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# Beacon

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# Winged Wealth

by John Huizenga



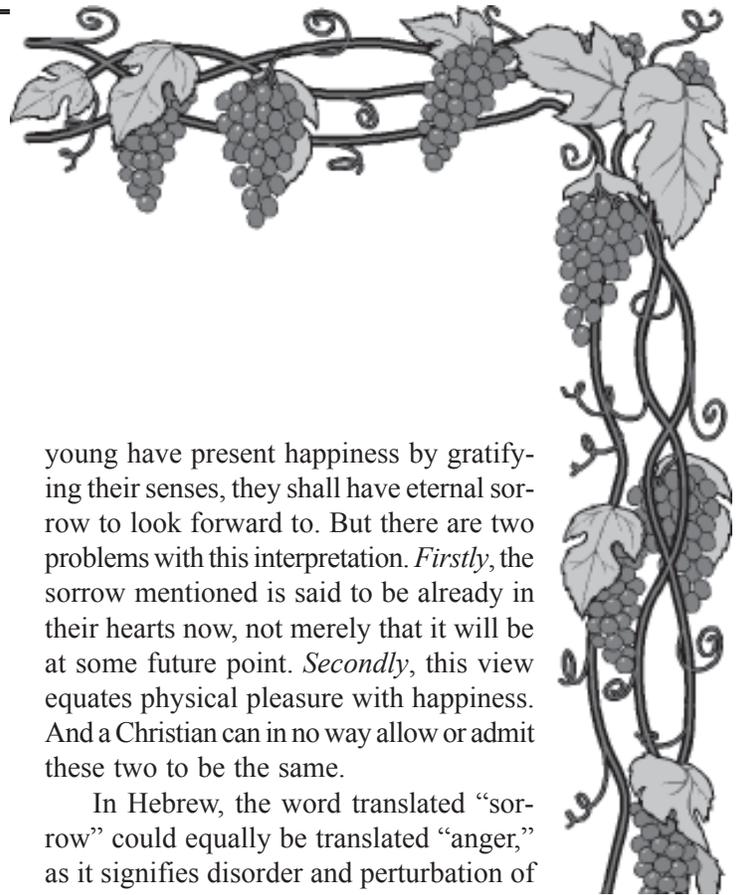
**M**en love wealth. It promises power and control to those who acquire it, security from famine, and hope in sickness or injury. Wealth promises pleasure and fulfillment in life, happiness, and ease in the time of retirement. It promises to alleviate the sorrows that have come in the wake of sin, and stave off death, the great enemy, for just awhile longer. Who is there that is not by nature attracted to such a promise?

But wealth is a wily sort of creature. Riches “certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven” (Proverbs 23:5). They fly away and are gone, leaving but a few light feathers. Like the hungry cat whose eyes are riveted on a bird, so is man in pursuit of wealth. Unlike a cat, man’s appetite for wealth is never satisfied. Adam’s fall into sin has left man with very greedy, but slippery fingers. Wealth swoops before the eyes of man flashing its brilliant colors. When caught, at last, more riches flock in to excite more desire and to mock man. The result is a feeding frenzy. Man scrambles here and there, he tramples anything in his way, he lurches and grasps, he devises ingenious means to capture wealth. Though his pleasures and luxuries increase, he grows desperate because his heart is void of true happiness and peace. Soon he will die. Wealth stares back with cold mocking eyes and a silly grin. It flies away, laughing and chattering like a monkey.

“Cease from thine own wisdom” God commands (Proverbs 23:4). Proud man can not do that of himself. He will not be distracted even by the voice of God. By nature he abhors and hates the voice of God. He knows that what God says is true: “Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?” Peace and happiness in riches does not exist. But he hates God, and tries harder to “prove” his own wisdom. Only when God looks upon His children, redeemed and cleansed in Christ, and in mercy and love sovereignly turns their heart toward Himself, does the sinner see his folly. What is there that can compare to God? Wealth is nothing when the blessedness of holy covenant friendship with God is experienced. And salvation will not make itself wings and fly away toward heaven. No, God is ever faithful and true. He bears us on eagles wings and takes us to be with Himself. With gladness the child of God ceases from his own wisdom.

Take hold of the wealth God gives your and by the grace of God make it your servant. We are called as servants to use our earthly wealth and possessions in service to God. He is the king. All riches are His. We are the servants with whom He entrusts these riches. He gives unto us wisdom to do with them as we judge proper in light of His word. Never must the possessions we have become our master to control and mock us.

The child of God receives a new heart that loves God, but the old man of sin that loves power and pleasure for oneself remains. We must fight against the temptation to rely on our own wisdom and labor to be rich. Seek ye first the kingdom of God. Pray that God will so strengthen your faith that you find it a great joy to give of your riches to the churches and schools. God is pleased to use the means of church, home, and school to gather His people. God is pleased also to use the money He gives to maintain the earthly needs of these institutions as they carry out the work God demands. ❖



# Angry Young Men

by Allan Baird

*“Rejoice, O young man in thy youth; and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.”*

*Ecclesiastes 11:9-10*

These verses are remarkable for two reasons. *Firstly*, above all other sorts of people that the preacher could choose to address, such as husbands or wives, rulers or servants, he picks on young men as the objects of his sermon. *Secondly*, the tone employed by the preacher is ironic, sarcastic even, as he addresses them, using similar tactics to Paul in I Cor. 15:32 when he argues that if there is going to be no resurrection, we might as well spend all our time indulging our flesh, eating and drinking, “for tomorrow we die.” Here Solomon reasons correctly that if there is to be no general judgment of sin on the last day, we might as well spend our time here doing exactly as we please.

The reason why young men are particularly spoken to is not hard to guess. Solomon’s central theme in Ecclesiastes is that every kind of earthly activity and pleasure which is “under the sun,” or which excludes God and spiritual things, is meaningless and empty, “vanity and vexation.” Above all other types of human it is the characteristic central to young men that they have both the strongest ability and greatest inclination to pursue sexual or earthly pleasures. Solomon sets forth a remedy for this moral illness by reducing them to absurdity. He lets them do what they want, and tells them what they wish to hear. But he also reveals the certain consequences of such thought and behaviour—God will surely judge them. The irony is this: the youth who began his life in search of joy ends it in punishment and misery.

But this is not all. According to Solomon’s exhortation to these inconsistent young men in verse ten, they are to remove from them the sorrow and misery that is in their hearts. Some take this to mean that although the

young have present happiness by gratifying their senses, they shall have eternal sorrow to look forward to. But there are two problems with this interpretation. *Firstly*, the sorrow mentioned is said to be already in their hearts now, not merely that it will be at some future point. *Secondly*, this view equates physical pleasure with happiness. And a Christian can in no way allow or admit these two to be the same.

In Hebrew, the word translated “sorrow” could equally be translated “anger,” as it signifies disorder and perturbation of mind. Anger is a typical passion of youth, particularly young men. We can be angry against authority, against admonition, and ultimately against God. After all, is it not God who reproves and threatens us when all we want is to be left alone in peace to do our own thing (walk in the ways of thine heart) and see what the world is like (and in the sight of thine eyes)? And so what?

Only this. The angry young man is a creature who always stands in relation to God, was originally made towards God and in the image of God, and will not find happiness until he returns and rests in his Maker. Let him have as much physical pleasure as he will, he will not be happy until evil is removed from his flesh. Let him have as much liberty as he wishes, he shall not have true freedom unless he submits to the authority of God. How can a man be happy and free when he leads a life which denies what he is, and when his life is such a mass of dreadful contradictions? Not until God is given His rightful place at the center of our angry young lives will our youth cease from being “vanity and vexation of spirit.” Without Christianity to give pleasure meaning, value, and purpose, young men who seek it are no more than angry young beasts. ❖

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*Allan is a member of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland.*

# One Hour With God

by Kristin Brands

*This is the first prize winner of the Beacon Lights writing contest in the high school and younger category.*

Sarah plopped into her favorite easy chair and closed her eyes. What a wonderful feeling just to lay back and relax! It was this great care-free feeling that she looked forward to each Sunday. Just a chance to ease off and catch her breath. “Wasn’t it great of God to give us this day?” she thought.

Down the hall her parents were taking their traditional Sunday nap. Her younger brother John (14), and sister Rachel (6) were also in their bedrooms dozing. The whole house was quiet.

Quietness always nudged Sarah’s mind into the thinking zone, usually thinking about all the ups or downs of the past week. Today, however, her mind was on the sermon that morning. It just refused to leave her mind. It had been on observing the Sabbath day. Sarah had always been quite sure that this was one of the commandments that she always kept. She never worked on Sunday. But the minister’s sermon made her feel as if she were doing something wrong. He had said that resting on Sundays does not mean we are just to relax and do nothing. He said we should be busy with spiritual activities, such as reading the Bible, studying scriptures, or praying. “Surely he can’t mean a nap on Sunday is wrong!” Sarah thought indignantly. “What may we do on Sundays?”

Determined to define her boundaries, Sarah prayed a quiet prayer. “Lord, teach me Thy purpose with regards to this day,” she prayed. “Help me to do Thy will and not my selfish own.”



Quietly, so as not to waken her family, Sarah slipped on a pair of sandals and crossed the road to her Uncle Lee and Aunt Pat’s house. She knew Uncle Lee would be awake.

As if he’d been expecting her, the door opened on the first knock. He greeted her with a warm smile. “Hello Sarah. Nice to see you. Won’t you come inside?”

“Good ol’ Uncle Lee, always there when I need him,” thought Sarah, slipping out of her sandals and heading towards the living room.

“So what has prompted this surprise?” Uncle Lee inquired.

“Actually, I need to talk,” Sarah confessed. “I would like to discuss the sermon this morning. I’m not sure I fully understood it.”

“Glad to talk,” Uncle Lee responded, “Where would you like to begin?”

“Well,” Sarah began, “I guess I just want to know what Sunday is all about. If it’s not meant to be a day of rest and relaxation, what is it? Doesn’t the Bible say that Sunday is supposed to be a day of rest?”

“Sarah, Sunday is a day of rest. We know that is what the Bible says. What you need to understand is what the Bible means by ‘rest’. The Bible is not referring to physical rest, but spiritual rest. As Christians we try very hard to walk in God’s ways throughout the week, but it takes much energy. It is like a runner who runs many miles. He may start out with much energy but he can’t go on forever. He needs to stop and take a rest.

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After a thorough rest with some water or food he will be able to run some more.

