts accumulated by the memory will become so much ballast to the brain if they are there left unused. Yet it is also true that no house can be built nor loaf baked before the constituent elements have been gathered together. So again there can be no religion without knowledge of "God's praise." It remains equally true that just as an aggregation of constituent elements can never equal a house or a loaf of bread, so also an accumulation of facts cannot amount to true religion unless they have been seized upon and shaped into a living, organic whole.

It is necessary that memory be put to work at accumulating facts that can be of real use. That fact makes a second caution necessary. There are those who fatigue children by compelling them to commit long, meaningless lists of names to memory. Perhaps your children can recite in order the names of all the patriarchs who lived before the flood and of all the kings of Israel. Pray, what of that? It does not prove that they appreciate the "praises of the Lord, and his strength, and the wonderful works he hath done."

Such appreciation should nevertheless be the sole purpose of religious study. The progressive movement of the grace of God is clearly discernible in history. It has pleased God to accomplish strikingly a mighty work in successive epochs of history, a work that affects all mankind, and that accordingly affects you also. By that work, which culminated gloriously in the sending of his Son, God displayed his compassionate grace toward sinful men. It is that work, that mighty deed that must be struck deep into your consciousness and into the consciousness of your children. Familiarize yourself with the evolution of that work. Let its organic unfolding be a vivid picture in your mind. Ponder it often; be able to translate yourself from the present to the past at the bidding of your will; learn to enjoy living with previous generations. That should be the goal of your study, the content of your trust, the stay of your hope in life.

How untoward the results of those Sunday schools and catechism classes are therefore that try to convert pupils into memorization machines. Upon graduation such pupils can recite quantities of facts. But when they are asked, "What has God done for you, and what has he revealed to you?" they stand embarrassed for want of an answer.

A child must be able to appreciate what he has learned and must be allowed to enter into the spirit of it. His knowledge should mean things for him and should serve him well in the conflicts his soul is soon enough to experience.

If he is armed with such real knowledge, you need not be anxious about your child. It may even be likely that he will hear the Lord's "praises" mocked, slandered, or denied. But upon such occasions he will come to his Savior's defense, armed not with a series of patriarch's names or with a list of parables, but with the bold and eloquent testimony that God has wrought a mighty accomplishment throughout the centuries. If he is to make that bold and lofty confession, your child must have stood in breathtaking awe and wonderment before the grandeur of that work of God.

Interview with James Blankespoor
Part 1

Mark H. Hoeksema: It is November 28, 2009. I'm at the residence of Mr. James Blankespoor in Lansing, Illinois. We are going to hear today the story of Mr. Blankespoor's childhood and youth up until the end of the 1940s.

MHH: Mr. Blankespoor, where and when were you born?

James Blankespoor: 1917.

MHH: And where did you come into the world?

JB: It was on the farm north of Rock Valley, about six miles north. My dad had bought that farm. That farm was bought quite a while before I was born, but anyway, that's where I was born. Shortly after that we moved to Rock Valley because he went into the elevator business.

We were there maybe a year and a half. Then he moved to Hull because the partners separated in the elevator business and then he bought one in Hull.

I was going to be baptized in Rock Valley. I think we probably went by car. I can't tell you that for sure because I wouldn't know. But according to my brother, the question was, what they were going to name me? You see, my mother's parenthood was Drok, kind of an unusual name in Dutch, and her father's name was Koop. There was quite a few Koops in those days. My dad didn't like that name. He said, "It's never going to happen." So they were on the way to church. He said that they still hadn't agreed what they were going to name me because all the Blankespoors, which was quite common in those days, would be named after their father. My brother was Henry John. He only had one name, but they always called him Henry John. The other ones were Henry G. and Henry E. They finally decided on Jacoba, which, of course, is James. And that's still my name today. That's the history there.

We went to catechism at a very young age. By that time I was in Rock Valley, about this time I was going to go to school also. Everything was in the Dutch language. The trouble was that I really couldn't speak American very well either. But the neighbors were Americans—Oort was their name. They had a girl exactly the same age as I was. We would be visiting across the fence, and she'd talk in American and I'd talk in Dutch. It wasn't too long after that, she was talking some Dutch and I was talking some American, that is, better American, if you want to call it that. I don't suppose I'm doing so well today. (Laughter)

Anyway, then he [*JB's father*] decided to move to Hull. So I had some catechism and one year of school in Rock Valley. Then we moved to Hull and I went to the Christian school there. We also had catechism there also. They had it on Friday afternoons, and they would have an elder teaching us. It was a big class, and we guys were no angels either, of course. We liked to shoot paper wads, you know. But this elder would ask, "How many questions do you know?" "Oh, three." So he asked three. I was not forced [*to learn all the answers*], but I never had any problem with it anyway. We were always taught, you learn the whole lesson. And I could give the answer and then quite often also quote the question. He'd get to my desk and I'd get to answer all 10 of them. You can imagine how that went. Maybe four, five rows of students. And, like I said, we boys were no angels. It wasn't that we didn't want to answer the question. But of course, they couldn't look in the book because he's right by the desk and he'd stand almost right on the top of the desk. It got to be a drawn-out affair. Finally the boys would get sick of that and they'd say, "Mr. Rice, I have to go the bathroom." "Yup, that's fine. You just go to the bathroom." What was behind it was that we had no clock. He'd come back in and he said, "Mr. Rice, they're all gone home! There's nobody here." "Oh, oh, well." We'd get five minutes of discussion and that was the end of it. So we didn't get very good

catechism.

My father decided to go back to the farm. Then I went to the Christian school in Rock Valley, with horse and buggy with my sister. My brother graduated in Hull already. So I had three months (from March till the end of the season) I went to school in the horse and buggy with my sister.

What was I going to do the next year, because she graduated and then I'd have to go six miles through that cold weather all alone. They didn't think that was good. So there's the country school. In the country school the teacher was Roman Catholic. They were our neighbors, and one of their daughters was also there. We had a pretty nice basement with heat. We'd play down the basement. Well, what are you going to play? This girl started saying, "We got to play church." Being young, we didn't think so much of that. So we were playing church. I was nominated preacher. I got to read the Bible. She said, "When you get to the corner, you got to bend down and kneel." At that age, I thought, now what in the world! We don't have anything like that in church. I said, "I can't do that." Well, I should have asked my parents because they didn't really know that was going on. But it was funny that nobody else realized that! So this lady was actually introducing us to the Roman Catholic church. That was the end of that, of course.

Then the bus came through, so I went to the Christian school in Rock Valley. It was Christian Reformed in one way or another. But, at any rate, things were stirring up quite a bit already that we were already in the Protestant Reformed Church.

My father never made too much of that. He was more opposed to the common grace theory, the offer. That was not real clear to me yet at that time, but I was taking quite an interest in everything. I always liked Bible, very much so, even Bible stories in school.

So, anyway, that was the standing. I could hear the folks talking about it different times. They started doing a little church hopping, if you want to call it that. They went to the Reformed church. And I figured that's where we would end up. They had a minister there by the name of Rev. Edverson (?). He was a very clear speaker and I would say for that day he was really quite Reformed. He would sometimes spoil it in the last sentence of the sermon. But I figured that's where it would end.

But it didn't. The folks didn't quite seem to find it. I suppose [*the reason*] was the Reformed church in Rock Valley was really opposed to the Christian schools, and my folks always wanted the Christian school.

I went to the Christian school in Rock Valley. We had Bennink (?), and he was really pretty sound. Looking back now, he was one of the older men. He finally got too old, so we got a different principal—Grasman was his name. He was a regular Janssen man. Of course I didn't understand what Janssen was at that time.

Well, it got to the ears of one of the boys of Rock Valley Protestant Reformed Church, and it looked like it was going to explode the whole school. But that principal really had it in for us. Whenever he could find something wrong with us…but I didn't realize that at the time. And so, he said that where Joshua said that "sun stand thou still in the dale," I can't think of the right word now, that was not a miracle. It was just a phenomenon in history. That's what started the whole business.

Anyway, I graduated from the Christian school in Rock Valley. By that time we had a church started because the folks were very unhappy (if I use the word right) about the sermon they had heard. So they decided in the afternoon to go to Doon to see once how that minister was. We never did that before, not once. But I remember very well that we went to church in Doon. But the very same elder from Rock Valley read to the Doon church because they were without a minister that day, and they heard the very same sermon. So they were really very disgusted. So they were going to go back to the farm. And there was a man there with a little different cap that most of them had. He came and talked to my folks and invited them for coffee. And so, as they were having coffee, they got to discussing the things that were going on, and they did not agree. So they thought they better call Hoeksema up and have him to come and lecture. That's what started it in the[*Protestant Reformed*] church: two families.

The difference was this: The Blankespoor family was only three offsprings, while the Kuipers had quite a large family. We were meeting in the Baptist church because there was no money at that time, so they rented that. And no minister, either, of course.

Vos and Verhil [*Protestant Reformed ministers*] were going to school because they realized in the East that something had to be done. In between that, the whole Danhof case arose. Danhof tried to take over in Hull because he wanted his boys to really be authority, too. He had two boys, not his own—I think

they were nephews—but anyway, there was a Ralph, and I don't know who the other one was. They spoke a lot in Doon, and they were pretty good preachers, too. At least I thought so. I suppose I was making a distinction already what's good and what isn't good.

Then Hull went head over heels and built a new church and a new parsonage. Then the whole thing split apart and I believe there were about seven or eight families left, and they sat with a big mortgage, too. So it looked like they weren't going to last too long.

