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“As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.”

Genesis 17:4-5

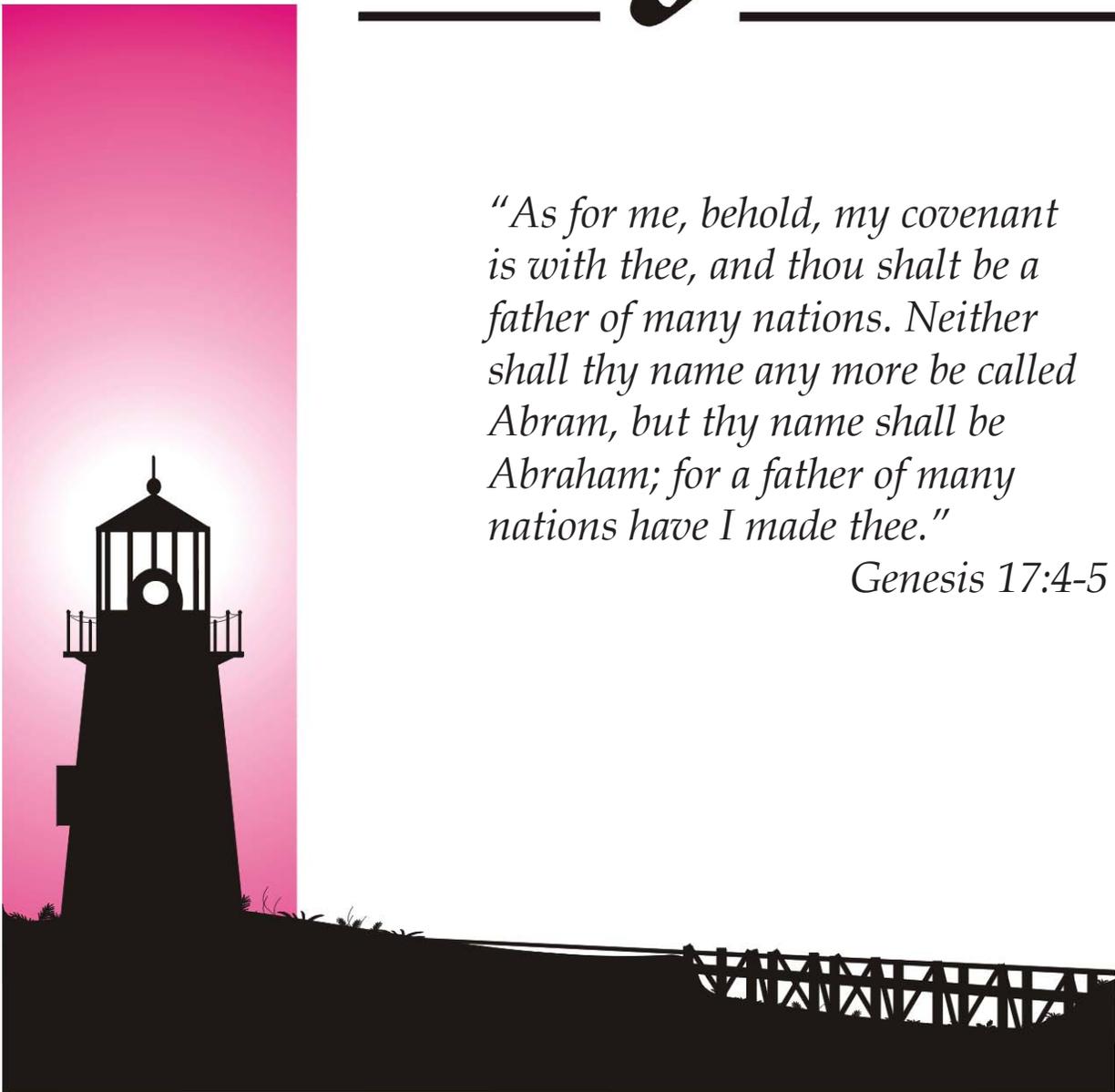


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BEACON LIGHTS

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Onward Christian Soldiers

By Tom Cammenga

“It is enough!” The mighty prophet of God now sits alone in the shade of a juniper tree a day’s journey into the wilderness of Beer-sheba, far from the danger that wicked Jezebel posed, and proclaims to his God that he is finished. He is no longer able to battle on and makes an ardent plea that the Lord now take away his life. In effect, he requests that his battle be ended. He is able to fight on no more.

Yes, this mighty prophet is none other than Elijah himself. The man called of God to prophesy to his people Israel and through whom God would turn them back to himself. This was the man who boldly proclaimed to wicked king Ahab that the land would see neither dew nor rain until he spoke thus. This was the man who experienced first hand the providential care of his heavenly Father when the Lord fed him by the ravens and later when he miraculously caused the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil to remain. This was the man who earnestly entreated the Lord to restore to life again the son of the widow and who witnessed the amazing power of God in his raising the lad from the dead. This was the man who through the grace of God challenged Ahab and all those who worshipped Baal to see once and for all whether Baal was god or whether Jehovah was God.

This great man now lies at the foot of this small tree, probably in the only bit of shade he could find, and asks that the Lord declare his battle to be ended. “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers” (I Kings 19:4).

How often have you and I felt this same way? How often have we not so desired that the battle in which we find ourselves be finished? If only we could lay down those weapons of war, remove the heavy armor bloodied from our many wounds, collapse to the ground, and be done. Finally, to be able to rest in that perfectly complete rest that the gospel promises will be ours one day.

Many are the occasions in our lives when we feel this way. As children of God our way through this life is plagued with hardships and difficulties. It is, after all, a vale of tears. The young people of the church face many troublesome temptations. Often the difficulties of the transition from child to adult bring much confusion and distress.

Sometimes it seems that one trouble after another afflicts us, a loved one, or fellow member in the church. One need only read through the bulletins of the churches to see this. And these are only the published needs. So many others there are that we are unaware of. And then, of course, there is our sin. This to be sure is the real and fundamental warfare we fight. What battles we wage against our old man of sin! How often it seems that our defeat is sure.

It has been my own experience that no other time brings the fury of our struggle to the front more than when we find ourselves standing at the grave of a loved one. Here, as in no other place we find that the battle rages. In fact, in I Corinthians 15:26 the apostle Paul refers to death as “the last enemy.” Here we are physically able to stand on the very brink and stare into that dark chasm that is the grave. Not one of us is able to do so in and of ourselves without fear. From an earthly point of view we can see only defeat. Certainly Satan is here too. Most assuredly he stands at our side and whispers in our ear that the battle is too difficult, the road too long, the pain too much to bear. Give up. There can be no great victory here for you.

When we are assailed, whether it is at the grave of a loved one or in some other hardship or adversity that the Lord calls us to walk through, oh how we long to be loosed from these earthly bonds, from this body of sin! To be where all tears will be wiped away, where death will be abolished, where sorrow and pain no longer afflict! (Rev. 21:4)

In this we are no different from Elijah, the great prophet of God. He, as we often are, was no longer able to continue the fight. No longer, that is, in his own strength. You see, Elijah had lost sight of the fact that these things he had done and been a part of were not his to claim. He had not withheld the rain. He had not commanded the ravens to bring him food. He had not by his own power raised from the dead the widow's son. He had not successfully proven that Jehovah was God rather than Baal. He had simply been an instrument used by God. He had done nothing of himself. And this is indeed that which brings him to the valley in which he now finds himself; unable and unwilling to persevere but wanting simply to give up. Once again God must remind Elijah that he is in control.

No sooner has God shown us his mighty power through some occasion in our lives than we are once again off on our way, seemingly in our own strength, having so soon forgotten God's mercy toward us. This, as we always find, invariably ends in God, in his great love for us, reminding us that our strength is not our own.

This too is the case with us, is it not? No sooner has God shown us his mighty power through some occasion in our lives than we are once again off on our way, seemingly in our own strength, having so soon forgotten God's mercy toward us. This, as we always find, invariably ends in God, in his great love for us, reminding us that our strength is not our own. Without his grace and mercy we are utterly helpless and unable to exist, much less carry on in the battle.

So the Lord sends his angel to Elijah. He sends that angel to provide physical sustenance for Elijah to be sure. Once again God extraordinarily provides for Elijah's physical needs as he had done so many times in the past.

God sent the angel in order to show Elijah that he will provide for him and never leave him. As he has strengthened him in the past and given him the grace he needed then, so now in the present distress in which he finds himself as well as in the future he would continue to be the all sufficient God. He will continue to hold Elijah in the hollow of his hand.

The Lord also intends to show Elijah in the sending of the angel that indeed he is not able to go on in his own strength. "Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee" (I Kings 19:7). Clearly there is a battle yet to be fought and the battle that remains his to fight is too great for him, yes, even this great man of God. Without the preserving grace of God the battle for Elijah would be lost.

And finally, the Lord calls Elijah back into the battle once again. Elijah is tired, bruised, and wounded. His only desire is for the Lord to take him home and declare an end to his earthly fight. And yet his battle is not over.

God makes this clear to Elijah in the fact that he does not grant his wish to end his life. Although the Lord does not need Elijah to fulfill his purpose, he is nevertheless pleased to continue to use him to carry out his will. God also makes this clear in his command to Elijah through his angel that he rise up and eat the food provided for him. Why? Because the battle is not over! Exhausted though he be, the fighting rages on. The Lord has work for him to do yet. He must yet pronounce God's judgment on Ahab.

That call, as it came to Elijah so many years ago, comes to you and me today and every day that the Lord is pleased to give us life. Weak and weary sinner, by God's grace, fight on! The battle is not over for

you as it is for your loved one or for the many soldiers who have gone before you and have fought the good fight, have finished their course, and have kept the faith (II Timothy 4:7).

And just as it was the case with Elijah so long ago, we cannot do so in ourselves. Only by the grace of God are we able to once again don our heavy armor, lift our battle scarred shield, and grasp our bloodied sword in order to enter the fray once more. Only in the strength that the Lord gives are we able to do this.

