

BEACON LIGHTS

BY PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUTH

"As we struggle against the ever present flesh, we are thankful for the constant reminding, admonition and the encouragement of God's law. We love to hear it as we gather in that oasis of congregational worship to gather strength and to be encouraged in the battle of faith for the week that lies ahead."

An Introduction to the Ten Commandments
by Rev. M. Joostens

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EDITOR'S NOTES

APRIL 1992

by David Harbach

Look for a new editor-in-chief, D.V., within the next two months. A couple of people are considering this important work. I hope to be able to introduce your new editor-in-chief in the next issue.

In case you missed it in the last issue, you will have to wait until the May issue to know who won in each level of the writing contest. The winners will be notified in April. Look for the winning articles in future issues.

Does the following statement shock you? ". . . Abraham could borrow his idea of immortality from the heathen and that Israel could borrow its idea of the resurrection and eternal life from the pagans because God had preserved these ideas in heathen peoples by common grace." Who would even suggest such a thought. Read Prof. Hanko's excellent series on the Janssen Controversy. "Chapter V - The Relation Between Common Grace and Janssen's Views" (3). Seventy years later Janssen's teachings are still being taught.

Letter #17 by Mrs. Brands studies Ecclesiastes 4:13-16. "Popularity and High Office." How many times have you seen a person rise to popularity for a few years only to be forgotten in future years? Mrs. Brands points out that our goal is not popularity but humility before God, not to please men or get their approval but to

know the approval of our Father in heaven.

"Who Am I?" a poem by Angie Schipper is very appropriate for this time of year when God's people in a special way remember the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you, Angie, for your thoughtful poem.

The unfinished series started about four years ago on the ten commandments will begin again with this issue. In this issue we will reprint Rev. M. Joostens' introduction to this series, along with the first commandment written by Rev. B. Woudenberg. I wish to thank those writers who provided their articles for this series a couple of years ago. You have been very patient with me and I apologize for the delay in printing your articles.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Beacon Lights Staff and the Federation Board of Protestant Reformed Young People Societies expresses their deepest Christian sympathy to our typesetter, Jim Van Overloop and his family in the sudden death of his wife and their mother, Linda. May they continue to experience the Lord's sustaining grace and the comfort of His Word in Psalm 135:5, 6 "I know that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places."

My Father! what am I, that all
Thy mercies sweet like sunlight fall
So constant o'er my way?
That Thy great love should shelter me,
And guide my steps so tenderly
Through every changing day?

Standard Bearer
November 15, 1936

To Lose The Battle and To Win The War

THE JANSSEN CASE

Chapter V - The Relation Between Common Grace and Janssen's Views (3)

by Prof. Herman Hanko

(In the last article we were talking about the relation between common grace and general revelation as Janssen held to this position. He taught that God's general revelation was an evidence of common grace, and that by general revelation the heathen were able to know many things about the truth of God, about right and wrong, and about God Himself — although all such knowledge was not saving knowledge. Janssen made this very specific as he applied all this to Scripture. And to this we turn in this article.)

First of all, Janssen taught that elements of the religion which were found among the patriarchs and Israel came from heathen and pagan sources. His argument was that the fruit of God's gracious revelation to all men was that certain elements of the truth were also revealed to the wicked, that these elements of the truth were preserved among them, and that they were incorporated into the religion of those who were the objects of God's special grace and special revelation, because of the close contact between the two.

Hence, we can acquire a better understanding of what Scripture tells us by a close study of pagan civilization, belief and culture.

Some specific examples of this to which Janssen referred shed light on what he meant.

He took the position that Abraham could borrow his idea of immortality from the heathen and that Israel could borrow its idea of the resurrection and eternal life from the pagans because God had preserved these ideas in heathen peoples by common grace. This is not to

say that these ideas were always fully correct, for Abraham and Israel both reflected the imperfections of these ideas and showed how completely they had borrowed them from the heathen. In other words, the Old Testament ideas of immortality, the resurrection from the dead, and eternal life are imperfect. They are merely the expression of what Abraham and his generations thought about these matters. And what they thought about them, they had borrowed from the surrounding heathen.