Doon didn't have a parsonage. They didn't even have a church. No minister, either, except in the summer we'd have Vos. Vos happened to be the minister. With his help they weren't finished yet. But in the meantime we had John DeJong, and I don't know who else. But Vos stayed by us a lot. Vos and Verhil would go back again and we'd be without a minister. And the Danhofs they'd sprinkle in between. And maybe we had C. Hanko once in a while. But we really did an awful lot of reading. People finally got tired of that.

By this time I was around 12 years old. I was born with a double hernia. Well, they gave me trusses for years. That didn't seem to work, and it was getting worse. Now there was an outfit in Sioux City that advertised, and they demonstrated a man that had a new type of truss. It was kind of a pneumatic—with air, and it seemed to do the trick. Well, my dad bought it, but he didn't have the money. So they said, "That's all right. We'll send it to you C.O.D." There was another man there that my dad knew quite well. He was in the Christian Reformed church, but quite outspoken. And he had the money. So he bought it for his son and paid for it—cash. They had to order that thing from the company, wherever that was. Finally we could pick it up in Rock Valley. Well, I was really waiting for it because I was getting to the point if I pulled up on the crank on the engine it would go down on me. That was painful, and dangerous besides.

We were ready to get in the car about 9:30 in the morning. We were going to Rock Valley to pick it up. It was about $160 or $180, which was a lot of money in those days.

This man came flying in the yard and said, "John, did you buy that thing?" "No," dad said, "we were ready to go get it." He said, "Don't do it!" Then he used a couple of Dutch words, which he meant to say, "It's not worth it." The result was that we didn't buy it, and we didn't spend the money either.

Well then, what were they going do? They knew they had to do something. So they started investigating. There was an outfit of doctors, I believe it was in Orange City. They were doing that kind of surgery. That was a death sentence in those days if you had to have surgery. He wanted $300 for each side, so there was $600, which they didn't have.

John Verburg was dating my sister by that time—just starting, I guess. He had heard that Sioux Falls had a couple of doctors there that were doing it for a lot less money. So we'd better investigate that first. And we ended up with a Doctor Moe. He was about 75 years old, but he had his own hospital and he was training his own nurses. What it amounted to was that he was a retired doctor from Mayo Clinic. We didn't know that. My folks had been to the Mayo Clinic when they were in Hull. But, that's beside the point now. He examined me and he looked, and he said, "John," he said, "he's got to have surgery, no question about it. You got to do it quick." Well, my dad says, "What do you get?" "Well," he says, "normally I get $100 for a side." "Well," my dad says, "Better figure on it. In the meantime," he says, "I'll get the money together." And I can still hear the old doctor, he says, "John, this boy needs surgery. I'll do it for nothing if you can't come up with the money." And that's what happened. He got paid alright. It wasn't that my dad was trying to get out of it. But he didn't have that money. Now I'm coming to the point of the church.

We had no minister, and we just had two elders by this time.

There was a lot of dissatisfaction. The Kuiper family (there were four brothers—there was Henry, and Al, and John, and Frank), and they had their children, so some of them were married and had different names. There were the Gorders, the Lenses, and Zylstras.

Well, they were getting into each other's hair, which was nothing unusual. But they [*Doon PR church*] decided they'd probably better quit. They didn't have money to keep going. The fact is they had a hard time getting enough money to buy coal.

But I was in the hospital, so I never got in on that. They all thought they better disband, if I am making use of the right language. But my mother hadn't talked, yet. You see, the women had to come [*to the meeting*] too.

One elder saw that she didn't speak. He said,

"Mrs. Blankespoor, what do you say?" She hemmed and hawed a little bit, and said she didn't think it was proper. But they said, "Yes, you speak." So she finally said, "Well, if you're convinced that you're standing for the truth, you have no business quitting. You got to keep going." That's what happened.

This was all going on while I was in the hospital. In those days, car travel wasn't near as fast, and Sioux Falls was forty miles from where we lived, so they didn't come to see me too often. I had to stay in bed thirteen days on my back. They did both sides [*repaired the hernias*] at the same time. I couldn't lie on my sides, So I lay on my back. So I learned to sleep on my back.

My sister did come one day. How she came to get there I don't remember. And she said, "Yeah, the folks went to a fighting party last night." "Fighting party?" I said, "What are you talking about?" Then she told me the story of the meeting.

After thirteen and a half days, they decided I should be able to go home. Oh, I was feeling like a million bucks, you know. I thought there was nothing to that. I'll just jump out a bed. I stepped off the edge of the bed and I went right on the floor. (Laughter) My legs wouldn't hold me up. But I got over that and went home.

Things started getting a little bit better in the church then. I think Vos and Verhil were released from the seminary for a certain length of time. By that time Sioux Center had organized, and Hull got the first chance to vote [*for a minister*]. Well, they voted for Verhil. My dad was kinda happy about that because he enjoyed Verhil better than Vos. I knew that. He didn't say it, but I knew that. I was observing things at that time. He figured that Doon would sure vote for Vos. But they voted for Verhil! And he was upset about that. Sioux Center was going to vote next, and they voted for Vos. They got Vos and Doon got nothing (Laughter).

So they [*Doon*] called John DeJong. John DeJong was (I would say, officially) considered very Reformed. But he didn't consider too much about the common grace theory, so he never really mentioned common grace. Things went quite smooth because, like I said, it was pretty much of a mixed group, and DeJong never really hit any doctrinal issues. So they were pretty much attached to DeJong.

Then we called [*Rev. George*] Lubbers. Everybody thought that was pretty nice. He took the call but he hadn't come yet. [*Here JB takes a lengthy side trip in which he describes the drowning of his sister on the occasion of a young people's outing. The account is unclear and disjointed, and has therefore been omitted*].

Then Lubbers came. I thought he was a little too bold. I'll be honest. I thought he was young, but I didn't like him. But I learned to like him very well, and I supported him.

That's when I finally did get some good catechism. I didn't get good catechism from DeJong, either, so I really had very little catechism. What you'd call the first class, I had that in the Christian Reformed church—that was still pretty good because they weren't that far off at that time yet. My dad helped with some catechism. With two elders, or three at the most, and no money, and all that fighting, you can about imagine that I didn't get much catechism. Finally we got Rev. Lubbers, and he insisted that we have some of the Essentials [*of Reformed Doctrine*]. So I had a wee little bit of essentials. Then Lubbers left because there was trouble. They disliked him. The trouble was that he was too Reformed. That was really what it amounted to.

But they had it in for Lubbers. Finally John Leverink, who was quite outspoken, said "We got to get rid of him. If we can't do anything else, we'll starve him."

My mother would never let that happen. If she had anything to give, she'd give it. So I carried gallons (to go to catechism—I could drive when I was twelve years old—I drove to catechism on my own—didn't need a driver's license), and I took gallons of milk and canned meat—no refrigeration, so it was canned meat. We made our own cheese, so I took a lot of cheese. And we made some sausage, so I took some sausage whenever that was possible, and vegetables and fruit, and what have you. We had some apple trees. So I took an awful lot of food. They would have never starved. The town of Doon wouldn't even allow that. Even if they were of the world, they would have never allowed that. But that's what Leverink wanted. He wanted to starve them.

He got that whole business together that we had to get rid of Lubbers. It finally got so bad that he said, "If a car would run over Lubbers, I wouldn't pick him off the ground until the second one would run over him." That's pretty rough stuff in the church, especially in my youth. What I went through, you'd say, well, forget about the church!

Thanksgiving

I thank the Lord for countless blessings daily sent;
For circumstances notwithstanding, making me content;
For gifts of health, but also gifts of death and pain,
For pleasant sunny days, but also icy wind and rain,
For warmth and shelter, clothing, and for food in vast supply;
For mountain, lake, the flow'ring tree, the butterfly.
For loving family, with joyful celebrations,
Who also share my griefs with me, and tribulations.
For scores of friends, who in my need are glad to give;
For opportunities to serve when others too need help to live.
Yet most of all, I thank my heavenly Father for his love
In sending One, his own begotten Son, from heaven above
To suffer and to die to make me free from every sin,
And give me peace and joy, and knowledge that within
The trials sent, his love for me is ever shining through.
His everlasting arms around me strengthen and renew.
And when I give him thanks, he shows to me by grace divine
That he has placed thanksgiving in my heart—'tis his, not mine!

Watching Daily At My Gates

November 8 ***Read James 1***

The writer of this book, who may have been a brother of Christ, writes to the Christian Jews much like the last book. However, the theme of the book is different. The theme can be found in the last verse of this chapter. What is true religion? True religion is living out of the salvation afforded to us by Christ's death in a life of sanctification. True religion is helping those who are less well off than we might be. True religion is to stay away from all manner of evil. Young people, do you seek to walk in this way? This is our calling in this life no matter what our age may be. Sing Psalter 13.

November 9 ***Read James 2***

Is your faith like that of the Old Testament figures mentioned in this chapter? Or is it a faith of convenience? Do we regard all kinds of men as brothers, or do we pick and choose those whom we will count worthy of honor? James points out a fallacy often found in the church of God. We are quick to esteem some people higher than others due to their social or monetary position on this earth. This is not working out our salvation with fear and trembling. This is accounting our desires more important than God's commands for us. We cannot sing versifications from Psalm 133 with our whole hearts while esteeming some more important than others. Sing Psalter 369.