But as we fight on we must hold on to this wonderful truth. No matter how we stumble, no matter how often we are wounded, no matter how hopeless it may seem to us, our victory is sure. It has already been won by the Captain of our salvation. Though engulfed in the raging battle that surrounds us we are already victorious! Our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished this in his death and resurrection and in it has assured our salvation. This indeed is our eternal hope and sure confidence. This it is that strengthens us and enables us to persevere.

And so believer, young or old, fight on in the assurance of I Corinthians 15: 53–57: “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Let the battle cry be heard; Onward Christian Soldiers! ❖

Tom is a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.

Story Time

The Gift (10)

by Tom Cammenga

In the previous installment of “The Gift” the old man had busied himself with baking goodies for the VanVleets, intending to bring them the next day as a celebration for what he supposed had been good news from the doctor regarding Ruth’s diagnosis. Though miss-understanding the situation, this thoughtful act would do more for the VanVleets than the cookies or bars ever could.

If it were the case that the old man was on the peak of a mountain the previous day then it was a valley into which he found himself descending today. As he sat in a chair at the kitchen table he stared at the mug of coffee that his hands were wrapped around and just shook his head, watching the steam as it rose into the air and then was gone. Still, only hours after he had discovered that Ruth had been diagnosed with cancer he struggled to comprehend it. It just didn’t seem real, as if it couldn’t really be happening. All the joy and peace he had felt the previous evening was gone, only to be

replaced with a melancholy that seemed to envelop him. In addition to this were the questions that his immature faith now grappled with.

He grunted softly as the irony of the steam rising from his coffee cup hit him. Life was so short. Even his life which by all accounts had thus far been quite long and full seemed now as he looked back to have flown by in mere moments. And now Ruth could quite possibly be facing the end of her very young life, a life only ten or so years on. It was so difficult to believe. It was so difficult to understand.

He recalled then in his mind the events of the morning. Oh, if only he had looked at the signs he would have realized something wasn’t right. So caught up was he in what he was doing that he didn’t see anything else. For one thing, none of the children were outside playing or working in the yard. For that matter, Jack was also nowhere to be seen which was very strange indeed for a Saturday. Normally he was out in the yard or in the garage

working on something. And then there was the car in the driveway. He actually had not given it a second thought. He wished now that he had.

Or just maybe God had been using him in a way he could never have thought possible to bring some joy to this family in a time in which they desperately needed it.

Having risen early and eaten a good breakfast he had decided to bring the goodies he had baked the evening before over to the VanVleets. Because it was Saturday he waited a little while to make sure they would be awake, gathered all the goodies he had baked the night before, and made his way next door.

Barely managing to hang on to all the goodies he nudged the doorbell with his elbow and stepped back to wait for the door to open. Janet had seen him coming across the yard and now opened the door and asked him to come in.

“Good morning Mr. Michealson!” she said as she held open the door in order for him to come through. “Here, let me help you with that.” Carefully she took one of the packages from him not knowing for sure what it was but all of a sudden smelling the aroma of fresh baked goods. “Are those chocolate chip cookies on that plate?” she asked as her eyes fell on the plate he carried in his other hand.

“Yes they are, my girl,” he said as he set the plate down on the counter along with the bag he had been carrying in the other hand.

“What is all this?” asked Jack as he walked into the kitchen to see what had brought Mr. Michealson to their home. Seeing the plate of cookies on the counter he pulled up a part of the plastic wrap in order to get a better look. “It smells like a bakery in here.”

“Well, I know you folks have been going through some tough times lately,” said Mr. Michealson as he leaned up against the counter seeing through the doorway that Janet’s parents sat in the family room. “You did so much for us before Jenny died and you have been so good to me.... I just wanted to do something for you, something to help you celebrate.” He had paused in mid-sentence in order to compose himself. He hated to cry in front of other people. Not to mention he did not want that on a day that should be filled with joy for this family.

Both Jack and Janet looked at each other then acknowledging what each was thinking. He doesn’t know.

Taking his direction from the look on Janet’s face, Jack put his hand on Mr. Michealson’s shoulder. “Bill, we talked to the doctor yesterday.” He slowly stepped back and leaned on the island in the center of the kitchen and prepared to tell the story he had told what seemed

like a hundred times already.

By the look on Jack’s face Mr. Michealson could tell that he had been wrong. The news could not have been good. Immediately he wished he could turn and leave, to get away before he caused any more damage.

In his mind he was suddenly brought back to that cool autumn day not so long past when that young man had walked up on him as he sat staring at the casket that held the body of his beloved. He imagined the look on his own face right now probably matched the look that had crossed the face of that young man; disbelief and embarrassment for having intruded on this family at such a time as this.

“I am so sorry Jack and Janet,” he said as the look on his face turned from disbelief to anguish. He stepped forward and took both of them in his arms and hugged them tightly. “I thanked God last night before bed that you had gotten good news and now....” Tears streamed down his face and for a few moments he could say nothing more. As he relaxed his grip Jack and Janet stepped back with tears in their own eyes.

Although each of them cried, they did so for far different reasons.

The old man cried because his heart went out to these two people to whom he had grown quite close over these last months. He cried because his own recent wounds now seemed to ache once again.

Jack and Janet cried for a number of reasons. First there was the old man’s kindness to them in their time of need. Then there was the fact that they felt terrible for the confusion they may have had a part in creating. But more than these they cried because for the first time they saw solid evidence of a softening in this old man’s hard heart. Only a few months ago he would never have shown such emotion. Only a few months ago the only reason he would have talked of God at all would be to voice his doubt that such a being could exist.

And now here he was, telling them that he had prayed. He prayed! Oh how that filled both of them with inexplicable happiness! In an instant they both forgot the seriousness of their own situation and basked in this new joy that the Lord had given them.

“Don’t be sorry,” Janet said as she took the old man’s hands in her own. “There was no way for you to have known.” Letting go of one of his hands she reached around him and pulled some tissues from the box that sat on the counter, and divided them up between the old man, Jack, and herself.

While everyone wiped the tears that streaked their faces Jack went on to tell Mr. Michealson about their

visit with the doctor and the difficult night they had spent coming to terms with the situation that God had now placed them in. He also told him that the prognosis seemed positive and that they were confident that everything would be alright. In fact, they knew it would because Ruth, along with the whole family, was in the loving hands of Father.

“But Mr. Michealson,” Janet said as she took his hand in hers once again and looked him in the eye. “God answered the prayer we made last night. You see, we asked for him to lift our burdened hearts and to give us joy, even in this difficulty he has placed in Ruth’s life and in our life as a family.”

Uncertain of exactly what she had meant and unsure how to respond or even if it had been expected, he simply stood there, his gaze slowly dropping to the floor. After a few silent moments he said he must be going and began to move towards the door. As he opened it he turned back around to face the two of them.

“If you don’t mind my asking,” he said softly with a questioning look on his face. “How do you know God

answered you?”

Janet had also begun to leave the room and turning she said with a smile on her face and tears brimming in her eyes, “You prayed.”

Nodding his head slowly in understanding the old man had looked from one to the other and as he reached for the door to leave many questions echoed in his mind. Had God heard him when he had prayed? How could a loving God place a family such as this into such a difficult situation?

Confused and bewildered the old man made his way back home. He would need some time for this news to sink in.

In the kitchen that the old man had just left Jack and Janet hugged each other once again and hurried into the family room to share this good news with Ruth and the rest of the family. ❖

Tom is a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.

John Calvin Essays

John Calvin and the PRC: The Heartbeat of the Gospel

by Rachel Kamps

Indeed, John Calvin was a great reformer, a great theologian, author, and preacher. John Calvin was not all of this of his own strength; it was by God’s grace that he was all of this in order that he could serve the purpose of God. He was a man of the sixteenth century whom God used to preserve the truth so that we, the Protestant Reformed Churches in the twenty-first century, may enjoy and confess the right doctrine of preaching.

The doctrine of predestination was of supreme importance to John Calvin. Through the whole of his ministry, he defended the doctrine of predestination against those who vehemently opposed him, even when it meant standing alone. Predestination is fundamental to his *Institutes*, his commentaries, and his book, *Calvin’s Calvinism*. This is because Calvin realized that the doctrine of double predestination is the “foundation of salvation” (Engelsma, 266).

Calvin believed that the doctrine of predestination controls the preaching of the gospel. He confessed that the preaching of the gospel is the gracious saving of the elect and at the same time it is the non-gracious hardening of the reprobate (Engelsma, 283). The call of God in the gospel to believe is strictly bound by the decree of predestination. According to Calvin, predestination is the very reason why the gospel is believed by some, and rejected by others. The effect of the preaching is that some are saved, and others perish - this is God’s sovereign, eternal decree of predestination (Engelsma, 270).

The way Calvin begins the section of the *Institutes* dealing with predestination is significant:

“The covenant of life [gospel] not being equally preached to all, and among those to whom it is preached not always finding the same reception, this diversity discovers the wonderful depth of the Divine judgment. Nor

is it to be doubted that this variety also follows, subject to the decision of God's eternal election" (3.21.1).

In *Calvin's Calvinism*, Calvin attacks Pighius' teaching that God shows grace to all in the preaching of the gospel. "The fiction of Pighius is puerile and absurd, when he interprets grace to be God's goodness in inviting all men to salvation, though all were lost in Adam..." (Calvin, 49). The idea that God is gracious to all the hearers of the gospel "cuts the call of the gospel loose from eternal election and attributes the saving effect of the call to the acceptance, that is, the will, of those sinners who are saved by the call" (Engelsma, 283). Calvin unwaveringly opposed this doctrine because he was determined to keep God's decree of eternal election as the source of salvation (Engelsma, 283).

The ecumenical Synod of Dordt adopted Calvin's understanding of the relationship of double predestination to the preaching of the gospel, and made it creedal for the church of Christ. Head 1, Article 4 expresses two effects of the preaching: "those who believe not" and those who "receive it, and embrace Jesus the Savior." Article 6 states "That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree."

Astonishingly, in our day, almost the entire Reformed and Presbyterian church world teach that the preaching is a gracious offer of salvation by God to all. They teach and believe that God expresses an attitude of favor to all men in the preaching, and he desires to save all men. These churches imagine and claim that they are in line with the teaching of John Calvin.