“Christians are the same way. We *need* Sundays. That’s why God gave them to us. We can fight about what is legitimate or not legitimate to do on Sunday, but we are missing the point! Sunday is our day to become spiritually refreshed and ready to face another week. During the week we have so many things to worry about. We are so busy with our jobs, food, clothing, or friends that it becomes hard to keep God always before us. We need Sundays to draw closer to God. In drawing closer to God we realize our purpose here in life. Realizing our purpose, we become calm and trust God to take care of our troubles here below. Without Sundays we would soon lose sight of the big picture and would soon become more concerned about the here and the now.”

There was a pause as Uncle Lee allowed these words to sink in. As if on cue, Aunt Pat appeared with a tray of milk and cookies. “Help yourself” she said, pulling up a chair. For a few minutes there was silence as all three, lost in thought, munched on Oreos.

Finally Sarah spoke. “You know, I’ve really been wasting my Sundays by just sitting around, haven’t I? Maybe that is why you always seem to be so much closer to God—because you spend so much more time with Him.”

“There is more to it than just how you spend Sundays,” Uncle Lee replied thoughtfully. “It’s a lifestyle. When God works in one’s heart, causing him to realize that in spite of his great sin God chose him to be His own child, paying for his sin by the death of His own son... Well, it causes you to want to do everything for Him. Not only are Sundays spent with Him, becoming spiritually refreshed for a new week, but throughout the week as well we seek to please Him all the time. We spend time with Him in the morning and at meal times. Personal devotions are also very important.”

“So it’s like this,” Sarah said, “During the week it’s like we are running a race. To keep us going spiritually strong we need to spend time in devotions with God. Sundays are our refreshment breaks where we spend the whole day being spiritually built up, by going to church and studying the Bible, etc. This way we become spiritually energetic, ready to face a new week, or run a new race.”

“Exactly!” exclaimed Uncle Lee with a broad smile. “Or another way you could look at it is like this: We are soldiers. During the week we have to fight in a battle. On Sunday we prepare our weapons and ammunition,

making sure we are totally prepared for the battle ahead. Daily devotions are just little stops or rests long the way.”

“What about when we are on vacations?” Sarah asked anxiously. “We are going to be in Florida next weekend. I’ve been looking forward to it all year. Is it okay to go to the beach just one Sunday of the year?”

“Let me ask *you* a question, Sarah, and let you answer your own question. Remembering Sunday is just one of God’s commandments. Another is not to commit adultery. How will you feel if you marry a man who claims to love you heart and soul for fifty-one weeks a year but then says, ‘Honey, the fifty-second week I’d like for myself. You are satisfied with fifty-one faithful weeks, aren’t you?’”

Sarah laughed. “It’s obvious that no wife would accept such an arrangement! Either a husband loves his wife all the time or he is an unfaithful louse!

“And... I guess that’s the point with Sunday, too, right? If we truly love God we want to be with HIM, our spiritual husband, as much as possible. If on ANY Sunday we are separated from Him and His family, we should feel terrible on that Sunday. So it should never be a CHOICE to be away from His church on Sunday.”

“Well said, Sarah! Let me add this, that being in church is the starting point of all Sunday observance. That is where Jesus Christ promises to feed us. He speaks to us through His ministers. If we have devotions all day long but skip church—unless necessary—we are not loving and obeying our Husband. Nor can we expect His blessing on that lifestyle.”

“I guess that means that I’ll have to give up my vacation to Florida,” said Sarah sadly. “But,” she added, her countenance brightening, “it’ll definitely be worth it.”

“Maybe you should talk to your folks, Sarah. They might make arrangements to be back by Sunday. But if not, you’ll know you’ve done the right thing, and God will certainly be with you and bless you.”

“Okay. Thanks *so* much, Uncle Lee, for your help! I now clearly see the purpose of Sundays. I can hardly wait to get home and share this with my family!”

“Glad to be able to help, Sarah. Just remember one thing before you go. Remember that one hour spent with God is far more valuable than a lifetime spent without Him.” ❖

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*Kristin is a member of Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church of Edgerton, Minnesota.*

# Concerned with Evangelism Methods

## Dear Brothers in Christ,

I am writing in response to the article titled “What the Georgetown Young People Learned in Houston,” in the July 1996 issue of the *Beacon Lights*. I must say I was surprised by what I found in the article. With all due respect to the elder, who wrote this article and the pastors associated with this trip, I will state my concerns.

In the third paragraph of the article we find the description of a room filled with pictures and statues of false gods. Some of their names are Rama-Chandra, Krishna, Varaha, and Vishnu. “This is a room for worshipping,” the article states. In the same paragraph, we have the description of a giggling child coming into the room while some of our young people are present. We are told the reason for the child’s laughter is because they did not know that they were to take off their shoes in this room because it is sacred. What were these young girls from our churches doing in this room? What the article states is that they were unpacking. They were assigned to sleep in this room. The author states that the Georgetown Young People were in Houston, in order to expose them to an evangelistic enterprise, so they could see how it was properly done. The author states “It almost goes without saying that God is glorified in all of these things.” Was God glorified in this enterprise?

I would like to discuss several items that concern me the most.

1. *A lack of important information*
2. *A negative example to our impressionable young people*
3. *A blurring of the line regarding the antithetical life*

The article seems to lack some important information. The article is very clear that our young people lived

in the home of an unbeliever and slept in his idol room, but does not clearly indicate that our young people presented the gospel to the people that they stayed with. The article indicates devotions were held and ministers and group leaders were present at times to make applications. It does not tell us that the idolatry was condemned. This was a serious oversight on the part of the author. I believe that the gospel was presented by our people, however it should have been clarified in the article.

The article spoke of the necessity of people taking off their shoes upon entering this Idol room. The article does not indicate whether they did take off their shoes or not. This is an important matter that should have been clarified. I understand that they did not remove their shoes.

It is not my intention to scrutinize the author’s writing, but to make sure that those who read the article might not have misconceptions concerning what was written. I believe that the people involved in planning this trip love our children and had the best of intentions regarding them. However, we must be very careful to not be blinded by good intentions, but to walk according to GOD’s word.

The article speaks of several situations in which our young people were involved. It speaks of some of our young girls sleeping in a Hindu mans idol room. This room was still in use, as the children “saw Ravi doing the daily chores of incense and chants.” The article speaks of our young people attending a function at a local Baptist church. The article indicates that they were involved in social games, at which time the minister of this church called them together to bow their heads and pray. The minister said “If you accept Jesus into your heart, raise your head and look at me.”

I find these activities to be very disturbing. Are we as God’s people immune to the assaults of Satan? Is it not possible that our children, and even us adults, are

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impressionable? We send our children to our Protestant Reformed schools to keep them separate from the world as long as possible to teach them the truth. Do we tell our children that getting drunk is a great sin in the sight of God, and then take them to a bar to show them the evils of drinking? The Bible tells us to flee from idolatry. Should we not heed this warning? “Come out from among them and be ye separate.” How does II Cor. 6:14-17 harmonize with these activities?

I contend that this was not the proper means of educating and evangelizing the Indian people. I believe that our young people’s witness was compromised by staying in the homes of these peoples. We are to have contact with unbelievers, else we would have to go out of the world. This intercourse should provoke those who see us in our daily lives to ask of the hope which is within us. We must tell those wallowing in the mire of sin to repent and seek after God if happily they may find him.

This Hindu man’s household had to receive the impression that “my beliefs are not all that bad”(my words). How could he not get this impression, after all they were not only staying in his home but also sleeping in his gods’ room? Actions speak louder than words. No matter how strong our young people’s testimony was it would have been nullified as soon as they walked back into the house to slumber for the night. The scriptures say, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” How were our people maintaining the antithetical life under the given circumstances?

We must remember that God uses ordained ministers of the gospel to call His people out of darkness. “For how shall they hear without a preacher.” We must always be conscious that God’s word spoken by His minister is sufficient to reach all of his elect people. It is certainly true that we as individuals are to live in such a way that we speak of our blessings to others and give an answer of the hope that is within us. But we are not called to be “little missionaries” who travel across the country. That is what arminians believe. Our calling is to be witnesses where we are in our daily lives.

I pray that I have not offended any without a cause, and that God will forgive me if I have over stepped my bounds. I love our church and hope that it will flourish until Christ comes again.

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. I John 5:21.

Jay Martz  
Member of Peace Protestant  
Reformed Church

## Response to Jay Martz’s letter:

The report published in the *Beacon Lights* concerning the visit of the Georgetown Young People has aroused interest both positive as well as negative. We have received much encouragement from all quarters, and for this we are thankful. But, as our brother’s letter shows, there are also criticisms. We are not surprised by this because the work of evangelism among the heathen in the U.S.A. is a relatively new labor among us. We are thankful for the concerns raised.

The activities in question were held under the auspices of our consistory, as well as with the approval of the Georgetown consistory, and with the involvement of our home missionary. Therefore, the criticisms are not levelled against the article or its author, but against all those who planned and supervised the activities reported in the article.

Nevertheless, since brother Martz’s complaint is directed against information brought by the article I wrote, the lot falls on me to respond. Let me clarify a couple things right away with four preliminary points:

1. *No compromise was made with the idol worshippers because they were explicitly warned from the Scriptures that idolatry is condemned by God. This was done both by the preaching and teaching as well as by the witness of the young people and the chaperons.*
2. *The families who hosted our young people were those who had been coming to our worship services and other meetings. They were asking questions and spiritually struggling with the matter. They were selected as the ones in whose homes the young people might serve as a good witness, answer questions, and help those we have been working with to come to a greater understanding of the truth of the gospel of grace.*
3. *This is very important—our young people did not by any means participate in the worship of idols in these homes. On the contrary, during the entire week our young people had group devotions around the Word of God and the Hindu hosts sat in on these sessions.*
4. *Please note that there were older chaperons as well as pastors who were present not only*

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*at devotion times, but also at different meals, etc. The groups of ten who stayed in the homes were in no way in danger of being influenced by the hosts. The whole idea was that our young people may learn to be a godly influence upon these unbelievers.*

Now, allow me to deal with some of the specific things mentioned in the letter. I will do this by giving additional information which I trust will help clear up the misunderstandings.

Ravi and his family had been attending our worship services and mid-week meetings off and on for about two years. Ravi is Hindu, his wife was raised Roman Catholic, and both of them were struggling with the call to repent and believe. The fact that he let the girls sleep in the ‘worship room’ shows how far he had come from the devout Hindu ways which prohibit any profane use of the room (no eating, no sleeping, no shoes).