November 10 ***Read James 3***

As we read through this epistle, we are struck by words that seem to fit in the book of Proverbs. That is because true wisdom is from God and not from man. In this chapter we find words of wisdom concerning our tongues. Think about all the good and evil our tongues can do. What kinds of songs do those tongues sing? Are they songs that extol God or man? What kinds of words come from our tongues about our neighbor? Are they words of love or hatred? What kinds of words come from our tongues as we go about our daily work? Do we swear or do we speak well of our God and neighbor? Guard your tongues, people of God, and in that way please him. Sing Psalter 386.

November 11 ***Read James 4***

Let us ponder the phrase submitting to God. By nature we do not like to submit to anyone. We want our own desires to be first in our lives. Submitting means we need to be humble, and that is not our nature. What does it mean to submit to God? It means that in all aspects of our lives we need to bow to his will even as we pray, "Thy will be done." In submitting to his almighty will we will use the Latin phrase Deo Volentie daily. We will make no plans without saying, "If God wills." By submitting to God we will find that peace that passes all human understanding. Sing Psalter 64.

November 12 ***Read James 5***

Along with submitting to God we need the virtue of patience in the way that he leads us. Patience is not often a characteristic of the modern person. We are not prone to wait for someone else to do something for us; we plunge ahead and do it ourselves. The epistle's writer counsels us to be patient in God's way. We can do that if we give ourselves to prayer. Reread the examples given in this chapter. Elijah surely needed patience with the people of the northern kingdom. But he also needed patience in the way that God was leading them and him. Be patient, people of God, and be given to much prayer every day. Sing Psalter 235.

November 13 ***Read 1 Peter 1***

Peter, the leader of the disciples, was mandated to preach to the Jewish converts after Christ's ascension. In his two epistles he address those Jews who had left Judea, as well as Gentiles who had been brought into salvation by the blood of Christ. Peter reminds his audience of that salvation, from whence it came, and the calling to live in brotherly love because of it. Already in this first chapter we see Peter using his experiences as a disciple as he sets forth various doctrines. He also points the Christians ahead to the second coming of Christ. May we live in and out of our salvation merited for us by Christ alone. Sing Psalter 363.

November 14 ***Read 1 Peter 2***

In the first chapter Peter enjoins the church to live in holiness even as God is holy. This Old Testament reference and many others in these epistles show to us that Peter learned his lessons well while sitting at the feet of Christ. This is our calling as well. Whether it is the word preached on the Sabbath, the lessons in the catechism room, or what we glean from personal study of the

scriptures, we must learn our lessons well so that we can apply them in our lives and live the life of holiness that is becoming to the child of God. This way of life must be found in all that we do. There is no sphere of life that can be devoid of a Christ-like walk. Sing Psalter 1.

November 15 *Read 1 Peter 3*

In the previous chapter Peter gives instructions to servants and masters how they are to carry out the command to love their neighbor as themselves. He continues in the first part of this chapter with similar instructions to wives and husbands. This is valuable instruction for women and men who are sisters and brothers in Christ. While it may be hard sometimes to bear one another's burdens, we must do so in love, even as Christ loved us. Our marriages are to be pictures of the marriage of Christ and his bride, the church. When we can live with our spouse in this way, there will be peace, joy, and happiness in our marriages. We cannot put ourselves first if this is to be true. Sing Psalter 360.

November 16 *Read 1 Peter 4*

In the last days there will be many trials. Peter understood this from a practical viewpoint as he lived in the Roman Empire, which was prepared to crush all who tried to rebel. He also saw farther ahead to the days when antichrist would reign. The lessons learned on the Mount of Olives were well learned. Even in troublous days, we must love our neighbor as ourselves. We need to practice hospitality when it is easy so we know how to be hospitable when it is not so easy. We must pray for our neighbors, and we must show to them the love we have for them as brothers and sisters in Christ. This is how we watch for the last days. Sing Psalter 370.

November 17 *Read 1 Peter 5*

We all have cares in this life. We all have burdens to bear. Do we cast those cares upon Jehovah? We can, you know, because he cares for us. We do this by humbling ourselves before him in prayer as we go to the throne of grace. We can have the confidence that our prayers will be heard because we can have the assurance that he cares for us. This is the testimony of scripture in many places. When your burdens become seemingly too great to bear, read Psalm 55, John 14, and this chapter. Go unto God if you are burdened and heavy laden, and he will give you rest. Sing Psalter 150.

November 18 *Read 2 Peter 1*

There is much to learn in this first chapter of Peter's second epistle. First, we find his list of the fruits of the spirit in verses 4–7. After reading that list, we can see what it takes to walk in a sanctified way in this life. It is not of ourselves that these good works are done, but it is God who works in us. But in walking in this way, we can make our salvation sure within our souls. Peter goes on to show to us that this sanctified walk is from the Holy Spirit, as he talks about inspiration. We do well to commit the verses at the end of the chapter to memory as our guide to the blessedness of scripture in our lives. Sing Psalter 203.

November 19 *Read 2 Peter 2*

As we walk in the way of sanctification described in the previous chapter, we will come upon false teachers. This will be even more true as the end of time approaches. Peter shows the church of all ages how to identify those evil teachers, using examples from the Old Testament. Knowing our Bible, the inspired word of God, can and will help us in this matter. We need to know our enemy so that we can defend ourselves and our families against him. The Bible is our sword; let us keep it sharp, and let us continue in practice with it. Sing Psalter 333.

November 20 *Read 2 Peter 3*

Peter had to remind the church of his day of those who scoffed at the idea of a second coming of Christ. He reminded the church of those who scoffed at Noah as he built the ark. It is no different for the church today. There are those, even those who call themselves church, who scoff at the idea that Christ will come, will judge the living and the dead, and will bring about the destruction of this present creation for the re-creation of a new heavens and new earth. Like Noah, are you ready to answer to those scoffers? Are you ready for Christ to appear on the clouds of heaven? Do you want him to come? Let us watch and pray for the coming of our savior even as he commanded the church before he died. He is coming. Sing Psalter 362.

November 21 *Read 1 John 1*

After reading the epistles of Peter, we turn to the epistles of the beloved disciple, John. John too draws from his three years of being with Jesus, and he shows us what we must know as only one who had been with our Lord could tell us. He tells us that God is light. Stop and think for what we use light. Think about its opposite, darkness. The earthly ideas of light and darkness are only small pictures of the spiritual. We must walk in the light because we are children of the light. Only the children of darkness can feel comfortable in the dark. Let us seek the light and let us walk in it. Sing Psalter 71.

November 22 *Read 1 John 2*

Because we are children of the light, we must walk in the light with our brothers in Christ. This is not just an abstract idea; this is truth. John recorded Jesus' words about this thought in his gospel. Now he tells the church of his time and of all ages the necessity of walking in love with our brothers and sisters in the faith. This love starts within our homes, but then it must extend to all those around us. We must keep the second "great" com-

mandment, that is, to love our neighbor as ourselves. When we do this, we follow the truths spoken by Christ and reiterated by John in this chapter. Walk in the light, people of God, and walk in love with each other. Sing Psalter 24.

November 23 *Read 1 John 3*

Verse 18 shows us how we must love one another. The words, "I love you" are not enough. We must show that we love our brother by our deeds. Those deeds will make "I love you" true. This is explained elsewhere in scripture. Paul tells us "to speak the truth in love." It is possible to tell a true thing about someone, but not show love in doing so. James tells us to show our faith by our works. The same is true of our love. If our love is out of a true faith, it will be genuine love. As we live one with another, let us love one another in word and deed. Sing Psalter 369.

November 24 *Read 1 John 4*

The first verse of this chapter exhorts and admonishes us to try the spirits. What does this mean? It refers to the activity that we must do as we live a life of sanctification. As we hear doctrine, we must be like the Bereans and search the scriptures to see if it is true. As we listen to songs that are so-called Christian songs, we must try the spirits and see if those songs portray the truth of scripture in their entirety. As we fellowship with various people, we must try the spirits and see if they are of God. Our whole lives must be one of trying the spirits. In this way we work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Sing Psalter 256.

November 25 *Read 1 John 5*

John continues with his theme of love. Once again he reminds his readers that the child of God must love God, and that he must also love his neighbor. This love is based on the love that God has for us in that he sent his Son to die on the cross. Notice that John goes back to the theme of his gospel that Jesus was truly the Son of God. If this truth is not foremost in a person's life, there will be no other love emanating from that person. In this chapter we see that doctrine is first, and then practical living flows out of doctrine. Search the scriptures, people of God, and know how to live the life prescribed by our God. Sing Psalter 198.

November 26 *Read 2 John*

Some think John is writing this letter to a specific person, a lady, while others think the lady is the church. Did you notice how many times the word truth is used in the chapter? Truth is important for the Christian. That is because God is truth and Satan is the lie. We live out of either one or the other; there is no middle road. John is happy to hear that the lady's children walk in the truth. What grandparent is not thrilled when their grandchildren exhibit in their lives the truths of scripture? What elders are not joyful when the young people of the church live what they have been taught in catechism? Young people, walk in the truth, for this is the will of God for you. Sing Psalter 334.

November 27 *Read 3 John*

The writer in Hebrews admonishes us with these words: "Let brotherly love continue." This is the thought in this short book consisting of one chapter. Who Gaius is does not matter; the message of the book does. Gaius had followed John's command to show brotherly love to all and especially to strangers. This is in contrast to Diotrephes, who had not. What is our reaction to strangers in church? Do we ignore them? Do we think others will welcome them? Or do we seek them out, try to make them feel welcome, and even invite them into our houses so that they can have a sabbath day's rest? This is our calling, and this is part of walking a walk of sanctification. Sing Psalter 371.

