

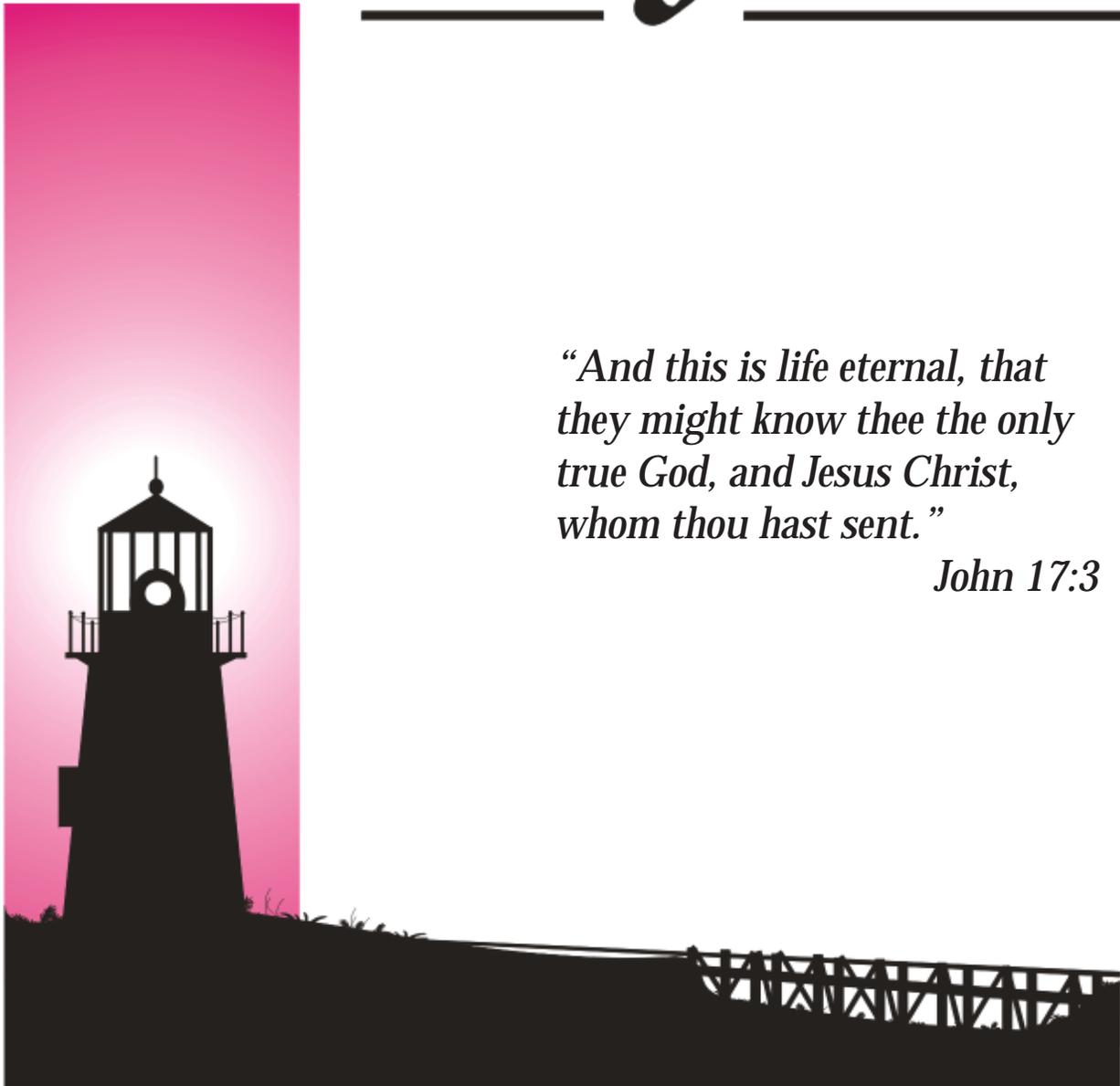
# Beacon Lights

July  
2004

Volume LXIII  
Number 7

*“And this is life eternal, that  
they might know thee the only  
true God, and Jesus Christ,  
whom thou hast sent.”*

*John 17:3*



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# Doubting Thomas and the Passion of Christ



by Trevor Kalsbeek

*“But Thomas one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:24-29).*

“**T**homas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” These powerful words that Christ spoke to his disciple Thomas because of his lack of faith can be applied to us today. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed that the *Passion of the Christ* is the work of man, ungodly man. This movie is not a dead issue, and should not be forgotten about in our circles. Once again it was at the top of the charts, on Easter Sunday week, and yes once again it grossed millions of dollars for those who created it. Sure, we have read the many articles and speeches given by our own ministers and professors and are given the reasons why it is wrong; but do we lack the faith as Thomas did to stand up for what we believe? Young people, young adults, did you heed the warnings, or was there a Thomas? Did you have to go out and see the movie to believe?

Troubling it is to hear the warnings so clearly stated and yet come to find out that many have to see to believe. Is not the word of God given to us sufficient? Should we be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, and instead see how man views Christ? Paul writes to us in Romans 1:16-17: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” The gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection is clearly given to us in his word. Why then must we see mere man try to portray the perfect image of Christ? The *word* is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, not a *movie* used to evangelize. The righteousness of God is set forth here as God working faith in every one of us through the gospel. It could not be more clearly stated!

Why then must these men who are the creators of this movie, holding the truth in unrighteousness, be held in such high esteem when they can see God all around them in this creation, knowing that he as made them all and they are without excuse? They know who God is all right, yet they do not glorify him as God. (Romans 1:20-23) They change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man. The glory and the thanks are not given to God. Instead they become vain in their imagi-

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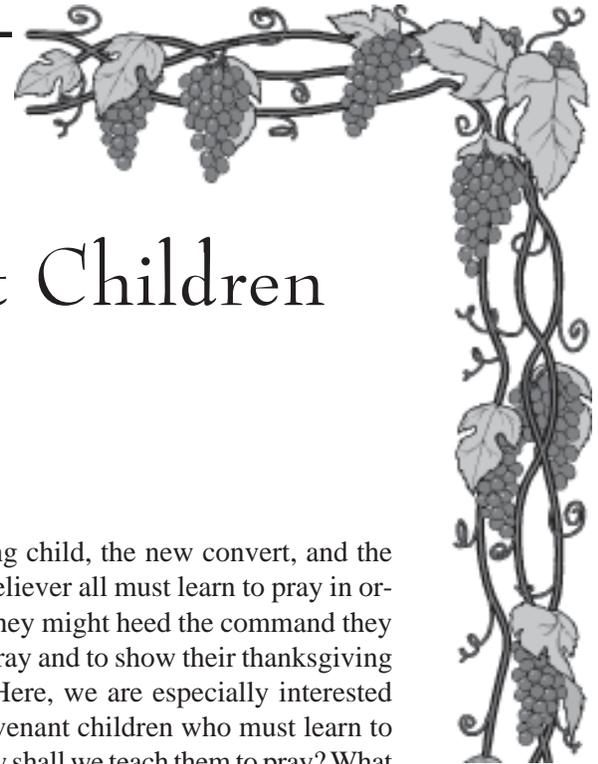
nations, with respect to the knowledge of God. A sinful, proud and selfish man of the world portrays an image of Christ. How foolish!

Don't be foolish as these men are. Believe! Make the beautiful confession that Thomas made, "My Lord and my God." Do likewise in faith, not having to see and witness the Passion of the Christ portrayed in the movie, but by reading it in his word. Blessed are those who have not seen the movie, and yet have believed. For therein is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. Thanks be to God for the preaching and teaching of his gospel, and of his word. ❖

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

Fruitful Branches



# Teaching Covenant Children To Pray

by Andy Lanning

Prayer is necessary for Christians. Prayer is not merely an option for Christians, to be used or not as they see fit. Rather, the Christian man or woman is under a joyful and blessed obligation to pray. He has been so commanded in I Thessalonians 5:17-18: "Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." Therefore, prayer is a significant part of the Christian's life. Not only must he pray, but he must do so "without ceasing." Lord's Day 45 of the Heidelberg Catechism also indicates the important place of prayer in the Christian's walk. The Catechism explains that prayer is necessary for Christians in part "because it is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us...." The Christian shows his thanks to God for God's marvelous salvation of him in prayer. Prayer is necessary for Christians.

Prayer is necessary for all Christians. It is not only the mature Christians who are commanded to pray without ceasing. It is not only the mature Christians who must show their thankfulness to God chiefly through prayer. Also the newly converted Christians must pray. Also the children of believing parents must pray. All Christians must pray. All Christians must, therefore, learn to pray.

The young child, the new convert, and the mature believer all must learn to pray in order that they might heed the command they have to pray and to show their thanksgiving to God. Here, we are especially interested in the covenant children who must learn to pray. How shall we teach them to pray? What role do the church, the home, and the school play in this instruction?

Before anyone undertakes to teach covenant children to pray, he himself must know how to pray. Just as the carpenter who intends to instruct his apprentice in how to build a house must first himself know how to build a house, so also the believer who intends to teach children to pray must first himself know how to pray. Christ instructed us how to pray in Matthew 6:9-13 with the familiar words of the Lord's Prayer. This prayer is explained for us in Lord's Days 45-52 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Let every parent, pastor, and teacher study this instruction so that he may know how to instruct children.

Children must learn many things as they learn to pray. This is because God only hears prayers that are

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proper. Therefore, children must be taught to raise proper prayers to God. Question and Answer 117 of the Catechism teach us what a proper prayer is. “What are the requisites of that prayer, which is acceptable to God, and which he will hear? First, that we from the heart pray to the one true God only, who hath manifested himself in his Word....” In the first place, then, children must learn who God is. They must learn the true God, who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. They must learn to know the true God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture. From their earliest years, they must be taught how God cared for and preserved and regulated the lives of His people in the Old Testament. They must learn God as the Creator in Genesis and as the Redeemer in Exodus. They must learn that He is a God Whose will is sovereign and Who gives His people His law. All of this, they must be taught about God so that they know to Whom they pray.

The Catechism continues explaining what a proper prayer is when it says that prayer is “for all things He hath commanded us to ask of Him.” In other words, prayer is not up to us. Just as we do not decide whether we will pray or not, so we do not decide what it is for which we will pray. God’s will must be the rule in all of our prayer. Therefore, children must be taught that they may not pray for the new bike that they sinfully covet. Rather, they must be taught to pray for God’s kingdom, God’s glory, forgiveness of sins, and the rest. They must be taught to pray in accordance with God’s will.

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**Children must not only know  
God in order to pray; they  
must also know themselves.**

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Children must not only know God in order to pray; they must also know themselves. This, the Catechism declares when it says, “[s]econdly, that we rightly and thoroughly know our need and misery, that so we may deeply humble ourselves in the presence of His divine majesty.” Children must know that they may not come before God in pride, but as creatures, and sinful creatures at that. Even the holy seraphim cover their faces and feet with their wings as they fly about God’s throne crying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3). Children must be taught that the utmost humility is needed in prayer, for in prayer they draw before God’s throne as His children.