The Protestant Reformed Churches, faithful to Calvin, are a witness against the erroneous and false teaching of those that hold to an offer of God in the preaching to all men and that it is God's desire and intention to save all men, etc. The PRC firmly confess and teach that God does not love all men; neither does He desire to save all men in harmony with what God taught us through John Calvin. Faithful to John Calvin's teaching, the PRC affirms that God does certainly call everyone to repent and believe. In the preaching God calls externally everyone to repent and believe, and internally only the elect by the Holy Spirit. God causes some who hear the Word to believe, and He causes some who hear to hate that Word. Those who hear the word and believe are the objects of the Holy Spirit's gracious and efficacious work in their hearts. The preaching is grace only to the elect, and it is a hardening power to the reprobate.

The significance of the call for those who believe (because of God's grace only) is that God will gather all

of his elect from all nations of the earth. The significance of the call for those who reject the call is that it reveals how truly wicked their sinful heart is as they reject the gospel. Not only this, but it makes their judgment all the worse.

In 1924, when the Christian Reformed Church adopted the infamous Three Points, the real point of the first point was that they said God had a certain attitude of favor or love towards the reprobate. Because of common grace, they wanted a well-meant offer of the gospel to all. The command to repent and believe was replaced with an offer of salvation, thus dethroning God and making man's salvation dependent on man's will and work. This was a denial of the doctrine of double predestination as manifested in the preaching taught clearly by John Calvin and the Synod of Dordt. The well-meant offer of the gospel can never be harmonized with reprobation. How can a God who hates the reprobate desire their salvation and show grace to them?

Herman Hoeksema was able to stand against the CRC's teaching of common grace and the offer of the gospel to all men in the assurance of John Calvin's teachings. Herman Hoeksema had to return to John Calvin's teachings concerning the matter of the preaching as relating to predestination. For Herman Hoeksema, the issue in the common grace debate was the well-meant offer of the gospel expressing a favor of God to the reprobate. From John Calvin's teachings, Hoeksema was able to combat this error. Not only was he able to fight this error, but he was able to prove that the CRC had departed from John Calvin. (For an extensive proof of this, see Herman Hoeksema's three articles titled "Calvin and Common Grace" in volume 37 of the *Standard Bearer*.)

Is there a way that the Protestant Reformed Churches are born of John Calvin? Indeed there is. The PRC came into existence because its original founders and leaders took a decisive stand foursquare in John Calvin's doctrine of predestination in regards to the preaching.

Let us imagine that John Calvin was alive in 1924 and had attended the Synod of 1924, when the Three Points of Common Grace were adopted. He would have shot out of his chair and said, "Mr. Chairman, I object. There is no such thing as "a favorable attitude of God to the reprobate" or a "well-meant offer of salvation to the reprobate." Gesturing to the man at the center of the debate, he would have continued, "Rev. Herman Hoeksema is correct."

Even though this could not have happened literally that John Calvin objected to those proceedings, he does in fact give clear testimony that he is in agreement with

the PRC in its insistence that the preaching is controlled by predestination and that there is no “well-meant offer” to the reprobate ungodly. ❖

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Gem of the Month

From Revelation to Genesis

*My journey through the Scriptures led me through the end of time;
The book of Revelation has an ending most sublime.
I gazed at the pomp and pageantry recorded there by John
And felt a thrill of wonder at the view I looked upon.
How could a sinner such as I fit into God's great plan?
Yet through the blood of Jesus Christ - redeemed is fallen man.
Together we, the sinner/saints of now and ages past
Become the bride of Christ: His church completed and enmassed.
The majesty and splendor, the beauty that is given,
No sin to mar the lovely scene: the marvel that is heaven.*

*I felt a bit deflated to leave the heavenly sphere
And read from Genesis instead-I had to squelch a tear.
I read the first verse, second, third: my heart with awe now reeled
When I considered all the works these verses had revealed.
Our Triune God, by word alone, the whole world had created;
The first book of the Bible this history related.
Again I felt the wonder of a perfect world - no sin!
Splendid Eden was the site He placed the man within.
Throughout His word His plan unfolds: salvation for His own.
His wisdom, pow'r, grace, mercy, truth, and saving love are shown.*

- Thelma Westra

Covenant Courtship: (4) Surrendering

by Aaron Lim

“Submit yourselves therefore to God” (Jas 4:7).

In the covenant of grace, God extends his friendship to sinners who are by nature totally depraved. He does so by his Spirit, accompanied by the preaching of his Word, drawing his elect people out of darkness into the marvelous light of his fellowship. And although the hearts of his people have been transformed to the image of his Son who died for them, yet while on earth they still retain their sinful natures. Throughout their entire lives the people of God struggle with their sinful natures which are at enmity against him, crying for deliverance. In earnest expectation they seek the blessed hope of Christ’s coming where their sinful natures will be fully destroyed and transformed into perfectly glorious bodies.

As much as courtship is a time of great excitement, it is also a time of profound humility. This is because the two young believers who are brought together in the providence of God realize that they are ultimately nothing but sinners saved by grace. They understand that they still retain their distinctively sinful natures and are prone to sin against God and each other. They know that only the grace of God could have brought them together in covenant courtship and that it is the only thing that will sustain their relationship.

Sin is present in any relationship, be it in the home, with our colleagues or friends. When we approach courtship with a spiritual frame of mind, we see the motions of sin working in the relationship. We see sin working powerfully and expressing itself in the form of pride, lust, jealousy, anger and self-centeredness amongst other sins. A covenant couple may not be guilty of all of those sins but they carry with them specific sins according to their characters. This struggle with sin carries on not only in courtship but also in marriage and all through their lives as one flesh. The form for marriage at the back of the Psalter confesses accurately that “married persons are generally, by reason of sin, subject to many troubles and afflictions.”

Sin has the potential to destroy a couple’s relationship. When sins are committed in the process of courtship and are not repented of, they grieve the Spirit that unites both believers in the bond of love. This grieving draws the couple away from each other, and consequently their

personal relationship with God is also affected. They are unable to enjoy God’s favor and each other’s love for a season because sin has separated them.

The tendency to sin against each other in courtship is far greater than in normal friendships because of the closeness that the couple shares. Ironic as it may be, this closeness can sometimes have a contradictory effect. On the one hand it is the cause by which a couple devote themselves to each other, care for and love each other deeply. Yet on the other hand, this closeness makes them deeply aware of each other’s flaws and sinful tendencies. This awareness may sometimes cause a couple to sin against each other willfully or to tempt the other to sin.

A couple’s knowledge and experience of sin in their courtship must finally bring them to the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ. Above all things they must acknowledge their sinfulness which provokes the holy God to wrath and anger. As they pray for forgiveness and submit themselves to him in repentance, they understand that they need God every moment of their relationship. God must reconcile them to him and to each other. Only then will they experience his favour again and enjoy the blessings of his friendship with each other.

When a couple submit themselves to God, then they will be able to submit to each other. The ability to confess individual faults to each other, to seek each other’s forgiveness is evidence of the Spirit’s work in their hearts. Pride hinders us from confessing our faults, and the devil is ever quick to stoke that pride when believers sin against each other in a relationship. Sometimes the hardened heart finds it agonizingly painful to humble itself in repentance.

Nevertheless, the powerful grace of God working in the lives of his covenant children will break down that sinful pride, enabling the couple to surrender themselves fully to each other. As they are reunited to each other in humility they experience the peace of God which passes understanding. This peace gives them the assurance of their covenant friendship with God who alone works out all things for the good of his people. ❖

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Marriage

by Rev. G. Vanden Berg

In our previous article on this subject, we wrote primarily of the events of the life of the covenant youth which lead up to the state of marriage, or, the time of courtship. Three thoughts we expressed as “guiding principles” which, if heeded, would contribute to the assurance that one in the pre-marital state would find happiness and blessing. We stated that the courtship of covenant youth must, in distinction from the world’s increasing immorality, be characterized by chastity. A second thought was that in this courtship there must be spiritual compatibility. Spiritually mixed relationships conceive and bring forth misery and apostasy whereas “two that are agreed” walk together harmoniously in love. Our final thought was that whereas “the Lord brings to every man his wife” we must learn submission to His choice. We must not seek one who answers to the qualities of our carnal lusts but one who according to God’s standard is fully qualified as a life companion to assist us in the higher service of God. Along these lines our courtship will be fruitful unto a truly christian and richly blessed marriage.

In our present article we will continue these thoughts and this time consider especially the “institution of marriage” itself. One has no right to enter a relationship such as this without an understanding of what is involved and, consequently, we shall try to elicit from the Word of God a few “guiding thoughts” which we hope may prove helpful to a better Christian life in the marriage sphere.

Our first thought in this connection is that marriage is an institution of God. John Calvin wrote in his *Institutes*, “Marriage, as an institution is not only originated by God’s authority but is also sanctified by His blessing.” As Christians, it is salutary to be mindful of this important fact and that especially if our courtship is attaining maturity. The world ignores and disregards this truth and by and large considers marriage as a human agency by which man may legally procure the deepest satisfaction of his carnal nature. As a result such marriage is not enacted and perpetuated according to the ordinances of God and, therefore, cannot be blessed. “The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked” (Prov. 3:33). As covenant youth

we are not to emulate this worldly way and seek marriage as a means unto self-satisfaction but bear consciously in mind the divine phase of this institution and enter it with the intent and purpose of making divine satisfaction. That is done when the ordinances and laws regulating life in this institution as they are set forth for us in the Word of God are properly and faithfully kept. Then “He blesseth the habitation of the just” (Prov. 3:33).

When covenant children enter this holy state, it is not only the relatives and friends of those to be married that are interested in the affair, but just as much and perhaps more so is the church concerned. She realizes that God, through covenant marriages, continues his church and in the families of believers bestows his blessings. Hence, our second thought is that “marriage ought to be performed by the church.” By this we do not mean that the “minister alone performs the ceremony in the church” as is the customary practice in many of our circles, but rather that the church, through its offices, the consistory, attend to the marriage of her children (see Article 70 of our Church Order). At such a marriage the Word of God is appropriately preached and the church, institutionally convoked, offers her prayers for the blessing of God upon the marriage that is being solemnized. Such a beginning is “in the Lord.” There are many, I think, who, because we have traditionally discarded this good practice of our fathers, are even averse to it today. They prefer the gaudy show of modern wedding to the simplicity of that which our fathers wisely prescribed. I would, therefore, encourage those who oppose “church weddings” to express openly their principle objections but at the same time may our consistories and parents further enlighten our youth regarding these matters and discourage the practice of “a wedding in the church” and cultivate the desire for simple, spiritual “church weddings.” This is an institution of God and primarily “the consistories shall attend to it...”