November 28 *Read Jude*

Early in this epistle we are called to contend for faith. Then we are given two main ways to do this. First, we have to avoid those who are and do evil. The writer gives many examples of why this must be done. As scripture instructs us elsewhere, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," so does one evildoer adversely affect the church. The second way to contend for the faith is to build ourselves up in the faith. We do this by learning and using the true doctrines and by showing compassion to those in need. Sometimes this compassion means we have to admonish them, sometimes quite strongly, for a way not pleasing to God. Finally, the epistle ends with a beautiful doxology. Reread it, maybe memorize it, and include it often in your prayers. Sing Psalter 53.

November 29 *Read Revelation 1*

The final book of the Bible is the Revelation of Jesus Christ to the apostle John while he was exiled on the island of Patmos. This revelation is important to us because it shows us where we are going. Similar in places to other parts of scripture, it is a clear road map to us of what will come before the church is united with each other and with her Lord. In this first chapter we see a glorious picture of Christ. That it is a divine Christ is evident to see. This is important and should show to us the way to understand what will be ours in the years to come. Sing Psalter 29.

November 30 *Read Revelation 2*

After seeing Christ, John is instructed to write to seven churches with which he is familiar. These churches are in various stages of development, and they show us the development of the church of all ages. We must see in them our congregations, and more importantly, our own

personal spiritual life. Have we lost our first love like the church at Ephesus? Do we face persecution like the church at Smyrna? Do we allow certain sins into our lives such as the churches at Pergamos or Thyatira? If the characteristics of one of these churches characterize us, let us have ears to hear and let us be encouraged or admonished as only Christ can encourage or admonish. Sing Psalter 140.

December 1 *Read Revelation 3*

The final three churches of Asia Minor are addressed here. Are we like Sardis, so that though we are called Christians, our lives show that we are anything but Christians? Let us watch and live as we should. Do we evangelize like the members of the church of Philadelphia, the church of brotherly love? That was Christ's command to us in Matthew 28 just before he ascended into heaven. Surely we are not like the church members at Laodicea. But because of our old nature we are at times. When we are fit only to be spewed out of Christ's mouth, let us pray for forgiveness and walk in a way that uses the spiritual ears we have been given by grace to hear what Christ through the Holy Spirit says to us. Sing Psalter 83.

December 2 *Read Revelation 4*

In this chapter we are shown a picture of the majesty of almighty God. He is also shown to us as the thrice-holy God, as is shown in other places in scripture. It may be hard for us to understand what that throne looks like, as we are only given a small picture of God's majesty here on earth. We must be sure not to miss the pictures given to us in nature of this beauty. The heavenly creatures testify God is holy. We are enjoined elsewhere in scripture to be holy as he is holy. Is this our goal throughout the day and throughout our lives? Sing Psalter 266.

December 3 *Read Revelation 5*

In this chapter we are shown the truth that the glorification of God through the redeeming work of Christ is the purpose for the creation and all actions on earth. We study history to see how it has unrolled throughout time. We also study it to see what is going to come to pass in the future as it is shown to us in the rest of this book, as well as in other places in scripture. History shows us that the world did not evolve into its present form. History shows us that the history of the world has been purposefully unrolled so that our sovereign, supreme God will be glorified. Is this the God whom you worship? Sing Psalter 213.

December 4 *Read Revelation 6*

As the first four seals are opened, horses ride forth, bringing with them their work on this earth. We can find many evidences that these horses have been traveling throughout history by studying the history of the world and of the church. We can see that those horses are running even now by considering what is happening in the world around us. Today we can see evidences that the horses are more active and are working at the same time. Are you considering? Do you hear the horses coming, bringing with them the return of our Savior? Sing Psalter 214.

December 5 *Read Revelation 7*

In the previous chapter the opening of the fifth seal described those who had died for the faith. At the end of this chapter they are further recognized as wearing white robes and worshipping God. In our country few are openly persecuted for worshipping the one true God. This has not been so in other time periods and even in other places today. Are we ready for the great tribulation that will come before Christ returns? Are we ready to be denied even daily necessities because we will refuse to give up our faith? This is the reality that scripture declares will be ours. Let us watch and pray for grace to stay faithful in spite of any difficulty. Sing Psalter 246.

December 6 *Read Revelation 8*

We find two characteristics in the book of Revelation. First, we find repetition. As we move from the seals to the horses and finally to the vials, there are some elements that are very similar. Repetition is used to show us the certainty of what will happen before Christ returns. Repetition also ingrains in our minds the events that will happen. Just as you repeat various memory passages to learn them, so Christ uses repetition to teach us the signs of his return. Second, we find progression. As we move from seals to horses to vials, there is progression in the elements. Activities happen faster and with more force as the return of Christ approaches. It is like riding a sled down a steep, snowy hill. You move the fastest the closer you approach the bottom of that hill. Our calling is like that of the saints who have gone before us. We must pray fervently, "Thy kingdom come." Sing Psalter 434.

December 7 *Read Revelation 9*

A new character arrives on the scene of the revelation of the last time. This character has been in evidence since just after creation. This character is none other than Satan himself. Satan wants the kingdom that lasts forever, and he will do all in his power to gain it. We need not fear, however. The victory is sure. We do not have a dualism of forces fighting it out for the prize. Rather we have forces fighting where the end is certain. God will be glorified, and his entire church will be gathered from all nations. Throughout scripture there is a comforting theme for the people of God. That theme is, "Fear not." Sing Psalter 73.

Biblical Judging: Judging Ourselves and Judging Others in Humility

Judging is condemned by many Christians today as being unbiblical and not in accordance with the teachings of Christ. This has led to many adverse effects on the church. The lack of judging and church discipline has led to the church's often looking just like the world, with its members dwelling in all kinds of sins. Abortion, divorce, fornication, Sabbath desecration, and blasphemy are often just as prevalent among those confessing the name of Christ in the world. This essay will reply against the growing trend of churches and church members crying "do not judge me" by proving that judging is required and even absolutely necessary for the Christian to practice. To do this, it will consider three points. First, it will prove that the Christian may judge. Second, it will describe in what manner the Christian may judge. Finally, it will discuss the purpose of judging.

Let us first prove that the Christian may judge. Proper judging is certainly a righteous act, for God is called throughout scripture a judge. In Hebrews 12:23, God is called the "judge of all"[1] and in Isaiah 33:22, Jehovah is called "our [Zion's] judge."[2] Since God is perfectly righteous and holy (a picture of that infinite holiness is seen in Isaiah 6), he cannot perform any unrighteous or unholy act. Therefore, judging cannot be evil of itself, since God is perfectly righteous and holy, and he does judge and issue judgment.

Further, that judging is not just an act that God may perform, but that man is allowed to judge as well is made apparent by the prophets in the Old Testament. They acted as God's spokesmen to lead the people back to the true worship of Jehovah. This often meant harsh rebukes for the people living in sin, as is the case when Nathan appeared before David to call him to repent of his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. Jonah had to call the Ninevites to repentance from their evil sins, so that God would not destroy them. Isaiah is so strong in his judgment of the people of Israel that he refers to them as the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, as is apparent from Isaiah 1:10, "Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; Give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah." These are just a few examples of men judging others in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament the preachers of the gospel take on the same role as the prophets in the Old Testament. It is their duty to bring the gospel to all people, and the gospel message includes the call to repentance. Man needs to be called to repentance from the many sins that he commits. Therefore the preacher needs to judge the acts of men and determine from the scriptures what is sinful in the eyes of God. In 1 John 1, John mentions numerous sins, such as dwelling in darkness and wrongly boasting, "I have no sin." After John judges these and various other sins, he comes to the comforting statement in 1 John 2:1, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." In order to be advocated by Jesus Christ, it is necessary for the Christian to know that he is a sinner and that he must confess his sin to God. The Christian knows he is a sinner by the judging of the preacher. Thus taking the apostle John as our example today, it is necessary for the salvation of the elect that preachers judge and call men to repentance.

Nor is judging limited to the preachers. Judging must be practiced by every believer, as is apparent from the words of Christ in Matthew 18:15, "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." To obey this command of Christ requires judging

1 *The Holy Bible: King James Version, Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version*. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), Hebrews 12:23

2 Isaiah 33:22

and holding the actions of others in light of the law of God. The believer must have a discerning heart to determine what is sinful and wicked in the eyes of the Lord. The believer must have the desire to flee all unrighteousness in order to show true thankfulness to God for his work of salvation. But there is a certain manner in which the Christian must judge, as will be explained in the next paragraphs.

An important aspect of judging is that the Christian will first judge himself before he judges others. This was a problem in the days of Christ, and therefore he says in Matthew 7:1–5, "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." Christ is not condemning judging here, but is rather commanding it. Christ directly commands us to pull that beam, that sin, out of our own eye, before attempting to pull the mote out of our brother's eye. Yet the Christian is still to remove that mote from his brother's eye. Calvin shows in his commentary on Matthew that it is not judging here being condemned but the eagerness to judge others. He says, "This vice [unbiblical judging] is attended by some strange enjoyment: for there is hardly any person who is not tickled with the desire of inquiring into other people's faults…. This depraved eagerness for biting, censuring, and slandering, is restrained by Christ, when he says, Judge not. It is not necessary that believers should become blind, and perceive nothing, but only that they should refrain from an undue eagerness to judge: for otherwise the proper bounds of rigour will be exceeded by every man who desires to pass sentence on his brethren."[3] The self-restraint not to judge others and rather to look on our own sins proceeds only from the grace of God. Man cannot do this in his own strength, for he constantly desires to think himself better than others, and does not desire even to think of himself as a sinner.

