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*“Answer not a fool according
to his folly, lest thou also be like
unto him.”*

Proverbs 26:4

*“Yea also, when he that is a fool
walketh by the way, his wisdom
faileth him, and he saith to
every one that he is a fool.”*

Ecclesiastes 10:3

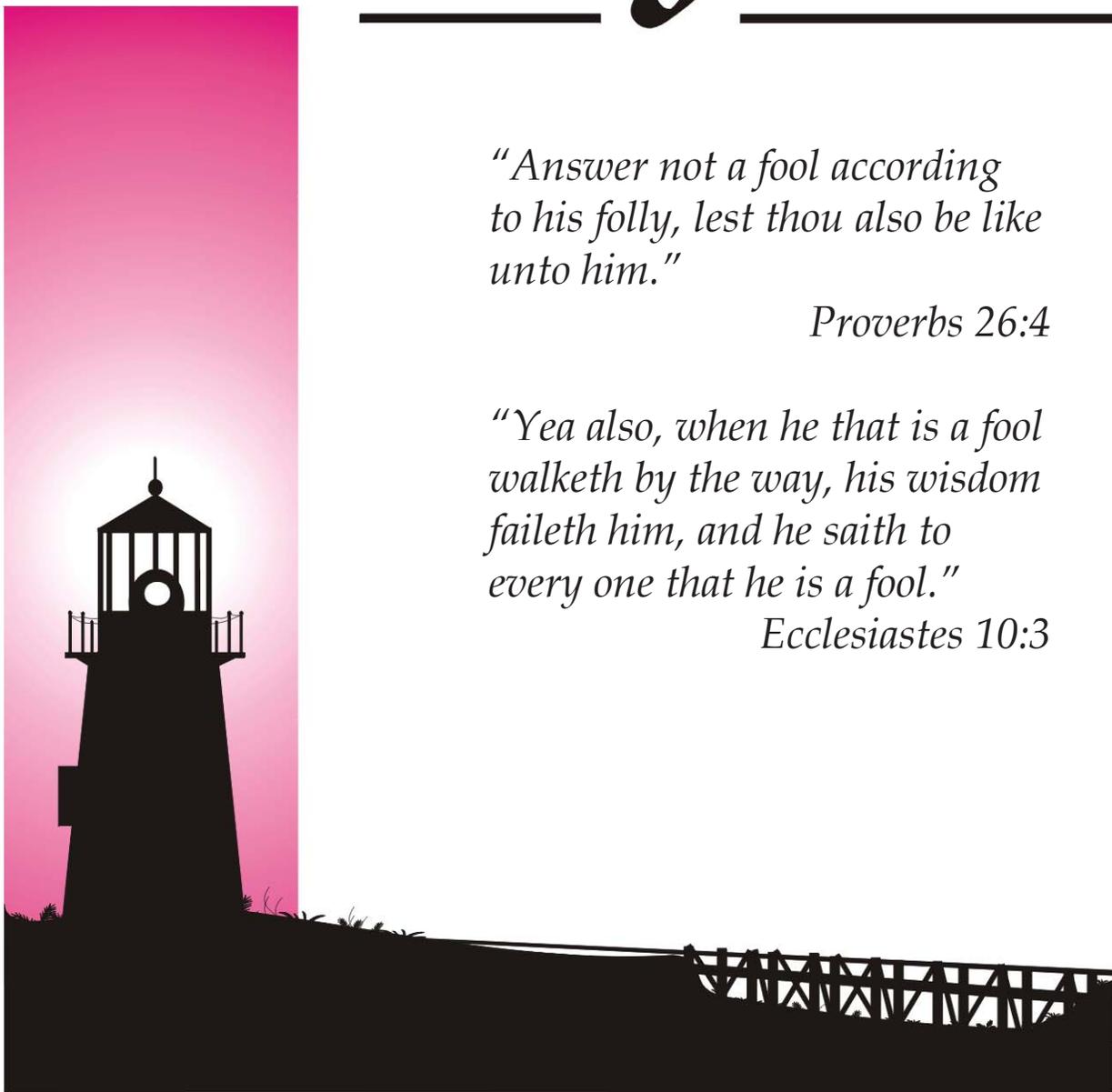


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BEACON LIGHTS

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A Modern Parable About a Fool

by Rev. David Engelsma



Once upon a time, there was a young man (there was a young woman also, but I am more familiar with the young man). He was the son of believers; he was baptized; he was raised in a Calvinistic church, which preached that the end of all things is the glory of God; every day, the Bible was read in his home, giving sober instruction about the brevity of this life and about a coming eternity; he knew the Heidelberg Catechism and its teaching that the redeemed are not their own, but are the property, body and soul, of the Lord Who bought them.

He was a fun-loving young fellow already in his teenage years. He found church and catechism a bore. At first, he attended catechism, because his parents made him. But he hardly ever knew his lesson; almost always the preacher would have to lead him, stumbling, word by word, through the answers. He had no time for this. His week was filled with friends, with games, and with television. Although he attended, he was not interested in the lesson. He never learned. Sometimes, he would fool around with his buddies, disrupting the class. When rebuked for this, he would sit sullenly by, looking at the clock, as the preacher went on explaining the Trinity, the covenant, and the return of Jesus to judgment. As he became older, his attendance fell off. At times, he skipped; at other times, he arranged his schedule so that he could not attend. Soon, he made a formal, public profession of his faith; and that was the end of catechism.

It was much the same as far as church was concerned. When he was younger, he had to go to church regularly with his parents. But he had made up his mind that the services, and especially the sermons, were a drag. He disliked church and made no effort to hear and understand, or to enter into the worship. It was dull! He itched to be finished with it. The fun was outside. When he became older, he would sit in the back with his friends. There, they could whisper and joke and pass the time. Before long, it became customary for him to skip the evening service altogether. Instead, there were parties, or television, or just driving around.

Much of Sunday was spent in front of the T.V. During the football season, the whole afternoon was devoted to the games.

He never read the Bible, much less any religious books or articles. He seldom prayed, and when he did, the prayer was formal and fast.

He had a good time, and there were many things to do. He had many friends. He had a car and a snowmobile. There were parties and movies and ball-games. He dated. He liked girls, and girls liked him. This all cost money; and, so, he got a job. Even while in high school, he worked part-time, much more than was necessary, although the schoolwork suffered.

Needless to say, he was never home. This bothered his parents, but he paid no attention. It was much more exciting, going out.

There were times, it must be admitted, when, strangely, all his fun left him cold and empty, times when he was restless, depressed, down. It was especially at those times that he drank too much and smoked pot.

He was in his early twenties when he met and fell in love with the young lady who became his wife. She was not from his church; in fact, her background was not Reformed at all. But she was pretty, and she was willing to join his church. He recalled some warnings of his parents about marrying in the church, but

brushed them aside, reminding himself that the girls at church were too dead; and, besides, he knew them all like sisters.

The first years of their marriage, he worked long hours. In fact, they both worked. They had to, because they had gotten enormous debts. They had built a new house. They had furnished it with fine, new furniture. They had bought a new car. They also liked to eat out and to take a good vacation, now and then.

Often, he was much too tired on Sunday to attend church. He never went more than once. This was his only day of rest, he said. When he did go, he was critical of the preacher—much too long-winded and much too deep. He could not understand a word the preacher said. In fact, he changed churches, giving as his reason that the new preacher was more down-to-earth, although the real reason was that the consistory had angered him by reminding him that he did not attend faithfully, or pay his budget.

Then the children came. But only two. That was his decision. “Too expensive,” he argued. “I can’t afford them.” Secretly, he also thought that they would take too much of his time and get in the way of his pleasures.

Through hard work and good luck (he boasted), he became successful, quite successful. He established his own business and made it flourish. He became rich. With his money, he made new investments, which also paid off. He lived the good life. He ate and drank well. He travelled. He was a big man in financial and civic circles. He and his wife were recognized socially.

Between his work and his play, he was hardly ever home. He saw very little of the children and took almost no part in their upbringing. He soothed his conscience, occasionally, by assuring himself that all his hours away from home were for his children’s financial benefit and that, someday, the time would come that he could slow down and spend more time with the family. He never had time for the Bible or prayer.

It was on account of his work that he left the Calvinistic sphere of his upbringing. Business demanded that he move to another city. He did, although the city had neither a Reformed Church nor a Christian School for the children. The change of churches did not trouble him. “There is no difference,” he would say. To tell the truth, he much preferred the new church. There was little preaching, mostly jokes and stories. No one cared that a man would miss church for months on end; and the budget was low. As for the lack of the Christian School, he had long felt that tuition in the Christian School was much too high, and that his children could just as well be taught in the public school. Didn’t he support the public school with his taxes? And shouldn’t Christians be witnesses to the world?

In the new city also, he prospered. He had everything heart could desire. Life was good.

Still, there were times of depression. In fact, he was often worried—”up-tight,” he said. Worried about his business; about his investments; about his help; about high taxes; as time went on, about his children—wild, rebellious, running with a bad crowd, on drugs, in trouble; even about his marriage. He would drink then, heavily. And think: Always time to get things straightened out; everything will work out fine.