The business in the article about the laughing child and the shoes was meant to point out that the child knew about the formal rules, even though the parents did not enforce them. He remembered when they were much more strict about these things. Whether the girls removed their shoes or not, it would have been a matter of social etiquette, and not an act of worship (see preliminary point 3, above). The article did not say that the idolatry was condemned. The letter is right about this. I could have made this point, but I did not because the subject of the article was what was learned by our young people. The young people learned that idolatry is a futile and pitiful attempt of man to obtain salvation by his own efforts. That point was made repeatedly.

For your information, my article was originally submitted to the *Standard Bearer* to be published with home missionary Rev. Miersma’s article relating to the same conference. When it was decided that Rev. Miersma’s article be published in the *Standard Bearer*, and mine in the *Beacon Lights*, I did not think to make changes. Looking back now, I probably should have broadened the scope of the article on account of its becoming a standalone report of the whole week. I would encourage you to read Rev. Miersma’s article in the July 1, 1996 issue of the *Standard Bearer* (page 426), titled “Reaching the Nations with the Gospel of Grace — An Evangelism Seminar in Houston.”

The letter states that the young people were “involved” in idol worship. They were **NOT** involved in it. They witnessed it. The pastors and leaders made sure they knew what they were seeing.

There is another concern brought out in the letter, which is the altar call at the social gathering attended by (some of) our young people. This concern should be relieved by a little closer reading of the article. That altar call was, as the article points out, an “unplanned and unexpected object lesson showing just how varied are the alternatives men in their ‘cunning craftiness’ devise to the truth of salvation.”

‘Cunning craftiness’ comes from Ephesians 4:14, and describes how men “lie in wait to deceive” us. But our young people were not deceived. The article made the point that they were not deceived because of their training in the doctrines of the Bible. They were not deceived because the overseeing ministers and leaders taught them the truth, reminded them of the truth they already knew, and reinforced the lessons they had been taught throughout their whole lives.

To clarify, the official schedule had the young people spending that Wednesday night in the hosts’ homes, relaxing with the families. When the possibility of going to the local church was brought up, we were assured it would be just ice cream and skating. But the providence of God brought about the unexpected turn of events, and the pastors and leaders later taught the obvious lesson, which was that there is no essential difference between heathen idol worship and Arminian freewillism.

The crafty Arminian, of course, denies this truth, and will seek every opportunity to ensnare us with emotional and psychological appeals. But his power over these young people withers when they remember the stark comparison between blatant and crude image worship and the pathetic attempt at self-salvation through raising a hand at a meeting.

Another misunderstanding was found in the statement that “this Hindu man’s household had to receive the impression that my beliefs are not all that bad.” The letter contains the idea that somehow we compromised with the idolaters. Again, by definition, the article’s intent was to relate what the young people learned, not what the heathens learned.

But the heathens definitely received the clear and unadulterated condemnation of idolatry. In fact, after one of the meetings in which Rev. Miersma spoke pointedly about the despicable nature of those who Hindus claim as gods, Ravi approached one of the young people outside the church, asking if he thought everything Rev. Miersma had said was true. The quick and confident answer, “Yes,” was a powerful testimony. Preaching the gospel and the lives of the saints are the entwined ways

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of presenting the gospel to the world. Ravi was so upset at the preaching of our pastors and by the clear testimony of our young people, that he has stopped coming to church. This is hardly the response to compromise.

The fact that the young people stayed at his house did not constitute becoming “unequally yoked.” Yoking is a bond, a partnership, or a marriage, and is forbidden. On the other hand, a light is not to be hid under a bushel, but put on a table so its beams reach the farthest corners of the room. Salt that loses its savor is thrown out, but salt that stays in the shaker is no better than savorless salt.

So, Biblical antithesis should not be confused with isolation. Idolatry, as such, is not limited to Hindus and other heathen religions who worship pictures and statues. Idolators are all around us. The ungodly worship houses, cars, and any other material thing, as the treasure of their lives. What should our attitude be towards them? If we are to do the work of evangelism properly, seriously, and willingly, we must be able to communicate with them. That means we must be willing to learn their

language and about their ways, so we can bring God’s word to them. It is true that there is a sense in which we are to hate with a perfect hatred those who hate God. But we are not to confuse that with being unwilling to get to know the unbeliever, and, yes, to express genuine love and concern for his spiritual welfare. There is one very important reason why we may and indeed must befriend the unbeliever. It is to bring to such a one the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. God uses the preaching of His Word as well as the faithful witness of the saints. Our witness is not separate from the preaching, but our witness as saints is itself one of the fruits of preaching. I believe this is what the young people learned at the conference, and to their spiritual profit. Faithful preaching should be accompanied by an informed and zealous witness given by God’s people who are willing to communicate with the world in which they live.

Ben Hopkins  
Houston Texas

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## From the Web

# Infant Death

by Rev. Richard Moore

### Question #17

**B**ut what of the little ones, the infants, those yet in the womb? Why does God give them life only to take it soon away?

### Answer #17

**O**ne thing we ought to say at the beginning is that God’s ways are past finding out, we cannot know all the reasons God has for doing the specific things that He does. It is not for us to know. But on the other hand He does reveal to us enough to understand what we need to know to walk in faith and to be comforted. With respect to the little ones He takes to glory before birth, at birth or soon after birth we may consider the following.

The body of Christ is made up of many members, of many different characteristics, talents and capacities. Each and every member of that body of Christ is needed and is important. Each have their exact place in the body of Christ. From the smallest infant, to the oldest gray-

headed saint. Now this body of Christ is not complete without every one of its members. This is the instruction of the Word in I Corinthians 12. And in verse 18 we read “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.” It is God who determines the perfect make up of the body of Christ. This is also the teaching in Romans 12.

Or to use another figure of the Scripture, I Peter 2:4 ff. for example, the church eternal in Christ is viewed as a temple. And just as a temple is not complete without every stone, every window, every shingle, so also the church of Christ. From the corner and foundation stones unto the smallest chink of mortar are necessary for the temple to be complete.

Therefore with every conception the godly parents may know that God uses them as the blessed means to bring forth each member of the body of Christ. And according to His will as He is pleased to gather His church in the line of continuing generations, each soul brought into being by God through conception belonging to Him is

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most precious, to God, to Christ, and to the body of Christ apart from which we would not be complete. Thus when believing parents conceive and the godly mother carries within her womb this little soul whether it be to full term, birth, and a long life; or whether it be only for a few weeks or months, they have the privilege of bearing the seed of the covenant which makes complete the body of Christ. Which is the fullness of the glory of Christ as we read in Ephesians 1:21-22 “And hath put all {things} under his feet, and gave him {to be} the head over all {things} to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”

What a blessing then that we have to make complete His kingdom, even when it pleases God to take His little ones to glory before we have much time with them, but also before they must pass through all the suffering in the midst of the world.

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Finally, just a comment for now. It is obvious from the above that from the moment of conception there is a new life, a spiritual soul, a living being. Man dare not take the life of such a one. Abortion by man is a great evil promoted by Satan, and his co-workers of darkness. As children of God we may have no part in such an evil act of murder. Remember, when Jesus Who according to His humanity was only conceived and life but begun in the womb of Mary; and John was within the womb of Elizabeth but six months, that we are told that John leapt in his mother’s womb for joy at the presence of His Lord.

John could have joy only being spiritually quickened to in some wondrous way to recognize the Lord’s presence as the Messiah in the womb of Mary. Both being living souls. ❖

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*Rev. Moore serves the Hull, Iowa congregation and receives and answers these questions on his Web Page.*

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Church Family

# Thirteen

by Thelma Westra

**W**hat is 13? Thirteen is a special age! This is the age at which we really begin to mature. It is the threshold of adulthood. We have become something we’ve been waiting for: teenagers! No, the physical, psychological, and emotional upheaval does not suddenly occur on our 13th birthday. Some individuals are far more mature than others at this age, but God gradually prepares us for these responsibilities. Yes, they are responsibilities! That’s what you want, don’t you? For years you “strained at the leash.”

“Mom, don’t you trust me?”

“Dad, why can’t I do it myself?”

Independence; that’s what we want!

Of course, this is just the beginning. You’ll need guidance. There will be trials and errors. When we turn 16, Dad doesn’t just hand us the car keys and say, “Okay, you’re old enough to drive now. Get going.” Or if you

could afford a plane, “All right, hop in and fly it.” We need instruction. We must hone our decision-making skills. We must get the “feel” of the car or plane while accompanied by the driving instructor or pilot. We need hours of practice under their watchful eyes.

So it is with grown-up living. We can’t suddenly make all the right decisions. But the Lord provides us with counselors: parents, grandparents, teachers, pastors. Actually our entire lives up to this time have been preparing us for adulthood. You have been watching parents, teachers, and other role models as they accomplish various tasks. At your request, “May I try it?”, you’ve been entrusted at first to help and then to handle certain situations alone. Now we want our complete independence. Or don’t we?

Our minds are filled with questions and uncertainties. On the one hand, we are self-centered and want to

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be self-sufficient. On the other hand, we are filled with self-doubt. Our childhood, which we'd like to leave behind, still clings to us. There are many "Whys." Why so fat, so thin, so ugly, so shy, no friends, not understood, so stupid. Why does a loving God let such cruel things happen around us? Earthquakes, tornadoes, air disasters, floods, terminal illnesses (even in children). Why was I even born?

Who art thou, O man, to question God? Imagine if you can, that you had power in and of yourself, apart from God. Then imagine that you created a person. You created his surroundings and everything connected with him. Now, does this person who is total dependent on you for everything, even for continuing to breathe, have the right to tell you that you made things all wrong? Does he dictate the rules for his own life or do you, his creator?

And this is but a poor illustration. You know yourself to be a sinner and your power is not used properly. Our God, the Almighty Creator of the heavens and the earth, is absolutely righteous and holy. His doings cannot be understood by us, His mere creatures. So we murmur and complain!

Do you remember how the Israelites complained as God, by the hand of Moses and Joshua, led them through the wilderness? Isn't that a pretty good picture of us as we are led throughout our lifetimes? We are certainly as dissatisfied as the Israelites were. And yet, God was faithful. Time and again He rescued them from the disasters into which their sins led them. And time and again the Israelites repeated their sinful foolishness. Yes, there were times that many of them were destroyed. Think of Achan, of Korah, of those who perished by serpent bites. All were not Israel who were of Israel. God's children, by His grace, repent and turn from their sinful ways. Those who do not repent never were His children, even though they outwardly belonged to Israel. God calls all of His children to repent and to flee from their sins. As soon as children understand the ideas of right and wrong, parents must tell them that for God's sake they must do the right and repent of the wrong.