Children must be impressed with the fact of their own sin and misery and neediness so that in humility they draw before God’s face.

But the instruction must not stop there, for God’s view of us does not stop at our sins. He sees us in Christ, washed and cleansed and righteous with Christ’s righteousness so that though we come before Him humbly, we come before Him also in confidence. This, the Catechism teaches us when it says, “[T]hirdly, that we be fully persuaded that He, notwithstanding that we are unworthy of it, will, for the sake of Christ our Lord, certainly hear our prayer, as He has promised us in His Word.” Children must be taught that we come before God only in Christ Jesus. They must be taught to say “for Jesus’ sake” in their prayers, so that they are conscious of the only One in Whom they are heard. These are the things that children must be taught as they learn to pray.

The question arises how this instruction must be carried out practically in the home, church, and school. In the home, the children learn from godly parents how to pray. As father opens and closes each meal with prayer, the children listen and learn what petitions are proper in prayer. As mother prays with the children while father is at work, the children learn the humility and reverence with which prayer is conducted. Our covenant homes must be homes of prayer, not only because this is our command, but because our children will learn much in the home about prayer. If family prayer is not a part of the family life at home, prayer will not be important in the eyes of the children of that home. Therefore, there must be a time of day set aside for family devotions, in which the family gathers around God’s Word to be instructed by God and to pray to Him. This is usually done at the evening meal of the family, when all of the family is together. But more and more, our lives become busy. Not only the parents are busy, but the children also have soccer practice, sleepovers, and the like. It is especially difficult to find a time of day when the whole family is assembled as the children learn to drive and desire to spend more time with friends than at home. Godly parents must insist that each day, be it early morning, or the evening meal, or any other time that works, the entire family is gathered together for prayer. Parents can also instruct their children by teaching them simple prayers from their earliest years. Teach them to say “Lord, bless...” and “Lord, we thank Thee...” before and after they eat. Teach them the simple and easy to learn Lord’s Prayer. Teach them a prayer to say before they go to bed

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at night, so that in this way they memorize prayers and get in the habit of setting aside time each day to pray. Furthermore, parents can teach their children to pray without ceasing by praying with them at all times. Before and after meals, before and after discipline, before leaving on vacation, before bedtime, before the activities of the day begin, and at all other events of the day, prayer can be raised. In this way, the children also learn to see that every single activity of the day is not isolated but has its meaning in God.

The church also teaches children to pray inasmuch as the preaching explains prayer. This is a powerful reason why the church ought to continue to insist on the preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism. There are eight entire Lord's Days devoted to explaining prayer to God's people. In this way, the church regularly receives instruction in the important activity of prayer. God's people are then able to explain to their little ones how to pray. But the children must be taught by the preaching itself. The preaching that reveals God and God's will, our own sinfulness, and Christ's covering blood must be applied to the children as well as the adults. In this way, the chil-

dren will learn from the voice of Christ Himself how it is that they must pray.

The school, also, must teach children how to pray. Prayer must be an integral part of the school day so that children learn to pray among their peers. The teacher serves the same role as the parent in the home in teaching the children to pray in school, instructing them in the proper prayer and in the necessity of prayer. Time must be set aside in the school day as well when all of the students together sit around God's Word and then pray to Him as the teacher leads in prayer.

When children are taught to pray, God's name is glorified. This is the motivation for all parents, pastors, and teachers in teaching children to pray. Then, not only from the mouths and hearts of the older sheep, but also from the mouths and hearts of the littlest lambs is God's name praised. God help us in this task. ❖

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*Andy is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan. He wrote this essay for the Protestant Reformed Scholarship.*

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## The Reader Asks

# Crosses in the Churches

by Rev. James Laning

### Dear Rev. Laning

Here is my question, hopefully you can answer it.

In examination of the movie the "Passion of Christ" and the Protestant Reformed stand against it, how, in light of the second commandment, do you view the crosses that we have in several of our churches? Are they a symbol that have a meaning? If so, wouldn't it be like books to the laity as it says in Lord's Day 35 Q&A 98? Or if they are just a piece of wood with no meaning, why do we have them in the churches?

Thanks for your time and effort in considering my question.

Yours in Christ,  
Timothy Kleyn

### Dear Timothy

You ask an interesting question that happens to be one that we as churches considered at the Protestant Reformed Churches Synod of 1990. Therefore, I think it would be good for the readers of *Beacon Lights* to know what our official position is on this matter.

In 1990, our Synod took the position that the erection of a cross on the wall of a church sanctuary is not a violation of the Second Commandment, and that it is not in conflict with Lord's Day 35 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which states what we refer to as the regulative principle of worship. The regulative principle, which is referred to in one of the quotations below, states that we must worship God only in the way that He has commanded in His Word.

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Let me briefly summarize what was decided. It can be found in Articles 43 and 57 of the 1990 Acts of Synod. I will include a couple of quotations, so that you can see the very wording of Synod.

First, the Synod said that the erection of such a cross does not violate the Second Commandment. To explain why, the following distinction was made:

1) The Second Commandment forbids the use of images. An image is a physical representation of God, or anything made for the purpose of worshipping God or with the intention of teaching men, or anything that becomes a means of worshipping God or teaching men. (Lord's Day 35).

2) The Second Commandment does not forbid symbols. A symbol is a sign of some spiritual reality that identifies a group. For example, the symbol of the fish in the meeting places of the early church.

Secondly, Synod said that the placement of a symbol on a church does not make that symbol an element of the congregation's worship. The following reasons were given to support this statement.

1) There is freedom in the Protestant Reformed Churches' application of the regulative principle in those incidental details connected with the church's worship and government.

2) The Second Commandment regulates the worship of the Church but does not prescribe the incidental details connected with the worship services. For example: the use of musical accompaniment in singing the Psalters, standing or kneeling during prayer, pictures of a Bible or a plain cross on a church wall.

3) The elements of the church's worship are prescribed in Scripture as explained in Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Synod, therefore, determined that a symbol, such as a cross, may be placed on a wall of a church, when it is being used not for the purpose of teaching, but merely as a means to identify a group.

There is, of course, the danger of desiring to set up more and more symbols in the churches, and to use them to assure us of God's presence in our midst. When churches decline and turn away from Christ as set forth in the preached Word, they often desire to have more and more symbols to assure them that God is really present in their midst, even though they are rejecting His Word. This danger is very real; it happens all around

us. We must always be on our guard, lest the same thing happen to us.

I thank you again for your question.  
Fraternally in Christ,  
Rev. Laning ❖

**D**o you have a question that has been on your mind? Something that came up at school or during a discussion with friends or co-workers? You can be sure that there are many more people reading these words who have had the same question and are looking for answers just like you. Rev. Laning of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan is waiting to answer them. Don't worry, if you would rather your name was not published with your question, we will honor your request. We do, however, ask that your name and either your home or email address be included so that Rev. Laning can respond privately if need be.

Please send your question to:

Rev. James Laning  
1550 Ferndale S.W.  
Walker, MI 49544  
E-mail: [jlanning@msn.com](mailto:jlanning@msn.com)

## 2004 PRYP Convention

**Topic:** Drawing Near to God

**Location:** Covenant Hills  
Otisville, MI

**Dates:** July 12-16

**Speakers:** Rev. R. Cammenga  
Rev. R. Kleyn  
Rev. W. Langerak

**Website:** [www.prcconvention.com](http://www.prcconvention.com)

# Rev. Angus Stewart

edited by Kris Moelker

**O**n October 8, 1973, I was born the second child and oldest son of Ronnie and Lorna Stewart. Shortly thereafter I was baptized in the Church of Ireland. My time in the Church of Ireland left me with two indelible impressions. First, I found church very dull and boring, and indeed it was, for the true gospel was not preached there. Second, I thought that salvation was by man's works and that I was basically good.

As a young teenager, like the others my age, I entered confirmation classes preparatory to receiving the Lord's Supper. After a few weeks I left because I did not think that I was a Christian, and so partaking of Communion would be hypocritical.

Growing up in the state school system, and especially as I progressed through high school (12 years old and on), I unconsciously imbibed the unarticulated message of public education: God is irrelevant; man can understand the world without God; science gives us real knowledge; religion is a joke.

As I got older, I began to do those things that unbelieving boys do at that age. This disturbed me. Maybe I wasn't a good person. And what if the Bible is true and there really is a place of eternal punishment for the wicked? I felt that I was coming to a crossroads. If there was no God then I should press on with my worldly pleasures and suppress my fears. But what if Jesus really was the Son of God?

I decided that I should examine biblical prophecy to see if Jesus Christ was the One predicted in the Old Testament. My mother, who is a Christian, gave me some books on prophecy and the end times. As I read I became convinced that Christ was the fulfilment of prophecy and that He was coming again. But I could not believe in Him because I loved the world and was afraid of what my friends would think. As Jesus said, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?" (John 5:44).

That summer when on holiday in Portrush on the north coast of Northern Ireland, I met four young men in the Faith Mission, a second-blessing, lay-preaching



group. One of them was an Arminian, another a Calvinist, and the other two were nearer the former. (These theological evaluations, you understand, I make with the benefit of hindsight). Through attending their meetings and asking questions, I became more and more convinced of my sin and misery. I experienced the bondage of the will, that though I knew that I must repent and believe to be saved, I could not will it. The truth that God especially used to convert me was that of election. The Calvinist explained that God eternally chooses some and not all and that only the elect are given faith. This truth staggered me and humbled my proud mind. Yet people think that preaching election is a hindrance to evangelism!

In September, I returned for my last year at high school fearful of what my friends would think of my becoming a Christian. I started to read the Bible with zest, in part to be able to witness to them. Their questions and comments led me to read Christian books more diligently. Also the young man God used in my conversion wrote me letters, visited me, and encouraged me in the Christian life. He spoke of God's sovereign grace and recommended Calvinistic literature. At the time I

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thought he was a bit too insistent but I'm glad he persisted!

As a young babe in Christ, I was not able to explain what was wrong with the Methodist church I was attending. I found that I derived more benefit reading the Bible in the pew while the minister was preaching than listening to his sermon. Always keen to learn more about God's Word, I attended lectures on the Old Testament and on the New Testament at the Methodist theological college. There I heard of the several "authors" of the Pentateuch, the various "Isaiahs" and Gospel source criticism. Though I was unable to recognise it at the time, the Methodist church was blighted with higher criticism, ecumenism, Arminianism, feminism and charismaticism.

So when I heard of a local Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, I started to attend it, and, a few months later, I became a member. The preaching there was much clearer flowing from a confidence in the inerrancy of Scripture. In that church I received much help, for which I am thankful, though I also fell into the errors of lay-preaching and anabaptism.

By this time, I was studying at Queen's University, Belfast, in N. Ireland, where I ended up doing a degree in Biblical Studies. The courses were largely shaped by the concerns and methods of higher criticism. But they had some value in that they gave me further incentive to read the Scriptures and to develop answers to the critics. My university course was not very demanding so I attended other Queen's lectures on philosophy and history and some night classes, and sat in on classes at the Reformed Presbyterian College.

