Beacon Lights

Magazine of the Protestant Reformed Young People

May 2014

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Strangers and Sojourners: Alone

Strangers and sojourners often travel the road of life alone.

That road is so narrow that no one can travel it except in single file. The road is no freeway or smooth highway that lends itself to high speeds and a rapid arrival at one's destination. Rather, as we have previously observed, the path of strangers and sojourners is more like a rugged trail that allows only single-file travel, and that is fraught with obstacles and troubles. Sometimes the trail is so rough and remote that the travelers cannot see anyone else ahead or behind.

While all of God's people travel essentially the same road, while their journey is basically the same, and while their goal is the same, yet there are individual differences among them. Each one of us needs to walk his individual, distinct path along the road of life.

In the Bible the concept of "alone" implies the idea of separation, to be apart from, to be distant from one's self. This means not to have close friends with whom one has conversation and fellowship, not to have something in common, but to be distinct and separate from others. Usually, though not always, "alone" carries with it a negative connotation.

One notable exception is Deuteronomy 33:28, which is part of Moses' farewell address to Israel. After promising the people that God would thrust out their enemies before them, he says that Israel will dwell in safety alone. Israel's strength will be in

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possessing their own land and living in isolation from the heathen nations around them. Their aloneness will enable them to live as strangers and sojourners in a physical, outward manner, which is typical of the believer's spiritual journey.

Being alone has different aspects and shows itself in various ways. By looking at some of these, we will understand what it means to be solitary.

God himself does not like aloneness. He says of Adam in Genesis 2:18, "It is not good that the man should be alone." The animals were created male and female, but Adam had no companion, so God created Eve to be his helpmeet. Why did God not want Adam to be alone, and therefore created the woman? Because God is a covenant God; within his divine being he has friendship and fellowship with himself. He wanted man, the head of his creation, to reflect the covenant life that he enjoys within himself. This is impossible if Adam is alone, so he gave the woman to the man that together they would be covenant friends with one another and with the Lord.

A similar idea we find in Psalm 102, a prayer of one who is afflicted and pours out his complaint to the Lord. The psalmist prays, "Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble" (verse 2). We do not know what his specific problem is, but he spends several verses describing his pitiable condition. Apparently he suffers alone without anyone to share his grief and trouble, for he says in verse 7, "I am like a sparrow alone upon the house top." The picture is that of a sparrow bereaved of its mate. There on the top of the house sits the poor little lonesome sparrow, all by himself, with no one to help or comfort him. Have you ever been a sparrow alone on the top of the roof? It's not a good place to be, is it?

We think of Jacob as he traveled toward the promised land after a long absence, only to meet with his brother Esau, from whom he had bartered away the birthright. After sending his entire family and all his possessions across the Jabbok River, Jacob hit a major bump in his stranger's sojourn. Genesis 32:24 tells us that Jacob was left alone to wrestle all night with the angel of Jehovah. Jacob was one who always tried to help the Lord along a bit, and who tried to do things in his own strength. When finally God put him in a position in which he was truly alone, he had to learn the hard way that the Lord is sovereign and that salvation is his alone.

In considering the idea of being alone, we cannot forget the example of Job. He lost all his possessions. He lost all his children. His three alleged friends repeatedly told him what a sinner he was, miserable comforters that they were. His wife told him to curse God and die. He was covered with boils. He had no friends. He suffered alone. He was so miserable that he said to God, "I despise my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone; my days have no meaning" (Job. 7:16). He uses similar language in Job 10:20: "Are not my days few? cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little." Job did not want to hear what God had to say to him. Can you conceive of telling God, "Leave me alone?" I cannot. To put it in today's language, Job said, "Quit bugging me." Have you ever been so miserable that you have said such a thing? Maybe some have. I have not.

Perhaps the epitome of lonesomeness in the Old Testament is the prophet Elijah. The narrative in 1 Kings 19 is familiar. After his glorious victory over Baal and his prophets on Mt. Carmel, the wicked queen Jezebel swore to kill him. Elijah fled for his life and ended up in a cave at Mt. Horeb. When God asked him what he was doing there, Elijah replied: "I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (vv. 10, 14). Romans 11:3, speaking of Elijah, expresses his words this way: "Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thy altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life." In the light of what Elijah says about Israel, all of which was true, we can understand a little of how he felt. I say "a little" because his situation has never been ours. We have not experienced apostasy and its results as they are described by the prophet. We have never had to flee for our lives. Talk about being alone! Can you imagine thinking that you are the only person left who stands for the Lord's cause and covenant? We know that Elijah drew the wrong conclusion from his situation. He was not the only one left, for God had preserved a remnant in Israel, seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Nevertheless, the point is that from his personal perspective, Elijah was alone.

Christ is the ultimate example of being alone. Unlike Elijah, usually he was alone by choice and for a definite reason. We read that after the feeding of the five thousand, "When he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone"

(Matt. 14:23; see also Luke 9:18). John Calvin instructs us as to the reason Jesus wanted to be alone, with application to us on our stranger's journey:

> By going up the mountain he was seeking the possibility of praying free from all interruption. We know how easily warmth in prayer can be quenched or at least cooled by the least distractions. Although Christ did not suffer from this weakness, yet he wished to warn us by his example to be careful to use all the helps that will disengage our minds from the snares of the world, so that we may be carried up to heaven. The most important thing is solitude. Those who set themselves to pray with God as their only witness will be more watchful, will pour forth their heart into his bosom, will examine themselves more carefully, and, knowing that they have to do with God, will rise above themselves.[1]

In John 16:32, referring to the time of his death, Jesus says, "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, now is come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." Here is the ultimate manifestation of being alone. Christ came as the mediator between God and man. As the savior he alone can make satisfaction for the sins of his people. There can be no work of man involved whatsoever. No one can help Christ, no one can contribute to the work of salvation, no one can add anything to his redemption of his people. Christ must be alone; he must suffer and die alone; he must rise again alone. Therefore he tells his disciples that everyone will leave him alone. So it is, and so it must be. The road that Christ must walk is solitary.

To his assertion of his aloneness the Lord immediately adds, "Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." It does not matter that all men will forsake him and leave him alone in his suffering. Even if he is forsaken by the whole world, as he will be, he has no need of anyone, because his heavenly Father is with him. The Father will sustain him through his suffering and death. Though he is alone, yet he is not alone.

This truth has implications for you, young people. When you are alone, or when you feel like Elijah or Job, remember that Christ was also alone. He knows, and he understands the difficulties of the path we must walk, for scripture teaches us that he was like us in all things except sin. We have a high priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He will sustain us in our darkest hour, and will comfort us by his Spirit, so that we are never really alone, appearances notwithstanding.

There is an implied admonition in this matter of being alone. It is that we need friends on our stranger's sojourn. As I plan to show in next month's column, we need to walk together on our rugged trail. The negative consequences of being alone are stated by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 4:9–11. In verse 9 the wise man states a general principle: "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour." This makes one think of the necessity of lifting and moving something that is too heavy for one person. Two people working together can get the job done. Applying this principle to the rough and rocky trail that strangers and sojourners must walk, we note what Solomon says in verse 10: "For if they fall [which is a virtual certainty, given the jagged and craggy nature of the trail], 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." The meaning is so clear that it needs no explanation. Solomon drives home the point with the rhetorical question of verse 11: "Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?"

Being alone, according to verse 10, is a "woe." One who is alone is to be pitied. He is certain to fall, but he has no one to help him. Do you have friends? Do you have companions on life's road? If you do, then you are blessed. If you do not, make every attempt to make friends. You can't reach the Christian's goal alone. While every one of us must walk his own individual way in this world, we must also travel together toward the narrow gate that leads to eternal life.

1 John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, 3 vols., trans. T. H. L. Parker, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), 2:151.

Editor's Note — Mark H. Hoeksema

In my introduction to the oral history under the "Goodly Heritage" rubric (March, 2014) I stated that copies of both the verbal and transcription versions of the interviews are available from the PRCA archives. Due to a misunderstanding, this statement is inaccurate. My apologies.

Interview with Rev. Henry deMots
Part 2

Mark H. Hoeksema (MHH): Those were some excellent answers. I do have a couple of questions, though. Still on this subject of common grace (and in the context of your comments about what Bavinck wrote), after having lived a very long life and having been in the ministry for as many years as you were, when you look back over the years and you look at the common grace controversy, what are your feelings about that? Do you think that common grace, on the part of the Christian Reformed Church, was a mistake or it wasn't? I'm curious as to your thoughts regarding not just the theology of it, but the practical implications.

Rev. Henry deMots (HdM): No, I believe that the three points are valid. I believe that. But what I think has happened (and I'm not very happy with that), is that in so many instances, consistories in our church—abdicated is too strong a word—but that they don't exercise discipline, at least you never hear of it, and I think the church is perhaps directed too much by committees. Let me give you an illustration. When the church is vacant, what used to be done was that the consistory would determine who is to be placed on a trio, or who was to be called. Now that is placed in the hands of a search committee. Young people are on that. Calvin [*Christian Reformed*] Church has been vacant for two and a half years, and a search committee is working on it. They have come close, a couple of times to recommending somebody. And there's more of that. Another thing is the Heidelberg Catechism isn't preached in our churches—very little, at least. I think as far as going to movies, why, they watch all the movies they want on TV. To see a good movie, I think that's perfectly fine. A lot of trash, I'm sure. I think that, as far as discipline is concerned, a lot of that has been neglected.

But on the other hand, I think the church has been more open. Many of the young people have been more ready to witness than I ever was ready as a kid. The statement that I heard when I was younger is, "In isolation lies our strength." And so people were opposed to introducing English sermons because then the American church and the American world would come in. So, there are pros and cons here, as I see it, Mark. And the three points—I hold to them. I think there is a lot of good out in the world. Things we can enjoy. But I do think, for example, Sabbath observance has declined considerably. Our people travel on Sundays.

Did the three points make a difference? I think Agatha Lubbers intimated that to me one time, while we were in the condos. She intimated that in a sort of off-hand way. No, I still hold to it. But I think Bavinck's admonition was valid. And I think perhaps it has been forgotten. Perhaps a lot of people don't even know about the three points today in our church. I don't think they do.

MHH: It's not an issue.