As young teenagers we do not wait for our parents to hover over us to make our decisions, but we show our budding maturity by choosing right and by showing sorrow for sins. We are reaching for adulthood, as Paul defines it in I Cor. 13:11. "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things."

The greatest enemy you face right now is peer pressure. Yes, the devil knows the weaknesses and uncertainties of the teenage years, and he uses his most effective weapon: peer pressure. Every time you come to a decision-making moment, a whisper comes to your ear: "Just try it once," "Everybody's doing it," "Don't be a wimp," "The kids will make fun of you," "No one will ever know," "Don't be square," "Parents don't understand," "God wouldn't be that unreasonable." And so, gradually your resistance to evil can be shattered. After all, you do want to be with the "in" crowd, don't you? But do you really?

Think about Noah. The "in" crowd was eating and drinking and making merry until it was too late, and the waters of the flood swallowed them. Noah dared to be different; he was saved! Jesus said (Matt. 10:32, 33): "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."

In fact, Jesus tells us that if there is some certain sin that constantly allures us, we should take drastic measures to get rid of it, even to the cutting off of a hand or plucking out of an eye. It is better to enter into heaven maimed than to remain whole and be cast into everlasting fire.

Our life on earth is likened to a battlefield. We are called to be soldiers of the cross; to fight the good fight of faith. When a country prepares for war, who are chosen for soldiers? The young people! The strength of a country is its youth. They certainly need the wisdom of seasoned warriors, but warriors are trained from their youth.

So also in the battle we wage against evil, we must be prepared while we are young. We will have a lifetime battle against the devil. However, we have one advantage that no earthly army has. We know that we shall win the victory. Our Captain has already obtained the victory for us!

So—thirteen-year-olds: there will be problems, but they are not insurmountable. There will also be much joy and satisfaction. You will grow physically, psychologically, emotionally, and, by God's grace, spiritually. Exercise your new maturity by looking to your Heavenly Father for help in time of need. ❖

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## April 1

### Read Psalm 15

Psalm 15:1 What a beautiful Psalm to use in our preparations for going to church next Sunday. What does it take to appear before the almighty covenant God? Do the questions in verse one appear on your lips? Do you desire to dwell in God's tabernacle? Do you desire to dwell in His holy hill? David assumes that our answer is yes. He does not allow for not having these desires. He wants God to tell him how it can be possible to attain such a goal. The rest of the Psalm which we shall consider will instruct us in the life of gratitude for our salvation through Christ. This can only be because if the rest of the Psalm were conditions we would all fail miserably and not be able to go to heaven. Let us make these desires ours and thank God for giving us His Son as the way of our salvation. Sing Psalter 25:1 and 26:1.

## April 2

### Read Isaiah 33:13-22

Psalm 15:2 The first description of the man who will abide in God's tabernacle is found in this verse. The man must walk uprightly and work righteousness. In his daily life he must seek to do only the good. There may no appearance of evil be found in his life and character. A businessman must be upright in all of his dealings. Every employee must give an honest day's work. A student must study in a way that no hint of cheating or rebellion toward the teacher clouds his reputation. What about us, people of God? Do we strive to thank God for our salvation by walking uprightly? There is also a second characteristic. We must speak the truth in our heart. Some may say what good is this; shouldn't we speak the truth so it is heard? The answer to that is, "Of course." But Scripture also teaches us that out of the heart comes the issues of life. We will not speak the truth outwardly if we do not speak it inwardly. Pray for such grace today and every day. Sing Psalter 24:1 and 26:2.

## April 3

### Read Galatians 5:13-15

Psalm 15:3 Yesterday's verse told us that we must speak the truth in our hearts. Today's verse tells us about speaking the truth outwardly. Take the time today to read the Heidelberg Catechism's exposition on the ninth commandment. It speaks of loving the truth and speaking about it uprightly. This love of the truth must be for God and the neighbor. Yesterday's verse emphasized love for God. Today's verse speaks of love for the neighbor. Children and young

people how do you speak about your fellow students? How do you speak about your parents and teachers? Members of God's church, are your mouths constantly full of love for every other member of that church? God expects no less from us if we are to abide in His holy hill. Sing Psalter 25:2 and 26:3.

## April 4

### Read James 2:1-9

Psalm 15:4 People of God, who are your companions? Who do you wish to be seen with in this world? What is your fascination of the wicked? Do you honor those who have no use for God? Do you go with them because it is convenient to do so? What about the members of the church? Do they "play second fiddle" to other "friends" that you may have? Do you find excuses to avoid God's people so that you can socialize with those who you find physically more desirable? We must remember that physically we were unsavory in God's eyes. Read Ezekiel 16:3-9 sometime to see this. Our friends and companions must be those who love God's truth with their whole heart. By doing this we will be ready to dwell in His tabernacles. Sing Psalter 16:4 and Psalter 24:2, 25:3 and 26:4.

## April 5

### Read Psalm 15

Psalm 15:5 This final verse in the qualifications of an upright man again instructs us in our duty to our neighbor. In keeping the eighth commandment, we show our love to our neighbor. Sometimes we must go against good business sense to do so. Sometimes we must put our own desires aside for a while so that we reflect God's love upon us toward our neighbors. What can we do for our neighbor? Or to use the language of Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan, to whom can we be a neighbor? There is a beautiful promise found at the end of this verse. When we make the qualifications of an upright man ours, we will never be moved from God's tabernacle on His holy hill. Let us ask for grace to live lives pleasing to Him looking to our eternal reward in heaven. Sing Psalter 24:3, 25:4, and 26:5.

## April 6

### Read Psalm 16

Psalm 16:1 This Psalm begins with a plea of preservation from David to God. David had many troubles throughout his life. When we look at David's experiences, we should be able to see parallels in our lives. We, too, are afflicted on every side when we confess the name of our God with our mouths and our lives. David bases his

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plea on the fact of his trust in God. Is God our trust? As we enter the house of God today, what is our reason for doing so? Is it because we trust Him to provide for us no matter what our situation in this life is? Do we desire to worship Him in the confident trust that He will supply our every need? Let us only trust in Him who is our help and our deliverer. Sing Psalters 27:1 and 29:1.

## April 7

### Read Jeremiah 31:1-14

Psalm 16:2 The late Rev. Harbach writes of the last clause of the verse that the Hebrew original is to be understood "O my Goodness there is nothing above Thee." God's goodness is beyond our comprehension. Sometimes we make light of it using the phrase "my goodness". We have no goodness of our selves. Even our best works are as filthy rags. But God, He is good, and He is the only Good. This is the God who is our Jehovah-our covenant God. Is this our confession as we make our way to school or work today? Was this our confession in our work today? God is good; let us thank Him for it and confess daily that "The Lord is our LORD. Sing Psalters 27:1 and 30:1.

## April 8

### Read Acts 2:41-47

Psalm 16:3 Young people, in whom do you delight? Which boy or girl do you count as your special friend? Why do you count them as a friend? Is it because they have some physical or emotional characteristic which you find attractive? Our question must be is that special boy or girl a saint? Is he or she one that confesses the same God you do? It does matter, you know. Questions like this are important and may have a large impact on the rest of your life. After all, our life does not end here on this earth. Our lives on this earth need to be reflections of that life we wish to have in heaven. Make it part of your daily prayers, as do your parents, that your delight may be in the saints that God has placed around us. Sing Psalter 27:2.

## April 9

### Read II Chronicles 33:1-11

Psalm 16:4 Reading through the Old Testament provides us with ample evidence that God hates idolatry and will not allow it to go unpunished. The first and second commandments deal with the various aspects of this sin. God warned His people often about falling into this sin, and because of this sin both the nations of Israel and Judah were led into captivity. What about us? What about the idols we worship? When the minister preaches on the second commandment, is it easy for us to see that we are guilty of the sin of idol worship? If we do not seek forgiveness, God will chastise us for this sin. If we do not leave it, it will eventually weaken the spiritual character of our family and God will led us into captivity. Pray often for the grace to flee idolatry, and work to flee this sin. Sing Psalter 27:3.

## April 10

### Read Numbers 18:20-24

Psalm 16:5 Each of us has a lot in life. Each of us has a little niche in the history of this world. Each of our lots have been ordained by almighty God. David first of all confesses that the Lord is His inheritance. We will look more at this idea tomorrow. Today we must see that it is God that sets our little corner for us. This does

not make us robots carrying out the whim and desire of a remote maker. No, God the living creator has made us for His glory. It is He that shows us the way we must go. This should give to us great confidence as we face hardship and struggle. This should give us confidence as we look to make decisions about the life ahead that to us lies unknown. We need to be glad that Jehovah is our portion, and we should know that He will be our portion forever. Sing Psalter 27:4 and 30:1.

## April 11

### Read Isaiah 58:8-14

Psalm 16:6 A goodly heritage is ours from eternity! This inheritance is not riches, influence, or tremendous power in this world. This inheritance is not able to be taxed or taken from us by unscrupulous men. This inheritance is given to us by God. It is insured by God. This inheritance is salvation. This inheritance is given to us in the pleasantness of the church. The verse tells us that it is a goodly heritage. Earlier this month we saw that goodness was an attribute of God. He imputes that attribute to our heritage-salvation. People of God, is your trust squarely founded on the salvation that is your heritage from almighty and everlasting God? This was David's confession; is it ours? Sing Psalter 27:5 and 30:2.

## April 12

### Read Luke 2:36-39

Psalm 16:7 Because of his goodly heritage, David praises God. We see that he does this day and night. In the passage you read, we say that the aged saint Anna made God's word her delight. We often see that our elderly saints in the church make God their delight no matter what the hour. This should not be confined to them. We who are younger should be driven to seek God's Word by ourselves no matter what the clock says. The night is often a time of terror. Often death comes at night. Robbers and thieves choose the darkness of night to do their evil deeds. God's people do not need to worry, because their hearts tell them that God has given them good counsel. Young people, you need to seek God often. Sing Psalter 28:1 and 29:1.

## April 13

### Read Proverbs 12:1-8

Psalm 16:8 It is easy to say that we have put God before us today because it is Sunday. If we cannot say this today, when can we say it? But what about last night and the night before? As we sought entertainment, was God before us? We know He saw what we did, but did we put Him before us? Did His word govern our choice of entertainment and friends? If we fell into sin in the last two days, it was probably because we did not put Him before us. Before we go to church today, we better stop and examine our lives this past week. If God was not before us, we better pray for the grace to do better this week and then go and worship Him. Otherwise, our worship will not be true. We also have His promise that if we put Him before us we will not be moved. Sing Psalter 28:2 and 30:3.

