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"And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire."

Hebrews 12:27-29

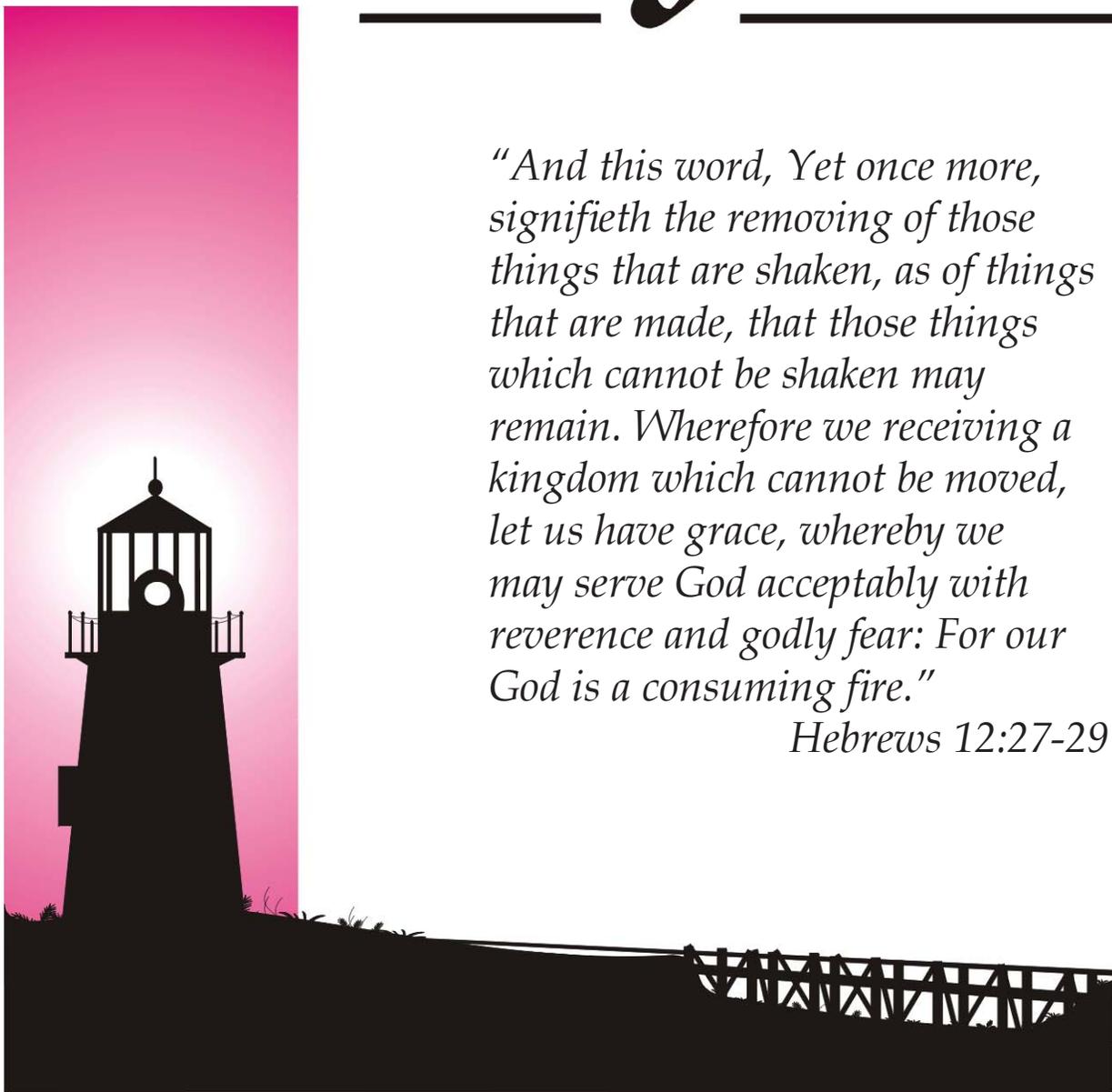


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BEACON LIGHTS

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Haiti Earthquake: A Stage for Common Grace?



By John Huizenga

The history of Haiti is a history of abuse and suffering. Spain had turned the island into a sugar factory run by slave labor. Having ravished the land, Spain abandoned the country to the French who established a brutal slave operation until the revolution of 1791, when, as many other colonies were doing, the Haitians managed to yank themselves from under the yoke of France. But revolution did not bring freedom or a better life. Brutal dictators and corrupt governments have further devastated the people, leaving them to live in hopeless poverty.

And now an earthquake has leveled cities, and reports indicate that the loudest cry is that of the preachers of the land preaching the imminent return of Jesus, and repentance or further judgment from God. The vast majority of the people adhere to the teachings of Rome. Protestants are the minority. Many of these mix their faith with the idolatrous spirit-world religion of voodoo, and perhaps fear that disquieted spirits are to blame. The evangelical preacher Pat Robertson links the judgment of God in this quake to the rumor that the Haitians, in their desperate attempt to throw off the catholic French in the late 1700's called upon the devil to help them.

Preachers who would rather avoid the public outcry against Robertson's statement either ignore the concept of judgment or blame the terrible suffering on the devil and call upon God to sooth this devastated nation with his love and mercy. For those who imagine a common grace of God displayed in the progress man makes in this world, the island of Haiti appears to have fallen between the cracks.

The world gnashes its teeth against anyone who "wastes" their time on reasons (especially religious reasons) and calls upon everyone to pitch in with whatever they can and help these people in this time of great need. If the Haitian preachers want to babble about judgment, so be it, let's show them the power of human compassion and money. Let's salvage what we can, and use this terrible event as a springboard to demonstrate what man can do when we set aside prejudice and unite for the good of fellow men and women. Maybe this is where common grace fits in: Haiti offers an opportunity for the fruits of common grace—the relief organizations, technology, and human care—to be displayed on a grand scale for all the world to see. God won't take all the glory, but in willing helplessness gives opportunity for man to link the power of grace with human resourcefulness and share in the glory. That is common grace.

Nobody, except for a believer in the absolute sovereignty of God, could find anything offensive with the common grace approach to redeeming the Haiti situation. The Haitian believer sitting alone among the rubble of his home who knows the sovereignty of God in his or her salvation finds no comfort in a god who can't control the tectonic plates of the earth and depends on man to reveal love and mercy through the power of a common grace. Certainly he receives earthly gifts from man with thankfulness, but he also recognizes that this earth is not his abiding home. A gift from a fellow brother or sister in the Lord and in the name of the Lord to alleviate earthly needs would make such a saint rejoice and give thanks to his covenant God. And when we can, let us give in the name of the Lord. While the earth groans under the judgments of God, he hears the footsteps of his Lord and Savior coming to deliver those whom He has redeemed from sin. With the psalmist, and the church of all ages he sings Psalm 147.

Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely. The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite. The LORD lifteth up the

meek: he casteth the wicked down to the ground. Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry. He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy. Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem; praise thy God, O Zion. For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat. He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly. He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow. He showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD” (Psa 147:1-20). ❖

God’s Word Concerning Earthquakes

from R.A. Torrey’s *New Topical Textbook*

EARTHQUAKES

Islands and mountainous districts liable to: Psa114:4, 6; Rev 6:14; Rev 16:18; Rev 16:20

FREQUENTLY ACCOMPANIED BY

Volcanic eruptions: Psa 104:32; Nah 1:5
 Convulsion and receding of the sea: 2 Sam 22:8; 2 Sam 22:16; Psa 18:7; Psa 18:15; Psa 46:3
 Opening of the earth: Num 16:31; Num 16:32
 Overturning of mountains: Psa 46:2; Zec 14:4
 Rending of rocks: Mat 27:51

ARE VISIBLE TOKENS OF

God’s power: Job 9:6; Heb 12:26
 God’s presence: Psa 68:7, 8; Psa 114:7
 God’s anger: Psa 18:7; Psa 60:2; Isa 13:13
 Men always terrified by: Num 16:34; Zec 14:5; Mat 27:54; Rev 11:13

MENTIONED IN SCRIPTURE

At mount Sinai: Exo 19:18
 In the wilderness: Num 16:31; Num 16:32
 In strongholds of Philistines: 1 Sam 14:15
 When Elijah fled from Jezebel: 1Ki 19:11
 In Uzziah’s reign: Amo 1:1; Zec 14:5
 At our Lord’s death: Mat 27:51
 At our Lord’s resurrection: Mat 28:2
 At Philippi: Act 16:26
 Before destruction of Jerusalem, predicted: Mat 24:7; Luk 21:11
 At Christ’s second coming, predicted: Zec 14:4

ILLUSTRATIVE OF

The judgments of God: Isa 24:19; Isa 24:20; Isa 29:6; Jer 4:24; Rev 8:5

The overthrow of kingdoms: Hag 2:6; Hag 2:22; Rev 6:12; Rev 6:14; Rev 16:18; Rev 16:19, 20

“on May 17, 1382 a council of bishops met in London under the prodding of the pope to consider what to do with the pestilential teachings of John Wycliffe. Just as the council was beginning its meeting a rare and unusual earthquake struck London, causing many walls to collapse and stones from buildings to rain down on the streets. Wycliffe interpreted this to mean that the judgment of God was upon the council met together to condemn him; but the archbishop assured the assembly that they should continue with their deliberations because the earthquake was proof that the awful teaching of Wycliffe had seeped into the ground and that now the earth had belched to rid itself of these foul doctrines. This council was, from that time on, known as the Earthquake Council.”