HdM: No, that's right. Even the three creeds are not an issue, really. People jump from church to church easily. I don't know, maybe not much church loyalty. I'm amazed at the loyalty of the people when I was a pastor. I wonder if I would have been as loyal. I was always there twice a day, but the people were there, maybe less in the evening, but people were there. Today, quite a few of our churches have only one service, or they combine, or whatever.

Yet I think as far as missions is concerned—home missions, foreign missions—they are more involved than we were at that time. So that's a good sign. I have some grandchildren who are really involved. I have some who are not so much involved. That's sad. And things have happened in my family that I never thought would happen, like divorce—my grandchildren. Some are justified. When I say "some," that means there was more than one.

MHH: The situation then is very different from what it was many, many years ago even with regard to

divorce?

HdM: I don't know. Of course divorce at that time was unthinkable practically among our older people. But on the other hand, I know how some have stayed together, and how they lived together was perhaps an even greater sin. But I got involved with these families. And that was not because of adultery. So, I still maintain the three points. Do you feel that that is a mistake, Mark?

MHH: Personally, yes.

HdM: Well, of course, how could it be the other way?

MHH: If I thought that the three points were correct, I would probably be in the Christian Reformed denomination (laughter).

HdM: What would Homer [*Hoeksema, my late father*] do to you?

MHH: He would not have been happy.

HdM: No, he wouldn't.

MHH: But I appreciate your forthrightness. I want to ask you one more question. Backing up in this history a little bit, let's go back to Edgerton because I'm not quite clear on how the Protestant Reformed congregation in Edgerton was formed. You told me about the group that was not happy with the preaching of Rev. Ehlers and that met under Bernie Kok's leadership. But I'm still not quite clear. Was the formation of the PR church in Edgerton a result of a definite doctrinal difference, or was it more a matter of antipathy toward or unhappiness with some of the practices in the Christian Reformed Church? How did that happen?

HdM: They said it was because of the three points. Whether they understood the three points, some of them, I'm not sure. I wasn't there when these churches were organized, but my understanding of it was that that was because of doctrine. And, of course, the fact that they were unhappy in their own church fed into that and maybe they justified their act by saying that it was a doctrinal matter. I question whether a couple of them really understood what the three points were all about. Even as a lot of people who remained in the Christian Reformed Church didn't understand what the three points were all about (laughter).

MHH: Well, perhaps not all of the events in Grand Rapids filtered down to the West.

HdM: That's right, Mark.

MHH: When you were in the ministry, did you preach the Heidelberg Catechism?

HdM: Always, always.

MHH: The Protestant Reformed Churches still do.

HdM: I know they do. I see it in the [*Grand Rapids*] Press. I have preached some from the Belgic Confession. And I made an attempt to preach on the Five Points of Calvinism. I have no problem with preaching on total depravity, because there's a lot of it around (laughter).

MHH: Good point.

HdM: Where I have some difficulty, actually, is limited atonement. There was an article in the Reformed Journal, written by Jim Daane (hmmm). Are you familiar with Jim at all?

MHH: Yes!

HdM: And the title of that article was "Timeless Logic." It was a critique of the theology of Herman Hoeksema, and the point was that the theology of Rev. Herman Hoeksema is very logical. One step follows the other. Total depravity, irresistible grace, limited atonement, and perseverance of the saints, and so forth, that all follows. What we say and what we preach sometimes doesn't seem to be logical. People say, On the one hand you say Jesus said, "Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." But then you say, "But Jesus didn't die for everybody. Atonement is limited. He never intended to save some people." And so it isn't logical what you say. But Hoeksema's logical. You know, you probably read this discussion between Dr. [*Richard*] Mouw and David Engelsma [*deMots refers to a formal public debate between Mouw and Engelsma*]. Now, I heard a tape of it. I wasn't there. And from a debate point of view, I think you can say that Engelsma bested Mouw because he was logical. Mouw tries to take in the broad scope of the gospel. And yet to reckon with limited atonement, that couldn't be logical.

I recently read a little book by him, "TULIP in Las Vegas." Did you see that?

MHH: I don't believe so.

HdM: It's about the Five Points of Calvinism.

MHH: The author is?

HdM: Mouw. His point is this. According to the setting (and that's in the movie), a stripper (I think a stripper, but anyway, a questionable woman), is sitting with an old man. And she asks him, "What do you really believe?" And he said, "We believe

TULIP." That stripper, why she said, "TULIP, what's tulip all about?" Well, see, then he goes on that that was not the way to present your faith to that kind of person. You should have presented the gospel to that person instead of the Five Points of Calvinism. And then he discusses the Five Points. And then he comes to Limited Atonement. And he said he has problems with that, just like I have some problems with that. I don't reject it. But I have problems with it. And he said, "I accept limited atonement, but I put it on the shelf" (laughter).

MHH: That's an interesting way of saying it.

HdM: Yeah, that's right. So that article by Jim Daane I thought hits the nail on the head. "Timeless Logic." It's logical. And therefore presenting the offer of salvation to a mixed group isn't logical because of election. Yet, I maintain this. I've never preached a sermon on reprobation.

MHH: Really?

HdM: Never!

MHH: Why not?

HdM: What could I say? What could I say to my church? Election? Yes. And you will find that throughout the Bible, too, that election is much more emphasized than reprobation. "I have no pleasure," says the Lord, "in the death of the unrighteous, but that he turns from his wicked way and lives." That's my problem.

MHH: That's very interesting.

HdM: Yes. What would I say to my congregation? There are people who are reprobate. Be sure you're not. Well, one would say, If God has rejected me, I'm rejected. I remember in Bellflower there was a man. He was about sixty years old. Never made profession of faith. Came there on family visiting. I said, "Case. Do you ever think of making profession of faith?" "No, why should I? If I'm elect, I'll get to heaven even if I don't make profession of faith. And if I'm a reprobate, even if I do, it won't get me to heaven." Time went on. Case became terribly sick. In fact, he had cancer. He said to me, "I'm going to have them remove my stomach. I want you to be there at the surgery so that you can tell me what they're doing." I said, "Case, I wouldn't know. And, furthermore, they wouldn't let me." You know, it was a Seventh-Day Adventist hospital, and they welcomed me. I sat on a little balcony above them. And the doctor would stop every so often and tell me what he was doing. I sat there for about five hours. Case survived the surgery, but it wasn't successful. And then I would visit him often. And what he would bemoan was that he hadn't brought up his children better. He never, never mentioned election. He was just simply concerned about his spiritual well-being, and what he had done to his family by neglecting to really be an example and by leading them. And he had reason to be concerned about his family. One of them died in a drunken state—frozen to death in a parking lot here in Grand Rapids.

But what Case was at that point, beforehand he was absolutely logical.

MHH: I take your point. But there is certainly more to salvation than logic.

HdM: Absolutely. And Rev. Herman Hoeksema was logical.

MHH: Do you feel that he and others were logical in, let's say, too much of a one-sided sense? That that aspect of salvation was emphasized, perhaps, to the detriment of other aspects?

HdM: I wouldn't draw that conclusion. Because I am sure that they also preached the gospel. But how did he preach it? I don't know. I never heard his sermons. Did he bring the offer of salvation? No, he said that was accursed. So, I would judge, personally, he never preached one-sided. We're not all as balanced as we ought to be. But that logical system, that's what I have in mind. I can't judge his preaching because I never heard him. He was a gifted man of God, no doubt about it. If this common grace problem had never risen, he could have been a very successful professor in our church, because he was gifted. Very much so. I'm not critical. But I'm trying to be objective, Mark.

MHH: I appreciate that.

HdM: I think I've been fairly objective, because that's the way I've seen it. You know, Peter says, "Make your calling and election sure." How do you do that? By believing the gospel. Make it sure. You know, Jim Daane in that article "Timeless Logic," makes the point that people jump on that: Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated. That was not said in connection with their birth. That statement comes way over in Haggai. There's where it says, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated." And there it refers not to them personally but to the nation, because immediately it mentions Egypt in connection with it. In other words, a lot of history has taken place between where God saying the elder shall serve the younger

and this saying Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated. But that's another story (laughter).

MHH: That's very interesting.

HdM: Even Paul, when he picks up that, he is still talking, in my judgment, about the people of Israel when he quotes "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated." He is speaking about Israel as a nation and all that history.

Federation Board Update

In addition to the regular business of the federation Board, we are presently working on the upcoming convention and future conventions. We are eagerly looking forward to the convention this year, which will be held at Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Redlands, California. Their theme will be "Living in the Last Days" from 1 Thessalonians 5:1–8. One note on the convention: the Federation Board cannot feasibly organize widespread transportation for everyone this year. You will have to get to Redlands on your own. But we sincerely encourage everyone to go. All of the work going into this convention is for your edification. Not only will this convention be exciting, but it is our prayer that it will be spiritually profitable for you.

Planning a convention is a lot of work, especially for the host church. One recently formed committee is working to establish a better process for hosting conventions. We hope to develop a streamlined planning process to reduce the workload of host churches. Another committee is working some of the kinks out of the present policies for convention travel subsidies. Some of the guidelines for distribution need to be clarified, as well as a greater amount of money devoted to the travel subsidy. We want all of our young people to be able to travel to the convention.

In addition to convention work, we are working with the Young Calvinists group to establish it permanently. The Young Calvinists Committee has worked in close conjunction with our Youth Coordinator to bring edifying events to you for the past year on a trial run. Our work as a Federation Board is to decide the most appropriate ways that the Young Calvinists can work with the Board to serve the young people. The Board faces many questions with taking on a new committee. All of these questions must be sorted out to ensure the best possible outcome.

Closely related to the Young Calvinists is another important question: does the presence of the Young Calvinists indicate a need for more integration of the young adults, that is, our young people after high school? Presently the Young Adults societies of our churches are not united under one board, and it can be difficult to encourage participation in society life among young adults. Young adults must be active in the church. The presence of the Young Calvinists may indicate that more could be done for the young adults. Thus a committee from the Federation Board is also looking into those future possibilities.

Over the next several months, as these committees continue to meet and the regular business of the Board is performed, pray for us. Pray that our decisions will profit our churches. Above all, pray that God will be given all the glory among us.

Brian is president of the Young People's Federation Board and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

Poem

Craig Ferguson

The Pilgrim's Plea

His soul borne down by sorrow's load
The pilgrim treads life's weary road,
Assailed by doubts and fears.