Janssen denied that these ideas came through divine revelation to Abraham and the Old Testament saints. He denied that this revelation came from God as special revelation, with the result that the Scriptures are the record of God's revelation in Christ — also concerning immortality, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Israel's views were obtained in large measure from the heathen.

But this same basic idea comes up in other connections. Janssen interpreted the whole life of Samuel and Saul in this same context. He argued this way about it all. The one great mission of Samuel was to purge the religion of Israel from heathen elements which remained in Israel's religion and life. Here, said Janssen, is the proof that Israel depended upon the heathen for their views. Much of what Israel borrowed was good, but some was not. There were elements in what was borrowed which were too pagan. And so Samuel set about to purge the nation from what was too heathen. He had hoped that Saul would cooperate in this endeavor, but Saul proved to be a bitter disappointment.

So the argument is clear. Although there were some elements in the religion of Israel that had to be purged from the nation, much was good. This good was borrowed from the heathen. Thus good was to be found in the heathen. And this good was because of common grace.

When Janssen discussed Samson's history, he argued in much the same manner. He argued that it was possible to make a comparison between Samson and the mythical figure of Achilles. Perhaps a quote from Janssen's own pen will give some of the flavor of how he argued.

Indeed, if we pay attention a moment to the history of the world, that is to say, to the broad terrain where God works with His common grace, then we discover that the time in which God raised up judges was a period in history in which heroes appeared. In Greece, Asia and in other lands we see heroes appear. This phenomenon in the history of people must be correctly considered as a confirmation of the historicity of the history of the judges in the area of particular revelation. With respect to Greece and Asia this history is preserved for us in no other way than in the form of poetry, but later discoveries have indicated that we have to do with historical reality. There were heroes in those days. In the study of the heroes in Israel, raised up by God, we may with good reason pay attention to the heroes of other people. But the analogy between Israel and the heathen, between the judges and the heroes of other people, goes father. Bavinck, as we said, says, "There is nothing in Israel, which cannot be found to be analogous with other people." In this way we have pointed out other details of comparison between Samson and, e.g., the heroes of Greece. The four professors and the four preachers, (those who opposed Janssen, H.H.) however, who deny and misunderstand the doctrine of common grace are, as is to be expected, fiercely opposed to the analogy which we made between Samson and the Greek heroes. This idea is, on their dualistic basis, profane, naturalistic, and whatever else.

That leads them to the notion that we do not consider Samson to be an historical person. One sees that a deep chasm yawns between the four professors and four preachers, and our view, the Reformed position. In the nature of the case, a clash cannot be avoided. Their dualistic viewpoint is principally different from ours. It always leads again to strife between them and us. A reconciliation is not possible.

From the notes which Janssen used in class, it is evident that what he meant with all this was that Israel had to have heroes just as the Greeks had heroes. He probably did not deny that Samson was a real historical figure, but the stories that are in Scripture about Samson were really invented or at least exaggerated so that the miraculous element was gone and the stories were only invented so that Israel could have its own heroes.

The same was true of David's desire to bring the ark to Jerusalem and build a temple for God. Janssen was sure that these ideas came from heathen religions and made David a progressive and forward-looking king. Nathan, however, was more conservative, probably due to the fact that he was an instrument of special revelation. And so, David's impulses had to be restrained by the prophet. But David's ideas came from heathen religion in which good elements were to be found because of common grace.

Other elements in Scripture which came from the heathen are mentioned. Janssen suggested that the names of the patriarchs could very well have come from heathen sources; that the body of Mosaic legislation had its roots in laws found in old Mesopotamian civilizations; that the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes and Proverbs also contained many evidences of the influence of heathen thought in which truth was preserved by common grace.

It is striking that what Janssen taught over 70 years ago because of his views on common grace are exactly what is being taught today in the church which officially adopted common grace as church dogma.

Dangers inducing us to sin are not all found outside ourselves; they are also inside; and sometimes the enemies within are stronger and more furious than those without.