As I continued reading Reformed literature, I began to see the shortcomings of the Free Presbyterian Church including its Arminianism, its baptistic theology and its disregard for the regulative principle. I tried to divorce myself from some of the departures of the denomination on the basis that things in my congregation were better. The hymns caused me problems, for I could no longer sing the Arminian parts. I read G. I. Williamson's *The Singing of Psalms in the Worship of God* and became increasingly troubled about singing human poems in God's public worship, for if this booklet was right then I was personally engaging in sin.

All this was particularly difficult for me because I believed from the time of my conversion that I was called to preach the gospel. But how could this be if I could no longer give 100% allegiance to the church of which I was a member?

Around this time, I came into contact with the Covenant Reformed Fellowship (CRF) through a fellow stu-

dent who was from Ballymena. We dropped in with Mr. Callender (the CRF bookstore manager at the time) and picked up some Protestant Reformed pamphlets. I started to attend some of the CRF meetings. Rev. Hanko answered my questions. I met his family and was amazed: family worship and young girls who knew Reformed theology. I had not met the like in Northern Ireland!

In the summer of 1996, I attended the BRF Conference in Ashburnham, England, on "The Church." The lectures spoke to me of my need to join a Reformed church. A discussion with Prof. Hanko one evening settled it for me.

I resigned from the Free Presbyterian Church citing in my letter various articles in the *Westminster Standards* from which the church had departed, and joined the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (CPRC) which had constituted by then. The preaching opened my eyes to sovereign grace, the covenant, the sacraments, the church, the confessions, worship, etc.

After concluding 4 years at Queen's and managing a filling station/supermarket for a year, I studied for 4 years at the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Many family members and friends did not see why I needed to go to a seminary in America: "Are none of the colleges in the UK good enough?" When I returned many came to understand.

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### Young people, treasure and pray for your seminary!

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The four years in Grand Rapids were the most peaceful days of my Christian life. For the first time, I was in an environment that was truly Reformed, where I was not engaged in debates with unbelievers and professing Christians of various theological persuasions. Highlights of my seminary training were the courses on Reformed Dogmatics, Church History and History of Dogma. One man in England recently wrote that the PRC Seminary "probably represents the last bastion of Reformed teaching, which contends for the whole counsel of God." Young people, treasure and pray for your seminary!

While at seminary, I found a wonderful wife, an answer to many prayers. I had little idea when we married of Mary's many talents. I would not be able to serve in the ministry without her.

On 4 July, 2001, I was ordained as the minister of the CPRC in N. Ireland with Rev. Gritters bringing God's

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Word. The first year of my ministry was very difficult and yet it was a very rewarding and blessed year. I knew that there were problems in the congregation before I came but I didn't know how serious they were. A spirit of delusion was abroad in the church. Were all our doctrines really true, and if so were they important? The apostasy came to a head when the elders decided that members no longer had to confess the *Three Forms of Unity*, merely the *Apostles' Creed* as it is explained in the relevant articles of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. They understood that this would also mean the end of our sister church relationship with the Protestant Reformed Churches.

At a special congregational meeting the majority of the male confessing members voted for the disbanding of the church. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (I Cor. 5:6). The disbanding was a relief because we could not go forward with officebearers and members who no longer believed that the doctrines of the church were "the true and complete doctrine of salvation" (*Form for the Public Confession of Faith*). It was disappointing, though, that the preaching and doctrines of the church meant so little to so many.

Young people, your calling is to "Buy the truth, and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23). Do not let pressure from friends or family, or the allurements of advancement and popularity in this world or in the church, tempt you to give up so much as one iota of God's truth! It is too precious, for

it is through the truth that we know the Triune God in Jesus Christ! Times of sifting come in the lives of individuals and families and churches. The Scriptures teach that "there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (I Cor. 11:19). Only those "rooted and built up in [Christ], and stablished in the faith as ye have been taught" (Col. 2:7) will stand. The rest will be "carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14). They and their children will depart.

In the last two years I have had the joy of seeing Jesus Christ build His church here and the saints growing in grace. With the Covenant Protestant Reformed Fellowship founded on the Reformed faith without compromise or concession, unity and peace have returned. In the will of Christ, the disbanding of the CPRC was the way forward.

You, as the youth of the Protestant Reformed Churches, must be convinced that Protestant Reformed churches and missions need to maintain distinctively Protestant Reformed doctrines—the truth of God's Word—even though the battle is hard and the cost is high. Labouring for the Reformed faith is labouring for a worthy cause, a cause to which you must be dedicated heart and soul. ❖

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

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## Church History

# George M. Ophoff (17)

## Post-Split Work

by Prof. Herman Hanko

In our last article we concluded the history of the controversy of 1924 and the role which Rev. Ophoff played in it. At the time of this history Rev. Ophoff was minister in what is now the Hope Protestant Reformed Church. After the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Rev. Ophoff continued his work in Hope for a while, but then took a call to the Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan. These years form the subject of this and the following articles.

In order to put these years in their proper perspective, it is important first of all to understand somewhat the situation which existed in the Protestant Reformed Churches, that determined the labors of Rev. Ophoff.

Rev. Ophoff was not only the pastor of Hope during these first years, but he was also professor in the Seminary. At the very outset of the history of our churches, the Seminary was established. Those whom God used to begin our own denomination felt very strongly that if

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the denomination was to continue in the truth of God's Word, it was imperative that the churches train their own ministers.

So the Seminary was established and Reverends Hoeksema, Danhof and Ophoff were appointed as teachers in the Seminary. The enrollment was rather large at the outset and the work was difficult. This was true for various reasons.

In the first place, all three teachers had pastorates of their own, that required their time and attention.

In the second place, the Seminary trained ministers not only in the subjects normally taught in a seminary curriculum, but also gave to the students a large number of college courses. The average stay in the Seminary for the students was five years. The number of subjects that had to be taught was great.

In the third place, within but a few years after the Seminary was begun, Rev. Danhof left the Protestant Reformed Churches, and the entire teaching load fell upon the shoulders of Revs. Hoeksema and Ophoff.

In the fourth place, none of these men had taught in Seminary before, and the work that had to be done to provide a good Seminary training was enormous. It must not be forgotten in this connection that not only did the professors have to prepare all the courses which they were instructed to teach, but they had to prepare, in many instances, their own material. They were determined to give instruction which was thoroughly Reformed and biblical. They were determined to do more than repeat in parrot-like fashion what others had said before them. They were determined to carry forward the Reformed faith and develop the subjects which needed to be taught in the light of that fundamental point of the Reformed faith, namely that God's grace is only for the elect and is, therefore, sovereign in its working. And so they prepared much of their own material in syllabus form for the use of the students.

This latter is worth a bit more discussion. We must remember that the men who worked in our seminary were, in their own way, intellectual giants. God had given them unusual gifts for the cause of the church of Jesus Christ. They knew and loved the Reformed faith as it had been maintained by the church in the past. But they were also deeply conscious of their calling to develop the Reformed faith yet more as they searched the Scriptures to learn the depths of the truth of God's Word. And so, building on the past, they blazed new trails in the work of the development of the truth. These syllabi, prepared for use in these early years, have become the foundation of all the instruction which was and is given in

the Seminary until the present; and the work of these men laid the foundation for the truth as maintained in our churches throughout our history. A unity of doctrine, that has consistently been maintained in our churches, is due to the work which our fathers performed in our early history in giving, under God's gracious blessing, a clearly articulated confession of the truth. Thoroughly biblical and confessional, the membership of the Protestant Reformed Churches knew what they believed, knew what was biblically and confessionally Protestant Reformed, and knew the importance of maintaining those distinctive doctrines.

I sometimes think that we do not adequately appreciate this. Not only do we have, as Churches, a deep commitment to the Reformed faith, but we have a clearly articulated theological position which is based squarely on Scripture. We live in times of doctrinal confusion, of departure from the truth, of theological innovation. As a result, there are few denominations (if any) which have the clearly defined theological position which we have. We know what we believe, and we stand together united in this truth. Others from outside our Churches have often remarked concerning this to me. We have our God to thank for this, and the work which God performed through those who have set this truth forth in clear and systematic form.

Rev. Hoeksema spent his years in the Seminary teaching reformed dogmatics. He instructed two generations of students in the doctrines of the Reformed faith as held in our churches. He developed the truth in various ways. Perhaps the most significant way was his clear insight into the Scriptural teaching of the covenant of grace. Understanding the importance of the truth of sovereign and particular grace, he applied it to the covenant and enriched that doctrine immeasurably. The result of those years of work was his magisterial *Reformed Dogmatics*, which, along with many other writings in books and in the *Standard Bearer*, shaped the thinking of the denomination.

He was also, all the years he taught, professor of New Testament. The heritage of this work was not only his *Chapel Talks*, containing solid exegesis on many New Testament books and a treasure to fledgling ministers of the gospel; but also instruction in homiletics, which trained two generations of ministers in and was responsible for the solid exegetical preaching heard from Protestant Reformed pulpits. It is not a matter of boasting to say that Protestant Reformed ministers are second to none as preachers of the gospel.

But such innovative work was no less true of Rev. Ophoff. While his work has not been published, anyone who is at all acquainted with the bound volumes of the *Standard Bearer* knows the rich mine of material which can be found there and which came from Rev. Ophoff's pen. This is especially true of his writings on Church Polity and Old Testament History. Over the years, ministers, Sunday School teachers, and those people of God interested in the truth have found in these articles not only extremely delightful reading, but a wealth of material which formed the basis for the Reformed Church Polity as maintained in our Churches and for the understanding of the Old Testament which is so important for the knowledge of the revelation of God. It is a source of great delight to me that the fruit of Rev. Ophoff's Old Testament studies, unique in their own way, are now being preserved in the series entitled *Unfolding Covenant History*. Prof. Homer Hoeksema, who long taught Old Testament History after Rev. Ophoff's death, wrote the syllabuses that resulted in the first four volumes of this series. Especially Ophoff's unique covenantal perspective, original with him and a unique application of the doctrine of the covenant to Old Testament history, is part of our heritage on which others among us have built.

But the point which needs to be made here is that these men were, in these early years, almost unbelievably busy. Add to the work of a congregation and the Seminary the responsibility of writing for the *Standard Bearer*, the responsibility of getting a fledgling denomination off the ground and going in the right direction, the responsibility of working on combined consistory meetings (the churches, until 1940, held combined consistory meetings and a combined classes instead of our present classical and synodical structure), the responsibility of helping to solve innumerable problems which arose in the churches in common and in the congregations in particular, and the mind staggers at the work demanded of these men. It is no wonder that the midnight oil burned almost every night, that there were many nights when they had no sleep at all, and that soul-shattering weariness was frequently their lot.

