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Lights

*“But ye are a chosen generation,
a royal priesthood, an holy nation,
a peculiar people; that ye should
shew forth the praises of him who
hath called you out of darkness
into his marvellous light.”*

1 Peter 2:9

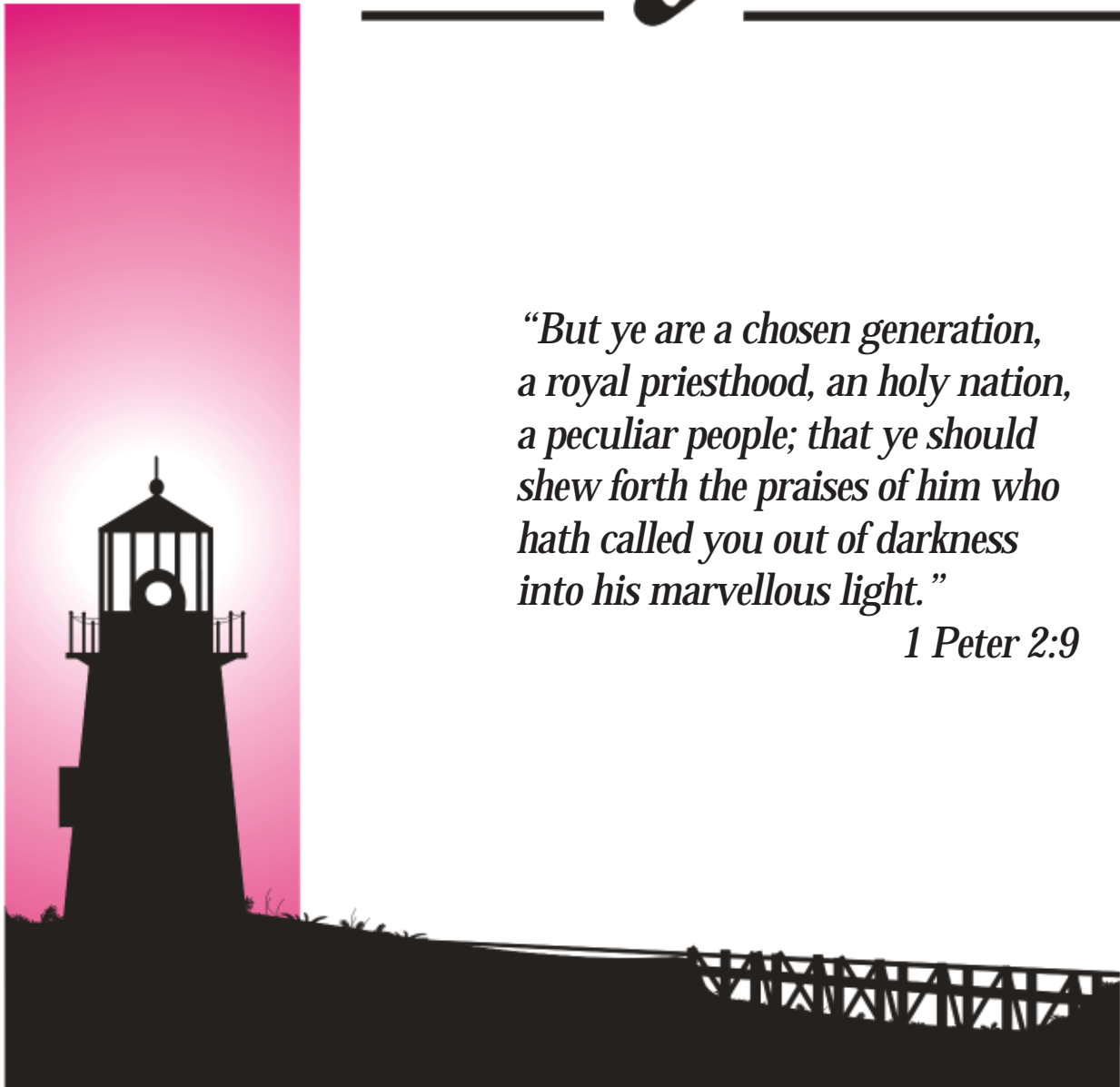


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Mega-churches: A Manifestation of the Spirit of the Age (4)



by Aaron J. Cleveland

In our last article we noticed how many mega-churches tend to be structured and operated more like businesses than churches. We also observed the casual attitude that these churches have towards membership. We ended with a look at the average mega-church pastor who has his “fingers on the pulse of the culture.”

In this article we will conclude our look at mega-churches by examining their “vision” and “purpose” and how this relates to their outreach and evangelism. One can get a good grasp of the “mission” of mega-churches in general by looking at a sample of their websites. Nearly all mega-church websites contain a “mission statement” or some kind of statement expressing a “vision” or “purpose.” When one takes the time to examine a number of websites, one is struck by the similarities among the sites and how little they differ from church to church. This is also true with the mission statements of various mega-churches. Many of them are merely variations on one general theme.

Let us take a look at a few mission and vision statements taken from various mega-church websites. The website of a South Barrington, Illinois church and trend leader among mega-churches, states that: “The mission of Willow Creek Community Church is to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.”¹ A few paragraphs later, we read that they believe the role of the church “is to glorify God and serve those in need.”

The mission of Northwoods Community Church of Peoria, Illinois is “to make fully devoted followers of Christ out of unchurched people in the Peoria, Illinois area.” Next, we read that their vision is “to build a community of contagious Christ-followers out of unchurched people in the Peoria area by attracting them to the life of Christ, introducing them to Christ, and maturing them in Christ.”² The mission of Kensington Community Church of Troy, Michigan is “To turn people who think God is irrelevant into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ through high-impact churches.”³

A central theme found in many of the mission statements is a desire on the part of mega-churches to “impact” and “make a difference” in their surrounding communities and even the world. This theme can be found in the vision statement of Point of Grace Church of Des Moines, Iowa. It reads:

Equipping people to impact their world, by providing an innovative, grace-filled, people-empowered church, located in the western suburbs of Des Moines, focusing on the real needs of people, introducing them to an authentic growing relationship with Jesus Christ in a casual environment of love and acceptance.⁴

Calvary (undenominational) Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan states that their mission “is to equip followers of Jesus to impact their world to the delight of God.”⁵ If a church views its mission as making a difference in the surrounding community then the kind of outreach they conduct will reflect this mission. Mariners Church of Irvine, California makes the connection between their mission and outreach in one paragraph found on their website. Under the heading of “Innovative in our ministry and relevant to our community,” the paragraph reads:

We want to make a difference in our community by being aware of and sensitive to current situations within our neighborhood. In doing so we challenge ourselves to stretch outside our “comfort zones.” Our goal is to be innovative in the ministries of music, teaching, drama, art, and multimedia, as well as other ways that may capture the attention of those in our community who don’t know Christ.”⁶

Under the title of “Citywide Ministry”, New Life Church of Colorado Springs, Colorado declares that:

No city in the United States has been measurably impacted by the success of one church. However, cities can be forcefully impacted by the success of networks of churches. At New Life, one of our main functions is to organize and coordinate with the hundreds of churches in our area. Together, we can strategize and utilize each other’s distinctives to strengthen us all in the goal of reaching and serving more people for Christ.⁷

Perhaps the mega-church which serves as the best example of how mega-churches view themselves and their mission in the world is NorthRidge Church of Plymouth, Michigan. The first two sentences and a few excerpts of their vision states:

Our vision is most clearly understood when pictured as a spiritual shopping mall. The shopping mall seeks to provide availability and easy access to most everything a person needs or wants in an attractive, convenient and desirable setting....

We see NorthRidge as that kind of place, only for the purpose of meeting spiritual needs. It is our desire to provide availability and easy access to ministries designed for every spiritual need and want a person has at every stage of spiritual development, from unbelieving to mature believer. As well, we want to have something for every kind of person God has placed in our surrounding communities....

We see ourselves as a church that, through diversity, innovation, size, total member involvement, flexibility, understanding of present cultural and community needs, love and acceptance, concern for quality and excellence, and commitment to truth, can meet the spiritual needs of people in all of life’s varying circumstances in an exciting, relevant and enjoyable way.⁸

In order for us to properly evaluate the various mission and vision statements of these mega-churches, it is necessary for us to know from God’s Word exactly what the church is, who the members of the church are, and the reason for the existence of the church in the world. Rev. Ronald Hanks, deals with the topic of the church in his book *Doctrine According To Godliness* on pages 219-279. Pages 219 and 220 are very helpful in defining the church and God’s purpose for it in the world.

Rev. Hanks defines the word *church* as follows.

The Greek word translated *church* means “called out.” The name *church* in the highest and best sense refers to those who are saved and to them only. The name reminds us that the true members of the church are those who are “called... out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (I Peter 2:9). It reminds us, too, that their place in the church is of grace. They are not members by their choice or works, but by God’s *calling*.⁹

One sees immediately that this definition of the church does not square with the various mission statements which we have just read. No doubt average unchurched, irreligious mega-church attendees would feel very uncomfortable being told that they were a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that they should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Peter 2:9). They would feel much more comfortable being told that they were gathered together for the purpose of improving themselves so that they could go out and make a difference in the world. Mega-churches do their best to blur the distinction between the church and the world, between those “called out” and those not. Their very appeal is that they are as close to the world as possible, yet still calling themselves the church.

We must notice also how mega-churches put emphasis upon their own innovation and techniques in “reaching” and “equipping” people “for” Christ. There is much talk about “love and acceptance,” “flexibility,” “innovation,” and “understanding.” Many mega-churches are careful to advertise their “ministries” of music, drama, teaching, and multimedia. Bringing people into the church is seen as nothing more than a human endeavor. It is up to the church to become as creative as possible to draw people through

the doors. God is not extolled as the One who powerfully calls His people out of darkness and into the light of His truth through the preaching of the Word.

Also missing in the various mega-church mission statements is the reality of the spiritual separation that exists between the members of the church and the world with all its wickedness. Rev. Hanko points this out as he continues to define what it means to be “called out.” He writes:

That members of the church are called *out* refers not only to their salvation from sin (they are called *out of darkness*), but also to their spiritual separation from the world and its wickedness (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Implied in the name *church*, therefore, is the holiness and obedience of the church’s members. A church whose members are not holy does not deserve the name *church*.¹⁰

Churches which incorporate as much of popular culture into their worship as possible, in order to appeal to those in the community around them, are not living out this spiritual separation. Churches which reject sound doctrine, which overlook sin in the lives of their members, and which have a “come as you are” attitude about attendance, are guilty of violating the command of 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. The “impact” of all of this behavior is that the church becomes more and more like the world. Instead of the church “making a difference” (the vision of many mega-churches) in the world, the world floods into the church, drowning the witness of the church and its members.

That the church and its members live in spiritual separation from the world and in dedication to the service of God is very important. Writes Rev. Hanko,

Holiness is essential to the very existence of the church. Unto holiness the members are called, chosen (Eph. 1:4), and redeemed (Col. 1:21, 22). Church holiness is important because it has to do with God’s purpose in the church. The reason for the church’s existence is the glory of God (Eph. 1:6, 12). It is in the holiness of the church and its members that this purpose is reached. An unholy church, a church whose *members* are not holy, cannot and does not glorify God. In the holiness of the church, most of all, God’s glory shines out.¹¹

Notice how the glorifying of God is missing from nearly all of the mega-church mission, purpose, and vision statements. They see meeting the “needs” of the community and “impacting” the world as their main reason for existence. The typical mega-church resembles more a social service agency existing for the service of man than a church living in holiness for the glory of God.

The typical mega-church resembles more a social service agency existing for the service of man.

Because they see their purpose in this way, their witness in the world is ineffective. Writes Rev. Hanko,

It is to the shame and hurt of the church today that its members do not live as those who are *called out*. If the church itself is not any different from the world in its teaching, in the conduct of its members, and in its practices, its witness will be ineffective. The church’s glory, and the glory of its witness to this lost world, lies in its being called out, separate, and holy—different from the wicked world.¹²

Ultimately, their goal is an earthly kingdom brought about by the efforts of man.