The Behavior of Belief, Part III, page 218

WHO AM I?

by **Angie Schipper**

I am the person that came to this world
I came to this world to bring cheer,
To bring you salvation and to save you from fear.

I am the Father's Son,
Come down from the world above,
To die on wood to save you.

I preached to the world
Of salvation, the Lord, and of me,
And you listen to me.

My mother a virgin, with a sign from an angel
Gave birth to me the Son of man and of God.
Her husband named Joseph understood not but,
with faith he came to realize that I was the
miracle of God.

I walked among men and traveled with sinners
All to find out that I would die for my own.
Sinners were they and they did not believe.

I performed many miracles from water to wine,
From feeding five thousand with fish and bread,
From healing the sick and restoring sight to the blind.

By now you must realize that I am Christ, the Son of God and of man.
Born to save sinners,
And to be the Friend to you.

ECCLESIASTES 4:13-16

LETTER #17

POPULARITY AND HIGH OFFICE

by Mrs. H. Brands

Usually, it is not necessary to retranslate a passage of Scripture to understand it. The Word of God is clear and understandable for the average Christian who will but take the time to study it and who approaches the study by faith in prayer.

Some passages, however, do demand study of the original languages to be understood. There can be words or phrases which are difficult to translate, that allow several translations, and that demand comparison of the various original manuscripts, as well as the early translations, to discern the best translation and the true meaning of the text.

The four verses we study today, ECCLESIASTES 4.13-16, are an example of such difficult translation. The commentary which this time seems best to me and which gives the translation I'm using is by H. Leupold. (I don't always agree with Leupold; in fact, I disagree on some major points like authorship and setting... but he is valuable enough that I always read him!) So, for today's study, I will be partially using Leupold's alternate translation as we study the passage.

Remember that this is the fourth and last illustration of the futility of laboring to please people. This illustration shows the futility of seeking meaning in labor (or life) through attaining high office and popularity.

One more thing before we really get into it. Notice that Solomon is again observing the cyclical nature of things. This time the cycle is that of popularity and loss of popularity. One person rises to popularity and power; his popularity wanes and someone else takes his place in popularity and power; and then this person has the same thing happen to him. This pattern happens

over and over in history, especially when power and popularity go "to a person's head" so that he begins to think he is really somebody.

Let's look now at these four verses one by one.

(4:13) "Better is a poor and a wise youth than an old and foolish king who will no more be admonished."

Notice immediately that the contrast is not between any poor youth versus any old king. Rather, the contrast is between a wise youth who happens also to be poor and an old king who has also become foolish.

The wisdom and foolishness spoken of here are not the spiritual wisdom and foolishness of which we usually think. Rather, this illustration is still "under the sun" apart from God and so this illustration is of earthly wisdom versus earthly foolishness. Earthly wisdom is the ability to know what one wants on earth and then to go about getting it. Earthly foolishness is any conduct or speech which will make one lose the things one seeks on this earth.

The king illustrated here was possibly also once wise in earthly wisdom. He, too, had been popular and had become king. But his kingship had gone to his head and made him proud so that now he had lost the good qualities he once had. He would "no more" be admonished, that is, he would no more take advice from other people. As a result, he made mistake after mistake, too proud to correct his errors. He had lost the respect of the people as well as the ability to function well in his office.

(4:14) "For out of prison the youth cometh to

reign, even though he was born poor in the kingdom of the other man.”

Various attempts have been made to identify this poor man in the story. Is it Joseph? Is it Jeroboam? Myself, I can see both of these people fitting the illustration but feel that the illustration is actually general, not particular. This sort of thing happens often, Solomon is saying, although it may be rare that the youth who rises to power actually comes out of prison and then to power.

But the idea is clear. Within the kingdom of the once-popular but now foolish king, there is a very poor youth. Not only is he poor but even in prison, most likely due to adverse circumstances, perhaps his very poverty putting him there or perhaps circumstances which he could not control. But this youth has earthly wisdom and is able to think things out, to speak well, to gain friends and to take advantage of every opportunity. Due to his earthly abilities, he gains in popularity until he actually manages to usurp the throne of the old and foolish king.

