Beacon Lights

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Our Eternal Home: A New Heaven and a New Earth

What will our eternal home look like? Will we enter through pearly gates and walk on streets of gold? Will it be dazzlingly beautiful with the decoration of all kinds of shiny, precious stones? Some of the old hymns about heaven speak of the beauty of heaven in such terms. After all, we do read in Revelation 21:21, "And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." I don't want to disappoint you, but this verse is not saying heaven will have pearly gates and streets of gold. This is actually a symbolic description of the church, not heaven. Maybe we will walk on streets of gold, but this is not what Revelation 21:21 is saying. Whether or not we walk on streets of gold, the new heavens and new earth will be amazing!

God has designed us to desire beautiful, dazzling things, whether a shiny diamond or mountain grandeur. By saving us, God has kindled in us a desire for a new life with a new body in a new heavens and new earth. We do not desire to eat gravel or drink gasoline because God did not design us to eat gravel or drink gasoline. By saving us, God makes us to desire life with him in the new heavens and new earth. We desire magnificent things. There is nothing more magnificent than the new heavens and new earth, which will be our everlasting home.

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Let me tell you about it, not from the perspective of one who has gone there and returned, but from the perspective of what God reveals in his word.

The home in which we will live forever in our resurrected bodies is called in Revelation 21:1, "a new heaven and a new earth". This place is different from the place our souls enter at death. That place is called heaven in distinction from this earth. We know very little about the heaven we will go to when we die. But God has revealed more about the new heavens and new earth. He has revealed that this place will be our magnificent home!

Revelation 21:1 speaks of a new heaven and new earth in contrast to the first heaven and first earth. In the beginning God created two distinct, separate places, which are called, "the first heaven and the first earth." The first earth includes all that we see and experience on earth presently. Breathing, eating, and drinking are part of our present existence. This earth includes many living creatures: sparrows, deer, ostriches, spiders, and so many more. Although this world is marred by sin, it is filled with the breath-taking beauty of sunrises, sunsets, snow-capped mountains, red tulips, yellow roses, and so many other things. The first heaven is the spiritual realm where Christ now rules, angels dwell, and the souls of the elect who died pray for Christ's return. The first heaven and earth are two distinct places that do not intersect. This is evident from what happens when we die: we go from earth to heaven, and we do not return.

In contrast to the first heaven and earth that are separate, the new heaven and new earth will be one place. When Jesus Christ returns, heaven and earth will not be two separate places, but they will be joined as one by Christ. This is evident from the language of Revelation 21:1, which speaks not of the new heaven and the new earth, but "a new heaven and a new earth." By omitting "the" and using "a", the Holy Spirit is saying that heaven and earth will be joined together.

Does this mean that God will completely destroy the first heaven and the first earth and will create a brand new place called heaven and earth? Will God scrap this creation and start over? No. We learn from scripture that God does not abandon this creation to start over. God renews it. He delivers it from the effects of sin. This is evident from God's covenant with Noah, which included the creation (Genesis 9:9–10). We read there that God establishes his covenant with every living thing on the face of the earth. This is the testimony of what God did in the flood. He did not completely annihilate the world in the flood. He gave it a bath. He will cleanse this world again, finally, with fire, as we read in 2 Peter 3:7, "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." The result of this will be a new earth joined to heaven to make the new heaven and new earth (2 Pet. 3:13).

This earth will be part of the new heavens and new earth, but not as it is right now. All the ways sin has affected the creation will be undone, and all sin will be removed from this world so that it will be new in the sense of renewed. Think about all the ways sin has affected this creation: death, the changing of the seasons, the separation of the continents and people. Think about the murders, the sexual sins, the stealing, the hurtful words that destroy people's lives, and the way technology is used in the service of sin. All the effects of sin will be removed when Christ comes to form a new heaven and new earth.

Because this renewed earth will be part of our eternal home, there will be something familiar about heaven. Our eternal home is described as a city, a country, a kingdom with rivers, mountains, trees, and flowers. It will be a place where our senses are used. We will see, hear, smell, taste, and touch the things of the new heaven and new earth. The beauty that we see presently in this creation despite the effects of sin will be part of what is to come.

Home is never a foreign place to us. It is familiar. When we are away from home on vacation, we are ready to go home because it is familiar. God created us to live on this earth, and this earth will be a part of our eternal home. This should be one of the reasons we desire to live in the new heavens and new earth. When Jesus returns, we will live forever in a familiar home.

Because our everlasting home will include this earth, we should not despise or hate this earth, but we should have a proper love and respect for it. This earth is not like an old clunker we may buy as our first vehicle. If it only cost a thousand dollars, is full of rust holes, and is a mess inside, why wash it, vacuum it, or take very good care of it? After a couple of years it will end up in the junkyard. This creation will not end up in the junkyard, as it were. Instead, this world will be part of the new heavens

and new earth. We are called to be good stewards of the creation by using the things of it in the service of Christ.

Our eternal home will not be a return to Eden. There are many today who wrongfully teach that heaven will be this earth without sin. I heard this many times from my professors at the Christian college I attended. They said that heaven will be the continued development of culture on this earth, but without sin. They are looking for a heaven on earth. Our eternal home will not be this earth without sin. It will be so much better! What makes it better is that it will be new. The word new does not mean brand new, but superior in quality or character. To put this in computer language, right now we have heaven and earth 1.0. What is coming is heaven and earth 2.0. But there is nothing better than 2.0. 2.0 is the best! There is no 3.0 or 4.0.

What makes the new heavens and new earth better? Heaven and earth will be one. The hymn, *This Is My Father's World*, includes these biblical lyrics: "and earth and heaven be one…" This is what Paul says in Ephesians 1:10, "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in him." Earth and heaven, the physical and the spiritual, will be joined together so that God and his people are united in fellowship forever without sin. There will be one universe and one place where we will dwell with God forever. No longer will there exist an inseparable gulf between the spiritual and physical realms. There will be no more need for two separate places of heaven and earth. Presently they serve God's purpose for the salvation of his people. God says his original creation is good. And it is for the accomplishing of his sovereign purpose. Life on this earth serves the purpose of God—bringing us to heaven when we die. This is why we are identified in scripture as strangers and pilgrims in this earth. When history comes to an end, there will be no need for the two places, heaven and earth. Instead, the two separate places at the end of the world will be heaven and hell.

Do we desire to be at home in the new heaven and new earth? Jesus Christ died on the cross so that we will live there forever. Do we want to live there? Do our lives show we want to live with Jesus in the new heavens and new earth more than anything else?

As we live on this earth, at times we think certain things will satisfy and will make us happy. We set our hearts on these things. If I had a better job, a raise, a better boss, a boyfriend, a newer car, a cottage on the lake, my own bedroom, or a condo in Hawaii, I would be satisfied. These are the desires of those who want heaven on this earth as it is right now. But we know none of this will satisfy. If we set our hearts on these things, it will never be enough.

What we should really want is Jesus and the heaven we were saved to inhabit. The new heaven and new earth will be our home.

Longing for this home does not mean that we must hate all things earthly. In fact, God says we should not. 1 Timothy 4:4, 5 says, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." Let us not fall into thinking that the things of this earth are bad. This creates hypocrisy in our own lives for then we think that on Sunday, while sitting in church, we must disdain the very things we enjoy during the week: work, golf, riding bikes, gardening, a cup of coffee, or a good book. We enjoy these things Monday through Saturday not because we are sinners, but because we live on this earth. These things are not essentially evil. And maybe, just maybe, some of these things will be part of heavenly life. The problem is that we set our hearts on them so that they become more important than they should. They can become idols. We must despise the idolatry of our hearts, but not the good things that God gives. When we hate the idolatry, this is an evidence that we desire our eternal home.

We love things about life on this earth and that is okay. In this life we experience foretastes of heaven. We experience this most fully in our worship services on the Lord's day. Yet we experience tastes of heaven around our dinner tables, fellowshiping with each other, and seeing the beauty of this creation. We taste heavenly life in so many small ways on this earth. But they are only previews of the greater life which is to come. May this desire grow in our hearts and lives by turning from sin and to God.

Life in heaven and earth 2.0 will be magnificent! God designed us, as his children, to crave this life.

Rev. Eriks is pastor of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Question for Schuyler

Dear Schuyler,

I am writing in response to your answer to the anonymous question regarding the "Christian Patriarchy Movement and its Dangers." I do not disagree with your answer in its entirety, but some parts of your answer concerned me enough that I decided to write.

First, I had never heard of the Christian Patriarchy Movement either. This surprised me, since I am familiar with a number of books written by Mr. Wilson, and I have occasionally heard Dr. R.C. Sproul, Jr., on the Renewing Your Mind radio program and read some of his articles published by Ligonier Ministries. I am aware of Mr. Wilson's promotion of the Federal Vision heresy. At the same time, I have profited from what he has written regarding the Christian family. While both Mr. Wilson and Dr. Sproul, Jr., use the term "patriarchy," it seems that the "Christian Patriarchy Movement" has been so named by individuals who do not believe that the Bible teaches "father rule."

My chief concern with your response is the source of your information regarding the so-called movement. You cite Mr. Wilson and Dr. Sproul, Jr., as its main advocates, but note that your research was done online. As I'm sure you know, anyone can publish anything on the Internet, and more often than not, things associated with conservative Christianity are misrepresented to the extreme. When I Google "Christian Patriarchy Movement," I find much about the dangers that you note in your article. Those positions may very well be held by the farthest right of this so-called movement. However, none of those extreme views are supported by anything that I have read that is authored by Mr. Wilson. A few excerpts from his book *Reforming Marriage* will demonstrate this.

With regard to a husband's temptation to abuse his authority, Wilson saddles that authority with responsibility—so much so that he makes husbands ultimately responsible for every problem in every marriage, and men in general responsible for the feminist movement. He notes that Paul in Ephesians 5:23 does not command husbands to *be* the heads of their wives, he simply states that they *are* the heads of their wives. What is *the* imperative for husbands, according to Wilson? "Husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the church" (p. 24) and "to love and lead with a servant's heart" (p. 38). He notes that a husband's realization that he needs a helper in order to fulfill his God-ordained vocation should move him to a "holy terror" (p. 32), and he warns against a husband's tendency to exploit his wife rather than honor her as the weaker vessel. "A husband's top priority should be her spiritual and emotional contentment. She should be in his prayers, and she should know that she is. She should be frequently held, comforted, counseled, and taught by her husband from the Word of God" (125).