Our third and final thought has to do with the duties, privileges, purposes, and briefly, the relationships of the marriage state. Marriage is not a state that God commands us to enter, neither does he prohibit us from doing so,

but it is left to the choice of the individual. Hence, those who choose entrance also willingly assume the duties. The husband affirms that he shall love his wife, lead her with discretion, instruct, comfort and protect her and labor faithfully to provide for the needs of his family . The wife, likewise, promises love, honor, reverence and obedience unto her husband in the sphere of all lawful things. These duties ought to be understood before the marriage bond is confirmed.

Then there are privileges in this new relationship which, if exercised in accord with the command of God, result in the blessed realization of the divinely instituted purposes of marriage. Man and wife, exercising marital cohabitation, experience the fellowship of two creatures whom God has not made separate but has created that they should be one. "It is not good that man should be alone.... I will make an help-meet for him" (Gen. 2:18). Man and wife, who are created physically and spiritually the counterparts of each other, complete one another's life and joy. It is not good that one should be alone but that they should be together in the Lord. That is the fellowship of marriage.

**As we sow we shall
reap. The sowing era is
"courtship" and the reaping
time is "in the married
state."**

In such a normal union the beginning of the home is made. For marriage also has its purpose in procreation and the establishing of the home. The christian home is the blessed fruit of the Christian marriage. The broken home, orphaned children and pitied vagabonds are the results of worldly union. As we sow we shall reap. The sowing era is "courtship" and the reaping time is "in the married state." Our aim must always be the realization of fruits unto God manifest in a model Christian home. Many are the forces to combat in the striving toward that goal. Evil lurks on every side. Marriage is contracted for selfish purposes. There is a mad striving after "houses, beautiful furnishings, modern conveniences, automobiles, etc." which, in our day, require years of combined labor of husband and wife. The children of the Lord are not wanted...at least for a time...and the "home" is not established. The goal of the Christian marriage is not attained and the true blessing of marriage is lost. As we

approach the end of the ages, we must not expect this to improve but CHRISTIANS...young men and young women... "watch and pray that ye fall not into temptation." Build your hopes, also in marriage, not in the things of this world but in the things of God.

That is Christian living! ❖

Rev. Vanden Berg was pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Oak Lawn, Illinois when this article was written. It is reprinted from the November, 1950 issue of Beacon Lights.

From Beginning To End...

Not only must we grow into Christ, but in growing into Christ we must grow out of him, so that all the manifestation of our life becomes like Christ. We grow into him; and then growing into him, we derive everything out of him; and deriving everything out of him, we become conformable to his image. And, we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Thus we fulfill our part of the covenant of God, namely, that we love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life. That is our part!

Negatively that means we must not grow into anything that is outside of Christ, must have nothing to do with it. We must never strike any roots into outside soil, that is, outside of Christ. And positively that means that in our inward life and in our outward manifestation and walk of life we grow spiritually into and out of Christ in all our life. Inwardly, so that all our righteousness, all our love, all our faith, all our confidence, all our hope, all our spiritual life is out of Christ and into Christ from beginning to end. None of our piety, none of our religion, none of our goodness, nothing that we can do, nothing that we have to do, absolutely nothing as regards our salvation! Nothing! That's Scripture! That's Reformed! That's the Confession!

— *Extract from Pre-Synodical Sermon delivered by
the Rev. H. Hoeksema, Hull, Iowa, 1950.*

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Chester Hunter

February 15 Read Isaiah 44:1-4

Here in this short passage we have several beautiful words to and about the people of God. First of all, we see that they are the chosen servants of God. Secondly, we notice the covenant aspect as God identifies himself as Jehovah. Then we see that we have no need to fear because he has formed us even before we were born. The word Jesurun is a tender nickname that means “upright one.” It is a loving name that God calls his people. Finally, we see that to encourage us and to help us in the wilderness of this world, God has sent the Holy Spirit who refreshes our children and us. What words of comfort we have here! These words can give to us the confidence to live lives of praise and glory to our God. Let us do that today and everyday. Sing Psalter 241.

February 16 Read Isaiah 44:5-8

Isaiah had to proclaim God’s sovereignty to the people of Judah. He had to do that at a time in which idol worship was prevalent. As the second commandment states, our God is a jealous God. The idea of following others is an age-old problem. The words we see in this text are similar to those Paul wrote to the Corinthians. It is no different today. We are prone to follow some man or some idea. We, too, need the admonition that there is no God besides Jehovah. He is the first and he is the last. He has made us to be his people. We need not be afraid of such turmoil around us. God is God, and of that there is no doubt. Let us cling to him as the sovereign God of our salvation. Sing Psalter 308.

February 17 Read Isaiah 44:9-20

What do we do with God’s good creation? Israel of old took it and made idols out of it. They used the same materials that Solomon had used in building the temple to fashion images with which to worship. Why did they do that? It was unbelief as we see in verse 18. In verses 19-20 we see the foolishness of their actions. How can you worship a created thing? For most of us, we do not bow down to a graven image. But do we have idols? The answer, sadly, is probably yes. Those idols are as foolish as a golden calf. There is not salvation in them. Let us

seek to walk only in adoration to him who made us and all of creation. To trust in anything else is to trust in a lie. Sing Psalter 309.

February 18 Read Isaiah 44:21-28

The chapter is finished with the promise of redemption. This is a redemption that only can be carried out by Christ. It is a covenant redemption as we see by the use of LORD or Jehovah. Creation waits that redemption as it, too, will be made whole in the new heavens and the new earth. The church will be restored and gathered together as the church triumphant dwelling with God and the lamb. The assurance that all this will come to pass is found in the last verse. Cyrus will give the order that the earthly Jerusalem will be rebuilt. Cyrus’s birth is over 150 years away. The people then and the church of all ages will know that the Word of the Lord is true and will come to pass. Sing Psalter 310.

February 19 Read Isaiah 45:1-7

It should be no surprise that God raised up a man named Cyrus to release his people from captivity and make it possible for them to return to Jerusalem. It is not surprising because God is God! Nothing is too hard for God. Notice the last verse of this passage again. There is nothing that is not in God’s hand. He is sovereign over all things on this earth. He controls all the forces of nature. He controls all the forces of mankind. Why does he do this? First of all, of course, he does it for his own glory. All things serve to God’s glory. Even what we might call evil serves to glorify God. Secondly, he is sovereign over all things for all salvation. This provides to us utmost comfort as we confess in Lord’s Day 1. Let us see God’s glory in all things, and let us thank him daily for the great salvation he has afforded to us. Sing Psalter 265.

February 20 Read Isaiah 45:8-14

Quite often man, including God’s people, forget who has made them. We forget that it is the sovereign God who not only created all things but also has formed them for his glory. Creation is not just for our benefit, but we must use creation in a way that God is glorified. There are many times that we want to ask “Why?” about our situation in

life. We want to ask that in a way that shows we think God is being unfair. His answer to us is “Because I have made you.” This should be a comfort for us because we know that God makes all things good. Judah had to learn this and we must as well. Sing Psalter 287.

February 21 Read Isaiah 45:15-25

The final part of this chapter gives hope to all peoples: not every person, however, but all kinds of people. This gives hope to us, the Gentiles of the new dispensation. It is only through God that our salvation cometh. There is no one or nothing else that can give to us the salvation that we so desperately need. This is the truth of the Reformation for which Martin Luther and the rest of the reformers struggled and even gave their lives. This is the truth that is carried on today. It is only in Jehovah that we are justified. What a glorious thought that is! What a comfort that we can have in this dark world of sin! What a hope is ours as we await the return of Christ! Sing Psalter 174.

February 22 Read Isaiah 46:1-7

In this passage we see the folly of trying to serve someone or something other than God. Isaiah points out the lack of logic in worshiping a god that you have to carry from place to place and set up. We do this when we make an idol out of something or some thought in our lives. How can we say that they are equal to God? Why would we want to do such a thing? Whether it be money, education, sports, or some human philosophy; it cannot be compared to almighty sovereign God. Why is idol worship ludicrous? It is because our God cares for us from birth to death. He cares for us. What else can we want? Sing Psalter 266.

February 23 Read Isaiah 46:8-13

Notice that in this text we have the reassurance that salvation is only from God. We can have all the idols we want, but they profit us nothing because they are nothing. We must stay away from idol worship because our God is a jealous God. Judah had to go into captivity, ordained by God, in order to learn that lesson. God will teach us as well to not hold onto other gods. Let us adore him in all that we do. Let us live lives of thankfulness for the salvation that he freely gives to his people for his own glory. Sing Psalter 263.

February 24 Read Isaiah 47:1-9

Isaiah comes to Judah with these words of judgment against Babylon. Once again we must be reminded that these words were spoken many years before the captivity and the return. These words served to encourage the faithful remnant in Judah that God had not forgotten them. By his judgment of Babylon would come their redemp-

tion. We must also remember that Judah and Babylon are pictures of the elect and the reprobate. Therefore, we can be comforted in this world filled with evil that there is redemption for us though the judgment of the wicked. Our redeemer is the covenant God, Jehovah of hosts. Trust in him, as he delivers you to glory. Sing Psalter 379.

February 25 Read Isaiah 47:10-15

The final portion of this chapter is words addressed to Babylon. But they are words to which we do well to pay heed, for we are no different. We often time fall into the same sins. We say that God does not see us. We act as if there is no God, and we can do what ever we wish. We, too, trust in our own counsels not depending upon God’s will and providence. We must know that he will chastise us when we fall into such sins. But we must know that Christ has died for us for our salvation. Let us flee sin and ever walk in God’s ways. Sing Psalter 380.