(4:15) “I considered all the living which walk under the sun, that they were with the second youth that arose in the old king’s stead.”

The old king had figured his position was secure because he had once been popular with scores of friends. But Solomon now observes how fickle people are, easily changing their allegiance from one person to another. The old king had not one friend left! Apart from Godliness, “all the living” quickly change alliance from someone who is unpopular at the moment to someone else who is popular, if it is to their advantage to do this. People are fickle!

As Christians, we must be reminded that there is a two-fold principle of Godliness here. First, we are called to be in subjection to whichever authority God places over us (the fourth commandment). However unpopular the authority may be, it is always there not by chance but by God’s Providence, and He calls us to submission (cf. Romans 13). Second, God nonetheless uses the sinful rebellion of men to

change this authority when He so chooses. Though we may not join in the rebellion which overthrows the authority, yet we must once again submit to the new authority.

(4:16) “There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit.”

The thing that is so vexing in this illustration, says Solomon, is the realization that this rise and wane in popularity has been repeated so often in history and that it is so final. Person after person has had this happen to him. Further, once the popularity is gone, every person finds no one who speaks well of him and who will tell of his former greatness. All the years of his glory are forgotten once his ignominy comes.

In response, once again we see that our calling is not to labor at all for this earth. We do not labor for people and prestige but for God and eternity. Everything we say and do must be said and done in the reverence of God. While we must love people and seek their welfare, our goal is not their approval (which may be gone tomorrow) but the approval of our Father which is in heaven.

Questions:

1. How does this example fit into ECCLESIASTES as a whole?
2. Compare earthly wisdom and earthly foolishness.
 3. a. In your own words, describe the old king.
 - b. Describe the youth.
4. How does verse 15 show the vanity of popularity?
5. How should we respond to this story? What lessons are there in it for us?

Lives are many chapters.
After one is written
it cannot be revised,
but we can write a
new chapter with each new day.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

by Rev. M. Joostens

The Law of God has fallen into disrepute. Not only is there no appreciation for the moral law in the world but, also in the church, there is more and more a de-emphasis of the Decalogue. Often a few words of summary are sufficient and the details of the Law of God are given no attention. In many circles the Law of God is no longer "strictly preached" as God would have it!

There has always been opposition to the Law of God. This need not surprise us. The "flesh" militates against the spirit and would like nothing better than a complete abolition of the Law. By nature we do not cherish gazing into the mirror of the Law of God! We hate to have our sinful nature called to our attention. We dislike the reading and preaching of the law stepping on our toes. There is sometimes, even, a tendency to minimize the law of God in the very pious way of antinomianism. We say to ourselves, "we are justified in the blood of Christ. He has fulfilled the law for us. We need not bother ourselves any longer with the commandments of God or at least we should not be so worried about keeping them!" All this is very wrong. It is a reprehensible attitude over against the Giver of the Law. The Law of God is to be taken very seriously. It is a matter of our daily devotion. It is the controlling principle of a sanctified life.

A proper understanding of the Law of God illustrates this. Often the objection is heard. "But the Law belongs to the old dispensation. It was for Israel! We live in the liberty of our Lord Who fulfilled the Law!" True enough. But does that cancel out the Law of God? Does that mean that it is of no use to us? Must we discard it? Definitely not! Most emphatically our Lord taught us differently. He is the fulfillment of the whole of the old dispensation. He is the end of the types and shadows for they all pointed in one way or another to Him. So Israel was placed under the "schoolmaster" of the law. It led them

to Christ! He is the end of the law as well. He has fulfilled it. This simply means that we are justified in Him. As Paul tells us in Romans 8, ". . . For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh (i.e. we in our flesh could never keep it), God sending His Son. . . condemned in the flesh:" But Christ makes it plain to us, that though He made full the demand of the law for us, it is not for us abolished! He said, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." We stand in that liberty of the fulfilled law.