Although the congregation of Hope was reduced in 1924 to nine families, Rev. Ophoff continued to labor fruitfully with that flock. The congregation had lost the parsonage as well as the church in 1924, and so Rev. Ophoff also had to move his family to another location. The first residence was on 1925 Watson Street just off Butterworth Drive in the vicinity of John Ball Park. The second residence, during his years of ministry at Hope



*1100 Jackson Street, Ophoff's residence during his years of ministry at Hope.*

was 1100 Jackson Street. In 1930, at the age of 39, Rev. Ophoff moved his family to Byron Center after accepting a call to that congregation

During these years, Rev. Ophoff's family was also born. The oldest son, Fred, now deceased, was born just before the split in 1924 on July 27, 1922. George was born on August 23, 1925 and is now also in glory. Herm was born on July 26, 1927, and Ed, the youngest, was born the year of the move to Byron Center, September 20, 1930.

The greater part of the responsibility of bringing up these boys fell upon Mrs. Ophoff. She was however, eminently suited for the task not only of caring for her growing sons, but also for the work of giving them spiritual instruction. She wanted them to know why their father did not have the time for them that most other fathers had; and she wanted them to have a deep appreciation for his work, for his place in the church, and for the importance of the movement of which he was one of the leaders. She was able to make the history of the controversy live for her boys, and she impressed them with the seriousness of the issues and with the role that their father had played in the work of church reformation. One of her most prized possessions was the newspaper clipping from the *Grand Rapids Press* which had correctly described Rev. Ophoff's stand on Classis Grand Rapids West with the words: "OPHOFF PREFERS DEATH." (*To be continued.*) ❖

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# Watching Daily At My Gates

by Cornelius Jonker

## July 1 Read Hebrews 2:1-4

Our meditations this month will center on the miracles of Jesus during His earthly ministry. Commentators have written volumes on definitions and categories of miracles. Miracles abound throughout the entire Scripture and may possibly be defined as an extraordinary work of God that is essentially a sign and wonder of His grace to His people. The principal miracle of all time is the incarnation of the Son of God. All other miracles point to this great wonder that we believe by faith. The world scoffs at the biblical account of miracles and either offers some contrived naturalistic cause, or else they blatantly deny them in unbelief. But may we by the miracle of regeneration bow before the word of God, be instructed by it, and embrace it with believing hearts. Sing Psalter 173:1, 4 and 5.

## July 2 Read John 2:1-11

Shortly after Jesus began His earthly ministry with newly gathered disciples, we read of His attendance at a wedding and the performance of His first miracle. After lovingly rebuking His mother who wished to see Him display His power for the wrong reason, He miraculously turned water into an abundance of excellent wine. Several lessons can be learned from this account. Jesus honored the state of marriage by His presence and approved the enjoyment of proper feasting and happiness. Wine, according to Scripture, “maketh glad the heart of man” (Ps. 104:15), and “cheereth God and man” (Ju. 9:13), but obviously it must be used in moderation. However, the main purpose of this miracle was to manifest His glory and to strengthen the faith of the disciples. Just as Jesus’ preaching always had a two-fold effect, so did His miracles. By faith let us behold these wondrous works of our Savior with a believing heart and stand in awe at His power, grace and mercy. Sing Psalter 288:1-4.

## July 3 Read John 4:46-54

Jesus returned from Jerusalem and Samaria once again to Cana of Galilee, where He was met by a distraught nobleman whose son was at the point of death in Capernaum. He had heard of Jesus as a great miracle worker, and as a last resort asked Jesus to come to his home and heal his son. Jesus countered his request by stating that he, along with others, would not believe unless they saw signs and wonders. Not to be deterred, the nobleman again pleads with Jesus to come. In response Jesus said simply, “go thy way; thy son liveth.” Faith sprang into action at these words and the man believed. Though several miles separated Cana from Capernaum, the mighty power of Jesus is revealed as the nobleman’s servants met him and told him of his son’s recovery at the very time of Jesus’ words. Then we read that his entire household believed. Our God is a covenant God who shows mercy to believers and their seed. What an incentive for us who are parents to nurture our children in the truths of the gospel and to those who are children, to thank God and walk in obedience to Him. Sing Psalter 213:1-3.

## July 4 Read Luke 5:1-4

Jesus’ fame as a preacher and miracle worker caused many people to seek Him out and as a result they “pressed upon him to hear the word of God.” So Jesus went into Peter’s ship, and from a short distance away, sat down and taught the people. Jesus now uses this occasion to demonstrate His divinity, not only to the people, but especially to Peter as He officially calls him to the office of disciple and apostle. Jesus instructs Peter to cast his net into the deep, and although Peter argued that they caught nothing all night, yet at His word he would comply. The miraculous result of Jesus’ powerful word wrought such a sense of awe and fear in Peter’s heart that he fell in contrition and dread before Jesus. To allay his fear, Jesus said, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.” Upon hearing that, Peter, James and John forsook all and followed Jesus. This is our calling as well. Not all are called to preach the gospel, but all have the calling as our Baptism Form states: “that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life.” Sing Psalter 127:1, 2 and 8.

## July 5 Read Matt. 8:23-27

A wondrous miracle indeed and a comforting lesson for the disciples, for the church, and for each one of us today! A tempest arose on the Sea of Galilee as Jesus and His disciples were crossing over to the other side. This was no ordinary storm even though the sea was susceptible to high winds. This divinely ordained storm pictured what the church in the world must face on the sea of life. The disciples must learn that the powers of darkness threaten to overwhelm the small boat that is representative of the church. We too must learn that of ourselves we are powerless to withstand the trials and storms that afflict us. This miracle is a sign that there is only One who can save us from perishing, whether that is the church that is constantly attacked by Satan, or we as believers who are constantly attacked by the world, the devil or our own flesh. Let us also cry out to Him who has power over the wind and waves: “Lord save us; or we perish,” and go forward in confidence and faith that He will surely save us. Sing Psalter 241:1, 7 and 8.

## July 6 Read Luke 8:26-39

We read here of a seeking shepherd and a mighty Lord. When Jesus stepped out of the ship in the country of the Gadarenes, a man met Him who was possessed with many devils. In spite of themselves, the devils fall down before Jesus, recognizing His absolute authority, and beseeched Him not to send them yet to the abyss of death. Knowing that they must relinquish their hold on this man, they foolishly request that they might enter into a nearby herd of swine. This was granted to them and they went to their doom when the swine perished. What an amazing demonstration of the power of Jesus over the devils and what mercy was displayed by Him who “is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). What was the reaction of the Gadarenes? Instead of rejoicing over a man made whole, they sorrowed over the loss of

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swine and urged Jesus to depart from them. Jesus graciously says to the man and to us who have been delivered from the power of the devil: “Return to thine house and shew how great things God has done unto thee.” Sing Psalter 385:1-3.

### **July 7 Read Mark 5:22-24, 35-43**

“Be not afraid, only believe.” These were the words that Jesus spoke to Jairus when the message arrived that his daughter had died. How could Jesus say that? When there is yet life, there is yet hope. But now it is too late and death has claimed its victim. Again these words echo in our ears: “Be not afraid, only believe.” It was not man who spoke those words, but He who is the Resurrection and the Life Himself. The scornful laughter of the spectators turned to silence and astonishment as the sovereign Lord of the universe demonstrated His power over death itself. And not only does He have power over physical life and death, but more importantly, over spiritual life and death. We read in Ephesians 2:1, “And you hath he quickened (made alive) who were dead in trespasses and sins.” This miracle points to that wonder work of Christ by His Spirit who gives us a new life in regeneration that we might live “unto the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:14). Sing Psalter 319:1 and 2.

### **July 8 Read Mark 5:25-34**

“Who touched me?” exclaimed Jesus as He made His way to Jairus’s home, even though throngs of people crowded about Him. They were eager to see some miracles done by this wonder worker about whom they had heard so much. The words He spoke held little interest for them but they pressed in on Him to satisfy their curiosity. There was one woman, however, who approached Jesus with a different attitude. Jesus was her last hope for a cure from her devastating illness and believed that if she could but touch His garment she would be cured. With a childlike faith she did just that and immediately was made whole. Jesus willingly healed her, but asked “Who touched me?” so that she could publicly make her confession of faith known. Trembling before Him she fell down and explained why she touched Jesus. “Fear not,” said Jesus, “go in peace, thy faith hath made thee whole.” Let us also with contrite hearts touch the hem of Jesus’ garment in faith and prayer desiring that we may be made whole from the guilt of our sins and experience the peace of forgiveness. Sing Psalter 141:1 and 2.

### **July 9 Read Matthew 9:27-31**

After Jesus left the home of Jairus, two blind men followed Him, crying out for mercy. By addressing Jesus as the son of David, it appears that these two men of Israel recognized Him as the promised Messiah. Jesus seemingly ignores them until He came to His lodging place. But these men were persistent. Had they not heard from the book of Isaiah that the Messiah would open the eyes of the blind? When Jesus asked them if they believed He could heal them, the earnestness of their faith was evident in their simple answer: “Yea, Lord.” The touch of Jesus upon their eyes gave them sight. We are not certain why Jesus forbade them to tell others about this miracle, but even though they were bursting inside to relate the details, it is not to their credit that they disobeyed. We are reminded by this miracle that blindness or darkness is a picture of sin. Without the redemptive work of Christ, we too would grope about in spiritual blindness. But thanks be to God, He has touched our eyes of faith and we see Him and we love Him because He first loved us. Sing Psalter 383:1, 2 and 5.

### **July 10 Read Mark 2:1-12**

We notice many facets that appear in this account of the healing of the paralytic. We see Jesus teaching in a crowded house at Capernaum; among those present were believers and the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. An interruption occurs when a penitent and helpless man appears before Jesus in an unusual way—he is let down through the roof by his friends. Jesus in mercy says, “Son be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.” More wonderful words than these could never be heard by anyone. But what a startling effect they caused in the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees who silently accused Jesus of blasphemy. Then Jesus revealed the thoughts of their hearts and demonstrated that He was worthy of belief by also healing the man of his physical infirmity. The Pharisees were hardened in their sins, but the penitent paralytic not only experienced bodily healing, but also tasted the gracious forgiveness from the Son of Man. The Savior is no longer on earth, but even now in heaven intercedes for us with the Father. Let us confess our sins, forsake them by His grace and go on our way rejoicing. Sing Psalter 233:1-3.

### **July 11 Read Matthew 8:1-4**

Leprosy in Biblical history was the most loathsome and feared disease imaginable. It not only was incurable at that time but, according to the law, it signified legal impurity, a sign and token of sin and spiritual corruption. Whoever fell victim to it was cut off from the congregation and experienced a living death. The leper in our passage today had undoubtedly heard tidings of miraculous healings wrought by Jesus. Upon seeking and finding Him, he fell down in faith and worshiped Him, saying simply, “Lord if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” Jesus, moved with compassion, touched him and healed him. Who can fathom the infinite power of the Lord? Who can understand the depth of His love and mercy toward His own? By nature we too are lepers, disfigured with sin and worthy to be cast away from His presence. However, Jesus came into our flesh, suffered our curse and paid the ransom for our sins. Having the beginning of this new life within us, let us nurture it by His grace, praying daily for cleansing and forgiveness. Sing Psalter 351.