* * * * *

This fool was not yet 50 when God required his soul. There was no warning. What clearer, sharper warning could there be anyway, than the warning of the Word of God that he had despised and shut his ears to from childhood?

He lost his treasure at that instant, lost it all, and lost it forever.

And in the moment before he was sent away to eternal hell, the charges were placed against him:

- Idolatry: the love, the seeking, and the service of Mammon, all the while hating and rejecting the God of heaven and earth. For “no man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”
- Unbelief: It was Jesus Christ and his kingdom that the fool trampled under foot when he rejected the preaching at church, the teaching in catechism, and Holy Scripture. This was

the treasure that he despised when he chose the treasures of earth—destroyed by moth and rust, imperiled by thieves, and lost at death.

- Profaning the Covenant: Having sold his birthright for a morsel of meat, he counted the blood of the covenant, with which he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace.

These charges pressed him deeply into hell, for they were terrible charges, and he was, remember, the son of believers; baptized; raised in a church that preached the glory of God as the end of man; taught the Bible with its message of the brevity of life and an eternity to come; and familiar with the Catechism's doctrine that the redeemed are not their own, but the property, body and soul, of the Lord Who bought them.

* * * * *

This modern parable of a fool has a point: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and do it in the days of your youth. ❖

Reprinted from Beacon Lights May 1982.

Gem of the Month

David Meditates

"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psalm 37:25).

*David reflects on the care of the Lord -
How He always is blessing His own;
Since the days of his youth the shepherd boy saw
That God's children were never alone.
Their heavenly Father stood at their right hand
His grace and His mercy were shown.
Forsaken? No, never will God leave His seed
To wander outside of His care.
David remembers when helpless he stood;
Satan fought hard, his soul to ensnare.
God's promises stand, His love does not swerve -
In battle David need not despair.
Did David then triumph? No, David is weak!
'Tis the Lord Who will win every fight;
And David accedes - it's not his own strength,
But the King of all power and might.
Now as an old man, he praises God's name,
His Redeemer, upholding the right.*

Thelma Westra

John Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper: An Act of Faith

by Jonathan Langerak Jr.

John Calvin restored faith to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Faith as an instrument by which Jesus Christ is received in the Supper was nonexistent, indeed nonessential, in the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation which held sway for over 1,500 years before Calvin was born. The purpose of the Savior in instituting his Supper—the strengthening of the faith of the elect—gradually fell away in the Roman Catholic mass until in Calvin's day it was not found or preached anywhere in any land where Romish tyranny dominated. In restoring faith to the Lord's Supper, John Calvin restored the Supper to its proper place in the life of believers and returned it to the simple, magnificent ceremony of the Scriptures. For this mighty work of Calvin, the Protestant Reformed churches are indebted to him.

Calvin considered this to be the principal purpose for which the Lord instituted his Supper: "In order to sign and seal in our consciences the promises contained in his gospel concerning our being partakers of his body and blood, and to give us certainty and assurance that therein lies our true spiritual nourishment, and that having such an earnest, we may entertain a right reliance on salvation."¹ Notice the words "sign and seal," "certainty," "assurance" which he uses. This is the work of the Spirit in the hearts of believers of working faith in the gospel and nourishing faith through the sacraments. Pay attention also to the pronouns "us," "our," "we," which, written in regards to those who have the Spirit working in them, signify nothing else, or less, than that the nourishing potency of the Supper is worked in the children of God. It is for the elect alone that Jesus gave his Supper, for they alone possess faith.

Faith is required in partaking of the Lord's Supper for two reasons. In the first place, the communion believers share with their Savior is a "spiritual mystery which cannot be seen by the eye or comprehended by the human understanding."² Therefore, Christ, in consideration of

their limited and earthly intellect, gave the signs of bread and wine to signify to his people the reality and substance of their communion with him. The *reality* is that in his passion and death they have salvation and eternal life; the *substance* of the sacrament is Jesus Christ as the all-sufficient bread of life by which their souls are nourished.³ Hear Calvin's words: "[In the Lord's Supper] He offers himself to us with all his benefits and we receive him by faith."⁴ The great mystery of celestial fellowship with Jesus through the sacrament can be grasped only by faith. Echoing Calvin, the Belgic Confession in Article 35 affirms,

...For the support of the spiritual and heavenly life which believers have, he [God] hath sent a living bread, which descended from heaven, namely, Jesus Christ, who nourishes and strengthens the spiritual life of believers when they eat him, that is to say, *when they apply and receive him by faith in the Spirit.*⁵

In the second place, partaking of the Holy Supper demands faith because the presence of Jesus in his Supper is *spiritual*. This is the only possible manner in which he can be present, for his body is now ascended into heaven, in triumph at the right hand of God Almighty, from whence he will return only at the time appointed by the Father (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Matt. 24). Neither is it conceivable that Christ is not present at all in the signs of the Supper, for "to deny that a true communion of Jesus Christ is present in the Supper is to render this holy sacrament frivolous and useless—an execrable blasphemy not to be listened to."⁶ This statement by Calvin is undoubtedly a withering condemnation of the position of Ulrich Zwingli. Zwingli believed that the Lord's Supper

1 John Calvin, "A Short Treatise on the Supper of our Lord," *John Calvin's Tracts and Treatises*, vol. 2, ed. Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1958), 167.

2 John Calvin, "A Short Treatise," 171.

3 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 4.17.1.

4 *Institutes* 4.17.5.

5 The Protestant Reformed Churches, *The Confession and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, Mich., 2005), 71; emphasis added.

6 John Calvin, "A Short Treatise," 170.

is merely a memorial feast in which the bread and wine act as stimulants to the mind to contemplate the death of Christ and which in no way contain the body and blood of the Savior. Therefore, it can only remain that Jesus is spiritually in the bread and wine. To believe this requires faith, for our eyes see and our mouth savors only bread and wine. Again, hear the reformer of Geneva: “What then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space.”⁷ Christ’s body is given to us through his Spirit and only through his Spirit, as John 6:63 makes plain, “It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”

Since faith is required to receive Jesus Christ in the Lord’s Supper, Calvin holds that those who are unbelieving do not receive any benefit from the Supper because they possess no faith. This teaching is in keeping with, and indeed it *flows* from, the doctrine of double predestination which is at the center of Calvinistic and Reformed theology. Calvin does not deny that the sacrament is extended to all men, hypocrites and believers both, just as the call of Christ’s gospel to repent and believe Jesus the Savior goes out to the elect and to the reprobate; rather, Calvin denies that the sacrament imparts any benefit when it is consumed in unbelief, even as the gospel preached in time hardens the hearts of those whom God has rejected in eternity. Rather, says Calvin, that to those who eat the sacrament without any strengthening of faith (because no faith exists to strengthen), who hold the sacrifice of Jesus in contempt, who “rush like swine to take the Lord’s Supper”, the bread and wine are a “deadly poison” because by eating that which signifies salvation in Jesus Christ alone, they condemn themselves by that which is an activity of faith.⁸ In keeping with the teaching of Calvin, the Protestant Reformed Churches affirm the same in their *Declaration of Principles*:

It follows from this [Article 35 of the Belgic Confession, whose sections concerning the institution and efficacy of the sacrament for believers only were quoted immediately before this statement] that both the sacraments, as well as the preaching of the gospel, are a savor of death unto death for the reprobate, as well as a savor of life unto life for the elect. Hence, the promise of God, preached by the gospel, signified and sealed in both the sacraments, is not for all but for the elect only.⁹

7 *Institutes* 4.17.10.

8 *Institutes* 4.17.40.

9 The Protestant Reformed Churches, *Confessions*,

In order to partake of the Supper in faith, the believer must first be assured that he possesses real, true, and living faith. He does this through self-examination. The second of three parts of this examination, as explained in the Reformed “Form for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper,” makes this plain: “That every one examine his own heart, whether he doth believe this faithful promise of God that all his sins are forgiven him only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ...”¹⁰ This Form, with its comprehensive treatment of examination, is the legacy of John Calvin. Calvin restricted the act of examination to two points: whether the believer is truly repentant for his sins and whether he believes the promises of God as read in Scripture and explained in the preaching.¹¹ However, Calvin does not teach that the believer must come with *perfect faith* to the Supper. The Netherlands Reformed congregations, who claim to be in the tradition of John Calvin, teach this and cause great trouble and even terror in the souls of their members, who can never seem to find that perfect faith and thus may never come to the Supper of the Lord. This is an evil thing, and not at all in line with the teaching of John Calvin. Calvin taught that faith is indeed necessary to benefit from the Supper; perfection is not, because believers approach the Holy Supper to have their faith *strengthened*. The children of God may not let either their own unworthiness (revealed to them by examination) or perceived unworthiness in others hinder them from joyfully devouring the Lord’s Supper. “For,” says Calvin, “if we allege as an excuse for not coming to the Supper, that we are still weak in faith or integrity of life, it is as if a man were to excuse himself from taking medicine because he was sick.”¹² Rather, the imperfections of their faith and life should spur the faithful ever more fervently to seek the solace of the Lord’s Supper as a means to lift them closer to Jesus. Believers must send up as a continual prayer to God John 6:34: “Lord, evermore give us this bread!” and Mark 9:24: “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!” The Heidelberg Catechism asks and answers the question in Lord’s Day 30, Q/A 81, “For whom is the Lord’s Supper instituted? For those who are truly sorrowful for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ, and that their remaining infirmities are covered by his passion and death; *and who earnestly desire to have their*

421; emphasis added.

