



the Banner *of Sovereign Grace Truth*

IN THIS ISSUE

Godly Manhood in
the Home under the
Offices of Christ

Finding Hope in the
Age of Temptation

The Significance
of Jesus' Name

A Periodical for Young and Old

Publication Number (USPS 010584)

Official Publication of the Heritage Reformed denomination. Typeset at Grand Rapids, Michigan (Gardner Graphics); printed at Grand Rapids, Michigan (Grandville Printing).

Subscription price for ten issues per year: \$20.00 in the United States. \$30.00 in Canada, payable in U.S. funds. To foreign countries \$35.00 (surface mail) or \$65.00 (air mail), payable in U.S. funds. Rates listed are for one year subscriptions.

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Copy for the *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* is due the 5th of the month prior to publication. All copy (including announcements, obituaries, anniversary notices, and ads) should be sent to the editor. All announcements submitted for publication should be typed, and are subject to editorial policy. Communications relating to subscriptions should be addressed to the subscription manager. Change of address should be forwarded to the subscription manager one month in advance of moving date. Please provide both new and old address.

PERIODICAL Postage is Paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to "The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth," 540 Crescent Street, NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503.

Additional Sources

For a list of printed Reformed literature (both new and used books in English, and used books in Dutch), write: Reformation Heritage Books, 2965 Leonard Street, N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49525, or visit our on-line bookstore at www.heritagebooks.org; 616-977-0889.

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Contents

DECEMBER 2010 • Vol. 18, No. 10

MEDITATIONS

- "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift"** — *Rev. Jan Neels* 267
The Significance of Jesus' Name — *Rev. Jim Greendyk* 268
New Year's Eve — *Rev. David Lipsy* 269

EDITORIAL — *Dr. Joel R. Beeke*

- Jodocus van Lodenstein's Experiential and Practical Theology** . . . 270

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION/FAMILY GUIDANCE — *James W. Beeke*

- The Unwavering Parent and Teacher** 273

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE STUDY — *Dr. Gerald M. Bilkes*

- The Parable of the Seed Growing Secretly** 274

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

- Finding Hope in the Age of Temptation** — *Dr. David Murray* 276
Coping with Failings — *Allen M. Baker* 278

FAMILY GUIDANCE — *Dr. Joel R. Beeke*

- Leading Through Office-Bearing (1)** 280

CHURCH HISTORY — *Rev. Brian G. Najapfour*

- The Sister of My Heart** 282

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES — *David Clark*

- What Every Parent Should Know About the Internet (6):
Internet Gaming** 284

BOOK TALK — *Jay T. Collier/Dr. Joel R. Beeke* 286

FOR OUR CHILDREN — *Diana Kleyn*

- Wondering about Jesus** 288

BIBLE QUIZ — *Diana Kleyn* 289

STORY FOR CHILDREN — *Diana Kleyn* 290

NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS 292

CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW — *John Goudzwaard* 293

CORNER FOR TEENS — *Rev. Mark Kelderman and Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven*

- The Reformed Faith (11): Are You Raised from the Dead?** 294

FROM OUR MAILBAG 295

POEM — *Philip Doddridge*

- While on the Verge of Life I Stand** 296

THE INCARNATION

"The glory of the Incarnation is that it presents to our adoring gaze not a humanized God or a deified man, but a true God-man—one who is all that God is and at the same time all that man is: one on whose almighty arm we can rest, and to whose human sympathy we can appeal."

— BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD

“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

—2 Corinthians 9:15

meditation

meditation

Rev. Jan Neels

The year 2010 will soon come be over. All year long, we have experienced God's faithfulness as He expressed it in Genesis 8:22: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." Just as God is faithful in the realm of nature, so He is in fulfilling the prophecies concerning His Son. The record of the great events of Christ's virgin birth, perfect obedience, suffering, death by crucifixion, burial, resurrection on the third day, ascension, and return on the clouds of heaven forms the basis of the sure foundation of our faith. Our faith is grounded on the realities of Holy Scripture. It is especially at the time of Christmas we focus on the great redemptive facts of Jesus' first appearance on this earth.