Since this particular book is on marriage, Wilson addresses the calling of wives, not unmarried women. But even regarding wives he writes: "The Bible does not teach that the woman's place is in the home; it requires that the home be her *priority*, but she is not at all limited to the home" (49). With

Editor's Note — Mark H. Hoeksema

In this issue is a response from a reader to Schuyler's answer to a question in the June issue of *Beacon Lights*. Unfortunately this letter just missed the August publication deadline, so it was not possible to print it more promptly. The reader may want to re-read Schuyler's original answer before reading the letter and response that appear in this issue.

In recent issues we have advertised for a new author of the Devotional rubric to replace Chester (Skip) Hunter, who soon will retire from this position. The response has not been exactly overwhelming, and the time is growing short. If you have good writing skills and are interested in the continuation of the rubric, please contact a staff member (contact information appears in the masthead).

regard to child-bearing and child-rearing, Wilson emphasizes parents' very weighty calling to teach their children the fear of the Lord. "Large, obedient families are a blessing. But when the children are disobedient, the more there are, the worse it is." Nor does he disallow birth control or promote home-schooling exclusively. Indeed, the example he gives as a potentially godly use of birth control involves a couple's difficulty paying for their children's Christian school tuition (p. 127). Wilson's wife, Nancy, a gifted author in her own right, states this in her book, *The Fruit of Her Hands*: "Another example of this crucial distinction between principle and method regards education. Christians must agree with the biblical principle that parents are responsible before God for their children's education. Now if one family chooses to home school and another chooses to enroll their children in a Christian school, we ought not get worked up over it."

I hope those examples sufficiently demonstrate that Mr.Wilson cannot be held responsible for the dangers associated with the CPM. The same is true of Dr. Sproul, Jr., another man whom you named as one of its main advocates.

There are two other comments in your response that I question, Schuyler.

First, I disagree that the Bible teaches that father and mother have equal authority in the home. Both father and mother have authority, no doubt. The fifth commandment and many other scripture passages command children to honor their parents, in the plural. But if the husband is the head of his wife, is he not also head over her in the area of child-rearing? A home cannot have two heads.

Second, you write that we must not legislate for others with regard to contraception. Then you state, "Married couples must decide before the Lord, based on their circumstances (especially the health and well-being of the mother) how many children they are able to receive." To say that married couples *must* decide how many children they can receive is to make a law that I do not believe can be supported with scripture. Perhaps we *may* make such a determination, but I am glad that that is a determination that my husband and I do not *have* to make. After all, in most circumstances it is the right of the giver—not the recipient—to determine what gift he will give.

In the end, all that any movement ever does is exploit the dangers already present in our own sinful hearts. I am tempted to resist my husband's authority not because I associate with the feminist movement, but because I was conceived and born in sin. Likewise, my husband is tempted to abuse his authority as head of our home because he is a son of Adam, not because some distort the Bible's teaching regarding patriarchy.

Thanks, Schuyler, for taking the time to read my response and for your work on behalf of the *Beacon Lights*.

—Sarah Mowery

Response

Many thanks to the sister who took the time to write. I appreciate both the content and the spirit of her response. The sister's concerns expose one of *my* weaknesses: I do not want to refuse or decline to answer any questions sent to me, but sometimes I am as ignorant about the topic as the original questioner is. I do not claim to be an expert.

In such cases, I have little choice but to do some research. This research will of necessity be online, unless I want to buy books on every new subject. That is why I included a caveat: "Please bear in mind that the movement is varied and this summary of necessity must be general."

Research on the internet has its pitfalls, but, first, let me assure the sister, that I did not consult anti-Christian websites. Although I do not have a record of all the websites I consulted, I can assure the readers of *Beacon Lights* that, as much as possible, I consult primary sources (i.e. the CPM websites themselves) and, where the sources are secondary, I prefer Reformed websites with good, Christian, biblical, Reformed commentary.

I am happy to concede that the sister knows more about Mr. Doug Wilson's writings than I do. The quotations she offers from Mr. and Mrs. Doug Wilson's books are helpful, especially the comments on the education of children. Bear also in mind that Doug Wilson is an advocate of the Federal Vision. Therefore, his books (even on the family) ought to be read with careful discernment. Undoubtedly the sister does this already.

I left the impression, by calling R.C. Sproul, Jr. and Doug Wilson the "main advocates" of the CPM, that they are responsible for the main dangers associated with it. That is regrettable. I called them the "main advocates" only because they are the best known promoters of the CPM. This does not mean that they are necessarily promoters of its most extreme ideas. My research does not permit me to

reach that conclusion.

Finally, the sister has a couple minor disagreements.

First, she questions my statement that "the father and mother have equal authority in the home." Certainly, I agree with her that the final authority is the father's. Eventually, after a husband and wife have thoroughly discussed all options, the husband/father has the final word: his is the responsibility, or, as the saying goes, "the buck stops here" (with the husband/father). My impression of the CPM was that it downplayed the important role of the wife/mother, as if she was simply there to agree with the husband/father. I would contend that the wife/mother must give her input, and a wise husband will listen to her.

Second, the subject of contraception is controversial. We believe that God sovereignly gives and withholds children as it pleases him. Contraception is not necessarily sinful, however. Abortion and abortifacients are, of course, sinful and forbidden in all circumstances. Perhaps if I had written, "Married couples may decide before the Lord…" instead of "Married couples must decide before the Lord…" the disagreement would have been avoided.

The sister is absolutely correct that "all that any movement ever does is exploit the dangers already present in our own sinful hearts." We would be foolish to try to blame movements for our sins. Perhaps we can say that as God uses means for our sanctification, so the devil seeks to use means for our corruption. We must avoid falling for his temptations, whatever means he may use.

—Schuyler

Schuyler would like more of your questions. Please submit them to editor@beaconlights.org.

Christian Living — Abraham Kuyper

Implications of Public Confession

IV

The Confession of Your Church

"Let us hold fast our profession."
Hebrews 4:14

Time and again you hear the remark made that the confession of your church is a comparatively unimportant matter, and that your personal confession ought in no way to be affected by it.

Those who voice such remarks usually talk in this fashion: You belong to Jesus, do you, and the life of God dwells in your heart? Why then be concerned about the confession of a church? Every church of Christ worthy of the name must open its doors to you, and every church that refuses to do so thereby forfeits its right to exist! Why all the learning and theology? As if the kingdom of God depended upon the formulated questions and answers of a Catechism! Confession is the work of the Spirit, and it is nothing else. As though sheer memorization could ever take the place of a heartfelt experience. No, indeed! If you have experienced the work of the Spirit, each and every church must admit you to her celebration of the holy supper; and if you have not experienced the influence of the Spirit, even though you are the best of catechetical students, each and every church must refuse your request for admission.

Sentiments such as those were being expressed by the Montanists soon after the apostles of the Lord had died. Certain delicate, emotionally pious people have spoken in that vein in every epoch. During the time of the Reformation the Anabaptists were saying such things. Today too there are spiritually one-sided individuals who would make the awakening by the Spirit the sole condition for permitting access to the holy supper. Has the "big thing" happened in the life of the person asking for admission? If so, let him come; if not, let him stand outside among the unconverted many. The study of a Catechism is quite irrelevant. All study can safely be ignored. In fact, even that much touted "making confession" represents a mockery of holy things.

But it is remarkable that the holy apostles have

judged of the matter also, and that their judgment is the exact opposite of the judgment of these ultra-spiritualists. What? The common confession of the church does not affect one's personal confession? It most certainly does. Read what Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing" (1 Cor. 1:10). This "speaking of the same thing" definitely refers to a common confession, for Paul added: "And that there be no divisions among you; but that ye [as a church] be perfectly joined together in the same mind and judgment." It is the identical plea he addressed to the church at Philippi, when he wrote: "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing" (Phil. 3:16). The apostle John gives expression to the same thought and as definitely relates it to a confession. Paul had written in Romans 10:10: "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." John affirmed with equal decisiveness: "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is the spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4:3).

You see therefore that the holy apostles, who wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and to whose word and meaning all people should be subservient, affirm the exact opposite of that of those ultra-spiritualistic people who assert that the common confession of a church is a comparatively unimportant matter. Whereas the latter maintain that the mind's confession affects that of the heart hardly at all, the holy apostles affirm in the name of the Lord that "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation," that you must be of one mind with the believers, and that you must speak the same thing with them. They boldly add that he who in his confession departs from the true conception of the Son of God is of the antichrist.

Let this testimony of the apostles encourage you when you find that you must *study* as a part of your preparation for confession. Let it encourage you in insisting that your children be taught. It is obligatory that you teach them. You promised to do so when you proffered them for baptism. Upon that occasion you answered affirmatively to the important question: "Do you promise and intend to see these children, when come to the years of discretion, instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein?" Nor was that "aforesaid doctrine" a vague and nebulous one, for the immediately preceding one asked: "Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and perfect doctrine of salvation?" Hence your baptism bound you to a specific doctrine, and a doctrine that is well-defined and nicely circumscribed.

That baptismal promise is made by one generation to another. The father promises that he will instruct his child. The child when he has become a father vows it anew. The promise is always the same: to instruct or to cause or help children to be instructed in the "aforesaid doctrine." In that way the church continues in a common confession. Ecclesiastical life and activity are based upon that baptismal vow. It is encouraging to note that the propagation of the same doctrine is enjoined upon you by the holy apostles also. Their dictates are conclusive and are binding. All must be of the same mind and must speak the same thing. That means that the same doctrine should be confessed by all.

For that reason study is necessary. A church that does not teach her youth can never hope to retain a pure confession, but relinquishes it, cuts off all contact with the past, divorces herself from the fathers, and forms a new group.

Yes, study is obligatory. If you desire to confess, you must learn. You must not learn the interpretation of this or that preacher or instructor, for the opinions of these vary widely, and have always done so. Instead, you must learn what the church has throughout the centuries confessed as the truth revealed by God in his holy scriptures. That confession must be taught in all the churches, to all who are reared within the church, to all who wish to become responsible members of it, whether they are young or old, experienced or inexperienced.

The present generation must *reaffirm* the confession that the previous generation received from its fathers. Nothing could be more erroneously conceived than to suppose that each new generation should make a new and different confession. The children must reaffirm the confession of their fathers. True education is just that: a reinterpretation and a reaffirmation. Such true education, accordingly, should obtain in the church of Jesus. It should be the holy

objective of that church to make the spontaneous voice of the heart identical with the reaffirmation of the lips.

In Psalm 78, Asaph laid down the golden rule in this matter: "Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will utter dark sayings of old: which we have heard of old: which we have heard and known, because our fathers have told us" (vv. 1–3). Asaph tells us concerning these truths that we may not "hide them from our children, from the generation to come" (v. 4). The Lord God has committed the treasure of his truth to the keeping of his church, in order that it may maintain itself from paradise through the generations to the consummation of the world. Asaph sang: "For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (vv. 5–7).