Portraits of Faithful Saints
 by Herman Hanko

Signs in the World

by Prof. Robert D. Decker

As a boy I recall that from time to time my pastors, H. Hoeksema and C. Hanko, would preach on the last things. They would preach about the signs of Christ's coming and about the Antichrist and the persecution during the great tribulation. And I was frightened by it all. Rev. Hoeksema used to say from the pulpit that he hoped he would still be living in those days but I fervently hoped I would not! I dare say you share some of those same fears. That's why I'm glad for the opportunity to speak on this subject. Jesus knows our fears. That's why he said: "See that ye be not troubled." We have nothing to fear and every reason to rejoice.

The occasion for these words of Jesus is found in verses 1-3 of Matthew 24. Jesus and the disciples are near the temple when Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple. Then they went to the Mount of Olives. The disciples ask: "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming?" The rest of the passage is Jesus' answer to their question. Jesus explains that the destruction of the temple is a picture of the end of the world. What we have then in this chapter are the signs of Christ's coming and of the end of the world. We shall consider the beginning of those signs, those which occur in the world. They are wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famine, pestilence and abounding lawlessness. The Lord speaks of these in verses 6-8 and 12.

Let us consider first what these signs are. Jesus tells us they are wars and rumors of wars. It was a time of peace when Jesus spoke these words. It was a peace enforced by Rome's military might, but peace nonetheless. Jesus said that's going to change. The disciples were on the verge of hearing of wars and rumors of wars. In the very near future they would hear of these. How true these words of Jesus are. There have been thousands of wars since that time. In Europe there have been three hundred wars in the past three hundred years. The world of the twentieth century witnessed two terrible world wars in which millions were slaughtered. Six million Jews died in the second world war alone. Then there were the Korean and Vietnam wars. And we hear of wars and rumors of wars today. Ireland is wracked by conflict, Russia invaded Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq are at war. There is revolution in Poland. The Arab-Israeli

world is a virtual time bomb which could explode at any moment and at the slightest provocation. The world is simply an armed camp. The world is armed to the teeth with all kinds of sophisticated weaponry, to say nothing of the utterly fearful nuclear weapon. The world has the capability of destroying itself with the push of a button in a matter of moments.

But there's more. Wars will continue and increase. Nations shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. War has characterized the entire history of the world. That will continue and increase. Jesus said so. And our Lord told us these are a sign of his coming and of the end of the world.

But there are more signs in the world. There shall be famines. Thousands die from starvation. Children with bloated bellies go to sleep hungry every night. A recent newspaper reported that ten thousand people, most of them children, die of hunger per day. There shall be pestilences. Think of the destruction of crops by insects. There are diseases of every sort. Heart disease and cancer kill thousands every day. There are earthquakes in diverse places. How true! They cause untold damage to property and loss of life and injuries. Scientists predict many more and worry about the severity of them. Jesus spoke too of abounding iniquity. Iniquity is literally lawlessness. The word refers to contempt for the law, willful violation of the law. That abounds and increases. This too is perfectly obvious in today's world. Prisons are filled to overflowing and they can't build new ones fast enough. In Michigan the problem is so severe that the state wants to release prisoners early. Crime in spite of men's best efforts increases. When we lived in South Holland the Chicago police called the Cabrini-Green housing project, "the war zone."

Many streets in our cities are unsafe at any hour of the day or night. But there's still more! How many thousands of babies are murdered in cold blood before they see the light of day!? Think of the pornography, prostitution, gambling, and homosexuality in our world. It's enough to make the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah blush. Drug addiction and drunkenness are problems of huge proportions.

How are all these to be explained? Not as natural

occurrences. They don't just happen. They are not to be explained in terms of Political Science or the principles of Sociology. There is no natural explanation which accounts for them.

That's what sinful man thinks. He thinks that man is in control. He measures the force of earthquakes with his seismograph. He forecasts volcanoes like Mt. St. Helens. He spins his theories of world economics to prevent famine and has all kinds of measures to prevent pestilence. With his diplomacy, man attempts to end the wars and tensions among the nations. None of this is the answer. At bottom it's utterly futile. Wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes and lawlessness continue and abound.

But Jesus has the answer! "All these things must come to pass." Literally Jesus says: it is necessary that these things become. That's a divine necessity. No matter what man thinks or does these things must happen. Nothing will stop them or even cause them to slow down. It is necessary that these things become. God said it is necessary. This is divine necessity. God brings these things. God has determined that his kingdom will come in the way of all these things. That's his eternal counsel in Christ Jesus.

What must be our attitude towards all these things? Jesus tells us, and he uses very strong language. "See!" He says. Take note of this! Know this! Our Lord means to emphasize this very, very strongly. One commentator put it nicely when he wrote: "Look out for wars but do not be scared out of your wits by them." This is what Jesus is saying to us. "See, that ye be not troubled." To be troubled is to be alarmed, to be paralyzed with fear and to cry out in terror. The Lord says: "See that ye be not terrified by these things."

Make no mistake these things are terrifying! Think of the terrors of war. Who knows the terror of many millions of war victims and soldiers since these words were spoken? Who can measure the screams as troops and

tanks and guns roar through village and countryside or as the bombers devastate cities and towns. Think of the screams of a mother who has just seen her child burned to a crisp or blown to bits! That's war. Go to the hospital and hear the moans and cries of the sick. Witness the fears of the dying. The examples could be multiplied. There is no way one can calculate the terror caused by earthquake and storm. The suffering caused by all these things is simply beyond comprehension. In the face of all these things Jesus says: "See that ye be not troubled."

Why not? The answer is all these things must come to pass but the end is not yet. These are signs of the end of the world. But there's more that has to happen before the end comes. God has determined these things as signs of the final revelation of his glory in Jesus Christ. We must know that. We must be sober and watch and pray. When we see these things we must realize our God is at work bringing the coming of Christ and the end of the world.

All these are the beginning of sorrows. Literally Jesus says these are the beginning of birth pangs. The end is not yet but these signs tell us that the beginning of the end is at hand. Other signs must follow until finally Antichrist comes. And when the gospel shall have been preached to the ends of the world then shall the end come. But these signs: war, earthquake, famine and the rest are the beginning of birth pangs. Just as birth pangs tell us that the birth of the child is very near so these signs tell us that the end of the world and the birth of the new world are very near.

Therefore do not be terrified! Rejoice and be very glad! Christ is coming in great power and glory. We are more than conquerors through him that loved us. ❖

Prof. Decker is Professor Emeritus of Practical Theology and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary in Grandville, Michigan. This article was originally given as a convention speech and is reprinted from the October 1981 issue of Beacon Lights.

Shaking of the Nations

by Sherry Van Egdom

"Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:6 and 7).

Can you imagine what that day will be like when the Lord shakes all the nations, and the Son of God returns? What a day that will be!

At 4:53 PM EST on January 12, God gave me a tiny glimpse of what that day will be like. I had the privilege

of witnessing the power of God as he struck Haiti with an incredible earthquake. This was not a privilege from an earthly point of view, but from a spiritual point of view, for we see God's glory when his power is displayed in such a fashion.

My coworkers and I journeyed to Haiti as part of a medical team. We planned to travel to different villages and do dental work for those in great need, but God had other plans for us. When the 7.0-magnitude earthquake rocked Port-au-Prince, we became a trauma team and tended to the injured. The death and devastation we witnessed is difficult for me to accurately relate. It was beyond words. A nation of people who physically had so little now has even less.

How does a Christian begin to put such an event into perspective? God has used Rev. Overway, my family, and friends to help me do so. First, we must realize that any earthquake is a picture of God's wrath against sin. At the end of time, he will shake all the nations and save his people alone. We can further compare an earthquake and its unsteady foundations to a life of walking in sin. There is no surety or comfort in such a life, but when we walk with God, he is our Rock. "The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower" (Psalm 18:2).