Perhaps mega-churches most clearly manifest the spirit of the age in their endeavors of trying to make this world a better place to live. Ultimately, their goal is an earthly kingdom brought about by the efforts of man. This goal brings them into close contact and cooperation with the world. We see this cooperation between apostatizing churches and the world and the attempt to establish an earthly kingdom as one of the signs of the return of our Lord.

May we be those who watch and are aware of the signs of Christ’s coming, not fooled by the false doctrines and practices which surround us. May we also be careful to remain members of a true church

(or join it, if necessary) where the marks of the true church are found: the preaching of the pure doctrine of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline.

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (I Peter 5:8). ❖

Footnotes

¹ http://www.willowcreek.org/what_we_believe.asp (retrieved 6/11/2005)

² <http://www.nwoods.org/?section=76> (retrieved 6/11/2005)

³ <http://kensingtonchurch.org/aboutus/missionstatement.php> (retrieved 6/11/2005)

⁴ <http://www.pointofgrace.com/about/purpose/index.php> (retrieved 6/11/2005)

⁵ <http://calvarychurch.gospelcom.net/purpose.htm> (retrieved 6/11/2005)

⁶ <http://www.marinerschurch.org/pages/values.html> (retrieved 6/11/2005)

⁷ <http://www.newlifechurch.org/whatwebelieve/index.cfm?FUSEACTION=citywideMInistry> (retrieved 6/11/2005)

⁸ <http://www.northridgechurch.com/About/Vision.asp>

⁹ Ronald Hanko, *Doctrine According To Godliness*, (Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grandville, MI, 2004) p. 219.

¹⁰ Ronald Hanko, p. 219.

¹¹ Ronald Hanko, p. 219

¹² Ronald Hanko, pp. 219, 220.

Story Time

The Farbers?*

by Aryn Kikkert

Beacon Lights *received a number of excellent, creative stories in response to the writing contest we offered. The winners will be published in this and subsequent issues. We would like to thank all those who participated and look forward to having the contest again next year. Teachers, you are invited to consider having your students write for the contest as part of their writing assignments. Keep this in mind as you plan out the coming school year.*

Hi! This is Alice Farber! I haven't written for a while, so I thought I'd let you know what's been happening in my life, since we last talked. Wow, I must have been only about five or six years old then...so many years have passed!

First of all I'm not a Farber any more; I'm a Fisher. I met Ron Fisher in high school and he was (and still is) a nice God fearing man that I liked. So, we got married. God has blessed us with three kids. First came Elizabeth

(we call her Liz). She is five and in kindergarten. Our son Jared is three, and John is one. My older brothers Joe, Terry, and Ben are all married and each have four kids. Beth is a nurse and is engaged to be married. We all love our Saviour and try our best to follow the Lord's teachings, and are thankful how God has blessed us over the years. Mom and Dad love having us all over, and it is very nice to have fun with our family. We live on a small farm with two cows, Liz's chickens, two cats, and a dog.

Yesterday, Liz asked me what a diary was, and it reminded me of what we did when we were kids. We had a notebook, and in it, we wrote the exciting, or important things that happened that day. It was kind of like a family journal. Liz, of course, thought this was a good idea for our family. She wanted me to write about what happened yesterday.

Well, it was after nap time, and the kids were in the toy room playing happily. I was dusting. What a horrible

job! Liz was playing blocks and had just made a big tower, so she called me to come in and see it. Just as I stepped in the room John toppled over. (He is just learning to walk.) It didn't matter that he fell, but the thing he toppled over onto mattered!

"My tower!" Liz cried! She was so angry she went over to John and slapped him! I had been standing "behind the scenes" but got in pretty quick when that happened. "Liz!" I said, "Tell me, why did you do that?" I was surprised; she *never* did that!

"Because he is mean and he wrecked my tower," she wailed! By this time John was done crying, and was having fun throwing the blocks around the room.

"Liz," I said in a stern voice, "Do you think that was the right thing to do?" Then I reminded her of something she did the other day. "When we made cupcakes and you spilt the batter, did you want me to be angry with you and make you clean it up?"

"But that was a ac-accident," she said, trying to say it right.

"But John is little and couldn't help falling down," I said, trying to help her understand.

"You're right," she said, "But what should I do now?"

I thought for a moment and then replied; "Jesus said to forgive people when they do evil to you." I was going to continue, but was stopped short by Liz.

"But what does forgive mean?" Liz asked.

"Forgive means that the person is very sorry, and asks you to forgive them. If you say 'Yes I forgive you,' It means you are not mad any more and you sort of forget the whole thing."

"Okay," said Liz. "But what if he does it over, and over again?"

"Keep forgiving him!" I said "Does God forgive you a lot for the same sin?"

"Yes," said Liz, "but what if I don't?"

"Well," I said, "In Mathew 6:15 Jesus says, 'But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you.'"

"Oh," said Liz.

"Jesus also says in Mathew 18:23," I continued, "when Peter asks how many times to forgive a person 'I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, seventy times seven.'"

Liz replied, "Okay, but why did Jesus say to forgive seventy times seven times?"

"Oh," I said, "When Jesus said that, he did not mean four hundred and ninety times, he meant it as an infinite number."

Again I was stopped by Liz. "But what does in-infinite mean?"

"Whoa!" I said, "You are going tooo fast! Infinite means never ending, sort of like numbers. Numbers never stop they just keep going, understand?"

"Yes." Liz said, "If John does it again and again I have to forgive him."

"And some times it is hard to forgive people so always remember that Christ forgave you!" I was proud of her. But yet came another question.

"Do I have to forgive John? He is so little, he really doesn't understand."

"Well," I said thinking hard, "just because John is so little and does not understand, give him a hug and kiss so he knows everything is all right." Just then I thought to myself, "Good thing he is not older, or he wouldn't let her kiss him!"

Just then I heard Jared say, "Eww, she's kissing him!"

"Good," I said. "Problem fixed!"

Liz was happily playing blocks again. Five minutes later I heard, "Mom, come look at my tower!"

"Okay," I said.

"Crash, Bang, Boom!" I winced expecting to hear a wail. But, to my surprise I heard, "Its okay, John, but don't do it again, oh, *please!*"

I laughed! It's a good thing she learned that lesson, because she will be using it a lot! ❖

**This entry to the writing contest was written as a follow-up story to a book by Gertrude Hoeksema entitled The Farbers. The book was published in 1993 by Heritage Christian School and was promoted in the December, 1995 issue of Beacon Lights. This book is a wonderful collection of 101 short stories about a fictional Christian family and their everyday experiences. Each story brings to life Christian values which we dearly strive to reach our children. Adults as well as children will enjoy this book time and time again.*

The Farbers makes a great gift for your child, grandchild, niece or nephew, and will be a treasured item in your home. We invite you to visit The Reformed Book Outlet, 3505 Kelly, Hudsonville, MI 49426. Write to the address of the bookstore and request a free catalog. Or you can view their catalog on the Internet at <http://www.hudsonvilleprc.org/bookstore.htm>.

Aryn is in the grade 7 and is a member of Wingham Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario, Canada.

Rev. C. Hanko

Chapter 4

Church Life

edited by Karen Van Baren

Editor's Note: As a lad, Rev. Hanko attended the Eastern Avenue CRC. Rev. Johannes Groen was his first pastor. When Rev. Groen left, Rev. Herman Hoeksema became his next pastor. No doubt the reader will smile a bit as he reads this next chapter, as many of the characters and their quirks are recognizable in our modern congregations. Some of the elements of Sunday worship are also recognizable. Yet, there are many differences too that will capture one's interest.

Sunday was a special day. As far as possible, we made all preparations on Saturday. We checked Sunday clothing, peeled potatoes, prepared vegetables and meat, and whatever else had to be done. At ten thirty my father arose from his chair, wound the clocks and, no matter who was there, announced that it was bed time.

Sunday morning we all had an egg. We also generally had fresh baked bread and a slice of raisin bread. At 8 o'clock the church bell rang for every one to adjust his or her clock. There was a time when the three girls that were still home wore tight shoes that came almost to their knees. Because the girls were already strapped into their corsets, they could not bend down to string them. So it was my task to tie the shoes. We each received our collection money along with two peppermints, and Corrie and I started out for church to save seats for our folks.

Our church was a white, wooden structure. It had fourteen steps to the front entrance; there were two side entrances and two back entrances. One evening the church caught fire. Whatever the cause, much of the fire was between the sidings and the inner wall where the firemen could not get at it. It smoldered for quite a while. The result was that the sidings were removed, the exterior was rebuilt with brick and a new front entrance replaced the fourteen front steps.

The services were conducted in the Dutch language. The English language was not introduced without a bitter struggle. Many, including my father, were convinced that if English was introduced into the churches mod-

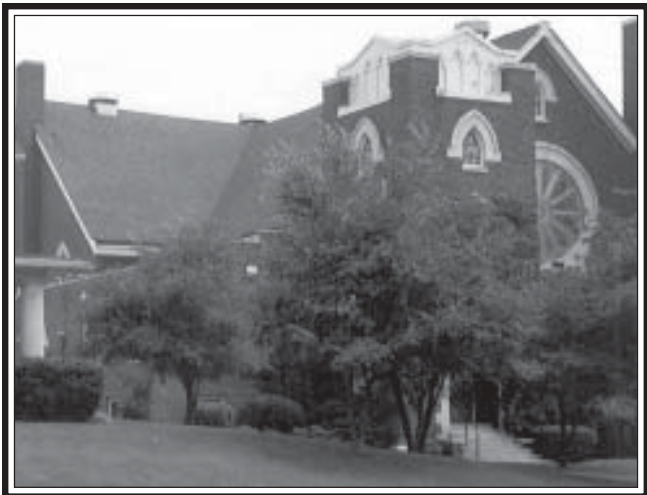
ernism was sure to follow. The members feared this more than usual in the Eastern Ave. Church because our minister, Rev. Groen, was known to lean toward the more modern views. For a number of years after it was introduced, some of the Hollanders refused to attend the English service. The same struggle took place before we started using individual rather than the common cup at communion.

Our minister was Rev. Johannes Groen, who served our church for 18 years. Although I did not understand at the time, he was a Janssen man.¹ Often I heard criticism of Groen's liberal preaching, but really never understood why. Outsiders referred to his church as "Johnnie Green's Opera House."²

He always addressed the congregation as "esteemed audience." When he reached his last point he always said, "And finally, esteemed audience," which sometimes meant that he was almost finished. But that could also very well mean that he would continue for another fifteen minutes. During the last song he put a velvet cap on his head, evidently because he had been sweating.

The first elder always led the visiting minister to the pulpit, and shook hands with the minister to show the congregation that he was officially appointed to preach. This first elder was usually Mr. Bishop, the kerosene peddler who sat in the first row, along the north side of the center aisle. During the service he had the habit of turning the beard under his chin up to his mouth and licking it. On the opposite end of the pew sat our catechism teacher, Mr. Sevensma. He always held his hand on the head of his son to keep him quiet.

Behind the elders sat Mr. Karsies, the baker of Logan Street. Whenever the organ gave out during an electrical storm, which happened quite often, he would step forward and lead the singing. In the meantime, Mr. Hoek from under the south balcony would hasten to the back of the organ to start pumping the bellows, which produced the air for the organ. If only he succeeded in getting there first, which was not always the case, he would remain official organ pumper throughout the service. In



Eastern Avenue CRC.

fact, he would bring a chair up on the pulpit to be all ready for the next act.

Later, Mr. Karsies had throat cancer and had to have an opening put in his throat to breathe. He still wanted to lead the singing when the occasion demanded so he would get up, solemnly place his finger on the opening of his throat and give the pitch.

When the Griffioen family (my future in-laws) began coming to Eastern Avenue Church they would come in the side door by the elders. Usually there was no empty row for the whole family to sit together, so Pa Griffioen would spread them around, but always saw to it that Arie sat by him, because Arie could not sit still.

