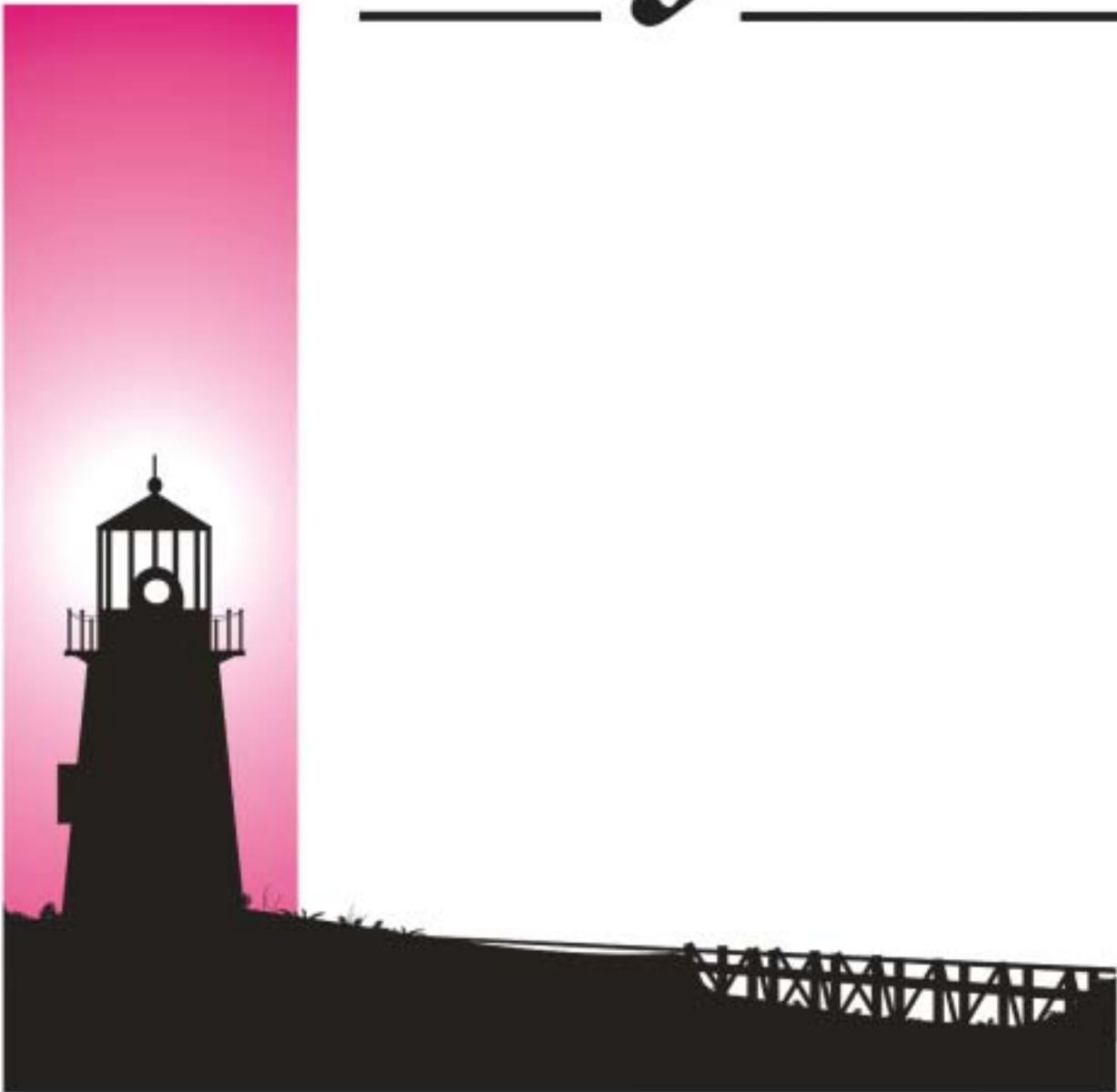


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God Has His Way in the Storm (1)



by Aaron J. Cleveland

We, as Reformed believers, confess along with our Belgic Confession in Article 2, that God makes Himself known “by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, His power and divinity.” This is the truth as revealed in all of Scripture, and found specifically in Romans 1:20. The article goes on to state that all of these things which surround man in creation “are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse.” We also confess that this testimony of creation is not sufficient to bring man to a saving knowledge of God. This, of course, is only possible as the creed states “by His holy and divine Word.” Nevertheless, it is important to maintain that all men will appear before God in the day of judgment without excuse because God’s “eternal power and Godhead” are clearly seen from His creation and governance of the universe. This is the truth contained in the latter half of Romans 1. Another passage which helps explain this truth is Acts 17:22-31. Paul here is speaking to the superstitious men of Mars’ hill, who had erected an altar “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.” Paul begins speaking with the words, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth...” (vs. 24). In the next verse Paul utters the words, “seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (vs. 25). From this passage it is evident that all men are surrounded by the clear testimony of creation that God is God and that He must be worshipped (vs. 27). Man can see, hear, touch, and taste this in the creation that surrounds him.

Even more striking is the fact that every man has the works of the law written in his heart. Every man is accused by his conscience when he commits evil. Romans 2:14,15 sets forth this truth, where we read, “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.” Not only is man surrounded by the eternal power of God in creation, but man’s conscience also accuses him when he refuses to worship God and disobeys God’s law. The unbelieving man seeks to cover and corrupt this revelation of God in the creation and His governance of it. While he may admit that there is a “supreme being” mysteriously at work in the universe, he continues to put forth all of his energies into denying the God that declares His glory in the heavens and His handywork in the firmament (Psalm 19). Unbelieving man, to varying degrees, sinks into the darkness of his corruption of the truth of God. Those whom God has given over to a reprobate mind (Romans 1:28-32) become mired in the terrible pit of destruction. Even though they know the judgment of God against them, they continue in the way of rebellion and take pleasure when others follow them into the pit (vs. 32).

However, God does not allow them to go through this life without sufficient warning of the judgment to come. Do not doubt that wicked men live in terror of the day of the Lord. In fact, those men who are

the greatest despisers of God, fear His impending judgment the most. There are many examples of this in the Bible. Read of the account of Nabal in I Samuel 25. Wicked men, who can be so bold in their opposition to God, are smitten in a moment by the mere thought of His judgment. John Calvin, in his Institutes, points this out in the section "The Knowledge of God The Creator." In book 1, chapter 3, sections 1 & 2, he points out that man cannot remove from his mind "an awareness of divinity." Everywhere he looks, even within his own thoughts, he cannot escape it. To varying degrees wicked men seek to suppress this awareness within themselves. Some are even so bold in their foolish unbelief as to say, "There is no God" (Psalm 53). Yet as Calvin writes,

he who is the boldest despiser of God is of all men the most startled at the rustle of a falling leaf [cf. Lev. 26:36]. Whence does this arise but from the vengeance of divine majesty, which strikes their consciences all the more violently the more they try to flee from it? Indeed, they seek out every subterfuge to hide themselves from the Lord's presence, and to efface it again from their minds. But in spite of themselves they are always entrapped. Although it may sometimes seem to vanish for a moment, it returns at once, and rushes in with new force. If for these there is any respite from anxiety of conscience, it is not much different from the sleep of drunken or frenzied persons, who do not rest peacefully even while sleeping because they are continually troubled with dire and dreadful dreams. The impious themselves therefore exemplify the fact that some conception of God is ever alive in all men's minds.

It is interesting to consider the truth of God's revelation in creation and the fact that wicked man seeks to cover up and corrupt the truth of God, even though his conscience accuses him. God uses many means to strike fear into the hearts of wicked men. God so governs the creation that it becomes the means by which he reveals undeniably to wicked man that He alone is God. One way in which God does this is by means of violent storms, what carnal man calls, "natural disasters." Storms, and their particular elements of clouds, lightning, thunder, wind and rain, are interesting to consider in the light of God's Word.

A believer observes a storm in a much different way than an unbeliever. The believer confesses that the Lord is a "refuge from the storm" (Isaiah 25:4). The unbeliever, when he is in the midst of a storm experiences that "God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserveth wrath for His enemies. The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath His way in the whirlwind

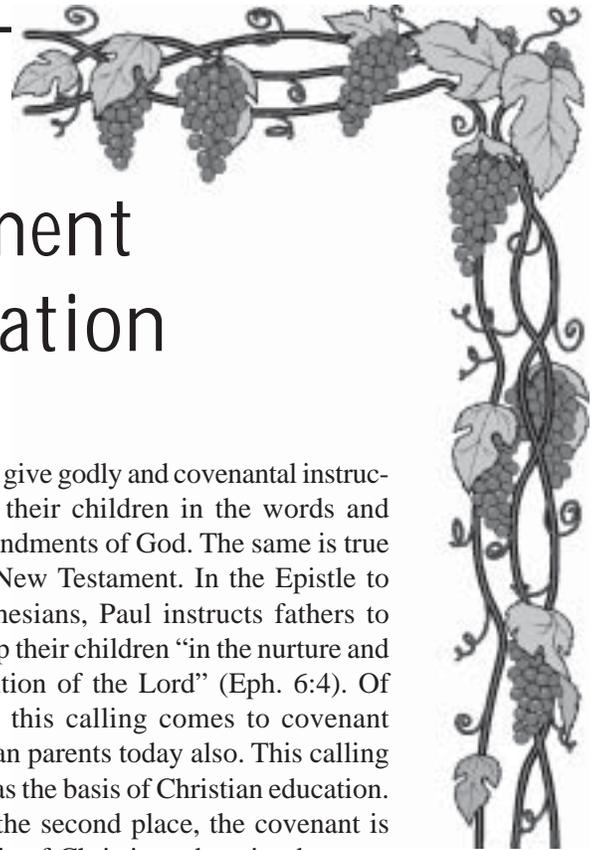
Not only do the wind, rain, and lightning speak of different aspects of God's judgment, but they also picture comforting truths for the children of God.

and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet" (Nahum 1: 2-8). When one goes through God's Word, it is profitable to note the significance of storms in Scripture and how each element of the storm pictures a different aspect of God's power. Not only do the wind, rain, and lightning speak of different aspects of God's judgment, but they also picture comforting truths for the children of God.