Hence there is no room for doubt about the obligation of study and of instruction. You are duty-bound to do so. The truth of God that he revealed must be transmitted from one generation to another. The confession of the church may not become embedded in the dust of the ages, but must be constantly reaffirmed. Memorization alone is futile, it is true, but without it the links of the chain that bind the church of God into a unity break and fall apart.

It strikes us, at first thought, that it would be a most gratifying situation if the church of God upon earth had a confession now that was the same as that which she had always confessed, and a confession that was most exact and elucidating in every detail. Yet there is an element of unsoundness in the very appeal of this situation. In fact, there is an element of sin in it, because the history of the church proves that exactly the opposite has been God's will. How plausible too that changes sometimes must occur. Otherwise the confession of one generation would simply be a blind imitation of that of the preceding generation.

We know therefore that there are some virtually deformed or contaminated churches, and some reformed or purged churches, representing contaminated and purged confessions, respectively. It has been your privilege to have been born in one of those reformed churches that has a reformed confession. That privilege should tend to strengthen the yearning within you never to relinquish your hold upon that purged confession, but to "keep that which thou hast."

Christian Living — Catherine Marcelle Vink

A Firm Foundation

Recently at our dinner table, my father addressed our family on an issue that had been bothering him for some time. "I worry about you," he said, speaking to my older sister, my two younger brothers, and myself. He elaborated by saying that it was one of his greatest concerns that we have a firm foundation on which to build the rest of our lives. In this modern age, the world seems to foster a culture of baseless relativity, encouraging young people to drift about from place to place with no proper direction or purpose. During such tumultuous times, it is vital that Christian young men and women have a deep spiritual understanding of the scriptures in order that they may adequately defend their beliefs.

Perhaps my father's unexpected outburst was related to the fact that my eighteenth birthday had just passed, and I was now, in the eyes of the state, an adult. Regardless of whether or not these two events were connected, I felt particularly convicted by his words. It may seem basic, but understanding that the Protestant Reformed (PR) churches provide me with the purest form of spiritual nourishment is

the most important way I can be assured that I am firmly grounded to weather the world's continuous assault. This is not to say that salvation or a solid scriptural basis cannot be found outside of the PR churches. The Lord chooses to gather his people from all nations, tribes, and tongues, and he works in the hearts of all of his elect, not just the members of my church.

However, remaining in the PR church and eventually becoming a confessing member will do a great deal to prepare me for my adult life and the challenges it will present. When I look at the world, and how the godless youth of my generation choose to live, it causes me great distress. In a time when divorce, remarriage, and infidelity are commonplace, children grow up in broken, empty homes. Often they are more or less forsaken by their parents and left to fend for themselves. It is no wonder that because of this, the children of my era have learned to imitate their parent's sins, and go into the world indulging in all manner of carnal pleasures.

While so many lack direction, it is more important than ever to be an outspoken witness of God's guiding light. In the words of Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." I know that more often than not, I fall miserably short of this calling, but as I continue to grow and mature in my faith, I strive to achieve the high standard that has been set. From the perspective of a high school student, sometimes my life feels so frantically busy that I barely have a moment to think, let alone set aside time for meditation on scripture or personal devotions; but having such a crammed schedule is part of what makes devotions so important.

When I get so caught up in my daily worries and problems, nothing brings me back to earth like pausing for a moment and hearing what God has to say about my suddenly trivial issues. For example, nothing puts my problems in perspective quite as well as reading about the heart-rending trials that Job endured for the sake of God's glory. Knowing what comfort my fellow young Christians and I have is part of what makes seeing the members of this lost and hopeless generation so distressing. Every man, woman, and child knows that true assurance can only be found in the Lord, but still they deny him and instead grasp hopelessly at straws and desperate imaginations, trying to create substance but finding only illusion.

I cannot even begin to imagine how different my life would be if I had not been raised in the loving, Christian family I am blessed to be a part of. Without my father's constant concern and careful guidance, I would have ended up as just another mute member of the senseless masses, blindly groping through life. The foundation my upbringing provided me with has given me a peace that is incomparable to any earthly pleasure I could ever enjoy, and maintaining and building on this foundation is a never-ending duty that I hope to pursue with vigor and enthusiasm into my adult life.

Catherine is a member of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Christian Living — Becca Joostens

How Can Single Individuals Serve the Church?

In my previous article I spoke about several aspects of the single life that may be difficult for a single church member. I mentioned in particular that I worry about not being useful or of value to the church. I would like to expand on this by exploring the idea of how single individuals can in fact be of significance and even important to the church. This can and should come through our acts of service.

Writing this was quite intimidating for me. I can in no way pretend to be an authority on this topic and also need reminders myself to work toward possessing a servant's heart. Knowing my shortcomings in this area, I have reached out to other single individuals and was shocked and encouraged by the great response. The majority of this article is the fruit of an amazingly uplifting evening discussion among twelve single individuals (aged young to experienced) in our Protestant Reformed churches. I am humbled by the great ideas and witness these individuals provided!

We have all heard that Christians should serve their church and in general serve the body of Christ. We are called to live a life that displays thankfulness to God and reflects his love; we do this by using our time to serve God (2 Cor. 5:15). Each of us, whether married or single, has unique opportunities to do so according to Ephesians 4 (read all of verses 1–16, but I will quote verse 16 here): "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." The church is often pictured as a body. But stop and reflect for a minute what a great picture this really is. Imagine completing a simple daily task without each of our body parts serving each other with its unique gift. How could you share your thoughts without your tongue? How could you get where God directs you without your feet, arms, and eyes? Not only does each individual have unique gifts to bring to the church, but it is beautiful in the eyes of God when the church is united in this way and the church is blessed for it. Psalm 133: 1–3: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity…for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."

It is not enough even to say that we do some things for the glory of God. Colossians 3:23–24 calls us to do EVERYTHING as if on fire for the Lord—with excitement! "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men: knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." Living life heartily in service won't allow us not to serve the church!

I'd like to discuss briefly how the act of serving may look a little different for single individuals than it does for married persons or families. It may seem that opportunities to serve come more naturally for married couples or families. Opportunities such as teaching their own children, volunteering in their children's school/classroom, assisting other families in time of need, and joining together to support each other as fellow mothers/fathers are where the majority of service seems to be—or at least the obvious ones. Although these opportunities are not directly placed in front of the single person, this is not an excuse to refrain from serving; single individuals must remember they are part of the body of Christ mentioned earlier. Seek God's guidance for what his desire is for you to do with your gift of time. It is currently God's will that we be single. Ask yourself and pray to be shown what opportunity he is preparing us for.

Getting started is difficult; this is what hinders me from serving in areas I am capable. It is easy to say, "We should serve the church." It is another thing entirely to consider exactly what this means. It has been a personal frustration of mine that this statement is so vague. How can I serve the church? Who has a need? Who can I help? Who is comfortable with my helping? What types of needs can I impact? Is it OK for me to approach someone about their need, or what I think is their need? Am I going to offend someone by offering help? How do I get to know someone well enough to approach them? What time do I have available to help? What do they need? Can I meet their needs?

Though difficult, we must strive to find opportunities to serve (Heb. 13:1–3, Phil. 2:1–5). Keep in mind the reward (re-read Colossians 3:24 quoted earlier) of impacting not only someone else's life, but yours as well in a rich way. Take that first step; it only takes a bit of courage, and what follows will get easier and will be spiritually rewarding. Also, don't discount the possibility that taking a first, courageous step just might point you in a direction you hadn't yet considered, but where God intends you to go. A great example of this is one of our Christian school teachers who was hesitant (and maybe even scared) to start teaching Sunday school; but shortly after beginning, he realized that teaching was his life's calling!

There are many examples in the Bible of single persons who are of great importance and assistance to the church. Read how Biblical characters were examples of service to Christ and his church. Read how Mary Magdalene left all earthly ties and devoted her life as a disciple of Christ during his ministry, aiding

and comforting Christ in many instances. Read in Luke 10 and John 11 of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus' service to Christ and his disciples. Many of us are familiar with Paul's declaration that it is better to live in single life so as to be free for the service of the Lord (1 Cor. 7:7–8). Jeremiah was called by God to forgo marriage and serve as a prophet and a priest. Also consider the lives of Elijah, Lydia, and Rahab. These individuals provide us with excellent examples of how to live lives of love and service in a bold way. Imitate these individuals, read their stories, and note their characteristics; then pray how you may display these characteristics in your life.

There are some practical things we can do when communicating with our church family that can help us find areas in which to serve. A very small change in the way we offer our service may mean the difference in an acceptance or a decline: we shouldn't ask IF we can do something for someone in need; rather, ask WHAT you can do. This encourages a positive response and makes the other person feel less as if they are placing a burden on you. Stating "I have Saturday mornings available and I would like to help you, what can I do?" is much more likely to receive an acceptance than "Let me know if I can do anything for you."

Another idea to consider is that service in the church doesn't necessarily have to be a grand gesture. It may be a small thing that you feel is inconsequential, but is probably of great significance to someone else. If you have an idea to try to help someone, act on it without worrying if it is only a small thing. It will likely be greatly appreciated or even lead to more opportunities; the idea is just to START!

Befriend someone in the church, or befriend someone at work who appears to be struggling with their faith (or lack of faith). Pray for these individuals. The power of praying for someone is great; you will be amazed what this leads you to do both in your own life and the lives of others.

Look at the things in your life you enjoy or the things you wish you had more of. When you think sadly about an opportunity you may not have because you are not yet married or do not yet have children, ask yourself what you can do instead. For example, loving children likely leads you to wish for your own, but it is also an excellent reason to volunteer at one of our schools, start tutoring struggling students, or teach a music lesson or even consider obtaining a teaching degree. Craving companionship is a good reason to seek out others who may also need companionship. The elderly individuals of the church are good examples of those looking for more companionship. Find out what needs they have or just spend some time visiting with them. Something as simple as sitting with an elderly person is service to both the elder and their family, and you will soon find you were blessed by their wisdom as well.

The limitations of the length of this article do not allow for an intense investigation of what actual tasks we can do to serve. Because I have always been frustrated that such a list does not exist, I want to be sure to address this more thoroughly, so I will follow with another article to explore the possibilities. In the meantime pick just one thing that you could possibly change over the next month that might help you start or continue to show your servant's heart. This can be something as small as adding a church member to your personal prayer and devotions.

I'm going to conclude similarly to my previous article by encouraging you to pray! Be intentional about what you are praying for; that includes how you can serve the church. Pray that you have ideas for using your talents for the church, pray that needs of the church be brought to your attention, pray for the courage to start something different, including offering your service to members of the church. Pray that members of the church remember you and your talents that you are able to bring, and even pray that your pastor remembers single individuals in his sermons and congregational prayers. Most of all, pray that God gives you a servant's heart. If we live our lives with a servant's heart, we will not need to wonder how we can be of value, but we will already be seeking for and acting upon any opportunity to serve others and ultimately God.