February 26 Read Isaiah 48: 1-7

We see that Isaiah’s writing goes from a condemnation of Babylon in the last chapter to a chastisement of Judah in this chapter. What is the difference? The difference is that Judah is God’s people. Of course not all of Judah is. There are those that face the same condemnation that Babylon does. But the remnant belongs to God. But they must repent. They, too, say they love God, but it is only lip service. What about us? Are these words for us as well? Of course they are. Because of the old man of sin which lurks within us we, too, are obstinate. We, too, must be set on the right path. Let us pray daily for the grace to walk in God’s ways and seek to glorify him, the creator of heaven and earth. Sing Psalter 146.

February 27 Read Isaiah 48:8-15

The purpose of all things is for God’s sake, his honor, and his glory. This is hard for us to understand when affliction is brought upon us. We wonder why God has chosen to cause us what we see as grief. But we see that through the affliction there is profit for us. When we acknowledge God as the covenant God, only then can we understand his ways. In his sovereignty he loves us and only does what is good for us. As we have said before, we will be redeemed through judgment. We must be patient and wait until God delivers us to eternal glory. Sing Psalter 329.

February 28 Read Isaiah 48: 16-22

Standing by a river that flows through a field or woods can be very peaceful. The sound of the water provides solace for a soul that has been troubled by the busyness of the world. This is the picture that we see in verse 18. Walking in God’s commandments can provide that same solace. When we try to live as we want instead of as God

commands, there is no peace for us. But when we seek Jehovah and his kingdom, waves of peace flow over us throughout the day. Let us see that peace by obeying our covenant God. In that way we will feel the redemption wrought for us on the cross. Sing Psalter 127.

March 1 Read Isaiah 49:1-12

In this chapter we see the promise that Jehovah God will also be the God of the Gentiles. The Jews would reject God and his Son, and he would call unto himself a people from among all nations. He would use his servants such as Isaiah to accomplish this purpose. We, who are of those Gentile nations, must not fall into the sin of rejecting God even as the Jews of Isaiah's time did. We have been given a glorious gospel and promise. Let us look for the day when Jesus returns on the clouds of heaven and brings the church of all ages together around the throne. Let us live lives steeped in waiting and watching for that glorious day. Sing Psalter 195.

March 2 Read Isaiah 49:13-26

What a comfort we find in the first few verses of this section! It is a comfort which should cause us to break forth into singing. As Christ said if we cannot sing at his coming, the very rocks would cry out. Are we thankful for the great salvation wrought for us by Christ? Do we sing with joy when we have the opportunity? We may think that God has forgotten about us. He no more forgets us than a mother would forget her newborn baby. He will care for us in all adversity. He will be our God even unto death. So sing in thanksgiving. Sing Psalter 170.

March 3 Read Isaiah 50:1-11

First of all, in this passage we see that God speaks to the rebellious Jews who had rejected him. They did not listen when he sent his prophets to proclaim his Word. This should be a warning unto us. We are blessed with the preaching of the Word each Sabbath. Are we listening? Secondly, we see a prophecy concerning Christ. Christ would be abused. Why? The answer is so that we might receive the salvation that he earned for us. Finally, there is a message to believers and unbelievers alike. Reread verses 10-11. Are we trusting in Jehovah or lying down in sorrow? Our help is in God. Let us trust in him at all times. Sing Psalter 352.

March 4 Read Isaiah 51:1-8

These verses afford to us great comfort at all times on our earthly pilgrimage. We are called to look unto the rock. That rock is Christ and the covenant line that he has established with his people. A rock is something unmovable. A rock is something that will last. When we look to him, we can rest assured that he will care for us

in all things. Our salvation is eternal and cannot be taken from us. We need not fear what men might do to us; they are mortal and their works will fail. The day is coming in which we shall rejoice forever in our salvation. Thanks be to God! Sing Psalter 162.

March 5 Read Isaiah 51:9-16

Here we have an impassioned prayer that God, who is signified by the arm of the Lord, would deliver Israel even as he delivered them from Egypt. In verse 11 God replies with certainty that they would be redeemed and delivered not only from the struggles in the present age but from all struggles. What a comfort this is that when we take a loved one to the grave we know that the struggle against sin and Satan is over and God's people are delivered to the heavenly Canaan. God is almighty; we are his people, and he will most certainly care for us now and forever. Sing Psalter 307.

March 6 Read Isaiah 51:17-23

Now it is Jerusalem, that picture of the church of God, which is called to awaken. Her sleep is not alcohol produced; her sleep is produced by her wickedness. Among her none is found that can bring comfort. The only deliverer is the almighty God. That deliverer will give to the church the victory over sin and Satan. He will bring deliverance and redemption through the judgment of the wicked. What a comfort this is to us. Let us wake up and walk in the ways of Jehovah. Sing Psalter 152.

March 7 Read Isaiah 52:1-6

Once again the church is called to wake up and notice what Jehovah has done for them. While these words were written to comfort the God-fearing in Isaiah's day, they are written for us as we await the return of Christ Jesus. The day will come when our redemption will be complete; when all of God's people will be gathered together in the new Jerusalem. We do not have to do anything for this day; in fact, we cannot do anything. We must wait with patience; we must use the talents that Christ has left us. This is a calling that has great promise. The day will come when we will know Christ experientially because we will be with him forever in heaven. Sing Psalter 182.

March 8 Read Isaiah 52:7-15

In the first verse of this section we see a beautiful description of the preaching of the Word. Those who preach must bring the good news, the gospel, that God reigns. They must bring the good news of salvation by faith alone. In that good news the people of God find peace. This is the only kind of peace that brings the comfort that we so desperately need in this world. These servants would not just proclaim the good news to Jerusalem; they would

preach the gospel to the nations. What a joy it is when we hear the pure preaching of the Word. Let us seek it and thank God for it each and every Sabbath Day. Sing Psalter 232.

March 9 Read Isaiah 53:1-5

Here we have the Christmas story that no one likes. Everyone likes to worship a baby lying in a manger when there was no room for his parents in the inn. That is the story that they love. But to worship an ugly, bloody beaten man. That no one wishes to do. But it was that ugly, bloody, beaten man who was those things for us. He became those things to take away our sins. What about us? Whom do we worship? Remember, we were healed by his stripes. Sing Psalter 185.

March 10 Read Isaiah 53:6-12

Reread verse 6. Think of what that last clause means. Our Lord and Saviour took all of our sins upon him and went to the cross for us. Should this direct the way that we live? Should not we want to spend our lives in a way that shows gratitude for such a sacrifice? We know our sin; and when we realize that Jesus took each and every one of them upon him, it should be sobering. Jesus obeyed, and because he obeyed, we prosper in his hand because we are Jehovah's pleasure. We are bought with a price and a very steep one at that. Let us be thankful each and every day for such a Savior. Sing Psalter 47.

March 11 Read Isaiah 54:1-10

Our God is a God of mercy. We see this throughout this passage. First of all he is a God of mercy because he saves his people from among all nations. We are from among the nations. We sometimes forget this. Most of us have been members of an established church for a long time but in our generations we have been gathered from among heathen nations. After Pentecost the church of Christ grew and spread throughout the world. Isaiah prophesied of this fact. Our God is also merciful in that he will not take his covenant of peace from among the line of continued generations that he has established with us. As God is merciful, let us also be merciful day by day. Sing Psalter 271.

March 12 Read Isaiah 54:11-17

"And all thy children..." What beautiful words are found in verse 13! Children and young people do not always consider their covenant education to be a great heritage. They are not ready to appreciate what true peace is. God, through Isaiah, gives to us these blessed words of hope. Our children will be taught by Jehovah. We may not always see how this is going to happen, but it will happen. We can be comforted that they will have the peace that

passeth understanding. They will have the peace that is not the peace after which the world seeks. Jehovah cares for us in all of our life. This is a great heritage. This is what Christ has left us after dying and ascending into glory. We have no reason to doubt this because our righteousness is from Jehovah God alone. Sing Psalter 360.

March 13 Read Isaiah 55:1-5

Here we have the call of the gospel. This is not a call to all men. It is not an invitation to all men. It is only to those that are thirsty. Many in the world today do not think they are thirsty. They will not listen to this call. In the beatitudes we hear that those who are hungry and thirsty after righteousness shall be filled. The call is for the elect to drink only the pure drink of the Word. They are to buy only bread that is fit for consumption. Is that our goal in our life? If it is not, we will not come to the living water. It is good that it is not up to us, however. It is good that this verse is in the form of a command. This command will only be obeyed by those who are the called ones of God. Sing Psalter 114.

March 14 Read Isaiah 55:6-13

There is not much more that needs to be said than what we find in verse 6. It is a command for us to seek the Lord. When we look for other answers to solve our dilemmas we not only waste time; we will fail. We must look for him because his thoughts are the action for our lives. His thoughts because they are higher than our thoughts are the way that we must go. How do we seek the Lord? We need to go no further than our Bibles. Daily devotions will help us know our Bibles and therefore know what is in them that will help in any given situation. The end of seeking the Lord is found in the last two verses of the chapter. A blessed place of peace and rest awaits us in heaven. Sing Psalter 333.

March 15 Read Isaiah 56: 1-7

This is an appropriate passage for the celebration of the Lord's Day. Our covenant God has given to us the way we must keep the Sabbath. Our Sabbath keeping cannot be our own invention. We must keep his day and his worship in the way that he has charged us to go. To do anything else is to not please our covenant God. The reward for obeying Jehovah's commandment in this matter is found in verse 7. He will bring us to heaven where we will celebrate the eternal Sabbath with those of his from every nation. Let us diligently remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. Sing Psalter 251.

March 16 Read Isaiah 56:8-12

Israel of old had times in which those who were entrusted with the flock neglected their duties. Because of

this the flock was harassed by wicked from without the church. It is no different today. Each of us is entrusted to be a watchman over the walls of Zion. While it may not be in the official offices of elder and minister, there is a calling to all of God's people to watch. We must watch out for ourselves, for our families, and for our friends. If we do not watch, but are found walking in sin, there will come judgment upon us. Let us watch each day, that when Christ comes, he will find us faithful to him and his church. Sing Psalter 223.