### **July 12 Read Luke 7:1-10**

This Roman centurion gave evidence of a man upon whom many graces had been conferred. Although he was a powerful Gentile, he acknowledged the God of Abraham as the one to be feared. He showed great love and anxiety for a servant. In deep humility he sent Jewish elders to Jesus, feeling himself unworthy even to have Jesus enter his home. In faith he believed that only a word from Jesus would suffice to heal his servant, saying that if he himself could but speak to the soldiers under his command and they would obey, how much more effective and powerful would be a word from Jesus. Responding to this, Jesus marveled and exclaimed that he had not found such faith in all Israel. We are still privileged to hear the word of Christ every Lord’s day. He bids us to come to His house. Let us do so gladly with hearts made receptive by His Spirit. Sing Psalter 349:1 and 2.

### **July 13 Read Mark 1:21-28**

The worshippers in the synagogue were astounded at the teaching of Jesus. He spoke with authority, expounded the word perfectly, and not as the self-seeking scribes. In the audience a cry rang out from a man possessed with a devil, “I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.” Although this was true, Jesus would not

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allow this testimony, and He rebuked the devil and called him out of the man. What a display of power! What must we think of demon possession in our day and age? We know from Scripture that Satan is not only a “roaring lion...seeking whom he may devour,” but also “is transformed into an angel of light.” We believe that all non-Christians are under his power and do his bidding. We also know that he hates God’s people and does all in his power to destroy their faith. But the devils are all under the sovereign control of God and because Christ delivered His people from their power, the Christian can never be demon possessed. May this knowledge comfort us and cause us to live closer to our God by a holy walk and prayer. Sing Psalter 249:1-3.

### **July 14 Read Matthew 8:14-17**

This miracle is recorded in all three synoptic gospels. Mark and Luke state that Jesus left the synagogue where He healed the demoniac and then entered the home of Simon Peter where Peter’s mother-in-law lay sick. Luke describes her illness as a great fever, but which left her upon Jesus’ touch. In Matthew’s account we read that the Scriptures were being fulfilled where Isaiah prophesied of the One who “took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.” Throngs of sick people were brought to Jesus for His healing touch. According to Scripture, demon possession, blindness, deafness and leprosy are symbols of the spiritual powers of darkness and sin. These diseases abounded when Jesus was on earth and serve as pictures of us in our spiritual corruption. He took to His cross all these sicknesses and infirmities, all our guilt and sins, and paid the ultimate price so that we can stand justified in the sight of a holy God. What a tremendous price! What an unspeakable gift! What a glorious Savior! Sing Psalter 137:1, 2 and 6.

### **July 15 Read Luke 7:11-16**

There is a saying that goes: “where there’s life, there’s hope.” But that was not the case as a funeral procession made its way out of the city of Nain led by a widow whose only son had died. A widow’s lot was difficult enough when her husband, and provider, was dead, but now her only son was gone as well. As Jesus providentially met this sad procession, he was filled with compassion for this widow. “Weep not” He said. Then He touched the coffin and spoke a powerful word that caused the dead to rise up and live. Nothing but divine power could perform this greatest kind of miracle. Fear and awe gripped the people who were present as they glorified God and realized that He visited His people. This miracle is a sign to us that God by His Spirit visits us and raises us from our spiritual death by His regenerating grace to a new life in Him. Let us strive then to live according to that principle whether we are young or old, and praise God for His grace and mercy. Sing Psalter 203:1, 3 and 5.

### **July 16 Read John 5:1-18**

Some important lessons may be learned from this narrative of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda. This man who could not walk for thirty-eight years was made whole by a word from Jesus. We too are unable to walk in the ways of God except by His regenerating power and grace. We also may hear His word from week to week exhorting us to walk in repentance and godliness. Because Jesus healed on the Sabbath day, the Jews found great fault with Him. Jesus responded to that charge by saying, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” They rightly discerned that Jesus made Himself equal with God and hated Him all the more for it. We stand in awe at these words, heartily confessing that Jesus is very God and that our calling in regard to the Sabbath is to be busy in the works

of God. We rest from our daily labors, not in idleness, but in spiritual activity that glorifies Him and edifies us. Sing Psalter 320:1, 4 and 5.

### **July 17 Read John 6:1-15**

All the gospels relate this miracle of Jesus. His fame as a wonder worker and healer had spread throughout the country, and as a result vast throngs of people constantly followed Him. Jesus and His disciples sought a quiet place to rest, but could not escape from this multitude who were by now weary and hungry. Jesus, moved with compassion, multiplied the loaves of bread and fish, and fed the people with much food remaining. What a picture and sign this miracle means to you and I today! We find in Jesus the true Bread of Life that He bestows upon us abundantly. We eat of this heavenly bread through the preached Word and the Lord’s Supper. Let us never follow Jesus, as did the multitude, for purely carnal reasons and then forsake Him when they realized His kingdom was not earthly, but spiritual. But in faith, fall at the foot of His cross, and humbly respond in the words of Peter (vs. 68): “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” Sing Psalter 334:1 and 4.

### **July 18 Read Matthew 14:22-33**

Do you see a comparison in your life at times, dear reader, with the disciple Peter? Jesus had sent the disciples by boat across the Sea of Galilee while He went apart into a mountain to pray. The boat made little headway in the storm that arose and toward morning the disciples were weary and afraid. Then they saw Jesus miraculously walking upon the water toward them who calmed their fears. Impetuous Peter asked and was granted permission from Jesus to come to Him upon the water. When he kept his eyes on Jesus, he walked on the water, but when he looked down at the wind and the waves, he began to sink. He cried, “Lord save me,” and Jesus lifted him up after reprimanding him for his doubting. We too, regardless of our age, have times of relatively strong faith, but all too often when we don’t look to Jesus, we start to sink in the waves of doubt and despair. Listen then to Jesus who calls us to be fervent in prayer, to read His word, and to cast all our cares upon Him. In this way we have peace and assurance that He will never leave or forsake us. Sing Psalter 202:1 and 2.

### **July 19 Read John 9**

This is a lengthy and interesting account of a notable miracle of Jesus and the controversy that resulted afterwards. Without going into details because of space restrictions, we see that Jesus demonstrated that He is the Light of the world in causing the blind to see. Various reactions occurred. The hypocritical Pharisees considered Jesus a fraud because He healed on the Sabbath day. They examined the man who was healed from his blindness, and his faith, although understandably weak at first, became progressively stronger, and as a result of his testimony he was excommunicated from the religious and social life of Israel. But when Jesus searched this man out afterward and revealed to him who He really was, the man’s faith was strengthened and he worshipped Him. Are we too prepared to give up everything for the cause of Christ? Are we ready to defend our faith in the truth of the gospel over against false and heretical views that are so prevalent today? May God give us grace always to be faithful to Him who is the Light of the World. Sing Psalter 305:1, 4 and 6.

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## July 20 Read Luke 13:10-17

Jesus made a point to perform many of His miracles on the Sabbath day to expose the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and to teach the people the proper principle of that day. We see Jesus, teaching in the synagogue in this passage, who encountered a woman of Israel severely bowed down with a chronic infirmity. Jesus also described her as being bound by Satan. So, although she frequented the synagogue, we may believe that the devil also afflicted her in a special way. When Jesus saw her, He spoke a word and touched her. Immediately she stood straight and glorified God in faith and thanksgiving. What a picture of a merciful God who "raiseth them that are bowed down" (Ps. 146:8) with a load of sin and guilt! As usual, the ruler of the synagogue was indignant with Jesus not only, but also the people who sought healing. Jesus effectively silenced His accuser and as a result we read that His adversaries were ashamed, but the people rejoiced. This is a picture too of the glorious return of our Savior who as sovereign king will destroy His enemies, but take us, and all His beloved people, to dwell with Him forever. Sing Psalter 198:1, 6 and 7.

## July 21 Read Luke 17:11-17

We have here an account of ten lepers who met Jesus as He was journeying to Jerusalem from Galilee. These victims of this horrible disease, which was the outward symbol of sin and death, called to Him from a distance for mercy. Instead of instantly healing them by a word or a touch, Jesus told them simply to show themselves to the priests. Only when the priests pronounced them clean could they resume their place in society. To their credit they proceeded on their errand and as they went they realized they were healed. It is note-worthy that only one returned to give thanks to Jesus and he was a Samaritan. All the rest who were Jews did not return to their benefactor in gratitude. Jesus pointedly referred to these two reactions by saying that none returned to give glory to God except for this stranger. What about you and I dear reader, who once "were by nature children of wrath," but now are "quickenened (made alive) together with Christ"? Shall we not return thanks and praise to our God unceasingly for so great a salvation? Sing Psalter 164:1, 3 and 4.

## July 22 Read Matthew 15:21-28

The manner in which Jesus performed His many miracles of healing was not always the same. Each one took into account the circumstances peculiar to the individuals who sought the Master's help. In this case, a Gentile woman besought Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter. Interestingly, Jesus seemingly ignored her pleas for help until even his disciples were so annoyed by her persistence that they asked Jesus to send her away. But Jesus' very silence stirred her faith into greater zeal and Jesus, testing her faith, said that it was not proper to cast the children's bread to the dogs, meaning that He came primarily to bring the gospel to Israel. Not deterred in the least, this woman replied that even the dogs desired to eat the crumbs that fell from the master's table. Jesus commended her for her great faith and healed her daughter. Sometimes we struggle for an answer to our prayers and it seems that they are unheard. It is possible that God's will may not be our will or desires and then we pray for the grace of submission and contentment, knowing that our Heavenly Father loves us and will turn all things, even our afflictions, for our good and His glory. Sing Psalter 324:1, 2 and 4.

## July 23 Read Mark 7:31-37

The prophet Isaiah testified that "the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped...and the tongue of the dumb shall sing"(Is. 35:5,6). Jesus fulfilled this prophecy when the deaf and mute man was brought to Him. Here again we see that instead of laying His hands upon him, Jesus took him aside from the crowd and did three things. First He put His fingers into the man's ears, a symbolic action to pierce his deafness so he could hear. Then followed the sign of Jesus using the moisture from His own mouth to unseal the man's tongue that was bound. At the same time Jesus looked to heaven and spoke a Chaldaic word meaning, "be opened." Immediately he, who most likely never heard or spoke a word in his entire life, was able to speak plainly. Once again the people were astonished, and rightly so, at the mighty power of our Lord. He is not present among us now in His bodily form, but His Spirit lives within us and applies His word powerfully to our hearts, so that our spiritually deaf ears may hear the gospel and our tongues may speak and sing His glorious praises and testify of His greatness. Sing Psalter 399:1 and 4.

## July 24 Read Matthew 15:32-39

Some interpreters of Biblical narrative claim that the two accounts of the feeding of the multitudes are one and the same. But this is not true since there are differences in many aspects such as place, time, number fed, number of loaves, fishes and leftovers. In the other account, Jesus spoke of Himself as the Bread of Life (cf. John 6), whereas in this miracle we see the emphasis on His compassion for the people. They had followed Him for three days, and their provisions were depleted. Jesus addresses His disciples with His concerns, but they seemingly are not greatly worried even though they answer that it would be impossible to obtain sufficient food in that wilderness. They were learning to trust their Master to supply their needs. We must do the same. We pray to our Heavenly Father for our daily bread. Not for filled pantries or freezers, but for necessary provisions for each day. In His compassion He cares for our physical needs so that we may serve Him and fulfill our calling as members of His church. Sing Psalter 400:1, 5 and 7.