In Christian Love,

A servant of Christ

Becca is a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Watching Daily At My Gates

September 10 ***Read 2 Corinthians 10***

There were those in Corinth who disparaged the work of Paul and therefore the work of God through Paul. The apostle tries to answer those scoffers. His final argument points at their boasting, and he leaves them with the admonition of verse 17. We do well to heed that admonition in our lives. The world loves to glory in itself. Do we do the same? Is our speech sprinkled with the pronouns *I* or *me*? Let us glory in God who has created us. To him be all glory now and forever. Sing Psalter 99.

Spetember 11 ***Read 2 Corinthians 11***

Some might think that the apostle repudiates what he has stated in the previous chapter. This is how fierce the opposition was to him and the gospel he preached. He had to answer all the scoffers so that God's name would be glorified. Paul takes great pains to show how his work was not of himself, but of God who sent him to minister to the Corinthians. God's grace is great toward us. How do we receive it? Do we disparage those who bring to us the word? Let us esteem our officebearers highly, for they do the work of Christ even to watching over our souls. Sing Psalter 133.

September 12 ***Read 2 Corinthians 12***

In defending his work Paul shows what God has done to him. While Paul saw a glimpse of glory, he was also afflicted with a severe thorn in the flesh. Many have tried to explain exactly what this affliction was, but we do not know and do not need to know. God afflicts his people to keep them humble in their lives. We must learn to bow before his good will and accept such afflictions as for our profit. This was the testimony of the psalmist in Psalm 119, and it is Paul's testimony as well. Reread verse 9 for comfort in all afflictions. Let us know that God loves us and his afflictions are never more than we can bear. Sing Psalter 329.

September 13 ***Read 2 Corinthians 13***

As Paul ends this letter, which seemingly rambles from subject to subject, he ends with the theme found throughout the epistle. That theme is that he has the Corinthians' good in his mind and heart. Sometimes when we are chastised, we think those who chastise us do so in hatred. But we must see that they are God's servants who have our welfare in mind even as our heavenly Father does. Paul prays for the Corinthians even as a father prays for his children. Paul's benediction to them, found in verse 11, should show to us how to live toward one another and with the church of Christ. Sing Psalter 216.

September 14 ***Read Galatians 1***

In this chapter of the letter written to various churches that Paul established on his second journey, Paul must defend his apostleship. He wastes little time in doing so, as there is only a short benediction. Paul reminds the Galatians that his apostleship was given to him by none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He also reminds them that the gospel that he preaches is from that Christ. Those who have been disparaging Paul and the gospel that he preached are to be ignored. We need this admonition today as well. We must not stray from the old paths that have been set before us. There is but one way to salvation, and that is by faith alone. Sing Psalter 82.

September 15 ***Read Galatians 2***

After continuing with the argument that his apostleship was from Christ alone, Paul then proceeds to the great doctrine of justification by faith. You will notice similarities between this epistle and the one to the saints at Rome. This has been an issue throughout the new dispensation. How are we saved? Is it of us? Do we have any part in our salvation? The answer is a resounding No! Our salvation is from God alone and merited by Christ alone through his death on the cross. There is no other way in which we receive eternal life. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift! Sing Psalter 186.

September 16 ***Read Galatians 3***

It is obvious from this chapter that those who sought to lead the Galatians astray were Jewish. They wanted to bring these churches under the Old Testament law once more. Paul now uses proofs from the Old Testament itself that salvation through Christ was pointed to by that scripture. First, he points to the righteousness of Abraham, whom many Jews clung to as their father. Second, he shows that the law had a place, but its place was to bring them to Christ as their teacher. Now Christ has come, and they are no longer under the constraints of the whole law. We must see that nothing can give us salvation except faith. Sing Psalter 214.

September 17 ***Read Galatians 4***

What a joy it is to be called the sons of God! The Judaizers in Galatia were trying to make the new church go

back to the ways of the law. Paul uses various means to show that this was not God's way for the church of the new dispensation. He finishes using the idea of Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac was a son of the promise, given to Abraham and Sarah when humanly it was impossible for them to bring forth a child. Ishmael was their attempt to do God's work for him. We must not fall into that error today. Our salvation is from God alone. What else do we need or want? Sing Psalter 172.

September 18 *Read Galatians 5*

Because we have been saved by God through the operation of the Spirit, who applies to us the benefits Christ has obtained for us, we must walk in the Spirit. We must live a life of sanctification in which we live antithetically in this world. In the church we must live in unity; in the world we must show ourselves to be true sons and daughters of the Most High. In this sanctified life we will bring forth the fruit of the Spirit as outlined in verses 22 and 23. We have been made free from the law and from sin; let us use that freedom to glorify God in all that we do. Sing Psalter 25.

September 19 *Read Galatians 6*

In this final chapter of the letter written by Paul's own hand, he exhorts the Christians to walk in love. We are to work with one another even when a brother sins against us. This is not easy, since our natures want us to get back at that person, but this is not the way that God has treated us. Then Paul exhorts the Galatians to not be weary in well-doing. Sometimes we tire of helping our neighbor and doing the "right thing." We must continue to glorify God in all that we do. The second half of the epistle is a reminder to stay away from the evils brought upon the church by those who would have them find justification by means other than faith. We need this warning as well. Like Paul we should glory in Christ crucified and live a life of those redeemed by his blood. Sing Psalter 113.

September 20 *Read Ephesians 1*

Paul had visited Ephesus at least three times. He found a group of believers there on his second missionary journey. On his third journey he visited Ephesus twice. First he spent a long period of time there as his main objective on the journey; then on his way back to Jerusalem he called the elders of the church to him for a farewell address. In this opening chapter he praises God for his work for the church. Read through verses 3-14 once again and see all the various doctrines on which the apostle touches. Then in the final part of the chapter he prays for the church. We too must praise God for his work on our behalf and then pray for saints wherever they may be. Sing Psalter 235.

September 21 *Read Ephesians 2*

What a blessed gift our salvation is to us! We who do not deserve any such gift are saved by faith. Paul expressly states in verse 9 that our salvation is not by any of our works. What further proof do we need of justification by faith alone?! Notice how the apostle first addresses the personal salvation of the believers in Ephesus and in the church of all ages and then goes on to show how that salvation leads to a unity of the church as a whole. We must avoid the individualism of this present age and realize that we have been made part of the body of Christ. For this we must give thanks daily. Sing Psalter 369.

September 22 *Read Ephesians 3*

In the first part of the chapter Paul reminds the Ephesians of his qualifications for the work that he had done among them. These qualifications were not man-bestowed, but were given to Paul by God through Christ. We see that Paul is in prison in Rome as he writes this epistle; he wants the Ephesians to know that he cares for them and that his work was not of himself, as some said, but was solely of God. In the second part of the chapter he once again prays on their behalf. Do we pray for God's people throughout the world? Do we remember that Christ will not return until all his people are gathered? When we pray, "Thy kingdom come," we pray for all of the kingdom and not just for ourselves. May we remember this fact each time we bow our heads in prayer. Sing Psalter 204.

September 23 *Read Ephesians 4*

While we do no works to earn our salvation, out of that salvation we work the works of God. In the first part of the book Paul expresses several doctrinal truths. Now in the second part of the epistle, Paul turns to the life of the Christian. We must walk in a sanctified way in all that we are called to do. Once again Paul calls the church to walk in unity one with another. Then he exhorts the individual believer to walk in a pure and holy way. This is a sober calling for each of us. Let us walk in the Spirit, who has given to us so great a salvation. Sing Psalter 391.

September 24 *Read Ephesians 5*

Paul continues with the exhortations that he gave in the previous chapters, but now he makes them specific. He speaks about our daily lives. Young people, do you walk in the Spirit with your friends? In what kinds of activities do you engage? With whom do you do these activities? Husbands and wives, how do your live one with another? Do you obey all the commandments of God in regard to marriage, as those commandments began to be given shortly after creation? What songs do we sing for worship? Would we rather sing the man-centered songs of much of what calls itself church or are we content with the songs of Zion as given by God in the psalms? We should review this chapter often in our lives so that we remember how we must walk in gratitude for our salvation. Sing Psalter 360.

September 25 ***Read Ephesians 6***

Children and young people, Paul has directions for your lives as well. We find them in the first part of the final chapter of this epistle. Workers—and this includes students—did you hear God's word to you in this chapter? After pointing out our individual calling in this life, the Holy Spirit through Paul reminds us that we are in a battle. It is the battle of faith in which we fight against Satan and all of his hosts. Are you wearing the armor of faith? Are you comfortable in that armor? This is what we need to fight the battles that we will face in this life. David could not wear Saul's armor, but he wore the armor of faith as he went out to face Goliath. Are we wearing the correct armor? Sing Psalter 53.

September 26 ***Read Philippians 1***

People of God, do you make the confession that Paul makes in verse 21? In our lives do we live Christ? This is not just when we worship, but we must live Christ in our daily lives: in our work, in our play, and in whatsoever place God has put us. This is not easy. To live Christ means that we will face persecution and hardship. This is the way it must be if we call ourselves Christians. But Paul does not stop there. He says that if we die, we gain. We may wonder about that. We may not want to see that no longer to live on this earth is a gain for us. But we must always remember that this earth is not our home. Our home is in heaven, where Christ is preparing our place for us. Let us live Christ, but let us look ahead to the glory that will be ours in heaven. Sing Psalter 203.

September 27 ***Read Philippians 2***

In this chapter Paul continues to exhort the saints at Philippi to be Christ-like. To be Christ-like means first to take on the mind of Christ. What did Christ do for our salvation? He put off his own glory and became like us, sin excepted, so that we could have salvation. This means we do nothing to earn our salvation; we only live in the salvation that Christ has merited for us. Second, we must be lowly in mind. While Moses was the meekest man that lived on this earth, he was only a type of Christ who humbled himself for our salvation. We must take the *I* out of our vocabulary and put Christ and our neighbor ahead of our desires. Finally, Paul exhorts them to walk in Christ in all things. Sing Psalter 366.

September 28 ***Read Philippians 3***

There are many verses that a child of God could hold on to as precious. One of these is verse 14. Do we press toward the mark? The picture here is of a long distance runner working hard to attain first place. He has spent himself over the course of the race, but must continue to work hard and to press ahead. This is a picture of our life here on this earth. We must press forward to reach the mark. That mark is eternal life in heaven. It is achieved by those who live as God has commanded. Of ourselves we cannot achieve that mark. We must have the help of him who shed his blood on our behalf. While we do nothing to gain that high calling, we must live out of that salvation. We must live a life of sanctification as we work out that salvation, as we learned in the previous chapter. Press on, people of God, and receive the prize that is ours though faith in Christ Jesus. Sing Psalter 234.