March 17 Read Isaiah 57:1-12

Here we have a contrast between the only two kinds of people on the earth. There are the righteous and the wicked. You fall into one camp or the other; there is no middle ground. Notice the comfort brought to God's people in the first 2 verses. While the world cares little for the death of the righteous, their death has no sting. Christ has taken away the sting of death. They are gathered unto "their people"- that "great cloud of witnesses." The wicked, however, may have great funerals, but nothing can cover up the fact that their death is the beginning of an eternal death. Nothing they have done in this life can help them in the next. Those who disregard God have nothing in death. Let us not fear death, but let us fear God who has delivered us from death's power. Sing Psalter 133.

March 18 Read Isaiah 57:13-21

Isaiah continues with his words of comfort to God's people who are afflicted by the wicked around them. Their spirits are broken down by those who persecute them because of their righteousness. It is to them that God comes with peace and comfort. In this day and age we, too, are afflicted by the world. It may not be physical persecution, but they hate us and all for which we stand. God will come and bring perfect peace. We must be patient, for he will only come in his time. Let us be thankful for the peace that will reign in our souls and give to us contentment with the way our heavenly Father leads us. Sing Psalter 350.

March 19 Read Isaiah 58:1-14

God's people have much for which to be thankful. How do we show it? One of the ways of which we must make use is taking care of those in need. Do we see those whom he has placed on our path? Do we give to them the assistance that they need? Israel of old had their needy. These needy were right in Jerusalem There is a great blessing for those who care for the needy. Reread verse 11 and 12. When we are in despair, we should see that maybe our thanksgiving is not what it should be. Let us truly be thankful and show it to those around us. Sing Psalter 25.

March 20 Read Isaiah 59:1-8

In this section of Scripture we see an accurate picture of what harm our sin does with our relationship with God. Because of our sin we are separated from him. Our relationship is one of friendship. That is the truth of the covenant. There are times that it seems that he is not our friend any longer. Verses 3-8 describe exactly what we do. Is all lost and despair? No, that is the truth of verse 1. Because God establishes the covenant of friendship through Christ, it will never be broken. He will save us and hear us even when we fall into the worst of sins. Let us remember this blessed truth and live lives of thankfulness for his goodness toward us, an undeserving people. Sing Psalter 398.

March 21 Read Isaiah 59:9-15

When we read about the sad state of affairs that is described above, one calamity should jump out at us. That one is found in verse 15. "Truth faileth." Now the text is speaking of the lack of truth among men because it goes on to say that Jehovah was displeased because the lack of truth meant the lack of judgment. Why was there a lack of truth? A major cause to a lack of truth among men, is that there is a disregard for the truth of God. When the church disregards God's Word as found in the Scriptures and the pure preaching of that Word, the church will fall into all sorts of sins. This is true with us as individuals as well. We must hold the truth of God in high regard or there will be no truth within us. Let us seek God's truth and walk in it day by day. Sing Psalter 230.

March 22 Read Isaiah 59:16-21

Israel had troubles from both within and without. From within were sins in both the people and their leaders. From without were nations who wished to destroy them and rule over them. After describing those troubles, God states that he will bring to them a redeemer. This passage is an introduction to the redeemer that will be described in the following passages. Yet, we find in these short verses a description of our Christ. There are comforting words in this chapter for the church of all ages and for us today. We need not fear because God will keep his covenant with us and his word will stand eternal. Let us embrace our redeemer and walk in his ways each and every day of our lives. Sing Psalter 280.

Buddhism

by Rev. Douglas Kuiper

As Christianity decreases in influence in America, other pagan religions are becoming more influential. One such is Buddhism. Two web sources, The Christian Science Monitor and Wikipedia, agree that Buddhism is America's fourth largest "belief-set" (after Christianity, Judaism, and those professing no religion), with over 1.5 million adherents.¹

Whether Buddhism can properly be called a religion is a question: "Buddhism is so different from other religions that some people question whether it is a religion at all. For example, the central focus of most religions is God, or gods. But Buddhism is non-theistic. The Buddha taught that believing in gods was not useful for those seeking to realize enlightenment."²

So what are the main teachings of Buddhism? How is it different from Christianity? And what would be an appropriate response by Christians to Buddhists?

Teachings

Buddhism originated with Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, the "Enlightened One," who was born about 563 BC in what is now Nepal. Various factors in his life made him decide that life was full of suffering, and that no one had yet found the way to true happiness. So he devoted his life to finding the cause of suffering, and the way to be rid of suffering. He thought he found his answer in "the Middle Way," a way of living that avoids indulging oneself and depriving oneself. The heart of Buddhism is to understand and practice this Middle Way. Buddhism is a way of living: "Most religions are defined by their beliefs. But in Buddhism, merely believing in doctrines is beside the point. The Buddha said that we should not accept doctrines just because we read them in scripture or are taught them by priests. Instead of teaching doctrines to be memorized and believed, the Buddha taught how we can realize truth for ourselves." (See endnote 2 for the source.)

Buddhism is based on four principles called the *Four Noble Truths*:

¹ <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0914/p14s01-lire.html>;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism_in_the_United_States

² <http://buddhism.about.com/od/basicbuddhistteachings/a/basicshub.htm>

The Four Noble Truths

1. Life consists of suffering.
2. Suffering is due to our desire for things which are not permanent (earthly possessions, food, fame, etc).
3. When one is enlightened, he no longer desires these things, and his suffering ends.
4. The Middle Path sets forth the way to enlightenment.

The Middle Path consists of eight steps—two dealing with wisdom, three with ethical conduct, and three with mental discipline:

The Middle Path

Wisdom

1. Right Understanding (knowing the four noble truths, and rejecting wrong ideas about the cause and cure of suffering).
2. Right Thought (freeing our mind of all evil desires, and concentrating on the Middle Path).

Ethical Conduct

3. Right Speech (speaking well of others, and refraining from slander and gossip).
4. Right Action (do not kill men or animals; do not steal; do not lie; do not drink intoxicants; do not be sexually unchaste).
5. Right Livelihood (in his work, a Buddhist must be productive and helpful to others; he may not be a butcher or brewer, for to kill animals and drink intoxicants is wrong).

Mental Discipline

6. Right Effort (trying to overcome evil, and developing one's powers of thinking).
7. Right Awareness (understand things as they really are, and be aware of minute details in one's life, such as one's breathing and the moment one falls asleep).
8. Right Meditation (meditate on a particular object until one is free from distractions and the feeling of suffering, and becomes enlightened).

Evaluation

Some mistakenly suppose that Buddhism has much in common with Christianity, because both religions recognize suffering, set forth a way of deliverance, and require an ethically moral life.

I hope it is clear to you though, that Buddhism and Christianity are quite different.

Buddhism finds the cause of suffering in our desire for earthly things. God teaches that suffering is caused by sin. While God forbids us to covet earthly things, He does not teach it is wrong to desire them in proper amount, and for a proper use; we express such a desire, when we pray for our daily bread.

Buddhism teaches that one escapes suffering by following the Middle Path. The Christian confesses that one escapes suffering God's wrath, because Jesus Christ suffered that wrath for us. We hope for our own complete deliverance from suffering in the way of our death and resurrection. We know that we will suffer in this life; yet in the midst of our suffering we find comfort, hope, and joy, in Jesus Christ (read again the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism).

Buddhism teaches that one can find this escape by oneself: think hard enough, concentrate long enough, and you will escape suffering! This is salvation by works. Christianity is emphatic that salvation is only by God's grace, and that our works are the fruit of salvation, not a way to be saved.

The Buddha taught that gods exist, but they are merely spirits who also must know the Four Noble Truths and follow the Middle Path to attain enlightenment; they are not to be worshiped. Christians confess one eternal, sovereign, Triune God who is to be worshiped.

That Jesus Christ lived on earth, Buddhists would not deny; but that he is God, and earned salvation for us, they deny. Jesus is just a man who may himself have become enlightened.

One thing the two religions have in common—both teach that their way of salvation is the only right way. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," said Jesus (John 14:6); and of him Peter said, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Buddhism claims that its Middle Path is the only way. That they have this in common simply underscores that Buddhism is unChristian and antiChristian.

Witnessing suggestions

Perhaps the following suggestions will be helpful, should you discuss your faith with a Buddhist.

First, realize that Buddhists are spiritually blind to saving truth (as were we). We must pray that God will open their eyes, and use us to that end, if he pleases. But we also know that he hardens some, rather than opening their eyes to the truth.

Second, ask the individual to state his faith for you. In response, point out that the Bible gives a different cause for suffering than does Buddhism, and so also a different solution. If you have several conversations with a Buddhist, you will have time to look up specific passages which can help you.

Third, use the Bible unashamedly! If he will not submit to the authority of the Bible, then any substantive conversation about religion is over. The Bible is your sword, and is authoritative for use in this situation (II Timothy 3:16).

Fourth, be careful to explain Christian concepts. Buddhists use terms such as "salvation," "regeneration," and "meditation"; but they give those terms a vastly different meaning than do we. Don't assume that because they are familiar with the word, they understand it as we do.

Finally, live your faith! Be open in confessing that you find forgiveness for your sins in Christ (the Buddhist, though emphasizing the need to live a morally upright life, knows nothing of forgiveness), and that you find in Christ the power to obey God.

Especially, live your faith consistently when you suffer! Scripture often commands us to contentment and joy in suffering (Philippians 4:11; James 1:2; I Peter 2:19ff, 4:12ff). Should the Buddhist notice that, rather than complaining about our suffering, or trying to eliminate it, we manifest joy in it, he might realize that our faith has a solution to suffering which is deeper than his, and requires of us a power which he does not have, but (if God so works in him) which he desires. ❖

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

God's Everlasting Covenant and Missions

by Rev. Dennis Lee

The subject I have been asked to speak on is God's everlasting covenant and missions.