Further, judging ourselves is so necessary that the apostle Paul says that without that personal examination, the Christian stands in danger of being condemned with the world. He says in 1 Corinthians 11:28–32, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." As Charles Hodge writes concerning this passage: "For, if we *judge ourselves*, that is, if we examine ourselves… and prepare ourselves for the Lord's table, *we should not be judged*, i.e. thus afflicted. It is because we do not sit in judgment on ourselves, that God judges us."[4] Thus, the Christian must judge himself, lest he stand in danger of the judgment of God.

The Christian must also judge in humility. This is one of the most important truths of Biblical judging. It is only in the way of humility that the Christian realizes, by the grace of God, that all men are sinners and are deserving of the cup of God's wrath against sin. The Christian realizes that he has been graciously delivered from that state of total depravity, but at the same time realizes that he is still a creature with many sins and faults. Therefore he recognizes and knows the sinful flesh of others and judges humbly with the knowledge that he can fall into the exact same sin.

Further instruction on judging is found in Zechariah 7:9: "Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother." Immediately before this verse, Zechariah is telling the Israelites that their fastings were not directed to God, but to themselves. They were concerned only with themselves, and thus God has this admonition for them. They are to execute true judgment that does not seek the profit of oneself or the harm of the neighbour, but the truth. The way to seek that true judgment is in showing "mercy and compassions every man to his brother." An example of this mercy and compassion is in the proceeding verse, "And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the

3 John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke, vol. 1*, ed. William Pringle (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 346.

4 Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 234

poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart" (v. 10). This is a very strong argument for proper biblical judging. Proper biblical judging is done in mercy and compassion, without the imagining of evil or sin in the brother or sister. Therefore the Christian must not be a gossip, for in doing so he takes pleasure in hearing and imagining the evil of others.

Nor must the Christian judge rashly, for in doing so he violates the ninth commandment and is guilty of thinking evil of his neighbor. This applies to those who gossip. Gossiping often results in rash judgment on the part of the person who hears only one side of the story and is left to determine the truth just from that one side. Thus the Christian must avoid such situations where rash judgments occur, lest he sin. As the Heidelberg Catechism puts it in stating what the requirements of the ninth commandment are, "that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly or unheard; but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God."[5] Therefore the Christian must not only avoid rash judgment, but also situations where that is bound to occur.

Finally, the purpose of judging should always be the salvation of the brother or sister dwelling in sin. The purpose is not that the one who judges be esteemed and puffed up with pride for his boldness and supposed superior godliness. That is not the way of humility that the Bible teaches. An example of proper motive in judging is found in Peter's sermon after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. After Peter accuses and judges the Jews for slaying Christ by their wicked hands, they were "pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:37–38). The beautiful purpose of judging is that men might be drawn to God and receive salvation through the suffering of Jesus Christ. This glorious purpose of judging is further demonstrated by Paul's words to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 5:5. Here Paul is rebuking the church for allowing a man living in adultery to dwell in their midst. He calls them to "deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Harsh measures and harsh words need to be spoken to the man dwelling in sin, but the purpose is and must always be the salvation of God's people.

In conclusion, the Christian certainly must judge, for to do otherwise is to be in rebellion against the word of God. The Christian must judge to determine what is right and wrong in relation to the law of God. But he must also rebuke brothers and sisters for living in sin. The biblical and God-glorifying method of judging is found in humility. It is only in the way of humility that God can be glorified by our judging. Prideful judging glorifies and exalts the man who is judging, throwing his works high above everybody else. But the man who judges humbly first examines himself as sinner, and then proceeds to rebuke the sinner, all the time recognizing that he is by nature a totally depraved sinner saved by the grace of God. That is the biblical and God-honoring way to judge.

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God's Will

I am at a crossroads in life. What's next? Where am I going? What am I going to do next? More school or go to work? This job or that job? Marriage? How many kids? These are the types of questions that make your head hurt! Where do I turn? So much indecision and uncertainty! How can I know what path to take? What's God's will for my life? Does the Bible speak to these things? Yes, it does. Indirectly, but it does. God does have a will and a purpose for each of our lives, and we can know it.

The first thing we need to understand is that there are two types of will. There is God's decretive will and there is his desire. God's decretive will is his providential decree. It is what he has determined will happen from all eternity. An example of this is found in Daniel 4:24: "This is the decree of the most high," where Daniel pronounces God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar.

Although this first type of will is certainly going to happen, it doesn't assist us in figuring out what path we are to take on our earthly journey. This leads us to the second type of God's will, his desire. This can be described as what God wants us to do. He has given us the ten commandments, and he wants us to follow those. We face a choice concerning our desires. Just as when Joshua said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (24:15), so we too must choose daily to follow the path laid out for us in the ten commandments.

Regarding God's desire, how do we find out what God's desire (will) is in our lives? Are we going to find it in the world? Does God make himself known in the institutions of men? Will we be able to find it in secular writings? No, we must be connected to God in order to know what he desires for our life. It is impossible to find God's will apart from the Bible. There is great value in his word. It is in scripture that we find written, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Determining God's will in our lives is always connected to his word.

In the Bible we find wisdom. Isn't this what we are really seeking? We are looking for wisdom in our life, looking to make the right decision. So what is wisdom? Wisdom is the opposite of foolishness. It is not found in philosophy or in the world. A good working definition of wisdom we can use is "the proper apprehension of and adaptation of one's self to reality."[1] We need to grasp reality clearly in our minds and then act according to it.

In order to grasp reality clearly we need to have a proper view of it. We need to understand reality. We need to put all the pieces together in the right way, similar to a puzzle. This is difficult, but it can be done through the lens of God's scripture. God shows us the way things really are in his word, and we see these things properly and understand them rightly only when viewed through the spectacles of scripture.

In order to have this understanding we must be knowledgeable. Knowledge is a set of facts. We can spend our time on all kinds of subjects that are quite useless, gaining knowledge about things that do us no good with respect to knowing the direction God would have us go, but we are called to study the creation and his word in order to grow. One simple fact is that God created Adam and Eve. We know this because we study the Bible. The world might tell us about evolution, but that's not truth. Knowledge, which is connected to the truth, is found in the Bible.

When we gain a set of facts, we can put them together in a way that makes sense, a way that is according to the principles given in God's word. Only then, with knowledge based on his word, can we have a right understanding. In turn, only with this understanding can we apply our hearts to wisdom. Finally, only with this type of wisdom will we act in accordance with reality.

1 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), 100.

So how does one do this? How can I obtain these three most important virtues of life: knowledge, understanding, and then wisdom?

The first thing we must do is be willing to work. These virtues are not obtained by osmosis. They are not obtained through laziness or sluggishness. We must be willing to apply ourselves in the good and busy work of study. Isn't this part of what the apostle Paul means in Philippians 2:12: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"? He means there is a certain work that we must take up. We work; God leads, guides, and blesses our work. Only in the way of our working and being faithful to his word will we be blessed with his wisdom.

This work is in particular a being busy with personal study of the Bible. What does study look like? Is study opening up the Bible to a random page, putting your finger in, and expecting an answer at that spot? Of course not; you could potentially justify anything that way by taking it out of context. Is personal study a real quick sit down and expect an answer? No, it is more than that. To study the Bible means to set all aside and treat scripture as if it is the most important thing in our life—because it is. We sit in a quiet place, open the Bible, and read with our minds open, ready to receive what God has to say to us.

Where does one start looking in the Bible? Does your Bible have an index? Start there. Look up a key word. For example, in connection with dating you might look up *marriage* or *wedding*. A few of the passages you run across might be the marriage feast in Matthew 22, the wedding at Cana, or Proverbs 31. With these passages you will be off to a good start.

Let's face it: some passages are difficult, so how can we better understand their meanings? Is the best way to Google it? Certainly you will gain some sort of understanding, but maybe not the right one. When struggling to understand a passage, find a good, trustworthy commentary. Read it slowly, consider what it says, and pray with that in mind.

A second way to gain understanding of a passage will be to ask others. Whom will you ask? You will want to ask those with experience, with wisdom, those who care for you, those who will be honest with you, and those who love you so much they will hurt your feelings for your own good. You should ask your parents, your pastor, the elders in your church. These are the ones who have been, who are, and who will continue to look out for you and your needs.

Another thing you gain by asking others is that as you explain your situation to them and they gain a better understanding of it, they will ask questions of you. "Did you think of this possibility?" Or, "What will you do if the situation turns out this way?" These questions give you another opinion, another set of eyes, another viewpoint. Others' experience helps you think ahead and see how a situation might play out in ways that you might not necessarily anticipate. When we speak with those who are older, we have the benefit of their experience of life. The fact that they have been around longer means that they have been through many more situations.

Truly this is what is meant when Solomon says in Proverbs 11:14, "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety." In this verse the Holy Spirit through Solomon gives practical advice on speaking with others and shows us the benefits of doing that.

This experience is compounded for the better because when you ask parents or teachers, you have the benefit of someone who knows you and your character. They have watched you grow up. They see you for who you really are and will give advice accordingly. All of us are made different, so the solution may not be the same for every problem each of us encounter.