10 The Protestant Reformed Churches, *Confessions*, 268.

11 John Calvin, “A Short Treatise,” 175.

12 John Calvin, “A Short Treatise,” 179.

faith more and more strengthened..."¹³

Moreover, Calvin adds that if believers would have their faith strengthened in the Supper, this faith must first be nourished by the Word of God. There must be *preaching* to accompany the sacrament. Solid, biblical, Reformed sermons spoken by Christ through his ambassadors and rightly dividing the Word of truth along the lines of double predestination must go before the celebration of the Supper. The Word publicly proclaimed must be the call to repent and be turned to Jehovah, the chief means of grace, the first application of the death of Christ and its benefits to the life and soul of the believer, and the crier to the unbeliever of his damnation. Calvin trumpets: "Nothing more preposterous could happen in the Supper than for it to be turned into a silent action, as has happened under the Pope's tyranny."¹⁴

It was from the Pope's tyranny that John Calvin liberated the Holy Supper. Calvin rejects root and branch the doctrine of transubstantiation, which doctrine was as vigorously defended by Rome in his day, as it is proudly proclaimed by the Holy See in our own time. So vigorous was Calvin's denunciation of transubstantiation because he realized that it turned the popish mass, called an accursed idolatry in the Heidelberg Catechism, into a faithless action. This was because the mass was believed to impart salvation and forgiveness of sins *in the very act of partaking* of the bread and wine, since they were believed to be the true body and blood of Jesus Christ. Through only this physical consuming of the bread and wine, the spiritual reality of salvation was imparted; no faith was necessary to receive Jesus into the soul.

This obnoxious doctrine raises two important implications. First, if all that exists in the mass is the body and blood of the Savior after consecration by the priest, and no faith is necessary to receive Christ in the elements, then unbelieving partakers, though they are far from God and enjoy no salvation in his Son, no assurance of faith, and no desire for communion with Jesus, receive the whole sacrament. Not only that, but because the Eucharist is believed to impart salvation and forgiveness of sins, unbelievers may possess some assurance of favor with God when they receive the bread and wine. Secondly, the faithful people of God coming to have their faith strengthened by the Supper, are cruelly robbed of all spiritual refreshment when they are forced to content themselves with a merely physical presence of their

Savior and a partaking of him only by the mouth and stomach. What assurance is in bread? What assurance is flesh, even the flesh of Christ himself, if his Spirit is not present to comfort and encourage, to sanctify and stir to praise? The great evil of the mass is that it chains believers to this world. It chains the children of God to that which can be touched and felt with the earthly senses, instead of lifting them up through the Holy Spirit of Jesus to enjoy communion with him in celestial bliss. Now hear Calvin's dismissal of the mass: "Away then with this stupid fiction, which fastens men's minds and Christ to bread!"¹⁵ And echo his holy bellow damning the foundation of the mass, the doctrine of transubstantiation: "Therefore, we conclude, without doubt, that this transubstantiation is an invention forged by the Devil to corrupt the true nature of the Supper!"¹⁶

John Calvin, we conclude, without doubt, restored faith to the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ. Faith, as it is the only instrument with which we receive Christ in salvation, is also the only means by which he is received in his Supper. And not by all men, for not all have faith; only to the elect does the true benefit of the Supper come, for they alone possess faith. For the Protestant Reformed Churches, standing in the Reformed tradition with the heritage of the reformer of Geneva, this teaching of John Calvin is a precious treasure. We must shudder as we see many nominally Reformed and Presbyterian churches in our age sell their birthright, not for a mess of pottage, but for an empty symbol of bread and wine. This they do by forsaking the truth of Scripture as defended by John Calvin and rushing to pledge again their faithfulness to the Vatican and beg the pope's forgiveness for separating from his whorish church in the Reformation. The Protestant Reformed denomination will have none of this. We unashamedly confess with John Calvin: "We shall think, that the worthiness [of us to come to the Supper], which is commanded by God, consists chiefly in faith, which reposes all things in Christ, but nothing in ourselves."¹⁷ ♦

Jonathan is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

13 The Protestant Reformed Churches, *Confessions*, 117; emphasis added.

14 *Institutes* 4.17.39

15 *Institutes* 4.17.29

16 John Calvin, "A Short Treatise," 186.

17 *Institutes* 4.17.42

Who Are We Known As?

by Ryan Kregel

Who are we known as?

While taking classes at Michigan State, I got to know a young man my age. I can remember vividly talking with him about church before our class one night. The memory is ingrained in my head. I told him I attended a Protestant Reformed church, and what was the first thing he said to me? “Man, you PRs throw some pretty crazy parties, I’ve been to a couple and...” I admitted that it was pretty sad that this was how he and many others see us and I explained to him that this is not how all of us are. I know the term “partier” only refers to a minority of young people in our denomination, but more often than not other churches around us and the world only hear about the minority. Is this who we really want to be known as?

It’s not just under-age young people in our church that are getting drunk on weekends, it’s confessing members of the church also, confessing members who have vowed before God to “lead a new, godly life” (Form for Public Confession of Faith). These young confessing members of the church who are old enough by law to drink alcohol are examples to the young people of the church who are in their teenage and high school years. Not only is abusing your privilege to drink alcohol a bad example and a sin, but supplying minors with alcohol is cause for serious concern. I Corinthians 8:9ff says, “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak...and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.” Not only are we putting another in danger physically, we are harming them spiritually and we are sinning against Christ.

In regards to how we are instructed to use alcohol, it does not get any clearer than Proverbs 20:1, another pearl of wisdom from Solomon, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” This is simple biblical truth! Alcohol impairs

the judgment. One does sinful things he or she otherwise would not when under its influence. Alcohol in itself is not a bad thing. Psalm 104 praises God’s providence in creation and talks of God providing wine (vs. 15), “And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart.” Paul in I Timothy 5:23 brings this out: “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.” We are instructed of a little wine as good for the stomach, but notice, he adds the words “a little”. We have to be able to control our intake of alcohol and not fall into the sin of drunkenness. Proverbs 25:28 addresses this matter of self control, “He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.” We need to be able to control ourselves against the open floodgates of sin and temptation. Our life can be compared to a wall. Each brick in our wall is our resistance against each sin. One brick is our defense against drunkenness, one against lying, one against adultery, and so on. If we pull one brick out of our wall, in this case our defense against drunkenness, our wall is going to be weaker. When one is in a drunken state, the wall is in its most perilous position. One cannot control what he or she does when in the drunken state. One cannot control the evil thoughts, desires, lusts, words, and actions that occur in this state. By pulling out our one brick of defense against the sin of drunkenness, we have dislodged many others and our wall is starting to crumble and fall down. Proverbs 23:29-35 speaks of drunkenness and some of the sin it brings along with it. “...At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things...” The child of God in the drunken state can make some serious mistakes and commit sins that will affect his or her life and the lives of many others. Premarital sex, car accidents, and lost friendships are a few things that can and do happen when a child of God is living in this sin. Maintain your wall, be continually looking for weak points that need to be

patched. Be on the lookout for temptations that come flying in from all directions, temptations that have one goal: the downfall of your wall.

One thing the child of God must not fall into is the hype surrounding one's 21st birthday party. There is so much pressure on young people to get drunk on their 21st birthday. While there is nothing wrong with going out on your 21st birthday and using this privilege, there is something very wrong with misusing this privilege in a way that you are drunk, whether in public or private. We are the children of God and our bodies are his. I Corinthians 3:16, 17 tells us this and gives us the clear warning of what will happen if we defile his holy temple. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." We must always show in our lives that we are God's children by our witness. Satan along with the world laughs when the child of God professes to be Christian but leads a life of drunkenness and sin. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). We must leave a godly example for those around us to follow; we must *not* let our God be mocked because of our sinfulness.

Another sad truth is that there are certain homes that are known as "party houses." Parents, may your homes never be known as this. Rule your home in godliness. Make it explicitly clear that you will not tolerate underage drinking and the abuse of alcohol with children who are "of age." Know where your children go. Know who their friends are. Know what they do with their friends. Never put them in a situation where they are tempted to use your home as a haven for this sin. When I come home from a night out with friends, my parents ask me where I've been. One may think of this as annoying or pestering but I am thankful to my parents for doing this.

They care enough about my well-being to want to know where I've been and who I've been with. If a young person feels he or she has to lie about where they've been on Friday night, they probably ought not have been there in the first place. Setting a curfew is a great way to prevent a lot of problems. I'm not here to tell parents what to do or not do in regards to this matter, but a young person without a curfew has so many more opportunities to fall into this temptation.