Under the north gallery sat Mr. De Good, the janitor of the Christian School on Sigsbee Street. He always smoked his old pipe right up to the door of the church, then slid it into the inside pocket of his suit coat and sat down. One time he failed to knock out all the ashes. Shortly after he was seated he began to hit his coat as hard as he could. Then he hurried out. Just what damage was done, we never heard.

In the middle section behind the elders on the opposite side from Mr. Karsies sat Prof. Janssen, whom I mentioned before, and his family. He was deposed in 1922, mainly through the work of Rev. Hoeksema, for denying the infallibility of the Bible and the miracles.³ Behind him sat Rev. J. Vander Mey and his family. At the Classis of 1924 at which Rev. Hoeksema was deposed, he made the statement that almost caused the hair of the delegates to rise from their heads, yet was more truth than fiction. He said that Rev. Hoeksema had a different God than he had.

The deacons sat in the south section of the auditorium. In early years they had a black velvet bag that was extended on a pole and passed along from aisle to aisle. The people could quietly drop their money into the bag. When the pole was extended to its full length the bag was carefully lifted over the heads to the next row. When the collection was finished, the bags were hung alongside the organ room.

We always sat in the front row of the south balcony directly across from the pulpit. This was an ideal spot on communion Sundays. Around the pulpit were lined up five tables, the center one for serving. Usually Rev. Groen had us sing Psalm 25 going from verse to verse since there were usually eleven or twelve turns of partaking.⁴ That is, the elders would take their places about the table first. Then the deacons and others were invited to fill the chairs around the four tables. Even in the second round people were reluctant to come forward to partake of the sacrament—this was considered bold and presumptuous. But by the time the seventh or eighth round was reached there was a rush to come forward so that some had to return to their seats. No one wanted to be first, nor did anyone care to be last.

On baptism Sundays, father and mother would come in with their baby and take their places in the front row of seats, which had been provided with a small stool for the mother to support her feet. Usually the baby cried because it sensed the tenseness of the mother. Then a grandmother or a neighbor lady would get up and take the baby out. She would usually stand in the hallway at the back entrance until the Baptism Form had been read, and then dutifully bring the baby to the parents. It was very common for the mother, or even both parents, to leave as soon as the baptism service was ended.

Before church started, Mother had prepared a big pan of rice for Sunday dinner. This was made with milk, baked in the oven, and came out with a beautiful brown crust over it. In later years, during more prosperous times, we had potatoes, pork roast and green beans.

There was time for a short nap before the two o'clock service, the second of three services. All went to that service until the time when the English service was introduced in the evening. Then the older girls and brother Fred went in the evenings.

On Sundays, we never considered letter writing, games, or playing outside. I well recall that someone had reported that our large wooden telephone that hung on the wall in the kitchen was out of order. So on Sunday afternoon a repairman came into the kitchen and

began to work on the phone. My father came from the living room, took one look and in a loud voice, literally drove him out of the house. This man was so amazed at the yankee-dutch scolding that he received that he quickly packed up and did not return.

Our Catechism teacher was Mr. Sevensma, a hunchback and a cripple. He was very stern, holding us down with terror. We had to address him always with more than one word: for example, we had to say “Ja, Mr. Sevensma,” or, “Neen, Mr. Sevensma.” He could make scathing remarks to those who failed to learn their lesson. He picked in his nose while he was telling the story, and also had his own unique applications of the lesson. For example, Eutychus was an example of what happened if we slept in church.

In the summer we had a very special event, the annual Sunday School picnic. We children all met in the church and marched to Wealthy Street where we boarded waiting streetcars, some of them open cars that took us through downtown to John Ball Park. We received twenty-five cents in tickets that could be spent at the park. Ice cream cones and Cracker Jack were still a nickel. There was also a large wash tub with lemonade. The mothers and some of the fathers came for dinner. After the dinner a minister gave a speech and then the children played games. Streetcars took us home again.

On Christmas afternoon at five o’clock we had our Christmas program. All the speeches and songs were in Dutch, even though the Sunday School lesson was taught in English. After the program we each received an orange and a box of candy.

We sometimes hear people speak of the “good old days,” as if the church then was spiritually much better than at present. That may be true from certain aspects, since sin does develop from year to year in the church as well as in the world, requiring constant need for reformation. But there was much in those days of which one could hardly approve.

There were the neighborhood “toughies.” They did not hesitate to steal, as long as they did not get caught. They sought every opportunity to obtain their beer and have their pleasures. On Sunday they sat in the back row of the balcony, where they either slept, talked or played cards. The consistory appointed a muscular individual to keep order among them, and when necessary to strong arm them out of the church. He had the authority to make arrests, although I do not know of any instance that he did this. There was still a carry over of this practice when we were in First Church.



Johannes Groen's parsonage.

What was strange was the fact that the consistory did nothing about these outlaws. They took the attitude that they were still only baptized members, so that they were hardly subjects of discipline.

We ended our Sunday in the twilight singing Dutch Psalms, with Father as Voorzinger (lead singer). My dad had been in a choir in the Netherlands, so he enjoyed singing. Dad would also read to my mother from the religious paper, “De Standaard,”⁵ or from some religious book. In the winter, the hard coal stove with iced glass windows glowed in the corner of our home. What a wonderful way to end the Sabbath! ❖

Endnotes

¹ Prof. Janssen taught at Calvin Theological Seminary. He favored a higher critical view of Scripture.

² Johnnie Green is the English translation of Johannes Groen.

³ Rev. Hoeksema was appointed by the Theological School committee along with six other ministers to study Prof. Janssen's teachings. The majority of the committee drew up a report condemning these teachings, which report was adopted by the Synod of 1922. The majority report was chiefly the work of Rev. Hoeksema. For more information on the Janssen case, see Prof. Herman Hanko's master's thesis “A Study of the Relation between the Views of Dr. R. Janssen and Common Grace.”

⁴ The bread and wine were not distributed as they are now, but the people came forward in turns to the table to be served.

⁵ “De Standaard” was a Christian newspaper written and published in the Netherlands. It was edited by Dr. Abraham Kuyper.

Karen is a member of Protestant Reformed Church in South Holland, Illinois, and a granddaughter of Rev. C. Hanko.

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Skip Hunter

August 1 Read Romans 7:1-11; Canons of Dordt 3 & 4:5

Here in this article we see that the Ten Commandments are not the way to salvation. However, their work is important. They show to us our sin, and as Scripture states, they lead us to Christ. Our obedience to the law will not give to us salvation. The Canons wish to make it abundantly clear that Christ is the only remedy for sin. Our works, even the works of keeping the law, do not obtain for us salvation. As we live in this world, we must see that nothing that we can perform will give to us eternal life. As we live, let us look unto Christ the author and finisher of our faith. Sing Psalter 42:1, 2, 5, & 6.

August 2 Read Romans 8:1-7; Canons of Dordt 3 & 4:6

Finally we find the source of our salvation! People of God, do you put all of your trust in Christ? Young people, do you live a life of Christ and in Christ? Here in this short article we find the way God ordained to give to those whom He has chosen from all eternity eternal life. Salvation is in Christ through the operation of the Holy Spirit. The good news of the gospel, as it is proclaimed each week, shows to us the way to the Father. He has gathered His church from both the old and new dispensations. Are we thankful? Do we show we are thankful by our lives? Sing Psalter 391.

August 3 Read Acts 1:1-8; Canons of Dordt 3 & 4:7

It is popular in many public events to sing *God Bless America*. This article shows that this cannot or will not ever happen. God does not bless one nation in the new dispensation. God gathers His people from every tribe, tongue, and race. No one nation can claim Him as their God. Those who have been washed by the blood of the Lamb must acknowledge the greatness of their salvation. They must not also try to discover the reason why God saves some and condemns others. Let us ask God's blessing upon us and upon those faithful churches which proclaim the pure Word of the gospel. Upon them and them only does God's blessing rest. Sing Psalter 174.

August 4 Read Ezekiel 36:21-28; Canons of Dordt 3 & 4:8

Here we have the working out of God's plan of salvation. God has called a certain number of people to be saved. Those whom He has called will be saved. Of that there is no doubt. Nothing man can do will change that number. There are two facts which arise out of this truth. First of all we must preach the gospel to the nations believing that the called ones will be gathered. Secondly we must know that not all will ever be saved or have the possibility to be saved. The third point of Calvinism is limited atonement. Here we see that truth. Let us proclaim the gospel knowing that those who are called will come. Sing Psalter 170.

August 5 Read Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23; Canons of Dordt 3 & 4:9

The Scripture reading for today as well as the explaining article indicate to us that God is not at fault when some do not receive His Word. God's way of salvation is all powerful. It will do its work in the hearts of those whom He has prepared. Let us receive that Word with thankfulness, let us live our daily lives out of that Word, and let us praise God from whom all blessings flow. Sing Psalter 239.

August 6 Read I Peter 2:6-12; Canons of Dordt 3 & 4:10

Quickly the fathers want to make sure that we do not become full of pride and claim for ourselves credit for our salvation. This is a natural reaction to the error that they were combating. Men want credit for what they do. Listen to conversations of many people. How many times do the words *I* or *me* appear in that conversation? How about ourselves? Are we any different? We are nothing; God is everything. This must be our attitude and guiding light as we live in this world. Sing Psalter 352.

August 7 Read Psalm 101; Canons of Dordt 3 & 4:11

Here in this article we see the whole of the actions of God in His people. He takes a dead stick and causes it to live. And not only does it live, it brings forth good fruit. As we sit under the preaching of the Word today, let us see that the preaching is the means of grace which brings us to salvation. Let us see that the preaching feeds our hungry souls in

order that we may bring forth those good works. Let us concentrate on that word and know that this is God's blessed way for us. Take time today and every day to meditate on that Word. Let us begin the eternal rest which will be ours in heaven. Sing Psalter 271.

August 8 Read John 3:1-8; Canons of Dordt 3 & 4:12

Today's reading is one that is well-known and often misinterpreted. Jesus was preaching the gospel to both Nicodemus and us. Do we see the true gospel in this text? Or, are we like others who see a God who loves all men? The fathers at Dordt saw regeneration being preached in John 3, do we? Sing Psalter 357.

August 9 Read John 3:9-21; Canons of Dordt 3 & 4:13

The work of the Holy Spirit concerning our salvation is a mystery to God's people. But yet God gives to us the assurance that that work will accomplish its goal to bring His people eternal life. In the Scripture for today Jesus sent Nicodemus to the Scriptures to learn what it says about the way of salvation. He also sends us to the Scriptures to learn about that way. People of God, are you going? Young people, do you use your Bibles daily? Let us go to God's Word and listen to all that He has revealed to us. Let us be satisfied with the knowledge that is revealed there. Sing Psalter 325.

August 10 Read Philippians 2:5-13; Canons of Dordt 3 & 4:14

Once again the fathers come back to the truth that salvation is by grace alone. This truth of the reformation was under attack at Dordt. This truth of the reformation is under attack in the church world today. Because that truth is under attack, the Bible is under attack. As we learned yesterday the Bible holds for us those truths which God has seen fit to impart to us concerning salvation. Today's article contains one of those truths. If we do not believe that faith is a gift from God, we do not believe God's way of salvation. If we do not believe God's way to salvation, we will have no comfort in this life and the life to come. Believe, people of God, and receive rest for your souls. Sing Psalter 358.

August 11 Read I Timothy 2:1-6; Canons of Dordt 3 & 4:15

People of God, what is your conception of God? This is an important question as it relates to the subject of the Canons. If we consider God less powerful than He is, we will expect to have something to do with our salvation. If we by our actions bring God down to our level, we will try to save ourselves. If we by our actions or our words make light of God's sovereignty, we will not give to Him the credit due to our salvation. God is God! Of that there is no doubt. Because He is God, we must place all of our trust in Him for salvation and its benefits. Remember this, people of God,

and you will have no doubt of your salvation. Sing Psalter 266.