During the season of advent and Christmas, we will be bombarded with advertisements for the ultimate gifts. There will be immense pressure to be generous and get into the "Christmas spirit." Sadly, few will understand what that really means. The Apostle Paul expresses it clearly in these words: "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." The context of these words is that of thanksgiving and liberal giving (vv. 6–15). Having exhorted the Corinthians in the matter of liberality, Paul concludes with an unrestrained exclamation of his gratitude for God's greatest gift. He is at a loss for words, not knowing exactly how to express his heartfelt appreciation to God for giving us His Son; instead of searching for all the suitable adjectives to describe God's gift, he calls it "unspeakable!" The Greek word he uses has the idea of something that cannot be told because it is too wonderful for words: something that is indescribable in a good sense. God's gift of His Son is truly inexpressible.

Who can properly give a complete description of the Lord Jesus? Not only is He beyond our words, but our finite minds cannot adequately grasp the depth and breadth of this gift. No wonder, "for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD" (Isa. 55:8).

Even if we could fathom the depths of our sinful existence, we could never enter into the depths of God's determination to rescue sinners from their certain destruction. When we consider for a moment the glorious gospel realities in Scripture, we join Paul in his profound amazement. Think, for example, of the reality that "the LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3). Can there be a more suitable response than "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift"? In Christ, God loves His people and draws them. Read the gracious Old Testament gospel of Isaiah, especially chapter 53, and try to express your gratitude. There is no more suitable exclamation than "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

In all the busyness and bustle of this advent season, remember the reason for the season: "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). To grasp Paul's words, we need to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then in repentance and faith, we bow before the King of kings, and exclaim, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

Rev. Jan Neels is pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Jordan, Ontario.

The Significance of Jesus' Name

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. — Matthew 1:21

meditation

meditation

Rev. James Greendyk

In Philippians 2:7, we read that Jesus “made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” What a grand and glorious truth. Has Jesus’ coming in the flesh and taking upon Himself our sins produced utter humility in us and the experience of free salvation?

Christ took our nature on Himself and became man. Our Lord’s conception was without sin, being conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary. “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). Not only did Jesus become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, but Paul tells us that, “though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). As with all of us at birth, Jesus Christ was given a name. Matthew 1:21 reveals to us the name of “Jesus.”

What significance does this name bear for you and me? *Jesus* means Savior. How does this name function? “He shall save His people from their sins.” This is His special work. He saves repenting sinners from the guilt of sin by washing them in His precious blood. Furthermore, He saves from the dominion of sin through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart. Be comforted, dear child of God: sin will not have dominion over us. Finally, He will save from the presence of sin when our last breath will be taken and we enter into glory. Our song will be that we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. I recently visited two children of God who expressed the longing to depart and be with Jesus. One specifically expressed how he longed to be delivered from the battle with sin, in order that he might live a holy and God-glorifying life eternally. He then said, “Oh, what a glorious day that will be, and all for Jesus’ sake.” Yes, dear believer, we shall be delivered from sin to be forever with Jesus. Oh, how we will praise Him!

Jesus is a very encouraging and alluring name. As Jesus saves sinners, no one is excluded from His power to save. He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him (Heb. 7:25). No sinner who ever came to Him was ever turned away. “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). “This man receiveth sinners” (Luke 15:2). He delights to show mercy. “For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). Does He not say in Matthew 11:28, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”? Will you not come to Him as a merciful and faithful High Priest? He lived and died to make reconciliation for the sins of His people. To whom else can you commit your soul to find a cure for your sin? Trust Jesus; He will save you from sin and raise up within you delight in His ways and joy in His service.

My friend, would you be saved? Would you be partaker of that salvation Jesus has purchased and freely imparts? Acts 4:12 tells you: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” God provides no alternative for your salvation. Your own works or efforts will not make the grade before a holy and righteous God. Titus 3:5 echoes this profoundly: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.”

God offers you His Son as sin-bearer and sin-remover. “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21). Will you surrender? Will you submit?

Rev. James Greendyk is a pastor in the Heritage Reformed Congregations.