But when sin thrusts him side to side
And tempts his heart with lofty pride
He calls on one who hears.

His King, the Rock on whom he stands
The Cornerstone, the Son of man,
The Triune God, his Lord;

The loving Shepherd of the sheep
Who knows their names and ever keeps
Their souls from snare and sword.

And though the pilgrim's body fails
And falls upon that lonely trail
E'en then he never dies;

The seed of faith within him lives
That bond to Christ that ever gives
The strength again to rise.

Yea as that pilgrim struggles on
Still yet his soul lifts up this song,
His heart filled full with praise,

"I love thee, Lord, and wish to know
More of Thy love for me, to grow
In thankfulness and faith.

Yea, not my will, but thine be done;
Complete the work thou hast begun
And bring me home to thee.

That there I might with thee abide
And praise thee at my Savior's side.
Lord, hear this pilgrim's plea."

Craig is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta.

Review

Rev. Daniel Holstege

Noah: Not a Movie for Christians to Watch

"I don't think it's a very religious story. I think it's a great fable that's part of so many different religions and spiritual practices. I just think it's a great story that's never been on film."
"It's about environmental apocalypse which is the biggest theme, for me, right now for what's going on on this planet. So I think it's got these big, big themes that connect with us. Noah was the first environmentalist." ~ Darren Aronofsky, director of the biblical film, *Noah*.

Beloved young people, the movie *Noah*, produced and directed by Darren Aronofsky and released this past March, is not a movie for us Bible-believing, truth-loving, God-honoring disciples of Christ to watch, either for entertainment or education or evangelistic outreach. Nor is any Hollywood drama depicting sacred biblical history for that matter. I hope to convince you of that in this article. My focus in this article is on "religious drama." More specifically, my focus is the dramatic

depiction of events in sacred biblical history, which seems to be rather trendy in Hollywood as of late with the 2004 movie *The Passion of the Christ*, now the 2014 movie *Noah*, and still others in the works.

But first let me clarify my topic. I am not addressing the matter of drama itself. The question of whether or not drama itself is sinful, and whether or not the Christian may ever watch any drama, is not my topic in this article. That broader topic would demand a whole article or series of articles all by itself. But let me just say that whether or not we condemn drama itself as sinful, we must admit that almost all drama today, at the theater and on the television, is incredibly wicked, and we must not watch it. Almost all drama involves the *acting out* of horrible sins. Most even involves the repeated *committing* of actual sins such as blasphemy of the name of God and sexual sins with actors or actresses who are not one's real spouse. But perhaps worst of all, most drama involves the outright *glorifying* of sin. Sins against all the commandments are exalted and promoted, sometimes subtly, sometimes blatantly. Evil is portrayed as good, and good as evil. Lies are preached as truth, and truth is condemned as a lie. This is clear: the makers of drama, producers and actors, commit and promote all that is abominable to our God in their sitcoms and movies. Therefore this too is clear: if we watch and enjoy them, we partake in their sins. As Paul writes, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. 1:32). By watching we lead ourselves into temptation to commit the very things we see on the screen. Not least of all, we become desensitized to the horror of sin. Beloved young people, I beseech you to follow the example of David who wrote, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me" (Ps. 101:3).

But as I said, my focus in this article is on "religious drama" with particular emphasis on the movie *Noah* that was recently released. I contend that this too is something we should not watch. Many if not most Christians will disagree with this statement. Many watch these Biblical films and sing their praises. Many view them as evidence of a common grace of God producing good works among the unregenerate, which we may enjoy. Many churches show them in their Sunday services and use them as tools of education in their schools and colleges and even for evangelistic outreach. Some raise concerns about certain wrong aspects or emphases in these films. But they rarely conclude that we ought not to watch them.[1] I do make that contention.

I hope to convince you not to watch Aronofsky's *Noah*, and by implication other biblical movies of the past or in the future. Let me give some reasons not to watch *Noah*.

1. *Noah* is produced by an unbeliever with a secular agenda.

Noah is a Hollywood film. Hollywood is not Christian, but anti-Christian. Hollywood is the lair of the devil and the heart of the wicked world. Therefore we must be exceedingly wary of everything that comes out of it, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:16). *Noah* was not even produced by a nominal Christian, as some biblical films have been, but by a thoroughly secular Jewish man named Darren Aronofsky. He did not produce *Noah* to teach the sacred history of the flood as a real event of the past, or to refute the claims of evolutionism. Quite the contrary! He made it to earn a lot of money by entertaining millions and to push a secular agenda. Therefore he did not bother to tell the biblical story faithfully, but he made use of extra-biblical writings and extravagant "creative license," and thereby came under the curse of God, for "if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18). Aronofsky has seized this significant event in sacred biblical history with unholy hands. He does not even believe that it ever took place. He is quoted as having said, "I don't think it's a very religious story. I think it's a great fable that's part of so many different religions and spiritual practices. I just think it's a great story that's never been on film." Unlike Noah, who was a hero of faith (Heb. 11:7) and preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5), Aronofsky is an unbeliever and false prophet.

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1 One example is Christian movie critic Brian Godawa who gives a critique of the *Noah* script in an online article: http://godawa.com/movieblog/darren-aronofskys-noah-environmentalist-wacko/. I found the quotations from Darren Aronofsky and gained some insight into his agenda for this movie from this article. See also: http://h.tanalepy.net/?p=2568.

Noah was produced in part to push a secular agenda on the Christian community. Aronofsky is a secular environmentalist, that is, he worships the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). He has been fascinated with Noah since he was a child but views him as "the first environmentalist." He said about the history of the Flood, "It's about environmental apocalypse which is the biggest theme, for me, right now for what's going on on this planet. So I think it's got these big, big themes that connect with us. Noah was the first environmentalist." Aronofsky thinks much of mankind is evil, not because of its hatred of God, but because of its abuse of the environment. He portrays this in the movie as the great sin of mankind for which God destroyed the world with the flood. We are told that he goes wild in his fanatic promotion of this agenda. He twists Noah into a man-hating, animal-loving figure who becomes psychotic while on the ark and plans to kill off his whole family because it would be best for the world if mankind were eliminated. As some critics of the movie have already said, Noah is portrayed as an animal-rights activist and environmentalist wacko, not unlike Aronofsky himself.

We ought not to support this agenda by watching the movie. We ought not to think that we can watch it "with discernment" and be unaffected by the twisting of scripture and the forceful preaching of a false gospel which is no gospel. High-budget films like this one make use of powerful tools, special effects, and emotionally manipulative music to get across their message. We must listen to the warning of our Lord: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matt. 7:15–17). Aronofsky is a corrupt tree. Beware!

2. *Noah* is a profane dramatization of holy men of God by unholy men.

Noah is a profaning of the sacred. I admit that it is a hard question whether we may watch the dramatization of fictitious people and of acts of piety by fellow Christians. But it ought not to be a hard question whether we may watch the dramatization of real men of God, in scripture no less, and of their acts of piety, by men of the world! I cannot watch that. My conscience cries out against it.

Just think. Noah was one of the greatest men of God in biblical history. He was not perfect, of course, as became evident in his drunkenness after the flood. But he was a man who "found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Gen. 6:8). He was one with whom Jehovah established his everlasting covenant of grace (6:18, 9:8–17). He was one in whose heart God worked strong faith so that he "being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb. 11:7). He and his family were the only ones left of the seed of the woman in those days, and they valiantly lived in the midst of that crooked and perverse generation as the people of the living God over against the world. Noah is in heaven now in his soul, and we will join him soon. He was an outstanding man of God.

Now think. Would you dare to pretend that you are Noah and act out his faith, his piety, and his preaching? Maybe you would. Maybe a child would do that on a small scale. Maybe a catechism or school teacher would do that on a small scale to bring the story alive for the children. But would you dare to watch an unbeliever doing it? Some will say that Russell Crowe, who plays Noah in the movie, is a Christian because he talked about getting baptized a few years ago. Some might say that Anthony Hopkins, who plays Methuselah, also found God while fighting alcoholism.[2] But this is absurd. No, Russell Crowe, Anthony Hopkins, and the others in *Noah* are men and women of the world. *These* people are acting out *sacred biblical history*? Russell Crowe is Noah? Anthony Hopkins is Methuselah? This is a mockery of the faith and piety of the holy men of God whom they are pretending to be. It is a profaning of the sacred work of Jehovah God in the lives of these men. As one of our ministers once wrote about acting out the holy life of anyone, "To pray, repent of sin, love your wife, or any other calling of God, is too serious to pretend, aside from any good motive. For *entertainment*, it is blasphemous."[3]

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2 Note that in another (R-rated) movie, this same Anthony Hopkins plays a cannibalistic serial killer named Hannibal Lecter.

3 Barry Gritters, "Renewing the Battle: Drama, Television, and Movies." *Standard Bearer*. Grand Rapids, MI. Vol. 69, No. 19, p. 448. This series, found in volumes 69 and 70 of the *SB*, issues a strong and still timely warning against the powerful allures of drama. The series was

Add this. If you watch the movie, from that moment on you will have the image of these ungodly actors burned into your mind. When you open your Bible and read Genesis 6–9, the image of Russell Crowe with long, shaggy hair and a beard will leap into your mind, as if *he* is Noah! When you talk about the man with the longest lifespan in history, the image of Anthony Hopkins living in a cave will come to mind, as if *he* is Methuselah! That is no small objection to watching the movie.

3. *Noah* is not the way God wants us to be taught the scriptures.

Noah is a motion picture. It involves images. There is nothing wrong with making images, or even motion pictures. The Heidelberg Catechism clarifies that when it says that creatures "may be represented" (L.D. 35). We do not condemn art. We do not condemn the making of images of creatures. We celebrate good art. We seek to glorify our God through it. But God condemns the making of images as a means of worshiping him. That is the second commandment: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image…Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them" (Ex. 20:4–5). Therefore, as the Catechism teaches, we must "in no wise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his Word" (L.D. 35). That is why the 2004 movie *The Passion of the Christ* was so objectionable. It was image worship. Christ is God. To make an image of Christ is to make an image of God. This too is why we must not watch *Noah*. Note well: If God is brought into this film, it is a sin! If the voice of God speaks to Noah in a dream, for example, that voice is an image of God, a representation of his voice, and that is blasphemous. On the other hand, if God is not brought into this film, that too is a sin, a gross distortion of the true history in which God has the central role.