Young people, choose your friends wisely. Our friends must be those who are strong in faith and can resist temptation and who can in turn help us resist temptation. Not only must we choose our friends wisely, but also we must be wise with the friends we have. When the devil rears his head and one of our friends falls into the sin of drunkenness, we must not leave that friend, or join them for that matter. We are called by God to go to that friend with scripture and help that friend in whatever way we can in their struggle against this sin. This is nothing new to us, we all know the way of Matthew 18 in regards to approaching a fellow believer who has fallen into sin. It is our duty as Christians to tell our friends and fellow believers when they are walking in sin, and if we are walking in sin and they come to us we must have the strength to hear what they say and turn from our sin.

So who will we be known as? The words in this article are nothing new to us. Let us then strive to live up to the name we have as Christians. Let us try our very hardest to reflect the image of Christ in our lives. Let us not do this just so others will look at us in a better light, but more importantly for the glory of our amazing God! Let us pray to God to give us strength to resist temptation and keep our temples holy before God. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). ❖

Ryan is a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Chester Hunter

April 20 Read Isaiah 60:1-8

Here we have an explicit prophecy of Christ, and especially that he came to earth not only for the Jewish elect but also for the Gentiles. Notice that he is called the light. A light is the means by which we see in a very dark place. This world is a dark place of sin. We need the light to find our way in this world. Let us walk in that light day by day. When we walk in the light of the Word, we will see clearly our path for now and for eternity. Sing Psalter 334.

April 21 Read Isaiah 60:9-14

Here we see the victory of the whole church that is occasioned by the victory of Christ on the cross. We also see, in verse 10, both the justice of God and the mercy of God. At the cross both were accomplished. God's justice against the sinner was fulfilled in Christ. In his mercy Christ bore our suffering. We also see that there are both elect and reprobate in the whole world. Those who are God's chosen will inhabit the heavenly Jerusalem. Those who are not the chosen will bow the knee before they are condemned to hell. May we give thanks for the victory wrought for us by Christ on the cross. Sing Psalter 302

April 22 Read Isaiah 60:15-22

Here we have a description of life in heaven after the return of our Redeemer Christ Jesus. While we might wish to focus on the richness of the glory that will be ours, we must remember that that richness is but a picture of the spiritual riches that will be afforded to those who are accounted as all righteous. Look at the various symbols found in the text which are found elsewhere in Scripture. All the symbols will be brought together in the kingdom of peace. Let us await that peace which we cannot imagine in this world of sin. Let us watch daily for the Everlasting Light. Sing Psalter 238.

April 23 Read Isaiah 61:1-5

This passage is familiar because it is one Jesus used as a text for a sermon in Nazareth. We can see that it is truly Messianic in character because it describes the work of Christ. He comes to those who are poor in spirit. These poor need Christ to lift them up against all the trials of the world around them. Are we the poor in spirit? If we are, we are truly the happy ones as proclaimed in the beatitudes. The Holy Spirit as the spirit of Christ will bring to us the comfort found in the gospel because he is the Comforter. Israel received physical blessings when they returned from captivity. We will receive spiritual blessing when we are released from the captivity of sin. Thanks be to God. Sing Psalter 403.

April 24 Read Isaiah 61:6-11

Isaiah continues with his prophecy of joy concerning the gathering of Christ's church from all nations. Israel of old did not contemplate this reality, and sometimes we do not either. We become complacent in our home countries and churches and do not consider that God's people are abroad. Our salvation is not of ourselves, but our salvation is of the sovereign, covenant God who has clothed us with the rich robes of righteousness. Let our souls be joyful in our salvation wrought by Christ. Sing Psalter 198.

April 25 Read Isaiah 62:1-5

Our redeemer will not rest until we are delivered before almighty God in full righteousness. What was begun at the cross will be finished at his second coming. We may rest in that assurance even as we walk through this valley of the shadow of death. While most of the world wishes that we be desolate and forsaken, Jehovah's delight is in us, hence our new name Hephzibah. May he bless us each and every day, and may we continually give thanks for his care over us. Sing Psalter 55.

April 26 Read Isaiah 62:6-12

What a blessing it is that we have watchmen upon the walls! These watchmen are not of our doing. God has given to us men called officebearers. These men must make it their duty to watch for the enemy and pray without ceasing for us. When we have good preaching and when church discipline is faithfully carried out, the world will know that God is with us. Then we will truly be a holy people and not forsaken. May God continue to be with us and may we esteem those who have been placed over us. Sing Psalter 354.

April 27 Read Isaiah 63:1-6

This passage recounts the victory of Christ over his and our enemies. Edom typifies all those who would fight against the church of Christ. It was Edom (Esau) who sought to kill his brother Jacob. It was Edom who cheered as Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon. Only Christ will redeem us in the fight against Satan and his hosts. Only Christ will deliver us to glory from all the Edoms of this age. May we wait for the day of salvation when the conquering king will return to this earth and take us for his own forever. Sing Psalter 379.

April 28 Read Isaiah 63:7-14

The prophet looks back on God's goodness to his people in the first verse of today's passage. This is similar to the words of Jeremiah in Lamentations. Both of these prophets had seen God's people fall into grievous sins and refuse to follow God.

Both of these prophets could see that even though the people did not deserve it, God showed to them great loving kindness. Do we see this today? We should because the mercies of Jehovah are new every morning. When we awake, we must realize that we have only been sustained through another night by him alone. Let us give thanks each day for these undeserved mercies. Sing Psalter 309

April 29 Read Isaiah 63:15-19

“We are thine” are the first words of verse 19. What a blessed thought that is! If we are our covenant God’s, nothing can happen to us in this life that will prevent our joining with him in the new heavens and the new earth. All of life’s trials, troubles, and disappointments are nothing in comparison with the glory that will be ours in heaven. Because our redeemer is from everlasting, we know that his victory for us is sure. May we wait the day of Christ’s coming in prayer; always praying even so come quickly, Lord Jesus, and receive us unto Thyself. Sing Psalter 28.

April 30 Read Isaiah 64:1-5

Israel of old was looking for deliverance from their enemies of the day, and so these verses are their cry for help. But they are also applicable to the church today as we await the second coming of Christ. This must be our prayer as this world is not our home. We must look to God our help and Christ our redeemer and deliverer. Like Israel of old we have sinned and deserve God’s anger because of those sins. But we, too, have the covenant promise that God will save us through his Son. As we see happenings in the world of nature and men around us, let us know that they are signs that assure us that Christ is coming for us and will deliver us. Sing Psalter 224.

May 1 Read Isaiah 64:6-12

The Christian must understand that of himself he can do nothing good. Even what might be termed as good is described in this chapter as filthy rags. A rag can be useful in many applications. A filthy rag has no use whatsoever. Our only help is in Jehovah the sovereign potter. He fashions us in whatever way he desires by his will. We must go often to the potter in prayer. We must confess that we are his people. Only then will we know the blessedness that will be ours through the blood of Christ. Sing Psalter 140.

May 2 Read Isaiah 65:1-7

We see in these verses the addition of the Gentiles into God’s church, but we also see the rejection of the Jews. We have descended from those Gentiles. In our generations we were not those who were the chosen people as we are descendants of Japheth and not Shem. It is a blessing for us that we know that we are numbered among those who are covered by Jehovah’s covenant. But lest we boast, we must see the warning in the Jew’s rejection. We can easily fall into the same sins. We can desecrate the holy things of God. We can say we are holy but walk in a most displeasing way to God. Let us be warned and let us be thankful for the salvation that has been freely given unto us. Sing Psalter 183.

May 3 Read Isaiah 65:8-16

Here you have a picture of the church, as it is manifest here on this earth. In it you find both the elect of Jehovah, and those who are reprobate. Because of the elect found in the visible church, God does not cast it away. This was the truth as was found in Israel. The nation deserved destruction, but in it was a remnant. In that remnant was a special seed—Christ. As we celebrate his birth let us remember the circumstances of that birth. Let us be thankful to be part of the remnant that shall inherit eternal life through Christ our Savior. Sing Psalter 348.

May 4 Read Isaiah 65:17-25

In this passage the prophet looks beyond the coming of Christ to earth as a baby. He looks to the second coming of Christ when the church will be gathered together to live in heaven as the church triumphant. That will be a day of joy and rejoicing for God’s people. All the troubles of this life will vanish. Whatever we do in heaven will flourish and God’s church will not suffer. Are we looking for this day? Are we ready to leave this life behind? We must always remember that this earth is not our home. We are but strangers and pilgrims here. Let us watch and pray that our Lord comes quickly. Sing Psalter 31.

May 5 Read Isaiah 66:1-9

As the prophecy of Isaiah closes for Judah and for the church of today, we see that God is sovereign and in his sovereignty cares for his people. When the enemy attacked, God was there protecting his chosen people. This is no different today. God is on our side. He is our refuge and our strength. We also see the truth of childbirth as a picture of how God will bring forth his church. Even as God is in control of each birth, so he controls the bringing forth of his church. This is a great comfort for God’s people. We can rest assured that our God will care for us daily and will also bring us to heavenly glory at his appointed time. Thanks be to God! Sing Psalter 128.