New Year's Eve

Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years. —Genesis 1:14

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meditation

Rev. David Lipsy

In the first chapter of Scripture, our Lord records the words above about His creation of the sun, moon, stars, and other luminary bodies in the heavens. God divided His creature, time, into segments—smaller and larger ones. But have you ever wondered why God did so? Is there anything more to the marking of time? Is there anything more about New Year's Eve than just the end of another year? Could time be a sign, of sorts, pointing us to significant spiritual truths? Let's spend a moment considering this.

First of all, we know that everything God does is done with good purpose. He never wastes a thought, never wastes a moment, never creates anything without His glory in view. If you carefully read what the aforementioned verse says about the lights in the firmament, God specifically says they are first of all for "signs," thereafter mentioning "for seasons, and for days, and years." I'm afraid we tend to forget that first part. We use these luminous gifts of God to measure time, but too often miss what they point out to us.

Ordinary food is a sign. In many ways, God uses food to teach us about great spiritual lessons. Think of the manna, the bread from heaven, and how our Lord taught that this bread pointed directly to Him, the Savior. Our Lord speaks of the "bread of life" and the "water of life" and uses the common elements of bread and wine as means by which to remember Him at each Lord's Supper.

The lights in the firmament are also signs. They not only mark the passing of time, they also *point* us to something, to someone. How clearly this is portrayed in verses like Malachi 4:2: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." In the Bible, living either in sin or in the absence of a sense of God's favor is referred to as "walking in darkness." The former is spoken of in texts like 1 John 2:11: "He that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." The latter is referred to in verses like Isaiah 50:10: "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?" And how beautifully the apostle likens the creation of visible light to the regeneration of man by means of spiritual light: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

So what about New Year's Eve? Well, we must admit that as to the day itself, it is entirely a man-made commemoration. After all, we do not follow any calendar referred to in Scripture but instead that which is called the "Gregorian" calendar, named after the sixth-century pope who introduced it. Still, our gathering for worship on the last evening of the year does, in some sense, reflect the sentiment of God's command to His people in Deuteronomy 8:2, "And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee." New Year's Eve is an excellent time for reflection—personally and corporately with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We as Christians probably all reflect, at the end of each day, upon what took place—sins committed, mercies of God enjoyed, etc. Why not do so at the end of each *year*?

It may also be instructive to keep in mind that, with respect to God's ordaining measurements of time, in every instance there are *end points*. Repeatedly in the creation account we read "the evening and the morning were...." Days end. Months end. Years end. God didn't give us any measurement of time that doesn't end. And that's a sign, too. The end of each day, the turning of each page on the calendar to mark the change of months, each New Year's Eve—all of these are signs pointing to the end of our life, the end of the world, and the end of time itself. Certainly, these end points are worthy moments for reflection, for contemplation.

Our lives might be greatly enriched, spiritually, if we pay greater attention to the lessons that can be learned from the lights in the firmament, the demarcations of time, and the end of every day, every month, and every year.

Rev. David Lipsy is pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Harrison, Arkansas.



Jodocus van Lodenstein's *Experiential & Practical Theology*

Last issue's editorial provided a short biography on Jodocus van Lodenstein, one of the foremost preachers and poets of the Dutch Further Reformation. This article provides a summary of the major theological emphases, both experientially and practically.

Editorial

Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Typical of Dutch Further Reformation ministers, van Lodenstein longed to see the Reformation find flesh in vital godliness, resulting in experiential and practical theology. Consequently, he often preached the need for spiritual renewal.

Let us look at what thoughts dominated the mind of van Lodenstein and how they influenced the Dutch Further Reformation. Three matters that were closest to his heart were his view of the Reformation, his pietism, and his mysticism. Let's look briefly at each.