September 29 ***Read Philippians 4***

Which verse of this chapter might you hold dear in your lives? There are truly many. Look at verse 19. Here we have the assurance that God will supply all our needs. We have many needs in this life. We have spiritual needs. Sometimes we feel weak in the faith. We do not know which way to turn. God will supply that need. Sometimes we have physical needs. Our health may be frail, or we may be smitten with some disease. God will supply that need. Saints have lacked the basic necessities: food, shelter, or clothing. God will supply those needs as well. We may have emotional needs, which may be caused by a lack of the previously mentioned needs. God will supply what we need in that case as well. What a precious gift we have through Christ. God will supply our needs; of that there is no doubt. Sing Psalter 378.

September 30 ***Read Colossians 1***

In the first part of the chapter Paul prays for the church at Colosse. This epistle too seems to be another of the prison epistles. It is thought that Paul never personally worked in this church, but here we find him praying for these saints and their needs. This should be an admonition for us. There are many saints whom we do not know personally. Do we pray for them and their needs? In the second half of the chapter we see a summary of the doctrine of salvation. We can find many gems of doctrine here in an easily understandable form. We should take the time to review this doctrine in order that we can live out of it. Sing Psalter 403.

October 1 ***Read Colossians 2***

Throughout all ages the church is beset by those who would introduce false doctrine into it. The church of Colosse had this problem as well. It seems from the chapter that there were two errors against which the Colossians had to fight. First, there were the errors of those who wanted them to go back to the Old Testament ceremonial laws. Paul states that we have been delivered by Christ from such things, and we must live out of that salvation. Second, there was the error of worldly philosophy. This too is something against which we must fight. Satan attacks us using the philosophies of the world. Prevalent today are philosophies that are rooted in evolution. We must not let our lives be tainted by this error. By knowing God and his word we are armed against such evil. Let us pray for guidance in our lives to fight this aspect of the fight of faith. Sing Psalter 392.

October 2 *Read Colossians 3*

In this chapter, similar to one in Ephesians, we find exhortations on the manner of living the life given to us by Christ in our salvation. First, we are called to put away all evil in our lives. There is much evil that can tempt us. There are evils around every corner. Our young people are faced with the evils that Satan sets before them. They must be trained to ward off these evils. Second, we are called to live a new and godly life. This means we seek the things of God. This too is an admonition that our young people need. They must not only put off the old man, but with the whole church of God they must put on the new man. Finally, Paul exhorts the Colossians and us to walk in love one with another in whatever station or calling God has placed us. Husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children, employers, employees, do you seek God in all that you do? Sing Psalter 369.

October 3 *Read Colossians 4*

After finishing the thoughts of the previous chapter, Paul turns to the subject of prayer. People of God, how is your prayer life? Have your prayers become rote and stale? Are they full of repetition, even bordering on the vain repetitions of the Pharisees? Young people, do you seek to pray prayers that rise to heaven? Praying is hard work. It takes knowledge of the word of God and knowledge of prayer itself. Scripture is full of instances of exemplary prayers. Study them and use them to help you in prayer. Prayer is the chief means of thankfulness, according to the Heidelberg Catechism. We not only need not to avoid prayer, but we must also seek to pray meaningful prayers. Sing Psalter 434.

October 4 *Read 1 Thessalonians 1*

Paul established this church on his second missionary journey after his work in Philippi. He was driven out of Thessalonica and moved down the Balkan Peninsula. After leaving the church, he later sent Timothy back to see how the congregation was doing. While in Corinth he writes this letter to them. He commends the church for being an example to other believers. What does this say to us? Are others encouraged by our actions as believers? As we have seen in other epistles, our life must be one that shows our thankfulness in salvation. The Heidelberg Catechism exhorts us to lead a worthy life so that others may be brought to Christ. Is this the life that we live? Sing Psalter 246.

October 5 *Read 1 Thessalonians 2*

In this chapter Paul describes the gospel that he preached. It is a good chapter to read to examine our hearing of the gospel. Do we seek to hear what God will have us hear as the word is preached? Assuming that the preacher is preaching Christ crucified, which should be the heart of all sermons, do we listen for that message? Do we seek to hear that message so that our faith is strengthened? Preaching is not only the power of God unto salvation, but it also contains the spiritual food that we need for our lives. We must seek the pure preaching of the word that gives us life. Sing Psalter 366.

October 6 *Read 1 Thessalonians 3*

This is a very personal chapter that Paul writes to the Thessalonians. He is concerned about their faith in God. Not only should this be true of officebearers, but also each Christian should concern himself with the faith of his friends. This is not being a busybody or being nosy, but this is showing love for fellow believers. Each believer has his own trial. Each believer is part of the body of Christ. Each member of that body needs to care for the other members. In doing this the members walk in peace one with another. Let us show the same concern for each other as Paul showed for the Thessalonians. Sing Psalter 371.

October 7 *Read 1 Thessalonians 4*

In this very personal letter Paul points out three areas to which the Thessalonians need to give heed in their walk of love one with another. First, they need to walk in holiness concerning matters of the seventh commandment. Marriage and all that goes with it is a beautiful picture of the relationship of Christ and his church. We must be pure one with another in this aspect of life. Second, Paul enjoins them to live in love with fellow believers as they carry out their daily work. Each has been given his own station and calling by God. We must be diligent in that calling as we seek to glorify God all the days of our lives. Finally, Paul gives some instruction concerning life after death. Death is not the end; it is the opening to eternal life in heaven. Our mourning at a funeral must be replaced with the hope of the resurrection and the life that follows. Sing Psalter 29.

October 8 Read 1Thessalonians 5

After finishing the thoughts concerning Christ's second coming, Paul exhorts the Thessalonians concerning their lives on this earth. Reading this chapter often will provide much needed instruction for the church of all ages. As you consider the commands of verses 14–22, ask yourselves the question, "Which of these do I especially need to heed?" While it is true that all of them are for our edification, each of us may have a particular need in our lives. While living that life we need to follow the command of verse 22. We need to abstain from all evil in all aspects of our lives. In doing that we can follow the other commands that precede it. In doing this we live a proper life of sanctification and truly "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling." Sing Psalter 206.

Reminder: Beacon Lights *is still looking for someone to write the Devotions rubric in light of Mr. Hunter's imminent retirement.—Ed.*

Interview with Ray Ezinga

Part 1

Mark H. Hoeksema (MHH): Mr. Ezinga, where and when were you born?

Ray Ezinga (RE): I was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan about 1933. I don't know exactly where it was. The first I remember I was on 1062 Bemis Street, right by Baxter School, where I went to school.

MHH: Tell me a little bit more about who were your parents, where did you grow up. Tell me a little bit about your childhood and your youth.

RE: Well, Ryven Ezinga was my dad and Nell Ezinga was my mother. She came from the old country. I was raised there on Bemis Street. At that time that was a real nice place to live. The neighborhood was pretty well mixed. There were a lot of people from our churches and other people. And we had a good place to play ball and all that. Had a pretty good childhood. The only thing was, it was too restricted. I was nuts about the bow and arrow. I needed a bow and arrow, you know. My uncle had one and I finally got one and that worked out real well, but when you shot at a squirrel on the neighbor's house, why it arched over and went through the big window on the house on Baxter Street, which always was not real good (laughter). We played cowboys and Indians like most kids did. We had one kid there that his dad was real rich, so he had all kinds of guns. We didn't have any. So, he'd distribute them out to us and we played cowboys and Indians. So I had a little bow and arrow, finally. The most famous shot I ever made in my whole life was this one kid who was a loud-mouth. He furnished the guns, he ran everything. He came across the yard down a ways from me. And I was waiting in ambush (laughter). And I made a running shot at him at about, probably, if I remember right, twenty-five yards. He had a cowboy hat on and it took the cowboy hat right off his head (laughter). And after that they wouldn't let me play Indian any more (laughter).

Went to Baxter School. By the way, I can remember your dad being out in the hall. He taught down there. Remember that?

MHH: I think he did for a short time.

RE: I remember him there. And the neat part of it was that at Baxter School you could see what teachers you were going to have for years to come because they stayed there pretty much.

School was never my favorite place to be. They always told Mom and Dad, he could get straight As if he really wanted to, but, aw, that didn't really thrill me a lot because that just made it bad for me. And there was a lady there, I think it was the third grade or fourth grade. She looked a lot like the witch of Endor, and I was terrified of her. And the next year I was going have her. I don't know what there was about that woman, but she just was the most wonderful teacher in the school. I still don't understand it. She did nothing special. She was just real nice, and every kid in the class wanted to do the very best he could for her. I got straight As all the way through school, which proved, of course, that I could do that.

The next teacher I had was one I didn't like. I went back to my usual Cs; now I'm in trouble, right? 'Cause Mom and Dad know I can get straight As. I wasn't getting them. Fortunately, by the time I got into about the fifth grade, that would have been in the early 40s—I can remember the war. Mom and Dad would read the papers: the Japs were making headway in this place. I was sitting there, just a little kid, listening, just wondering if we're going to win the war.

We moved out to the farm, around 28th Street—about half a mile east of the East Beltline. I think now there's an Old Kent Bank setting right where the farm was. That's where I first became alive and started adding the joy of living to mere existing. Had a hundred acres there with swamps and cricks and everything a kid needs. So I went to East Paris Christian School there, which was a real nice school. Had one teacher that taught kindergarten through the eighth grade—thirty-some kids. And I can still

remember when it was recess time, the bell would ring—had a big bell, you'd pull a rope to ring. In the winter all the older girls would help get the little snowsuits on the little kids, you know. And by the time they had the last one out the door, why, they'd reach up, pull the bell (laughter), and all the kids would come in again.

We threw stones a lot. Every country boy loved throwing stones. Ya gotta remember it's times of war. So we don't have stones, we have hand grenades. Well, Van Kampen lived just over the hill to the south. He had chickens and we could just see the little chimney from the critter coop. We came to school one year and they put all new stone all over there—all just perfect—hen-eggs sized rocks. Perfect for throwing. They had a great big marten house in the place where the minister lived there, but nothing was ever in there but sparrows. So one of the kids threw a rock and hit it and pieces flew off. Well, it didn't take long and the whole thing was leveled. All that was left was a post with a platform on the top. And all the rocks were all over in the parsonage yard.

So, the next thing we had to do in our manual training was build another Marten house. So we built this great big marten house—beautiful thing. And it got martens in it, so, he came out way ahead (laughter).