Though it is difficult to understand, we must realize that God is using this great trial for the good of his people in Haiti. For some it was the divine method he used to take them from a life of earthly poverty into the

riches of eternal glory. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Although they may have little food, no home, and no family, God is there with them. He will be the Comforter of his people and provide the help that only he can give. In the minutes after the earthquake, I heard many of the Lord's people in Haiti crying out to him. What a blessing to know that he listened in love to every word! "This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Psalm 34:6). When night falls upon Port-au-Prince, the voices of his people singing can be heard. They are blessing the Lord at all times! (Psalm 34:1)

It pleased God in his grace to bring my medical teammates and I back to the United States safely. We see God's glory displayed in this as well. God placed us in Haiti at the time of the earthquake to do his work there. Even so, he has brought us back home according to his plan to continue to serve him here.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Praise him for what he has done for you, for his people in Haiti, and for his people in all nations of the world. "Oh praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us; and the truth of the LORD endureth forever. Praise ye the LORD" (Psalm 117). ❖

Sherry is a member of Doon Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa.

John Calvin Essays

Our Strong Pillar and Lasting Inheritance: Predestination Eternal Life or Eternal Death Before Time Determined Eternally

by Sara Doezema

The Reformation, Geneva, TULIP, covenant of grace, predestination, the Institutes of the Christian Religion; this was John Calvin. Nearly five hundred years later, we celebrate the work of John Calvin,

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the foundations of our Reformed faith that were set, and the truths and correct understanding of the mysteries of God which were revealed through this means. Today, we, as young people in the Protestant Reformed Churches,

have the great privilege of learning such teachings as predestination through Christian schools, catechism, and the pure preaching of the Word of God. For such a great understanding of such an important foundational doctrine, which gives us peace and the assurance that we will one day live with Christ in eternity, we are certainly indebted to John Calvin.

Predestination, as John Calvin defines it in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, is “God’s eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is fore-ordained for some, eternal damnation for others.” According to the *Belgic Confession* Article 16,

We believe that all the posterity of Adam being thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of our first parents, God then did manifest himself such as he is; that is to say, merciful and just: Merciful, since he delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom he in his eternal and unchangeable counsel, of mere goodness, hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works; Just, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.

In comparison, the doctrine we hold today and Calvin’s definition of predestination are nearly the exact same. This doctrine of predestination is a doctrine that deals with one’s life after death; a life that is everlasting, is a doctrine to which we hold today, and is surely one inherited from John Calvin.

Certainly we must credit John Calvin for such a beautiful truth that resulted from, no doubt, much hard, intense studying of the scriptures along with the grace and insight given him by God to see and realize such a beautiful truth. Once he saw this truth, there was nothing that could stop him from proclaiming it boldly to all those around him, that they too might share in his knowledge and understanding of the scriptures regarding predestination. Not only did Calvin do much studying to realize such a truth and much preaching to spread such a truth, but he also upheld it and boldly defended it, so that today, nearly five hundred years later, we still have this truth and hold to it.

In maintaining his view on predestination, Calvin faced much resistance and was faced by all those around him with questions, but he always came back with good, strong, biblical responses, interpreting to them the true meaning of scripture in light of scripture itself. For scripture never contradicts itself but, as Prof. H.C. Hoeksema puts it in his *Standard Bearer* article entitled

“Some Pertinent Questions About Our Reformed Position” (5), scripture is one and harmonious, and therefore one passage in scripture must be understood in light of the rest of scripture.

One of the first objectors John Calvin faced was the Roman Catholic Church. They taught that God wills for all men to be saved, but he foresees who will accept and who will resist the grace that he gives them to accept salvation (What is the Roman Catholic view of predestination?). They base their view on I Timothy 2:4 where we read, “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” Rev. Herman Veldman reveals Calvin’s contrasting interpretation of this passage in his *Standard Bearer* article entitled “The Doctrine of Atonement: The Reformation Period.”

Rev. Veldman expresses Calvin’s point that after looking at the context: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority” (I Tim. 2:1, 2); and the rest of scripture: “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Ex. 33:19), the only possible interpretation of I Timothy 2:4 is that God has chosen his people from all ranks of society; the ordinary citizen, yes, but also kings and those in authority. God does not will that every individual man be saved, for then he would not show mercy only to a select few, but that some from every level, or rank, in society be saved.

John Calvin brought to life the idea that election is particular, meaning that only a small remnant have been chosen unto everlasting life, and is one-sided, meaning that God chooses one either to be elect or reprobate, and man plays no part in that determination. Since all men are not saved, yet we of all people have been chosen by God to be his covenant people, we certainly have the duty of living godly lives of thankfulness to God, glorifying him in all things and putting him at the foreground in our life. Surely this doctrine of unconditional election does not serve as an excuse to live sinful, non-God-glorifying lives.

A second of Calvin’s opponents was Jerome Bolsec. Prof. David J. Engelsma presents us with this controversy in his *Standard Bearer* article entitled “The ‘Ugly’ Bolsec.” Calvin maintained the position that predestination is an eternal decree while Bolsec rejected that the decree of election and reprobation is eternal, or in other words, once the decree is made it could never be changed. Prof. Engelsma specifies that the issue wasn’t whether or not God decreed before time some to be saved through the

work of Christ and some not to be saved, but whether that decree was eternal or temporal. Even when it came down to these last little details, Calvin was ready to boldly defend them.

According to Prof. Engelsma, Bolsec's view on election and reprobation was this:

God gives grace to all humans so that all are able to believe in Christ. To those who avail themselves of this universal, or common, grace by believing in Christ, God gives special grace which results in their election. Those who harden themselves against the overtures of God in his common grace, are rejected by God. This temporal rejection is reprobation.

Bolsec believed that it is because of one's faith in Christ that they receive grace from God and are saved, making election a result of faith and something that is determined through time. John Calvin on the other hand taught and believed that only those whom God has chosen and elected to salvation can believe and have faith in Christ as their savior, putting election before faith, and making election something that is determined before time even began and will continue to be the same forever without any additions or subtractions (Engelsma). This predestination that Calvin taught was a never changing decree of God.

It doesn't take much to see how this doctrine of eternal predestination, as it is explained by John Calvin, is one for which we as the Protestant Reformed Churches are indebted to him. You just have to think of how our churches got started, namely, because of the issue of common grace. According to this false doctrine, grace is given to all and it is by man's free-will that he chooses whether to accept that grace by believing in Christ or not, giving man a role in his salvation. John Calvin's doctrine of predestination as a sovereign, eternal decree of God in which man plays no part is certainly a foundational doctrine of our Protestant Reformed Churches, and one for which we are no doubt indebted to John Calvin.

Not only are we as churches indebted to Calvin for this doctrine, but also each individual. With the knowledge of this doctrine of predestination, we personally can experience the peace of knowing and being assured that we are his people, those elected to everlasting life, and that just as nothing we do earns us eternal life, so nothing we do can separate us from or take away our salvation. Because we have the knowledge of this doctrine of predestination, we can confess with Paul in Romans 8:38,39 that "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things

present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We have seen only a couple instances of Calvin's defense of his doctrine of predestination, but they are enough to make us realize how indebted we are to John Calvin for this doctrine of predestination. Not only has John Calvin left us with this solid doctrine, but he also serves as an inspiration to us to defend and preserve this precious truth today. He has uncovered this truth and defended and preserved it for us, may we too defend and pass it on to the generations after us that it might be preserved through the generations. After looking at how much one man's work and deep studying brought about one of the important truths we hold today, we see how important careful studying of the Word of God is so that we might better understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. God has given us eyes to see, now let us use them to study and discover the mysteries that he has revealed to us in his Word. As we go forth in our lives, may we remember our duty to defend and uphold our strong pillar that it might truly be a lasting inheritance. ❖

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Covenant Courtship: (5) Godliness in Courtship

by Aaron Lim

As God establishes his covenant friendship with his elect in Christ, he draws them closer to him in a spiritual bond of love. His love attracts and compels them to union with him. He teaches them in his ways so that they know how to obey and love him rightly. His Word instructs while his Spirit guides them along life's journey. Covenant friendship with God is thus a perpetual process of uniting one's heart, soul and mind to God until it reaches eternal perfection in glory.

Covenant courtship presents a time of growing in godliness. As two are better than one, so a good covenant partner spurs the other on to closeness with God. When God brings two believers together, they may be at different levels of spiritual maturity and thinking. God in his wisdom does this to the end that they may grow spiritually together. As a covenant couple become united in their affections for each other, they must provoke each other's affections for God. This provocation must be active in covenant courtship if it is to be God-centered. Christ must be displayed in their own words and actions so that the other is edified and motivated in his love for God.