God does not want us to be taught the history of scripture by means of images and movies. This is the same old controversy about icons. The reformers rejected the Roman Catholic use of icons, or images, as a means of teaching the people. Our Catechism asks the question, "But may not images be tolerated in the churches as books to the laity? No; for we must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have his people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of his word" (L.D. 35). We may add: God will not have us taught by speaking images, actors and actresses on the movie screen. God will have us to be taught by the lively preaching of his word. To the Greeks living in Paul's day the preaching of the cross of Christ was foolishness. They wanted oratory and drama, philosophy and theater, but Paul assured the Corinthians that "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). He added: "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men" (1 Cor. 1:21–25).

Maybe you reply that you still plan to go to church and hear the preaching on Sunday. You do not plan to put aside the preaching in order to learn about Noah through this movie. But that misses the point. God *will* not have us taught about him by images. God forbids it. God has commanded us in his word how we are to worship him and learn about him. His way is not visual, but verbal. He wants us to learn not from images, but from words.

In conclusion, I encourage you, beloved young people, to think hard about this matter. Movie-watching is a widespread problem in the churches today. Too many Christians watch movies, and I fear that they do so with little or no discretion. The temptation is very strong. I feel it too. But we must remember that we are pilgrims and strangers in this earth. We must have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but reprove them. We must walk as children of light. We must not set our affection on things of the earth. We must do everything that we do to the glory of God. I pray that we might be given grace not to indulge in this worldly entertainment.

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written under the rubric "The Strength of Youth." I highly recommend it to you young people who, along with me, were not old enough to read it at the time it was written!

Watching Daily At My Gates

May 13 ***Read Mark 11***

We now come to Mark's account of the passion week, the week in which Christ walked toward the cross for our salvation because of his love and the love of the Father. As has been pointed out before, Mark is the gospel of action. We see that in these closing chapters of this gospel. Notice the verses that declare Christ's action of cleansing the temple. In a short, succinct description this action is described. His terse words carry much meaning. God's house is to be a house of prayer. Do we make it such? Do we only allow elements of worship that are prayerful in their execution? God ordained more than prayer in the temple. He ordains more than prayer in the worship service, but each element must be prayer-like. Let us come to God's house each week, and let us give ourselves to him in prayer in all that we do. Sing Psalter 185.

May 14 ***Read Mark 12***

The preaching of the word is a two-edged sword. For the elect it provides the means of grace that imparts to them their salvation. For the reprobate it cuts them off from that means of grace. The parables in this chapter especially point out this second element of the preaching. The scribes and Pharisees standing around Jesus saw themselves in the parables. Were they moved to asked forgiveness? Not at all, and as Jesus said, it was because they did not know the scriptures. They knew them intellectually but not experientially. What about us? How well do we know the scriptures? Do we know them as the widow, and are we ready to give all that we have to the kingdom in thanksgiving for what God has done for us? Sing Psalter 138.

May 15 ***Read Mark 13***

As in Matthew's gospel, we find Jesus' discourse about the end times. Both Matthew and Mark recount the material in a similar manner. In verses 21 and 22, Mark warns the church to beware of those who posit a false Christ. We need that warning today. In many churches, on many radio programs, and especially in much of what passes for sacred music today, false Christs are portrayed. We must discern those false Christs and not allow them into our lives. Our children need to see the false Christ in the music to which they listen. We must make sure that the sermons we hear, the radio programs we listen to, and the songs we hear and sing speak only of Christ, the Son of the living God. We must, as the last word of this chapter tells us: "Watch." Sing Psalter 334.

May 16 ***Read Mark 14***

As the chapter is long and self-explanatory, I will not comment much upon it, but I call your attention to verse 7. Do we do good to the poor who are with us? Do we seek them out and show to them Christian love? Those poor are around us. They may be poor only for a time because of some circumstance in which God has placed them. Especially during that time do they need the mercies of Christ showered upon them by fellow believers. Sing Psalter 101.

May 17 ***Read Mark 15***

We see three items of note in this chapter that details Christ's trial before Pilate, his crucifixion, and his death. First, note the silence. We know that Christ had other oral utterances during the trial. But we also know that he fulfilled Isaiah 53: "…as a sheep before her shearers is dumb." Second, only one cross word is mentioned in Mark, but yet what a word! Christ was forsaken by God that we may live. Is there anything else that needs to be said about the mode of our salvation? Finally he gave up his life. Even Pilate was surprised at the rapidity of Jesus' death. He died that we may live. Wonderful Savior! Sing Psalter 47.

May 18 ***Read Mark 16***

Mark in his concise way details for us three steps of Christ's state of exaltation. We see his resurrection and appearances to his followers: then in one verse we find his ascension and being seated at God's right hand. Mark leaves him poised, as it were, for his coming for the final judgement of all things. Our salvation

did not end in Christ's birth, his death, and his burial. The culmination of our salvation is his final coming when he will receive us unto himself. Let us wait for that day by watching and praying. Sing Psalter 33.

May 19 ***Read Luke 1***

We begin the gospel written by a trained scientist, a doctor. The Holy Spirit uses Luke's gifts to show to God's people the gospel in this unique light. We also see a Gentile who explains to his Gentile audience the Jewish customs that were evident and fulfilled in Christ. In this first chapter we have the announcement of the births of two babies. These two babies are intertwined in salvation: John was to be the forerunner of the Christ. In the songs of Zacharias and Mary are beautiful words concerning our salvation. Read them, consider them, and love them. Sing Psalter 198.

May 20 ***Read Luke 2***

Many of us can recite long sections of Luke 2 by heart. What do those words mean to us? Are they just words that we learned for a Christmas program? Are they just words that we have learned because we have heard them repeatedly? Or are they words of comfort and joy? The joy of our salvation can be found in those beautiful words. Jesus was humiliated by this lowly birth for us. Is there no greater news? Let us not just know these words as mere facts, but let us know them in our hearts as the way of our salvation. Sing Psalter 4.

May 21 ***Read Luke 3***

After Luke 2 scripture draws a veil over Christ's life until he was about thirty years old. It does us no good to speculate what that life may have been like. Our salvation is contained in what scripture does tell us. In the first verses of this chapter we see those who had a prominent role in Christ's crucifixion. Then Luke picks up his gospel narrative with the work of John the Baptist as he prepared the way for the coming of Christ. Before we have a genealogy to show Christ's human nature, we have his announcement to the people in the way of his baptism. This account also gives to us proof of his divinity as the second person of the Trinity. What we have in this chapter is the essence of our salvation in a nutshell. Sing Psalter 187.

May 22 ***Read Luke 4***

After the account of Jesus' temptations, we have the account of his rejection in Nazareth. Why was he rejected? He was rejected because he preached the truth. Jesus did not come to this earth just to do miracles. These miracles were only signs of the grace that was shown in his preaching of the word. Imagine, here was the Word preaching the word. What would have been our response? Our human nature would have responded just as the townspeople of Nazareth did. Only by grace can we sit under the preaching of the word from week to week and soak in the wonderwords of life. How do we sit under the preaching of that word? Sing Psalter 85.

May 23 ***Read Luke 5***

Much is covered in this chapter. Jesus is shown as one who heals not just the body from its physical ailments, but especially the soul from its spiritual ailments. We see the two reactions to that preaching. Some, who believe by grace, are thankful and follow Jesus. The others, who are cut to the quick by that preaching, mock and scoff. What do we do when we hear the preaching? What is our attitude to the preaching of the word from sabbath to sabbath? Are we following Jesus in our whole life? Sing Psalter 311.

May 24 ***Read Luke 6***

What must disciples of Jesus do? As those called to follow the Son of God, we must obey the Father's commandments. One of those commandments concerns keeping the sabbath day. Do we keep it like the world and desecrate that day? Do we keep it like the Pharisees, with many man-made invented laws? Or do we keep it like true disciples remembering the sabbath day to keep it holy and thereby we honor the Lord of the sabbath? When we do the latter, then we will find the blessedness described in the last part of the chapter a real joy. Sing Psalter 137.

May 25 ***Read Luke 7***

In this chapter we see Christ's mercy and compassion upon his people. First, we have two miraculous healings. The truths found in those healings are truths that we need to follow in our lives. No matter what comes upon us in this life we must have the faith of those individuals. Sometimes we need reassurance even as John did. Where do we find that reassurance? We find it in the Word, as Jesus conveyed to John. Finally we must come to Jesus weeping as we repent of our sins. In that way we will find and enjoy the compassion of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Sing Psalter 283.

May 26 ***Read Luke 8***

"Where is your faith?" Those were the words of Jesus to his disciples as they faced a storm on the Sea of Galilee. These disciples had seen many mighty works performed by Christ. Yet in the face of a personal crisis, they panicked even with the Lord of creation with them. Are we any different? Do we confess that we believe in Christ and who he is and what he has done, but when we are touched personally, do we panic? The words that Christ spoke unto his disciples,

he speaks to us daily. If your faith is low, reread this chapter. See what Christ has done for his people; see what he will do for you. Sing Psalter 271.

May 27 ***Read Luke 9***

Are we fit for the kingdom of heaven? After reading the words of this chapter, which is the beginning of the road to the cross for our Savior, we must ask about our desire to walk that road. Are we willing to take of the cross of Christ and bear the shame of that cross even as he did, as we wait for the coming of the kingdom? Can we live the words of Peter's confession when troubles strike? As the writer to the Hebrews puts it, he endured the cross and despised the shame. Why did he do this? He did it for us; those for whom the Father had given him. He did it so that we may live. May we follow him all the days of our lives. Sing Psalter 234.

May 28 ***Read Luke 10***

Which of the people in this chapter are we? Are we the ones beaten and despised by the established church? Are we those who left a man in need alongside of the road? Are we good Samaritans? Do we attempt to trap Jesus? Are we Marthas, so busy that we forget what are the good things? Are we Marys, who cling to the words of Christ? Or are we those who answer the call to go and reap the fields of the world in Christ's name? We are one of those people: which one? Sing Psalter 195.