His view of the Reformation

Van Lodenstein viewed the Reformation as doctrinally sound but incomplete in terms of practice. Because of the atrocities of the Roman Catholic Church, he agreed that the Reformation was sorely needed. In that sense, van Lodenstein was of Reformed persuasion.¹ However, he believed the Reformation did not go far enough. Van Lodenstein equated the Reformation to Ezekiel raising bones in the valley of dry bones. The Reformation renewed good doctrines, but it was only a skeleton on which flesh was yet needed.² This flesh, van Lodenstein said, consisted of two needs:

- *The need for the Spirit.* Van Lodenstein believed the reformation of the church stopped short of its ultimate goal of godly living. The church was not yet as purified as she should be.³ She had gotten rid of many Roman Catholic heresies, but she did not sufficiently emphasize the need for the saving work of the Holy Spirit in their place. The result was a cold and dead orthodoxy, which in turn produced nominal Christians who did not experience truth and did not cultivate holiness. The Reformation fell so far short in this area, van Lodenstein believed, that the Reformed church was now

embracing her own heresies and was even worse off in some ways than when she suffered under Rome.⁴

- *The need for perpetual reformation.* Van Lodenstein believed a single reformation was insufficient; there was a continual need for reformation. The consequence of failing to continue the Reformation was spiritual apathy, which was already prevalent in the Netherlands. According to van Lodenstein, many church members had lost their first love and had become worldly. Thus, his preaching continually emphasized the need for further reformation.⁵

It is important to understand van Lodenstein's emphasis on the Spirit and perpetual reformation for two reasons. First, the incompleteness of the Reformation was the focus of many of his thoughts, sermons, and publications. Van Lodenstein was not content to let the Reformation die short of spiritual transformation. Second, though van Lodenstein was critical of the shortcomings of the Reformation, he was still deeply Reformed. His pietistic and mystical tendencies were never divorced from what began in 1517; rather, they served to further the cause of the early Reformers. Van Lodenstein's practical theology, pietistic emphases, and mystical tendencies were always hedged in by the Reformed faith.⁶

His pietistic emphases

Cornelis Graafland defines Reformed pietism as "a development which characterizes itself by an increasing internalization and particularization of the experience of salvation, as well as by a more negative view of the possibility of revival in church or state in the Reformed sense, due to opposition and continuously worsening decay."⁷ Van Lodenstein's call for further reformation was directly related to his pietistic

emphases. In calling people to cultivate holiness, van Lodenstein stressed truth, godliness, self-denial, and sanctification.⁸

Even at an early age, van Lodenstein was drawn to asceticism and self-denial.⁹ Viewing the world as diametrically opposed to the kingdom of God, he renounced the pleasures that often marked aristocratic life. In later years, he was a quiet man and a good listener. He did not dispute with people unless he felt compelled to do so. His meals were primarily vegetarian, and he ate for nourishment, not enjoyment. He gave thanks for every cup of water he drank. He slept little and only as needed. His leisure time was spent doing only those things that were profitable for eternity.¹⁰

Van Lodenstein's asceticism was influenced by the monastic orders of the ancient and medieval church. He thought the Reformers erred in abandoning monasticism, which he believed was an important training ground for holiness. He asked, if monastic orders were rooted "in the old ascetics, or trainers of themselves to godliness, should men themselves not have the use of such as them to train the service of the church?"¹¹

The heart of self-denial was to realize the all-sufficiency of God and the nothingness of man, Van Lodenstein said.¹² He thus drew a direct line between inward sanctification and self-denial. Unlike Luther, he reasoned that justification is not the pillar by which the church stands or falls; rather, justification is a servant to sanctification. Sanctification is so dominant in van Lodenstein's thinking that he believed God took our nature upon Himself to sanctify and glorify it. The Incarnation thus is closely linked with sanctification.¹³

With his strong views on sanctification, van Lodenstein put his imprint on the Dutch Further Reformation. He and others called for a more profound commitment to Christ, for only such a commitment could deliver the church from shallowness and unholiness. By preaching repentance sermons each month, he hoped his congregation would not just embrace the truth with their minds, but experience it in every aspect of their lives. Carl Schroeder writes of van Lodenstein, "He both modeled and taught a strong commitment to a process of growth in devotion to Christ that spells out what sanctification as taught in the New Testament is all about. Few who listened to van Lodenstein regularly in Sunday morning worship could fail to feel his sense of urgency in these matters."¹⁴