## April 14

### Read Romans 5:1-11

Psalm 16:9 Is God before us as we begin this work week? If we have placed Him before us we will be glad because we can be assured that we will prosper in this week. It may not necessarily be physical prosperity, but there will be prosperity nevertheless. We also

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have the basis for our hope. In Romans we read that “hope maketh not ashamed.” This is not hope in which there is no basis. This is hope that is based squarely on the promises of God who changes not. Our hope is found in the blessedness of our salvation. This is not an abstract doctrinal tenet. This is practical theology. We hope in the promises of God knowing that they will come to pass for our profit and His glory. Sing Psalter 28:3 and 29:2.

## April 15

### Read I Corinthians 15:51-58

Psalm 16:10 People of God, do any of you fear death? Sometimes this question is asked of the aged saint who knows that his time on this earth is short. Young people need to be asked this question as well. They need to know that death is not fearful. David faced death quite often throughout his life. His hope in God told him that even though his body would be laid in the grave there was something more glorious than life on this earth waiting for Him. He knew that God would take his soul to glory. The church has the resurrection of Christ on which to base this belief. It is its hope and confidence. People of God, is it yours? Do you confess that you know that God will deliver your soul from death? Sing Psalter 28:4 and 29:3.

## April 16

### Read Psalm 16

Psalm 16:11 This verse is a continuation of yesterday’s verse. Not only will our soul be delivered from the grave, but there is life for us at the right hand of God. There is a completeness of joy that we can never experience in this world. Each of us has pleasures which delight us greatly. These pleasures cannot match the pleasure that will be ours before the throne of God. The pleasures on this earth are temporal; some even die or break. The pleasures in heaven are forever. People of God, don’t let anyone fool you into thinking that heaven is only a state of mind. Heaven is a place where you and the whole church will throng around the throne of God singing His praises. Thanks be to God! Sing Psalter 28:5 and 30:3.

## April 17

### Read Psalm 17

Psalm 17:1 Once again we read a Psalm that is a prayer. David obviously prays this as he is being bothered by enemies. The words I wish us to consider today are found at the end of verse one. Here David describes his prayer as one “that goeth not out of feigned lips.” It should be our desire that our prayers come from true lips. If we bow our heads in prayer and not mean what we say, our prayers will go, as it were, no higher than the ceiling of the room in which we are praying. We must pray from a true heart. We must earnestly mean what we pray. We cannot begin the day by saying one thing to God while all the while we have plans to do the very opposite. God will not be mocked as we pray. He will not answer a prayer that comes from a deceitful person. Let us pray earnestly and truthfully now and always. Sing Psalter 33:1.

## April 18

### Read Genesis 6:1-8

Psalm 17:2: Do we dare ask God to look at us with His all-seeing eyes and ask Him to pass judgment on us? That is what David does in this verse. David knows that the only way he can ask this is through the mercy found only in Christ. He asks this because he

must throw himself upon God’s throne of justice to avenge him of his enemies. David, like Noah, knows that he can find grace only in God’s eyes. It cannot be found in himself or in any other. Once again I ask, do we dare to ask God to judge us? As we go throughout the day which lies ahead or we look back at the day that is past, let us remember that our God is the righteous Judge. Sing Psalter 32:1.

## April 19

### Read I Peter 1:1-9

Psalm 17:3: David knew as he prayed that God had constantly tried his faith. He also trusted in God to deliver him from each trial and to bring him safely through them. We might despair and say, “How could David say such things?” knowing full well the sins into which David fell. But that should give us great comfort. If David could say the words of our text then God can deliver us from all sin into which we fall by His grace. Rejoice when you are tried, people of God! Our Father will deliver us. We can confidently go to the throne of grace knowing that we are cleansed by the blood of Christ. Sing Psalter 31: 1-2.

## April 20

### Read Proverbs 2:10-22

Psalm 17:4: Yesterday we said that it was only by the work of Christ that we can confidently approach the throne of grace. David continues that theme in today’s verse. David realized that it was Satan who was behind all of his enemies’ attempts to cause him to fall. We must know that, too. Satan would like nothing more than to have one of God’s sheep to fall into the deepest of sins. We, like David, must know that the only way of escape is through the word of God. We have that word written for us in the Bible. We must make it our constant companion in this life. From the earliest reader to the oldest man or woman among us, God’s word must be our delight daily. Is it yours? If not, pray that it might be. Sing Psalter 32:2.

## April 21

### Read II Samuel 22:31-40

Psalm 17:5: People of God, do you confess that the path that you walk is the path of God? Are you conscious of this fact as you look at the week that lies ahead? Do you make your plans with the words Deo Volentie (If the Lord wills) ringing in your heads? When you plan to do something, young people, do you plan an activity with the realization that God is with you wherever you go, whatever you do, and with whomever you do it? In order to ask God to not let your feet slip, you must not be walking knowingly in the paths of sin. We must be walking in His ways in order to make such a request. Such a request is necessary seeing that we are weak and sinful men. Let us pray this daily and let us conscientiously walk in the way of Jehovah. Sing Psalter 33:2.

## April 22

### Read Luke 18:1-8

Psalm 17:6: When a little child runs into the house and calls for mother, he does this knowing that if mom can hear him, she will answer. He also knows that if he goes to his father with a problem, Dad will fix it. It is this childlike faith and confidence that we must have as the children of the heavenly Father. David exhibits this in today’s verse. He knows that God will hear him and answer him in his distress. This must be our confidence as well, each time that we

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bow our heads in prayer. This is the confidence of faith. This is the confidence that we have through the faith given to us by Christ. Let us pray with confidence resting assured that the answer to our prayer will be good. Sing Psalter 33:3.

## April 23

### Read Jeremiah 32:16-22

Psalms 17:7: In this verse David extols the goodness of God's loving-kindness as it is exhibited in the salvation that He has wrought for us. He calls that loving-kindness marvelous. As we stop and ponder this fact, think about all the sins that we commit whether in thought, word, or deed. Think about the depths of evil into which we plunge ourselves. Then think about the fact that God has delivered us from those sins and that great depth of evil. Truly His loving-kindness is marvelous! First of all, let us confess that fact with our mouths. Secondly, let us give thanks in prayer for such deliverance. Finally, let us live lives of gratitude for this deliverance by walking in accordance to the law of God. Sing the third stanza of Psalter 31 and 32 and stanza 4 of Psalter 33.

## April 24

### Read Zechariah 2:6-13

Psalms 17:8: In this verse we have two figures of speech to help us understand the grace of God. First of all we have the phrase, "the apple of thy eye." God loves us as He loves Himself. When we use this figure, we are asking God to care for us in a way that only He can. In the second figure we have that of a hen and her chicks. Just as a hen will gather her chicks under her wings at any sight of danger, so David prays that God will keep him that safe. We can be comforted that in whatever situation we may find ourselves, God will care for us. He word is true and He is faithful. Sing Psalter 31:4.

## April 25

### Read II Timothy 4:14-18

Psalms 17:9: Yesterday we saw how great God's care is for His people. He loves them so much that He sent His son to die on the cross for them. In today's verse we again see the enemy that we face. Parents, are you conscious of the wicked world into which you send your children? Do you do all that you can to protect them from evil? You must start with prayer. Then you must teach them God's word. Then you must by example show them how to keep from evil. Finally, you must discipline those who fall into sin. God protects our children and us from evil but only in the way of walking in His word. Sing Psalter 33:4.

## April 26

### Read II Peter 2:1-10

Psalms 17:10: Another description of the wicked is given in this verse. It is a very graphic picture. I believe that we see an example of an Hebrew parallelism here. The fat spoken of in the first part of the verse is a picture of the pride of man. Wicked man proudly proclaims that he is his own savior. Wicked man has no need of a crucified Christ for salvation because he can do it all. How sad is the picture of the death of the wicked. Let us learn from his folly and walk in the wisdom of God's law. Even though his way may seem good now, it only leads to destruction. We must pray that pride never reigns in our hearts and that we only look to Christ for our salvation. Sing Psalter 31:5.

## April 27

### Read I Peter 5:1-11

Psalms 17:11-12: Most of us, if not all of us, have never met a lion as we walked about on our daily journeys. But yet most of us probably know what would happen if we would. We have seen pictures of lions, we may have seen them in zoos, or we may have seen them on videotape or film in the wild. A lion's reputation is that he is a fierce hard fighting animal. David and Peter make the comparison of a lion to Satan for our benefit. They knew of the helplessness of the child of God before the devil in his own strength. Adam and Eve could not stand; countless others have not stood. We need God to help us fight the lions that roam the streets today. Young people, you cannot fight the lions that Satan sends out after you by your own power. Acknowledge this and walk in God's ways alone. Then only will Satan slink back into his den beaten and defeated. Sing Psalter 31:5.

## April 28

### Read Revelation 22:13-21

Psalms 17:13: David expresses the truth of God's sovereignty in this verse. David knows that God uses the wicked to carry out His plans for the salvation of His people. David's prayer then is one of confidence. He prays for deliverance knowing that God is in control. We, too, must do this. We must pray for deliverance from the wicked around us. Then we must live lives of gratitude. I cannot express this enough. In our world we easily forget to thank those who help us. We must never forget to thank God through the way He has commanded us to use, that is to live God-fearing lives always. In the living of that kind of life, we know that God will bless us. Sing Psalter 31:5.

## April 29

### Read Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

Psalms 17:14: In this verse we again see the end of those whose "god is their belly." The wicked may live a life which appears fulfilling on this earth. They may seem to have it all while the child of God who struggles to live righteously seems to struggle just to survive. But when they die all that they have accomplished is left to the evil children they leave behind. They have laid up treasure to earthly riches which "moth and rust doth corrupt." The child of God, however, has treasure in heaven. Sure he leaves earthly goods behind. But they are not his inheritance. Our inheritance is in heaven as we sit at the feet of Jesus. Let this be our comfort even now as we live in this vale of tears. Sing Psalter 31:6.

## April 30

### Read Psalm 17

Psalms 17:15: We close this month with the beautiful last verse in this Psalm. Read it again. Is this your desire? I am sure that our aged saints would quickly say yes. But we who are younger must also have the same desire. This does not limit our lives. This does not make us able to do nothing here on this earth. But rather, this is the possibility to live. Our desire to awake before the face of God who sees all is all the comfort we need to live in this wicked world. People of God, do not despair. God will take care of us in this life and bring us to glory where we will be satisfied with the good things from Him "from whom all blessings flow!" Sing Psalter 31:7, 32:4 and 33:5.