The verses are too numerous to list which speak of God's sovereign control of storms. Psalm 135:7 will suffice. Here we read, "He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He maketh lightnings for the rain; He bringeth the wind out of His treasuries." While many in the world may prefer to use exclusively scientific explanations for the formation of storms, the believer says first, "The Lord reigneth." There is nothing wrong about talking of storms in terms of atmospheric pressure, dew points,

and the jet stream, but we must acknowledge that God sovereignly controls all of the forces by which storms are made. Further, we must confess that God does not use storms in some arbitrary manner which serves no purpose. As we learned from Nahum 1:3, God has “His way in the whirlwind and in the storm.” God not only has His way in the physical storm itself and the destruction that it may bring, but God has His way in a spiritual sense in the storm. Throughout the Old Testament, God accomplished His purpose of the preservation of His people by means of rain, wind, lightning, thunder, and clouds. Next time, D.V., we will look at each of these elements and see the spiritual truths that they picture. ❖

Fruitful Branches



Parental Involvement In Christian Education

by Rodney Kleyn

1999 scholarship essay.

Parental involvement in every aspect of the Christian education of children is crucially important. It is so crucially important because of the covenant. Christian education is covenant education. It is also important because Christian education, properly understood, is parental education. Christian schools are parent-controlled schools. Christian education in these schools is done on behalf of and in the place of parental instruction and education. It is a part of parental instruction.

Christian education is covenant education. This means that the covenant that God makes with believers and their seed is the basis for Christian education. The covenant is such a basis for Christian education in two ways. First, Christian education is the covenant responsibility of parents. That is, because of the covenant, parents are called by God to give Christian education to their children. When God spoke to his covenant people in the Old Testament he told them, “And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Duet. 6:6-7). It was the duty of the covenant people of God in the Old Testa-

ment to give godly and covenantal instruction to their children in the words and commandments of God. The same is true in the New Testament. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul instructs fathers to bring up their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Of course, this calling comes to covenant Christian parents today also. This calling stands as the basis of Christian education.

In the second place, the covenant is the basis of Christian education because it is through this Christian education that covenant children grow up into mature young Christians. That is, it is in the sphere of the Christian day school that the covenant child grows up and learns to live a Christian life. There he receives the influences and instruction that bring him to the point of Christian maturity. Of course, this happens in the home and under the preaching of the gospel in the church as well, but it is in the school that the Christian child comes into the most contact with God’s world, and it is there that he learns how to live in God’s world. At the Christian school, he also makes Christian friends. At the Christian school he learns to walk in love with his neighbors. At the Christian school he learns to submit to authority outside of

the home. The many influences of the Christian school serve to bring him to Christian maturity. The aim of the covenantal instruction of parents is to bring their covenant children to such a level of Christian maturity that they can confess their faith before the church. This aim is accomplished by means of the Christian school. Thus, the aim of the instruction of the covenant is the basis of Christian education.

In accord with the fact that Christian education is covenant education, Christian education must be understood essentially as parental education, that is, because the covenant is the basis of Christian education, that education must be seen as being in the place of the parents. This is an old principle that has governed Christian education since the time of the Reformation. At that time Christian education was described by the Latin phrase, *in loco parentis*, that is, in the place of the parents. This principle does not mean that parents can be freed of the parental responsibilities that they have toward their children for 6 or 7 hours a day and that they can let the school fill their place. Instead, it means that the parents associate together and find a like-minded believer who can instruct their children in certain areas better than they themselves can do. The Christian school, then, is not a lessening of the parental responsibility to bring up the children of the covenant to the best of their ability, but instead, it is a fulfillment of that responsibility. Cov-

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enant parents send their children to Christian schools because they believe that this is the best way in which they can fulfill their covenant responsibilities toward God concerning the instruction of their children in the words and commands of God. In the Christian school, fathers bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The application of this principle means that parents should be wholly involved in the covenant Christian

education of their children. Parents of children should organize the Christian schools. Parents of children should serve on school boards that govern the running of the school. Parents of children should support the schools financially. Parents of the children should decide on the curriculum of the school. Christian schools ought to be parent-controlled schools.

This principle carries over into the daily life of the parents in relation to the Christian education of their children also. Because the Christian school serves in the place of the parents, the parents take a keen interest in the day-to-day instruction of their children in the schools. They get to know the teachers of their children. They learn their children's lessons with them, so that they can know that the instruction is godly. They help their children with their homework, because they know that the education that their children receive is primarily their responsibility. They see the schoolteachers as their assistants in the instruction of their children, and thus, they follow up on the instruction of the schoolteachers by reinforcing that instruction in their children. They volunteer to assist in the instruction of their children in the school.

Above all else, the principle that Christian education is in the place of the parents means for the parents that they see to it that their children are taught in the things of God. They see to this in their own homes, but they also see to it that this is the emphasis and controlling factor of the education of their children. In the end of the day they don't care so much that their children do well in school, but instead they care that their children are taught to love the Scriptures, and to learn the Scriptures. This is the chief concern of the parents. They want their children to be well versed in the words and commands of Jehovah, their covenant God.

Covenant parents are keenly involved in the Christian education of their children because this is what they have vowed to do. At the baptism of their covenant children, believing parents vow to see their children "instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of (their) power." Believing parents believe that Christian schools are their covenant responsibility, and thus they devote the utmost of their power to the establishment and maintenance of these schools. The Christian education of their children becomes their life. ❖

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

A Sudden Change

by J.P. de Klerk

Wies van Balen was glad for the summer holidays in Bussum (in the center of The Netherlands). She was a sportive girl, who was good with tennis, swimming, basketball, cycling and running. Her energy was amazing. This morning she left the house already before breakfast.

Mother asked, “Would you wash the dishes for me today, Wies? I have such a lot to prepare in the kitchen for father’s birthday tomorrow.”

“But Mum, it is the first day of my holidays.... Well, I’ll think about it.”

It was not that Wies was not a serious girl. She was the best in the catechism class. But she felt like a lamb in the spring. She had promised two girlfriends to go cycling with them and pay a visit to a cheese farm.

So, she went with her bicycle to the main road, but suddenly she saw an old lady standing next to a firestake

at the the corner. She wept, and at her feet lay a bunch of flowers.

Wies stopped and went to her. She put her bike against the fire alarm and asked: “Madam, can I do something for you?”

The lady shook her head, wiping her eyes with a handkerchief. Then she asked Wies: “How old are you, young lady?”

“Seventeen, Madam.”

“You see, I came here today because a year ago my seventeen year old son was killed by a speeding car with a drunk driver. He was waiting for the last bus. Perhaps you think it is silly to lay these flowers here, and maybe you are right, but I wanted to do something today. You see, I have no other children and my husband died two years ago. I am not a heathen, but I am not a perfect Christian either, and I felt weak sitting at home looking at old photographs. Do you understand what I mean, young lady?”

“Yes, Madam, well...I think I do. Nobody is perfect, but God is stronger than we are, and He knows what has happened here.”

“Thank you,” said the lady. Then the bus came and she left.

Wies took her bike and went back home.

“Mum! I am back home in the kitchen! I will do the dishes!”

And that was not the only thing she did. She cleaned the floor, vacuumed the whole house, set the table, polished the Sunday shoes of her father and her two elder brothers, emptied the wastepaper baskets into the rubbish bin, and baked pancakes.

Later that night, she told her mother what had happened. ❖

J.P. de Klerk is an author and journalist from Ashhurst, New Zealand.



Seek Him that Made Orion

by Mike Feenstra

Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion...The LORD is His Name. Amos 5:8

Everything was going well for Israel. The people were building houses of hewn stone and planting vineyards in their fields. The armies were winning battle after battle under the leadership of King Jeroboam II. Although the nation had suffered under the Syrians in the rule of Jehoahaz, we read that under Jeroboam II the nation of Israel recovered Hamath and even took Damascus! It certainly was a golden age of physical prosperity.