## July 25 Read Mark 8:22-26

As we have seen before, Jesus performed His miracles in various manners, and this one today is no exception. A blind man was brought to Jesus in the city of Bethsaida so that Jesus could touch him and heal him. Instead of saying a word that would instantly restore his sight, Jesus led him out of the town, and put spittle upon his eyes and asked him what he saw. The man answered that he saw men as trees walking. Then Jesus laid His hands upon him once again and he saw clearly. Sometimes we too cannot always understand the way God leads us. Various trials and afflictions affect our spiritual vision no matter how old we are. Our sight is blurred and we cannot find our way in life. Pray earnestly for a season of richer grace that God may open our eyes and hearts to the wonders of His love and mercy, "holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised" (Heb. 10:23). Sing Psalter 201:1, 6 and 7.

## July 26 Read Mark 9:14-29

Jesus was returning from the mount of transfiguration with His three disciples when He encountered much people. Among them were the scribes who took evil pleasure in the fact that the other disciples could not cast out the demon that violently possessed a child. In response Jesus called the scribes a faithless and perverse

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generation who were not worthy to have Jesus among them. Then the father of the child implored Jesus to heal his son. When Jesus said “all things are possible to him that believeth,” the man answered with the touching response, “Lord I believe; help thou mine unbelief,” and Jesus healed his child. Afterward when the disciples asked Jesus why they could not cast out that devil because earlier they had been given that power, Jesus told them that their faith had weakened because they were not earnest in prayer and fasting. This is a lesson for us also. How diligent and earnest are we in our prayer life? It’s so easy to mumble a few trite words with little thought. May we be stimulated to earnestness and sincerity in our prayers, and be assured that God will hear us and bless us for the sake of Christ. Sing Psalter 235:1 and 3.

### **July 27 Read Matthew 17:24-27**

On this last visit by Jesus to Capernaum where He made His home, the collectors of the temple tax confronted Peter and asked “Does your master pay tribute?” Peter responded in the affirmative and upon entering the house, Jesus spoke to him first with a question relative to the payment of tribute money. Peter undoubtedly was surprised to learn that Jesus was aware of what took place outside on the street. This half shekel payment originally was instituted by the Lord in Exodus 30:11-16 as the amount of the ransom payment for each man’s soul when they were twenty years old and above. Even though Jesus is the great King for whom the temple tax was being collected, and therefore rightfully exempt, yet He intends to pay this tax as usual. To show His Lordship to the disciples, He instructs Peter to go to the sea, cast in a single hook, and the fish he will surely catch will have a shekel in its mouth. This money is to be given to the collectors for Jesus and Peter. On this occasion, as many others, Jesus humbled Himself as a man for He was come not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. This same Jesus by His perfect obedience and redemptive death on the cross is our living Savior and Lord to whom we cling by faith. Sing Psalter 397:1, 2 and 8.

### **July 28 Read John 11:20-46**

This miracle of our Lord that transcends all other miracles is recorded only in the gospel of John and a lengthy chapter is devoted to it. Jesus received a message from Mary and Martha that their brother was sick. Instead of immediately going to Bethany, Jesus deliberately remained where He was for two more days. Then He and His disciples proceeded on their journey that culminated in a miracle so noteworthy that the consequence was “then from that day forward they (chief priests and Pharisees) took counsel together for to put him to death” (v. 53). Not only must Martha and Mary and the disciples be instructed by the words of Jesus, but you and I as well when He said, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Not, I will be in the last day. Not, I will be if you believe. But I am the resurrection because I am the life. Resurrection really begins in this life when we are regenerated. Lazarus was raised again to this earthly life to be sure, but once again would have to return to the grave. But through regeneration we become partakers of the resurrection life of Christ by a living faith, and that is a life that death cannot overcome. What a blessed and glorious hope for the believer! Sing Psalter 29:1-3.

### **July 29 Read Mark 10:46-52**

All three synoptic gospels relate this miracle of Jesus. There are slight variations in some details, but we can safely believe Mark’s account as an eyewitness of this event. Bartimaeus was indeed a pitiful figure to behold. Blind and clad in ragged garments with no

means to support himself, he had to resort to begging on the road to keep himself alive. Hearing that Jesus was passing by, and undoubtedly aware of whom He was, he cried out “Jesus thou son of David, have mercy on me.” Spurned by the crowd and told to hold his peace, only caused him to repeat his pitiful request with greater fervor. But Jesus heard him. He always hears and seeks His sheep that are wretched and poor and blind, and by grace know themselves as such. Jesus asked him, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” knowing full well what he wanted. “Lord, that I might receive my sight,” he responded. Let that be our request, as well, dear reader! As Bartimaeus by faith received his sight and cast off his beggar’s rags, may we pray that our spiritual eyes may be opened to the wonders of His grace, discard the filthy rags of our own righteousness, and cast ourselves at His feet for mercy, pardon, and peace. Sing Psalter 117:1 and 4.

### **July 30 Read Mark 11:12-14, 20-24**

On Monday of the Passion Week, Jesus and His disciples left Bethany and were on their way to Jerusalem. We read that Jesus was hungry and saw in the distance a fig tree having leaves, even though it was too early in the season to really have leaves, much less ripe figs. Upon examining the tree and finding no fruit, Jesus pronounced a curse upon it saying, “No man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever.” On the following day they passed by the same tree and saw that it was dead from the roots upward. We believe this represents the unbelieving Jewish nation who according to outward appearance seemed to indicate that they bore fruit. They boasted in appearance and outward observance of the law, but forsook the true principle of the law to love God and their neighbor in sincerity. Jesus pronounced a curse upon them so that as a nation they will be barren and wither and die. Jesus used this example to excite faith and confidence in His own disciples and therefore also to us. Let us never be guilty of “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (II Tim. 3:5). Instead by God’s grace, cling to him in true faith and bring forth much fruit. Sing Psalter 25:1-4.

### **July 31 Read John 21:1-14**

The disciples remained in Jerusalem for at least a week after Jesus’ death and resurrection and then made their way into Galilee in compliance with Jesus’ earlier words that He would meet them there after He was risen. They didn’t fully understand all these events and their significance, and so, discouraged and weary of waiting, they decided to forsake their discipleship and return to their former occupation as fishermen. Despite the fact that they were experienced fishermen, they toiled all night and caught nothing. Suddenly toward morning, Jesus appeared near them on the shore and after hearing them say they caught nothing, instructed them to cast out their net once again. We all know the result. At the word of Jesus a large number of fish miraculously entered the net. Didn’t they remember that Jesus told them that they would be fishers of men? The disciples and the church today must not be discouraged and not seek to cast the net of the Word in their own strength. But preach the Word they must! That Word will draw the chosen fish into the net. All the elect will be gathered by that Word for it cannot fail. Let us then, dear reader, be diligent hearers of that Word and by God’s grace hear our Savior say, “Come and dine.” Sing Psalter 337:1, 2 and 4.

# Our Wonderful Treasure

by Missy Van Baren

**Y**ou know, we really have something worth treasuring right at our fingertips. Truly, we do! It's something truly to be thankful about! It's unbelievable to even comprehend. Each time that we turn to it, I'm sure that we don't always note the value of it. It is complete and it is whole. This thing that we have available to us is beautiful. It is precious. This treasure is just positively wonderful! If you have read some of my past articles, I'm sure you have caught on to what this precious treasure is. It is the beautiful praises of God that have been formulated into one book. It is a book given to us by God that we might praise Him. This beautiful thing is our Psalter and the Psalms. I am hoping in my next few articles to point out how glorious this book is and hope to show you all the more what a precious book this is to us.

The Psalms are a complete praise book in itself, showing how we are to praise our Father in heaven. It contains everything that we could possibly need for the praise of our Father. The more that we look at this book the more we come to realize it too. Did you notice how well all the different psalms fit perfectly with all the different sermons we've ever had? Yet, the same song can be used for *several* different sermons and topics. It is totally mind boggling sometimes if you sit and think about it. Yet, even more mind boggling is the fact that simple minds are able to comprehend the meaning of the Psalms. This is a book that is comprehensible from the infant child all the way up to the scholars and wise men. How many times have we had it in church that we're standing behind a younger family and the children are bellowing out at the tops of their lungs different songs that they know? How can we have just a small book in comparison to all the rest of the books written out there for praise to God and still have it fit every situation? How can that be? Even more wonderful, is that the Psalms have stood the test of time! How can *that* be?

This is because God has given the words to David and to the other writers of the Psalms as a way to praise God. It is God's doing that the Psalms can be so deep

that they fit all areas of our life and all areas of our praise to God! It is God who has given us the perfect words to sing to Him and to praise Him, not man! What a blessing and a treasure to have this way of praising God! It is because of all this too that the Psalms have stood the test of time. It is because it has fit every situation of life that these have lasted and not a lot of the other songs that just are written to fit the moment or the mood. We couldn't possibly have a more glorious thing in our possession. Just think about it, a God given way to praise Him. Why could we possibly want more? Why would we want to look for other ways to praise Him?

These Psalms contain the different doctrines that we as Protestant Reformed Churches confess. The different attributes of God are evident in this book. You can see in and through this book the different comforts that this brings to God's people through the singing of His praises. Also, there are the different fruits of the Spirit that are contained in this book! There is yet so many more things listed in this book that it is almost unfathomable!

If we look at even just one Psalm, we can see the different situations it would fit and its wholeness and completeness. Lets look at Psalter #268,

*All people that on earth do dwell,  
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;  
Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell,  
Come ye before Him and rejoice.*

*Know that the Lord is God indeed;  
Without our aid He did us make;  
We are His flock, He doth us feed,  
And for His sheep He doth us take.*

*O enter then His gates with joy,  
Within His courts His praise proclaim;  
Let thankful songs your tongues employ,  
O bless and magnify His name.*

*Because the Lord our God is good,  
His mercy is forever sure;  
His truth at all times firmly stood,  
And shall from age to age endure.*

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We can see in this Psalter number *numerous* things. We see in here the different attributes of God. There is God's sovereignty, His goodness, and His mercy that are expressed in this Psalm. We also see in this the different ways of praising God and why we are to praise Him. It says we are to "sing with cheerful voice," tell of His praises, we are to rejoice, we are to know God and we are to "enter His gates with joy." It is completely amazing the more you think about it what all is contained in this same Psalm. What about all the others?

This is what I'm hoping to cover in my next few articles. It would be wonderful to open our eyes a bit more to the glory of God contained in these Psalms. At least, that is my hope and prayer by these articles. It would also be wonderful to study the different fruits of the spirit that are contained in the Psalms too! So, for the time being, and for this next month, consider what all is contained in the Psalms. Notice how they fit for every situation. Glorify God through them! ❖

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

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From the Pastor's Study

# What Churches Need More Than Anything (3)

by Rev. David Overway



**W**hat is most indispensable for a church institute is that its membership has a thorough and accurate knowledge of the truth. In previous articles we have seen that this is exactly what most churches are lacking today, while it is at the same time what we as Protestant Reformed churches have been so richly blessed with.