One day, one of the kids winged a rock over that ridge where those chickens were, and the Japs made a lot of noise, a lot of fowl language (laughter). The next thing, there was just a hail of rocks winged over there, and you could hear all these chickens down there tearin' round—dust and dirt was flying up in the air. Finally the bell rang. We went in school. Pretty soon there was a knock on the door and Mr. Van Kampen (we didn't really know him too well, but we got to know him pretty good after that) said, "Would the boys who threw the rocks into my chicken coop come over and help me clean all the dead chickens so they won't go to waste." (Oh!) So we went down there. And he's the nicest old guy! His wife came out and served cookies and lemonade. We got the big boilers going and we cleaned the chickens—all the chickens were old ones anyway. "We're going to get rid of them anyway, so let's just do all of them." So we got all the chickens killed—and got them all ready to go in the freezer. So he was real happy about that.

MHH: During this time, where were you going to church?

RE: We were going to First Church. First Church was an enormous church. Your grandpa was preaching there at that time. I was a little tiny kid. We used to walk from where we lived on Bemis Street up there. But when we moved to the farm, we drove over there.

Later on, [*First church*] got so big that we started a church called the Fourth Church in Boston Square. That's where I first met Jean [*Ray's wife*]. Later on they bought a gas station and remodeled it into a church. That's where we went to church when we got started going together. Later on, they tore that down and made the Fourth Church, just before the split in '53.

MHH: Your parents and you participated in formation of Fourth Church then?

RE: Well, I guess I didn't remember being a participant in forming it as much as just being there. My dad was always in the consistory.

MHH: How old were you at the time of the split? [*Ray does not answer this question, but takes a side trip here*]

RE: Jean and I got married in that church. [*Rev.*] Rich Veldman married us. Nice guy. I always loved Rich Veldman. He was a great guy to teach catechism. So it kind of tore all the families all up. The thing that got me was they didn't seem to worry about where was the truth so much as who was doing this and who was going to go this way or who was going go that way.

So it tore up the whole family, and when we got all done with it, why, Jean and [*her sister*] Helene were the only ones left in her family. I was the only one left in my family in the Protestant Reformed Church. So it really tore things up, and it made things complicated. You couldn't have family get-togethers much anymore because right away they were looking down on you because you're still Protestant Reformed.

But the old church [*First Church*] was a beautiful place. I went there for catechism and Sunday School when I was there. I remember the railing that used to go around the top [*the balcony*]. One time after catechism, Andy Sjoerdsma and I thought, "We'll go up there." So we got on that railing and we were running along the top of that railing. We started up by the organ, went to the corner, and started back. All of a sudden he slipped and fell and landed on the chairs down there. He was going (deep, agonized breaths), so I thought he was going to get killed. But he pulled out of it after a while. We just figured

an angel must have tipped him off there, and we'd better get out of there before we got in more trouble.

Another thing that was interesting. There was a closet there with a ladder in it. That old wooden ladder was so rickety, but we climbed up in there. You lifted it [*a trapdoor*] up and you were in the bell tower. So we found out there was an old ax laying up there (I don't know why that was). Anyway, we could get up there in the winter and make snowballs and you could throw them at people going past. They never did figure out where they came from (laughter). Now years later, they sent me to synod. That was at the time when [*Rev.*] Ron Van Overloop had just taken a call to be a missionary. So I was telling him about that. I said, "I wonder if we can find that yet?" So we went in there and sure enough, there was that old ladder still looking pretty rickety. Well, we climbed up there. We got up in that bell tower and that old ax was still laying up there. I said to him, "Boy, look at this." And I was telling him that the church has a slate roof on it. You can get out of the bell tower and stand right on top of the peak. I said, "Tell you what, you get out and stand on the peak, I'll go down and take a picture of you and say, 'Here's our missionary. He's right on top of things, you know.'" (laughter) So he did. I took pictures of him up there.

MHH: Now you were how old at the time of the split? And when, in that context, did you get married?

RE: We were married before '53.

MHH: You were married before the split.

RE: Well, we got married in '53.

MHH: So you were twenty years old.

RE: Yes, twenty years old.

We got married and we bought a lot for $400.00. We went on our honeymoon and we saved dimes. Had a hundred and some dollars worth of dimes. That's what we went on our honeymoon with. We started building that house on Moelker Avenue before we got married. The land sloped down, so we could have a walk-out basement. We had a nice cedar-lined basement living room with a fireplace and a knotty pine kitchen. We lived down there while we saved money enough to work on the upstairs. It took us eight years to build the house, and we had it all paid for.

I knew Dale Mensch, He lived out here [*Colorado*]. He'd always said, "You have to come out sometime." I said to Jean, "Let's go out to Colorado and take a trip." So we took a two-week trip out here and met Dale. After two weeks out here, I said to Jean, "You know what?" She said, "Yah, we built in the wrong place, didn't we?" I said, "Yup." I went back and the first thing my dad said to me was, "When you moving?" I said, "Well, I'd just as soon do it and get squared around." So we sold the land on a land-contract, the house with it. Got fourteen thousand, five hundred dollars for it. We thought we got a really good price; that was a lot of money back then.

So we moved out here and started from scratch all over again. Bought land on the north end of the lake, paid a thousand dollars an acre for it when you could buy land all over for three hundred an acre. People told us we were crazy, so I knew we were on the right track. Then we moved an old house. We took the roof off. It looked terrible. Everybody told us we were really crazy. But I always thought, if you want to be like other people, then you do like they do, right? 'Cause if that's all you want out of life, that's fine.

So we lived in that house, rebuilt that house, got it all real nice. It was a great place for kids to live—they could swim. I had horses and mules. They had chickens and turkeys and all that. All the stuff kids need to grow up normal, you know? They'd take off to go swimming in the lake and the horse and mules would run right down in there with them. They'd all be out there just having a big time out in the water.

When we came out to Colorado the first time there were only about just a few families in the church. I think the school had six kids, and Ruth Kuiper was the teacher.

MHH: Oh, they had the school already?

RE: Oh yes. They had school right off the bat, thanks to Rev. Kuiper. The people were not real fired up about that school. But it kind of got forced on them, more or less, they figured. But it was the best thing that ever happened. Anytime you start a church, you'd better start a school. Just like in Spokane, right now. We're hoping today that they're going to get the OK to be a church. But the first thing you need up there is a school. Otherwise nobody will want to go there. School's the most important thing.

Anyway, church was in the old schoolhouse, up on the corner, on 57th and 287th, on the southwest corner. We had outhouses for facilities. They stood up during the long prayer, and they all had communion out of the same glass, which, they didn't think

nothing of it. We didn't either. But we were the first Hollanders amongst these Germans, and these Germans were real serious people. You could tell them a joke, they couldn't catch on for nothing (laughter). You could tell them the answer and they'd give you this little courtesy laugh, and you knew they never did catch on to the whole thing. We were brought up giving each other a hard time and saying things with two meanings all the time. Forget it!

Now the kids that grew up with us and our kids, they're real good at it. I mean, they learned in a hurry. But those old guys—they were kinda hopeless.

MHH: What year was it that you moved here?

RE: '64. I remember the first time we came here was '63. We stayed up in the mountains in a little tent. I got up early on a Sunday morning, and there was a fellow down a little ways had a campfire going. Our kids were up and Jean was sleeping. He called me over there. He said, "You want a cup of coffee?" He had a big, black pot in there. Almost looked like he lived there. And then he said, "You want a little inspiration in there?" I assumed he was talking about sugar and cream. Well, he poured about half a cupful of brandy in there. Things got real lightened up after that. We went to church and, man, they were nice friendly people (laughter). Mellow, you know? (laughter) They were nice people. All those old people meant well. They never invited you over. They just said, "When ya wanna come, come," so you just went back and forth. Had a great time with them. We got to really love those people. I can still remember our kids going to that school—Steve along with the Griess boys—all trudging off to school. Little tiny kids walked up there. You wouldn't even think of doing that today. I took a camera and stood by our house and took a picture to the south, all the way up the front range to the north. There were a couple of barns and some silos, and here and there a house; that's all there was. Boy, it was nice out here then.

Then the next thing was, we ought to have a church. They stuck me on the building committee when they found out I was a builder. At that time in Loveland, all these churches that they had started up, the old people were in them yet. There was no preaching ,so the kids all left.

MHH: What churches are you referring to?

RE: All of them. I mean all these nice little white churches, typical little farm churches in town all over the place.

RH: Lutheran?

RE: Lutheran, everything. They're all for sale; for about eleven thousand dollars you could buy them. A lot of them didn't have facilities, and no basements in them. Windows, of course, were a hundred years old—all the glass was cracking—a lot of upkeep. Needed paint—had wood siding. We'd go look at them, and there's no parsonage here. Well, they'd have plenty of parking for what they had then, but I'd tell them, "When you start getting a congregation out here and get bigger, where will you park? Can't park on the city streets, you know." Finally I said, "You know, eleven thousand dollars, I'd think I'd about give you a church." The next week some of the consistory came over—old Gus Huber, Fritz Schwatz and them. They said, "You made a remark about building a church for about eleven thousand dollars. Can you do that?" Gib [Griess] had donated land. Gus [Huber] had too, we had to choose between the two. They decided on Gib's land. So I said, "I'll put some figures together." So I said, "Yah, I can do it for that. It ain't gonna be nothing fancy. It'll just be cement block. Shall I draw it up?" OK, so I drew it all up on a great big piece of butcher paper. I drew it up and put it up on a piece of plywood. We had a congregational meeting. I can remember somebody said, "Well, how many will that seat?" Two hundred twenty-nine people. "What in the world do we need to build something that huge for? Why, there's no way in the world we'll ever have that many people. That's crazy."

I answered, "If you want to build it for $7,000, I don't care one way or the other." It went through, so we had at it. Jean and I laid all the blocks. I thought somebody would know how to lay blocks. Nobody knew how to lay blocks, so we went there every morning. Jean mixed all the mortar for that church. By the time I got blocks all stacked up she had the mud. And that's the way we put all the cement blocks up.

Finally we got it up to where the trusses were supposed to come and then the people were going to come at 4:00 in the afternoon and help us put them up. All day it was a beautiful day. There wasn't a gust of wind. The minute they picked up that first truss, a horrendous wind came from the north and blew! We got that truss up there. We had big two-by-fours drove into the ground with great big hay ropes holding it up there. We fought three or four more trusses up to where you could cross-brace them. The minute we had them all cross-braced so it wasn't a

problem, the wind shut off just like that (laughter).