In these circumstances, God sent His prophet Amos out of the fields of Tekoa. Through Amos, God decreed that a word be spoken against Israel. We read, “Hear ye this word which I take up against you, even a lamentation, O house of Israel” (Amos 5:1). From a physical point of view, many in Israel thought that it certainly was not time for lamentation, for Israel was prosperous! Furthermore, they “served God” in solemn assemblies, in offerings, and in songs. Therefore, they did not want to hear Amos’ warnings of judgment. Rather, they attempted to silence him and told him to prophesy no more among them (Amos 7).

However, God would have nothing of their hypocrisies. We read in Amos 5:21, “I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.” Israel did not thank God for saving them by the hand of Jeroboam II (II Kings 14:27). Therefore, God pronounced judgement upon them: “But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the Lord, whose Name is the God of hosts” (Amos 5:26, 27).

In addition to the judgment decreed in Amos 5, God also issues the command to repent and believe. In verse four we read, “For thus saith the Lord unto the house of

Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live.” The reason for this is given in verse eight where God says that they must seek Him because He is the God who made all of the creation. You will note that in verse eight, the words “Seek Him” are in italics. This means that these words are not in the original Hebrew. Nevertheless, I believe the translation stands. Amos declares to Israel: “Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion!”

Israel had to hear this warning because of their idolatry and image worship. However, of interest to us is Amos’ rebuke against the worship of the stars by the children of Israel. Did you notice that in Amos 5:26? The worship of the heavenly bodies is a very old sin. Certainly Solomon was right when he said that there is nothing new under the sun. This sin even appears today. The modern term for it is astrology. Since this article is to be on the study of the heavens from the spectacles of Scripture, I want to clearly distinguish between astrology and astronomy. Astrology is the superstitious belief that somehow the position of the stars affects human events. This ought to be rejected by us. For example, none of us should read or make use of the daily horoscope in the newspaper.

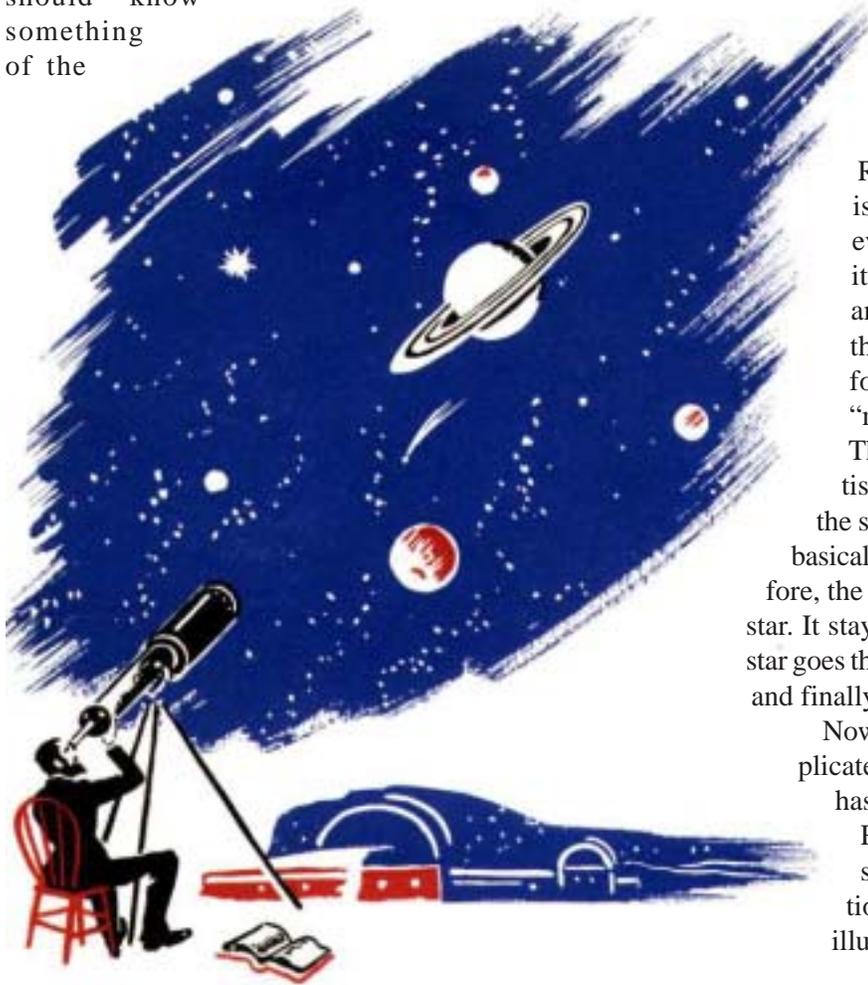
The study of astronomy is completely different. Astronomy is the science of the celestial bodies. For example, astronomers seek to find out properties of different planets and stars, such as their magnitude, composition and distance from the Earth. Therefore, the Christian can make use of astronomy provided he or she views its findings through the spectacles of Scripture. In fact, Calvin maintained that astronomy is a worthy study. Significantly, he refers to it in favorable terms in his commentary on Genesis 1:16. We read: “this study [of astronomy] is not to be reprobated, nor this science to be condemned, because some frantic persons are wont boldly to reject whatever is unknown to them. For as-

tronomy is not only pleasant, but also very useful to be known: it cannot be denied that this art unfolds the admirable wisdom of God.”¹

However, there must be an extreme caution here because the findings of modern astronomy are full of evolutionism. This basically is the idolatry of creature worship, because the evolutionist finds the origin of life in “nature” itself. To those who espouse such beliefs the command of Amos rings out! “Seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion!”

I’d like to show in the rest of the article how modern astronomy attacks the record of Holy Scripture. I want to do this because our young people will run into these arguments if they take science courses either at a secular college or at a Christian college which teaches theistic evolution. Furthermore, I think that at times we focus so much on battling the false teachings of evolutionism in geology and biology to the detriment of our battle against the false teachings of astronomy. Third, I want to do this because I believe that the

Reformed Christian should know something of the



wonder of God’s creation of the heavens. Those who have seen the beauty and splendor of the numerous galaxies and nebulae certainly know whereof I speak. By refuting the attacks of evolutionism in astronomy, we can see more clearly the glory of God in the heavens.

The first attack against Holy Scripture is rooted in the theory of the Big Bang. This false teaching, you will remember, maintains that the universe began when all of the matter in the universe was more or less in one dense mass. From this mass, the universe began to expand in an explosion called the Big Bang. Among other so-called proofs, scientists base this claim on measurements that the more distant a galaxy is, the faster it is going. Their conclusion is this: If we use astronomical formulas to find the distance to the galaxy and divide that by the velocity of the galaxy, we can find how long the galaxy has been traveling. The answer, according to scientists, is about 9 billion years.² Do you see what they are assuming?

The second attack comes from the false teaching that the age of the earth can be computed using the evolutionary track of stars. However, the theory of star evolution is different from the theory of the evolution of living things because stars, of course, are non-living. Rather, according to scientists, star evolution is the theory that over their “lifetime,” almost every star changes in temperature and luminosity according to a predictable pattern. For example, an evolutionary “track” for a star about the size of the sun would go something like the following. First, the star would start out as a “main sequence” star, that is, a “normal star.” Then, after millions or billions of years (scientists say that it depends on the mass—the bigger the star, the shorter the “lifetime”), the star begins basically to run out of nuclear fuel (hydrogen). Therefore, the star cools and expands to become a red giant star. It stays this way for 1 billion years. After this, the star goes through various stages until it becomes a nebula and finally a white dwarf.

Now, if you think that all of this sounds quite complicated, you are correct. In fact, not one scientist has ever seen a star go through the entire cycle!

Rather, through convoluted computer models, scientists think that they can piece the evolutionary track together by looking at stars which illustrate the different stages of the track. A very

generalized example of this would be to trace the growth characteristics of humans not by watching a human through his or her lifetime, but rather by studying a diverse group of humans on one day in an airport. If you would see that one seventh of the people were children, you could assume (they say), that humans spend one-seventh of their life as a child. Nevertheless, scientists are so foolish to assume that since there are white dwarf stars or stars at other stages, the universe must be at least 12 billion years old. What folly this is! Do you see a pattern emerging?

The pattern I refer to is that both of these false teachings are based on assumptions that are blatantly contrary to Scripture. That is, both examples assume ahead of time that the creation's processes have been working exactly the same way for millions of years. This philosophy is called uniformitarianism. How should we reject this philosophy when we hear it in our college science classes? This is an important question because we can easily argue with the evolutionists on their own ground. That is, we try to disprove their claims using science. Although we may be able to corner them on a small point with such arguments, the fact remains that we will have to keep up with numerous "new discoveries."

Over against this, I believe that we should persuade men by using the Holy Scriptures. How do we do this? First, we must confess that our belief in a literal six-day creation is based only on faith. This is the clear teaching of Hebrews 11:1-3 which says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Secondly, it is important that we use texts that explicitly reject uniformitarianism. II Peter 3:3-7 is one of those texts:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. 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.

The point is that the Earth perished in the Flood. This is the death-blow to uniformitarianism because this philosophy maintains that the Earth has remained ex-

actly the same for billions of years. At this point, you may ask, "Why do many people hold to such a theory?" The reason is that they are willingly ignorant, that is, they willingly deny that God sent a worldwide flood and that He created the worlds.