The final thing that we should be doing is praying. We must be praying throughout the whole process. Lord's Day 45 of the Heidelberg Catechism states that prayer is necessary because only through prayer will God give his grace and Holy Spirit.[2] Prayer takes our needs before the throne of God's grace, whereby we confess by our actions that he is Lord and sovereign over all. We actively seek his blessing on our lives. We connect with him. We thank him throughout the process. When children of the Father come before him with humble hearts, asking, seeking, and knocking, they will be blessed by receiving, finding, and being answered.

A couple of questions arise at this point. The first is, after a long search, how do you know that you have found his will? How can you be totally, one hundred percent confident? Confidence comes as the answer to much prayer. When we pray we can be assured that the answer will come. With the answer

2 Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 116, in *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and Added Chorale Section*, reprinted and revised edition of the 1912 United Presbyterian Psalter (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1927), 16.

will come peace. Jesus says in John 14:27, "My peace I give unto you." God will give us his peace.

What if you aren't at peace? What if you haven't obtained peace through this process? If you haven't found peace, then first repeat the process. Talk to a few more people, search the scriptures more, listen to another sermon, and pray—and pray, pray, pray, and pray: bleed before God in prayer. Pour out your soul to him in prayer. Does not James 5:16 say that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"? Continue to pray; God will answer.

The other thing to remember about not being at peace is that we must consider our conscience. If we are not at peace, we should never move forward in that area of life while violating our conscience. Our conscience is the witness of the Holy Spirit in our minds of the truth of God's word. Though we may not understand it at the moment of the decision, though we may not have it in the front of our minds at the time, a troubled conscience is the Holy Spirit taking the words of the Bible that we have heard somewhere in the past, whether from our studies, our devotions, a sermon, or a commentary, and bearing witness to those words in our minds so that we are not at peace. "Something just isn't right about this," we often say. We know the truth but can't put our finger on it. We should never violate our conscience.

The second question that comes to mind is, after a long search, what if I never find the answer? What if I am still not at peace? What if peace never comes? Though a difficult question, what we are doing is complaining about God's timing. How many times do I want an answer, and I want it right now? Doesn't the internet itself condition us to that response? With worlds full of information at our fingertips, we so easily become impatient. God has his timing.

Recall the words found in Lord's Day 49: "Grant that we and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey thy will."[3] Included in God's will is timing. God will reveal his will, but only when he desires to do so. Consider how many believers in the Old Testament were looking for the promised one to appear, but they died without seeing him. Then one day when God was ready, in God's timing, he made known to Mary that she would carry the Christ child. In the same way it just might be that we never see God's timing on this earth, and only when we get to heaven will all things be made clear to us.

If we think about this for a moment, there is comfort. God's timing is a good thing. Our timing may be correct, but when we align our wills with God's will, our timing with God's timing, our plans with God's plan, we are placing ourselves, our futures, our lives, and all of our beings into the most trustworthy place possible: into the hands of God. We then will truly be hidden under the shadow of God's wings and have no fear.

Being at a crossroads in life is natural. We are all there at one point or another. When we seek God through prayer, careful study of his word, and communion with him through his saints, he will abundantly bless us through Jesus Christ. He will grant the wisdom to direct all our paths toward him and will also grant the wisdom and contentment to say with the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:11, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

3 Heidelberg Catechism A124, in *The Psalter,* 18.

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Two things have I required of thee;
deny me them not before I die:
Remove from me vanity and lies:
give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with food convenient for me:
Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say,
Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor,
and steal,
and take the name of my God in vain.
—Proverbs 30:7–9.

Knowing God's Will For Us

Every child of God has struggled at one time or another to answer the question, what is my Father's will for me? Whether this is asked when it comes to deciding on a career path, whom to marry, or even whether or not we ought to purchase a certain thing, this question is of utmost importance, and it is good when God's children seek the answer to it. However, God does not come to us in visions or address us by name on the pages of scripture in order to reveal his will to us in these matters. In fact, there are many situations in our everyday lives that require godly decisions, yet God does not specifically address them in his word. How then may God's children know his will concerning such important matters? Although God does not give us a personal revelation regarding every situation we face, we may still discern what he would have us to do by studying the principles of his word, praying for wisdom to apply these principles, and by considering the earthly circumstances in which he sovereignly places us.

God's word gives us principles for our lives. Some of the most basic of these principles are found in God's law. In one way or another, everything we do, say, or think relates to the law of God. If we are perplexed about a certain choice or decision we have to make, looking at this in the light of God's law may clear things up. Especially will this be true if we view it through the lens of the summary of the law given by our Lord himself. In that summary Jesus teaches us that God's law has two parts. The first deals with our relationship between ourselves and God. The second has to do with the duties we owe to our neighbor. Love for God and the neighbor are all-encompassing. If we are faced with a momentous decision, one thing we ought to consider is whether choosing one way over another might demonstrate hatred against God or the neighbor. If so, we can know with certainty what we are called to do. With David we must pray, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer" (Ps. 19:14).

Nevertheless, God's law does not give specific instructions for everything. It certainly lays the groundwork, but it does not tell us whom to marry, what career path to choose, or how to manage our money. Yet there are other places in scripture that give principles on these matters. Concerning marriage, for example, we read that it is honorable (Heb. 13:4), and that it should be between a God-fearing man and woman (1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 6:14). This means that when the young people of the church earnestly seek a godly spouse, they are doing a very noble thing and are living in obedience to the command of God. With respect to finances, we are told that we should not love (worship) money (1 Tim. 6:10), and that we are to be faithful stewards of all that God gives us. In other words, we should not labor to be rich, but we must work in order to support our families and the church. With respect to careers, we are called to serve God according to the gifts that he has given us (1 Cor. 7:7). Therefore we must see ourselves as servants of the Most High and use what he gives us for his glory, not for self-promotion.

It is not enough, however, that we merely are able to find these principles in God's word. We must also be able to apply these principles to our own lives and circumstances. We are utterly incapable of doing this by ourselves. Therefore we must ask God for wisdom to apply these principles. This is all-important. We do not come into this world fully equipped with the wisdom needed for every situation we face. Indeed, we come into this world worse than fools, for we are born dead in trespasses and sins. Apart from Jesus Christ, who is wisdom personified (Prov. 8), our noblest efforts at knowing anything at all are the worst kind of folly, for then we rely upon ourselves instead of God. It is simply a must that we pray for wisdom. When we do, we acknowledge that we are utterly helpless apart from God, that he is the source of all wisdom, and that he alone can supply our needs. We may be confident that God will give us this wisdom when we ask it of him: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all

men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

What is this wisdom that we are to pray for? Quite simply, to have wisdom is to have the mind of Christ. To have the mind of Christ is to be humble and to seek the glory of God in all things. It is to desire to do the will of God rather than our own.[1] When this is our goal and attitude, then we can combine this with the principles of God's word in order to address some of the practical choices and decisions that we face in our own lives. We may begin to answer questions for ourselves such as, "Will this entertainment I am seeking promote the glory of God, or is it designed to satisfy my carnal lusts?" "Will purchasing this item help me serve God better, or will it take away from the time I spend studying his word?" "Would this person make a godly spouse, or do I only want to marry him or her for money and good looks?" These are just a few of the many situations we will be able to address better by following the way of wisdom.

Being familiar with our earthly circumstances is also important. We must be able to use the wisdom God gives us to analyze these circumstances, for God speaks to us through them. God puts us in certain places and situations. He makes some things possible for us, but other things he withholds. This is an important factor for a young person to consider when he is pondering a vocation or career path. To every one of us God gives gifts, and the gifts we have or don't have will serve as an indicator of what God would have us to do. If, for example, a young man aspires to the ministry of the gospel, but lacks the ability to master the original languages of scripture, he may be sure that the Lord is not calling him to be a minister. Yet, if the same young man enjoys working with his hands and is good at putting things together, he will be wise to pursue a career that involves such things.

This principle applies to other parts of our lives as well. One of the most obvious is the activity of seeking a husband or wife. There are many godly young people in the church, so how can one be sure which person to marry? The Lord will make his will plain to us through circumstances. If in the process of dating someone, we find that we enjoy their company and that we are able to discuss many subjects of common interest, then we may know that this person will be a suitable spouse. But if we find that there is nothing to talk about with that person, no matter how godly they may be, then we may know that this is not someone that the Lord would have us to be with.[2] This is the practical side of knowing God's will for us. If something is working for us and is not causing us to sin against God's law, in all likelihood we are following the way God wants us to go.

In all these things we should not neglect to hear the wisdom of others (especially older members) in the body of Christ. We must be open to their advice, admonishments, and encouragements. The Lord is often pleased to lead his children in a certain way through the influence of fellow believers. For example, the young men of the church should listen when their parents, teachers, and elders tell them to consider the ministry. Usually these encouragements are given because a young man displays certain gifts requisite for preaching and teaching. When others point these gifts out, let young men consider the call all the more seriously, for it may be the means that the Lord is using to impress the call upon them. The Lord may also use rebukes to turn his children from one path and to choose another. Perhaps a young person of the church wants to pursue a certain career because it pays well. His pastor may warn him not to pursue a career for money, for the love of it is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). The Lord may use such circumstances to turn his children from ways of selfishness to ways of service in his kingdom. Again, this requires much humility, but the same God who gives wisdom to those who ask it of him will also give his children the grace to be humble, even in the face of rebuke.