Central to van Lodenstein's understanding of sanctification is the lordship of Christ. Van Lodenstein saw the church as the "school of holiness" where members come to learn propositional truths of the Scriptures and how to apply these truths outside of church. Through the model of the church as a progression towards holiness, the lordship of Christ is played out on earth by those who are truly saved and live out their commitment to Him.¹⁵ Without both inward and outward sanctification, the saints cannot live lives of holiness.¹⁶

His mystical tendencies

In 1659, the stresses of life (a lack of sanctification in his congregants, difficulties with the magistrates, and lack of renewal throughout the Netherlands) caused a profound personal crisis in van Lodenstein. Spiritual dejection caused him to look inward and see that the only thing he could control was his personal devotion to Christ, which moved him to embrace more individualization. At this time, van Lodenstein learned more about what he called "the language of love."¹⁷

For consolation, van Lodenstein turned to the Song of Solomon. He feasted on these songs of love and often preached from them in relation to the Lord's Supper.¹⁸ He was also influenced by the medieval writings of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) and Thomas à Kempis (c. 1380–1471). In these writings and the Song of Solomon, van Lodenstein learned how to develop and cultivate personal devotion to Jesus.¹⁹ He viewed the Songs as portraying the inner chamber where a believer's soul and God are united. This union is not one of a King to His people but of a King to His bride. Through bonding in love to Christ as the perfect Bridegroom, the spiritual bride is brought to self-denial, acknowledging that God is the all-sufficient, and man, in himself, is nothing.²⁰

For van Lodenstein, the beautiful language of the Song of Solomon expresses Christ's precious benefits for His bride and the bride's spiritual longings for her bridegroom. Van Lodenstein particularly emphasizes the royal aspects of the believer's bridegroom. By calling the bridegroom *King*, he underscores Christ's immense attractiveness, majesty, and glory, as well as the bride's need to render Him honor, service, and subjection.

Van Lodenstein equates what happens in the King's inner chambers with Christ's sympathetic love and the believer's intimate fellowship with Him. Through spiritual communion with Christ, the believing bride tastes the first fruits of heavenly communion. When the bride sees the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus in the King's inner chambers, she no longer sees herself but is increasingly conformed to Christ's image and is more fully assured of the King's unchangeable faithfulness and love for her. She then loves God with her entire mind, soul, and being, and desires Him for His own sake, viewing Him as wholly delightful.²¹

Hughes Oliphant Old fascinatingly writes of van Lodenstein's sermons:

What got these sermons across was their interiority. That is not quite the same thing as subjectivity. These sermons have a tremendous sense of interiority in that they bring us into the inner room, just as the Sacrament [of the Lord's Supper] itself does. We find in these seventeenth-century Dutch sermons the same thing we find in the seventeenth-century Dutch paintings. The Dutch Masters had a marvelous ability to intimate the

interiority of our existence. The interiors of seventeenth-century Dutch homes as painted by Pieter de Hooch, Gerard Terborch, and Jan Vermeer tell us much about life and what it meant to these people. One looks at an interior of de Hooch and marvels at the eloquence of its simplicity and order. Or again, one looks at an interior by Vermeer and senses the quiet of the room. Perhaps it is a woman reading a letter or doing a simple household task. Perhaps it is a man contemplating the vanities of life. It all had to do with the mystery of the inner room, that Holy of Holies, the Song of Songs. That is what Protestantism is all about. It is not about baroque power and authority but interiority, the secret communion with God. That is what justification by faith is all about and that is what sanctification by faith is all about as well.²²

Though van Lodenstein was influenced by medieval mystics, his commitment to Scripture and Reformed theology were the hedge that spared him from falling into aberrant forms of mysticism. He has been accused of coming close to speaking of a tangible union between Christ and the believer, but van Lodenstein was careful to cite a difference between an *actual* and a *gracious* self-revelation of God. In his opinion, an actual divine self-revelation must be rejected. By gracious self-revelation, he means that, by considering God's character through Spirit-inspired Scriptures, we can be united to God by faith.²³

Van Lodenstein's definition of mystical theology was inseparable from "words of writings that express an experience or exercise of the holy truth."²⁴ He stressed the need for a personal experience of God. Viewed in this light, we do not need to condemn van Lodenstein's mystical tendencies, since he stresses that experience is always grounded in the Scripture and is brought to us by the Spirit's work through faith.