All too often young people are concerned only about having fun and excitement in their courtship. Their dates are nothing more than frivolous activities and worldly amusement. Their conversations revolve around the affairs of this world more than spiritual matters. They prefer the movies, sports and all kinds of worldly entertainment to studying the Word and having discussions of spiritual worth together. Little time or effort is given to delight in the things of God, his Word, their spiritual health and the affairs of the church. The couple set their affections on things on this earth rather than those of heaven.

Covenant courtship ought not to be so.

In a covenant relationship a couple's true happiness lies in their similar delight in the things of God. They are excited to understand each other's unique spiritual struggles and are deeply concerned about each other's spiritual welfare. Together they combat the lusts of the eyes and the lusts of the flesh, battling against the pride of life by humbling themselves before God. Together they fight the good fight of faith, being convicted that

they are in this world but not of it.

They are a help-meet to develop each other's spiritual character, so that the one spurs the other to grow in the fruits of the Spirit. It is an amazing truth that godly relationships are a process in which we grow in a deeper knowledge of our sinfulness and of our need for Christ. Such conviction causes a covenant couple to desire godliness in their relationship. In all of their conversation, conduct and activities they strive to please him who calls them into an intimate covenant friendship. As they mature as believers in Christ, so will their relationship be an increasingly powerful testimony of God's love for them.

Godliness in courtship enables a couple to overcome all the troubles and differences that hinder their unity. This is because godliness implies love for God and the will to do all that he pleases. This is a love that understands that God has given us everything good, so we are provoked to give him our very best. Sometimes the differences between a couple can be very significant and complicated. This is especially true because both individuals have been raised differently in their unique families. Although a couple, they still retain their individual mind and will. Sometimes differences of a spiritual nature arise and cause more complicated problems in the relationship. But when a couple's relationship is controlled by such a love for God, they will be able to love each other sacrificially and resolve their differences. They will, as Charles Spurgeon wrote, be able to "yield in all things; but be firm where truth and holiness are concerned".

Attaining growth in godliness requires diligent effort in covenant courtship. It requires a habitual study of the Word and prayer together as a couple. As a couple grow in their knowledge of God's truth they will be able to experience the immense joy of oneness in Christ. As God fellowships with a covenant couple they realize that the chief purpose of their relationship is to glorify and to enjoy him. Such is the blessedness of a godly courtship. ❖

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Watching Daily At My Gates

by Chester Hunter

March 23 Read Nehemiah 4:1-6

There are three things of note in this short section of Scripture. First of all we have the mocking of the wicked. When Christians go forth to carry out the commands of God, the wicked will try anything to stop them. Mocking is usually one of their primary weapons. Human nature is such that when mocking occurs, those who are mocked pull back from their intended plan. Secondly, we see Nehemiah's reaction to the mocking. He goes to God in prayer. Nehemiah was a praying Christian. Are we? Thirdly, we see that the people were of a mind to work to build the walls of Jerusalem. Are we willing to work for the church of God? Will we persevere in the face of tribulations and carry out that work? May God give to us the grace to persevere until Christ returns. Sing Psalter 99.

March 24 Read Nehemiah 4:7-15

The wicked hates the righteous and will do all to bring God's work to nought. This was Satan's plan from the beginning; and even now as we await the return of Christ, Satan will try to take any and every righteous man or woman, young or old, from the flock of Christ. We must follow the lead of Nehemiah. First of all we must pray. We pray for protection under the sheltering wings of our Lord and Savior. We pray for the wisdom to work in such a way that the cause of Christ and his church be furthered. When we trust in God, he will show to us that way. Let us fight the fight of faith "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." Sing Psalter 100.

March 25 Read Nehemiah 4:16-23

We see several practices that Nehemiah put into effect during this building of the wall. First of all there was the readiness to fight the fight of faith. Are we ready? Do we build with an eye on the enemy? Satan is always vigilant where the church is concerned. We must watch out for him and be ready to engage in the battle of faith at any and at all times. Secondly, the people cooperated with each other throughout the city. Not only were they concerned with what was happening at their front door, but they were also watching what was happening "across town." Is this our attitude for God's church throughout the world? Are we watching out for them? Are we praying for them? Finally

Nehemiah and others put their personal comforts last. This, too, must be our attitude. In this world the prevalent philosophy is "me first." What is our attitude? Sing Psalter 369.

March 26 Read Nehemiah 5:1-5

If it was not bad enough that enemies from without the church oppressed the people of God, Satan moved some from within the congregation to oppress some of them. Those who were poor and could not even afford the necessities of life were forced by their neighbors to give up all that they had including their children just for daily bread. Do we love our neighbor? Do we keep the second "great commandment"? God forbid that we not help those in need around us. Let us look for ways to perform true Christian service among the household of faith with whom God has placed us. Let us fight this battle of faith against our common enemy the devil. Sing Psalter 24.

March 27 Read Nehemiah 5:6-13

Upon hearing the complaint of the people, Nehemiah became angry at those who had been oppressing them. His anger was a righteous anger based upon God's grace. God had been gracious to Israel in having them delivered from the bondage of Babylon. They had taken that good gift and had turned it to their profit. What about us? Do we oppress those of the church in a similar manner? Do we withhold good from those who need help? We have been recipients of God's good gift of grace. Let us live lives of thankfulness in gratitude for that gift, and let us care for God's people as he gives to us opportunity. Sing Psalter 386.

March 28 Read Nehemiah 5:14-19

God's people are called to be examples to those around them. Not just those in authority are called to do that, but everyone must be an example of God's love. Nehemiah definitely was that good example. He was that not for his sake but for God's sake and for the sake of the people of God. As the king-appointed governor he had the right to expect a salary provided by the people of Jerusalem. For the good of those people he did not take that salary, but rather out of his own pocket helped a number of people. Let us strive to be good examples. All of us have that op-

portunity to some measure. In doing so we show that we love God and love our neighbors. Sing Psalter 186.

March 29 Read Nehemiah 6:1-9

Satan does not quit. In the whole of chapter six, at least eight times the work was threatened by one of his workers of iniquity. The work, as Nehemiah puts it, is a great work. It is a great work because it is God's work. We must remember this in whatever we do for God's church. No matter how small the task may be, it is a great work. Nehemiah found strength in one thing and one thing alone. He found strength in God as his short prayer in verse 9 states. We need to find our strength in the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. In him only is strength. May we make that our prayer from this time forth and forevermore. Sing Psalter 224.

March 30 Read Nehemiah 6:10-14

Once again we see another attempt to make Nehemiah afraid and to halt the work of the Lord. In this attempt Nehemiah's enemies try to entice him to sin by going into the temple where he does not belong. Sometimes we are told that we may do what God has forbidden because it is for a "good cause." Nehemiah did not believe that, and we must not either. We must keep ourselves pure from all manner of sin so that we might appear blameless before our God. Now we know that the only way to do this is through the blood of Christ, but yet Christ himself exhorted us to be holy even as he was holy. May God give to us the grace to flee sin and to walk in his ways. Sing Psalter 161.

March 31 Read Nehemiah 6:15-19

We see two items of note in this portion of God's Word. First of all we see in verse 16 that even the heathen had to confess that the work of building the wall was God's work. God had given to his people the zeal to begin and to carry out this huge task. The wicked knew that with all their "scare" tactics this project was only completed by God's hand, and they hated that fact! The second thing to which we must pay heed is another of Satan's tactics. Satan will have the church become friends and even marry with the world. This was the sin of Baalpeor mentioned earlier in Scripture. This sin is also pointed out in Revelation in the letter to the church at Pergamos. We must be careful about whom we befriend. We must be careful for God's sake and for the sake of his church. Sing Psalter 1.

April 1 Read Nehemiah 7:1-2

After the city walls were built Nehemiah's work was not finished. The organization and care for the city and its inhabitants was just as important. First of all those who did service to the church were appointed. A porter was important in the church. He had a work that was necessary. God has given to us porters, and we must honor them for the

service they do for God's glory. Secondly we see singers appointed. Singing along with the chief part of thankfulness, prayer, is a characteristic of the faithful church of God. If a church will not sing the songs of Zion, the church will have troubles. Finally two leaders were appointed. It was not nepotism that caused Nehemiah to choose his brother, but rather it was the characteristics that both he and Hananiah possessed. They were faithful and feared God above many. These must be the characteristics of not only church leaders but all of God's people including its young people. Let us be faithful and fear God. Sing Psalter 26.

April 2 Read Nehemiah 7:3-38

Sometimes we may wonder why these long lists of names are recorded on the pages of sacred Scripture. The answer is quite simple: God wanted us to learn from them. As Nehemiah was reorganizing life in Jerusalem, he needed to know who had come back and where they lived. We believe in the line of continued generations. We want our names recorded in a group of people who will inhabit the new Jerusalem. The day will come that we will hear the list of the 144,000 read in heaven. What a joyous day that will be! Let us look forward to that day with both eagerness and with patience. Sing Psalter 241.