In my view, these arguments also apply to the findings of astronomy. Our calling is to believe by faith that God made the heavens. This gives great joy and comfort to us because we know that God controls the stars. They are not independent of God as the astrologers have to say. As a result, we can study the heavens without fear but rather with awe. Furthermore, the doctrine of God's sovereignty implies that we do not have to be scared of science altogether. We can use science to gain useful information. Some of this information causes us to bow in fear and reverence. I have in mind the astounding orderliness of the rotation of the planets and the infinite vastness of the universe. This inspires us to praise God and confess, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:4). The answer is that He, out of His mercy, has elected us to be conformed unto the image of His Son. Because of this, He regenerates us so that we believe in Him. Therefore, when we see the awesome constellation of Orion in the southern sky of winter, we answer the call of God in the prophet Amos. We seek Him that made Orion. Jehovah is His Name!

¹The context of this quote is Calvin's explanation of the "greater light" and the "lesser light." The problem, according to Calvin, was this: "Moses makes two great luminaries; but the astronomers prove by conclusive reasons, that the star of Saturn, which, on account of its great distance, appears the least of all, is greater than the moon." What is the answer to this problem? Calvin states, "Here lies the difference; Moses wrote in a popular style things which, without instruction, all ordinary persons, endued with common sense, are able to understand; but astronomers investigate with great labour whatever the sagacity of the human mind can comprehend." What follows is what I quoted in the body of the article.

²The scientists also falsely "reason" that since those galaxies are billions of light years away, the light that we see from them is billions of years old. Therefore, according to modern scientists, the universe is at least that old. ❖

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The Song of Zion

A Psalter-Psalm Devotional of Praise to Our Sovereign, Covenant God

by Skip Hunter

July 1 Read I Samuel 19:18-21

Psalm 143:9-10 In verse ten we have the words, “Teach me to do thy will.” We should all take heed to these words and make them part of our daily prayers. By nature we do not wish to do Jehovah’s will. In fact by nature we wish to do the opposite of Jehovah’s will. The psalmist knew, and we must learn this as well, that God’s way is best for us. God’s spirit is good the verse says. Is this our testimony? Let us learn the will of God. Let us walk in that will. Let us bow before Jehovah’s teaching as He leads us into the land which flows with milk and honey where we will receive our eternal reward with the whole church triumphant. As we prepare to enter God’s house tomorrow, let us go to sleep with this prayer on our lips, “Teach me to do thy will.” Sing Psalters 389:5, 390:3, and 391:2-3.

July 2 Read Psalm 143

Psalm 143:11-12 In verses seven through twelve of this Psalm we have a series of pleas from the Psalmist. There are ten of these petitions. Take the time this Lord’s Day to find them and ponder their meaning. Do this personally and also with your families. The last five words of the Psalm give the reason why David could make these petitions. He knew that he was the servant of Jehovah. Only one who depends on a master can plead for such help. Is this our plea? Do we confess that we are God’s servants? Did we worship that way today? Do we live that way throughout the week? Let us think about being a servant, and then let us seek the help of our Master the almighty God. Only in that way can we find the good life here on this earth, but especially in our heavenly home. Sing Psalters 389:6 and 391:4.

July 3 Read Psalm 144

Psalm 144:1-2 In this Psalm of praise, David blesses Jehovah Who is everything to him. David has experienced much in his life. Throughout his life David has learned that in all things he must trust Jehovah. David acknowledges that he is a man of war. Even in this he knows that he has done all things only with God’s help. It was not the man David who “killed his ten thousands;” it was Jehovah who had made that possible. Do we, in the station and calling that God has placed us, acknowledge Jehovah as the One who gives to us the abilities to carry out that station? Do we daily give credit only to God? We must do this, you know. To do anything else is to claim that we have abilities of ourselves. In claiming that, we would claim that we have a part in our salvation. This we may never do. Let us daily praise God who doeth all things in and through us. Sing Psalter 392:1.

July 4 Read Hebrews 2:1-10

Psalm 144:3-4 David continues in his confession that he is nothing and God is everything. Here we see the same words as used in the familiar Psalm 8. These words were repeated in the book of Hebrews as its writer prepares the defense that Christ, alone, is the source of salvation. David looked back at his life; from man’s point of view it looked illustrious; from his enlightened eyes he saw it for what it really was: nothing! Can we do this? Do we do this? Do we claim credit for our accomplishments and even for our salvation? If we do, we are sadly mistaken. We are making ourselves puffed up with pride and are in danger of falling as those who have committed the dreadful sin of pride. Let us confess that man is nothing, emptiness. Let us fall upon our knees now and daily and give all glory to God. Sing Psalter 392:2.

July 5 Read Isaiah 64:1-8

Psalm 144:5-6 David had many enemies in this life. Just contemplate the account of Samuel as he ran from Saul and later became king. But David realizes that these were not just his enemies; more importantly he realized that these were God’s enemies. He understood that these men were the agents of Satan, who were trying to rid the world of the church and to prevent Christ from coming to save His people from their sin. Therefore He prayed this imprecatory prayer for deliverance. Do we use this language today? Are we so jealous for the cause of Christ in this world that we pray such a prayer? We should and we must for this is the will of God. Sing Psalter 392:3.

July 6 Read Judges 5:24-31

Psalm 144:7-8 David continues his plea for help against those who war against him and God. Now he gives the basis for that plea. The wicked are fountains of lies and deceit. They constantly take God’s Word and deceitfully use it. We, too, must be zealous about God’s Word. Like David we must be offended at the misuse and mistreatment of that Word. Are we? Do we, as a course of habit, express our dislike of the misuse of God’s Word, name, attributes, and works? This is unpopular, you know. We, in America, like to claim freedom of speech in all things. This misuse of God’s things is not covered under the freedom of speech. Let us use God’s Word correctly in our lives and let us be jealous for that Word in our daily lives. Sing Psalter 392:4.

July 7 Read Revelation 5:6-14

Psalm 144:9-10 In gratitude for his deliverance, David declares that he will sing a new song of thanksgiving unto God. It

is a new song because it is not polluted with man's sin. It is God's song written for His praise. These verses show to us a correct interpretation of the Heidelberg Catechism on this point. We must have knowledge of our sin. We must confess that our deliverance is only through the blood of Christ. And we must give gratitude for such deliverance. This gratitude is not legislated by man's ordinances; this gratitude comes from a thankful new heart given by God. Let us praise God daily for our salvation and let us do it with the songs that He has given to us. We need to use no other words! Sing Psalter 392:5.

July 8 Read Nehemiah 13:23-31

Psalm 144:11 In today's text we find reference to a problem that the church of all ages has experienced. There are those in the church who are strange because they have no use for God. In today's reading, Nehemiah found the same problem in Jerusalem after the captivity. This problem, too, is common in the church of all ages. There are "strangers" there brought in when men and women of the church marry men and women in the world. True, God can bring someone into the church from the outside. Think of Rahab or Ruth. But this is the exception not the rule. God saves His people in the line of continued generations. Parents, pray for your children that they do not bring strange children into God's church. Sing Psalter 392:6.

July 9 Read III John 1-11

Psalm 144:12 Why must we keep those who speak a mixed language out of the congregation? The answer is given in the beautiful words of today's text. We do this for our children's sake. We are not isolationists. We are not elitists as some would claim. We are a people who must care for the covenant seed that God has given to us. As a farmer rids his farm of weeds so that the desired plants can have all the nutrients, the Church of Christ must make sure that her sons and daughters receive all the spiritual nutrients showered upon them by God. As a mason chips away all unneeded parts of a rock so that he can have the right one for his building, so must we chip away the pollution of sin out of our children's lives. This is an awesome calling. Let us pray for the grace to carry it out. Sing Psalter 393:1.

July 10 Read Leviticus 26:1-13

Psalm 144:13-14 When we do all that is possible to nurture the covenant seed, God will bless us with spiritual plenty. Even though the text speaks of physical things, we know that these are pictures of the spiritual. It is true that our physical lives are affected by our spiritual strength and weakness. But we must be concerned about the spiritual climate in the church and in our congregations. Why? Simply because it is the Church of Christ, and it is our duty to be jealous toward the body of Christ. To do anything but to care for our children in the best way possible is to cause the church to go into ruin. Root out those evils in our houses and in our lives that are damaging to God's children. Pray for the strength to bring those children up in the fear of Jehovah. In doing this God will bless us both in this life and in the life to come. Sing Psalter 393:2.

July 11 Read Psalm 144

Psalm 144:15 In the first verse of this chapter David speaks well of Jehovah and His works. In this final verse he declares that the people of God are blessed or happy in the way of their

keeping the Word of Jehovah. A happy church is not one which has a social program for every need that can be imagined. A happy church is not one whose order of worship is "up-to-date and meaningful." A happy church is one which brings its children up in the fear of the Lord. This church catechizes its children and young people diligently in God's Word. The parents and elders make sure that catechism as well as church is attended faithfully with no thought of skipping for some "good" reason. The happy church is one which loves God's Word and teaches its children to love God's Word. Is ours a happy people? If not, why not? When God is Lord over all things in our lives, we will be happy. We do not make Him Lord; He is Lord! And we must bow to Him in all that we do. Sing Psalter 393:3.