# God's Sovereignty in Conception

## Part 2

Mrs. Geri Klaassens

**G**od is Sovereign in conception.

We like to make excuses to justify our reasons for doing something which we know in our hearts does not coincide with God's way. We also want to assume control for our lives in a way which does not glorify God. This aspect is not more clear than in the way the world is technologically taking over conception and birth; and the way the children of God are made to feel if they even have more than two children. We are bombarded by the world's attitude in many ways, especially through the media. Because these views permeate our society, we begin to think that it isn't really contrary to God's word to practice a 'little' conception prevention. Where will it end? How will we know when we've gone too far?

God is sovereign in conception.

"Yabbut, we can't raise all these children by ourselves. We have to be concerned with raising the children we already have."

To this we hear clearly from God, "There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God...there is none that doeth good, no not one," Rom. 3:10ff, and "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," Rom. 3:23. God humbles us to the dust so we realize how much we need *him*, how much we must depend on *him* for all things. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble," James 5:6, and "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up," James 5:10. In this humility, God brings us to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need," Hebrews 4:16. We then also declare boldly with Paul, "I can do all things *through Christ* which strengtheneth me," and "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content," Php. 4:11,13. Without God, this is true. We cannot do it by ourselves. With-

out him, we can do nothing. God also knows what is best for us and for our families—and the existing children.

"Yabbut, man has responsibilities and God provides means..."

Man's responsibility is to please and glorify and trust God. Man says, "Well, I don't think I should have more children for a season, but God still might give me one, so since God provides me with the means to prevent it, I may use those means to prevent God from granting conception?" We can see the conflict in the above statement. May we attempt to prevent God by using means 'God has provided' or is man making himself god by interfering in areas which he has no right?

Think of the sin of Onan and the results. (Gen. 38:8-10) We can see how our sins often rise up against us when we look at what *we* want and how much easier life would be if only...

God is our conception prevention or birth control, if you will. "Children are an heritage of the Lord and the fruit of the womb is his reward" Ps. 127:3; and we must be careful of the impression we leave on our children if we pray, "Not now, Lord. Our situation is such that we shouldn't have children right now." Or our attitude may 'tell' our children that they are burdens rather than blessings. They may wonder why their parents wouldn't want anymore children. Is it because of them and the stress they place on the family? Our attitudes about children are reflected in our children and their attitude toward other children and siblings. Rather, let us pray, "Turn us again O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved," Ps. 80:19.

"Yabbut, we're not in good health, and have great difficulty dealing with the daily challenges that a family brings."

When a husband or wife is very ill, the spouse will show tender love, care, and consideration, and they may

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choose to possibly abstain from sexual relations because of health; these relations being probably the last thing on their mind anyway when dealing with severe illness. In this situation, the motives for abstinence become to preserve life, (that of a spouse), not to prevent it. Here, conception prevention hardly comes into the picture. When scripture speaks of sexual abstinence, it is in the light of spiritual strengthening as fasting and prayers. This is never a long period of time. The seriousness of illness will necessarily dictate the duration of abstinence, but it also ought not be for a great length of time since it is indeed a picture of the unity between Christ and the church.

A mother may become ill after having had children (not necessarily related to pregnancy or childbirth) during which time fellow saints rally around to provide support as do the existing children, if they are old enough. Situations like this build responsibility and other positive character traits in the family. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts as we pray for and assist that family. Remember, God sends affliction and tribulation; “and we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us,” Rom. 5:3-5.

“Yabbut, I just can’t handle it. I’m so stressed out already, and any more children just might put me over the edge.”

God knows exactly what we can and cannot handle and deals with us accordingly. He grants grace sufficient *when* we need it. “And he said unto me, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me,” II Cor. 12:9. We will not necessarily be able to handle six children when we have two. But he usually gives us one (or two) at a time and grace to handle them when they come, not before they’re there. There are also those who (we think) would be able to handle six, seven, or more children, whom God has seen fit to bless with two or three (or not even one). These families may feel ‘short-changed’ whereas in reality they become a true blessing to the larger families about them with their helpful encouragement, generosity, and prayers, and their realization that life in the midst of a world of iniquity is not easy.

We need not fear the gifts God gives unto us. We must welcome them as the treasures they are. We need not fear that God might add trial to trial or tribulation to

tribulation just to see how much we can take before we break. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it,” I Cor. 10:13. Our God is righteous, just and full of mercy. “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord: that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy,” James 5:11. We have the confidence that we are his children through Christ and his tender love will carry us through. Even Job in the midst of trial, the death of his children, sickness, desertion by friends and family, could say, “I know that my redeemer liveth.” God will grant us the faith and humility as a little child to totally depend on him. He will cause his blessings to be a joy to us, “like olive plants round about thy table,” Ps. 128:3b.

We must look to the Lord, his glory and honor in all aspects of life, his sovereignty, and pray that we may trust in his goodness. “What man is there of you, whom if when his son asks for bread, will he give him a stone? how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” Matt. 7:9, 11. Pray also that God would grant us the faith and trust to “trust in the Lord with all (our) heart and lean not unto (our) own understanding. In all (our) ways acknowledge him and he will direct (our) paths. Be not wise in (our) own eyes: fear the Lord and depart from evil,” Prov. 3:5-7.

Let God’s sovereignty, honor and glory shine forth and may his kingdom come by way of the covenant elect seed.

“Now the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work,” II Thes. 2:16, 17. ❖

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*Mrs. Klaassens is a member of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. She and her husband, Herman, are the parents of eight children.*

# Maker of Heaven and Earth

by David Overway

*This article was originally written for and submitted to the scholarship committee in response to a question regarding the Christian's response to Environmentalism.*

I have always enjoyed the natural world. From as far back as I can remember until today, my childhood and my young adulthood have consistently been colored with the delight of nature. From this personal perspective, the topic of Environmentalism is for me especially interesting.

Indeed, I am only one of many to whom the enjoyment and preservation of the natural world is important. Throughout history, people have been moved, sometimes very deeply, by nature. Also, today there is a growing minority concerned with the preservation of the environment and with sensitizing others to this responsibility. As Christians, we need to work out not only a defense against the errors of the world with regard to their largely inappropriate relationship with the natural world, but even more importantly, we need to formulate and give attention to a correct and positive system of thought regarding our natural environment as our Father's creation.

Although Christians are the only people who can view the creation correctly, many others have viewed it positively. Often this positive attitude has become extreme and people have deified the natural world around them. Most, if not all, pagan religions include some element of nature worship. Ancient "uncivilized" cultures frequently held to Animism, the belief that all living phenomena have souls and need to be worshipped, placated, or dealt with in the proper manner. So-called "civilized" peoples such as the Egyptians, Aztecs and Incas worshipped a host of creatures and other natural objects including hawks, jackals, bulls, jaguars, rivers, seas and the greatly respected sun and moon. Even within the more familiar cultures of the Greeks and Romans, nature-based fertility cults were very common, particularly among the lower classes. In Western civilization, nature worship was gradually replaced by Christianity, rationalism, the worship of man and his advancements, and in turn, nature was gradually

seen as something to overcome, domesticate and control rather than worship.

In the nineteenth century, however, the Romantic poets again began to bow before the altar of the Natural world. Wordsworth, for example, referred to nature as "The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul of all my moral being" and openly referred to himself as "a worshipper of Nature."<sup>1</sup>

The Romantic spirit has not disappeared today. The modern world has not rejected as erroneous the ideas of men like Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Thoreau. Instead, these ideas have been modified and coupled with elements of thought from Eastern religions, science (or pseudo-science such as the growing field of parapsychology), the occult, and Native American spiritualism. It is not then the political agenda of the "environmentalists" against which we must defend the proper view of the creation, but the powerful, growing, conglomerate world view that is this agenda's matrix.

It is also this nature-idolizing world view, both historical and modern, that is not difficult to prove wrong. We find in Romans 1 a description of those who "became vain in their imaginations" and "worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator." This passage further speaks of the guilt of those who do such things and the judgement to which God gives them over.

However, instead of entering into a lengthy discussion of the faults and untruths of this nature-based, spiritualistic and unchristian world-view, it would be more productive to explore positively the Christian's proper view of nature. After all, with the cognizance of the truth is the lie exposed.

There are then, many different perspectives of the natural world that the Christian must keep in mind. For example, we must always remember that the natural world is the Lord's and is cared for by Him (L.D. 10). We must also remember that this creation will some day be made new (Romans 8:19-22). Also, nature provides a way of knowing God.

With regard to the last idea, we can picture the creation as a book of which our God is the author, because He made it and wrote it. We can read this book with the

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eye of faith and comprehend it with believing hearts and minds. The Belgic Confession in Article 2, supplies this picture of creation as a book and states that one of the ways in which we can know God is “by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely His power and divinity...”

Before we go any further, however, we must understand that nature only functions fully in this way to those who are believers and who already know God through other means. The unbeliever can only read on the pages of creation the words: “There is a God.” They can see in the creation some of the “invisible things” of God, “even His eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20) but they cannot witness Jehovah as a covenant God and all this implies in mountains and meadows unless first the gift of faith is present.

Another pitfall that we need to avoid is the misconception that we can lay our Bibles aside and replace the study of God’s Word with the study of His creation. Nature does not teach us about salvation, God’s will, the Trinity, or the Church. Nature can only supplement our Biblical knowledge by giving us pictures and showing us a little about what these things mean.

Although nature can reveal to us an idea of the glory of God, we must remember that it can not do so perfectly. All the limitations placed on creation’s revelatory message are due to the Fall. When Adam fell into sin he no longer was able to view God’s hand in nature as he once could. He went from a 20/20 vision in this respect to near blindness.

Also, because of the Fall the creation itself was no longer perfectly able to reveal its Maker, for the curse also fell upon the natural world. In Genesis 3:17 and 18, God informs Adam, “cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee...” No longer was this creation the ideal habitat for Adam and Eve. Because of their sin, the natural world became for them (and us) a hostile environment. Perhaps the greatest measure of this hostility was the profound silence of the creation that the banished couple experienced. When they were in the garden they daily heard the sweet serenade of all creation as it lifted up its voice in praises constantly glorifying its Maker, for which purpose it was created. After the Fall, however, nature too served to ostracize man from the blessed communion of the Holy

Trinity. Now Nature’s song was reduced to a barely audible whisper. Nature no longer taught man about his God as it once had. We have fallen and therefore need something more than the creation to teach us about God.