April 3 Read Nehemiah 7:39-73

As Nehemiah continued through the registry of the people of Israel, he comes to the priests and Levites. Some of them could not be admitted to do the work as their genealogy was tainted. Those who do the work of the Lord must be pure in all ways. We also see that besides the priests were the temple workers, the Nethinims, as well as the temple singers. There are many different ways in which God has appointed his people to serve him. Finally, we see that there was support for Jehovah's worship. Do we support his worship in this day and age? Are we happy with the place God has given to us? Have we kept ourselves pure so that we can worship properly? All of these are proper questions for the church of today. May we worship correctly, which way is in spirit and in truth. Sing Psalter 257.

April 4 Read Nehemiah 8:1-8

After the wall was built something more was needed. That something more was the understanding of what was written in God's Word. It matters not what type of physical structures we have. If we do not have God's Word as our guide, we have nothing; and all that we do will come to nothing. Let us go to the Word. First of all, we need to go to that Word each Lord's day. We need to hear it expounded by a faithful preacher of that Word. Secondly, we need to open our copy of the Word daily, and ask the Spirit to illuminate our hearts and lives with that Word. Let us allow

that Word to be a light upon our way, and then we will surely see the way that we need to follow each and every day. Sing Psalter 333.

April 5 Read Nehemiah 8:9-18

As the people heard the Bible read to them, they began to weep. They wept because they heard about both their sins and things that had caused them to go into captivity. But Nehemiah, Ezra, and other Levites comforted them and told them that the day was to be a day of joy for it was a special day of thanksgiving. This day had the feast of the booths as its focus. The people began to rejoice, but they remembered the poor and had food sent to them. We need to daily read the Bible so that we do not forget God's wonderful promises found within its pages. Those promises will sustain us in whatever place we are in our lives. May our God give to us the grace to daily read and study his Word. Sing Psalter 337.

April 6 Read Nehemiah 9:1-3

After reading the Word of God, the people of God were moved by their sins. They saw that they needed to go to God because of those sins. They first of all put away from themselves all that would distract them. Then they confessed not only their individual sins, but also the sins of the nation. Finally they worshipped Jehovah. This is the way that we must worship every day. When we have our daily devotions no matter how long or short they are, we must follow these steps, We must especially do this on the Lord's Day as we enter his house. Let us go to his Word daily, and let it provoke us to do what is right in his sight. Sing Psalter 339.

April 7 Read Nehemiah 9:4-19

Throughout the Bible we find prayers of God's people. These prayers can serve to instruct us how to pray. We do well to read them so that we can know how to pray. This prayer starts with the declaration that God is God alone. We must acknowledge this; we must believe this with all our hearts. If we do not, we might as well stop praying immediately. Secondly the prayer confesses that God is the sovereign maker of heaven and earth. This, too, must be our belief. If we have any inkling of evolution in our soul, again, we cannot pray as we ought. Finally, the people confessed the sins of the fathers. They did this because corporately those were their sins. Let us learn from these prayers, and let us pray without ceasing. Sing Psalter 242.

April 8 Read Nehemiah 9:20-38

As this prayer ends, those making it realize that those sins which brought them into captivity are still with them today. They knew they could not say how awful those people are because those sins still resided within them

and their children. We must be no different. We cannot say that any sin does not cling to us. We must confess our sins each time that we pray. We must ask for the covering of the cross to rest upon us. We can do this because our God is the covenant-keeping God. Let us go to him and on the basis of that covenant ask for forgiveness often. Sing Psalter 83.

April 9 Read Nehemiah 10:1-31

As children of God, we are bound to put off the old man of sin and to embrace the new man of righteousness. Part of doing this is to walk in the commandments of our God. It means we must live the separate life of the antithesis. We must separate ourselves from the world and live unto God. We also must keep God's day holy. This means that there is a very real practice that follows doctrine. The two are inseparable. As we learn and have learned the truth, let us walk in that truth each and every day. Sing Psalter 251.

April 10 Read Nehemiah 10:32-39

Notice the last phrase in this section. They pledged themselves not to "forsake the house of our God." The previous verses give an account of the offerings that they would bring for the work of the worship of Jehovah. They knew what they had to do and they pledged that they would do it. We need to take these words seriously. It is our obligation to carry forth the work of God's kingdom. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God." It is not the amount that is important; it is the willing heart. We must pray for such a heart, and we must give the gifts of thankfulness for the great gift of salvation that God has given to us. Sing Psalter 226.

April 11 Read Nehemiah 11:1-18

It was discovered that there were too few people to properly inhabit Jerusalem. Therefore, a plan had to be devised. The plan was that one out of every ten families would give up their place in their home village and live in the city of God. Notice in verse one that these families were willing to do so. Are we willing to do whatever is necessary in God's church even if it means giving up something that is dear to us? This does not mean that we pick what we want to do, but rather that we do anything for the work of Jehovah. Let us willingly do what is needed for God's glory and his kingdom. In that willingness we will be blessed of God. Sing Psalter 407.

April 12 Read Nehemiah 11:19-36

God preserved the singers! As we read through the Psalms we see that a number of those Psalms were written by and for the sons of Asaph. Here in this list of those who returned from captivity we find the sons of Asaph. Also in verse 23 we find that the king commanded that they were

to be cared for. Although we confess in the catechism that prayer is the chief means of thankfulness, singing is another important way that God has given to us to show our gratitude for the great salvation which he has afforded to us. Let us sing, and let us sing often. Sing Psalter 430.

April 13 Read Nehemiah 12:1-26

Throughout the history of the church there are those whom God has appointed over the church. We should be thankful for such faithful men whose work is to care for God's work on our behalf. They have their callings. Like the Levites of old each of these callings is different. Some must preach, some must rule, and some must care for the poor. Those who returned from captivity needed such men who put in order the proper worship of Jehovah. In today's church we need and should crave such men to put in proper order the worship of Jehovah. Let us pray for those men and respect them for the office to which they have been called. Sing Psalter 350.

April 14 Read Nehemiah 12:27-39

God's people throughout history have dedicated structures unto God. Quite often we have dedicated churches, schools, and other buildings because of the purpose for which they were erected. We might not think that a wall would be so significant. The wall around Jerusalem signified not only the protection that it afforded to Jerusalem, but also the protection that God places around his people. We forget this often. We tend to think that we can take care of ourselves when, in reality, we cannot. Let us give thanks unto God who cares for us. Let us go around Zion and mark the walls that surround her. God's care has been with us; let us acknowledge that care with our prayers and our lives. Sing Psalter 225.

April 15 Read Nehemiah 12:40-47

As society in Jerusalem was becoming re-established, the rulers made sure that those who were busy with God's work were cared for. This meant that offerings had to be taken and then distributed to those men who brought God's Word to his people. We must remember this as well. God's ministers must be cared for by his people. Their daily needs must be provided for. This is an obligation of those who have been afforded the gift of salvation. Are we careful in this matter? Do we give liberally to the kingdom causes? Each week as we enter God's house may we be ready to be a cheerful giver when that time of the worship service comes upon us. Sing Psalter 109.

April 16 Read Nehemiah 13:1-9

One of the reasons that we hear the law read each Sabbath day is that we might know our sin and flee from it. Israel, as the whole law was read to them, realized that

there were some things that had to be changed in its society. One of those things was to rid themselves of people with whom God had commanded that they were not to associate. Even one of their despicable enemies, Tobiah, had been allowed to take up residence in a temple chamber. These sinners had to be cast out. Do we cast out of our lives both sins and sinners? We must pray for the grace to do this every day. Only in this way will God be glorified in his church and by his people. Sing Psalter 40.

April 17 Read Nehemiah 13:10-14

Each week as we prepare to go to God's house to worship before him, we must prepare to give to the kingdom causes. This preparation cannot be hit or miss; it cannot be just an afterthought. The offerings that we give in worship are also commanded by God. They are part of what we term the regulative principle of worship. They are a part of the worship service in which we are afforded an active role. Let us be, as Paul terms it, cheerful givers. Let us bring our offerings each week as tokens of the thankfulness for being released from the captivity of sin. Sing Psalter 137.

April 18 Read Nehemiah 13:15-22

After Nehemiah built the wall, there was other work that he needed to accomplish. He had to work at helping Israel build a spiritual wall around themselves. One of the areas which was crumbled was the keeping of the Sabbath. Nehemiah reminded Israel that this was one of the sins for which they had been taken captive. Nehemiah becomes very proactive in this work, but when he is finished he goes to God in prayer. He prays that God bless this work as well. May we keep the Sabbath day holy every week until Christ returns. Sing Psalter 250.