May 29 ***Read Luke 11***

Can we pray to our Father for all things and also withstand the troubles those in the world bring upon us? This is the teaching of Jesus in this chapter. He starts with prayer. At the behest of his disciples, Jesus gives to them and us a form of prayer that has served the church from Christ's days until now. It is only a form. We can and must adapt it to fit the particular needs that we may have because of his sovereign hand. In praying daily, we receive the strength to fight against all the wiles of the devil and the hosts he sends against us. We will know how to answer those who call into question our faith. We will know how to stand in the last days. Let us pray, people of God, and let us pray often. Sing Psalter 386.

May 30 ***Read Luke 12***

From warning us about Satan's wiles, Christ teaches us about the trials that will be ours in the last days. He not only warns us about those trials, but he also shows to us that the cause and outcome of those trials are in the Father's sovereign hand. We need not fear, as he tells the church in verse 32. We can look trouble in the face by looking past it to the face of our heavenly Father. In that face we will find the grace to withstand all trouble. Look to the Father, people of God, and look by faith. Sing Psalter 145.

May 31 ***Read Luke 13***

Are we seeking to enter into the strait gate by walking upon the narrow path on this earth? Sometimes that narrow path does not seem so desirable. The wide path that leads to the wide gate seems to have a nicer way. That way seems to be more fun. If we choose that path, we will be selecting the same path of Israel of old who chose the worship of idols because it pleased their flesh more than the service of God. Let us follow him who leads us on that narrow path and will shelter us with his wings when trouble looms. Jesus is heading toward the cross; are we walking the same route? Sing Psalter 308.

June 1 ***Read Luke 14***

Are we ready to sit at the feast of the great supper? Or do we have our excuses ready-made why we cannot attend. Jesus's parable is very pointed. We must examine our lives and see if our lives are leading us to refuse to attend that great supper. Are we too busy for the things of the kingdom? Do we have other desires than the kingdom causes that God has placed before us? Do we seek that kingdom, believing that God will give to us the earthly needs that we have? Reading through this chapter more than once will show us how to be ready when God commands us to come. When we come, we will be blessed. Of that there is no doubt. Sing Psalter 120.

June 2 ***Read Luke 15***

In this trilogy of parables dealing with lost things, we see two similarities. First, the obvious one is that all of them deal with something that has gone lost for some reason. Second, and more important, each of these parables deals with us. Each parable deals with a different aspect of the life of the Christian. If we say that one of these parables does not characterize us, we are no better than the Pharisees who did not think that they were lost. We are the sheep, we are the coin, and we are the son. Only by grace have we been found and brought back into the fold. Sing Psalter 342.

June 3 ***Read Luke 16***

What would you rather have? Would it be the riches of this earth like the rich man, or the riches found in heaven like Lazarus? While we may say that the answer is easy, how are we living? Do we work on this earth to save up treasures in heaven? Or are the comforts and luxuries of this life more attractive? Which master do we serve? Is it our heavenly Father, or

is it the god of this world? Pray for the grace to know what is important and to seek that which is above. Sing Psalter 403.

June 4 ***Read Luke 17***

As Jesus was making his way toward Jerusalem, he was instructing his disciples in many things. They understood what was being taught but not always why; thus their simple request, "Increase our faith." They understood that what their master was teaching them was important, but they wanted to know more. Are we like that? Do we delve into the scriptures with that prayer on our lips? Do we see the truths of scripture as they are unfolded, or do we want them to say what are our natural desires? Let us not only seek the truth, but let us be truly thankful for the salvation that removed from us the leprosy of sin. Sing Psalter 394.

June 5 ***Read Luke 18***

This chapter begins with some instruction on prayer, goes on to address the doctrine of salvation, and finishes with Christ, obviously pointed toward the way of our salvation, the cross. In each of the four parts of the chapter we are instructed by way of some person. In the first we are taught that we must often go to our heavenly Father in prayer. Second, we are shown that our prayers must center on God's glory. Then we see that we must put away our earthly desires and seek that which is above. Finally we see that we must be insistent in seeking our heavenly Father like the blind beggars were. Sing Psalter 384.

June 6 ***Read Luke 19***

As a stone rolling down a mountainside gains momentum as it goes, so did Christ's ascent to the cross. Today's chapter shows him with his true mission, seeking the lost sheep of Israel—in other words, seeking us. Second, we see more instruction on the true kingdom. Are we looking, waiting, and praying for the kingdom found in heaven, not on this earth? Finally, we see the passion week begin with his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. While the world may not think much of that entry, for us it was the grandest of entries on this earth, for it signaled the final steps of Jesus' road to our salvation. Hosanna! Sing Psalter 318.

June 7 ***Read Luke 20***

Jesus had to fight his enemies to the very end. The leaders of the church of that day wanted to discredit his work of salvation, and they brought many attempts to trip him up in doctrine and life. Even today many who call themselves church and leaders of those so-called churches seek to take credit for the work of salvation accomplished by Christ on the cross. The ideas of the well-meant offer, federal vision, and others seek to strip God and his Son Christ of their rightful glory. May we see that they are no better than the Pharisees of Jesus' day, and may we seek the wonderful words of life found in scripture. Sing Psalter 302.

June 8 ***Read Luke 21***

After the touching account of the widow and her last mites, Jesus instructs his disciples and us what must come to pass before our salvation is fully realized. Are we like the poor widow? Do we give for the kingdom causes, leaving our physical needs in our heavenly Father's hands? Like the disciples, we must be instructed that Christ's kingdom is not of this earth. All of man's edifices will be destroyed, and the coming kingdom will be established on spiritual principles. Let us learn from both the widow and the disciples. Sing Psalter 13.

June 9 ***Read Luke 22***

Today's chapter is lengthy, so I wish to give us time to enjoy its depths. Here are questions to guide us. Are we like Judas or Peter? Or do we have characteristics and tendencies of both? When we partake of the Lord's supper we must examine ourselves and remove from ourselves those tendencies. Sing Psalter 203.

June 10 ***Read Luke 23***

Certain persons appear in scripture of whom we know little. But their actions or words speak volumes. We do not know who Simon was. But his action of bearing Christ's cross must instruct us. It is not a literal cross we bear, but the cross of belonging to Christ. May we confess as the centurion did that Jesus was a righteous man who died for our righteousness. Finally, do we have the love of Joseph as he gave up his own tomb for the savior? Read the Bible looking for these examples of how we must live. Sing Psalter 312.

June 11 ***Read Luke 24***

Which resurrection story is your favorite? Is it that of the women who loved Jesus so much that they were drawn to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus? Is it of Peter who found forgiveness from his sin of denying his Lord and Savior? Is it of the travelers to Emmaus whose eyes had to be opened to the truths concerning the work of Christ on this earth? Don't stop with the resurrection. Embrace the doctrines of the ascension, sitting at God's right hand, and return to glory. In those doctrines as well as those of his humiliation we find the complete way of our salvation. Sing Psalter 28.

The Pittsburgh Mission

The paragraphs below are a written adaptation of the verbal testimony I gave at Faith Protestant Reformed Church as a portion of Reverend Bruinsma's larger presentation concerning the mission work in Pittsburgh. While reviewing the actual transcription of my testimony and as I went back to amend it to a more reader-friendly version, I did make some adaptations to the wording, as well as clarify and/or elaborate on some of the ideas I touched on in the actual speech. However, the core content or main points of the speech remain intact.

Before I outline the work or begin the discussion on the outlined points, I would like to add a statement clarifying my disposition towards those who are not presently and/or professedly Protestant Reformed. It was not my intent merely to hail the Protestant Reformed denomination. Admittedly my flesh does occasionally take me down that road, but upon contemplation of a sermon series we had on 1 Corinthians 13, a chapter written to remedy party strife in an ancient church, but nevertheless applicable to the church of today and its denominational exclusivity, I find I must also heed the call to love above all else. For that reason I wish to say that my speech was not intended to demean or hurt anyone who sits in pews other than those that belong to the Protestant Reformed Churches. I do not believe that the Protestant Reformed Churches are the sole possessors of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ as expounded in the doctrines of sovereign grace, nor do I believe that all of God's precious elect are only found in those same pews. That being said, and for anyone reading this who is not Protestant Reformed, know that it is my hope that you experience the same rest, peace, comfort, and love that only the Christ of the holy scriptures can bring.

I now move on to the writing. I am going to give a brief outline of the writing and then follow it by a discussion on each point. Each point represents a particular way in which we experienced the reality of the blessings offered by the doctrines of the Reformed faith as taught at the Pittsburgh Mission. The discussion will essentially be in narrative form (a testimony), explaining in a very personal way the manner in which we experienced each of these blessings. As an aside, I hope that as Reformed Christians we do not wince at the use of the terms *testimony*, *experience*, or *personal*. I realize the nominal Christian world has abused, misused, and all but destroyed the proper connotations of these words, but they are words that in modern day Reformed Christianity we have a fabulous opportunity to reclaim and rightly define for both the unbelieving world and the realm of professing Christianity. My hope with all that is written below is that this testimony will bear witness of how the objective doctrines of the Reformed faith present themselves subjectively in the life of one family with whom God has established his covenant.

The Power of True Preaching and the Doctrine of Unconditional Election

My wife and I do not come from a Reformed background. Connected with that deficiency, we did not grow up under true preaching. Truth be told, I am not sure either of us were aware of the existence of the distinction made between true and false preaching. As far as our experiences are concerned with particular types of preaching, my wife grew up in one single church institute her entire life, the Church of the Brethren, which is essentially Anabaptist in its preaching. I on the other hand grew up as a kind of theological speckled egg. I heard Roman Catholic homilies, and sermons from the pulpits of Baptist, United Methodist, Pentecostal, and Lutheran churches. Though not preaching, I also did sit under and graduate college under liberal Catholic theologians. I suppose one can take off on a breakdown of the nuances between the doctrines taught in each of those theologies and how they manifest themselves in the preaching, but such is not the scope or intent here. It is more the intent to try to explain our conscious observations of what we see now as God's providential transformation of our hearts by being brought under true preaching.

I don't believe either Julie or myself had a "breakthrough" moment when we were all of a sudden like: "OK, I have been sitting under false preaching my whole life and here is the true preaching, and here we go…now we're true Christians." This much we did begin to realize, though; in each of the churches that we were in at the time, they did not satisfy us for one reason or another. Among these realizations about the preaching we encountered up to this point, we observed corporately:

There was no teaching of absolute truth.