Covenant Promises

The way I am going to approach this subject is by way of the covenant promises of God. Just as God has made a covenant promise to believers that he will be friend to their children, grandchildren, etc. down the family line (Genesis 17:7), so also, God has made a covenant promise in connection with the work of missions that he has clearly commissioned his New Testament church to perform (Matthew 28:18ff, Mark 16:15ff). And that covenant promise in connection with missions comes also from Genesis 17, and is from the verses 4 & 5:

As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

...missions, just like catechism instruction given by the church in support of the parental religious training in the covenant, is a covenantal obligation and duty that God has given to the New Testament church in and through Jesus Christ.

This covenant promise ought to be at the forefront of the minds of every consistory and evangelism com-

mittee, indeed every member of a Reformed church. For missions, just like catechism instruction given by the church in support of the parental religious training in the covenant, is a covenantal obligation and duty that God has given to the New Testament church in and through Jesus Christ.

The challenge for the New Testament church in our day is to be rightly concerned with both these covenant promises in Genesis 17, fulfilling its God-given covenantal obligations. The church of Jesus Christ in our day must pay attention to both these covenant promises and exert herself actively in being used as instruments by God to fulfill the obligations connected with both these covenant promises.

In this connection, one difficulty that churches face is that of one-sidedness. On the one hand, Baptist and Baptist churches focus their attention on evangelism and missions at the expense of a solid catechetical instruction of their children. They err in treating their children as the object of missions instead of regarding them as part of the church and covenant of God (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 27, Q/A 74). Their focus is on the one covenant promise of Genesis 17:4 & 5 but not on the other of Genesis 17:7. We certainly must not take such an approach. But on the other hand, Reformed churches can also take the other extreme approach of focusing only on the one covenant promise of Genesis 17:7 and neglect the other of Genesis 17:4, 5. It is easy for a Reformed church to take a one-track approach to the covenant and be focused only on the covenantal duties and obligations connected with Genesis 17:7: catechism instruction and the covenantal education of our children. This other extreme is also something we do well to avoid.

In seeking a right approach towards both these covenant promises, we need to ask ourselves: what is the relationship between these two covenant promises? The answer, negatively, is that they are not in conflict

with each other. And the answer, positively, is that they harmonize with each other. Specifically, the covenant promise of Genesis 17:4 & 5 builds on top of the covenant promise of Genesis 17:7. How do we know that? The Word of God sheds light on this matter.

God shows this to us in the Old Testament as he unfolded his covenant. God shows to us in the Old Testament how he remembered Genesis 17:4-5 in the Old Testament, even as he fulfilled the covenant promise of Genesis 17:7—the gathering of the church in the line of generations.

Clearly with Abraham in Genesis 17, God gave not only the promise of verse 7 to Abraham, but also the 2nd promise that he would be a “father of many nations.” In fact, God did that in an emphatic way. God changed his name from “Abram” to “Abraham,” which means exactly that, “father of many nations.” In doing so, God told Abraham, “You will be an international father. You will be a father of many in many nations. That’s what you will be.”

While Israel would be a peculiar people and holy nation, somehow, some way and at some time in the future, their faithful covenant God would cause the other nations to be gathered into his church.

And that change of name for Abraham was not something that only Abraham remembered. The Old Testament church and all true descendants of Abraham also had and continues to have the meaning of his name and the change of his name by God recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. While Israel would be a peculiar people and holy nation, somehow, some way and at some time in the future, their faithful covenant God would cause the other nations to be gathered into his church.

In fact, so important was this covenant promise to God, he would remind his people of this throughout Israel’s history in many other ways besides the name of Abraham. We take the time to point out a few of them. In the time of the Judges, didn’t God incorporate a non-Israelite—Moabitess Ruth into the nation Israel, in a significant way—so that through her would come king David? Significantly, the ancestral lineage of king David

passing through Ruth is recorded in Ruth 4. In the time of king David, didn’t God make a covenant promise to David that through his loins would come forth a mighty king who would sit on his throne forever, a king of an everlasting and international kingdom (cf. 2 Samuel 7)? And what about the wonderful mission promise of Isaiah 66:18-19 later on in the time of Isaiah that Rev. Stewart treated before me? Then, of course, came the age of the New Testament and God showed that he never forgot that covenant promise of Genesis 17:4-5, did he? Before Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, he gave that one important mission command and instruction to the New Testament church, now popularly known as the Great Commission, as recorded in Mark 16:15-16:

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

So, God shows us the way with respect to a right relationship of both these covenant promises. God establishes his covenant by fulfilling his promise of Genesis 17:4-5. He does this by building on his fulfillment of his promise of Genesis 17:7. When the established New Testament church teaches you, its covenant seed, about the work of evangelism and missions and you grow to be a part of that work in your life in the church, the church is not only being obedient in one important aspect of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. She is also following the pattern and way in which God himself establishes his covenant. She is building a consciousness of Genesis 17:4-5 in her covenant seed in the line of generations, who are friends of God by way of Genesis 17:7.

Ongoing Fulfillment

And so, in that way, there is and there must be ongoing fulfillment of this promise in the New Testament Church. By the time we get to the New Testament, both these covenant promises come together in Acts 2:39,

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

Let us recount the context and setting of this verse. In Acts 1, in obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, the gospel spread. Then, in Acts 2:1ff, Pentecost came. One important sign that the Holy Spirit gave to the infant New Testament church at Pentecost was that of the gift of tongues. The people of God spoke in the languages of the different nations, and they knew it. God was telling the New Testament church that she would

undoubtedly be catholic, international, gathered from many nations. And in Acts 2:14ff, what do we have—an important record of the first gospel preached in the New Testament by the apostles. Right at the end of the sermon preached by Peter, we have v. 39, a verse which shows that God is faithful and he remembered his international promise to Abraham—continuing to fulfill it with the preaching of the apostle Peter.

How beautifully those two covenant promises were brought together by God through Peter! “The promise is unto you and your children.” God shows in this first phrase that he remembers his covenant promise of Genesis 17:7. And then, he says in this second phrase, “and to all that are afar off.” God shows that he also remembers his covenant promise of Genesis 17:4-5. In Romans 4, God tells us that he fulfills this universal covenant promise to Abraham in the way of faith. This faith is through the gospel of grace, the gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ alone (vv. 16-17, 25). Finally, he adds to both phrases of Acts 2:39 – the important limiting clause “even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”

The importance of that limiting clause of Acts 2:39 is that God reaffirms that the way in which the New Testament church fulfills the Great Commission and the “mission” covenant promise of Genesis 17:4-5 is by going out into the world and preaching the gospel. As in all obligations and duties that God gives to her, she is to exert herself in carrying out the duty and work of evangelism and missions.

And that the infant New Testament church of the book of Acts showed she did. One cannot help but be impressed by the great energy of the early New Testament church in the work of missions: sending forth missionaries, who traveled far and wide to preach the gospel (Romans 10:14-15), and as the church itself was scattered by persecution and spread, members supported that gospel actively by witnessing the gospel. They witnessed that gospel by their lives and also by their speech (cf. Acts 8:1-4, 1 Peter 3:15). By the time the book of Acts concluded, the gospel went far beyond the boundaries of the nation Israel—into Europe and Asia Minor!

But even as God was fulfilling his covenant promise of a church gathered from the nations through the apostolic church, let us also realize that she needed to go through a time of learning and adjustment, even as she was greatly active in missions. The early New Testament church, especially the Jewish Christians, who were so used to seeing the covenant extended primarily down the family line, had now not only that covenant promise of Genesis 17:7 in the foreground, but now also,

understandably, needed a broad mission and vision of the international covenant promise of Genesis 17:4-5.

The early New Testament church, especially the Jewish Christians, who were so used to seeing the covenant extended primarily down the family line, had now not only that covenant promise of Genesis 17:7 in the foreground, but now also, understandably, needed a broad mission and vision of the international covenant promise of Genesis 17:4-5.

In this connection, God himself gave instruction to the New Testament church.

One important instance of this is in Acts 10. Peter was sitting on a housetop and praying there about the sixth hour, when we are told that God gave to him a vision of a great sheet or net that contained inside of it “all manner of 4-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things and fowls of the air” (v. 12). And then, God commands him to rise, kill and eat all these creatures that were in the sheet (v. 13). Then, we read in Acts 10:14-16:

But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

Peter, and the New Testament church along with him, needed instruction that the sinful Gentiles whom God called into his church, just like the Jewish Christians, were clean. Though they had the Old Testament scriptures and Genesis 17:4-5, they needed to learn and get adjusted to the idea that God was going to bring in elect Gentiles into the church.

A second important instance of God giving instruction in connection with missions is through the apostle Paul. After setting straight the doctrine and gospel of

salvation by grace alone through Christ alone in Ephesians 2:1-10, the holy inspired apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 2:11-17:

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

The Ephesian church, which likely was having some tension between its Jewish and Gentile members, needed instruction that by dying on the cross of calvary, Jesus had not only purchased forgiveness for those for whom he died, he had also “broken down the middle wall of partition” between them. Nothing ought to divide Christians of different nations and ethnicities any more. For Jesus Christ is the peace of the church, the church gathered from and comprising not only one nation, but many nations.

Just as the early New Testament church went through a time of learning and adjustment as she was active in missions, so also we today in the PRCA need to do the same.

Just as the early New Testament church went through a time of learning and adjustment as she was active in missions, so also we today in the PRCA need to do the same. Through much pain and tears, God has preserved the precious, biblical and Reformed heritage in our midst. Our churches are blessed with the doctrines and gospel of sovereign particular grace and the wonderful and warm

doctrine of God’s covenant as a bond or living relationship of friendship with his people in Jesus Christ. God graciously gives such a heritage to us not to keep for ourselves, but to communicate to the church and world around us. We have this precious, peculiar and pure biblical gospel, well-developed through the controversies of 1924 and 1953 in our church history to bring to the world. Let us, in obedience to the Great Commission and with consciousness of the covenant promise of Genesis 17:4-5, continue to exert ourselves in mission work. And let us, as we continue doing so, also continue to learn and make adjustments in our work of missions. And we are. For example, we are learning the biblical and practical wisdom of doing foreign mission work not singly, but two-and-two—as the apostolic church did in the book of Acts. We are certainly growing in our denomination to have a mind-set for missions.