We have also seen why it is so important that churches have a knowledge of the truth in pulpit and pew. Knowing the truth, one knows Jesus. Knowing Jesus Christ, one knows the Triune God. And knowing God and Jesus Christ, one has life eternal (John 17:3). In order then, to enjoy life eternal, it is absolutely necessary to know the truth. In light of this, one can see that a lack of knowledge of the truth is indeed a serious thing.

In fact, it is dangerously serious. It is not as though one could opt to remain in relative ignorance of the truth, being content with a subsequent small enjoyment of life eternal and live without any other consequence. Rather, God's judgment falls upon those who live in spiritual ignorance. Ominous are the words of the LORD in

Hosea 4:6: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee...I will also forget thy children." God will

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**God's judgment falls upon those  
who live in spiritual ignorance.**

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destroy those churches that have a lack of the knowledge of the truth. He will do so largely in their generations, by rejecting them in their generations and casting away their children into hell. That is the serious warning of God's Word. And that is also what we see happening in many churches today.

What can these churches do to regain a knowledge of the truth and thereby escape the judgment of God? And how are we able to keep our knowledge of the truth so that we do not also fall under that judgment? Chiefly

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by faithful preaching of the Word of God. The only way for a church to regain or maintain a knowledge of the truth among her members is by the preaching of that truth.

Other things may not be allowed to take the place of the preaching. A church will not grow in its knowledge of the truth through dramatic presentations in the worship services, through puppet shows, or Superbowl viewings. It will not be led into God's truth by the lying "gifts" of healings, miracles, speaking in tongues and other supposed demonstrations of the Spirit very common in some churches today. And the people will only be left in dangerous ignorance when music becomes the emphasis in the worship service so that choirs, soloists, and repetitive ditties replace the sounding out of the saving Word of God.

But not only must a church have the preaching, it must have sound, faithful preaching of the *Holy Scriptures*. A church will not benefit from hearing motivational speeches by celebrities and politicians regarding how her members "can make a difference." But neither will she grow in her knowledge of the truth by pulpit messages from ordained preachers who address social ills and push political agendas. It is not the preaching of Scripture either when ministers spend their time in the pulpit telling stories that stimulate emotions or being humorous with jokes they gleaned in the past week from books containing "pulpit helps."

No, churches need the Word of God preached to them. They need called and ordained preachers who open the Scriptures to them and work hard to explain that Word of God (Romans 10:15). They need to hear that preaching of the gospel which makes known the "word of the truth" as the apostle Paul says the Colossian church had heard (Colossians 1:5, 6). They need, after all, a knowledge of the truth. And the only place to find that saving truth is in the Scriptures. And the only way for a church to learn that truth is by the preaching of the Scriptures (Romans 10:14, 17).

The preaching of Scripture, then, is the only way for a church to regain or maintain a knowledge of the truth. This is true because preaching is the very voice of Him Who is named Truth, and Who by that voice reveals Himself to His people. Preaching is Christ Himself speaking. He speaks through the called and ordained preacher, but it is Christ Himself who speaks.

That Christ Himself speaks in the preaching is clearly the teaching of Scripture. In the original, Romans 10:14 asks: "How shall they believe in him *whom* they have not heard?" The point is that those who believe in Christ

believe because they have heard Him personally speak to them through the preaching.

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...those who believe in Christ  
believe because they have heard  
Him personally speak to them  
through the preaching.

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The same is taught in John 10:27: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Jesus says His sheep literally hear *His voice*. This was not only true of those sheep that lived on the earth during the time that Christ in the flesh lived among them. But this text is a general statement that applies to all the elect people of God through all time. They all, *we* all, hear the very voice of our Shepherd and because we hear His voice, we follow Him. Today we hear His voice in the preaching.

And yet one more important text in this regard is Ephesians 4:20, 21a. Again, according to the original, we read: "But ye did not thus come to know Christ, seeing that ye did *hear Him...*" Here the apostle tells the Ephesian church that they heard Christ and the result of their hearing Christ was that they came to know their Savior. They heard Christ in the preaching.

Why it is so essential that God's people hear Christ Himself in the preaching is because Christ's voice alone is able to impart a knowledge of the truth of spiritual things. In order for sinful, unbelieving man to come to know spiritual things in a spiritual way—that is, with a knowledge of faith—a divine wonder-work of grace must take place. That wonder-work takes place through the voice of Christ.

The voice of Christ is mighty, effectual, irresistible. When the elect, then, hear that voice in the preaching they are made, by the power of God, to know the Truth. Apart from the voice of Christ, one cannot know the truth with a believing knowledge. But by Christ Himself speaking to them in the preaching, churches will regain and/or maintain that indispensable knowledge of the truth.

And that's what churches need more than anything. ❖

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*Rev. Overway is pastor of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Wykcoff, New Jersey.*

# Christians in Nigeria

by J.P. de Klerk.

**D**r. Peter Hammond, the leader of the Christian Frontline Fellowship in Africa, has been in Nigeria several times and wrote about this country in *Frontline Fellowship News* (Cape Town). He also gave the pictures for publication.

He said that Nigeria is a country of contrasts and conflict. Like Sudan, Nigeria has a Muslim north and a Christian south. However, unlike Sudan, in Nigeria it is the Christians who are the majority. Also, just as Sudan is the largest country (2,503,890 square kilometers) in Africa, so Nigeria is the largest nation (120 million people in 490 ethnic groups). In fact, Nigeria has more Christians, and more Muslims, than any other country in Africa.



Dr. Hammond took a picture of the Grand Mosque in the Capital, Abuja. Built with Mideast oil money, the dome is gold plated.

In the northern states (provinces) in Nigeria Christians have been severely persecuted. Literally hundreds of churches have been destroyed and thousands of Christians murdered in recent years.

One popular book, which is widely circulated amongst the Muslims in Nigeria, declares: "Priests in their churches should of course be killed without any

exception." And "they should not build a church, nor leave one standing in an area controlled by the Muslims, if it is Muslim by force. Christians should not be allowed to hinder Muslims from being accommodated at their churches day or night. Gongs and bells should be hidden, no religious rights should be public. Christians should not display their religious convictions openly. We are absolutely certain about declaring a person to be a kafir who belies or denies any of the foundations of the Shari'a or anything that is known by certainty to have been a deed by The Messenger." This is quoted from "The Sign of the Sword" (1984) by Shaykh Abdalqadir Al-Murabit. The picture shows a Muslim woman walking past the ruins of a church building wrecked by Muslim mobs.



Well circulated in Nigeria is "The Programme" adopted by the World Islamic Organization at a conference, in 1974, in Mecca. Here it is:

a) Muslim organizations should set up centers to resist Christian missionary activities.

b) Islamic radio and TV stations should be established.

c) All Christian activities, no matter the secular expression, should be stopped.

d) Christian hospitals, orphanages, schools and universities should be taken over.

e) Muslims organizations should set up intelligence centers about Christian activities.

f) All Christian literature should be banned in Muslim countries.

1975, when General Murtaia Muhammed overthrew General Yakubu Gowon, was the beginning of the implementation of this program in Nigeria. Many streets bearing Christian names were changed to Muslim names. Christian schools and hospitals were taken over by the state. Arabic inscriptions and emblems began to appear on Nigeria's currency notes and on emblems of the Nigerian Armed Forces.

At the Islam in Africa Conference in Abuja (1989) the Resolution issued at the conclusion of the conference declared their determination. "To show the whole world that Nigeria is truly an Islamic nation, to support the establishment and application of the Shari'a, to ensure the appointment of only Muslims into strategic national and international posts of member nations. To eradicate in all its forms and ramifications all non-Muslim religions in member nations (such religions shall include Christianity) to ensure that only Muslims are elected to political posts of all member nations.

To ensure the declaration of Nigeria (the 24th African and 46th world member of the OIC) a Federal Islamic Suttanate, to ensure the ultimate replacement of all Western forms of legal and judicial systems with the Shari'a in all member nations, to write the history of Islam in Africa and of Muslims and their institutions from authentic Islamic viewpoint, to propagate the knowledge of Islam throughout the continent, to call on Muslims to review the syllabi in the various educational institutions with a view to bringing them into conformity with Islamic ideals, goals and principles and to serve the needs of their community, to encourage the teaching of Arabic language, which is the language of the Qu'ran as well as the lingua-franca of the continent and to strive for the restoration of the use of Arabic, to establish strong economic ties between African Islamic countries and other parts of the Muslim world in order to facilitate mutual resistance and cooperation, based on Islamic principles" (issued Nov. 28, 1989).

You see here a monument of a soldier, to remember, that between 1967 and 1970 Nigeria suffered a vicious civil war. The Federal forces, under Muslim control,



slaughtered or systematically starved to death millions of Christian Igbos in the Biafran war.

This was only the beginning of the misery for the Christians ten years later. (See the picture of one of the hundreds of churches burned down by Muslim mobs in 2003.)

The Chairman of the Bureau for Islamic Propagation, Bashir Othman Tola (a presidential candidate), declared: "These dangerous devils, calling themselves Christians...we Muslims cannot sacrifice our religion or our self respect for any type of peaceful coexistence. It is time to begin the offensive. Let us begin by proclaiming Friday as our Sabbath. Do away with the Christian Red Cross symbol. Let us found our own Islamic Jihad of Nigeria, to counteract the evil machinations of the Christian Association of Nigeria. Let us act right now!!!"

The Muslim Brothers issued this statement which declared as their objective: "The establishment of the Shari'a of Alland the destruction of Kafir from the face of the earth. It is this Kafir system which gives these slaves (Christians) all. It puts them on the same level, it even raised the Christians higher than the Muslims. It is also necessary that we rise and destroy oppressors and the Kafir system. Ulamas should rise up and take the lead for the annihilation of Kafir. Oh, we are tired of Kafir system of government, Jewish laws and decrees. All the Christians must be brought out to public and be shot. From now on, Thursdays and Fridays must be work-free days. Fight them till there remains no tumult (fitna) on the face of the earth, and religion (way of life) becomes for Allah alone."

Recently Dr. Hammond visited in Nigeria: Lagos, Jos, Gboko and Abuja. He saw the numerous churches that have been damaged, vandalized and burned down by Muslim mobs. He received many heart-rending reports of Christians murdered by Muslims. Federal forces had been sent in to restore order. They burned even more farms and houses! The units sent were predominantly Muslim or under Muslim control, so rather than restoring order, they joined in the assaults against the Christians, massacring whole villages. In Vaase, 1200 civilians were killed by these Muslim Federal forces. In Taraba state, up to 100 churches were destroyed by Muslim mobs. The long-suffering Tiv people rose up and resisted, fighting back. Over 80% of the schools in Tivland are owned by the churches. However, none have a Christian curriculum. There is a desperate need for Christian textbooks.