July 12 Read Psalm 145

Psalm 145:1-3 In these opening verses of this beautiful Psalm of David, we find David giving all glory to God. As we have said before, David had a life in which many men would like to boast. David accomplished many things which would land him in all sorts of halls of fame in this world. As David neared the end of his life, he saw that all of his accomplishments were little in comparison to the greatness of God. Children and young people, have you fallen prey to the philosophy of the world that you have to be number one in this life? If you have, reread these verses and reread them daily. Our greatness is nothingness. God's greatness is everything. Let this be our daily confession. Sing Psalters 394:1, 397:1, and 399:1.

July 13 Read Psalm 78:1-8

Psalm 145:4-5 Summer time! Parents, are you instructing your children? Catechism has recessed. We are in the middle of school summer vacation. Who is teaching the covenant seed? Is it the television? Is it some day care worker? Is it a baby sitter? Is it Satan? Parents, who is instructing your children this summer? We have much to teach our children about God. What better time to do it than when our children are not encumbered with the busyness of school and other activities. We need to tell the Bible stories to them. We need to show our children God's hand in nature. Are we making the most of our opportunities this summer? If not, why not? Sing Psalters 394:2, 397:2-3, and 399:2.

July 14 Read Acts 4:19-31

Psalm 145:6-8 We need to contemplate the truth of verse eight daily. Our sins rise up before God and in His righteous anger we should be destroyed in and because of our sin. But in His righteousness, God is also merciful. He loves us with a love that cannot be found on this earth. He is gracious to us poor sinners and gives to us eternal life with Him in heaven. As we busy ourselves this summer with all of our plans, let us stop and contemplate this truth. Then let us fall upon our knees and pray, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Sing Psalters 394:3 and 397:4, 5.

July 15 Read John 1:9-18

Psalm 145:9 One of the truths that we must teach our children is the goodness of God. This goodness extends to the whole creation as the whole creation goes about its calling to glorify God. Are we in the middle of drought? God is good! Has a dreadful storm ravaged our town? God is good! Have you seen the beautiful sunset? God is good. Even the lilies know the good-

ness of God. Even the sparrows are under His watchful eyes. God is good; of that there is no doubt. Are we teaching that goodness to our children? Are we teaching them about the ultimate goodness of God? That goodness, of course, is His great love for His people expressed in His sending His Son to die for their sins. God is good. What a truth! Sing Psalms 395:1 and 397:6.

July 16 Read Romans 8:19-27

Psalm 145:10-11 Do we confess the greatness and goodness of God to those around us? Our children must learn to do this even as they mingle with others. Our young people need to be guided to make public confession of faith before God and His church. The whole church must publicly confess God, His goodness, and His love in whatever place we are put in this life. This means that in the workplace we must rebuke those who sin. We must give God the glory when it is due to Him. Our children must learn to sing and listen to the songs of Zion and not of Satan as they are with their peers. They will not do this if they are instructed by those who do not confess every truth of God. We must open our mouths daily and in all places and speak about the glory of our great God. Pray for the grace to do that, and pray for your children as well. Sing Psalms 395:2, 397:7, and 399:3.

July 17 Read I Kings 10:1-13

Psalm 145:12 There are two accounts of a king of Israel or Judah showing his kingdom to a worldly monarch. Here we have Solomon's experience with the queen of Sheba. Later on Hezekiah shows his kingdom to ambassadors from Babylon. Christ mentions the Queen of Sheba's visit while He was on this earth. With this example He condemns those who do not believe Him. God reprimands Hezekiah because of his sin of pride. We, like Solomon, must speak of what God has done in our lives and not what we have done. We must make "I" a little used word in our vocabulary except when daily confessing our sins. Let us give God the glory due to His name. Sing Psalm 395:3.

July 18 Read Micah 4:1-7

Psalm 145:13 One truth that should afford us great comfort is that God's kingdom is everlasting. It has no beginning and no ending. Nothing can threaten its existence. No power, whether earthly or otherwise, can overthrow it. Satan attempted to do so throughout the Scriptures. But God always, by His power, said I am King. This is great comfort for the child of God. We need not fear anything that may happen upon this earth. As Paul in Romans 8 confesses, "nothing can separate us from the love of Christ." Let us hold on to these comforting words. Let us rest assured that nothing will harm us since our King's kingdom is everlasting. Sing Psalms 395:4 and 397:8

July 19 Read John 5:1-9

Psalm 145:14 The people of God in this life are often the weak in this world. We constantly fall either because of our sinful nature or because we are oppressed by those that hate the cause of Christ and His gospel. But each time we fall, we find our God picking us up and setting us on our feet once more. When we are oppressed in the world, He makes it possible for us to hold up our heads proudly and to say, "My God is Jeho-

vah." The prophets in the Old Testament knew this. The afflicted in Christ's day felt His personal healing hand upon them. This can be our confidence today as well. No matter how we are afflicted, God will hold us up. Let us make that part of our daily prayers to Him. Sing Psalm 396:1.

July 20 Read Matthew 6:25-34

Psalm 145:15-16 In this day of plenty, it is hard for us to look unto Jehovah for the fulfillment of our physical needs. Most of us have food enough for day, week, and even several months stored up in our houses. Most of us have much in the way of clothing. We have houses that protect us from all types of weather. Our physical bodies are cared for by doctors through means of modern medicine. But yet we must look upon our heavenly Father for all of our spiritual needs. He is the Giver of every good thing. He will supply all of our needs. Let us pray daily for our daily bread and wait upon the open hand of God for all things. Sing Psalms 396:2 and 398:1.

July 21 Read James 4:1-12

Psalm 145:17-18 It is the experience of the child of God that he has needs. These needs may be spiritual or they may be physical. Usually they are a combination of the two. Just as a child cries out in the night for his mother or father, the child of God will cry out in this night of sin for his heavenly Father. The earthly child has confidence that his parents will attend to his needs. He knows that mom or dad is just in the next room. The child of God can also have the same trust and confidence. His heavenly Father is always near to him and is always ready to help him. When the elect call upon God, He will help them because He is near. Let us rest in that confidence each day of our lives. Sing Psalm 396:3.

July 22 Read I John 5:12-21

Psalm 145:19 What is our heart's desire, people of God? Is it wealth, health, or earthly happiness? Do we desire the well-being of our children? Are we concerned about our last days on this earth before death closes our eyes? What is our desire? According to this text, the elect have a desire. This desire is very different from that of the wicked. Oh, we might share their desires at times, and our earthly desires might even overshadow our one true desire. We desire eternal bliss. This cannot be achieved by any thing that happens on this earth. There is nothing that we can do to achieve it. We know this quite well. But we need not despair. God is near unto us; He will hear our cries; and He will save us. What a beautiful truth and comfort this verse is! Meditate on it daily and through the night. Sing Psalms 396:4 and 398:2.

July 23 Read I Peter 1:3-12

Psalm 145:20 This verse is an example of the well-known Hebrew antithetical parallelism. This is a poetic device used quite often in the Psalms and in Proverbs. The second part of the verse provides a stark contrast to the first part. These two parts are absolute concepts. God will save the elect; God will destroy the wicked. There are only two kinds of people in this earth: elect and reprobate. Every human being is one or the other. God takes the elect to heaven; He condemns the wicked to hell. There is no other final destiny for any person in this life. Because these are two sure things, we can rejoice in them. We

rejoice in that God's word is sure, and that He will take us to our final glory. Let us ponder these things as we attend church and worship the sovereign God. Sing Psalter 396:5.

July 24 Read Psalm 145

Psalm 145:21 David has come full circle in this Psalm. He starts out by proclaiming that he will bless God for His greatness. Then he recounts many of these greatnesses in the Psalm. In this last verse he again says that he will bless God and he calls on others to do so as well. Is this what we do? Do we bless God publicly? Do we encourage and even command others to do so as well? This is our command in this life. Let us bless God from whom all blessings flow. Sing Psalters 396:6 and 398:3.

July 25 Read Psalm 146

Psalm 146:1-2 This is the first in a group of Psalms which is a doxology for the whole book of Psalms. Their theme is quite simple. Praise ye the LORD. Another way of saying this is Hallelujah! We might wonder why so much space is given over to this theme. But then we must remember Whom we are praising. Then as the psalmist states in verse 2, we realize that we must praise the Lord every day of our lives. Every breath which comes from our mouths must have Jehovah's praise in it. This is a foreign idea in this day and age of man-praising. We would rather praise others and especially ourselves than to praise God. As we study and meditate upon these Psalms, let us learn about the praise of our covenant God. Sing Psalters 400:1 and 401:1.