Do you, young people, have a mind-set and a heart for God in missions? A heart that desires not only that your friends around you at church make public confession of faith, but also to see others do the same? Do you desire to see people who are not presently in the church, people from other nations embrace the same faith in Jesus Christ that you do? There are lots of ways in which we can grow and cultivate that mission heart and mind-set that God gives to you. That begins with local evangelism and missions—in your own sphere of life, in your own town and community. Support the work of your church’s evangelism committee. Get involved with promoting and/or developing your church’s website. Keep up with the mission work of our denomination through the newsletters of our missionaries. Pray for our missionaries. Give financially to their work. The list goes on and on.

In all that activity, besides the benefit of a growing spiritually healthy mind-set and heart for missions, there are also other benefits to being used actively by God in the covenantal work of evangelism and missions. For one thing, the truth of “the catholicity of the church” which we confess every Sunday evening at our church’s worship services becomes less abstract and theoretical and more real to us. As God blesses our mission labors, he brings in people from other nations into our midst, and we grow to appreciate more and more the wonder of God’s grace. We see God’s irresistible grace work in the line of generations, and also to those who are far off, those outside the church, as he promises! He calls and gathers them unto himself through the preaching of the gospel. What a wonder that the power of God’s grace draws people different in so many ways! As you relate to such ones, even as I relate to you, we find, don’t we,

plan of God appeared to be so clear ... until now. Abel was dead! Knowing that God is sovereign, Adam and Eve learned painfully that God's ways are not man's ways. God had made known a profound truth about himself which did not receive mature expression until Paul wrote the words of 1 Corinthians 1:25 "the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." The church's years of experience with the death of covenant children do not toughen us against the pain one whit. Many of us know the crying questions.

Exactly how long Adam and Eve floundered in the valley of the shadow of death is not revealed, but thirty years into the second century a light began to flicker. A new smile broke out upon troubled faces as another son was born to Adam and Eve. Eve "called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew." (Gen 4:25) The sovereign God steadily and faithfully would work out his plan. The hope in the promised Savior again welled up, but now it was deeper and tempered with patient trust. With the prophet Isaiah 3200 years hence, Adam could declare "Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion. (Isa 8:18) Seth, as well as the covenant children that God has given to our fathers, and to us, are signs of the covenant wonder of God's faithfulness. The plan of God was far more glorious than Adam and Eve had imagined.

The second century of the church militant came to a close with a joyful and hopeful family. Even though Adam went out each morning with a heavy dew soaking the earth, and returned in sweat and weariness, he came home to love and questions of a son eager to hear the stories of the garden of Eden and the promised Savior. By a wonder of grace, God had given to him a son "in his own likeness, after his image;" (Genesis 5:3) In wonder Seth watched and listened as his father built altars and explained how the shed blood of a lamb pointed to that promised Savior.

As he grew older, Seth would work side by side with his father and satisfy his hunger for more knowledge. As the years went by, more brothers and sisters would fill the home. Their home would be much like every covenant home, with its share of sorrows and joys. On the one hand they would rejoice together to see the power of God's grace at work. On the other hand the angel with the flaming sword at the garden entrance would provide a twenty-four hour reminder of their guilt and shame. Against the terrible blackness of the background of

shame, guilt, and sin, the family of Adam would ponder the depths of God's love and mercy.

The beautiful portrait of sin and grace that Adam repeatedly painted for his children would not impress all of them. For many, the glory and excitement of Cain's adventures was much more attractive. Adam could now see that sin did not leave with Cain, but would continue to thrive and develop right within the covenant circle. Walking with God in this world would be impossible apart from the power of God's grace. What a mystery! How would God do it? Who would be that Savior? When would he come? What does God have in store for his people? Not until the apostle Paul did God reveal the grand picture of God sovereignly showing mercy and love, and by the power of grace gathering his people from all the peoples of the whole world.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom 11:33-36).

We can only imagine the depth of knowledge developed as these two men lived and talked together for some 600 years. It would be like having John Calvin among us today with Theodore Beza able to counsel and guide the church for another 400 years in the future!

To be sure, the home of Adam and Eve would fill with more children. Somehow, they were sure, even though the covenant circle remained small and weak in comparison to the growing power and technological advances of those who were driven by their own glory and lusts, God would fulfill his promise and reveal his glory in ways beyond the wildest dreams of man. ❖

John is a member of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin and is Editor of Beacon Lights.

Church News

BAPTISMS

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

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:
Olivia Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mark Bleyenbergh—
Grandville, MI

Dean Timothy, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy Langerak—
Hope, MI

Ondra Danielle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dan Kalsbeek—
Hope, MI

Sarah Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. David King—Hull, IA

Kennedi Jordyn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mike
Poortinga—Peace, IL

Courtney Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brent Kuiper—
Providence, MI

Lucy Joanne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joe Schimmel—
Providence, MI

Jake Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mark Koole—
Providence, MI

Aubrey Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Matt Regnerus—
Randolph, WI

Natalie Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ed Hoksbergen—
Randolph, WI

Andrew Stefan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Engelsma—
Trinity, MI

Kara Lyn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Bleyenbergh—
Trinity, MI

Natalie Renee, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dan Bylsma—
Trinity, MI

Grant Mitchell, son of Mr. & Mrs. Terry Dykstra—Trinity,
MI

Chad Martin, son of Mr. & Mrs. Murray Geertsma—
Wingham, Ontario, CAN

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

“Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be
established.” Proverbs 4:26

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

Rachel Kleyn—Byron Center, MI

Melissa VanDyke—Randolph, WI

MARRIAGES

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean
not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways
acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

Proverbs 3: 5 & 6

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Jon Kooiman and Miss Grace DeJong—Grandville,
MI

Mr. Robert Span and Miss Julie Tolsma—Immanuel,
Lacombe, Alberta, CAN

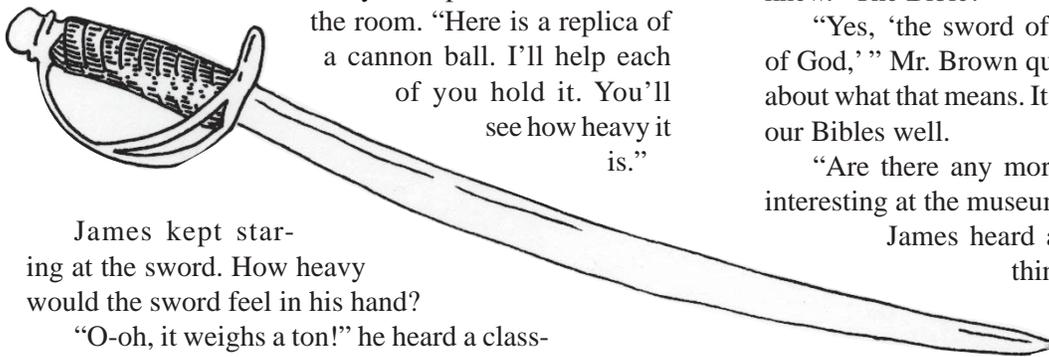
Mr. Todd Zandstra and Miss Joy Van Baren—South
Holland, IL

Mr. Lee Wiltjer and Miss Lauren Lenting—South
Holland, IL

The Sword

James saw the sword locked behind a glass case. The blade was long and sharp. He tried to imagine how the sword might have been used in battle. Did a soldier hold it high and shout in victory? Did the blade ever clash against other enemy swords? Clink.

James jumped. The museum tour guide had dropped his key. "Excuse me," the guide said as he picked up the key and opened a case across the room. "Here is a replica of a cannon ball. I'll help each of you hold it. You'll see how heavy it is."



James kept staring at the sword. How heavy would the sword feel in his hand?

"O-oh, it weighs a ton!" he heard a classmate say.

"Don't you want to hold the cannon ball, James?" his teacher asked.

"No, thank you, Mr. Brown." He watched his teacher and classmates trail into the next room. With one last look at the sword, he pushed himself away from the glass case and followed the group.

* * * * *

"So what did you like best at the museum?" Mr. Brown asked when they returned to school.

Sarah raised her hand. "The dinosaur bones! I wonder what the earth was like back then."

"I liked the cannon ball," Jeremy said. "It was so heavy!"

James raised his hand.

"Yes, James, what did you enjoy at the museum?" Mr. Brown asked.

"The sword."

James' teacher raised his eyebrows. "Why did you like the sword?"

Sometimes war is necessary, but he didn't really like fighting. He put his finger on his chin and thought. Then he said, "The sword was so long and sharp, I wondered what it would be like to hold and swing around."

Mr. Brown smiled and nodded. "I wondered that too. A soldier with a sword needs to know how to use it. But then I thought of something. We all do hold a sword in battle. Not a flesh and blood battle, but still a real battle. And we better know how to use that sword! You know

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

what sword I'm talking about, right?"

James straightened his back and raised his hand. He knew. "The Bible!"

"Yes, 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,'" Mr. Brown quoted. "It's good for us to think about what that means. It's another reason we must know our Bibles well.

"Are there any more things you found especially interesting at the museum?"

James heard a few more answers, but kept thinking about swords. He would look up the verses that talked about them.

Find the underlined words of the following verses in the puzzle below:

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God.... And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

E phesians 6:12-17

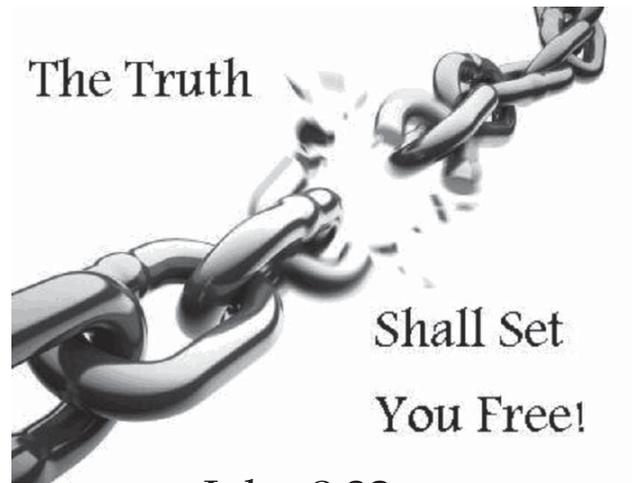
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Connie is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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