There was no teaching about the authoritative word of God.

There was no mention of the doctrines of sovereign grace.

While I sincerely believe the preachers who we sat under were well intended men, and yes, women, we could not dispute the fact that the before-mentioned truths about truth were not taught. Even the fondness that we gained for them, and to some extent have not lost, could not alter that.

Reflecting on our response to the preaching, I am not sure that we really knew why we kept returning to hear it. We just knew we wanted to keep coming back to hear more, and so we did. As we did, we continued to learn and continued to return. We would have conversations on the way home from the services discussing the sermons, but we really couldn't pinpoint one particular thing that was said in the preaching that kept bringing us back.

As we began to grow under the preaching, we began to see the doctrines of grace come alive in the preaching. It began to make sense. I suppose if I had to pinpoint the doctrines that grabbed a hold of me most, solidifying my convictions, they were unconditional election and the preservation of the saints. Although the latter is of extreme comfort, I will only elaborate on my thoughts toward the former.

To begin truly to understand the impact this doctrine had on me, it is important to understand at least in a brief way my disposition towards myself prior to embracing the doctrine. As a kid growing up, I was one who was very familiar with my own infirmities. I felt the pain and sorrow of sin horribly. I was one of those kids who had a very sensitive conscience, perhaps too sensitive. Total depravity was not a very difficult doctrine for me to believe by the time we began to sit under Rev. Bruinsma's preaching. I sought several ways, sinful upon sinful ways to heal my infirmities. I also sought more religious ways as well. As I mentioned before, I went through all these different churches and sought all these different ways to deal with my infirmities, and despite all my attempts to immerse myself zealously in these different areas, I never really found lasting and true peace. There were moments of apparent peace, but the same bad cycles would soon start over again. However, as I began to understand the doctrine of unconditional election, that all began to change.

In unconditional election I found a salvation that was declared to me. In other words, it wasn't based on my decision. It wasn't based on the fact that I walked down an aisle in response to an altar call. It wasn't a feeling or a movement or a hands-up-in-the air, spirit-filled, speaking-in-tongues experience. It was the objective fact that there existed a God who through his Son decided to fellowship with me before time even began; and there was no condition, set forth by either myself or anyone else, under which that fellowship would or would not occur. As a true Father would, God *told* us he was going to be our friend. He didn't leave it up to us. He didn't say, "Boy, I really love you and I'll be your friend, but you are going to have to come part of the way." No! He established the fact through his Son, saying "I am your God, you *will* be my friend." Tremendous, dependable, and unchangeable comfort lies within that doctrine.

The preaching and the doctrines contained therein were the chief way, I believe, God drew us; but there was also a more practical and personal relationship that we engaged in that supplemented that preaching—a relationship the Lord used not only to keep bringing us back to the mission, but to stay there and become grounded there. With that I lead into my next point.

The Work of a Beloved Undershepherd

We have a very faithful under shepherd in Rev. Bruinsma. In addition to being a faithful preacher, he has been a counselor and leader chiefly characterized by his faithfulness and gentleness. He has always been there and has never been a tyrant. Let me give you some examples of what I mean.

When we first started coming to the mission, our attendance at services could be streaky at times. We would come for a month and then not show up for three weeks or so. When those moments of streakiness occurred, we weren't met by a pastor who would not follow up with us, or at the other extreme, a

pastor who beat us over the head when we weren't there. I got gentle emails to which, by God's grace, we were able to respond, and then gently be brought back into the mission, where we continued to hear the preaching, continued to be convicted of our sin, and then with that to be brought back to the cross. I suppose one can assume this is characteristic of any good pastor, and I think it is, but what I am trying to emphasize is how these characteristics, though common and assumed, are extremely meaningful and persuasive in leading a work, especially a work as fragile as a mission field.

On a deeper and more individually personal level, I find in Rev. Bruinsma an example to follow of how I ought to lead my family. He has been very much a father to me in this respect. You see, with difficulty and a sense of defensiveness, weakness, bashfulness, and insecurity, I confess that I come from a divorced home. We all believe that unlawful divorce from a doctrinal perspective is sin, and therefore something to be abhorred and hated. But for me the hatred of it is exacerbated because of the consequence it has on all parties involved, including and especially the children, like me. Though not nearly as prevalent now because Christ has become the strength in my weaknesses, I struggled with my confidence level in being able properly to love my family and lead my home. The calling of a husband and father in the Christian home is one of such tremendous responsibility and proportion, even if you have had a good example to follow in your earthly father. But throw into the mix a lack of having a daily example to emulate and carry over into your own family, and it appears beyond impossible. However, God in his mercy and through an officebearer of the church has given me a real life example that shows me that it is possible for me to lead my family and home, despite the inability I feel to do so properly. In his life I see the fruit of the spirit of Jesus Christ and the constant emphasis of relying on Christ to lead one's family.

As an aside, and perhaps outside of this article's scope, I want to encourage any reader who finds himself identifying with some of the sentiments I mentioned above and/or is coming from a similar situation, to cling to Jesus Christ and to exercise your faith in knowing he is the strength in your weakness and infirmity. He is in full control of your situation, has borne your infirmity, identifies with it, and has put it to death in principle, which means *you do not have to live in the pain of these infirmities*. Also, do not underestimate the experiences and wisdom of some of your fellow saints in the church who may have dealt with the same experiences. Seek them out, talk to them, and learn from them. They love you! To those who are reading this and are inclined to treat your fellow saints who come from these situations as lepers, I encourage you not to be high minded, and if you are, repent and thank God for his grace that you have not had to endure those hardships. Then give your life to sharing in that saint's joys and sorrows, encourage them so that they in turn, and in spite of their weaknesses, can serve the church of Jesus Christ.

Ah, the church!

Church unity and familial bonds established by Christ

The above two points for us have helped inculcate in us the idea of church as family. As scripture affirms, the church is where we find the truest and holiest form of family. As family we love the church! I can say that there are times that I have felt such affections for the church that it literally hurts my body. The concept of the oneness of the church, its intimate unity in Christ, transcends any distance or fleshly limitations in space and time. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

Julie and I have been out to visit the churches in Michigan three times since beginning regular attendance at the work in Pittsburgh, and each time we leave Michigan describing our visits, amongst other descriptions, as ones of mutual encouragement. In Romans 1 Paul talks about "the mutual faith of both you and me." It is both edifying and amazing how we (I refer to Julie and myself, although I believe this would apply to all members of the work in Pittsburgh) haven't known all of you that long. We didn't grow up with you, and you didn't grow up with us; we didn't grow up in the same churches. Yet when we fellowship together, when we've eaten meals together, we feel like we have known you for years, and we hear these same sentiments from you. I understand that this sentiment (of feeling as if you have known someone for years, but whom you have known only for a short time) is used frequently as well by the world. But what is not a common denominator between the two is the grounds on which that sentiment is based. Our common ground is Christ and all that is implicit in both our individual and corporate relationship with

him (meaning his life, love, and covenant universally manifested in all his followers in the same manner).

Today it seems we speak often of family trees and genealogy, and from the strictly human point of view. I have noticed even in the Protestant Reformed Churches an emphasis on the particular Dutch strands each family comes from. These human ties and family histories are great! I very much look forward to enjoying my own. But far exceeding what "sma," "stra," "sema," or "Fennell" clan we come from is that of our family tree of faith. In that tree we not only have one another at present in the church militant, but also those of the church triumphant—Luther, Calvin, Augustine, Anselm, Justin Martyr, Paul, Peter, Isaiah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, and Adam! We all are tied together at the root, who is Jesus Christ, and his unifying, marvelous love!

John is a member of the Pittsburgh Mission of the Protestant Reformed Churches in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Called to the Ministry — Rev. Martyn McGeown

Called to the Ministry

I did not grow up in the Protestant Reformed Churches, but in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI), a liberal Presbyterian denomination. My mother instilled into me a love for the scriptures from childhood, and I cannot remember a time when I haven't read God's word. I suppose there must have been some true preaching left in the denomination when I was growing up, but in recent years that denomination has deteriorated at an alarming rate. When apostasy begins, it usually snowballs, unless checked by discipline.

I studied foreign languages at the Queen's University in Belfast. There I got to know (now Rev.) Angus Stewart, who was at that time pursuing biblical studies. He and I shared a house with other students in Belfast. He introduced me to the Reformed faith, something about which I had heard almost nothing in the PCI.

Around that time (1996) I met Rev. Ron Hanko, the missionary in Ballymena at that time, and his family and attended some of the meetings held in the CPRC. I also attended the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) conference in England that summer. Although the conference was excellent, I felt uncomfortable, because many of the visiting Americans kept asking me which church I attended. Many of the Americans assumed that I was a member of the CPRC. I was hesitant to tell them that I was not, as I was secretly ashamed of my own church. One never likes to admit to oneself, and especially not to others, that the church of which one is a member is apostate. At that same conference, Angus Stewart decided to leave the church of which he had been a member and joined the CPRC.

I did not, which is something I regret.

During my last year at Queen's University (1997–1998), I believed that I was being called to the ministry. I could see the apostasy in the Presbyterian Church, and I believed that there was a need for sounder men in the denomination. I had an interview with my Kirk Session (consistory), and then with the Presbytery Students Committee. Presbytery decided that I should be deferred for at least two years, as they judged I needed some life experience. The Presbyterian Church allows applicants to lead worship services *before* they even enter the theological college, so I was asked to lead two services (including preparing and delivering a sermon) in my own congregation. Knowing little about church polity at the time, I agreed to lead the services. I had had no training whatsoever at that stage. However, I see now that such a practice is wrong. I have those sermons still—I cringe when I listen to them, not because they are not orthodox, but because they were poorly organized and delivered.

After graduation I moved to Dublin, Ireland, where I worked as a customer service representative for UPS (1998–2000) and then as an insurance

underwriter (2000–2005). At the beginning I tried various churches in the Dublin area. My home church went from bad to worse. I realized as the years went by that the apostasy in the PCI was not going to improve. I knew too that if I survived the higher criticism and heresy of the Theological College and graduated from there, that no congregation in the PCI would accept me with my theological convictions, so I did not re-apply after that two year deferral period.