July 26 Read Ecclesiastes 3:16-22

Psalm 146:3-4 One of the first reasons for praising Jehovah is simple: who is man? Why should we praise him or even trust in him? Man is a creature whose days upon this earth are numbered. We cannot be sure that a man will be here the next day to help us. We cannot be sure that a man is even trustworthy since by nature he is not. God, on the other hand is eternal. He will always be here. He is trust in Himself. When He makes a promise, we can be assured that it will be carried out. Don't trust in man, people of God, trust in God, and you will never be disappointed. Sing Psalters 400:2 and 401:2.

July 27 Read Matthew 5:1-12

Psalm 146:5 Do you want happiness in this life? This is a question that is found in advertising. It is found on the lips of doctors of all types. It is found as the titles and themes of countless books and magazine articles. In this verse we find the formula for happiness. To be happy we must have God as our help. When God is our aid we will truly be blessed. We will be able to put our hope in something that will stand forever. This is not an uncertain hope, but rather it is a certain and sure hope. We will find true and blessed peace and happiness in this life when Jehovah is our God. Sing Psalter 400:3.

July 28 Read Genesis 1:1-13

Psalm 146:6 The next few verses of this Psalm explain who the God of our trust is. The psalmist first identifies Him as the Creator of all things. This is both basic and necessary. If we do not believe that God is the supreme Creator, we might as well give up immediately. To dismiss the truth of creation is to dismiss all truths. We see this truth in the words of Jeremiah 33:25-26: "Thus saith the Lord; if my covenant be not with day and

night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; Then I will cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them." Throw away the doctrine of creation as it is laid out in Scripture and you can throw away the rest of Scripture with it as well, including our salvation. It is that plain! Sing Psalter 400:4.

July 29 Read I Kings 17:8-16

Psalm 146:7-8 The next identification of our God is that He is Help of the helpless. In this world God has made many to be oppressed. This oppression can be caused by many things. It could be sin, physical disability, or affliction of men. No matter what the cause is; God is our help. We can trust in Him to deliver us from all manner of oppression. Now this deliverance may not be as miraculous as the widow of Zarephath. It may be that our deliverance may be the "no" that the apostle Paul received concerning the thorn in his flesh. But this we know, that God's grace is sufficient for us. Because of this we can trust in Him and trust that He will care for us in all circumstances in this life. The reason for His care upon us? It is simple: He loves us. Sing Psalters 400:5 and 401:3.

July 30 Read I Kings 17:17-24

Psalm 146:9 Once again we come upon antithetical parallelism. You remember what that is, do you not? If not, just go back a few days and read the explanation. The historical account that we have read the past two days fits well with these verses. This widow who was a Gentile had a hard life. She was a widow, she was poor, and eventually her son died. Into her life God brought Elijah and a word of grace. In seeing the miracles she tasted the goodness of God. There were many widows in her town, but she was special because she was chosen by God to taste of His grace. The others who trusted in Baal were turned upside down in their affliction, but this widow was set on high. Trust in Jehovah who cares for His people because He loves them. Sing Psalter 400:6.

July 31 Read Psalm 146

Psalm 146:10 This Psalm, as all others in this section, ends how it starts: "Praise ye the LORD." After reading this Psalm, is that your confession, people of God? Young people, are you willing to have the praise of Jehovah fill your mouths? Do you let the world of your friends know that Jehovah must receive the praise and not man. Have you turned off the man-boasting songs on your audio equipment and replaced them with God's praises? This is not just the psalmist's confession; it is his command as he was moved by the Holy Spirit to write this words. Praise Jehovah. Hallelujah to Him Who reigns forever and ever. Praise ye the LORD. Sing Psalters 400:7 and 401:4.

Psalter 272— Affliction and Appeal

by Beth De Vries

We return this month to a versification of Psalm 102. Last month we looked at the middle section of the Psalm (verses 12-22) where we found comfort in the deliverance of God from our afflictions. We now go backwards to look at the depth of affliction and sorrow. The comfort of this passage comes at the very outset with the truth that God hears His people when they pray.

There appear to be differing opinions of when this Psalm was written. Some suggest that it was written by one of the prophets either during the Babylonian captivity or immediately after, and others suggest that David may have written it during a very difficult time in his life. The author and time period are not really significant to us because it, as all Scripture, is written for the benefit of the church through the ages. We see that truth in II Timothy 3:16, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

In returning to the Psalm at hand, we reflect that it is for the afflicted in the church. This applies to personal afflictions but also to the public afflictions of the church. In the United States at this time the church suffers little or no public difficulties. We know that this is not true of the church in other parts of the world. We hear of Christians being persecuted and churches being unable even to meet publicly due to persecution. This is primarily true in the East, we think of areas such as: India,

Myanmar, and China. May we who are not persecuted enjoy and appreciate the freedom that we have been afforded as it may be soon taken from us.

We look in the second stanza of Psalter 272 to the third line and see that the grief consumes the very strength of the writer. One who has experienced the loss of a dear loved one, I am sure, can appreciate how this can happen. When a church is afflicted, this may happen to its

members as they try to maintain the truth of God and proclaim it to the world. These members of the church are ones who are truly committed to God and the church. The stanza goes on to speak of the days passing as smoke quickly away indicating that one is totally absorbed in this sorrow to not even notice the passing of time.

The third and fourth stanzas go on to speak of the effects of this deep sorrow. The heart is withered and one forgets to eat his daily bread. We can imagine this in our personal sorrows but can we imagine ourselves being that sorrowful for the

House of God? The church of God should be our primary concern in this life. We live in such a materialistic culture that we need to take time away from the busyness of the world and reflect on the importance of the church in our lives. The grief of the Psalmist here is very intense. Will we be that sorrowful when our church is taken from us? We think first of the building but I encourage you rather to think of the loss of the fellowship of the saints. What a sorrow when we will not be able to

272 Affliction and Appeal

PSALM 102 L. M. Organ, William B. Bradbury

1. Lord, hear my prayer, and let my cry Have reach - y
 2. At - tend, O Lord, to my de - sire, O haste to
 3. My heart is with - ered like the grass, And I fe-
 4. My feet re - proach me all the day, My drink is

as - cess an - is These; When in dis - tress to Thee I
 an - over when I pray, For grief con - sumes my strength like
 get my dai - ly bread; In lone - ly grief my days I
 tears, my bread is grief, For in Thy wrath I pine a -

ry, O hide not Thy face from me,
 fire, My days as smoke pass up - on my head,
 pass And sad my thoughts are as a with - er - ing
 way, My days are like a with - er - ing leaf.

gather together and encourage one another. For that is really a part of what our church is about. May we appreciate more deeply the gift of the church that we have.

Now we return to the first stanza of this Psalter versification where we find our comfort. It is the supplication to God to hear our prayers. We would not even dare to cry out to God if we did not know that He hears us. This is the confidence with which the Psalmist cries here. We know that God always hears our prayers, especially when in distress and sorrow. We are reminded of passages such as: Ephesians 6:18, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching there-

unto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints," and Philippians 4:6, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

As we sing the sad words of Psalter 272 may we be reminded that there is also comfort in the sadness. We rest in the assurance that God will hear our prayers and care for His people in their own distresses and the church in her troubles. God's truth shall forever stand sure. ❖

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Where We Stand

Hope and Comfort in the Truth (1)

by Rev. W. Bruinsma

Young People's Convention, Redlands, 1999

What is the use? What is the point in all of this? Our ministers and our denomination keep driving home this "truth" thing. It does not seem as if anyone else around worries their head all that much about the truth. We must know the truth, we are told, and we spend from our early years to our late teens being catechized in the Bible and in doctrine. Our ministers keep telling us: "Know your Bibles." We are constantly reminded as well to live in the truth. We must be filled with zeal and enthusiasm in the truth, so that we can go out and witness of that truth to others.

But what is the point in it all? I mean, what is in it for me? What do *I* get out of all of this? All this emphasis is placed on knowing God and witnessing to the truth; but where does that get me in life? Is there any benefit in it for me? This sounds quite selfish, does it not? But then, that is what society is all about today: do not do something unless I can get something out of it.

The point is not: what do I get out of all this, because you and I are not really of the essence. We are puny, insignificant creatures of time. We are here today and gone tomorrow. Isaiah tells us, "All nations before God are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity." When God almighty demands

of you and me to obey and fear Him, we do so not because of what we can get out of it. We do so simply because He is the sovereign Creator of heaven and earth, and we are His servants. We are required to do the will of our God. Who are we to demand of God anything? In fact, if we serve God for that reason, to get something out of it, then everything the former speakers at this convention have said means nothing. We have wasted our time here this past week.

Yet, since we are on the subject, we maybe could take a look at the question: is there any personal benefit in knowing and witnessing to the truth? Though it is true that God certainly does not owe us anything, God does give to us something. God is good and gracious to His people in Christ. Though they are deserving of nothing from Him, God gives to them some wonderful spiritual blessings. These blessings are those of hope and comfort. God gives to each one of His children who walks in His precepts and ways the wonderful blessings of hope and comfort! These are valuable gifts. In fact, these are priceless gifts. These are personal possessions the value of which is beyond comparison. There is nothing in this world that you and I can compare to the gifts of hope and comfort.