Here you see some election boards in town, made by Muslims, but Buhari, the candidate for president, was soundly defeated.



In the last few weeks, numerous reports came across the desk of Dr. Peter Hammond, about the violence against Christians in Nigeria and the volatile situation surrounding the first presidential elections. Muslim officials controlled the visa departments of the Nigerian embassies and caused numerous delays. Visitors of the nation without a visa previously approved can receive stiff penalties. But the Christians impress Dr. Hammond each time with their warm hospitality and their enthusiasm for worship and the Word.

He conducted a Muslim Evangelism Workshop and Reformation Conference in Jos, as well as presenting leadership training at Mount Carmel Christian School and ministering on the state radio. In Gboko, he was able to



present another Muslim evangelism workshop in the community center. All in all, he delivered 20 different PowerPoint presentations, in addition to sermons, radio and film evangelism.

Below, you see the interior of one of the churches where Dr. Peter Hammond was invited to conduct a Muslim Evangelism Workshop.

A Christian action was formed and plans made for conducting biblical worldview seminars, summits and Great Commission courses in Nigeria.

Despite the stresses of continual Islamic pressure and persecution, the mature and dynamic churches in Nigeria are standing firm and reaching out vigorously to their Muslim neighbors.

The conflict between the Cross and the Crescent in Nigeria is intensifying. Muslim nations are pouring in vast millions of dollars to fund the construction of Mosques, Madressas and Muslim schools, and to promote Shari'a Law throughout Nigeria.

The Christians are responding by establishing more churches and Christian schools and through literature and radio ministry. They need to receive encouragement, prayers and support. Dr. Hammond has the opportunity in Nigeria to roll back the Islamic offensive.

One meeting in Gboko went on for six hours without a break. The Lord's children there have a strong evangelistic concern and missionary vision. Many were expressing their frustration and disappointment that their government was not standing with the suffering people of Zimbabwe, but rather supporting the dictator, Mugabe.

It was remembered that previous Nigerian governments had supported other tyrants such as Idi Amin who, while Chairman of the Organization of African Unity, was massacring Christians in his country. Many hundreds of thousands of Christians were murdered under Idi Amin's brutal regime.

Similarly, during Mengistu's "Red Terror" in Ethiopia, Samora Machel's persecution of the churches in Mozambique and Augustino Neto's reign of terror in Angola; these tyrants were well received and supported throughout Africa, including in Nigeria.

Of greatest concern to the Nigerian Christians is the threat of Shari'a Law from the Muslims.

In the town of Jos, on September 7, 2001, for example, during Friday afternoon prayers, a Muslim mob beat a pregnant Christian woman to death. They claimed that she had walked past them while they were bowed in

prayer, outside the Mosque. In rage, they got up from their prayer mats and savagely beat her, killing both the woman and her unborn child. Not satisfied with this innocent blood, these Muslims then went on the rampage down the main street in Jos, burning churches, shops and homes. Many hundreds of Christians were beaten, shot or hacked to death. The next day, the Christians rallied and stood firmly together, resisting the Islamic attacks. More Christians poured in from the surrounding villages, some wearing traditional regalia and brandishing spears and machetes. Vicious hand-to-hand fighting took place on the streets, and many firearms were captured from the Muslims. Some Christians counter-attacked. Over 6,000 people were killed. The Muslims were completely defeated and many fled north. Throughout this conflict the police and the army were unseen—barricaded in their barracks.

Upon investigation, it was revealed that the Muslim community had been planning this attack for many months, stockpiling weapons and ammunition. They were looking for a pretext to trigger their assault. The Christian woman walking past the Mosque was seized as an ideal opportunity for them to initiate their attack. What they had not expected was such fierce resistance from the Christians. Many Muslims said that they had never expected the Christians to fight back.

Dr. Hammond said that the Christians in Jos related to him numerous examples of the Lord's protection. A truck carrying weapons for Muslims crashed outside Jos, spilling and revealing a weapons cache. There have been numerous other Muslim plots which have been exposed.



But here you see where the Tiv people live. Here the Gospel was first established by South African reformed missionaries in 1903. Now, for the last 100 years these Tiv people have resisted Islam day to day. In Gboko, they related to Dr. Hammond testimonies of how the Muslim Hausa and Fulani people attacked their homes and churches, burning down entire communities. When the army was sent in, they burned even more houses.

There is a great potential for Christian radio ministry in Nigeria. Over 85% of the population have a short-wave radio receiver and even more have access to FM. However, while both local and international broadcasts are used by Christians, the government has yet to allow an establishment of a Christian radio station inside Nigeria.



Travel in Nigeria involves passing through many military checkpoints. You need some polite smiles and patience, but that is how the churches in Nigeria have become a significant missionary sending force. It is a fact that there are about 600 Nigerian missionaries serv-

ing in other lands, and thousands of Nigerian missionaries working within Nigeria, crossing linguistic and religious barriers to plant the gospel in other communities. There are over 160 bible colleges and theological seminaries in Nigeria, however, most of these desperately need more quality Christian textbooks and qualified lecturers.

of Christian schools have been launched by local churches, but they don't have Christian school textbooks and biblical worldview training.

In Lagos many people are dressed in Muslim robes, because the heat is stifling and humid. Like in Arab nations the traffic goes on the right-hand side of the road (dusty, crowded and pot-holed).

The Christian churches in Nigeria are dynamic and everywhere one sees signs of growth and new buildings under construction (brick as well as concrete). Dr. Hammond said the names of the various congregations give one an insight into the dynamic faith of the Nigerians: Deeper-life Bible Church, Full Gospel Church, Evangelical Church of West Africa, Victory Faith Church, The Triumphant Church, Solid Rock Fellowship, Power Revival Ministries, and so many others.

The reformed Dr. Peter Hammond is the head of the Frontline Fellowship in Cape Town, South Africa, and works in many countries all over Africa, spreading the gospel for many years. He provided information and photographs for this article about Nigeria. ❖



*Next to the building of the Mount Carmel Christian School in Lagos, some of the teachers and staff with the Christian flag, that has become symbolic for the Christians in Africa.*

The government-controlled schools make provision for religious education. There are 15,000 Christian religious teachers in the state schools and they have great opportunities, but very limited resources. Many hundreds

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

*A typical village in the bush of Nigeria. The thick roofs give protection against the burning sun.*



## Prayer

*When unto Thee we come  
With heads bowed down in prayer  
May our first impulse be  
To glorify Thy holy name—  
To praise Thee for the fact that Thou art God—  
In deep humility and awe to see Thy matchless grace,  
Thy power, Thy glory, mercy, holiness and love—  
Thy justice, greatness, Thy longsuffering;  
And may we grovel in the dust  
Knowing our own weakness, meanness, evil lusting natures,  
Selfishness, pride, envy, laziness, deceit.  
May our prayers never be so self-centered that they are  
A catalog of earthly desires.  
May we seek Thee, not self—  
Lord, be merciful to us—sinners!  
And may we leave Thy courts  
With lighter hearts  
Knowing that our faithful Savior stands  
In mediation.  
God's just and holy wrath is fully satisfied—  
He bore the burden; set us wholly free.  
He even plants desire in our hearts—  
Desire to please Him.  
Our filthy, sinful natures, changed by love divine.  
We glorify Thy name!*

*Thelma Westra*

# "LITTLE LIGHTS"

## Puzzling Plants

*... let it shine!*

by Connie Meyer

Plants and grains and fruits and trees,  
Can you tell their story please?  
Can you see them all around?  
How in Scripture are they found?



Look up the Scripture references below to find the plant named in the verse and fill in the blanks. When all the plant names are found, assemble the boxed letters in their same order to answer this question:

Jesus used a plant to describe His relation to us. Exactly what words did He use to teach us about this?

“ \_\_\_\_\_ ”



Psalm 45:8⇒ \_\_\_□□ — “All of thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and ?...”

Exodus 30:23⇒ \_\_\_□\_\_\_ — “...and of sweet ? two hundred and fifty shekels.”

Exodus 36:20⇒ \_\_\_□\_\_\_ — “And he made boards for the tabernacle of ? wood, standing up.”

Jeremiah 48:6⇒ □□\_\_\_ — “Flee, save your lives, and be like the ? in the wilderness.”

Genesis 8:11⇒ \_\_\_□\_ — “...and, lo, in her mouth was an ? leaf plucked off...”

Isaiah 60:13⇒ \_□□□ — “The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the ? tree, and the box together...”

Isaiah 44:14⇒ \_□\_\_\_\_\_ — “He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the ? and the oak...”

Matthew 3:12⇒ \_□□\_ — “...and gather his ? into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Luke 19:4⇒ \_\_\_\_\_□□ — “And he ran before, and climbed up into a ? tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.”

Hosea 10:8⇒ □□\_\_\_\_\_ — “...the thorn and the ? shall come up on their altars...”

Song of Solomon 2:3⇒ \_\_\_\_\_□ — “As the ? tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.”

John 6:13⇒ □\_\_\_\_\_ — “...and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five ? loaves...”

Revelation 14:18⇒ \_□□\_\_\_ — “Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her ? are fully ripe.”

Ezekiel 27:15⇒ \_\_\_□\_ — “...they brought thee for a present horns of ivory and ?.”

Ezekiel 31:8⇒ □□□□\_\_\_ — “...the fir trees were not like his boughs, and the ? trees were not like his branches...” ❖

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

## BEACONLIGHTS

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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:

Jared Thomas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Cornelis Kleyn—Byron Center, MI

Ethan Mark, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mark Clossen—Byron Center, MI

Chloe Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Erin Windemuller—Grace, MI

Tabitha Jean, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tom VandenTop—Grace, MI

Brady James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Russell Lotterman—Grandville, MI

Andrew James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Bartelds—Holland, MI

Madalyn Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel VanGinkel—Hull, IA

Emma Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jason Scritchfield—Loveland, CO

Wyatt Bert, son of Mr. & Mrs. Darrell DeVries—Randolph, WI

Michala Suzanne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kevin Poortinga—Peace, IL

Aandon Reide, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron Lanting—Peace, IL

Jared Timothy, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Schaaf—South Holland, IL

Renae Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan VanOverloop—South Holland, IL

Julie Elyse, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dave Vander Meulen—South Holland, IL

Caleb Everett, son of Mr. & Mrs. Trevor Kalsbeek—Southwest, MI

Kelly Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel Huisken—Southwest, MI

Brianna Leigh, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Cal Dykstra—Trinity, MI

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

### CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

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

*Romans 10:10*

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

Eric Pols—Holland, MI

Andrew Tanis—Hope, MI

Sara Huizinga—Hope, MI

Jared VanBaren—Hope, MI

Jill VanBaren—Hope, MI

Grant DeJong—Hull, IA

Sarah denHoed—Hull, IA

Brenda Brands—Loveland, CO

Jenna Tolsma—Loveland, CO

Michelle Tolsma—Loveland, CO

Paula Kamps—Southwest, MI

Chad Noorman—Southwest, MI

Brad Schipper—Southwest, MI

Marie VanderVeen—Southwest, MI