April 19 Read Nehemiah 13:23-31

Nehemiah's final actions dealt with those who married young men or young women from foreign heathen lands. While we do not have the injunction not to marry those who might be called foreigners, we still must marry in the Lord. The consequences of marrying unbelievers are many. First of all, like Solomon, they will turn the believer to sin. Secondly, the children of such marriages will not know what is right. Thirdly, and most importantly, the name and honor of our God will not be upheld. We must be careful about with whom we associate in our lives. We must keep God's law and in that way keep our lives pure. Sing Psalter 360.

Our Involvement in Sports

by Aryn Kikkert

Sports have become a huge part of this world. Sports figures, professional teams, and the school teams that many of us play on, are often times part of our daily routine. While sports in themselves are not wrong, we quickly get caught up in the flow, and they then can become too much a part of our lives. They can become too much a part of our lives as Christians living for God. This brings up the question, how much of our time do we spend involved in sports compared to the time we spend on Christian activities? We make it a priority to show up at that practice after school and to be prepared and ready for it, but how much time do we spend on our catechism lessons? Could we recite our memory work better? What about our private devotions, preparing for Young People's, or helping out with an activity at church? 1 Timothy 4:8 says: "For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

Our number one goal in life should be to glorify God through all things, and not to be in the starting line for the basketball team, or the top scorer on the soccer team.

As was stated before, sports are not "bad" or "wicked". They are a lot of fun to play and/or watch and you can have great fellowship with your friends and classmates while doing so. It is also a blessing for us to have fit and able bodies so that we have the ability to participate in sports activities. God has given us this blessing, and we should use it to his honour and not abuse it. It is so easy for us to use our talents for reasons other than glorifying God. We can use them to gain popularity with our peers, to make us appear better than others, or to boost our own self-esteem. Our number one goal in life should be to

glorify God through all things, and not to be in the starting line for the basketball team, or the top scorer on the soccer team. We must also realize that sports are only an activity and/or a pleasure in our lives. As Christians we may never have a career in professional sports because this violates the Sabbath and affects our family time.

Just taking a little time out of your day to help the neighbor lady rake up her leaves, help a sibling with homework, or stopping by the house of an elderly couple to say "hi" can be very rewarding. You should take time before you go to bed to do some devotions, study your catechism, or go over that young people's outline. The time we put aside for these things, if we do, is so little compared to the time we devote to our practices and games. God is our great and awesome Father, yet we often use the talents he has given us for our own pleasure, and don't devote our time to him as we should.

We can also mention the time spent away from the home. Family meals and devotions can be sacrificed because of a practice or a big game. Family devotions and family time are important because the family is able to discuss things and grow together spiritually. Scripture teaches "The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:5, 6).

Next time you find yourself caught up in your sports schedule for the week, make it a point to make devotions a priority on that list. Make time for memorizing your catechism and going over the outline for young people's. You might play basketball for a season or two but God will be your refuge and salvation from everlasting to everlasting. "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23, 24). ❖

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The Gift (11)

by Tom Cammenga

The time had come. For a couple of days now he had struggled with the news of Ruth's cancer and had been unable to completely come to terms with the situation. Particularly he had much difficulty grasping how God fit into this. For what seemed like the millionth time he wished that Jenny were here. She would certainly have known the answers to the multitude of questions swarming around in his mind.

He had even briefly thought to himself that he would have to ask Jenny...only to realize immediately that she was no longer there. How often, he wondered, would that happen in the years to come? She would never be there again. Never again would she come to him.

And so, he had decided that the time had come for him to go to her.

With an anxious spirit he went outside and picked some of the nicest looking flowers from the Autumn Glories that Jenny had so tenderly planted a few years prior and after retrieving his keys, his coat, and a hat he made his way to the garage. Halfway through the doorway he realized that there was one other thing he needed.

His heart beat rapidly as he shut the car door and turned toward his destination. He was certainly anxious. There were also the feelings of apprehension. More than anything however there was the feeling of deep and profound sadness. A feeling that had begun to envelop him on Saturday and now had completely closed around him.

There was yet no stone in place, just a simple marker with her name on it along with the date of her birth and the date of her death. The outline of the sod that had been removed could still be seen in the grass.

Standing there in front of her grave he gazed down at this marker for a long time without really even seeing it. Memory after memory passed before his mind. Some of them, as they had when he had shared them with the young man not so long ago, made him smile while others brought the tears to his eyes once again. In a way he had felt silly coming here because he knew she was not really here. He knew that she would not be able to talk to him. He knew that she would not be able to hear him. And yet, even knowing these things, standing here next to her grave he felt at least the beginnings of a sense of

calm that he had not felt since she had died. In a way he felt near her again. The same way he had felt when he held her Bible to his chest. The same as when he smelled the scent of her perfume as it remained on some of her clothes in the closet.

He looked around then half expecting and half hoping that that young man would be standing watching him. But there was no one that he could see. He was struck then at how different everything looked. How everything had changed in the short time since he had last been here. The leaves that had been ablaze in glorious color only a few weeks before now lay scattered over the grass and the tomb stones; the trees that once held them were now bare and stark against a cold, gray, and cloudy sky. There were no birds that he could see nor were there squirrels running playfully up and down and around the trees.

With a sigh he sat down on the recently replaced sod and gently laid the Autumn Glories he had picked at home next to the marker bearing her name. Out of nowhere came the overwhelming and seemingly unbearable need to hold her one last time. To take her in his arms for but a moment, to feel her warmth, her embrace. And under the gray autumn sky that mirrored his soul at the moment, he cried. It was not the uncontrolled and mournful wailing as at times before but it was the simple weeping of a soul filled with profound sorrow.

He wasn't sure how long he had been there but in time, when the tears seemed to have eased and the sorrow abated, he retrieved his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped away what tears remained. Suddenly he realized that he felt better. Oh, the sorrow still remained but he felt as if his soul had been unburdened, even if only a little. And so he took the old tattered Bible that he had set on the ground and opened it to that same passage he had read a number of days ago, Romans 8:24-39, and read it aloud, though in a soft voice. He read it again and again until he could almost recite it from memory.

And then he began to tell Jenny all that had happened in his life since she had gone. He told her about all the cards he had gotten in the mail and about the calls from so many friends, mostly of hers, expressing their sorrow and desire to help if they could. He told her of

the VanVleets and how they had been so helpful and of the difficulty they now faced. He told her of the things he had done around the house and how beautiful all her flowers looked. He talked for what seemed a long time and even though he knew very well he was simply talking to himself, he felt much better.

“Oh Jenny,” he finally said. “Oh, I wish you could be here to help me understand. I think I believe in God but I just don’t know.” He bowed his head then and shook it slowly from side to side. “I just wish you were here to help me.”

Overcome by his feeling of helplessness and not knowing what else to do, he slowly rose up to his knees, folded his hands, and prayed.

“Oh God, I don’t know what to do. Please help me. Help me to understand. Help me to know what I believe. Help me to see the way that I must go. And if it is possible, heal this hurt I feel in my soul. Amen.”

As the day wore on he finally picked himself up and grudgingly walked back to his car. Before he reached

for the door handle he turned to look one last time to where his beloved lay. Then, as the sadness of leaving her touched his heart he wondered for the first time, at least that he could remember, what she was experiencing right at that moment. It was his sincere hope that she was happy. And yet, even though that was his hope, the thought of her being happy while he himself was in such turmoil and grief was almost too much to bear.

“And yet, life goes on,” he said softly to himself as he opened the door to the car and carefully got in. “Like it or not, life goes on.”

He drove through town and though his original intention had been to go home, without really realizing it he found himself parked along the road in front of the church that his wife had attended for so many years. It was really the last place he wanted to go or had even considered as a destination and yet here he was. ❖

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

From the Pastor’s Study

Pentecostalism

by Rev. Dennis Lee

Ever hear of a preacher telling his congregation, “The Spirit said to me...”? Or people attending a worship service falling to the ground and rolling in “holy” laughter or talking gibberish and claiming that to be “speaking in tongues”? Or both preacher and congregation busily engaged in “faith healing”?

These are the kinds of scenes and happenings one would find in a church worship service influenced by the Pentecostal movement of the past century.

A reputed scholar from the Pentecostal movement itself, Vinson Synan, traces the immediate origin of the movement to what took place at a “tumble-down shack” in Los Angeles in 1906 on Azusa Street. *The Los Angeles Times*, of April 18, 1906, reported what took place there as follows:

Meetings are held in a tumble-down shack on Azusa Street, near San Pedro Street, and the devotees of

the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal. Colored people and a sprinkling of whites compose the congregation, and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshippers, who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve-racking attitude of prayer and supplication. They claim to have the ‘gift of tongues’ and to be able to comprehend the babel. [quoted in VS, pp. 84-85].