Van Lodenstein's stress on the word *exercise* also kept him from falling into extreme mysticism. His mystical tendencies served his views of sanctification, for he believed that believers are led to the inner chamber of God's love, not for an ecstatic experience, but to equip them to serve. Thus, there is always a strong ethical dimension to van Lodenstein's mystical tendencies.²⁵

Conclusion

Van Lodenstein's writings are interwoven with his view of the Reformation, his pietism, and his mysticism. In his opinion, the Reformation had become a "deformation."²⁶ It was sound in doctrine, but failed to achieve the true goal of reformation, which is self-denial and sanctification.²⁷

His convictions about the Reformed faith and his pietistic persuasions did not allow van Lodenstein to stagnate in his commitment to Christ. He urged believers to keep growing by experiencing loving fellowship with Jesus Christ and to know, beyond mere cognition, the sweet and vital union Christ's bride can share with Him. By promoting this mystical experience, van Lodenstein teaches us to be discontent with

nominal and skeletal reformation so we can go through the process of being emptied of self and filled with Christ.

To understand the depth of van Lodenstein's mystical tendencies, we should read his poems and his later writings. Outwardly, van Lodenstein was a very temperate man. Inwardly, however, his soul yearned to know more about union with Christ and personal holiness, worked by the Holy Spirit.

Van Lodenstein has been called "the most prominent exponent of Reformed *praxis pietatis*" (the practice of piety) among the Dutch Further Reformation divines.²⁸ He stressed sanctification more than justification, and urged the Dutch Further Reformation to call sinners to repentance. In so doing, he paved the way for later pietists to follow in his steps.

1. Graafland, "Jodocus van Lodenstein," 91.

2. *Ibid.*, 89.

3. *Ibid.*, 113.

4. Iain S. Maclean, "The First Pietist: An Introduction and Translation of a Communion Sermon by Jodocus van Lodenstein," in *Calvin Studies VI* (Davidson, N.C.: Davidson College and Davidson College Presbyterian Church, 1992), 16.

5. Graafland, "Jodocus van Lodenstein," 88.

6. Old, *The Age of the Reformation*, 466.

7. Graafland, "Jodocus van Lodenstein," 85. See also Maclean. "The First Pietist," 15.

8. Graafland, "Jodocus van Lodenstein," 89–90. See also Brienens, *De Prediking van de Nadere Reformatie*, 1.4.2.b.

9. Trimp, *Jodocus van Lodensteyn*, 191–94.

10. Schroeder, *In Quest of Pentecost*, 37–38, 77.

11. *Ibid.*, 83.

12. Graafland, "Jodocus van Lodenstein," 107.

13. *Ibid.*, 110–11.

14. Schroeder, *In Quest of Pentecost*, 44.

15. *Ibid.*, 78–79.

16. Graafland, "Jodocus van Lodenstein," 95, 102–103.

17. Schroeder, *In Quest of Pentecost*, 79.

18. Cf. Old, *The Age of the Reformation*, 462–73.

19. Schroeder, *In Quest of Pentecost*, 80–86; cf. Trimp, *Jodocus van Lodensteyn*, 194–200.

20. Izaäk Boot, *De Allegorische Uitlegging van het Hooglied voornamelijk in Nederland: Een Onderzoek naar de Verhouding tussen Bernard van Clairvaux en de Nadere Reformatie* (Woerden: Zuijderduijn, 1971), 179–80.

21. *Ibid.*, 182–83.

22. Old, *The Age of the Reformation*, 467.

23. Graafland, "Jodocus van Lodenstein," 95.

24. Onstenk, "Lodenstein, Jodocus van," 3:254–55.

25. Boot, *De Allegorische Uitlegging van het Hooglied*, 182–84.

26. Jodocus van Lodenstein, *Beschouwinge van Zion* (Utrecht: Willem Clerck, 1674), 1:5ff.

27. Proost, *Jodocus van Lodenstein*, 118; MacLean, "The First Pietist," 16.

28. *Ibid.*

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the unwavering parent & teacher

And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of a doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.