In those intervening years God preserved me and did not suffer me to fall from the truth. God is faithful to his covenant. Of that I am convinced. Although I had no real church home in Dublin, I continued to read and study the scriptures and Reformed literature. That is how God fed me in those arid years in the spiritual wilderness. It is not an experience that I would recommend.

Around 2004 Angus Stewart (who had since become the pastor in Ballymena) contacted me to tell me that he and his wife Mary were planning to visit Dublin. I had not seen him in years and felt quite guilty that we had lost touch. We enjoyed a very profitable time of fellowship; I learned about Rev. Stewart's ministry, and I started listening to recordings. They were excellent, but they are no substitute for face-to-face fellowship in the Lord's house. I started regularly to attend the CPRC in Ballymena. In those days that meant a long journey to get to my parents' home. I would arrange a ride to Ballymena and attend services there. Some weekends I would spend the whole weekend with the Stewarts. On one such occasion I had the privilege of attending catechism class as a visitor with Rev. Stewart, after which he remarked, "Martyn, one day you'll be doing this." To that I just smiled.

Various members of the CPRC urged me to consider going to seminary. They also made pointed remarks about the need to move house and job so I could join the CPRC. In my heart I knew they were right, but I did not want to uproot myself from my comfortable life in Dublin.

In August of 2004, I attended the BRF conference on "Keeping God's Covenant." Again the teaching and fellowship were wonderful. During the conference Prof. Engelsma agreed to begin an e-mail forum on the subject of church membership. This later became the book *Bound to Join* (RFPA, 2010). As a result of that teaching, I relocated to join the CPRC and became a member in October 2005. It took me a long time to move—too long. But the Lord has been gracious.

My desires for the ministry were rekindled around that time. They had lain dormant in my heart, but I could not pursue the ministry in an apostate denomination. When I joined the CPRC, I saw the great need for the Reformed faith here, for Rev. Stewart brought me on his visits to Wales and Limerick. The saints in Ballymena saw in me gifts for the ministry and encouraged me to pursue that call. Frequently I heard the prayers that God would send laborers into the harvest. Spurred on by such suggestions, I thought, prayed, and studied, and then applied to the seminary. Synod approved my application in June 2006, and I started seminary in September 2006.

Seminary was a very happy time for me. It was so refreshing to be in a faithful Reformed school, a new experience for me. I remember that on my first day Prof. entered the room and said, "Let's open." I looked around, wondering what he meant: the door, the windows, the books? And then he started to pray. I had never been in class where the teacher opened with prayer before! The studies at seminary were rigorous and the workload was heavy, and some aspects of seminary were intimidating—especially practice preaching—but the students and professors became my friends, and the love showered upon me by the PRCA moved me deeply. Those were great times of camaraderie, friendship, and deep fellowship.

What really confirmed to me that the Lord was blessing my seminary training and confirming my call was that he enabled me to do the work. It is really that simple. Each new task at seminary was a milestone: Could I do Greek? Could I do Hebrew? Could I make a sermon? Could I deliver the sermon in front of the professors? Could I teach catechism? Could I (after I was licensed to speak) lead a worship service? When I found that I was able to do these things—and I never have been a confident public speaker—it greatly encouraged me to continue. And the more I did it, the more the Lord encouraged me. I also discovered that I *enjoyed* doing the work. I enjoyed studying; I enjoyed translating Greek and Hebrew (there were times where I enjoyed it less); I enjoyed writing papers, sermons, and catechism lessons; I enjoyed teaching; I enjoyed helping the saints. Never underestimate that: If you cannot imagine spending a long time studying, the ministry is not for you. If a minister does not study, he will have

nothing to say when he is in the pulpit, catechism room, or pastoral visit. A minister is not a glorified social worker. He must bring the word of God, and he must know that word. Another thing I might say to naturally timid young men is this: do not rule yourself out for that reason. Timothy was naturally timid; Calvin was naturally timid. The word alone gives boldness. The word of God can transform a man so that he is courageous. That's my testimony.

Being a missionary is different from serving in an established church. When I started seminary, neither I nor the CPRC who sent me had a clear idea where I would serve the Lord. I knew I wanted to be trained—the seminary is like a boot camp for spiritual soldiers—but I did not know where the Lord would choose to deploy me. Especially during my final year at seminary, the *Limerick Reformed Fellowship* grew, which made it possible for us to begin a full-time work here. Thus when I graduated from seminary—the synodical exam was another major milestone—there was a call waiting for me back home. I had already met some of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship (three of them came to the Calvin conference in September 2009, when I was interning at Southwest PRC, and I had been several times to Limerick with Rev. Stewart when he lectured there) so they were very excited to have a missionary-pastor.

One thing is indispensable for the ministry: love for God's people. Young man, do you love the truth? Do you love God's people? Do you love the Lord Jesus who redeemed the church? Will you serve him by serving his church? Pray for the church, for her ministers, and consider—seriously and prayerfully—the ministry as a calling for yourself. The church (your friends and family) need the word. The Lord is pleased to give her that word by preaching. Perhaps he will be pleased to use you.

Rev. McGeown is missionary pastor in Limerick, Ireland.

Christian Living — Joy Schwarz

Got Music?

Do, re, me, fa, so, la, ti, do. Do those words mean anything to you? You may recognize these as the words that designate the eight tones of a musical scale. Are you someone who knows how to play the piano or some other musical instrument? Many of you have had the opportunity to take music lessons when you were young, and thankfully, nearly all of you have sung in classrooms, school programs, and choirs through your years in school. You also sing every week in church as part of your worship.

Music is a beautiful gift from God, created by him and given to you to be a part of your life. With its stirring melodies and inspiring words, music is often powerful and moving, helping to build strong connections to other believers, while strengthening the faith of those who use it to express their love for their God. For you as a young person, music is a unique way to give expression to your growing and maturing faith as you more and more experience the fellowship known only by those who walk close to him as one of his own.

In the Old Testament church, some of the Levites were appointed to be professional singers, and they were "employed in that work day and night." (1 Chron. 9:33). These men were trained and instructed as singers "for song in the house of the Lord, with cymbals, psalteries (a type of stringed instrument—JS), and harps, for the service of the house of the Lord" (1 Chron. 25:6). They were also appointed unto the Lord, that they "should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army" (2 Chron. 20:21). It is worthwhile to note that these musicians were both skilled and valued, as musicians should also be today. Music is not an accessory to life, but a beautiful necessity, and the Bible is full of exhortations to praise our God both with our voices and on instruments. Google the word praise, for example,

in any Bible application, and a myriad of passages from both the Old and New Testaments will come up.

God created music with its own unique set of rules, and anyone who has taken any music theory soon realizes that our God has made the whole world of music to reflect his grace and beauty. It also becomes clear that God is a God of order, as is seen in the progression of chords and harmonies. But you may not have had the opportunity to plunge into the depths of music by studying music theory. So how can you develop an appreciation for music, and how can you continue to use your musical abilities once you have left the classrooms, bands, and choirs of your schools?

Exposure to different kinds of music teaches you what good music can sound like. By listening to well-crafted music you quickly learn what kind of music produces a pleasing sound and what is grating and obnoxious. You then learn to recognize proper tone and balance, emotion and expression, and you also realize that singing or playing louder is not always better; that a loud, chesty, abrasive voice is not nearly as pleasing as a clear, pure, head voice with well formed vowels. You also develop an ear for pleasing instrumental combinations and appealing arrangements. Wherever you live, there are opportunities to attend concerts and programs given by churches, community organizations, musical groups, bands, choirs, and symphonies. Take advantage of these and expand your musical background. You can also consider participating in some of these yourself. You will have to use discretion, since sometimes the secular music used is not suitable for Christians, but do not deny yourself the opportunity to learn from other people's styles, approaches, methods, and goals. Then take what you have learned from that experience, evaluate it and see if there are ways to do something different and better, and bring improvement to your own musical opportunities. You can also take lessons to learn better technique and performance etiquette in order to enhance your singing and playing skills. As young adults, continue to grow and learn and improve.

Where can you use your musical abilities? The opportunities are as boundless as your willingness and your courage. Do you know how to play the piano? Consider learning to play the organ. Our churches always need good organists to lead the congregations in singing. Instead of surfing the web, why not haul out your old saxophone or flute and play for a little while? Instead of getting together with your friends in front of the television, why not gather some of your friends and play your instruments together? Do you know anyone who plays a guitar? Sing together. Learn some fun songs or some rounds. Try singing the harmonies of some Psalter numbers or hymns. How about going to a retirement home or a nursing home to play the piano? You don't have to be amazing to entertain some old folks and brighten their day for a little while. Maybe you can join your church choir, or if your church doesn't have a choir, see if you can possibly start one. You don't begin as a performing professional, but singing or playing an instrument is a skill, so focus on challenging yourself in rehearsal and performance to improve your musical skills, and bring glory to God by doing your best work. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Eccl. 9:10). When you do spend time singing, whether in church, or in your car, or even in the shower, work on good singing techniques. When you play your instrument, whether the piano or something else, work to maintain and improve your skill level for both the Lord's sake and for your own personal growth.

Someday we will be in heaven singing and playing music perfectly. When you are able to taste even a little bit of that while you are on this earth, you will be blessed with a small glimpse of what lies ahead. While you are still here, remember the words of Psalm 150:6, "Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD Praise ye the LORD." Work, continue to grow, and press on.

Joy is a mother and a member of Loveland Protestant Reformed Church in Loveland, Colorado.

As snow in summer,
and as rain in harvest,
so honour is not seemly
for a fool.
—Proverbs 26:1

Nathan Lanning

Letter to a Dating Young Man

Dear son,

Now that you have been dating for a while, I thought now would be a good time to remind you of some of the discussions we've had on this topic. Before you started dating, remember all of those important things we talked about? Remember how we even read in God's word that part of my responsibility in training you to be a Christian young man is to help you in your dating life, and to ensure that you are going about this whole dating thing properly (Prov. 9:9 and 22:6)? So let's take this opportunity to go over some things.