This event on Azusa Street is “commonly regarded as the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement... Directly or indirectly, practically all of the Pentecostal groups in existence can trace their lineage to the Azusa Mission.” [VS, p. 105].

And yet, even though the Pentecostal movement has its immediate origin in the past century, its roots go far back to movements of Pietism and Mysticism in

church history. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church movement, whose theology was thoroughly Arminian and who emphasized subjective religious experience, has been identified as “the spiritual and intellectual father” of the Pentecostal movement.

What is the Pentecostal movement, or Pentecostalism, all about? Pentecostalism is a heretical movement that has arisen out of the Christian church in the past century. In response to spiritual deadness found in the mainline Christian denominations of the 19th century in the United States, Pentecostalism emphasizes “religious” feelings and emotions at its worship services by claiming that the signs, miracles and wonders of Pentecost recorded in the book of Acts at the time of the infant New Testament church are repeatable and for the church today. Accordingly, and over and above other earlier and related movements of Pietism and Mysticism, Pentecostalism maintains a well-defined and distinctive idea of a “baptism of the Holy Spirit” (BHS). A believer proves that he has the BHS if he is able to work a work that shows that he can and does speak in tongues, or display any other behavior that is supposedly a sign, miracle or wonder of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Once he has this BHS, he is reckoned to have a second experience of sanctification or holiness that identifies him to be a truly spiritual believer in the church, over and above those who do not have the BHS experience.

While the movement was first frowned upon in Christian circles in its earlier days, Pentecostalism took off in the 1960s and onwards. It resulted not only in the formation of new Christian denominations and churches, but also penetrated into virtually every mainline denomination, from the Roman Catholics to the Presbyterian and Reformed. This is because what unites the movement is not so much doctrine and teaching, but its emphasis on the subjective—“religious” feelings *and* experiences. Living in a time and age when biblical doctrines *and* the study of the Word of God are frowned upon and appreciation for the historic creeds of the church has waned, Pentecostalism has grown and thrived in the church world in recent decades and still today.

How do we, as Reformed believers who love the Word of God, give a witness to Pentecostals today? In general, and to begin with, we make the same point as the Reformer, John Calvin, did in his day to people who claim willy-nilly, the authority of the Holy Spirit for what they teach, i.e., “The Spirit told me this and that...” And it is impossible to argue against such a person! Moreover, we ought to be highly suspicious of any religious movement that does away with doctrinal differences and

rather unites people with vastly different doctrines, as Pentecostalism does.

Specifically, and firstly, let us point out that just as the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not a repeatable event, so also, Pentecost is not a repeatable event. The signs, miracles and wonders of the Spirit were temporary and have all passed away. And that is because Pentecost was the exalted Christ’s gift of the Holy Spirit to his church, a gift given in rich and full measure. It was the fulfillment of God’s Old Testament promise to his people that the Holy Spirit, given no longer as the Holy Spirit, but more fully as the Spirit of Jesus Christ (John 7:37-39), will be given to the New Testament church (Joel 2:28-30, Acts 2:17-21, Acts 2:38-39). Pentecost has now come and gone, just as the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, all one-time events. The apostolic period was a time of transition from the Old Testament (a church comprised mainly of Jews) to the New Testament church, which now includes mainly the Gentiles (Acts 8:5-24; 10:44-48; 11:15-18; 19:1-7). Once the New Testament church was established, Pentecost and all the signs, miracles and wonders connected with it came to an end. These signs, miracles and wonders came to an end with the end of the ministry of the apostles.

Secondly, let us point out that the Pentecostal teaching of the BHS is in error. To be sure, there is such a thing as a baptism with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11). But this Christian baptism is not Pentecostalism’s second baptism and work, the BHS. And that is because there is only one Christian baptism, the baptism signified by the actual sacrament of sprinkling with water through an ordained minister of a church; and it is not limited only to a special class of Christians. Writing on the subject of the oneness of the church, the inspired apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:4-6 writes that there is “one body, and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism...” Moreover, the Pentecostal teaching of the BHS divides the church into two classes of believers—ones who have performed a work that shows that they have the BHS and ones who haven’t, ones who are “super” Christians and ones who are not. How does such a teaching square with the gospel of grace (Eph. 2:8-9) and the oneness of the church of Jesus Christ?

Young People, are you looking for true joy and delight in your religious life? Look not for it out there in the world. Nor look for it in Pentecostal churches. Rather, cultivate your religious life by devoting yourself to growth in knowing God in Christ, and by being sanctified through his Word (John 17:3, 17). Let your joy and delight daily be a joy and delight of thankful and loving

obedience unto God according to his Word, a joy and delight that is expressed by the Psalmist in Psalm 119:9-16:

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

Let your joy and delight be found with God's people and especially in God's house on Sundays, where we glorify God, where we commune with God through his Word and by his Spirit, and where we find especially the spiritual renewal, nourishment and strengthening we need from week to week. Let the confession of our hearts and the fruit of our lips be that of the Psalmist in Psalm 27:4:

One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.

And let preachers of the church continue to love fervently their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, by feeding the flock of God (John 21:15-17) especially through their biblical, expository and lively preaching of the gospel at the church's worship services, and by being examples to their flock of ones who find their joy and delight in walking humbly and obediently with God in their daily lives. ❖

Bibliography

VS: Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements In The Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997 (Second Edition))

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Church History

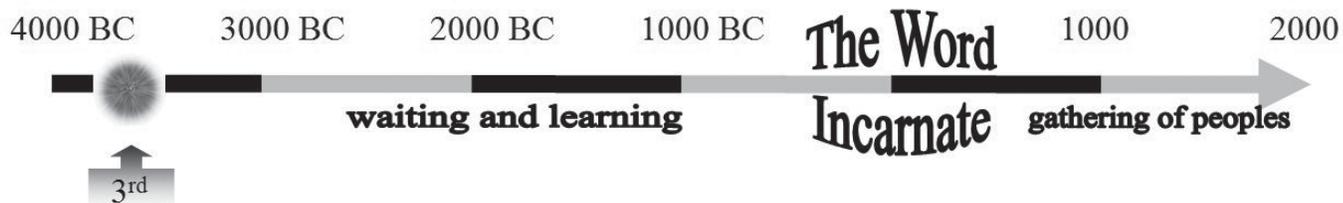
The Third One Hundred Years of His-Story: The Church Begins Formal Worship

by John Huizenga

“And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD” (Gen 4:26).

Having overcome the devastating blow of Abel's death and Cain's proud rebellion against God, Adam and Eve's hope in the promised Savior was renewed with the birth of Seth. After Seth, the dreadful picture of Satan's hatred for the covenant of God faded somewhat as Cain moved away with his family, and God blessed the home of Adam and **“he begat sons and daughters”** (5:4). With the birth of more children, Adam began to see the great variety of characteristics and traits

that God had created within him combine with those of his wife to form unique and special children. He began to see the beauty of the church as a body of believers, each one unique and suited for his or her particular place. With sorrow, he also saw the corruption of his nature come out in the nature of his children. Even so he found encouragement in the promise of God and was strengthened by the power of grace to press on and instruct his children in all the knowledge God had revealed to him, but especially that covenant promise of a Seed who would crush the head of the serpent. With wonder, he looked to the God to whom he had been shamefully unfaithful and began to see the depth of the riches of his love and mercy.



Now, as the third century of history unfolded, Adam’s children began to marry and establish homes of their own. In due time Seth married (likely a sister), and received a son from God. Adam experienced the joy of being a grandfather, and rejoiced to hold a grandson—Enos—in his arms. Adam had many grandchildren within the sphere of the covenant, but this one was ordained by God to be the next link to the promised Savior.

By now there were multiple families in the church, with separate distinct households where children were being instructed in the gospel. It was no longer practical for Adam to gather his household around the table for meals and tell the stories of God’s work and promise of salvation. Now his sons would take on the responsibility to reveal the wonderful works of God to their children, but they did not isolate themselves in this glorious work. Just as God rested on the seventh day of the week, so Adam around the time of the birth of his grandson Enos, called the covenant families together for a day of worship to “call upon the name of the LORD” (Genesis 4:26). To mark this wonderful development in church life, God tied this activity of worship to the name of Enos. “And he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.”

...while the covenant family of Adam was developing the concept of a church, the reprobate seed of the serpent were quickly harnessing the powers of man-in-cooperation to build a city.

The church was growing, but so was that group which, being deceived by Satan, found their salvation in the power and wisdom of man. Cain had also brought forth a grandson to Adam and named him Enoch. We

read in Genesis 4:17, “And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch.” So while the covenant family of Adam was developing the concept of a church, the reprobate seed of the serpent were quickly harnessing the powers of man-in-cooperation to build a city. The two groups were already quite different even in their ways of living. All the energy and resources that Adam used to fight sin and provide instruction for his family, Cain and his children directed to the enjoyment of this life and personal glory. Do you think Adam was proud of his other grandchild, Enoch, after whom a city had been named?