—Luke 12:29–30

Committed parents seek the best for their children. Dedicated teachers work hard so that their students can achieve their best. Whether Christian or atheistic, when referring to external achievements and prosperous careers, parents share similar goals for their children. Yet the two differ. How? In many ways, but I would like to focus on one significant difference: the basis for the believer's and non-believer's hopes for their children.

Unbelieving teachers have hopes. Their parenting and teaching is not hopeless. But what are their hopes based on? On their children; on the skills that they taught them, on their ability to apply their learning in new situations when they are alone. But fear and trepidation accompany such hope; all parents and teachers realize that the world their children and students enter is a dangerous one. Powerful influences are present. Will their children make foolish decisions? Will someone persuade former students into harmful commitments? Will my child have the skills, ability, and will power to always choose the best way and make the right decisions? Will my former students always apply the truths they learned at school to avoid the pitfalls and wrong turns along life's pathway? Will they choose the right career? Will they persevere and succeed in it? Will they marry well, or will the relationship fall apart some years later?

Do you see that if our hope is based upon our children or students, or on their abilities, or on what we taught them, our hope is built on shaky ground? No wonder we end up worrying so much! Indeed, our children are no match for the world's trials and temptations. Will all my hopes be dashed? These uncertainties create so much anxiety! A committed parent and dedicated teacher can worry so much about these things!

The Christian parent's hope is different. It is fixed. It is unwavering. Why? Because the Christian's hope is not based on our children or students, or what they will think, feel, decide, or do. The Christian's hope is founded on Jesus Christ. The more firmly believers' hope is rooted in the Lord, the more unwavering their hope will be. The realities and fears of daily life will not be removed; they remain the same. But the more Christian my hope is, the more it is placed above people, circumstances, and things. The more Christian a par-

ent or teacher is, the more he will trust his son or daughter or student into his heavenly Father's hand. God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-caring. No temptation or foolish decision is too strong for Him. He can guide my child safely through life. The Lord's intelligence and wealth is limitless. He can lead each student into fitting careers and provide for all his or her needs.

The world presents many unknown fears, doubts, and worries. Yes, you can be rightfully concerned about the future of your children, grandchildren, and former students. But do not end in the world or in the unknown future. Do not end in worry. Do not become anxious. As our text instructs us, do not be "of a doubtful mind." Do not let your thoughts end in all that can go wrong. All this is worldly and ungodly thinking. End in Christ; root your thinking in God. In Him, your hope will find unwavering ground. Your Father knows that your children need all the things that you worry about. He knows all the dangers that your students will face. He will provide; trust Him.

In the previous verses in Luke 12, Jesus directed His listeners' attention to the birds of the air and to the grass of the field. If God cares for them every day, will He not care for you and your children? If He provides food for the birds and clothes the grass so beautifully, will He not take care of you? Will He not hear your prayers? Will He not provide all that is necessary?

Trust God in Christ. Do not trust yourself, your children, or your ever-changing world. Trust your all in God. Do not try to hold the lives of your children or students in your hands; do not place your hopes in them or their abilities. All this will disappoint and generate anxiety. Do not be of a doubtful mind, for your Father knows that your children need all these things. Trust them in His fatherly hands. Here you will find solid hope—as solid as the Rock of Ages. Here the soul of a parent and teacher may find rest. This is the only unmoveable hope.

Are you an unwavering parent, a solidly rooted teacher?

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the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly



Read: Mark 4:26–29

In the spring, young children love to watch what happens when they plant a few seeds in a cup, put the cup against a sunny window and wait...day after day...for the thin green blades to push their way up through the soil. It is the miracle of new life and it comes in such a mysterious way that their minds are captivated. To have to wait for a week or two is part of the excitement.