At your age it can be hard to keep the ultimate goal of dating clearly in your sights. Marriage. I can tell by the look you're giving me that you and your girlfriend are not exactly ready to start sending out wedding invitations. That's okay. Really, it is. Dating can be an exciting experience, and it's good to enjoy it. Dating is getting to know someone new; it's the potential to get to know someone at a deeper level than other friends; it's engaging in fun activities like going out to eat or going to the beach. Of course it's enjoyable—it should be! But, remember, all of these activities are for a purpose: for both of you to get to know each other well enough to decide if you are compatible for marriage.

Yeah, I know—some of your friends' parents let them date just for fun. They don't have to think about marriage when they ask a girl out. But remember what we decided when we talked about this last time? Approaching dating with a casual attitude can be fraught with difficulties. No, I'm not saying that all of your friends are sinning when they date "for fun". But we can't deny that there is a world of temptations that accompany dating, and that these temptations are difficult enough to handle when dating is approached with the seriousness that it deserves. To pick just one example, you know that all Christians are called to remain chaste (Ex. 20:14, Rom. 13:13, 1 Cor. 6:18–20, Eph. 5:3, 1 Thess. 4:3, and many others), and that this becomes especially important for dating couples. I'm sure you can agree that starting a dating relationship with the attitude that it is "just for fun" is not the wisest way for sanctified young people to remain chaste. Note this too: I can see what kind of world we live in right now. There is an incredible pressure on guys your age not to grow up, but instead to continue having fun and living a carefree and casual life well into your 20s. Obviously this particular pressure plays right into the idea of "casual dating". As a Christian young man, you are called to mature—to grow up (1 Cor. 13:11, Eph. 4:13–15, 2 Tim. 2:22). I understand that it must be very hard to say no to that type of lifestyle, and instead start to grow up and mature right now at your age. Realize this though: if you start dating without taking it seriously, you will inevitably develop certain habits and a mindset that can be harmful when you begin a serious dating relationship. However, if, at the beginning of your dating life, you start with a sanctified attitude that looks towards marriage and the seriousness that it entails, you will have a certain amount of help against the temptations inherent in dating (2 Tim. 2:21, 1 Thess. 4:3–5).

So, are you dating with an attitude toward marriage, and specifically, marrying in the Lord? I know…you're right. It is easy for old married people like me to throw out ideas like "attitude toward marriage" and "marrying in the Lord" without really telling you what they mean or giving some practical advice about how to do it. Let's take "marrying in the Lord" first, because I think you probably already have a good idea what that means. Marrying in the Lord can be thought of as making the Lord the absolute center of your marriage relationship (Eph. 5:22–33). Yes, the fact that you are dating a girl who openly and faithfully attends a good church is evidence that you started in the right place. In order to have a relationship centered on Christ, both individuals in the relationship obviously have to be committed

to the Christian faith (2 Cor. 6:14). However, finding a confessing Christian to date is really only the beginning. Ensuring that Christ will be the center of your future marriage relationship requires that you engage in certain activities and have a certain attitude while you date—an attitude toward marrying in the Lord.

If Christ is going to be the center of your marriage, it is probably a good idea to make him the center of your dating relationship. Yes, I know that sounds very serious! But think about it. If through dating you build a relationship with a girl, and that relationship is not centered on Christ, do you really think that when you decide to get married that you will easily be able to change the center of your relationship to one rooted in Christ? No, probably not. Develop the Christ-centered relationship now, before it is too late!

Let's discuss some of the practical activities that you should be doing that will help develop this attitude. Prayer and searching the scriptures really have to form the basis of your "attitude towards marriage" activities. You're right—that shouldn't be a big surprise. Start with prayer and scripture reading by yourself. You need wisdom to make the right decisions about your behavior while you are dating, about whether the girl you are dating is the right kind of girl for you, and ultimately about whether a marriage between you and your girlfriend is right. Pray for wisdom pertaining to these things (James 1:5), pray for it with the understanding that this wisdom is not going to come like a flash of inspiration in your mind. You need to pray that you will appropriately apply the wisdom contained in God's word with respect to these things. Proverbs is full of wisdom for the time in your life when you are dating. So is Ephesians. Read these books and meditate on God's word found there. Think about the girl you are dating and your conduct while you are with her, and apply the words and ideas found in Proverbs. Also pray for yourself that you will be able to be a strong spiritual leader in your relationship. You know this is the role that you will have in marriage, so start praying about it now. Search out the wisdom contained in scripture for how to be this type of person. If you think that you are mature enough to date a girl, you had better be mature enough to be the spiritual leader in the relationship. No, right now you don't have to have the spiritual maturity and leadership qualities that a veteran of marriage has, but you definitely need to realize what your role is and take the initiative to begin developing that role.

But don't just keep these spiritual exercises to yourself. Pray with your girlfriend. Pray that Christ will be the center of your relationship. Pray that your relationship at this point in your dating life is glorifying to God in all aspects. Read scripture with your girlfriend. Discuss and meditate on Scripture with your girlfriend. And don't just pack these activities into the few minutes at the end of the date. Engage in conversations about your faith while you are with each other. Talk about points in sermons that you particularly enjoyed or that you didn't understand. Discuss religious books or articles that you have read. In this way you will build the strong foundations that are so critical for a godly, happy marriage. If you aren't engaging in these spiritual activities, that is good evidence that you are not currently interested in marrying in the Lord. As we said before, marrying in the Lord doesn't start at some point in the future while you are in premarital counseling right before your wedding; it starts right now while you are dating. Listen to this too: if you are not engaging in these spiritual activities with your girlfriend, and your girlfriend does not seem at all concerned about your lack of spiritual activities, that is a good sign that she does not have the proper concern for marrying in the Lord either. You need to be a leader in this respect, and if she is simply not aware of these things that we are discussing, you need patiently and prayerfully to lead her into an understanding of their critical importance.

There is one more thing that I, from my perspective as a father, recommend that you do. Get to know her parents, and get to know them at a level that is deeper than casual pleasant conversation. Don't be afraid to have real, meaningful conversations with them. Discuss religion and your faith with them as opportunities present themselves. I can promise you that any parents who are truly concerned for their daughter's spiritual wellbeing will be thrilled to have these conversations with you.

Son, I'm thrilled that you are dating, and that things seem to be going well. There is really nothing in this life that can compare to developing Christ-centered relationships and marrying in the Lord.

Nathan is married, a father, and a member of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

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:

Landon John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Bryan & Elisabeth Landheer—Byron Center, MI

Paul Benjamin, son of Mr. & Mrs. Reden & Marlyn Zuniega—Doon, IA/ Bulacan, Philippines

Weston Jon, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mitchell & Sarah Kamps—Grandville, MI

Graham Tyler, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tyler & Lindsey Schimmel—Grandville, MI

Elias Ben, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Cinda Van Der Zwaag—Hull, IA

Kristyn Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan & Charlene Gallagher—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN

Wesley Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Bart & Chelsie Zandstra—Lynden, WA

Rose Renee, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Andrew & Ricci Brummel—Providence, MI

Maximus James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Garth & Stephanie McKinney—Southeast, MI

Olive Jean, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Carl & Jennie VanDenBerg—Southeast, MI

Molly Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Owen & Rosie Wiersma—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:1

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

Andy Postema—Crete, IL

Samuel DeKryger—Georgetown, MI

Christopher Morris—Hope, MI

Nathan Koole—Hope, MI

Jake Schwarz—Loveland, CO

Karl Schwarz—Loveland, CO

Steven Holstege—Southeast, MI

Connie Meyer

A Turn of Events: From Chaos to Comfort

A History of the Heidelberg Catechism (Part 7)

A catechism had been written, beautiful and clear, a catechism that people would love and confess for 450 years—and more if the Lord tarries. What is so special about this catechism that it should stand this test of time? The document answered a burning question of its day about the Lord's supper, but that would not fully explain why we teach, preach, and confess this creed still today. The questions and answers of the Heidelberg Catechism were written in 1562. In 1563 this set of questions and answers became an official creed of the church. It is an official creed of Reformed churches everywhere still today. And people of God still love this confession as much as people of God did in 1563. Why?

God used all of the problems, chaos, and turmoil of the days when it was written to help the authors see what the questions needed to be, and then to see the answers. They are answers for all time because life on this earth is always filled with troubles and trials. Why is there always trouble in this life? Because of sin. We sin even when we do not want to. That leaves us miserable.

Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus were young men who saw that misery all around them and in themselves. They had been taught about that misery from their faithful teachers. But they also had been taught what the answer to that misery is. They saw the answer in all of scripture: we are delivered in Jesus Christ alone. His work is finished, full, and free. There is nothing we must do or can do to be delivered from sin and death. He has simply done it all. That is the answer.

This was new doctrine in 1563. People were only beginning to understand the truths of the Reformed faith. The Roman Catholic Church had explained scripture differently. Rome said you had to work to be delivered: Jesus delivers you, but you have to do something too; he didn't do it all. So the Heidelberg Catechism was important. It explained scripture rightly. In all its questions and answers, it proved from the Bible what we must believe: Jesus Christ did it all.

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

"What? He did it all? Then you won't try to earn your salvation anymore," Rome said. "Sinning won't matter to you."

Ursinus and Olevianus saw the answer to that accusation too. That's right: we won't try to earn our salvation anymore. God is not pleased with us if we do! What pleases God? Gratitude. Giving thanks to God for such full, free, and complete deliverance. That is what pleases God, that's what we want to do, and that is what we can and must do because that is why he saved us: so we would be thankful.

Misery—deliverance—gratitude. God led Ursinus, Olevianus, and their teachers to see this theme in all of scripture, to hear this melody that rings in glorious three-part harmony on every page of his word, to comfort the people of God, young and old, in life and in death on this earth. God led Ursinus and Oliveanus to write it all down for us to treasure still today, and to be comforted.

In God's providence and grace, such is the turn of events.

Unscramble the following words from Lord's Day 1, Q&A 2 of the Heidelberg Catechism. (Can you quote Q&A 1?)

How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily?

HERTE; HET TRIFS, WHO ARGET YM NISS NAD REEMISIS REA; ETH CONDES, WOH I YAM EB REEDVELID ROFM LAL YM ISSN DAN SRIEMISE; TEH HITDR, OHW I LASHL SPEERSX YM DRAUGITTE OT GOD ROF HUSC NEVERILCEAD.

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

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LIVING IN THE LAST DAYS

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"Ye are all children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

I Thessalonians 5:1-8

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