In many ways, the church began to take on a life and form very similar to the church life that we experience. Some members were strong in their faith and others were weak. Each had unique gifts and characteristics. Parents rejoiced to hear the confession of faith from their growing children, and also shared the sorrow of watching a son or daughter forsake the faith, leave the church, and join the citizens of Enoch. Exactly how far away Enoch’s city was, we do not know. Cain had moved far enough away to a land that had a distinguishing name, the land of Nod, to the East of Eden. God tells us that he “went out from the presence of the LORD,” which indicates that he was removed from the sphere of God’s covenant people. Communication was certainly likely, as it was only a matter of time before the two groups expanded into each other and intermingled. At this time, it would appear as though the church was relatively free of persecution. It was not for another 300 years until another Enoch with his pointed preaching of God’s judgment upon the wicked, that Satan pushed the tactic of persecution upon the church.

For a time, then, it would appear as though God blesses his church with peace. Church life develops. Families grow. Children are instructed. A world of life develops in and around the great city of Enoch as well. Families grow. Children are instructed, but not in history or the promise of God. Talents, beauty, power, pleasure, and technology crowd the curriculum. With glee Satan

urges man on, running away with the prize he imagines he has taken from God. All the wonders and powers of creation, Satan will harness for himself. The church has been left miles behind.

During the next hundred years, we will take a look at the creation itself. We will do some exploring in “the world that then was,” a world “standing out of the water and in the water” (2 Peter 3:5, 6). It was a world that was “good,” a world that shouted forth the handiwork

of God. We live on the rubble of that world, waiting to be melted down with a “fervent heat.” Even through the rubble, the handiwork of God shines through, but it pales in comparison to the world that then was, and the new heavens and earth to be. ❖

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

Gem of the Month

Trials To Triumph

*The trials of life are not easy to bear—
The illnesses, poverty, snares,
Disappointments, failures, the death of a friend,
And feeling that nobody cares.*

*But friend, don't despair, you don't suffer alone;
Your heavenly Father is near;
He answers our prayers, sends grace unsurpassed
Allaying our heartaches and fear.*

*Just looking around us may fill with alarm—
Our self-pity fills us with grief—
But looking above to the One in control
Brings us peace; what a blessed relief!*

*God uses these trials our souls to refine
As silver is tried in the fire;
Earthly cares overwhelm; God draws us to Him
Where His mercy is all we desire.*

*So focus, dear friend, on Jesus our Lord,
On Him all our burdens to cast.
What we've borne is so small compared to our gain,
We'll emerge, triumphant at last!*

Thelma Westra

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:
Addyson Shae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mike DeJager—
Calvary, IA

Hadley Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy Driesen—
Doon, IA

Jonathan Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dan DeJong—Faith,
MI

Cody James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dwight Kuiper—Lynden,
WA

Sarah Jorleen, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan Brunsting—
Hope, MI

Jolie Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mark Kooima—Hull,
IA

Tessa Beth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Michael DeJong—
Peace, IL

Lydia Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Michael Vermeer—
Peace, IL

Ashley Renae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. David Vermeer—
Peace, IL

Zack Ryan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brian Lenting—South
Holland, IL

Spencer Reid, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel Zandstra—South
Holland, IL

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

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:

Lesley Tolsma—Edmonton, AB

Liane VanGelderren—Immanuel, Lacombe, AB

Matthew Miersma—Immanuel, Lacombe, AB

Andrew Wierenga—Immanuel, Lacombe, AB

Daniel Wierenga - Immanuel, Lacombe, AB

Joel Koerner—Southeast, MI

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. Dustin Nead and Miss Brittany Landheer—Byron
Center, MI

Mr. Kevin Koole and Miss Jill VanDenTop—Grace, MI

Mr. David Faber and Miss Elisabeth Key—Holland, MI

Mr. Josh Dotson and Miss Bonnie Boer—South Holland,
IL

A Parable

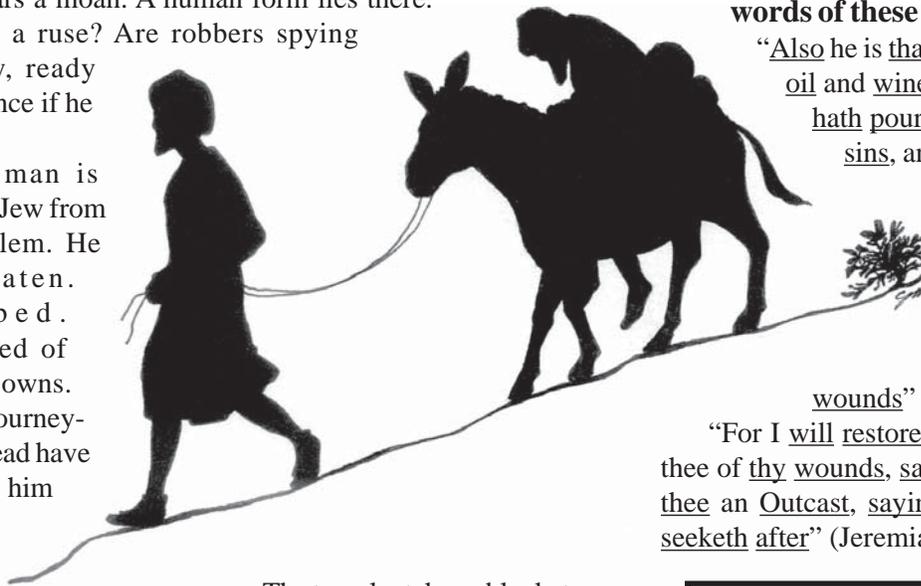
The road from Jerusalem to Jericho is steep and twisted. Barren ridges and rocks dot the highway, making perfect dens for thieves and wild beasts. A lone traveler looks from side to side on his way. The hooves of his donkey clomp in even rhythm on the path beneath him.

Around the next bend he sees something on the road. He draws closer and tells his donkey to slow.

He hears a moan. A human form lies there.

Is this a ruse? Are robbers spying nearby, ready to pounce if he stops?

A man is hurt, a Jew from Jerusalem. He is beaten. Robbed. Stripped of all he owns. Men journeying ahead have passed him by.



The traveler takes a blanket from his donkey's pack, and some oil and wine. He pours the wine on the poor man's wounds. The man groans more. The wine cleanses the deepest cuts. Oil aids in healing. He rips some cloth to make bandages.

The traveler gently lifts the beaten man and tries to hoist him onto his donkey. With much pain and effort the wounded man is mounted.

The traveler leads his donkey with the extra load on its back. They plod slowly down the road. The traveler raises his hand to shield his eyes. He gazes ahead. He knows the road. An inn should be nearby. He sees a dwelling in the distance. They continue on.

"Please care for this man," the traveler tells the inn-keeper after staying the night to nurse the man. "I will pay you now, but next time I journey through, I will stop and pay more if necessary."

The traveler goes on his way to Jericho—and back home to Samaria.

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine !

by Connie Meyer

You can find the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. Find the following underlined words of these passages in the puzzle below:

"Also he is that true Samaritan who hath poured oil and wine in our wounds, that is to say, he hath poured out his precious blood for our sins, and bought us with such a precious price" (The Consolation of the Sick [in back of the Psalter]—paragraph 5)

"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3).

"For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after" (Jeremiah 30:17).

B	O	U	G	H	T	D	E	L	L	A	C
T	W	W	O	U	N	D	S	G	B	B	S
S	U	O	I	C	E	R	P	L	L	I	W
M	B	O	U	R	M	H	H	G	O	N	Z
D	E	R	U	O	P	E	T	N	O	D	S
S	B	O	H	T	A	H	K	I	D	E	U
A	P	W	O	L	C	E	T	Y	W	T	O
I	N	A	T	I	R	A	M	A	S	H	I
T	H	H	L	O	L	L	S	S	H	T	C
H	A	L	T	O	B	E	P	T	H	E	E
T	I	S	S	Z	T	T	R	U	E	K	R
W	E	N	I	W	L	H	I	Z	A	E	P
R	O	O	C	N	C	A	C	K	R	E	T
C	N	U	K	Y	S	T	E	U	T	S	H
Y	M	A	N	A	L	S	O	H	S	A	Y
W	O	U	N	D	S	N	E	K	O	R	B
B	E	C	A	U	S	E	R	E	T	F	A

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

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Rev. Van Overloop, "Set Free by Christ's Death"
Prof. Gritters, "Set Free to Live Obediently"

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See You There!