Although we do not learn our doctrines and theologies from nature, we do stand to benefit greatly from turning an attentive eye of faith upon the wonderment of nature, remembering all the while what Rev. H. Hoeksema wrote: “Creation is, therefore, a thought of God, a creative Word of God; and all creatures are individual thoughts, words, together revealing the perfect and infinite wisdom of the Most High.”<sup>2</sup>

When we view nature in this way, then we respond as Job did when God showed him His greatness through the creation. We also respond in awe to the Lord, “I know that thou canst do everything, and no thought can be withholden from thee.” We answer in this way when we also witness in nature, “things too wonderful for me, which I knew not” (Job 42:2 & 3c).

Augustine, too, spoke about these “things too wonderful” in his wise and eloquent way. He wrote, “Ask the earth and the sea, ask the plains and the mountains, ask the sky and the clouds, ask the stars and the sun, ask the fish and the animals—and all will say, ‘We are beautiful, because God has created us’. This beauty is their testimony to God.”<sup>3</sup>

When we, as so many before us, turn intent and observant eyes on nature we also cannot help but be stunned by the beauty of our Father’s World. Augustine continues for us with a word of caution in this respect, “Yet the soul must not simply enjoy outward beauty, feasting its eyes on what God has made. For outward beauty fades and decays, it is constantly changing. The soul must understand all creation as a sacrament, an outward sign of the inward love of God.”<sup>4</sup> With this in mind, he says we must treat the creation “with respect and honor, with praise and adoration, but not as the first object of our love. The first object of our love is not the creation but the Creator.”<sup>5</sup>

The Psalms give us perfect examples of the nature-observant child of God responding in love and praise to the Creator. Many of the wonders of the creation that the Psalmists refer to are also very familiar to you and me, and so these Psalms also reflect our response to the Creator. We also exclaim, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained, What is man that thou art mindful of him?” (Psalm 8:3 & 4). We, too, have heard the voice of the Lord in the thunder and seen His “lightnings

lighten the world” (Psalm 77:18). We, too, with the writer of Psalm 147 have seen our God cover the heavens with clouds sending torrents of rain to the earth, causing the grass to grow. We, too, have seen Him send “snow like wool” and have exclaimed, “Who can stand before His cold?” We have seen Him return the springtime, melt the snow, causing “His wind to blow and the waters flow” again. We have heard the birds of the heaven “sing among the branches” and we know of the innumerable creatures of the “great and wide sea” (Psalm 104). We with the Psalmist instruct all these things to praise the Lord. Let all things praise their Maker! “Fire, and hail; snow and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling His word; mountains, and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl...Let them praise the name of the Lord!” (Psalm 148).

When we see the creation we cannot help but see through these things the great wisdom and glory, power and beauty that belong to the Creator. Then we can do no other but joyfully declare, “I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being...Bless thou the Lord, O my soul! Praise ye the Lord!” (Psalm 104:33 & 35). “For His name alone is excellent; His glory is above the earth and heaven.” (Psalm 148:13).

Creation, then, provides for us in part a way in which we can know God. As we gaze on our Lord’s magnificent creation we gain a more clear knowledge of His awesome wisdom and glory and by such are moved to praise and to a deeper and more fervent love for our God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.

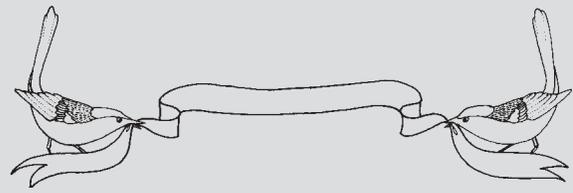


<sup>1</sup>William Wordsworth from Lines Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, taken from *Great Poems* compiled by Louis Untermeyer; pages 638-641.

<sup>2</sup>Rev. Herman Hoeksema from *Reformed Dogmatics*, RFP, 1966; page 176.

<sup>3-5</sup>Augustine from Sermons taken from *Selected Readings from Augustine of Hippo*, Fleming H. Revell Co., N.Y.; page 35.

*David is a member of First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan.*

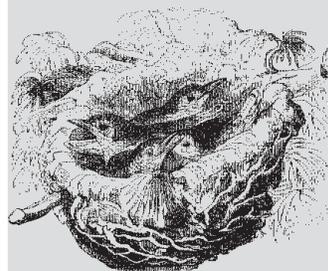


## New Birth

*Again it is springtime,  
We thrill to new birth  
As God in His wisdom  
Reclothes all the earth.  
Let’s praise our dear Father  
In heaven above,  
For each gift He gives us  
Is sent in His love.*

*May we see more clearly  
How God guides our way;  
His hand e’er upon us  
Yields strength day by day,  
Preparing us ever  
While here we must roam,  
Equipping us daily  
For our heavenly home.*

*Thelma Westra*





## In Veere

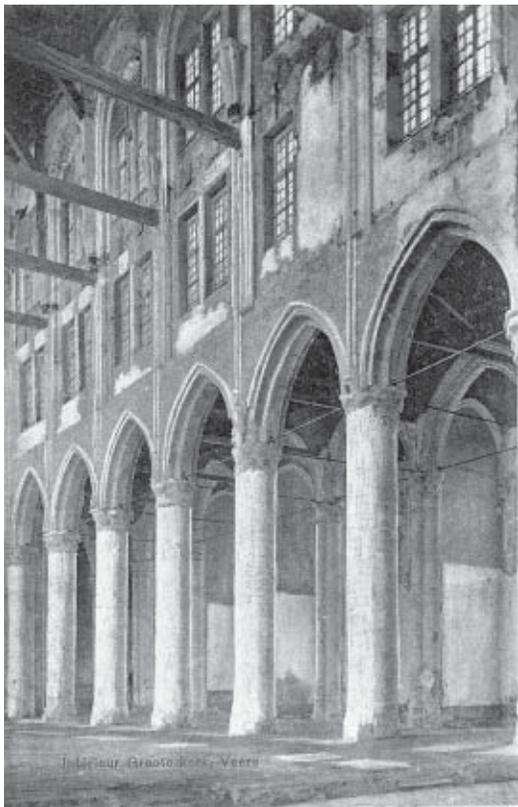
by J.P. de Klerk

**T**his de “Grote Kerk” (the big church) of the Dutch town of Veere, on the island of Walcheren. The town was founded by refugees from the Eastern part of The Netherlands, in 1170. It was damaged by flooding in 1530 but was restored. The church building started in the Middle Ages. The first part was a complete small church, but later became part

of the “Grote Kerk.” When one-third of the tower was made, there was no money any more for the rest. The planned big windows were replaced by small ones. The interior was simplified.

Veere and its harbor soon became an important trading town. In 1555 the German emperor Charles V made of Veere a margraviate. In 1564, the Reformation came to Veere by Johannes van Miggrode, who left the Roman-catholic priesthood and became a Reformed minister. In the “Grote Kerk” all statues and crosses were removed without damage to the interior. Almost all the inhabitants of Veere became State-Reformed; the majority still are, but they do no longer wear their traditional costumes, which can still be seen in a local museum. My grandparents still wore them; especially when it was a Sunday.

When the Spanish army of King Philips came, led by the merciless Duke Alva, he wanted to kill minister Miggrode, so in 1567 he fled to England, together with other Reformed people and founded a congregation in Colchester. On May 4, 1572 Veere declared itself a territory of Prince William I of Orange, and Alva did not come. Minister Miggrode came immediately back to Veere. He preached the Reformation in all the towns of the island of Walcheren. Together with a minister Gerobulus he went to the neighboring island of Zuid-Beveland and made the churches Reformed. In 1925 he was secretary (“scriba”) of the Reformed Synod who made a Church Order. In 1774 a pillar in his honor was placed in Veere, so that he would not be forgotten. The interior of the “Grote Kerk” had to be restored. It had especially suffered in the days of the French emperor



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## Veere in 1925

*Leaving the church, in traditional costumes, except the minister who has a black suit with a black hat. At the background the famous townhall of Veere, which has a beautiful carillon in the tower. This building was never touched by wars. Together with the "Grote Kerk" it is visible from far away.*



Napoleon who occupied Walcheren and put a whole batallion of soldiers, with cannons, horses, etc. in the Church. He knew that the British Navy would not fire at the Church, when they came for the liberation of The Netherlands in 1809 (they were on their way to Antwerp, but returned).

Veere had during 200 years a close religious and economic relationship with Scotland; they had a small Church of their own in Veere, for the sailors. The "Grote Kerk" is built on high ground and not inundated, like the rest of the island in 1940, 1944, and 1953; now protected by a high dam. ❖

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*J.P. de Klerk is an author and journalist from the Protestant Reformed Church in New Zealand.*

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Where We Stand

# Oecolampadius: Father of Reformed Church Discipline

by John Huizenga

**W**e can be very thankful that God raised up a man such as Oecolampadius to study the doctrine of church discipline and develop it for proper use in the church. He was a shepherd and heart. He brought to light the pastoral nature of church discipline, in contrast to the false idea that church discipline is punishment. He also saw that discipline was the work the Great Shepherd through the church, and not the work of secular authorities. Today we include this

doctrine under the reformed concept of the autonomy of the local church. The autonomy of the local church means that each congregation is a complete manifestation of the body of Christ who exercises His authority through individual believers and the special offices of minister, elder and deacon which are called by Christ through the church to rule the church by means of preaching, administering the sacraments, and exercising Christian discipline.

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Oecolampadius was born in 1482 to parents who were quite different in character from one another. He was given the name Johannes Hausschein. His father was known in the small town of Weinsberg as a rather shrewd merchant while his mother was noted for her religious piety and dedication to good works among her neighbors. We can be thankful that young Johannes received his mother's character along with his intellectual gifts because his wise and loving character lives on in the Reformed approach to church discipline.

Although his father could see no use for higher education, his mother directed him along a course of study that would prepare him for higher education. In 1499 the University of Heidelberg admitted young Johannes, now 17 years old, to study under its distinguished professors. It is likely that here Johannes was introduced to Reformation ideas through the reform minded Jakob Wimpfeling who taught only a few years at Heidelberg, but had a strong and attractive personality.

After completing his liberal arts education in 1503, his father wanted him to study law, but he pursued a degree in theology instead. Before completing the degree in theology, Johannes accepted the invitation to tutor the young son of Philip of Pfalz and therefore lived in Mainz from 1506 to 1510. After tutoring he was called to preach at his home town until 1513 when he resigned after realizing his need for further education.

From this time on, the life of Johannes was flooded with Reformation ideas. Between 1513 and 1516 he studied Greek and Hebrew at Tübingen, Heidelberg, and Basel, became good friends with Melancthon and Capito, and helped Erasmus with his Greek New Testament. He even began to use the Greek form of his name around this time: Oecolampadius; perhaps an indication of his enthusiasm for Greek and reading the Word of God in the original languages.