I can remember old Hugo Schwartz. He was blind. When we were shingling the building, his wife would put a bundle of shingles on his shoulders. He'd go over to the ladder—now this man is totally blind—climb up that ladder, walk across the roof, and put the shingles down. Then he'd walk back to the ladder and come down all by himself. I said, "Hugo, how in the world do you know where the edge of the roof is?" "Oh, I just kinda count the steps when I came up." Jean took pictures—8 mm, or super-8, I think, and she got pictures of him and Elizabeth putting shingles up there. We also had blind Art. He's down there helping level dirt in the basement. We have pictures of him doing that. Clara Serr and Ferd, her husband—they put the tar on the outside. Ferd was a neat guy. We liked him a lot. If you watched him in church, he'd sit there and spin his thumbs round and round. He's run them one way for about half an hour, and then he'd turn around the other way so they didn't get wound up (laughter). He was a neat guy.

Now all these people are gone.

Then Frank Van Baren moved out, and later on Dave Poortinga moved out. We started getting bunches of kids in here and people started coming. When we built the church the nice part was it had a basement under it (halfway out of the ground) with nice windows. So we had our school down there. The next thing you know, that school was full. They couldn't fit in the basement anymore. We had to build a school.

They put me on the building committee, and for four years we basically battled two guys that just simply fought—not with the truth always either— against that school. We'd come with a contract to build—we could have built a building twice as big as the one we did for $28,000, and by the time they screwed around, giving us a hard time for four years, we built a school half as big for $70,000.

MHH: What was the issue, what was the problem?

RE: They wanted to run things. They were on the building committee to start with, but neither one of them were builders. Finally, the school board came to me and said, "Would you serve on the building committee?" I had got on it and was off for awhile. I was working on my house, trying to get things done here too. Trouble was, I'd get all these bids from these different contractors to put the whole thing together. By the time you go on for years, they don't want to talk to you anymore. So we got another whole group of guys in on it. I still remember talking to Prof. Engelsma. I said, "Rev., if we don't get a school tonight, we ain't gonna get it." I said, "I ain't got time to be fooling around like this all the time." I went to those two guys and I said, "You as much as open your mouth tonight—we're going to go through all the minutes and show how you been screwing everything up." They didn't say anything. We had the school.

The big thing was, how many kids will that seat? We had three rooms and the library room. Why in the world do we have to build such an enormous building? We will never have kids enough to fill that up. By this time we also badly needed a parsonage. They came with a figure of $24,000 to build a parsonage, and I came with a figure of $34,000, if I remember right. This one guy—he wasn't a builder, but he was a real slick talker, and he was going to build it for $24,000. He had all these "ins"—he had a in on this and a in on that. He was going to get all this stuff for practically nothing. I told him, "Hey, you gonna put these cheap little ol' aluminum windows in?" We have to have good windows in there. It doesn't pay for it with lost heat. It cost us for about $36,000, if I remember right.

So I tore out all those aluminum windows and put in good windows. By the time we got that done, the church was getting way too small. We had seats only for 279 people. So they put me on the building committee for that. The first idea of the committee was to tear the other building down. I said, "Don't even come with that idea! These old people, they were so tickled to have that building." They never dreamed they'd even *have* a building. I said, "You talk about tearing it down, right there you're going to lose the whole thing." "Well, what are you going to do?" I said, "Build right on the front of it, hook them together." They said, "You can't." I said, "Yes, you can." I'd been out there with my transit. I had the height, and I had it all marked out. I was talking about putting a basement under it. They said, "We're not going to put a basement under it!" I said, "Well, we're going to have four hundred people in there, and we have weddings. We can do it." "Oh, no you can't." I said, "Yeah, you can." I had it all laid out, and we finally went to the congregation. They OK'd it, so we built.

By that time the school was getting way too small. So they put me on the committee again. A

big idea was to build a gym. I thought, "Why do we want to spend money on a gym?" But I went with the kids and their dads to the local rented gym. I saw the kids playing with their dads, and I thought, "You know, this is a good thing—Dads and boys all playing together here. Maybe I'm wrong on this." We were going to put on two rooms and the gym for, I think, it was $79,000. We had to do all the work, of course. So we did that.

Normally we had two or three kids [*in a class*], now we have fourteen, and we're trying to figure out if we were going to add on to the school or build a whole new? We have so many kids. You go in our church right now, it's like a whole strata. If you look down, it's all little heads going by you. Gobs of little kids.

So we've come a long ways. When you look back on where we started, and at the time when we moved out here, it was pretty shaky. Now Jean and I are seventy-five years old, and the thing that strikes you is that God seems to take great delight in taking something that don't amount to nothing and really making something out of it,

So here we are. We have 50 families or better, and all kinds of little kids. It's pretty wonderful. They're talking now about if we get too much bigger, we might start another church out here. A lot of our people live out to the southwest.

MHH: Do you remember approximately how big the church was when you moved here in '64?

RE: I don't know—six families or something like that. Not a whole lot bigger than Spokane is now.

[To be continued…]

From the Classroom — Dana Griess

A Promise of Loyalty: The Pledge of Allegiance

There are many ways to show patriotism. Every culture has different ways of showing loyalty to their country. There are songs, colors, flags, holidays, and pledges.

Most countries have some form of a pledge of allegiance. There are different terms for a "pledge of allegiance": loyalty oath, oath of allegiance, or an oath of citizenship.

Canada's oath of allegiance goes like this: "I, [name], do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the second, Queen of Canada, Her Heirs and Successors. So help me God."

As Americans most of us know our pledge of allegiance by heart. "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

We say the pledge often, but do we really know what it means, where it came from, and the changes it has undergone? Have you ever considered the pledge from a Christian point of view? I have often wondered if it is appropriate for a Christian to say. But as we consider the pledge of allegiance, we will see that that it has a place in the lives of Americans and also Christian Americans.

The pledge of allegiance was first written in August 1892 by a man named Francis Bellamy. Bellamy was a Baptist minister, a socialist and the cousin of Edward Bellamy, who was a well-known socialist novelist.

According to Francis Bellamy's recollections, America was in a patriotic low in the early 1890s. He said, "The time was ripe for a reawakening of simple Americanism and the leaders in the new movement rightly felt that patriotic education should begin in the public schools."

Bellamy and a man named James Upham were hired by the owner of *Youth's Companion*, a famous children's magazine. *Youth's Companion* had begun

a campaign to get American flags in every school in America. By 1892 they had sold about 26,000 flags to schools. Upham had the idea of using the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' reaching the Americas to get more flag sales. In the magazine they encouraged children to participate in a Columbian public school celebration to coincide with the World's Columbian Exposition. A short pledge would be part of this Columbus Day celebration.

Bellamy was in charge of this pledge. His finished product was one line long: "I pledge allegiance to my flag and the republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." The pledge was published in the September 8, 1892 issue of the Youth's Companion and was put to use during the celebration.

While children faced their school's new flag, arms extended, watching it rise up the pole, they recited the new pledge they had read in their magazines.

But this was not the end of the story for the pledge of allegiance. After receiving very little attention for almost 25 years, it underwent its first change. On Flag Day, June 14, 1923, a conference was held in Washington D.C. A concern was raised with the pledge where it said, "to my flag." With so many immigrants in the U.S at that time, it was a concern that they would think of the flag of their native country. So it was changed to say, "to the flag of the United States." The following year "of America" was added.

The pledge remained unofficial until June 22, 1942, when the congress added it to the United States Flag code. It was officially given the title "The Pledge of Allegiance."

The last change given to the pledge was on Flag Day, 1954. President Eisenhower approved adding the words "under God". He said, "In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource in peace and war." This addition has caused much controversy over the years. Many say that there ought to be separation between church and state. Others say that it helps remind us that our nation is forever under God's control. Atheists argue that religion should not be forced on them by the pledge. It seems that this will always be a controversy, especially as our nation grows increasingly wicked.

As children, we have often said the pledge. But how many of us actually understood what we were saying? In order to discover whether or not we ought to say this pledge, we should break it down and discover its meaning.

First, we should define a pledge and what it is to make allegiance. The word *pledge* is defined as "a solemn promise or undertaking." Words such as *promise*, *vow*, and *commitment* serve as synonyms of the word *pledge*.

An allegiance is "loyalty or commitment of a subordinate to a superior or of an individual to a group or cause". Synonyms include words such as *loyalty*, *obedience*, and *devotion*.

J. Evans defined the pledge this way in his article, "What The Pledge Means": "In other words the pledge says: I promise to follow and obey the laws of the land, to never renounce, desert, or betray the Republic of the United States of America which cannot be split into parts. I acknowledge that the people and government are dependent upon a supernatural being and I will strive to ensure equality and freedom for all citizens."

Now that we understand what the pledge means, we can consider it deeper. Can we and should we, as Christians, make this allegiance?

Our nation has changed much since its origin. The United States stood for things that we as Christians could agree with: freedom of speech and religion, freedom to disagree and call things evil. Children were counted a blessing and marriage was nothing to scoff at. Religion was important and respected. The United States of today is much different. The freedom of our speech and religion is in question. Tolerance is the new "love," and sin has become the norm. Children are murdered by the millions and marriage is merely a tradition and comes later in a relationship. Religion is minimal and the religious are looked at as strange. Our government is perverse. We live in a wicked nation.

Do we owe allegiance to such a country? Can we as Christians promise obedience and loyalty to a nation such as the United States?

We must remember that our first allegiance is to God. By his grace he saved us. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20) Because of that we are called to be thankful. "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called

in one body; and be ye thankful" (Col. 3:15)

When our first allegiance is to God, that means that we obey him before any earthly authorities. When we are commanded to do anything against God and his law, we are called to disobey. But even in this, we must remember that God has placed those men as our authorities. Therefore, in obeying their decrees, we obey God's will. The Belgic Confession, article 36 expounds on this truth.

God has placed us in this nation. He has used the United States for much good. He has used the freedoms we enjoy for the furtherance of his truth, and he is still granting us the use of these freedoms today. With a right understanding we can place our right hands over our hearts and promise to obey and be loyal to our nation that truly is "under God". Romans 13: 1–7 supports this view. Verse seven says, "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor."

As our country continues to grow increasingly evil we must never lose sight of our God, to whom our true allegiance is due. When authorities make laws that we cannot obey and will be punished for, the Lord will be near and he will give us strength.

While we enjoy the freedoms that the United States of America offers us, let us be thankful, obey God first and foremost, and honor the country he has given us by saying the pledge of allegiance.

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Book Review — Matthew Kortus

The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert

The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey Into the Christian Faith, Rosaria Champagne Butterfield; (2012) Crown and Covenant, paper, $10.99, 153 pp. ISBN 1884527388. Reviewed by Matthew Kortus.

"What would you do if a homosexual entered our worship service?" This question was posed to the author of this book by a fellow church member (p. 138). The author's response: the "R-Rated" testimony of her conversion into the Christian faith, which she describes as a spiritual

train wreck.