August 12 Read Colossians 3:1-7; Canons of Dordt 3 & 4:16

Here we see two truths. First of all we have plunged ourselves into ruin. The Canons remind us of this in order that we do not begin to look at ourselves as creatures of worth by nature. In the world in which we live, this is a common error. Secondly, we must see that God took our corrupt nature and changed it by His power into a nature which is spiritually restored. This was done by the work of our elder Brother upon the cross. This was done that we may live and show forth His glory each and every day. Let us remember these two truths as they are part of our salvation. Sing 23.

August 13 Read Colossians 3:12-17; Canons of Dordt 3 & 4:17

This is an excellent article to read and reread as we prepare for the coming Sabbath Day. Tomorrow we will sit under the means of grace. We will sit under that means which God has ordained to give to us the salvation wrought in Christ. Are we prepared to use that means? Are we looking forward to those means? By the preaching of the Word and the sacraments, we receive great assurance of our salvation. Let us prepare ourselves to begin the eternal Sabbath as we worship tomorrow. Sing Psalter 349.

August 14 Read Romans 8:28-35; Canons of Dordt 5:1

We begin the final section of this great creed. Here we come to the fifth point of the doctrine of Calvinism or TULIP: Perseverance or Preservation of the Saints. This is a most comforting doctrine to the people of God as we live in this sin filled world. The text that we read for today also provides us with that comfort. Reread verse 28 again. Notice **ALL THINGS** work for our good! For what else could we hope? Someday this evil world will be destroyed, and we will live in harmony with all the saints in heaven. But for now we know that God will care for us. What a blessed comfort! Sing Psalter 293.

August 15 Read Colossians 3:8-13; Canons of Dordt 5:2

People of God, we must be a praying people. God has given to us this manner of communication with Him for our comfort in our salvation. If we could not go to our heavenly Father for this comfort, we would be miserable. There would be no purpose for us to live on this earth. We know our condition. It is terrible. But because we can pray for deliverance from our sins, we will be comforted by the answer which comes from God. As we begin our work week, let us remember to seek God in prayer and let us do that often. Sing Psalter 385.

August 16 Read Jude 20-25; Canons of Dordt 5:3

Every time we are reminded of our sin and misery, we would be in despair if that is as far as we go. But God does not leave us in that state. Our faithful God, Creator, and Father cares for us, loves us, and stays with us. Just as a child who might be lost in the wilderness finds himself in hopelessness, so we who are in the wilderness of this world of sin feel hopeless without the love of the Father. Let us pray for His care and rest assured that He will care for us. We know this because He is a faithful God and will not leave us. Sing Psalter 202.

August 17 Read James 1:12-16; Canons of Dordt 5:4

It is a known fact that even the people of God fall into sin and even into very grievous sins. As we saw in the article even David and Peter fell. Because of the old man of sin in us, we are prone by nature to sin. The article also tells us that we must by prayer and meditation on God's Word fight against the tendency to fall into sin. When we fail to pray and meditate, it is more likely that we will fall. Let us fight against the old man of sin, and let us do that by the means given to us by our faithful covenant heavenly Father. Sing Psalter 83.

August 18 Read James 1:17-21; Canons of Dordt 5:5

Sin is not a light manner. Sin against the holy God is very offensive. We may not live lives of "sowing wild oats". We must not have the attitude that we "sin that grace may abound". No, we must flee from sin. We must avoid it by using that which God has given to us. When we fall into sin, we will lose that assurance that we have of our salvation. We will feel destitute and lost. When we fall into sin, we must seek repentance. This repentance only comes from God. Let us confess our sins to God and seek the repentance which brings the blessed assurance which is by grace alone. Sing Psalter 106.

August 19 Read James 1:22-27; Canons of Dordt 5:6

What a comfort this article is to the people of God! Go ahead; read it again. God does not leave us in despair. Our merciful God will not allow us to plunge ourselves into utter destruction. This is a comfort of the doctrine of election. This doctrine is not cold. This doctrine is warm and full of God's love for His people. Even though it may appear that the Holy Spirit has left us, He has not! Jesus in John 14 tells us that He will not leave us comfortless. What a blessing this is! What a comfort! Thanks be to God! Sing Psalter 149.

August 20 Read Psalm 32:1-5; Canons of Dordt 5:7

In the next few days we will read the Psalms penned by David after his fall into sin with Bathsheba and events which followed. These are Holy Spirit inspired writings. These are proofs that the Holy Spirit does not leave the elect even when they grievously fall. These Psalms are just not for David. They are for us. They chronicle our life experiences. We, too, must lift our voices in praise to the God who delivers us from all sin and evil. Sing Psalter 140.

August 21 Read Psalm 32:6-11; Canons of Dordt 5:8

We, like David, deserve to fall completely out of favor with God. We, like David, deserve all the punishments of hell for our evils in this life. But God in his rich mercy rescues us before we fall away. There is nothing that we can do to save ourselves. There is nothing that we can do to rescue ourselves from the quicksand that is sin. Of ourselves we would perish. It is only by God's grace that we are rescued. It is only by the work of Christ on the cross that we are saved. As we enter His presence in worship today, let us thank Him for the salvation that He freely gives us. Let us consider our ways, confess our sins, and seek the repentance which only He can give. Let us use this Lord's day aright. Sing Psalter 141.

August 22 Read Psalm 51:1-6; Canons of Dordt 5:9

What a comfort it is to know that we will never be lost. This article shows to us the goodness of our heavenly Father. Not only has He elected us to eternal life. Not only has He provided the way to eternal life namely His Son. But He has also provided to us the comfort in this life that we will receive eternal life as well as the other accompanying spiritual benefits. He does this by the faith that He alone provides for us. People of God, as we walk through this valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil because He is with us. Sing Psalter 53.

August 23 Read Psalm 51:7-13 Canons of Dordt 5:10

After David was convicted of His sin by Nathan he knew he needed the help that comes only from one source. That source was God. As we study Psalms 32 and 51, we can see the path along which God led not only David but also each of us. God does not leave us in our misery. Not at all! God provides the way of comfort through the work of His Spirit as the Spirit of Christ. We can find in His Word much comfort. This is what we must do. We must study that Word, we must pray for the help of the Spirit, and we must rest assured that our covenant God will help us and give to us that comfort. Knowing that the spiritual victory is ours will give to us the peace that passes all understanding. Sing Psalter 143.

August 24 Read Psalm 51:14-19; Canons of Dordt 5:11

Part of the Lord's Prayer states, "and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." As we live in this world of sin; as we struggle with our own weaknesses and sin; we must constantly pray this prayer. As well as praying for this deliverance, we must also seek to find God's word to us as He has given it to us in His Word. The Bible is replete with passages which will help us in our darkest hour. Just as Jesus Himself banished Satan with the words, "It is written." So must we, too, banish our demons with those words. How can we know what is written unless we take time to study and discover what God tells us in His word? Let us daily search the Scriptures and find rest for our souls. Sing Psalter 333.

August 25 Read Psalm 54; Canons of Dordt 5:12

People of God, why must we do good works? Is it to procure for ourselves a place in glory? Is it to help God with our salvation? The answer to the last questions is a resounding NO! We do good works in thankfulness for the salvation freely given to us by God. We do good works out of the comfort that we gain from being preserved by almighty God. By doing good works we see that God has given to us salvation without our help. If we would for a minute believe that we could help, our wickedness would plunge us into despair because we know that even our best works are as filthy rags in His sight. Let us humble ourselves before mighty God, let us work out of the salvation that He was given to us. Sing Psalter 152.

August 26 Read Romans 13:10-14; Canons of Dordt 5:13

We see in this article that we must carefully consider that salvation which God ordained for us. We must carefully consider that perseverance that He has provided for us. Why must we do this? We must do this in order that we continue to walk in that good way. If we disregard that which we have been given, the comfort obtained would be lost from consciousness. We would then slip into our wickedness again. We must carefully consider what God has given to us every day and know that without His help we would fall. Sing Psalter 159.

August 27 Read Psalm 119:9-16; Canons of Dordt 5:14

As we come to the end of this beautiful creed, we see the fathers once again pointing us to God's Word. Young people, do you daily take that Word into your hands, read it, consider it, and take it into your hearts? There is nothing else which will provide for us the comfort and assurance that we need than what is found in the Bible. Even as we need physical food to sustain our physical body, we need the spiritual food of the Word to sustain our spiritual body. Read that word daily, meditate on it, and use it in your lives. Then

prepare yourselves to make confession of faith so that you may use the other means of grace for your comfort and your assurance. Sing Psalter 322.

August 28 Read John 17:9-13; Canons of Dordt 5:15

As we end our meditation on the Canons and the beautiful truths found within them, we read that Christ at the end of His earthly life considered these doctrines for His bride the church. There are few that wish a sovereign God to preserve them for eternity. They want to have a part in it. This is the world in which we live. People of God of all ages, take time to consider these things, for in doing so you will become more and more assured of the blessed life to come which God has prepared for you. As we worship today, let us bring our gifts of thanks and lay them before Him. In this way we will be comforted and ready to face whatever Satan and his hosts have in store for us. *Soli Deo Gloria!* To God be the glory alone! Sing Psalter 362.

August 29 Read Psalm 1

Once again we turn to the Psalms for our daily meditation. The Psalms are inspired poetry for God's people. Here we have songs of praise and songs of prayer. We are shown our sin and the deliverance from those sins. We are urged to put our trust in God. The first Psalm begins with the word blessed which has the idea of happiness in it. We are not happy because of any worldly pursuit. We are only happy when our delight is in the whole law of God. We are happy when we meditate in that law day and night. We must spend part of each day meditating on God's law. For then and only then can we be truly happy. Sing Psalter 1.

August 30 Read Psalm 2

From the description of the happy man, we come to a Psalm which speaks of Christ. Our heavenly Father knows the trials that we go through. He knows that the wicked rage against us and are trying to destroy us. These same wicked tried to kill His Son. But the almighty sovereign God has decreed that no one would defeat His Son. Because His Son is not defeated, our salvation is sure. The Psalm closes with the word blessed. Who are the blessed ones? They are the ones who put their trust in the almighty sovereign God. Sing Psalter 4.

August 31 Read Psalm 3

Reread verse 5 again. People of God of all ages, we have no reason to fear as we lie down on our beds at night. With childlike trust we can know that God will care for us. Our little children can have that trust. Our young people can have that trust. Aged saint, do you have that trust? Do you trust that God will deliver you from all the evils of this day? Why can we have that trust? We can have that trust because salvation belongs to Jehovah. Our covenant God will care for us at all times. Notice the word blessing appears again in the last verse of this Psalm. We are truly a blessed people. Sing Psalter 5.

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Skip Hunter

September 1 Read Psalm 4

Verse 3 states. "The Lord will hear when I call unto Him." What a beautiful and comforting statement! When men call, not all who are called hear. When we call to Jehovah, He hears. It is as simple as that, He hears. And because He hears, He will answer our call. When we are in distress, when we lie upon beds of affliction, or when we are lonely; He hears us when we call unto Him. Not only does He hear us, but He will answer us. His answer will be good for us. It will be deliverance from what ever difficulty we may find ourselves. O, it may not be the deliverance which we expect, but it will be the deliverance which we need. Let us call upon our God knowing that He will hear us. Sing Psalter 7.

September 2 Read Psalm 5

Notice the similarities between this Psalm and the last one. The writer is being oppressed by enemies. He knows that he must cry unto God. In his cries he knows that God will answer. He asked God to lead him in God's way which is the way of righteousness. People of God, we must do this as well. We must go to God and ask to be led in the straight path of righteousness which leads to eternal life. Because we know that God will defend us, we can break forth into joy. This joy can be expressed in singing the inspired Psalms of God. Because we are the people of God, He will bless us and protect us. Let us each and every day go to Him from whom all blessings flow. Sing Psalter 11

September 3 Read Psalm 6

Here we have a Psalm in which the author David seeks relief because of his sins. We do well to meditate upon this Psalm and learn that we, too, need this relief. David realizes that Satan and his host do battle against him each and every day. This is a realization which we must make about our lives. Satan fights hard. Because he fights hard, we will become weary. Without the help of our Father to strengthen our weaknesses, we will fall. David knows that God will hear his prayer. Do we know that, people of God? Is this our experience in this life. By God's grace it will be, and we will be able to fight the battle of faith until we are delivered to the glories which will be ours in heaven. Sing Psalter 12.