But perhaps we as young people might think that hope and comfort are not really all that precious to us in our youth. We might think that at this point in life we would rather enjoy our pleasures and wealth. Maybe we might be one who came to the convention this year because it was in California. What a great time we can have in California! Who cares about the speeches or the discussion groups! We will simply bear with them for the few hours, bide our time, and in this way get through them. We came to this convention to have a good time! We are not all that interested in hope and comfort in the truth!

With a little bit of consideration, however, you and I will find out that hope and comfort really are the best gifts that God could ever give His children.

With a little bit of consideration, however, you and I will find out that hope and comfort really are the best gifts that God could ever give His children. Let me see if I can explain the gifts of hope and comfort in a way that I can make you understand just how priceless they are.

Hope is an anchor for you and me in this life.

Hope, first of all. Hope is an anchor. An anchor, as we well know, is that which keeps a boat from drifting around aimlessly. If that anchor is not down while you are fishing then the boat is subject to the waves or the wind, and the boat will drift around without any direction. But when we drop that anchor down and it takes hold of the bottom of the lake the boat will immediately stop. The boat will take a firm position in the lake and will not drift anymore. It will stay right there no matter what the wind or the waves.

Well, that is hope. Hope is an anchor for you and me in this life. It is that which keeps us from drifting through life without any aim or purpose, without any direction. When we have hope, immediately our life is anchored and this lends purpose and meaning to our lives. Why?

Because of what hope is! Hope is looking forward with eager anticipation to something that is coming. It is to expect the fulfillment of that which we desire. For example, all of us weeks in advance were impatiently waiting for the convention to come. You and I were hoping for its swift coming, looking forward to it, longing for the coming of the convention.

From a spiritual point of view God gives His children hope. That hope is the second coming of Jesus Christ. We will be discussing that in our discussion groups in a little while. Why do we hope for the coming of Jesus Christ? Because when Christ comes He is going to usher in the new heavens and earth where righteousness will dwell. He is going to come and bring you and me to that kingdom where there is no more sin, no more crying, no more pains, hurts, or troubles. And we will have this blessed and wonderful, this perfect fellowship with God and Jesus Christ. That hope is an anchor in the life of the child of God. When I have this hope then I am going to aim all of my life toward the fulfillment of that hope. It is like a target in my life. I aim everything that I do and say and every place that I go toward that one goal, the accomplishment of my hope. That lends purpose to the life of the child of God.

There is another gift that God gives His children too. That is comfort. The opposite of comfort the Heidelberg Catechism tells us is misery. When we are miserable, our heart is filled with restlessness and discontentment. There is a lack of joy and luster to our lives, a lack of happiness. Misery is when our hearts refuse to be still and at peace. Comfort is the opposite of that. Comfort is when we are content and happy in life. We experience joy in the things we do, the places we go, and in all our activities. Comfort is encouragement and strength when I feel insecure. And, best of all, comfort is this certain deep-down consolation that I receive from God when I am hurting or face the problems of this present life. Comfort is a gift of God to His children, too, when they walk in the truth. Even when the sorest trials come in my life, the most threatening of circumstances, God gives me in my heart a certain joy and peace that is able to see me through the difficulties of life. In fact, I have seen the child of God stand up under the most adverse conditions

Comfort is encouragement and strength when I feel insecure.

in life simply because God gives to him comfort. Comfort is strength!

So, these are the gifts God gives to you and me when we know the truth and walk in it: hope and comfort. These are the best gifts God can give to us as young men and women. When we love and live the truth then hope and comfort belong to us. God gives these gifts to us freely!

The question is: do young people actually need this comfort and hope? We can certainly understand why old people need that comfort and hope. They do not really have all that much more to look forward to in this life. They are going to die pretty soon. They need to have hope in the future life to see them through their older years. And, since they are the ones fraught with all kinds

of infirmities in life they really need comfort. But I am a young person and I live in the strength of my youth! I really do not need all that much comfort or hope in my life because the pleasures of this life are enough to make me happy! I could come to a convention and do without the speeches or discussion groups and go home at the end of the week with all the joy and happiness that I need! All I need is good times with my friends!

So then, do young people need comfort and hope? We will answer that question, the Lord willing, in the August issue of *Beacon Lights*. ❖

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Church Family

Be Not Deceived

by John Huizenga

Recently Disney has produced a new movie called "Dinosaurs" in which computers were used to create animated dinosaurs that were merged with real landscape videos in such a way that it was virtually impossible to distinguish what was real from that which was computer generated. An article in "Newsweek" described the techniques used to make the skin of the dinosaurs jiggle with each step and wrinkle with the movements of the gigantic bodies. The movie represented the cutting edge of technology in the making of animated pictures.

Another example of picture tricks showed up in an advertisement in which a baby is made to converse in an adult manner with another adult. Apparently a video recording of the baby was manipulated so that the eye and mouth movement corresponded seamlessly with the dialog. The effect is quite remarkable, and the advertisement and others like it are becoming more popular.

The above-mentioned examples are quite harmless in themselves. The idea has been around for years, and the technique has been brought to a new level of perfection. With a more perfect technique, however, comes more power to deceive. In the cases mentioned, it is easy to distinguish the real from that which is added by the

imaginings of men. The technique, however, can just as easily be used to deceive. Imagine what would happen if someone used the technique to put you on a video tape committing a crime that you in reality never committed. Imagine being imprisoned for your faith and being shown videotapes of our ministers preaching false doctrine.

Our Lord has warned us that Antichrist and false prophets "shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:5). Deception will no doubt include more than visual wonders. It will include deceptive philosophies, corrupted facts, and earthly enticements, But God does give special warning to visible signs and wonders in Revelation 13:13-14, where we read, "And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live." Again we read of the signs and wonders in II Thessalonians 2:9, where we read,

“Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.”

We ought not underestimate the power that Antichrist will have. It is dangerous to say “O, God would never give Antichrist that much power,” because we only make ourselves more susceptible to the delusions. We are warned that many will be deceived (Matthew 24:5, 11). We are warned that the deception will be so designed that it targets the very foundational faith of the elect. God comforts us with the words “*if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect,*” but this does not mean that it will be easy to withstand the temptations. We also read in II Peter 3:17, “Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.”

We must beware. We must be prepared for the powerful delusions of Antichrist. The church has confronted such delusions throughout its history, but we must always prepare for new and more powerful delusions. We can learn some fundamental tactics of the devil when we look at the pattern that the devil used when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Luke 4:3-13). First he tempted Jesus to look at his earthly needs and desires apart from the Word of God. Then he tempted Jesus to worship him by presenting an alternative to eternal heavenly glory. He presented earthly glory that could be attained without the way of the pain and suffering of the cross. Finally the devil tempted Jesus to exalt himself over against God by a foolish and rash test of God’s Word.

We are earthly and the things that we need and want to satisfy our bodies surround us. Given our fallen nature, we would plunge ourselves into self-indulgence apart from the enlightening grace of God in Christ. In Christ, however, we use our earthly bodies to serve and give glory to God. In Christ we are able to see through the delusion of the devil and keep our eyes fixed upon the truth.

Our parents, teachers, pastor, and church congregation as a whole are called by God to teach the youth about the world in which we live in such a way that they begin to see how the things of this earth can be used in their service to God. Most importantly, each member of the church must teach by word and example that God’s Word must take priority in all things. The Word of God must be firmly rooted in the heart if we are to put that Word before our earthly desires.

The second temptation of Christ has to do with an alternative to the pain and suffering of this world. We

live in a world filled with suffering and pain. Man strives with all his might to alleviate pain with medication and make life easier with technology, but God has decreed that we come to know the depths of the riches of the knowledge of God in the way of suffering and affliction. This does not mean that we should refuse all medical treatment of physical pain or avoid using technology that helps us in our daily life. We must remember, however, that the devil may very well present a life to us that is free of pain and suffering. It may happen that the Antichrist receives power to develop and use technology in such a way that it appears as though he has the very keys to heavenly life on this earth. We read of this power in Revelation 13:3-4: “And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” The devil will use the wonders of this world to tempt us to look to the Antichrist for salvation from earthly suffering and forsake Christ.

We must look at wars, plagues, social unrest, etc. through the spectacles of Scripture and understand that this is the judgment of God against sin. We must not look to medicine and technology as the solutions to the corruption of this world by sin, but to Christ as the deliverer. The Word of God must be firmly rooted in the heart if we are to have the strength to choose the God glorifying way of Christ rather than the man glorifying way of the Antichrist.

Finally, the devil seeks to stir up our own pride. He encourages us to challenge and test the Word of God rather than walk in its light. He wants us to distance ourselves from God, pull away from covenant fellowship with Him, and test Him using human standards of judgment. He wants us to look at God’s Word with skepticism instead of by faith.

The believer, however, lives in covenant fellowship with God and always treats God’s Word with reverence. We must never look at the Bible simply as a piece of literature. Whenever we read the Scriptures, it must be understood that the words are the Word of God.

In ourselves, we will never be prepared for living in the end times. We could memorize the whole Bible and still be deceived. Knowledge is not enough. The key to standing in the end times is a love for the truth. Having a love for the truth is the only way that we will be able to withstand the deception of Antichrist. This truth is taught

negatively in II Thessalonians 2:10, where we read “And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” We will be deceived if we do not love the truth. When we have a love for the truth, however, we will stand firm.