Rosaria Champagne worked as an English professor at Syracuse University. Her primary field of study was Critical Theory, also known as postmodernism, as applied to gays and lesbians. This field of study matched her lifestyle: she was a self-declared lesbian, currently in a relationship. As an activist for lesbians, she involved herself in the gay and lesbian community, where she became a respected leader.

In her efforts to trumpet the cause of the gay community, the author published a critique of a group's gender politics in a local newspaper. In response to this article, she received a tremendous amount of feedback in the form of letters. She began sorting them into two different boxes: one for hate mail, the other for fan mail. Among the letters that she received was one written by Pastor Ken Smith, minister of the Syracuse Reformed Presbyterian Church. The letter asked her to explore the presuppositions that undergirded her article and invited her to discuss the matter with Pastor Smith. This challenge intrigued the author; so much so, she did not know which box to file the letter into.

At this same time, the author had begun researching for a book she intended to write on the religious right as it targets gays and lesbians. To understand Christian thought better, she responded to Pastor Smith's letter. She began making regular visits to Pastor Smith's home to study scripture with him and his wife Floy. These visits exposed the author not only to the broad teachings of scripture, but also to the dynamics of a Christian home. After meeting for some time, the author began to wonder if the teachings of the Bible might actually be true. After admitting these thoughts to Pastor Smith, he challenged her to consider her Roman Catholic upbringing and baptism in light of God's providence. Doing so, the author found herself in the "crucible of confusion" as she made attempts to pray, contemplated the idea of repentance, and began attending church. By God's grace, Rosario Champagne, a woman previously caught up in the gross sexual sin of homosexuality, was led to the point of repentance.

Soon after her conversion, or "train wreck," as she describes it, the author quickly realized that it had massive implications for her life. She realized the need for change as she sought to obey God "one small step at a time." Along with breaking off her lesbian relationship, she saw from scripture other sins that were deeply rooted in her life. On the basis of Ezekiel 16:48–50 and Matthew 11:23–24, she realized that at the root of her homosexual lifestyle, along with many other sins, was pride. When pride and other sins go unchecked, then sin progresses. In articulating all of this, the author writes:

> Conversion overhauled my soul and personality. It was arduous and intense. I experienced with great depth the power and authority of God in my life. In it I learned—and am stilling learning—how to love God with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind. When you die to yourself, you have nothing from your past to use as clay out of which to shape your future. (34)

This all culminated in her public confession of faith to become a member of the church she was attending. Making her vows before the church caused her to realize that there was no going back to or maintaining any aspect of her previous life.

The author continues her story by chronicling her life after conversion. After committing to marriage with a member from her church, the author learned the importance of placing her faith in Christ in the midst of a trial when her fiancé broke off the engagement. Shortly after, she took leave from her position at Syracuse University to move to Pennsylvania where she studied and taught at Geneva College (the Presbyterian Reformed denominational college). There she had opportunity to give her testimony at a chapel speech. Her speech served as a springboard for opportunities to work closely with students.

While at Geneva College, the author continued to correspond with friends and colleagues from Syracuse. She faced many difficult questions about why she joined the Reformed Presbyterian churches. To give guidance, a seminary student at the college directed her to two books that explained how believing in *sola scriptura* produces the regulative principle of worship and calls for exclusive psalmody in worship. These resources helped ground her in the Reformed faith.

The seminary student (Kent Butterfield) who offered assistance eventually became Rosario's husband in May 2001, the day after he graduated from seminary. During the first several years of their marriage, the couple remained in Pennsylvania, where Kent did a pastoral internship. During this time, the couple developed their philosophy of hospitality and mercy ministry. After a year, they moved to Maryland to begin the work of church planting, which began mostly with college students. This involved constant

ministry to the students' physical and spiritual needs.

The author's life of service changed drastically when they were able to adopt children. In total, they successfully adopted four children. In addition, they faced one disrupted adoption, an event that caused much sorrow in the family's life. The author recounts the story of each adoption and the impact on her life of having children. She now spends her days homeschooling them. The author describes the many the joys she has in serving her family and instructing her children. Her family now lives in North Carolina, where her husband is pastor of a Reformed Presbyterian church.

While *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* is a memoir that chronicles the work of God in an individual's life, the author makes constant effort to make sure her testimony is not simply a "how-shocking-was-my-sin-before-I-met-the-Lord story" by faithfully describing the believer's daily struggle against sin.

This book is extremely thought provoking, especially with regard to two aspects of the Christian life: our view of homosexuality and personal evangelism. The author of this book is a living testimony of God's grace to sinners. Just as Christ called Saul on the road to Damascus and the malefactor on the cross to believe in him, so too he gives faith to those entrenched in the most heinous sins. Do we sometimes view homosexuals, especially in the way we talk, as having committed an unforgivable sin? Have any of us tried to share the good news of the gospel with a gay or lesbian individual? And what about our personal evangelism? Would we ever invite a homosexual into our home with the purpose of showing him or her the peace and comfort we have as believers?

Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert provides a powerful testimony of God's irresistible grace and his power to save sinners. The book is well written and provides the reader with a tremendous amount of food for thought. I highly recommend this book and I encourage you to read it slowly, taking time to meditate on many different points that the author addresses. Certainly this will make a great book for any discussion groups. This book provides a great opportunity to think deeply about certain aspects of the Christian faith as well as the sovereignty of God in salvation of his people.

Matt is a member of the Beacon Lights staff and attends Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.

Kuyper's Common Grace 'Christianizing of Culture' —Reformed Calling or Ecclesiastical Suicide?

Sponsored by Southwest Protestant Reformed Church Evangelism

A public lecture, "Kuyper's Common Grace 'Christianizing of Culture'—Reformed Calling or Ecclesiastical Suicide?" will be given at Sunshine Christian Reformed Church on the East Beltline in Grand Rapids, MI on September 26, 2014.

The speaker will be David J. Engelsma, emeritus professor of theology in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.
More info @ **commongraceandculture.com**

The lecture will examine the present project of "Christianizing" the culture by a common grace of God in light of Scripture, the Christian creeds, and the history of Kuyper's common grace project in his own Netherlands.

The occasion of the lecture indicates the interest it ought to have for all Reformed Christians and for members of the Roman Catholic Church. The topic itself—the relation of the Christian to the increasingly corrupt way of life in the United States, not excluding Western Michigan—ought to be of vital concern to every man, woman, and child who confess themselves disciples of Jesus Christ in a wicked world.

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

The Generous Father (2)

Abby yanked the weed out of the garden, nearly taking the baby cornstalk along with it. She glared over at her brother Matt. He and Dad were weeding the other side of the garden as if nothing was wrong.

She couldn't believe it. Matt had wasted his whole month's allowance, but he wasn't getting punished for it. She would never do anything like that. She always saved her money for the collection plate at church and put more than Matt ever did into the bank. She had spent weeks helping her dad in the garden like a good girl when Matt was off having fun. What did she get for being so good? Nothing!

She threw the weed onto the ground and stomped away. She was sick of this. She might as well not help at all. When she was away from the garden, she plopped onto the grass underneath a tree and crossed her arms. Let Dad and Matt weed the garden. They didn't want her anyway.

A moment later, her dad eased to the ground beside her. "What's wrong, Abby?"

Abby hugged her knees and turned her back to her dad. "You didn't punish Matt."

"His guilt and my disappointment was punishment enough. He learned his lesson," her dad said. "And, it isn't your business to see that he is punished. That is between me and him."

"But you'd punish me if I did something like that." Abby crossed her arms tighter as if she could strangle her anger with her arms. "It's not fair. Why do I have to work so much harder than he does?"

Her dad shifted so that he was now kneeling in front of her. "You have always been more responsible, so I expect more out of you. That doesn't mean I love you any less. You are my daughter. My love does not have to be earned by working hard. You already have it." Her dad leaned forward and hugged her. "I want you to work hard because you love me, not because you feel you need to earn my love."

Abby nodded and hugged her dad back.

Questions to think about:

1. Read Luke 15:11-32 by yourself or with your parents. How was Abby like the older brother in the story? Are you ever like Abby?
2. Both the older brother and Abby had to be reminded that their fathers' love was freely given, not earned through hard work. How does this remind us of how God loves us?

Fill in the blanks in the below verses:

Psalm 103:13. "Like a _____ pitieth his _____, so the _____ pitieth them that _____ him."

Ephesians 2:8–9."For by _____ are ye saved through _____; and that not of yourselves: it is the _____ of God. Not of _____, lest any _____ should _____."

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

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Church News

Melinda Bleyenberg

BAPTISMS

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

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

Kyle John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron & Bobbi Regnerus—Crete, IL
Savannah Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brian & Amber Lenting—Crete, IL
Margaret Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Jill Rus—Faith, MI
Chase David Alan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jared & Susan Dekker—Georgetown, MI
Lucy Louise, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dave & Gina Van Den Top—Grace, MI
Cody John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Derek & Lydia Kuiper—Grandville, MI
Anna Elisabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. James & Meri De Zwarte—Holland, MI
Dakota Wayne, son of Mr. & Mrs. Wayne & Brenda Bleyenberg—Hope, MI
Oliver Seth, son of Mr. & Mrs. Andrew & Maria Wierenga—Immanuel, Lacombe,CAN
Bradley Grant, son of Mr. & Mrs. Darren & Karyn Solanyk—Loveland, CO
Caleb Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Todd & Vonda Kaptein—Providence, MI
Lacey Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Keith & Melissa Gritters—Providence, MI
Joshua Lee, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ed & Jess VanDyke—Randolph, WI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

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

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

Joel Langerak—Hope, MI
Matthew Streyle—Hope, MI
Bruce Feenstra—Redlands, CA
Thys Feenstra—Redlands, CA
Carisa Meelker—Redlands, CA
Kalysta DeKraker—Southwest, MI
Jared Pastoor—Southwest, MI

MARRIAGES

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

Mr. Robert Birkett and Miss Katie Oostra—Crete, IL
Mr. Derek Bleyenberg and Miss Lynette Kleyn—Grace, MI
Mr. Tyler Kamps and Miss Bethany Walcott—Grace, MI
Mr. Chad Looyenga and Miss Ashley Johnson—Grandville, MI
Mr. & Mrs. Jordan DeBoer—Hull, IA
Mr. Kevin Warner and Miss Danielle Burgers—Hull, IA
Mr. Joshua Mulder and Miss Megan Zylstra—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Mr. Benjamin Laning and Miss Rebecca Feenstra—Loveland, CO
Mr. Richard Van Den Top and Miss Joanna DeJong—Peace, IL
Mr. Grant Feenstra and Miss Kyra Zolan—Redlands, CA