September 4 Read Psalm 7:1-7

If you study the life of David, you can understand how and why he wrote many of these Psalms. These are the re-

sponses to the way God led him. In each of them we see how David grew in grace through the path on which he was led. But if we study the life of David and the Psalm more closely, we see more clearly that these Psalms are for us. They are what we need in the path on which we are led. We can learn how to pray more earnestly by such a study. As we attend church today, let us worship the God in whom only we can trust. Let us praise the God of our salvation with every song that we sing. Finally, let us live lives led by this Word until we are taken to glory. Sing Psalter 13:1-3.

September 5 Read Psalm 7:8-17

When it comes right down to it, we must see that judgment belongs to God. God will judge all men ourselves included. Because He is the righteous judge, we know that His judgments will be right. Not only is God our judge, He is also our defense against those who wish us to fall. He will give to the wicked the proper judgment and punishment. This affords to us comfort because we know without God's grace we would receive the same judgment and punishment. Because Jehovah is righteous, we can sing His praises. Because He has saved us we will sing His praises. Because His judgment is right, we must sing His praises. Are we singing with all our being the praises of the righteous God? Sing Psalter 13:4-7.

September 6 Read Psalm 8

Here is one of those gems of Scripture! No matter how you hold it up to the light, it sparkles with the glory of God. When you line up all the names ever spoken upon this earth, God's name is more excellent than any of them. We can see that when we examine the creation which is all around us. From each creature of the sea to the heavenly bodies, to the flowers of the field, we see the wonderful glory of Jehovah. What is man that God has concern for him? What is man that He sent the Son of man to save Him? Man is nothing compared to God, but in His loving kindness He cares for us and causes us to utter with our children "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is the name in all the earth!" Sing Psalter 15.

September 7 Read Psalm 9:1-11

What does it mean to us that the Lord will endure forever? Think about that for a minute. First of all it means that nothing else has or will endure forever. Only God is above time. But more importantly because He endures for

ever we can rest assured that nothing is greater than He and that nothing can cause His decrees to fail. Because of this our salvation is sure. As the psalmist endured much in his life, as the church endures many enemies, each of them could know that that eternal God was greater than all that opposed them. This is our comfort. While it might seem that the wicked might win the battle, we know that God who endures forever will give to us the victory. Thanks be to our eternal God who preserves us by His grace. Sing Psalter 16:1-5.

September 8 Read Psalm 9:12-20

The second part of this Psalm continues the thought of the first part. We trust in a God who will care for us no matter what difficulties arise in our lives. Young people, as you go to school each day, you must learn to see that God does care for you and will help you in what ever difficulties arise in your lives. As you come into contact with more and more of the wicked world, you must see that God will help you. As your sins rise up against you, you must see that God will deliver you from sin and from Satan's clutches. You must learn how to ask God for such deliverance. Your prayers must be to the God who will deliver you. This must guide you as you pray. For then your prayer will be acceptable unto God as they go through Jesus who is our mediator. Meditate on this and learn to pray the prayers that each child of God needs. Sing Psalter 16:6-9

September 9 Read Psalm 10:1-11

In verse 4 we read, "God is not in all his thoughts." Could this be said of us? It is one thing to say that God is not in the thoughts of the wicked. But what about us? How do we live our lives? Young people, as you plan your activities for tonight, is God in your thoughts? Does the type of entertainment you chose, show that God is in your thoughts? Children, as you play on the playground, is God in your thoughts? Businessmen, is God in your thoughts as you make decisions about your work and relations with others? God must be in our thoughts in whatever we do. We must show that God is in our thoughts by our activities throughout the day and night. By meditating upon the Word of God we can more clearly put God in our thoughts and live sanctified lives. Sing Psalter 18:1-5.

September 10 Read Psalm 10:12-18

Jehovah is King for ever! When God is in our thoughts, this will be our confession. When we acknowledge God as our King we will live lives with Him in the center. Do we do that? Have we thought much about God since last Sunday? Yes, I know we pray at meals and have our devotions. At least I hope these are our practices. But has God been in our thoughts since last Sunday? Have our daily lives reflected the fact that we acknowledge Him as King? Or have we made choices which have shown that we want to be king? Or have we made choices which showed that we ignored the King who reigns above? As we finish this week, and prepare to

worship in God's house, let us consider the fact that God is King forever in our lives. Sing Psalter 18:6-9.

September 11 Read Psalm 11

As we rest this Sabbath Day, let us remember that God is always in His temple. We enter His house today to worship Him, but we should always be worshipping Him. God sees us wherever we may be because the whole world is His. This is a great comfort for us. The righteous do not have to fear what the wicked may do. In history the church has not always been the refuge that it is today. In the future, as antichrist approaches, it will not be that refuge either. But we need not fear; God's eyes are beholding all men. God loves His righteous people. He will provide the refuge we need. As we go up to the house of God, let us consider these things, and let us resolve more and more to live a new and holy life. Sing Psalter 20.

September 12 Read Psalm 12

As we begin another school and work week, let us consider more closely the words of verses 3 and 4. What will we do with our mouths today? Children, how will you speak about the adults in your lives? What will you say about your classmates? Will you lie about those around you or about yourselves? Young people, what proud words will you speak? Will you curse God to show how great you are? Adults, have you resolved to guard your tongues? While these words were penned because the wicked were oppressing David, they apply to us as well. As James says the tongue is a little member, but it can cause big things to happen. As we begin this week, let us pray that God will help us guard our tongues, and that we can use them in His service. Sing Psalter 21.

September 13 Read Psalm 13

Reread that first question in this text. The answer is simple but yet full of comfort. Our heavenly Father will never forget us. This is the truth we learned of in the last head of the Canons. The truth of preservation of the saints assures us that God will never forget us. What a blessed truth that is! No matter what situation we find ourselves, God will never forget us. No sickness, no pain, or no suffering can take us away from the love of God. If we lie on a bed of affliction, we can rest assured that God will remember us. Because we can trust in our covenant God, we can and must praise Him for the salvation which He has prepared for us. Let us remember to always sing unto God because of His goodness. Sing Psalter 22.

September 14 Read Psalm 14

The first six verses of this Psalm deal with the truth of total depravity. All men by nature are dead in their sins. All men are in misery because of such sins. But verse 7 indicates that there is a difference. Some men, not all men, have the hope of a salvation coming. Some men, not all men, will rejoice. People of God, do you pray the prayer of verse 7. Are you awaiting the day that Christ will return on the clouds of heaven to take His church to the spiritual Jerusalem? We

must live lives that indicate that we are captive in this world of sin. We must live lives that show that we are waiting a deliverer. Are we awaiting the day that we will truly be glad and rejoice? Sing Psalter 23.

September 15 Read Psalm 15

There is a connection between Psalms 14 and 15. That connection is the actions of those people who are awaiting their deliverer. Those people are those who have been chosen before the beginning of time, and now they live a particular life. Young people, do verses 2-5 describe you? Do you keep God's commandments? Do you watch your tongue especially as it concerns those around you? Do you stay away from the evil doers of this world and have friendships among the people of God? If you do, even at this age, you will find the blessings that belong only to God's people. If you do, as it says in verse 5, you will not be moved. Young people, is this your desire? It must be, you know, if you wish the peace that belongs to God's people. Think about your lives and walk the sanctified life of the child of God, and then and only then you will have peace in your soul. Sing Psalter 24.

September 16 Read Psalm 16

There are many thoughts in this Psalm on which to meditate. We should read it more than once today in order to receive its complete meaning. First of all we see a necessary prayer that God will preserve us. Another beautiful thought is that in verses 5 and 6 where we see the promise of the covenant of grace which God has extended to us in which He is our friend and we are His people. We see the promise of Christ in verse 10 where we see the promise of the resurrection which was the necessary for our salvation. Finally we have the promise of eternal bliss in heaven. What wonderful truths are found in this Psalm! Read and reread it and take its words to your heart. Sing Psalter 29.

September 17 Read Psalm 17

The title of this Psalm is "A Prayer of David." The prayers in the Bible give to us patterns for our prayers. We can and must meditate upon them in order that we, too, can pray. God has given to us prayer as a means of communicating to Him all of our cares in this life. Because of Christ our prayers rise as the sweet incense of old unto the throne of grace. In verse 8 we see the beautiful words asking for preservation as only God can provide it. We need to take these thoughts on our lips daily. Finally we can pray in the confidence that not only our prayers will reach heaven, but the day will come that God will take us before that throne of grace. Let us consider the prayers of the saints, and let us pray without ceasing. Sing Psalter 33.

September 18 Read Psalm 18:1-6

In this Psalm which is entitled a song, David begins with a prayer. He sees that he needs deliverance from the wicked around Him. He pens these words in full confidence of God's goodness towards him. Even though he has been led in a hard way, David is able to say that he loves God. He has

tasted of God's goodness, and he knows that God is worthy to be praised. People of God, we must learn from David's experience. We must know that help comes from God not from other men or even from within ourselves. When we have confidence in Jehovah, we will find the comfort and confidence to endure all hardships in this life. Let us wait upon God, and let us call upon God knowing that He will hear us and deliver us from all evils. Sing Psalter 34:1-3.

September 19 Read Psalm 18:7-19

Here in this part of Psalm 18 we see the deliverance God has wrought for us. Notice that deliverance is portrayed in the various wonders of nature which we behold. We do not fear the thunderstorm, for it is a picture of God's judgment upon the wicked. We do not fear the volcano, for we see the wrath of God upon those who hate Him and us. Take notice of the various forces which God has placed in nature. Take notice of them and know that they are there for our instruction and our comfort. God will not leave us to be destroyed. He will come for us. Sing Psalter 34:4-9.

September 20 Read Psalm 18:20-29

The last line of verse 19 is "Because He delighted in me." Today's reading continues that thought. Because God delights in us through Christ He rewards us. Our righteousness is the righteousness that is imputed to us through Christ. Only through Christ are our hands judged clean and we are upright. In the darkness of this sinful world, He is our light and our salvation. This is a great comfort to us as we live. Let us seek Him who has made us righteous. Let us live lives of thankfulness to Him who delights in us. Sing Psalter 35:1-3.

September 21 Read Psalm 18:29-36

God's way is perfect. That we know. What does that mean for us? It means that whatever way He leads us is good. David did not have an easy way, but he confessed that God's way was perfect. This is what we must do. As we face difficulties in our lives, we must know that they are part of the perfect way of God for us. If our way is the hospital bed for many months or even years, God's way is perfect. What ever that way is, God will care for us and help us to live in that way. This was David's testimony, and this should be our testimony as well. Let us pray for the grace to walk in God's perfect way. Sing Psalter 35:4-6.

September 22 Read Psalm 18:37-50

As David finished this Psalm, he finishes it with a song of thanksgiving. Singing is one of the ways with which we can show our thanks for what God has done for us. It is also a way for us to prepare for that eternal Sabbath in heaven singing the praises of the Lamb and the King. Some of our songs are private songs of thanksgiving, but here in verse 49 David speaks of singing among the brethren. Singing in church by the congregation is one of those God-ordained parts of the worship service. Let us make good use of those songs to thank God for all that He has done for us. Sing Psalter 36.

September 23 Read Psalm 19:1-6

People of God of all ages, do you study the created world around you. God has placed much in His creation for our instruction. Our Belgic Confession calls it a most “excellent book.” We need to spend time looking at the creation in order that we can learn more about God and His works. While we cannot find salvation in the creation, we can find out about the way of salvation as God illustrates in this Psalm using the sun as a picture of Christ. Young people and children, one of your responsibilities in school is to learn about creation in order that you can learn more about God. God speaks to us in creation. Are we listening? Sing Psalter 37.