After this flurry of academic activity, he went back to Weinsberg to preach with a baccalaureus formatus. But soon, 1518, he went to Basel, where, among other things, he published his Greek grammar, received his doctorate, and became Cathedral preacher of Augsburg. During this time he began to read the writings of Luther. His reading of Luther had something to do with the great tension he began to feel between the practices of the church and his own experience. Though Oecolampadius never indicates why, most historians believe that it was this tension which forced him in 1520 into the Brigittine monastery at Altomünster.

It was not long, however, before he discovered to his horror that the monastery was full of the same conflict between church practice and what the Scriptures taught. Nevertheless he stuck it out for two years, using the agitation of his situation to formulate his thoughts.

He finally came to the conclusion that "The rock on which Christ intended to build his Church is not Peter nor even his faith alone, but the faith of all believers in Christ."<sup>1</sup>

Unable to contain himself, Oecolampadius ended up making an "open challenge against the Church's entire system of sacramental dispensation and her authority guarded by the holy order of priesthood."<sup>2</sup> Finally in 1522, he fled the monastery "a fully-fledged and convinced Reformer," and hid in Basel. But because Oecolampadius was famous as a scholar and evangelical preacher, the people forced him out of his scholarly recluse to the pulpit of St. Martin's Church.

The city of Basel was on the brink of making a complete reform. The subsequent process of reform (1522-1528) depended on Oecolampadius for its success and provided him with the environment necessary for doing his work in Reformed polity. Iconoclasm and other inappropriate behavior of overzealous people followed closely in the wake of reform, and left Oecolampadius, along with other Reformers, feeling the need for discipline in the life of the church. But "What distinguishes Oecolampadius from all the rest of his fellow Reformers, either in Switzerland or Germany, was his profound insight into the very nature of church discipline itself, namely its pastoral and curative function."<sup>3</sup>

It is not clear exactly how Oecolampadius came to his position on discipline. His position appears to be quite original with him. He did not get it from Zwingli of Zurich or Haller of Bern. Neither did it come from the Anabaptists. Demura remarks in his thesis that:

The general tenor of his theology, characterized by the pre-eminence of love as the central motif of Christian life and thought may have something to do with the formation of Oecolampadius' idea of restorative, curative, and amendatory church discipline.<sup>4</sup>

Needless to say, his ideas were based upon Scripture which brought about his concern for the sanctity of the Lord's Supper, and the Supper could only be safeguarded by means of the discipline of excommunication. The purpose of excommunication as understood by Oecolampadius was "the holiness of the Church. The Church could not judge the heart; but if it did not judge the fruit of faith, every hypocrite would be able to break

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in.”<sup>5</sup> This understanding of Oecolampadius resulted in this significant contribution to church government:

The genuinely original contribution of Oecolampadius to the history of the Reformed church polity, in our judgment, consists in his incessant assertion of the autonomy of the Church, namely her complete independence of the temporal power in her execution of the disciplinary measures over her own members.<sup>6</sup>

Since discipline was a matter of judging the fruit of faith, only the Church could do it. Oecolampadius believed that there was a big difference between church discipline and temporal discipline:

The one consists of power and dominion for the constraint of the wicked and the delinquent, and thus for the maintenance of peace and order of the civic community, whereas the other consists of mercy and love, the restoration of the lapsed and diseased brethren being its sole objective. To the one is allowed the use of physical coercion and corporeal punishments, while the only suitable weapon for the other is verbal persuasion to the effect of the offender’s repentance.<sup>7</sup>

With these ideas at hand, Oecolampadius produced a new and original formula under the title *Form und Gestalt* etc. which put into practice his radically transformed concept of excommunication. By 1529, the City Council of Basel issued a famous Reformation Ordinance under the guidance of Oecolampadius. This Ordinance brought about, among other things, the formation of a synod. Especially important was the September 26 synod of 1531 (shortly after which he died), because “the address Oecolampadius made in this synod...struck out in an unequivocal way his idea of autonomous church discipline.”<sup>8</sup>

How did the ideas of Oecolampadius find their way into the stream of reformed thinking? Comparative study reveals that Martin Bucer of Strasbourg forms the link between Oecolampadius and Calvin. When Bucer came into contact with Oecolampadius around 1530, Bucer became convinced that discipline was both desirable and possible and should be under Church control.<sup>9</sup> The influence of Martin Bucer on Calvin, in turn, is substantial in the areas of church discipline and polity, and evident when one compares Calvin’s views before and after his years spent with Bucer in Strasbourg 1538-1541. Thus, after Oecolampadius, the idea of autonomous church discipline “was further developed by Guillaume Farel and John Calvin, and fully explicated by Theodore Beza. In the end, it was the position of Oecolampadius that became the Reformed approach to church discipline.”<sup>10</sup>

This is evident in the Reformed “Form of Excommunication” which breathes the spirit of Oecolampadius. Its primary concern is the spiritual welfare of the individual walking in unrepentant sin. The goal is that “by your [C]hristian admonition and prayers to God, [he] might be brought to repentance, and so be freed from the bonds of the devil (by whom he is held captive), and recovered by the will of the Lord.” It is with sorrow, that the church at last must, at the command of Christ in Matthew 18, excommunicate the member, lest he “put the whole body of the Church in danger, and that God’s name may not be blasphemed.”

All through his life, Oecolampadius displayed a quiet, careful, humble, and loving character. His character is preserved in the spiritual and amendatory approach of the Reformed form of excommunication. This approach is suited only for church discipline that is separate from state control. Not only must we maintain autonomy and discipline, we must maintain its character. All three aspects are interdependent and necessary for the preservation of the church. State involvement will destroy its character. A lack of discipline invites all sorts of heresy and eventually state involvement. A lack of spiritual character destroys the purpose of discipline. Never was this clearer than in the days of Oecolampadius, and as a result he developed a doctrine which we must never abandon. ❖

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Akira Demura, *Church Discipline According to Johannes Oecolampadius in His Life and Thought* (Thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, photocopy Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1980), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>5</sup>Wayne Baker, “Church Discipline or Civil Punishment: On the Origins of the Reformed Schism.” *Andrews University Semetic Studies* 23 (1985): 17

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>7</sup>Demura, Op. Cit., p 330.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>9</sup>R. E. H. Uprichard, “The Eldership in Martin Bucer and John Calvin,” *Evangelical Quarterly*, 61, 23 (1989).

<sup>10</sup>Baker Op. Cit., p. 18.

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*John is a member of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.*

# Church News

**BAPTISMS** *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."*

*Mark 16:16*

**BYRON CENTER, MI**

Mr. & Mrs. Brian VanBaren presented their daughter, Amanda Jean, for baptism.

Alaina Lauren, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chip Wierenga, was presented for baptism.

**DOON, IA**

Mr. & Mrs. Mike VanBemmel presented their daughter, Lindsey Marie, for baptism.

**GEORGETOWN, MI**

Receiving the sign and seal of holy baptism was Alyssa Noel, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Doug Lubbers.

Mr. & Mrs. Kelvin TenBroeke, presented their daughter, Brittany Marie, for baptism.

**HOPE, MI**

Holy baptism was administered to Ellie Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dave Jessup, and to Ryan Jay, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan Brunsting.

**HOLLAND, MI**

The sacrament of baptism was administered to Benjamin James, son of Mr. & Mrs.. Don DeJong, and to Alyssa Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Scott Meeuwsen.

**PEACE, IL**

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to Jenna Helen, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chris Bauer.

**CONFESSIONS OF FAITH**

*"...and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."*

*Romans 10:10*

**BETHEL, IL**

Steve Reyenga made public his confession of faith in the Lord Jesus.

**HOPE, MI**

Public confession of faith in our Lord was made by Jim Schimmel.

**HULL, IA**

Public confession of faith was made by Mr. & Mrs. Carl Maassen

**MARRIAGES** *"...and they twain shall be one flesh."*

*Matthew 19:5*

**HULL, IA**

Mr. Mike VanOtterloo and Miss Marideth Bleyenbergh were united in holy matrimony.

**SOUTHWEST, MI**

United in the holy bond of matrimony were Mr. Bruce Boer and Miss Kim Doughton .

Thank -you to those of you who sent in bulletins this month. Please continue to send them in. We *welcome* more news from the other churches who have not yet sent in their bulletins. You may send your bulletins to:

**Melinda DeMeester**  
**1171 Sunset Hills NW**  
**Grand Rapids, MI 49544**

or e-mail to:

**melinidad@juno.com**

# "LITTLE LIGHTS"

## What Is Lovely (5)

*... let it shine!*

by Connie Meyer

The sun was still high above the horizon and Philip judged they would have plenty of time to play before darkness would put an end to their fun. Philip's family had invited another family over for a backyard picnic, and Philip was excited because even though they had never visited with them before, he knew they had a boy near his age. Philip could smell the hamburgers as they began to sizzle on the grill. He could hardly wait for their guests to arrive! Finally a van drove into the driveway as Mother was putting finishing touches onto the picnic table.

"They're here!" he shouted.

Out of the van came a little girl and two boys. But what was this? One of the boys was in a wheelchair! The other boy looked like he was the one closest to Philip's age, and he pushed his smaller brother over to where Philip stood.

"Hi, my name's Joel and this is Jared."

Philip stared for a moment, but then remembered himself. "Oh, uh, Hi. My name is Philip." He smiled and thought that probably what he saw was Jared's smile in return.

The suppertime went by quickly with lively chatter and good food. Philip tried to think of questions to ask Joel in order to get to know him better. "Do you like baseball?" he asked.

"Sure," Joel said.

"Maybe we can play some catch after supper."

"Sure," he replied again. As they ate, Joel was ever attentive to his brother's needs, reaching different dishes and helping him hold his cup. Philip noticed it all.

After devotions Philip ran to get his ball and glove, and when he returned, he found Joel--and Jared--waiting for him. Philip gulped. How would they all play catch?

But Joel knew exactly how. "Throw the ball to me and I'll throw it to Jared. He can't throw very far, so he can throw it back to me and then I'll throw it back to you, okay?" Philip watched as Joel gently tossed the ball to Jared so that all three boys could enjoy the game together.

Much too soon, though, the picnic was over. As Philip waved good-bye, he could not help but appreciate the love these two brothers had displayed for him this evening. It would leave a lasting memory.

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"Finally, brethren,... whatsoever things are lovely,... think on these things" (Philippians 4:8). ❖

*Connie is the mother of 5 children and attends Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.*



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