Whether it is the call to the ministry, a question of whom to date, or something of seemingly much less importance, let the youths not be afraid to ask the older and wiser members of the church for advice. All the advice found in magazines and on the internet cannot compare to the godly wisdom of the saints of the church, especially those who are at the end of their earthly pilgrimage. They are qualified above all others to give advice concerning everyday choices and decisions, for they have walked the

1 I am indebted for these insights to Prof. Russell Dykstra, who addressed them in a sermon: "Getting the Principal Thing" based on Proverbs 4:7, preached on September 1, 2013, and accessed from prca.org on May 27, 2014.

2 Cornelius Hanko, *Leaving Father and Mother: Biblical Courtship and Marriage* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2001), 12.

same pilgrim way and have faced many of the same challenges throughout their lives. They will be glad to help, and will rejoice that the youths even come to ask them about these things. Anyone who goes to an older saint for advice and comes away with godly wisdom will not be sorry.

The life of the Christian is a pilgrimage, that is, a long journey to our heavenly home that is filled with obstacles. Many of these obstacles take the form of choices and decisions that we face every day, but which God's word does not specifically address. In his sovereignty God has ordained that it should be so. He wants us to work hard in our efforts to learn his will, because in this way we are sanctified and made ready for our eternal home. The Lord uses means to bring us there. He makes us pray for wisdom, he causes us to study his word for the principles to follow, and he even leads us to consider our earthly circumstances and talk to our fellow pilgrims about it. Through it all we confess his absolute sovereignty, as well as our love for him, "For this God is our God forever and ever; he will be our guide, even unto death" (Ps. 48:14).

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Scholarship Essay — Lanae Regnerus

Judging

"Tolerate! Tolerate! Tolerate!" This is the demand of the postmodern world today. Much of the church world echoes this demand with words such as, "Do not judge, just love the brother." How common is it for the false church not to embrace the world's demands, put a "Christian perspective" on them, and then claim them as the demands of God. In this way Satan uses the church to promote worldly thinking. As with most things, it is usually quite easy to reject the world's blatant lies, but it requires discernment to recognize the false church's sly deceptions. It is regarding this intent that it is wise and timely to consider the topic of judging. It is especially pertinent to consider judging in these three ways. First, *why* must we judge? Second, *how* must we judge? Thirdly, *what* must we judge?

Why must we judge? Before answering this question, it is first necessary to see if there is any place for judging at all in the Christian's life. Is it proper in any way for a Christian to judge? At first glance it appears as if Matthew 7:1 tells us that Christians must never judge when scripture says, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." However, we know from our lives that it is impractical and unreasonable to make the claim that Christians may never judge. After all, every time we go shopping we make a judgment about the brands of food, clothing, or electronic devices that we should buy. In fact, every time we make a decision we are making a judgment. If then it is impossible for us never to judge, what does Matthew 7:1 mean when it calls Christians not to judge? This chapter answers this question in verse 5, which clearly demonstrates that the text is speaking about the manner in which we judge but is not forbidding all forms of judgment. John Calvin in his commentary on Matthew 7 states, "These words of Christ do not contain an absolute prohibition for judging, but are intended to cure a disease, which appears to be natural to us all" (345). In the next paragraph, Calvin again states, "It is not necessary that believers should become blind, and perceive nothing…" (346).

Although we now see that God does not forbid judging, the question still remains whether Christians

have the calling to judge. Scripture, the Reformed confessions, and our forefathers plainly demonstrate that it is necessary for the Christian to judge in especially two regards. First and most importantly, every Christian is called to make a judgment about the church. Articles 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession teach that all Christians are called to judge whether a church is true or false by examining the three marks of a true church and then joining themselves to a true church. Although this type of judgment is very important in the lives of all Christians, even those who are Protestant Reformed, it is not my intent to focus on this aspect of judging. Rather, my intent is to expound on the second aspect of judging, the calling that all Christians have to make judgments in regard to people. It is important to note that judging in this context is not synonymous with condemning, as many people take it to mean. Rather, judging is used more broadly to refer to both positive and negative judgments.

Why are Christians called to make judgments regarding people? First, it is a necessity for an antithetical walk. Genesis 3:15 says, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed." Psalm 139: 21–22 teach us to hate those who hate God. We can judge whether or a not a person loves God by observing his obedience to God's commandments. In John 14:24 Jesus teaches, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." In order for us to live an antithetical life, we are called to make judgments about people.

Second, it is necessary for Christians to make judgments about people within the church, so that we hold one another accountable. Proverbs 27:17 teaches us that iron sharpens iron. Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 states, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." This is our motivation for judging others within the church, namely, building one another up. Never must we use our calling to judge as an excuse for our gossiping and backbiting. Christians are called to judge each other in order to hold each other accountable. This is necessary so that Christian discipline can be administered within the church. Matthew 18 calls the church to proper church discipline. In order for church discipline to be carried out, judgments must be made about people.

Finally, it is necessary for Christians to make judgments about people because the word that they bring goes forth as a two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12) and never returns to God void (Isa. 55:11). When we make a judgment about a person, especially one close to us, we often worry about what the person's reaction will be to our judgment of them. When we see a friend or family member walking in sin, we hesitate to point out his sin because we are afraid that he will get angry with us. However, we must remember that when we bring God's word, it always accomplishes God's will. It either will harden the sinner in his sinful, disobedient ways, or it will bring the sinner to repentance before God.

Seeing that Christians are called to judge, the next matter for consideration is to determine the proper manner in which to judge. We will do this by first looking negatively at ways which we ought not to judge. Then we will examine positively how we ought to judge properly.

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus taught us how we should not judge. In Matthew 7:1–5 Jesus strongly reprimands hypocritical judging. In verse 5 he states, "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." In order to judge in a non-hypocritical way, it is necessary that we first examine ourselves so that we can clearly cast out all pervasive sins from our lives and live a new and holy life. Hypocritical judging is an enormous temptation for all of God's people. It is so easy for us to spot sins in others' lives while we overlook our own sins.

The proper way to judge is laid out for us in Matthew 18, which speaks of judging within the church, but can be applied to every area of our lives. Notice the motivation that the text gives for pointing out a sin in a person's life. Jesus gives the parable of the shepherd who left the ninety-nine sheep in order to search for the missing one. This is always the goal: repentance. We do not judge others in order to make ourselves feel better about ourselves. Rather, we judge them so that we can bring the word of God to them and turn them from their sinful ways. In all of our judging that we do, we must remember the words of Philippians 2:3, which tell us to esteem others higher than ourselves.

Not only does Matthew 18 teach us the proper motivation that ought to be behind all of our judging, but it also teaches us the correct manner in which we are called to judge. We are not called to make a

judgment about a person and then keep our judgment to ourselves. Neither are we called to make a judgment and then use our judgment to gossip about that person or group of people. Rather we are called to speak out our biblically-based judgments. In some cases, as described in Matthew 18, this is to be an individual conversation that might eventually get taken to the church. In other cases we are called to speak out against sin and sinners in a public way. We see this demonstrated for us in many of the Old Testament major and minor prophets. Many of them were called to speak judgments to the children of Israel. However, in this regard we need to be careful. Although we are called to leave no man without excuse, Matthew 7:6 warns us not to cast our pearls before swine.

Since now we see that it is indeed necessary for Christians to judge, and that there is a proper way in which to judge, it is necessary to examine last what exactly we judge about a person. What ought to be the object of our judgment? Within Christianity and the church world, this is the biggest gray and controversial area. Do we judge only actions, or are we called to judge persons themselves? A popular phrase among Christians today is "hate the sin, love the sinner." When this phrase gets applied to judging, it quite often is said that we can judge the actions of a person, but we may not judge the sinner himself. If we would judge the sinner, we are accused of making ourselves self-righteous and taking on a holier than thou attitude.

We are called to judge actions. If we are called to hold one another accountable, we need to make a judgment about their actions. Second, we are called to judge people themselves. There are differences in the ways in which we judge people. When we make a judgment about the actions of a person, we are necessarily making a judgment about the person himself. Imagine reading a poorly written book, and when you finish the book, you decide to contact the author. In your message to the author, you make it clear that you thought the book was poorly written. In this way you make it known to the author that at the time the book was written, he was a bad author. You make a judgment about him as an author at that moment. So too, when we judge the actions of a person, we are making a judgment about that person at that particular moment. As stated earlier, judgment is necessary in order to walk antithetically. Walking antithetically means walking separate from sinners. Psalm 1:1 states, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." This means that we must make a judgment about people. We do not judge a person's eternal state as if to condemn him to hell. Instead, we simply judge that at this moment in time, he does not reveal himself to be a child of God. This is a judgment of the person himself.

However, there is another way in which we judge people. This second type of judging is done only through the church. In this judging we make a temporal judgment about the man's destiny. This is done only regarding those who have been excommunicated from the church. In the Form for Excommunication we read:

> Therefore we, the ministers and rulers of the church of God, being here assembled in the name and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, declare before you all, that for the aforesaid reasons we have excommunicated, and by these do excommunicate N. from the church of God, and from fellowship with Christ, and the holy sacraments, and from all the spiritual blessings and benefits which God promiseth to and bestows upon His church, so long as he obstinately and impenitently persists in his sins, and is therefore to be accounted by you as a heathen man and a publican, according to the command of Christ (Matt. 18), who saith that whatsoever His ministers bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.