May 6 Read Isaiah 66:10-14

Even when the afflictions of this life seem to be overwhelming, we can read a text such as this and realize from where true peace comes. That peace comes from Jehovah as we read in verse 12. And it is not just a little time of peace; it is a peace like a mighty river that refreshes the land. It is a peace that brings comfort in all times of affliction. We can be like the little child who runs to his mother’s arms for comfort. We have such a comforter sent by our elder brother as we read in John 14. Redemption is ours; of that, there is no doubt. We must rest in Jehovah and wait for him in our time of need. Sing Psalter 7.

May 7 Read Isaiah 66:15-24

Redeemed by judgment is the theme of this book. Who will be judged? Those who abhor God and his holy things and those who disdain the worship of Jehovah and his holy day will be judged for their sin. For the people of God this brings great comfort. We, too, deserve such judgment. By nature we are no different. But by the grace of God we have a redeemer. That redeemer is Christ. By his work of redemption, we can

look forward to the new heavens and the new earth. We can look forward to spending our days in everlasting worship to Jehovah. This should bring to us peace because Christ is the Prince of Peace both now and for all eternity. Sing Psalter 385.

May 8 Read Nehemiah 1:1-3

In the beginning of this book we come face to face with a man of God named Nehemiah. We know little of his background, and we do not know the reason why he is still in Babylon after his countrymen have made their way back to Jerusalem, But we know that he is concerned about their affairs and the situation in Israel. We, too, must share Nehemiah's concern for the church of God. We must seek Zion's good at all times. The church's welfare is not something to be left up to just the office bearers. We are the church, and we must care about her and for her. May we, as God has given to us ability, seek Zion's good and God's glory. Sing Psalter 273.

May 9 Read Nehemiah 1:4-11

Even though Nehemiah was a long way from Jerusalem, he deeply felt the troubles of Jerusalem, for Nehemiah was concerned about the church of God. When he hears of these troubles, he immediately goes to his God in prayer. Is this our response to troubles of others? Do we remember the church in all places of the world? Do we consider the families of our own congregations in their troubles? Do we bring those needs before the throne of grace? Let us be concerned about the church of the living God in their needs, and let us use prayer often. Sing Psalter 367.

May 10 Read Nehemiah 2:1-6

Here we see in this passage Nehemiah again going to Jehovah in prayer. Even though he is in the presence of a great earthly king, he knows that God is his king. He knows that by his sovereignty God can cause the heart of this king to give to him his desire. Do we do this? Do we pray without ceasing in every situation in which we find ourselves? Do we trust God to make his way for us plain in our sight? A second thing we must notice here. Because Nehemiah had been a faithful servant to this great king, the king was willing to please Nehemiah. This, too, was in God's hand. We must be faithful in whatever we do. In that faithfulness, in even earthly things, we will find the blessing of Jehovah. Sing Psalter 234

May 11 Read Nehemiah 2:7-10

After receiving the king's permission to seek the good of Jerusalem, Nehemiah makes provision for the task ahead of him. Because of his connections within the government, he was able to procure materials needed for his massive building project. We see how the chaff serves the wheat. But this, too, is all in God's counsel and by his sovereignty as verse 8 tells us. Satan is grieved; that grief comes out in the hatred of Sanballat and Tobiah. The world hates the church and those who would help them. This is a sure fact. We have been given the armor of salvation to battle that hatred. Nehemiah would use that armor in the months to come. We must use that armor as we fight the battle of faith each and every day. Sing Psalter 205.

May 12 Read Nehemiah 2:11-20

There are times in the church's history that God will raise up a leader who will incite those around him to do what is needed for the church. Nehemiah was such a man. God had put into his heart and soul the zeal for Jerusalem. Even after he saw the daunting task before him, he believed that God would prosper him. Not only would God give to him the zeal necessary for the work, but God would also give to him the courage to face enemies of the church. May we willingly take upon us whatever task God has given to us. May we look to him to help us in the church's time of need. Sing Psalter 368.

May 13 Read Nehemiah 3:1-6

Here we have accounts of two different kinds of people in the church of God. Some rose up and got right to work, and some refused to "put their necks to the work of the Lord." Which kind are we? Do we willingly undertake the work of Jehovah? Do we use the talents and abilities that he has given to us for his work? There are many things that we can do; are we doing them? It does not matter what the work is; it is important in God's sight. We should not be like the nobles of Tekoa and refuse to work or to work halfheartedly. Let us look for work in God's church and let us do it wholeheartedly. Sing Psalter 227.

May 14 Read Nehemiah 3:7-12

As we read through the list of those who repaired the walls, we see several notes of interest. We see people who were not inhabitants of Jerusalem working on the wall. They might have wanted to go back to their own home town and work there, but they saw the necessity of repairing the city of David, the place where God dwelt. Others saw the necessity of repairing the area near their homes. We must look to our houses and see what they need spiritually. If there are deficiencies, by the grace of God, we must work hard on their repair. Finally in verse 12 we see a man and his daughters working. This man was a ruler, but no work was too good for him and his daughters. There is a place for women and the work of God's church. God will show that to them and to us. As we all work for the glory of God in his church may we look out for the place that he has set for us. May we never shirk in that duty, and may we know that God will bless us in his work. Sing Psalter 349

May 15 Read Nehemiah 3:13-32

As we read through the list of what was repaired, we notice the variety of what had to be repaired. One of those places was the wall and gate known as the dung gate. Here was the area in which the sewage left the city. A more malodorous place could not be found, but yet a man by the name of Malchiah volunteered to take that on. In the church, as well, there may be less than pleasant tasks. These, too, must be accomplished. Are we willing to take these on? Do we look for such tasks? As part of the work of the church they must be done. May God give to us the grace to carry out whatever calling he has assigned to us. Sing Psalter 369.

What is the Federation of Young People?

by Ryan Barnhill

The Federation Board is an organization governed by the Word of God as interpreted in the Three Forms of Unity. On that foundation, we as a Board seek to enable all Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies to work in close unity, to guide these societies so they develop in faith and doctrine, and to give united expression to our specific Protestant Reformed character.

The Federation Board meets the first Sunday of each month to discuss and vote on various matters of importance concerning the young people. Major items on the agenda often include decisions for and oversight over the *Beacon Lights* and the annual Young People's Convention.

Delegates at the Young People's Convention recently voted on new Board members for this year. The delegates voted for Joshua Engelsma, Vice-President; Elizabeth Noorman, Librarian; Rebecca Koole, Vice-Secretary;

Scott Mingerink, Vice-Treasurer; Rev. A. Lanning and Rev. R. Van Overloop, Spiritual Advisors. Members on their second term are Ryan Barnhill, President; Emily Kuiper, Secretary; Ben Rau, Treasurer; Joel Langerak, Youth Coordinator.

As a Board, we recognize our inability to perform the tasks at hand without the wisdom and grace that only God is able to give. We covet your prayers. Pray that we might have the wisdom of God to direct all of our decisions and efforts, to the end that he is glorified. The time of youth is a critical time for spiritual growth, and so we ask that you pray that we be tools in God's hand to build and strengthen the young people of our denomination. ❖

Ryan is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church.



*Back row: Ben Rau, Rev. A. Lanning, Joshua Engelsma, Joel Langerak.
Front row: Scott Mingerink, Rebecca Koole, Elizabeth Noorman, Emily Kuiper, Ryan Barnhill.
Missing from picture: Rev. R. Van Overloop.*

Covenant Courtship: (6) The Head of the Woman

by Aaron Lim

“The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man” (1 Cor. 11:3).

In the miracle of God’s work of salvation, he promises to save families and their generations after them. As he establishes his covenant with a man and a woman in marriage, he establishes a system in which husband and wife are to live in their state of marriage. To the man he instructs to rule over his wife in love, to lead the home in the fear of Jehovah. To the woman he instructs to submit to her husband, to obey him and to guide the household. When husband and wife faithfully submit to their covenant callings, they see a beautifully harmonized system through which God saves them and their families.

The world hates this system of harmony between husband and wife because it hates God. It rebels against him by rejecting this order that God places in marriage and in the church. The wicked world does this by promoting feminism and all sorts of notions that insist women have equal standing with men. One can see this wicked phenomenon in apostate churches today which allow women into office. They usurp the authority that God gives to men alone who are called to rule the church and their homes in obedience to him.

The idea of a young man ruling over his girlfriend may not be so apparent in the early stages of their courtship when they are only getting to know each other better. Nevertheless, as they become more committed to each other in their courtship, a young man must prepare himself to lead and to rule over her as they prepare to be united in marriage. The responsibilities of being the head of the woman are not small because his headship is a reflection of Christ’s headship over the church. His rule over her must therefore be a faithful testimony to this truth.