September 24 Read Psalm 19:7-14

The second part of this Psalm speaks about God’s law as it is found in His Word. While creation tells us about God, it is in the Word that we are led to salvation. God’s perfect law provides for us the only way of salvation. This law is better than any man made law. It is better than anything in creation. The law also shows to us our sin. It also prompts us to pray for forgiveness from those sins. The last verse of this Psalm is one of those verses that should be committed to memory. Take a minute to reread it. Did you see the beauty found in it. Let its words be ours as we pray today. Sing Psalter 40.

September 25 Read Psalm 20

Notice the three times that the word *name* is used in this Psalm. In each case that word is shown with activity. God’s names tell us not only about Him, but also about what He does. By learning those names, we learn what He does for us. Those names have power. Through those names we can find the source of our salvation. We do not need any of man’s inventions or accomplishments for our safety. “Our help is in the name of Jehovah who made heaven and earth.” As we worship today let us remember to listen and learn about the names of our God. As we prepare for the new week, let us remember to use those names in a right way. Sing Psalter 44.

September 26 Read Psalm 21

Here in this Psalm we see David in a different light. He is no longer running from Saul and those who would kill him. He has been placed upon the throne and has a period of relative peace. What does David do? He praises Jehovah who made him king. He knows that it is not of himself that he gained this position. It was God’s will and God’s will alone. What about us? As we go about our work today, do we confess that it is of God that we have what we have? Do we think our businesses are our doing? How many times do we use the word I as we talk about our place in life? We must remember that it is God who has given to us all things, and that we must give to Him all praise and honor for what He has done for us. Sing Psalter 45.

September 27 Read Psalm 22:1-10

This Psalm, like the last one, has prophecies of Christ found in it. That is because David is a type of Christ. David as king was a picture of the King, Christ Jesus. Here in this Psalm we see prophecies of Christ as he suffered on the cross for our sins. It is good for us to read these words because they tell us about the way our salvation was obtained. Christ suffered for us. The first words of this Psalm were among the last that Christ spoke before His death. They indicate to us the depths of suffering that Christ endured for us. This should cause us to thank Him daily for His sacrifice. Sing Psalter 47:1-5.

September 28 Read Psalm 22:11-21

As we continue this Messianic Psalm, we realize that our sufferings on this earth are minor compared to what Christ endured for us. Like Christ we must call upon God to help us in these times. David confessed that his strength came not from himself but from God alone. This must be our confession as well. Young men, this should be your guide when you consider the use of your body. Your strength is not yours; it is God’s, and you must use it to His glory alone. Let each of us pray that God be not far from us at any time. If God is far from us, we are helpless. What a terrible condition that it! Sing Psalter 47:6-11.

September 29 Read Psalm 22:22-31

As David once again enjoys the blessing of fellowship with God, he once again states that he will praise God where ever he is. Why does he do this, and why must we do this? We must do this because God has not left us in despair. He does not hide His face from us. He cares for us and will continue to care for us. There is also a beautiful truth found in the last part of this Psalm. Once again the truth of the covenant is proclaimed. Parents and grandparents, is it not wonderful to read, “A seed shall serve Him”? Is not this the content of many of our prayers? Let us rest in the comfort of the last two verses of this Psalm. Sing Psalter 49.

September 30 Read Psalm 23

Once again we come to this most familiar part of Scripture. Can you say these words by heart. Adults, can you do this? Young people, can you? Not only should we be able to say them by heart, we must also say them from the heart. When we confess that Jehovah is our shepherd, that means that we believe that He will care for us just as a shepherd cares for the sheep. This also means that we confess that we are sheep with all of their characteristics. These words provide comfort for the youngest saint who can take them on their lips, and they provide much comfort for the oldest saint who cannot say anything else. With Jehovah as our shepherd, what else do we need? Sing Psalter 53.

Hull Protestant Reformed Church

by Jan Westra

The history of the Hull Protestant Reformed Church goes back to the beginning of the Protestant Reformed denomination. Just a few weeks after the meeting at which the consistories who were expelled from the Christian Reformed Church formed a temporary organization called the Protesting Christian Reformed Churches, Rev. H. Hoeksema responded to a call from Northwest Iowa to “come over and help us.” Here many had been closely following the controversy that had been going on in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Many were keenly interested in what Rev. Hoeksema had to say. During the week meetings were held in a town hall filled to capacity in the city of Hull. In the town halls of Sioux Center, Doon, and Rock Valley, similar meetings were hosted at that time. The “Three Points” were the topic of enthusiastic discussion in many homes, coffee shops, and these public meetings. Before Rev. Hoeksema left the area, the Protesting Christian Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa, was organized with a membership of 32 families.

This was a group filled with determination to cling to the truth of God’s Word. They went to work with en-

thusiasm and zeal and the Lord blessed their labors abundantly. After only five months a new parsonage was ready and occupied by Rev. B. J. Danhof. And after only three more months the congregation met for the first time on Thanksgiving Day in the new church building the Lord had graciously provided for them. The church building was 76 feet long and 40 feet wide with a 60 foot bell tower and a seating capacity of 350. December 3, 1925, a dedication service was held in the new church building. What a celebration that was! The Revs. H. Hoeksema, G. Ophoff, and H. Danhof had made the two day journey from Grand Rapids to participate. The service began at 1:00 that Wednesday afternoon with a sermon preached by Rev. H. Danhof in Dutch. According to a report in the *Standard Bearer*, he preached for ninety minutes from Revelation 21, “Behold the tabernacle of God is with man.” After that Rev. Ophoff took over the pulpit and preached in English. According to the same report, it was 5:00 pm when he finished his sermon. The audience was then given a break until 7:30 pm. There were refreshments served in the basement and no doubt a few of the farmers hurried home to do chores. The



church building was filled that evening when Rev. H. Hoeksema addressed the audience in Dutch concerning the events that had taken place in the last year bringing about the organization of the Protestant churches. Reports indicate that there were many visitors from the surrounding areas present to hear this speech. Enthusiasm continued and the congregation flourished.

In the January, 1926 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, Rev. B. J. Danhof reported that the congregation had grown to 50 families. He writes, "The day will not be far in the future if by God's grace and blessing, Hull has an annual remembrance of December 3, 1925." This "annual remembrance" however, was not a part of God's sovereign plan. A year later found this new and flourishing congregation entangled in controversy. September 17, 1926 a notice appeared in the *Sioux County Index* written by Rev. B. J. Danhof stating that the congregation in Hull had always been and still was an independent church and not part of the Protestant Churches in the east. This of course was not true since they had been organized under the *Act of Agreement* set forth by the consistories of the Protestant Churches. At a congregational meeting held on December 8, 1926 in Hull Rev. Danhof defended the Three Points of Common Grace and tried to persuade the congregation to return with him to the Christian Reformed Church. He almost succeeded in destroying this newly organized congregation. Rev. Danhof left with all but ten families and returned to the Christian Reformed Church. On February 28, 1927, the church was reorganized as the Hull Protestant Reformed Church. Through strife and trial the Lord would purify His church. Ten families and five individuals with a debt of \$11,000 on a new church building and parsonage was what were left of the once flourishing congregation.

Through strife and trial the Lord would purify His church.

The seminary in Grand Rapids was quick to respond to the needs of this struggling, little congregation. Since there were no ministers available, William Verhil, a student in the seminary at that time, was given a two year leave of absence from the seminary to help out in Hull. Meeting in the basement of a church much too large for them, the congregation was led by Student Verhil until the late summer of 1929 when Rev. C. Hanko graduated from the seminary and took the call extended to him by

the Hull congregation. The group was still small and according to Rev. C. Hanko met in the basement during the winter months so that they would not have to heat the church auditorium. During the thirties and forties the Lord blessed the congregation in Hull with steady growth. After Rev. Hanko, Rev. Leonard VerMeer, and then Rev. Andrew Cammenga served as pastors in Hull. Again in the early 1950s it was the Lord's will to purify His church and bring them to a clearer understanding of the truths of His Word.

Along with many churches in the denomination, Hull again suffered great numerical loss at the time of the split in 1953. At that time Rev. John DeJong was the pastor of the Hull congregation. During the controversy concerning the covenant, Rev. DeJong sided with the Rev. DeWolf who had been deposed from First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He and a majority of the congregation claimed the church building. In September of 1953, just twenty-five families were left faithful to God's word and continued in Hull as the Protestant Reformed Church. This small group was forced to find another meeting place where they could hold church services. After holding services at Western Christian High for several weeks they were able to rent the basement of the community building. Little did they know that this would be their meeting place for more than ten years. During this time Rev. Heys and Rev. Kortering served as her pastors. It wasn't until 1964 that they again regained possession of the original church building and property through court action.

During the seventies and eighties the Lord continued to prosper the church in Hull. Rev. J. Kortering and then Rev. M. Hoeksema served as her pastors during the 1970's. It was with thankfulness and joy that they saw the opening of the doors of the Hull Protestant Reformed Christian School in August of 1976. In 1979, Rev. R. Cammenga accepted the call to Hull and in 1985 Rev. R. Moore came to serve as her pastor. During these years the pews were becoming more and more crowded. It became evident by the early 1990s that a new place of worship was needed. Land was purchased near to the grade school and in the spring of 1993 the congregation met for the first time in its new house of worship. During the 1990's the congregation in Hull also became involved with the mission work in Ghana. After being appointed the calling church for the mission field in Ghana and after several calls were declined, Hull called her own Pastor, Rev. R. Moore to that field.

After Rev. Moore took up his labors as missionary in Ghana, the Lord sent Pastor S. Key to labor in Hull. The congregation continues to grow and now numbers 137 families with 582 members. A congregation that was once made up mostly of farmers and their families is now made up of members from many different occupations. Although still mostly a rural community the growth of urban areas has affected this part of the country also. The congregation has in its membership a doctor, a lawyer, engineers, contractors, construction workers, factory workers, business men, teachers, and farmers. The Lord has blessed the congregation in Hull abundantly. With the prophet Jeremiah, we must confess “It is of the

Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning, great is thy faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22-23). We are especially thankful that we are privileged to hear the truth of God’s Word proclaimed to us from Sabbath to Sabbath. It is our prayer that the Lord will preserve that truth among us and continue to strengthen us spiritually as we look toward the ever more quickly approaching day of the return of our Lord. ❖

Jan is a member of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.

Church Family

A Faithful Witness: The Christian Family

by Nathan Dykstra

The institution of marriage and the family structure have come under heated debate in religious and political circles. Various churches degrade marriage by the allowance of divorce and remarriage and their support of the changing roles of men and women in marriage. Politicians also seek to redefine marriage through the promotion of homosexual relations. These influences on the institution of marriage desecrate the sanctity and meaning of a true, biblical marriage. It is imperative that Christians follow the guidelines of proper marriage as they are recorded in Holy Scripture. Fathers, mothers, and children are called by Christ to faithfully abide in their respective roles in both marriage and the family life. Through their adherence to the principles of God’s Word, Christians provide a witness of a proper family structure to the wicked world which seeks to pervert the basic foundation of a family. As a future minister D.V., I will set forth the principles of marriage and family life to His people and help them to apply this doctrine positively to their lives.

The marriage of a man and woman has been the basic foundation of society from the very beginning. Genesis 2:18 states, “The Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet

for him.” God created pairs of all the animals so that they were complete in their natural design. Adam viewed the perfect order of the other animals in their male and female relationships, and he realized his incompleteness.¹ God purposely directed Adam to recognize this incompleteness because that prepared Adam for the newly created female, Eve. Adam learned that the woman was an essential part of his life and “necessary for his own completion.”² The man and the woman complemented each other from the very beginning. Thus, God in His perfect wisdom created the institution of marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman.