The fact that this judgment about the eternal state of this person is only a temporal judgment is evidenced by the Reformed church's seeing a need to include the Form for Readmitting Excommunicated Persons. This forms states, "whereby he giveth to understand that when any person is cut off from his church, he is not deprived of all hope of salvation, but can again be loosed from the bonds of condemnation." The judgments that the church makes are not unchangeable. God can soften the hearts of the hardest sinner and bring him back into the church. What a joy for the church! Even though for a time a person may need to be put out of the church, God can bring him back in true sorrow for sins.

This is always our joy in judgment. Although the world and the false church hate judgments, for the true believer judgments are a means of salvation. It is through judging one another that we grow up into Christ. The ungodly hate judgments because they desire to continue on blissfully in their sins. For

the elect children of God, judgments always bring us back to God in the way of repentance. Give thanks to God for this gift which he has given to his church!

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Lanae is a member of Doon Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa. She is a university sophomore and is studying to become an elementary teacher.

Church News

Melinda Bleyenberg

BAPTISMS

"But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children." Psalm 103:17

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

Malia Elaine, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Aric & Rachel Bleyenberg—Byron Center, MI

Calvin Joseph, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joseph & Sherry Mantel—Doon, IA

Colby Ryan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason & Brianna Brands—Edgerton, MN

Michelle Renee, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Stephanie Tolsma—Edmonton, AB, Canada

Gwenann Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Melanie Noorman—Georgetown, MI

Jackson Scott, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Amanda Gritters—Grace, MI

Casen Joshua, son of Mr. & Mrs. Josh & Carrie Meulenberg—Grace, MI

Natalie Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Cheri VanderVeen—Grace, MI

Saige Raelle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Keith & Melissa Doezema—Holland, MI

Quenton Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Don & Hillary Lotterman—Hope, MI

Melody Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Randy & Katelyn Kooiman—Hull, IA

Azlynn Faith, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Shane & Tamara Davelaar—Hull, IA

Daniel Lee, son of Mr. & Mrs. Paul & Tena Hoekstra—Kalamazoo, MI

Matthew Ryan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Eric & LeAnne Westra—Loveland, CO

Kiersten Luella, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Seth & Alison Griess—Loveland, CO

Mira Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Melissa Verburg—Peace, IL

Amos James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Caleb & Jenn VanBaren—Randolph, WI

Eric Matthew, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mike & Corrie VanderVeen—Randolph, WI

Brooke Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kent & Sandee Hoksbergen—Randolph, WI

Connie Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tony & Laura VanDonselaar—Southwest, MI

Alaina Drew, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jason & Kim Schipper—Trinity, MI

Derek Ryan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan & Brittany Karsemeyer—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Proverbs 3:6

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

Cody Altena—Doon, IA

Dillon Altena—Doon, IA

Brandon Kaptein—Faith, MI

Derk Bergers, Stephen Boonstra, Greg Gritters, Christy Korver, Haley Uittenbogaard, Nicole Vander Veen, Jacob Van Engen, and Alex Van Ginkel—Hull, IA

Thomas Buiter—Randolph, WI

MARRIAGES

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

Mr. Karis Mpindi and Miss Rebecca Vander Wall—Georgetown, MI

Mr. John Feenstra and Miss Madeline Poortinga—Kalamazoo, MI

Mr. Kyle Tanis and Miss Hannah Westra—Southwest, MI

Tricia Mingerink

A Thankful Meal

Matt's mouth watered as he stared at all the food laid out on the dining room table. A plate filled with slices of ham and turkey sat near one end of the table where his grandparents sat. Steam rose from bowls of mashed potatoes, corn, and beans set in the center of the long table near his parents and aunts and uncles. He, Abby, and his cousins sat on their hands as they stared at the basket of warm rolls that had been placed at their end of the table.

When all of his family members finally went silent, Matt's dad said, "Let's pray."

Matt bowed his head and folded his hands, hoping his dad would make this a short prayer so that he could eat.

His dad's voice filled the room, "Our Father in Heaven, we gather together as a family to thank thee for the bounty that thou has blessed us with this year. Our table has been filled with thy goodness."

Matt thought about all the food on the table. God really had blessed them with a lot of food this year. He thought about all the picking they'd had to do in their garden and all the jars of corn, beans, and tomatoes that his mom had spent hours canning. The bowls of corn and beans on the table were from their garden.

"Thou hast given us strength in this year to work in the jobs that thou has placed us."

Matt remembered all the chores his dad had given him that year. He'd helped plant, weed, water, and pick the garden. It hadn't seemed like a lot, but God had used it to put food on their table. Maybe all those chores had done some good.

"Finally, we thank thee for the family members around this table. Thou hast placed each of us in this family to care for each other."

Matt nudged his sister Abby's foot under the table. She could be a pain at times, but she was nice to have around when he needed help with his homework.

"Amen."

At the last word, Matt's head shot up. His mom smiled at him. "Corn?" She asked, picking up the bowl. He nodded furiously and held up his plate.

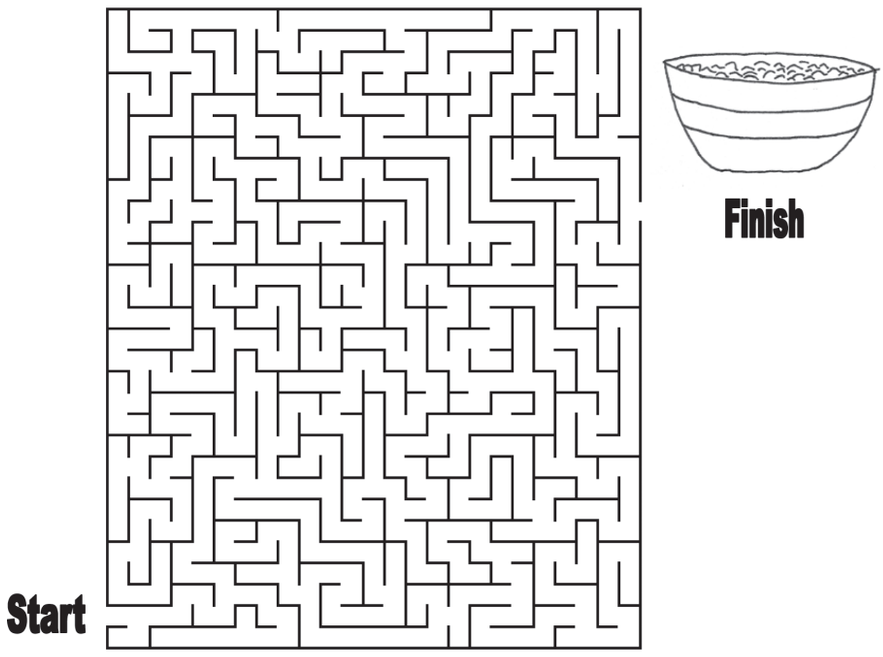
"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

Questions to think about:

1. Read Philippians 4:6 by yourself or with your parents. What does this say about thankfulness?
2. This Thanksgiving, what are you thankful for?

Help Matt get through the maze to find his bowl of corn:



Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

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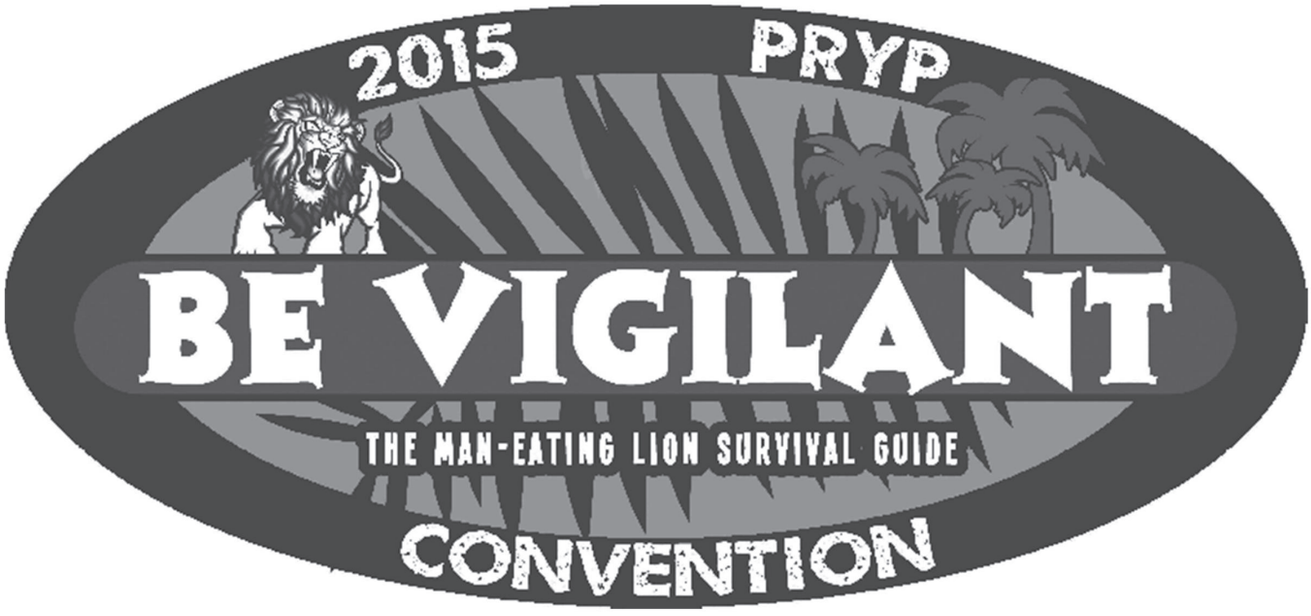

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:" 1 Peter 5:8

August 10-14, 2015

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