Covenant courtship is a process in which a young man grows in an intimate knowledge of his girlfriend. It is striking how married couples can fail to meet each other’s expectations simply because they do not know each other sufficiently well. The common, frustrated expression from married individuals seems to be, “You just

don’t know me well enough!” Emotional and spiritual closeness begins with knowledge. The Scriptures aptly instruct husbands to dwell with their wives according to knowledge (1 Pet. 3:7). This has important implications for covenant courtship. It teaches the young man that he must strive to know his girlfriend as much as possible so that he knows how to lead her in a way that is glorifying to God. Knowing her unique individuality, character, mind-set, personality, lifestyle, temperament, habits, preferences and dislikes are essential. Christ the bridegroom knows his bride with a perfect knowledge. That is why he can lead her in the perfect way. Godly young men reflect this beautiful truth when they diligently seek to grow in a deeper knowledge of their girlfriends to rule over them with the rule of Christ.

The process of courtship also prepares a young man to love his girlfriend adequately with the knowledge of Christ’s love for him. As he understands the truth that Christ condescended to save his people in the way of the cross, so the young man gives himself selflessly in love for his girlfriend. Quarrels and bickering are not uncommon in any relationship, but a godly young man covers himself with the cloak of humility and adorns himself with the wisdom of Christ to resolve those differences. He learns to love her in biblical ways that will meet her expectations.

He dwells with her as the weaker vessel, seeking her welfare and caring for her needs. The Scriptures are clear that God made the woman to be the weaker sex. This is especially true from a physical and emotional viewpoint. For this reason God so ordained the man to make up for these weaknesses by ruling over her. Together man and woman complement and make each other complete. A man of God understands and appreciates these weaknesses, not criticizes them harshly. He bears patiently with his help-meet despite her weaknesses, knowing that God loves him in spite of his sinfulness.

The rule of Christ renders honour unto his bride. He honours her because she is his prized possession, chosen in all eternity to be his. For her he bleeds and dies to redeem from corruption. As his body he cherishes and

nurtures her until the final day of their consummation. So too a godly young man must honour his girlfriend as his help-meet. He honours her by praising her qualities, appreciating her uniqueness and defending her from all criticism, harm and danger.

As the head of the woman, it is above all else necessary for the young man to be responsible for his girlfriend's spiritual well-being. Her spiritual welfare is his responsibility. This means that he functions as her spiritual guide and counselor. He is responsible for creating and sustaining a spiritual and godly atmosphere in their relationship. Being entrusted as her head carries the heavy responsibility of ensuring that she is spiritually healthy. A spiritual relationship bears testimony to the truth that God is in and at the center of it.

To rule well a covenant young man must always be striving for spiritual excellencies, desiring to develop his spiritual gifts. He must equip himself with the knowledge of God so that he can use that knowledge to lead his girlfriend in God's covenant ways. It is extremely deplorable that the church world today is engulfed by spiritual ignorance. Our covenant young men must be men of knowledge, men who study the Word of God diligently. They must know the doctrines of the Reformed faith by heart, and be skilled at dividing the Word of truth. With

sound, spiritual knowledge they will then know to lead their future spouses in covenant courtship.

At various points in a couple's relationship, they meet with unique problems and difficulties. Only God's Word is able to solve those problems. That is why our covenant young men and women must be thoroughly and deeply acquainted with the Word of God.

Service to God in the church should also be in the minds of young men who desire covenant courtship. God calls them to lead his church as much as he calls them to rule over their wives. The young men are the future leaders of the church. They are called to bear the offices that Christ has ordained for his church.

True and biblical rule is always done in love for God and for the woman God places in a young man's life. A godly young man acknowledges that he is sinful, and that his rule over his girlfriend is therefore sinful. He needs the grace and wisdom of God to execute this rule in love for God and his girlfriend. While this rule is never perfect because of our sinfulness, God nevertheless is pleased to bless a young man in the way of his faith and obedience. ❖

Aaron is a member of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore.

Church History

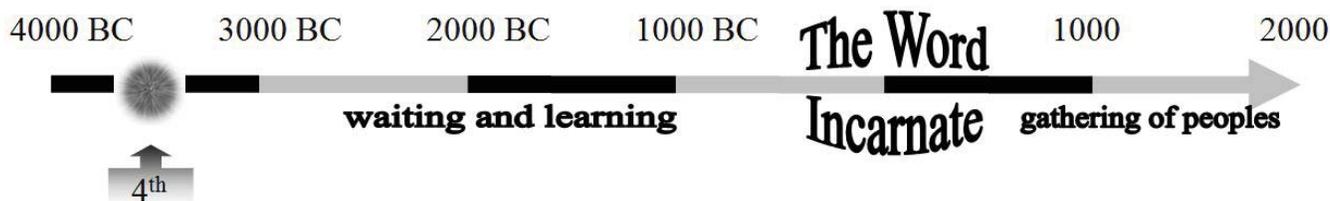
The Fourth One Hundred Years of His-Story: The World That Then Was (1): Its Watery Nature and Plants

by John Huizenga

The world in which Adam and Eve lived with their growing family was so different from the world we live in today, that it is no exaggeration to say that it essentially ceased to exist and was replaced with a new one. Even though God did not create anything new, the materials and life were so altered that the climate was different, the land was different, the vegetation was different, the animals were different, the people were different, and the nature of the planet's composition was different. I would like to take a few of the 100-year

intervals in the history before the great Flood to explore some of these characteristics of that world.

The one outstanding and underlying feature of that world was its watery nature. Though this fact may have lingered in the mind of man for many hundreds of years after the Flood, Peter is inspired to remind us of this fact because man has convinced himself that the world of today has always been the way it is with its mountains, volcanoes, earthquakes, rivers, and oceans. "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the



heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Pet. 3:5-7).

Our world today is characterized by fire. Water is still essential for life, and the surface of earth is still 75% water. From a million miles away, our planet looks like a beautiful blue marble because of all the water. The world of today has a lot of water, but it has been redistributed, and its impact upon the earth and life on the earth is much less than before. The world of Adam and his family was much more watery in nature. In contrast to the world that then was, ours is a fiery world. Molten rock spews from cracks in the crust exposing the incredible heat that seethes below our feet.

When God first spoke the earth into existence, we read that “the Spirit of God moved upon the waters.” And after creating light, God used the second day to divide waters beyond earth from those of the earth. The third day dawned upon a world entirely covered with water. It was not until God called the waters together into one place, that an area of land appeared which was to serve as the platform upon which the power of God’s grace was to be displayed.

The land, which may very well have been one large continent, was surrounded not only around the coastline by water, but was virtually floating upon the “fountains of the great deep” which were “broken up” at the time of the great Flood (Gen 7:11). And water filled the atmosphere in such a way that it did not drop down as rain, but was held in store until these too were released in a torrent when “the windows of heaven were opened.” Sandwiched, as it were, between these waters, the life God created to live on land thrived and rapidly multiplied to fill the earth. The space beneath the canopy of water was a perfect incubator for life. Even here, “there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground” (2:6), and a “river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads” (2:10).

Water was everywhere! The life that God created is

itself made primarily out of water, and in this world life burst forth in fantastic abundance. The life we observe in this world is stunted, sickly, and stressed by comparison. In the best spot of Eden, God prepared -a special sanctuary of select trees to display all the wonders of created life, and life with God. “And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (2:9). Artists have tried to capture this garden on canvas, but really have only the best parts of this world to inspire their imaginations.



The plant life that filled that world was far more diverse and abundant than that of this world. We are unable to even fathom the quantity and variety of life which surrounded the church of Eden. Plants were designed to supply the energy needs of the life created to inhabit the earth. Every creature with its unique qualities and jobs in the earth were provided with the exact type of food needed by their bodies. For every creature, God created the plants that would supply the food they needed. Their leaves were designed to absorb the solar radiation and store that energy in molecular bonds perfectly suited for the consumption, digestion, and health of every type of life. “And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.”

(Gen 1:29-30) Whether plants existed in that world that produced meaty type fruits to satisfy the diet of a lion, or the lion's diet and eating habits changed after the Fall or the Flood, is not clearly revealed to us. Perhaps some space can be used later for further discussion into this question.

Ironically, one indication we have today of the magnitude of plant and animal life that existed on earth at the time of the flood is the millions of barrels of oil man burns every day, and the tons of coal burned to supply our energy demands. All these fuel reserves found buried in the earth are the trapped remains of all the plant and animal life that existed from the time of Adam to Noah. Each creature, plant and animal in the ocean and land had been busy capturing and storing energy for its life. The solar energy gathered for 2600 years by plants was then buried under the rock, clay, and sand that was dredged from the earth by the Flood. And in these final years of history, man is busy releasing all that energy for his own glory and power. He now releases as fire the energy that was produced in a watery world.