A faithful pastor must set forth the doctrinal principle of a biblical marriage, but this also needs to be applied to the everyday lives of his congregation’s members. The pastor reminds the husbands to be faithful to their wives and honor them for they are the essence of their completion. This means that the men must be careful not to experiment with pornography or sexual chat rooms on the Internet. When a man participates in such a sin, he forfeits the relationship with his wife and stains the sanctity of it. The men must be warned of the present-day evils and the dire consequences for these sins. Although women also suffer from the sins that plague the

men, they need to focus on their special role within the home. Society influences many women to engage in employment outside the home. A pastor cautions the women to forsake the pressures of the world and focus their attention to the rearing of covenant children. These admonitions present difficulty for the pastor for the influence of the world upon the church is powerful. He must stand fast in the Word but also actively promote healthy marriages of his members. He performs this by eagerly counseling the young adults who desire marriage and encouraging couples of all ages to walk as disciples of Christ within their marriages. Husbands and wives must model their behavior and calling in marriage after the chief Shepherd who forsook his own interests for the sake of His people. What a powerful illustration for the people of God to follow! Jesus Christ gave up his place at the right hand of God in the glory of glories to come into the world and deliver his people. The children of God must follow this example and forsake themselves in order to build up their spouse.

God's people need to understand the God-ordained principle of marriage and the individual roles for the man and the woman inside that marriage so that the principle may be applied to their lives. The role of the male is described in Ephesians 5:23 "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church." Therefore, the man must assume headship over his wife and children just as Christ rules over the Church. The husband must rule in a kind manner and "dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heir together of the grace of life" (I Peter 3:7). The woman is commanded to submit herself to the authority of her husband for the Lord's sake. She lovingly respects her husband and dutifully performs the menial tasks of keeping a family because she desires to serve the Lord through her role in a God-ordained marriage. The women need to be of a sound mind for this allows them to reflect on the role of the church in its relationship to Christ.³ The Church must sacrifice itself to maintain the faithful witness of Jesus Christ, so the woman in a marriage must apply this example of sacrifice into her own life. It is important for women to remember the relationship between Christ and His Church because it may be the only thought which keeps them going from day to day. Husbands may lose respect for their hard work and children may disregard the dignity of the mother, thus, women need to hear and understand their important roles in a marriage. The minister encourages the men and women about their impor-

tant roles within God's covenant family and reminds them that all these ordinances are God-ordained for the benefit of His Church.

These are difficult guidelines for Christians to follow in this wicked day and age. The feminist movement encourages women to forsake their husbands and families by seeking careers outside the home. The men are tempted to treat their wives as mere objects of sexual pleasure or unnecessary parts of their lives. The people of God need to submit to these biblical marriage guidelines because "[He] gave unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator. He doth also uphold and govern them to the end that man (and woman) may serve his God.⁴ Since God has ordained the institution, Christian men and women desire to serve Him through their humble submission to His will.

The institution of marriage is being undermined today by the wickedness that abounds in the present day and age. Many churches no longer maintain a particular stand against the sin of divorce and remarriage. The minister of the gospel needs to defend the sacred institution of marriage by teaching the church about the evils of divorce and remarriage. The words of our Lord in Matthew 5 must be proclaimed and maintained. The minister also promotes the institution of marriage by taking a stand against homosexuality. Politicians and various members of society have not heeded to a most basic lesson of God's Word that one man is meant for one woman. Society uses an equality argument to justify homosexual lifestyles rather than turning to the Word of God. These people may twist the political principles for alternative lifestyles but the Bible teaches a different view concerning these people who "change the natural use into that which is against nature" (Romans 1:26). The Word states that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God, neither fornicators, nor abusers of themselves with mankind" (I Cor. 6:9). These words of Scripture cut to the heart of the issue and teach God's people of the seriousness of this sin so that they will not fall into the sinful habit of condoning such an immoral sin.

Children are also an important part of the family structure for they are the "fruit of the womb and happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them" (Ps 127:5). Parents ought to view their children as blessings from God for they are a part of the covenant mercies that God bestows upon His people. The role of children in the family plays an important part in the promotion of a biblical family structure. Children must serve the Lord in

their lives by honoring and obeying their parents. They do well to heed to the instruction of Lord's Day 49: "Grant that we may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey they will, that so everyone may perform the duties of his station and calling [in life]."⁵ When children follow the requirements of God's Word, a biblical family structure is promoted and God is praised.

Christians provide a witness of a proper marriage and a sound family to the world when they follow the principles in God's Word. Faithful preachers will lead their congregations in these truths and help their people to glorify God in their roles of husbands, wives, and children. Through the instruction of a sound pastor, the children of God condemn the worldly influences of remarriage after divorce and homosexuality because they are violations of the sacred Word. A caring minister will also actively help his people infuse these principles into their

lives. The children of God who strive to honor God in their respective family roles will receive a blessed reward of inner peace. Psalm 128 declares that "blessed is every one that feareth the Lord, that walketh in His ways." God's beloved people will "see their children's children, and peace upon Israel." These blessings of the covenant motivate a pastor to work hard for God's glory and make God's people content with their roles as husbands, wives, and children within the kingdom of God. ❖

Endnotes

¹ Engelsma, David. *Marriage: The Mystery of Christ and the Church*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Assoc., 1974), 21.

² *Ibid*, 22.

³ *Ibid*, 51.

⁴ Confession of Faith: Article XII—Of the Creation.

⁵ Heidelberg Catechism: Lord's Day 49.

"Church/School Dilemma"—Misnamed

by Jim Regnerus

Dear Editor,

The "Church/School Dilemma" of the June, 2005, *Beacon Lights* does not describe a dilemma. It is misnamed.

The article is misnamed chiefly because of this. A dilemma means two things must be chosen between; and in the truest sense of the word, they are both unsavory. God does not give commands to His people to follow that are dilemmas to each other, and then we have to choose which command we will follow. Parents heeding the instruction of Deuteronomy 6:7 and establishing schools to assist them to "teach them diligently unto thy children," is not a hindrance to the church heeding the instruction of Mark 16:15 to "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." One would struggle to find Scriptural support for one blessing of God extinguishing another blessing. "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." I Cor. 14:33. There is no dilemma between our churches and our schools.

Further, when we try to explain a dilemma where there is no dilemma, we're forced to create one. Where are the beacons of light that have been extinguished in

the darkness *because of our giving our schools preeminence over our churches?* Who's documenting this "trend" of families moving away from smaller congregations in vicinities that have no Protestant Reformed school, *and proving that school was the sole issue.* The Protestant Reformed churches in only three areas of the United States? Certainly not according to the yearbook in the back of the *Acts of Synod*.

This is not to say I don't sympathize with those parents in small churches or mission groups who yearn for Protestant Reformed schools, but who do not have them yet. I certainly do, and it is my prayer that more schools can be established. However, we must wait on the Lord in this matter. Until that day comes, I respectfully submit that perhaps we need to look at the lack of Protestant Reformed education in a location more as a symptom, than as a cause, of what might be stagnating growth.

May God bless the harmony our families enjoy among the schools they establish and maintain and His church. ❖

Sincerely,
Jim Regnerus
Doon, Iowa



Scripture Twisting (1)

by Rev. Angus Stewart

So far we have seen that God-breathed Scripture is absolutely sure and unbreakable, and that it shall never pass away. How then are sinful men going to avoid submitting to it? Many try to ignore it. Others attack it, calling it “cunningly devised fables” (II Peter 1:16). Others argue that the Bible’s meaning is simply a matter of personal opinion: “That’s what *you* say it means!” Many try all three of these methods to avoid obeying God’s Word. Moreover, Peter even writes of these who are “unlearned and unstable” who “wrest” or twist the writings of Paul and “the other scriptures” (II Peter 3:15-16).

The “other scriptures” (16) certainly include the inspired OT. Paul’s epistles (15) are also Scripture, placed on par with the OT as divine writings, since Peter refers to the OT as “*other* scriptures” (16). The OT, all the inspired letters Paul wrote, and indeed the remaining NT books constitute the sacred Scriptures. The 39 OT and 27 NT books are the product of divine “wisdom” (15) given to God’s chosen penmen. Wisdom is that which perfectly adapts to reality, and all Scripture perfectly accords with the reality of the sovereign Triune God and His redemption in Christ Jesus. The 66 books of the Scriptures, as the product of Jehovah’s infinite wisdom, are a perfect unity and contain no mistakes. For what part have errors in God’s wisdom?

There are, however, difficult parts in God’s Word—in the OT, in Paul’s epistles and in the rest of the NT—for there are “some things hard to be understood” in the Scriptures (16). This does not oppose the orthodox doctrine of the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture. “*Hard* to be understood” does not mean *impossible* to be understood. Furthermore, “*some* things” are “hard to be understood;” not *all* or even *most* things; merely some things. This means that most of the Bible is not hard to understand. As the Psalmist says, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105). Thus “ordinary” believers—and not just church officers or those with theological degrees—can and must read

the Scriptures in the confidence that most of Scripture can be understood. There are some hard bits, but do not let them discourage you. Interpret the hard parts in the light of the easier parts. Study more diligently. Pray over the Word for divine illumination. Use commentaries or ask an orthodox church teacher.

The infinitely wise God included some hard parts in Scripture in order to serve our salvation. These difficulties subdue our pride and stir us up to pray and search the Word. Moreover, we often only esteem that which we obtain with difficulty. God also uses the difficult sections of His Word to snare the wicked, for they twist especially the hard parts of Scripture to their own destruction (16).

II Peter 3:16 speaks of “unlearned and unstable” people who “wrest” the Scriptures “unto their own destruction.” The man who wrests Scripture is not neutral; he comes with a preconceived false view. He does not want God’s Word to condemn him and/or others, so he twists it. He wants Scripture to support his views, so he twists it.

The Greek word used here means to *torture*. Scripture is tortured, like a man put on the rack, in order to force it to say what the torturers want it to say. Picture a cruel tormentor in a torture chamber: “If you do not say what I want you to say, I will tighten the thumbscrew or suspend you from the rafters.” The Scripture twister—the spiritual equivalent of the Grand Inquisitor—likewise tortures the Word of God in order to extort a confession from it. By misquoting a text or ignoring vital words, by disregarding the context or the analogy of faith or the clearer passages which speak on the same subject, the Scripture twister perverts the Word of God. Violence is done to the divine oracles out of hatred for the truth in order to serve the lie.

The Scripture twisters of II Peter 3 twisted God’s Word in its doctrine of the last things: Christ’s second coming, the final judgment and the renewal of heaven and earth. In denying the Christian hope, the Scripture

twisters destroy the incentive to godliness provided by Christ's return (11-14). Thus their false doctrine serves their sinful "lusts" (3)—always an attraction of heresy. These false teachers hold the wicked world-view of the ungodly world that "all things continue as they were from the beginning" (4). They oppose the worldwide flood and find it hard to believe that Christ will return on the clouds of heaven to purge the world with fire (7, 10-12). Moreover, the godly lifestyle required of Christ's followers is too cramped for their fleshly desires.

Thus these heretics resort to Scripture twisting. They dismiss the gospel accounts of Christ's power and glory at His transfiguration as "cunningly devised fables" (1:16), for the transfiguration points to His glorious coming (1:16-18). They twist Paul's letters and the "other scriptures" of OT and NT (3:15-16), especially those parts which speak of the end of the world. The narrative

of the flood is "willingly" ignored (5). The final "judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (7) is an unpalatable truth, as is the doctrine that "the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (10). "What about our beloved sins!" their flesh cries out. Thus, not content to have any part of God's Word oppose them, they twist OT and NT—gospel, epistle and prophecy—to fit their sinful views and their carnal lifestyles. Many today do likewise. Next time (DV), we will consider the ways in which they twist the Scriptures. ❖

Rev. Stewart is a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches to the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Northern Ireland. This series is being reprinted with permission from the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship website, <http://www.cprf.co.uk/> Volume IX, Issues 20-21.

Church History

George M. Ophoff (24)

Polemicist

by Prof. Herman Hanko

In our last article, we were talking about the basic reasons for the doctrinal controversy which troubled our churches in the years preceding 1953. Our purpose in doing this is to describe the role which Rev. Ophoff played in this controversy, for he took an active part in the defense of the truth during those years. We had talked about the fact that, though our churches, in the last of the "forties" had considerable contact with the Liberated Churches in the Netherlands and with many immigrants from these churches, there were also deep doctrinal differences particularly on the question of the covenant of grace.