Love for the truth comes by grace alone. Our Lord taught us to pray “Thy kingdom come,” and in this petition we are also praying for the grace of God to know and love the truth. The Heidelberg Catechism’s exposition of the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer provides a concise summary of the things we need as we live in

the end times. “Q.123. Which is the second petition? A. “Thy kingdom come;” that is, rule us so by thy word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to thee; preserve and increase thy church; destroy the works of the devil, and all violence which would exalt itself against thee; and also, all wicked counsels devised against thy holy word; till the full perfection of thy kingdom take place, wherein thou shalt be all in all.” ❖

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

Church History

Early Church History— Peace Under Constantine

by Rev. John A. Heys

Reprinted from the February, 1947 issue of Beacon Lights.

“**W**e wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day....” With these words the Apostle Paul warned the church at Ephesus and reminded her of the power and type of enemy which is constantly seeking to destroy her. Church history is full of instances which show us that the church is never left alone by that enemy and that she must always be on her guard and equipped with the whole armor of God.

We have noticed many of the ways in which the devil had been trying to destroy the early New Testament church. He came with false doctrines which appealed to the newly converted Jews. He led men to propagate heresies which appealed to the converts who formerly believed all the pagan mythology. He also pro-

vided a false doctrine which was intended to deceive both the serious-minded Jews and Gentiles. Ebionism, Gnosticism and Montanism followed each other and were meant to be bait to lure the believers away from Christ and from their faith in Him.

But, not only is the devil a powerful adversary, church history teaches us that he is a relentless, untiring and persistent enemy of the church. He does not stop.

...church history teaches us that he is a relentless, untiring and persistent enemy of the church. He does not stop. He may change his tactics, but he will not cease to assault the church.

He may change his tactics, but he will not cease to assault the church. And he had one more fiery dart to hurl at the church besides those of which we already have spoken. He came as the wolf in sheep’s clothing after a period of walking about as a lion seeking to devour whom he could. After years of violent and almost continual persecution through which the devil sought to destroy the church and its faith, he moved his servants to make peace and usher the church into a new

era. Under Constantine, the church was given rest from persecution. Not only was it now possible for one to confess his faith in Christ without fear of persecution, but it

became compulsory for the citizens of Constantine's realm to belong to the church.

The devil was still there, however, and this sudden turn of events was not due to his concession of defeat. It was but a change of tactics. While formerly he sought to lure God's people out of the church with tempting bait, now he sought to corrupt the church from within by making it open its doors to unbelievers of every sort. Before this, false teachers had crept into the church in the vain attempt of destroying the church, but now thousands upon thousands of unbelievers were ushered into the church and began to corrupt it from within.

It all came about in the year 311 AD, when Constantine issued an edict of toleration. This was later followed in the year 312, by an edict which did not simply tolerate the Christian religion but even gave it complete freedom. Constantine himself cannot be regarded as a believer. His deeds were against any such judgment of him. In fact, had he been a true believer he would not have welcomed all these pagans of his realm into the bosom of the church. His reason for setting Christianity free was partly due to his realization that oppression of

the church in no way whatsoever stopped its growth, as former persecutions had made plain, and partly due to his carnal ambitions to unite church and state under himself as the head. He was an ambitious and worldly wise man.

The point we would have you consider about this incident in early church history is that this action of Constantine brought to a definite close the period which we have been considering: namely, the age of apologetics. It was no longer necessary for the church to defend its position in the world and to give a reason why it had a right to exist. Constantine saw to it that Christianity was recognized.

Let us not forget however that God was behind this historical event as He is behind all that transpires. He decreed all things, and this work of Constantine is not excluded from His counsel. A new period of church history now begins. A period is ushered in wherein the church, unhindered by persecution and stirred up to greater activity by the false doctrines which arose, began to develop the truth of the Scriptures, and led by the Spirit, composed many beautiful confessions to which

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we ascribe today. This of course was the divine purpose behind this new liberty which the church received at the hand of Constantine. Once again the truth of Scripture speaks to us that things work together for good to those that love God. In fact the actions of Constantine, by the wisdom and counsel of God, worked for the good of the

church as it stands in the world today. We share in the fruits of the church made possible by the freedom under Constantine. ❖

The late Rev. Heys was a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches from 1941 to 1980.

The Church of the Redeemer

by J.P. de Klerk



It will probably surprise you, but this church in old Jerusalem was founded by the Emperor Charlemagne (742-814). It was restored 300 years later by a group of merchants who came from Amalfi (a port city in Italy) who admired its excellent structure. It was again renovated by the Crusaders in 1150. In 1869, Sultan Abed el-Aziz from Turkey, occupied Jerusalem, who wanted to please the German Crown Prince Frederik III, gave the lot of land with the ruins of the church to him. He asked an architect to make a new drawing of the church, following the lines of the historic building as well as possible. During this work, the ancient decorative entrance was recovered and included. There was a delay in the building, because the Crown Prince suddenly died, but his son (Emperor) Wilhelm II, who designed the bell tower himself, came to see the building place in 1898 and gave it the name “Church of the Redeemer.”

It was in medieval style with much ornamentation and many colors, but in 1970, a complete renovation was done, following the example of Lutheran churches in Scandinavia, and all the grandeur was lost. The massive

stone walls are bare, so that the whole building is now plain. However, the mammoth pillars are topped by medieval capitals following the model of one discovered in the ruins. The windows have stained glass, but no biblical scenes; those in the dome are tinted brown, yellow and white.

The entrance of the church is decorated with a sculpted lamb, symbolizing the sacrifice the Lord brought for His children.

In the portal, twelve bas-reliefs (some damaged) represent the months of the year.

At the back of the church, there is yet a small door with the inscription “English-speaking Lutheran Congregation and Crusader chapel.” There is a remnant of a cloister with a muristan (which means hospital in old Persian language), where once a group of monks of the “Hospitaler Order of St. John” sheltering sick Crusaders. This was restored in 1871. ❖

J.P. de Klerk is an author and journalis from Ashhurst, New Zealand.

Tulip (1)

Krystal hummed along with a familiar hymn on the radio as she put a bunch of tulips in a vase. Mother had picked the late bloomers that morning, but hadn't had time to arrange them. Everyone was busy with special jobs to do on this beautiful Saturday afternoon! Even Krystal's little brother, Jamie, was sweeping the porch. The music helped make the work a little more pleasant for the whole family.

But the program on the radio switched, and someone began to talk. He started his message with: "God loves everyone. He loves every single per—"

Click. Father turned the radio off.

"Why did you turn it off, Dad? Isn't it a Christian radio station?" Krystal asked.

Her father sighed. "Did you hear the words that person was saying? Those words are not true. God does not love everybody. But He does love every one of His elect children," Father spoke with conviction.

Krystal knew what her father said was true. It was what she had been taught, and she believed it. She even knew Bible verses that said God's love is not for all. Yet, did it really matter that much? Neighbors and relatives—so many of them agreed with the speaker on the radio. They all believed that God loves everybody! She wondered about it and asked, "Why do so many people believe that God loves everyone?"

"That kind of god appeals to our flesh," Father said. "It gives us a part in the work of salvation. You see, doing the work of accepting Christ as our Savior goes right along with saying that God loves everybody. Salvation isn't so humbling that way. But—that's not Scripture."

Krystal still toyed with the tulips, deciding which one looked best in which place. As she tried them out in various positions she said, "I guess I don't understand it all yet. I would think that it ought to be very simple and clear."

"Hmm," Mother entered the conversation, "these tulips definitely remind me of something."

"And that something," added Father, "really does make it clear..."

(to be continued) ❖

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

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer



Puzzle

These are the verses that Krystal knew. Unscramble the letters:

"As it is trewint, Boajc have I odelv,

but Esau have I death." Mosarn 9:13

"Was not Suea Jacob's rhetrob?

tisah the Lord: yet I velod Jacob,

and tadhe Esau..." Lihacam 1:2b-3a

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Church News

BAPTISMS

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

Mark 16:16

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

Elisabeth Janelle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Scott
Haaksma—Georgetown, MI

Nathan Grant, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dan Nagelkerke—
Georgetown, MI

Brianna Rose, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy
Meulenberg—Grace, MI

Carter James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chris Dykstra—Hope,
MI

Lilyia Renae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Randy Vaalburg—
Hope, MI

Luke Anthony, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Koole—Hope, MI

Nathan Joel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel Minderhoud—Hope,
MI

Erica Faye, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric Dykstra—
Hudsonville, MI

Jeremy Martin, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jim Daling—Faith, MI

Seth Alan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Terry Kooinga—Faith, MI

David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Kleyn—Southwest, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

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

Romans 10:10

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

Lori Miedema—Georgetown, MI

Ryan Dykstra—Hope, MI

Chandra Poortinga—Loveland, CO

MARRIAGES

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

Matthew 19:5

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Jim Dykstra and Miss Lori Miedema—Georgetown,
MI

Mr. Brent Vander Kolk and Miss Jessica Bomers—
Hudsonville, MI