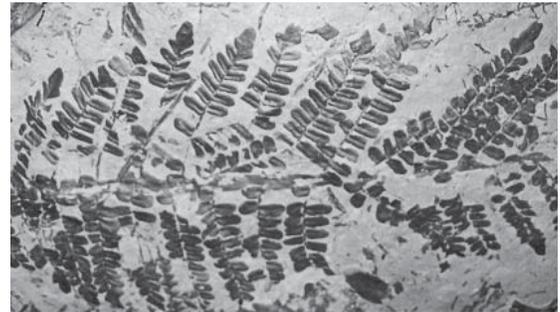


The known quantities of oil and coal buried in the earth boggles the imagination. Estimates vary widely, but about 1 trillion barrels of oil have already been burned up. That figure is difficult to comprehend. My calculations come out to about 38 cubic miles of oil which would cover the whole United States in about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch of oil. Pour that on Wisconsin and we would be wading through some three to four feet of oil. That does not include all the coal. If all the plant life on earth and sea for 2600 years was made into oil and coal that was easily accessible, 1 trillion barrels would only be the tip of the iceberg.

As we dig around in the rubble of the living world that then was (we can find it trapped in fossils and coal mines) we are given tidbits of information about that world. God tells us about giants born from man. What about other creatures? Fossils of giant dragonflies with 30 inch wingspans, 14 inch cockroaches, and cattail plants

30 feet long have been found throughout the earth. When we try to picture a world swarming with such life, we find ourselves in a new world.

The scientific world was recently abuzz about the finding of at least four square miles of tropical forest floor etched into the ceiling of the Vermilion Grove coal mines in eastern Illinois. The mud, rock, and silt of the Flood had buried the forest without first uprooting and washing it away. Coal miners have dug out the 2600 years of plant growth that had been compressed into a vein of coal, leaving imprints of tree trunks, leaves, and other plant debris in the ceiling. It is like looking at the world that then was from a worm's point of view. Plants we now have such as the horsetail which grow no higher than one's knee, grew like trees. Many plants and trees that grew then no longer thrive in this world or are so reduced that they are no longer recognizable.



An air sample of the world that then was had been preserved in a lump of fossilized pine sap. When analyzed, that air bubble had an oxygen content that was 50% higher than the air we breathe today. Such an oxygen concentration in today's world would fuel fires that would rage out of control and burn up all the forests. This fact of oxygen concentration leaves scientists baffled, but is not a problem for a watery world. All the water would prevent such fires. In fact, such oxygen concentrations can be explained by the abundance of water compressing the atmosphere, and even helps to explain dinosaur life and how insects could attain such great sizes.

This was the world in which Adam and his family gathered for worship. Life in all its forms thrived and multiplied with amazing speed. Corrupted now by sin, the life of man apart from the grace of God would thrive and multiply in sin. ❖

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

Simon Van Velzen: Defender of Sovereign Grace

by Andrew Koerner

In every Reformation of the Church of Jesus Christ, there are capable men chosen of God to lead his people back to the truth. God raises up men like Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli just when it seems that the church is about to disappear. These men are rightly remembered by us today, for without God's use of them, we would still be lost in the superstition of Rome.

The Reformation of God's church in the Netherlands in 1834 likewise brings to mind the names of those who arose as leaders in that movement.¹ Hendrik De Cock, Albertus Van Raalte, and Hendrik Scholte are usually celebrated as some of the great men of the Secession of 1834. Often overlooked, however (especially by those who despise his theology) is the life and work of a man who fought more valiantly than any other to return the church to the doctrines of sovereign, irresistible grace, especially as they are taught in the Canons of Dordt. His name is Simon Van Velzen. It is his story that we recount here.

Early Life and Education

Simon Van Velzen was born on either the 14th or 25th of December, 1809 in Amsterdam, Netherlands. His father, also named Simon, was a boarding school keeper, and his mother's name was Neeltje Johanna Geselschap². The family had their ecclesiastical membership in the apostate State church.

Van Velzen's childhood education was undoubtedly steeped in the humanistic philosophies of the Enlightenment, which had permeated the schools of the 19th century Netherlands. He likely never heard about sin or the cross of Christ, and instead was taught the importance

1 For a detailed history of the Secession of 1834, see Prof. Hanko's syllabus, *From Dordt to Today* as well as Chapter 48 of his book, *Portraits of Faithful Saints*.

2 Kor Postma, *Greetings from America: 10*. iagenweb.org/marion/GROETEN/English_GROETEN/Groeten-Trans_10.htm, May 2009.

of living a virtuous life. If the young Van Velzen knew anything of the Bible or the Reformed faith, he probably heard it in only bits and pieces from what little his parents knew. Somehow, though, God worked in Van Velzen's heart, so that by the time he entered his university studies, he began to understand and appreciate the Reformed faith.



Van Velzen received his ministerial training at the University of Leiden. It was here that he joined the Scholte Club, a small group of theology students who were unhappy with the condition of the State Church and the education they were receiving. These students, led by future Secessionist minister Hendrik Scholte, often met at the home of a certain Johannes le Febure, an aged grain merchant, who taught them the Reformed faith that their Leiden professors denied.³

After graduating from Leiden, Van Velzen married Johanna Wilhelmina De Moen on August 16, 1834. Sadly, she died in 1837 after only three years of marriage, and having given birth to one son, named Simon. Although Van Velzen married again the next year, his second wife, Hattum Johanna Alijda Lucia Van Vos, also died suddenly. On September 1, 1841, Van Velzen married his third wife, Zwaantje Stratingh, who gave birth to three daughters.⁴ God no doubt used these early trials in Van Velzen's life to prepare him for the difficulties that lay ahead.

A Ministry of Controversy

Van Velzen's first charge was at the Reformed Church of Drogeham. His pastorate here did not last long, however. When Hendrik De Cock and his consistory seceded from the State Church on October 13, 1834, thus forming the *Afscheiding* (Separation), Van Velzen quickly adopted a sympathetic view toward them. Having also

3 Elton J. Bruins and Robert P. Swierenga, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches of the 19th Century*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999, 21, 22.

4 Postma.

developed a strong personal conviction that the State Church was apostate, Van Velzen submitted an appeal to the General Synod of 1835, requesting that Synod declare its support for the Three Forms of Unity, bar the pulpit to ministers who refused to submit to these standards, and tolerate those ministers who preached the orthodox doctrine. Synod rejected this appeal, and the following January Van Velzen was deposed for refusing to withdraw it.⁵

Having been removed from his office and congregation, Van Velzen quickly joined the *Afscheiding*. Although he was now out of the apostate State Church, Van Velzen still experienced sorrow. For one thing, he and other Secessionists had to endure the persecution of the State Church and the government, which made it illegal for them to hold their own worship services. Ministers who were caught leading these services were severely fined and even jailed.

But for Van Velzen, there was added grief because of opposition from his fellow Separated ministers. Most of the ministers of the *Afscheiding* had Arminian tendencies and proclaimed that God sincerely offered his salvation to all who heard the preaching of the Gospel. This stood in stark contrast to Van Velzen, who preached salvation by God's sovereign grace, to the exclusion of willing and working man. Concerning man's part in salvation, Van Velzen declared, "Man *can do nothing*, yea, *may not* do anything, because this would be one's own work, and that such work is condemned before God."⁶ Statements such as this angered Rev. Scholte, who in 1840 was deposed for slanderously criticizing Van Velzen's theology.⁷

As time went on, the differences between Van Velzen and the other Seceders became more apparent. While Van Velzen, along with Hendrik De Cock, wanted to return the Church to the doctrines of grace found in the Canons of Dordt, men like Albertus Van Raalte and Anthony Brummelkamp wanted a more experiential theology. Ultimately, these divisions became geographical, as Secessionists of the northern Netherlands tended to follow De Cock and Van Velzen, while those in the South favored Van Raalte and Brummelkamp.⁸

Nevertheless, Van Velzen continued to preach the truths of sovereign grace, pastoring churches at Leeu-

warden and Amsterdam, among other places. Especially after De Cock's untimely death in 1842 and Van Raalte's migration to America in 1846, Van Velzen was recognized as a leader in the *Afscheiding*. In 1854, he became a professor at the denominational seminary in Kampen, a position he held until 1890.⁹ If Van Velzen experienced any peace during this time, it did not last long, for just seven years into his professorship, another controversy was brewing.

The year was 1861. Two Secessionist ministers, Revs. K. J. Pieters and J. R. Kreulen introduced into the churches the doctrine of a conditional covenant, teaching that God is gracious to all baptized children of believers. They added that the fulfillment of the covenant depended on the faith of these baptized children, thus allowing for the possibility that these children could fall away from Christ and lose their salvation if they did not believe.¹⁰

Van Velzen, in an outstanding demonstration of his orthodoxy, refuted the abominable covenant doctrine of these two heretics. Writing in the church magazine, *De Bazuin*, Van Velzen spoke of an eternal covenant of redemption between God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ "concerning the elect." He argued that this covenant is the "origin" and "ground" of the covenant of grace in history, so that this latter covenant is with the elect only. As Van Velzen declared: "By the power of this covenant, the Lord Jesus is the one who carries out the salvation of the elect."¹¹

Moreover, Van Velzen condemned the grace of a conditional covenant as a "common and powerless grace," because it made God's word of no effect (Romans 9:6).¹² This is significant! Van Velzen clearly saw that the doctrine of a conditional covenant is no less than Arminianism. Even more striking is the fact that he referred to the promise in this covenant as "common grace," and condemned it!