There were a number of ministers in our churches at that time who were interested in seeing our denomination grow. While this was not in itself bad, I am convinced that this matter of church growth became more important to them than purity of doctrine. These men saw, in our contacts with the Liberated and in the large influx of Liberated into this country and Canada, an opportunity for the denomination to increase rapidly in size. If these Liberated people could be persuaded to join our

churches, the results in terms of growth would be spectacular.

The problem however, was the difference in the doctrine of the covenant. Contact with the Liberated brought these differences to the fore. I do not think that all the ministers who left us were simply determined to see the church grow regardless of doctrine; but were themselves persuaded, for one reason or another, of the truth of the Liberated position on this question. This is somewhat strange when one considers that the errors of the Liberated were the same errors as had been rejected by our churches in 1924, except that now they were applied to the covenant. But whatever may be the explanation for this, such was nevertheless the case. The result was that there began, with these ministers, a certain agitation in support of these Liberated views; or, at least, a certain agitation for freedom of belief in this area. If we did not agree wholly with the Liberated position, then at least we could tolerate their position within the church.

It was a number of years before the split actually came that there were certain indications of trouble ahead.

And it is not an exaggeration to say that Rev. Ophoff noticed this before anyone else in the churches. Prof. Homer Hoeksema has told me on more than one occasion that Rev. Ophoff spoke of these things to him. Prof. Hoeksema was at this time taking post-graduate work in the Seminary. And often, after classes were over, Rev. Ophoff would stop Prof. Hoeksema to talk with him awhile. In a very troubled frame of mind, Rev. Ophoff spoke of the fact that all was not well in the Church, that trouble lay ahead if things did not change, and that the troubles centered in the contacts which we were having with the Liberated Churches. It was hard at that time for anyone to believe the truth of these fears of Rev. Ophoff. Things seemed to be going along well. Rev. Schilder had come to this country, had proved an amiable man appreciative of the similarity between the struggles of our churches and his churches in the Netherlands. He had lectured and spoken throughout the churches, and many had found him a congenial man of vast learning and of deep love for the Reformed faith. But, whatever else may be said about him, there were these important differences in the conception of the covenant.

It was not too long and the ideas of Dr. Schilder's teachings began to be heard in the churches. A paper by the name of "Concordia" was being published in the West; and this paper began to include articles in it which included strong defenses of a conditional covenant. To these articles Rev. Ophoff addressed himself when he now saw proof that his fears were indeed not imaginary.

It must be understood that, prior to this time, our contacts with the Liberated Churches had been fruitful in spite of the differences. There had been a great deal of discussion concerning the whole idea of the covenant of grace both in the Netherlands and in the *Standard Bearer*. When Dr. Schilder was in this country, a conference was held with him in which all these things were discussed. There was even some talk about establishing sister-church relationships. And all this was worthwhile and interesting. It could have continued to be a profitable exchange of ideas.

But there were practical problems which intervened. The immigrants from Netherlands were looking for a church home. And they were interested in considering our churches too. But they did not agree with our view of the covenant by any means. They were interested, therefore, in the question of whether they could be members of our churches and still maintain their own view of the covenant. They had to know this. Honesty compelled them to inquire into this. And so they sought out what

precisely the view of the covenant was as it was held in our churches, and whether they would be compelled to forsake their own views if they should join. Rev. Hoeksema writes about this in the January 15, 1949 issue of the *Standard Bearer*. A certain Rev. Van Raalte had written to the Dutch immigrants concerning seeking a church home. In this advice which he offered, no mention was made of our churches. Rev. Hoeksema writes:

That hurts.

The reason why this hurts is not because we are so eager to increase the membership of our churches and to become a large denomination, We are not looking for anything like that at all. We strive rather to keep our churches as pure as possible, both in regard to doctrine and life. And as a result we cannot expect a remarkable growth, especially not in the miserable age in which we live. There are not many that will accept the pure Reformed truth, and very few in our age will live from the principle of the antithesis and keep their garments clean. And as far as increasing our membership from the immigrants in Canada is concerned, I have stated before, and I say it again, that we detest Heynsianism; and if the Liberated Church members in Canada believe the Heynsian view of the covenant, they cannot be received as members with us unless they are converted. For it is our conviction that Heynsianism is not Reformed but Arminian.

But that does not mean that we like to be contemptuously ignored...

So these very practical problems forced the issue in a way. Those who were interested in gaining the immigrants from the Liberated Churches without any change in their covenant conception now began open agitation for these covenant views.

In the May 1, 1949 issue of *Standard Bearer*, Rev. Ophoff for the first time begins to attack these views. I want to quote rather at length from this article because, in a way it is important. It shows what other ministers in our churches were writing concerning this question of the covenant. It demonstrates the seriousness of the issues involved. It gives us a glimpse into Rev. Ophoff's polemical writings—of which there are many throughout the *Standard Bearer*. And it proves the deep concern which our leaders had for the truth of God's Word.

But our quote from this article will have to wait to our next issue. ❖

Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

The Ploughboy (6)

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

A very discouraged William Tyndale entered Hamburg in 1529. His manuscripts were lost in shipwreck. Months of hard work were gone. But a very helpful friend from Cambridge, Miles Coverdale, was there as well. He, too, would have a place in the history of the English Bible, but for now his place was to encourage the principal translator—Tyndale.

Within ten months the first five books of the Bible were ready, once again, for publication. As with the English New Testament, the *Pentateuch* was eagerly welcomed in England's towns and moors. This task done, Tyndale made his final move, this time to Antwerp.

Antwerp was not a safe haven for reformers. The agents of the king frequently traveled through its ports. And they were usually looking for one man in particular—Tyndale. Why did he go to Antwerp? It was as close to England as he could get, and—God had work for him to do there. As long as God willed, Tyndale would be safe. The agents could not find him. Meanwhile, the persecutions and burnings in England increased.

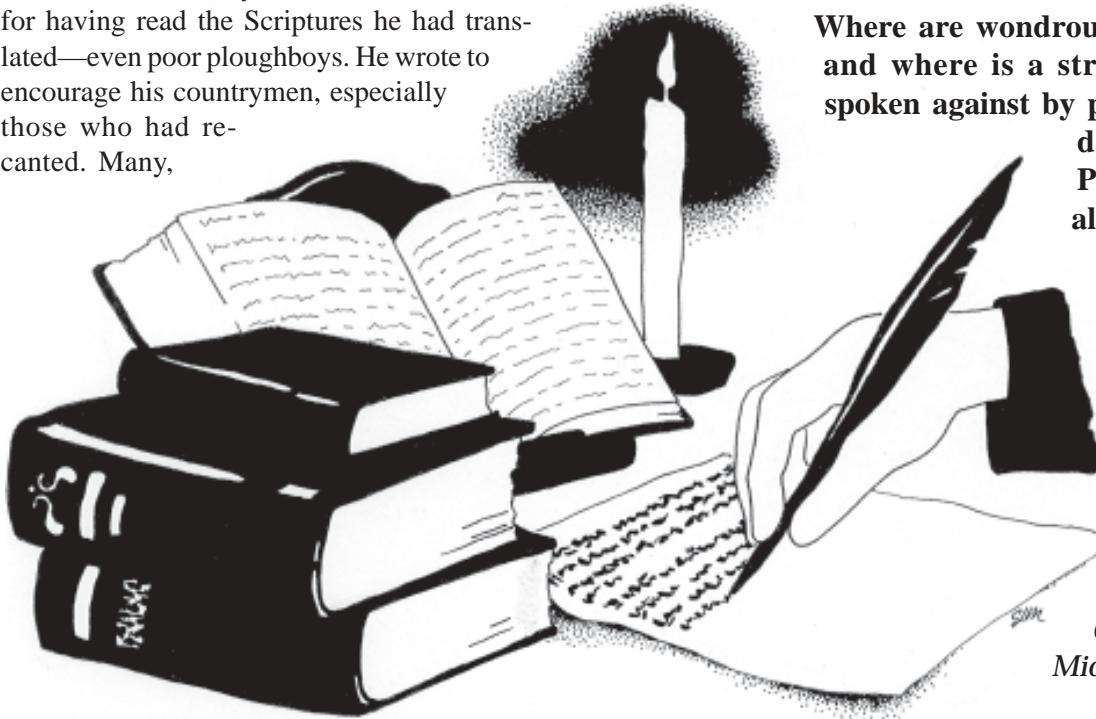
As Tyndale himself had to hide across the sea in Antwerp, his heart was with the suffering people of his homeland. Many of his own friends had been imprisoned or killed. Many were condemned to death for having read the Scriptures he had translated—even poor ploughboys. He wrote to encourage his countrymen, especially those who had recanted. Many,

like Peter, denied their Lord when first tried. But many received strength to stand firm when confronted again. These were always burnt at the stake.

And if Tyndale himself could not be burnt, they could at least burn his books. And if they could not burn all his books, they could at least refute them. A sincere, educated, and powerful Roman Catholic, Sir Thomas More, took up the task. He attacked the authority of Scripture and upheld the word of the pope above the Word of God. This Catholic "saint" even wished for a great many more Bible-reading brethren to be burned!

From somewhere in Antwerp, William Tyndale answered him with the truth of Scripture. But the hunt for Tyndale only became more heated. Special agents were dispatched to locate and arrest him. They searched; they bribed; they eaves-dropped—all to no avail. Tyndale continued his work. It was now 1534 and both Rome and the king were utterly desperate to find him... ❖

Where are wondrous things beheld, who and where is a stranger, and who was spoken against by princes and what was done about it? Read Psalm 119:17-24 to find all this out!



Connie is the mother of 5 children and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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Church News

BAPTISMS

"For the promise is unto you and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Acts 2:39

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:
Samuel James, son of Mr. & Mrs. John Marcus—Byron Center, MI

Andrew James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Terry Kaptein—Byron Center, MI

Gabriel Luke, son of Mr. & Mrs. Todd Overbeek—Byron Center, MI

Annika Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Hulst—Byron Center, MI

Corey Mark, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mark Koole—Faith, MI

Tessa Lynnae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Peter Byker—Faith, MI

Ella Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chad Rus—Faith, MI

Madison Leigh, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Rodney Rau—Faith, MI

Natalie Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mike Langeland—Georgetown, MI

Natalee Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Daran Deemter—Georgetown, MI

Madalyn Lee, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan Engelsma—Georgetown, MI

Cassie Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dennis Kaptein—Grace, MI

Connor Steven, son of Mr. & Mrs. Steven Lotterman—Grace, MI

Noah Jay, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan Dykstra—Grandville, MI

Aubrey Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Josh Hoekstra—Hudsonville, MI

Jenna Renae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brian Bleyenbergh—Redlands, CA

Kasia Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jon Regnerus—Randolph, WI

Kaitlyn Rose, daughter of Matt and Amanda Velthouse—Southeast, MI

Marisa Carolyne, daughter of Tyler and Michelle Pipe—Southeast, MI

Eric James III, son of Mr. & Mrs. Eric Ophoff—South Holland, IL

Emma Danae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dan VanUffelen—South Holland, IL

Kaleigh Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric Lubbers—Southwest, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

Proverbs 22:6

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

David Crossett—Ballymena, Northern Ireland

Heidi Gunnink—Byron Center, MI

Rebecca Gunnink—Byron Center, MI

Gina Verburg—Peace, IL

Rachel Warner—Peace, IL

David Ophoff—Southeast, MI

Jonathan Miersma—Spokane, WA

Alicia Buijter—Lynden, WA

Krysta Zandstra—Lynden, WA

MARRIAGES

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

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Michael Noorman and Miss Jamie Mol—Faith, MI

Mr. John Torlach and Miss Melissa VanBaren—Hope, MI

Mr. Jason VanMaanen and Miss Alissa Brummel—Hull, IA

Mr. Joshua Dykshorn and Miss Elizabeth Persons—Peace, IL

Mr. Peter Hanemaayer and Miss Nicole Pastoor—Trinity, MI