But that is not license! This does not mean that we may willingly disregard the Law of God. Not at all. It has simply placed the law out of the camp of bondage into the camp of thankfulness. That is why you find a discussion and exposition of the Law of God in the 3rd part of the Heidelberg Catechism. Being justified in Jesus Christ, we have been raised unto spiritual life! We now desire to live unto God! Our only concern in life is His glory. And, the standard of such a sanctified living is the Law of God! It is the only rule of faith and life. The Law of God is the rule for the new man in Christ who desires to love God with all his heart, mind, soul and strength.

But you say, "That is a positive desire: who needs the thou shalt not's?" We do! For that new beginning of the resurrection life, which we have in Christ, is but a small beginning. It is a principle beginning. It is a principle beginning which must work itself out in the body of this flesh. And the flesh strives against the spirit. Although we are dead to sin, sin is not dead in us. As we struggle against the ever present flesh, we are thankful for the constant reminding, admonition and the encouragement of God's Law. We love to hear it as we gather in that oasis of congregational worship to gather strength and to be encouraged in the battle of faith for the week that lies ahead. The words of Psalter 322 express it well:

“How shall the young direct their way?
What light shall be their perfect guide?
Thy Word, O Lord, will safely lead,
If in its wisdom they confide.

Upon thy precepts and thy ways
My heart will meditate with awe;
Thy word shall be my chief delight,
And I will not forget thy Law.”

The Ten Commandments

NO OTHER GODS

by Rev. B. Woudenberg

John Calvin once described the inner motivations of people in this way, “The poor yield to the rich, the common people to the nobles, the servants to the masters, the ignorant to the scholars; but there is nobody who does not imagine that he is really better than the others. Everyone flatters himself and carries a kingdom in his bosom.” It is one of the most perceptive insights into the workings of the human heart to be found anywhere; and each of us can know how true it is by simple examining his own inner life. Honesty can only compel us to admit that we all stand guilty before the first commandment of God’s law. “Thou shalt have no other gods before thee.”

This commandment is first because it’s most basic. Once one has turned himself from the true God to another, the rest of the law is effectively gone. And, on the other hand, any time one breaks any of the other commandments he is rejecting this commandment as well. The first commandment is fundamental and cannot be ignored.

It began, of course, with Satan. He came to Adam and Eve in the garden and said, in effect, there was no reason why they should have to acknowledge God as their God. They could easily ignore him; they could be their own god; nothing bad would result. In fact the implication was clearly there that it was actually arrogant and presumptuous for God to expect them to listen to him, or to suggest that any part of the creation, even the fruit of one lone tree, could rightfully be withheld from them. That was Satan’s thought. He had devised it while among the

angels; and since that time history has re-echoed it again and again.

Take the example of Pharaoh. Here was a man who had benefited immensely from Israel’s service, a people whose strength and faithfulness had been given to them by their God. Because of it, his nation had become the greatest and most prosperous in all the world. And yet, when he was reminded that Israel belonged first to this God, and they must be allowed freedom to worship Him as He wished (Ex. 4:22, 23), Pharaoh was incensed. He was Pharaoh and he didn’t have to listen to anyone else. With fury he answered Moses, Ex. 5:2, “I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.”

And it wasn’t greatly different with King Saul. He was given by God’s appointment a position to which he had no claim and no reason to expect. At first, to be sure, he seemed humbled and compliant (I Sam. 11); but once it came out that he was required to do what God desired (I Sam. 15), he set himself in resistance until his mind broke down in maddened distraction (I Sam. 18:10). He would not accept the fact that God is the only God.

And so it is with our world today; it will not recognize the God by which it was made. To be sure, Christians may worship if they wish; but public recognition of God becomes increasingly rare, and with it morality all but disappears. And the consequences are there. The same self-destructive patterns which drove Pharaoh into the depth of the sea and Saul into wild hatred and psychotic distractions are working their way

through the world in which we now live.

And you, Christian young people, are confronted with it.