The fires of this controversy produced a refined understanding of God's covenant. The Lord was pleased to use Simon Van Velzen to defend the doctrine of an unconditional covenant, not only for that moment in church history, but also for the future, so that the seed he planted would sprout in the next century, when the covenant controversy raged once more. In 1953, God

9 Postma.

10 David J. Engelsma, "Covenant Doctrine of the Fathers of the Secession," *Standard Bearer*, Volume 84, Number 7, 150-151.

11 Ibid, 151.

12 MA, \S1.

5 Adrian Van Koevering, *Legends of the Dutch*. Zeeland Record Co., Inc., 1960, 48, 49.

6 Bruins and Swierenga, *Family Quarrels*, 31.

7 Ibid, 32.

8 Ibid, 33-34.

caused the seed of Van Velzen's teachings to come to fruition in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Union with the *Doleantie*

As has been seen already, Van Velzen's theology did not fit in with the theology of most of the ministers of the *Afscheiding*. Therefore, it is no surprise that, shortly after the formation of Abraham Kuyper's *Doleantie* (Aggrieved) churches in 1886, Van Velzen sought ecclesiastical fellowship between them and his own denomination. Kuyper's churches were much more doctrinally solid than the churches of the *Afscheiding*, especially in that they rejected the well-meant offer of the gospel and emphasized sovereign, particular grace. To this, Van Velzen was strongly attracted.

The inevitable marriage of the two denominations took place in 1892. Van Velzen was present at their first joint Synod as the last surviving father of the Secession. Since he was too old to speak, his son spoke on his behalf, expressing to all in attendance that this union was the "fulfillment of the great wish of [his father's] heart," for he desired that "all God's children might be able to live together as brothers."¹³

In spite of this seemingly ideal union, it must be remembered that Van Velzen did not agree with Kuyper on everything, particularly Kuyper's view of the role of government.¹⁴ It is also certain that Van Velzen wanted nothing to do with Kuyper's cultural common grace. Van Velzen was a strong believer in the Antithesis—the spiritual separation of the church and the world. Kuyper, on the other hand, wanted to bridge this spiritual gap and engage the modern culture. In the end, Kuyper's view won out, as Van Velzen's age prevented him from exerting a significant influence in the new denomination.

Nevertheless, Van Velzen rejoiced. The cause of sovereign grace had prevailed. God had preserved him

13 Book Review of *Secession, Doleantie, and Union: 1834-1892*, by Hendrik Bouma, Tr. Theodore Plantinga. *Standard Bearer* Volume 72, Issue 9.

14 protestant.nl/geschiedenis/portretgalerij/velzen-simon-van.

through a long and difficult life, giving him the strength to see this great day. Having been granted the wish of his heart, Van Velzen lived another four years before God called him home in April of 1896 at the age of eighty-six.¹⁵

A Man of God

Simon Van Velzen has been criticized for his difficult and unbending personality in church affairs. While it cannot be denied that Van Velzen was often stubborn, his critics ought to remember that he was stubborn for a very righteous cause: the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation and the covenant. Although Van Velzen certainly had weaknesses (as we all do), God was nevertheless

pleased to use this weak and sinful man for the glory of his name. Van Velzen did not decide on his own to stand up for the truth—God worked it in him, even as he had ordained Van Velzen from all eternity for this purpose.

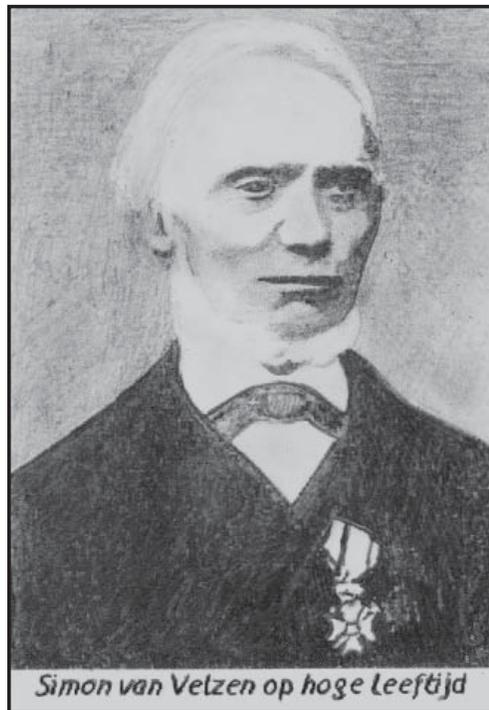
Van Velzen could defend God's sovereign grace as he did because he knew himself to be a recipient of it. Just as every child of God does, he loathed his sinfulness, and detested the idea that any of his works, even the very best of them, could earn his salvation. He confessed that salvation is all of grace—and so do we.

In the back of our Psalter is found the Chorale Section, which consists of some of the best-loved Dutch Psalms translated into English. Van Velzen was surely familiar with these songs and must have held them very dear to his heart. In one

of these Psalms, we sing of the wonder of God's grace as Van Velzen confessed and defended it. It is the confession of every believer:

Thou, O Jehovah, in Thy sovereign grace, Hast saved my soul from death and woe appalling, Dried all my tears, secured my feet from falling. Lo, I shall live and walk before Thy face. (Psalter 426, stanza 5) Thanks be to God for this truth—and for raising up men like Simon Van Velzen to defend it! ❖

Andrew is a member of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



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:
Nicholas Steven, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel Dykstra—Byron Center, MI

Tyler Joseph, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Boverhof—Byron Center, MI

Ethan Timothy, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matt denHartog—Faith, MI

James Tull, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan Whiteley—First, MI

Isaac Neal, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mitchell Kamps—Grandville, MI

Nolan Douglas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chad Corson—Grandville, MI

Tyler Matthew, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brent Tanis—Hope, MI

Holland Kate, daughter of Frank and Gina Hiskes—Peace, IL

Drew Anthony, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mike Pols—Southeast, MI

Elaina Nichole, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. John Flikkema—Southeast, MI

Jack Christian, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason Jabaay—Southeast, MI

Vada Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ralph Medema—South Holland, IL

Ruby Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dan VanUffelen—South Holland, IL

Kendra Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Marc Kuiper—Southwest, MI

Connor Jaycob, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron Gunnink—Trinity, MI

Samuel Isaac, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matt Dykstra—Trinity, MI

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:

Nathan Tanis—Hope, MI

Nathan Maassen—Hull, IA

The Spider in the Corner

"Help! Help!" yelled Amy from the basement. Her brother Caleb ran down the steps. "What's the matter?"

"A spider! See him there in the corner?" Amy shook with fear. "Kill it! Kill it! Spiders have poison!" Her voice turned into a shriek.

Caleb put his hands in his pockets and stepped near the corner. Cobwebs hung from wall to wall, draping the area in wispy, dusty curves. The spider scurried to the protection of a crack in one of the walls. Caleb smiled.

"He's just a little spider. He can live here too," he said.

"Oh, no, he can't!" said Amy, and she ran upstairs. "Mom, Mom..."

Caleb heard the footsteps of his sister searching for Mom in the rooms above him, but he stayed to watch the little creature as it came out of hiding.

"Yep, you have eight legs," he said, "and I can even see your eyes." Caleb shook his head. "I don't know why Amy is so afraid of you. You're not that scary looking."

The spider grabbed hold of its web and spun some more sticky strands for his trap. Caleb scratched his forehead and put his hand on his chin. "You've got a nice web, but I don't know how many insects live down here for you to catch."

"Oh, you'd be surprised," Mom said as she stepped off the stairs with a broom in her hand. "Now, where is that pesky spider?"



"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

Caleb frowned. He couldn't hide the webs. In moments his mother swept the corner clean.

Caleb looked to see if the spider might still be safe in the crack of the wall, but he couldn't find it. The spider was gone.

"But Mom, I wanted to watch him."

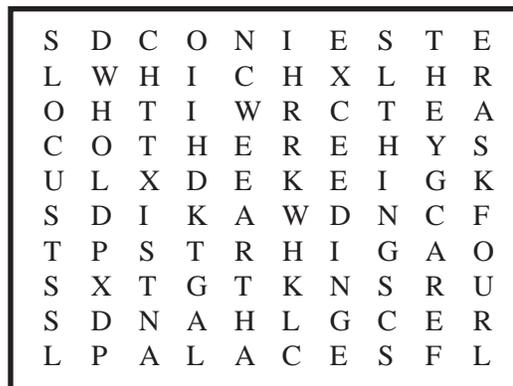
Mother took the broom to the rest of the corners of the basement as well. "Don't worry, Caleb," she said, "there'll be more. We live in quite a palace you know. I guess that makes you a king! Or at least a prince," she laughed.

Caleb cocked his head to one side and silently muttered, "What is she talking about?"

He shook his head and went upstairs. He started looking in the corners of other rooms. Whatever Mom meant, he knew she was right—there'd be more spiders to watch.

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

"There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: the ants...the conies...the locusts...the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces." Proverbs 30:24-28.



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"

Hosted by Hudsonville PRC

See You There!