You live in this world; and it beckons you to come along on this reeling course of self-infatuation which refuses to recognize the true God. There is only one thing sacred in our day; everyone must be left free to be his own god, to do alone what he or she wants. With this no one may be allowed to interfere.

And the fact is that you can understand this quite well. It comes easily to your way of thinking, and you like it. There is something in the nature of each of us which feels very comfortable with the suggestion that we should each be left to do whatever we choose; and the world has devised countless ways of encouraging that. After all, what are the pleasures of this world but just so many ways of making you feel good about yourself, of making you feel that somehow you are bigger and more powerful than you really are. Isn't it this that lies at the root of the rush of pleasure which comes from beating someone else at sport? Isn't it the sublimation of being able to

identify with the wild living of some fictitious character living another life than our own that gives the pleasure to fiction in books and film? What else is it that gives that momentary flush of satisfaction to intoxication through drink or drugs? To be, if only for a moment, like a god, to feel, no matter how unreal, that one can do whatever he wants; that is the pleasure of sin. To have some other god, that's what it's all about.

But "Thou shalt not." There is another way, and it's the only way that's right. Life and living do not consist of doing what we want; life and living are found in having true fellowship with others. And this is only possible when one has true fellowship with God. But it means that we don't live to do what we want, but that we live to respond to others, and above all that we respond to what is right and true. Life is real when we know that we are not our own (Ps. 100:3), and so we turn from ourselves to live in response to God Who made us. That is what the first commandment is all about.

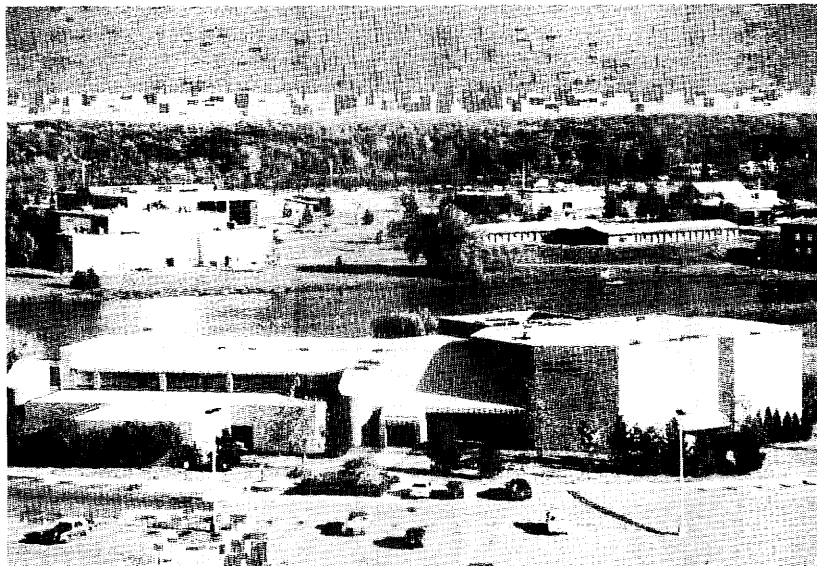
Our worship should be characterized by **REVERENCE**.

Worship is coming to God, bowing down before Him, praising and adoring Him, the King of creation, the Sovereign of the universe. Psalm 89:7 says it well: "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." If the angels, without sin, cover their faces in the presence of God and cry out, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory" how can we worshippers, who remain sinners our entire life, do anything less than come into His courts with reverential awe? Again, departure from Psalm-singing has detracted from our reverence of God. The Psalms bring us into that frame of mind: God is great, and greatly to be praised, His greatness is unsearchable.

Understanding this principle, the Reformed believer will not come to worship God dressed casually, but in his best. Understanding this, the Reformed pastor will not promote a casualness and carelessness in worship. Understanding this, the Reformed believer will pray for grace to come into God's presence with a reverent fear. Understanding this, the Reformed organist or pianist will play songs that bring to mind the greatness and glory of God. They are going to meet their King!

Public Worship and The Reformed Faith
Rev. Barry Gritters

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