The lessons learned from watching and waiting as a seed germinates and a plant begins to grow are not only valuable for children but, as we see in our parable, they are important lessons for all who wish to know how the kingdom of heaven takes shape.

The Scenery This parable is only recorded by Mark. We find it on the heels of the parable of the sower, in which Jesus spoke about the *preparation* of the soul for the gospel message. Christ was making clear that not all hearts have been prepared to receive the gospel. The seed must have a specific prepared “landing place” in order to bear fruit.

Now, in this parable of the growing seed, Jesus is dealing with the *process* that the gospel message undergoes in the soul. The parable mentions three main stages in the process: sowing, growing, and reaping. During the sowing stage the seed is “cast,” or embedded in the ground. During the second stage, the seed *grows*, first into a blade; next, the ear; and then the full corn in the ear. Then, finally, there is the reaping stage, when the fruit is fully ripened.

Between stages 1 and 3, however, the sower has nothing to do with what is happening to the seed. That happens secretly. In fact, the parable puts emphasis on the sower’s non-involvement with the seed. After “casting” the seed to the ground, the man in the parable “sleeps.” We read of him rising “night and day,” which tells us that time is passing. The sower isn’t anxiously turning over the soil to see if he can detect any growth or pacing up and down the fields at night trying to hasten the growth of the crop. On the contrary, he sleeps at night and rises each day to do whatever else he may need to do, and simply leaves the seed to grow.

Christ draws specific attention to the fact that the farmer does not know or understand all that goes into the process of the seed springing and growing (v. 27). He operates with

an implicit confidence that there will be a harvest. He trusts that there will be a harvest even when he doesn’t understand all that is happening under the ground.

The Substance For both the parable of the sower and the parable of the tares, the Lord had given His disciples an explicit interpretation. That probably means that the parable we are considering now may have been the first parable that these disciples—newly initiated into the mysterious world of the parables—would need to try to interpret.

The basic message of this parable is found in the phrase: “For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself” (v. 28).

The Greek word translated as “of herself” is *automate*, from which the English gets the word “automatic.” Christ is saying that the growth of the plant is subservient to the order and laws in creation. It is the natural process of a seed, when cast into the earth, to bring forth a plant. This natural process is far greater than anything a farmer or any number of farmers could do; ultimately, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has designed all things and still maintains and directs them, through these means brings forth a harvest from the seed. It’s like Paul says elsewhere: “God...giveth the increase” (1 Cor. 3:7). Matthew Henry comments: “God carries on his work insensibly and without noise, but insuperably and without fail.”

When God gives the increase, He does so gradually, just as we see with corn. The seed begins to grow and comes to fruition along the steps of the blade, the ear, and the full ear of corn. Some in the kingdom of God are still “blades,” others “ears,” and still others are “full ears of corn.” A blade is something that doesn’t show fruit, but it does evidence new life. A blade is very sensitive and might be easily trampled, but every lush corn-bearing plant at one time was a mere blade. The ear is the beginning of the formation of fruit, but to think it was the ripe and mature fruit would be a mistake.

Of course, we should not force the parallelism to spiritual life as to imply that those who die quickly after conversion would not be bringing forth a full measure of fruit to the glory of God. God measures and gauges fruit according to what pleases Him and, from that divine perspective, the sickle never comes a moment too early.

Many have difficulty seeing that the sower of this parable is Christ because the parable seems to be suggesting that the sower does not know how the seed springs and grows (v. 27). Nevertheless, the parable puts us into a bind, for if Christ were not the sower, neither would He be the reaper, for verse 29 says: “Immediately he [that is, the sower] putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.” Since we know that Christ *is* ultimately both the sower and the reaper, the only way out of this seeming dilemma is to regard this detail of “not knowing” as belonging to the earthly level of the story. Since Christ has both a human nature as well as a divine nature, we shouldn’t be surprised that this detail simply cannot carry over to the person of Christ.

In the end, the point is precisely that Christ is *much more* than just the sower. In His incarnation, He took on a true human nature in order that He could come to this world and personally sow the message of the kingdom. He could also be fully confident that the harvest of this seed would be most certainly accomplished, because as the second person of the divine Trinity, He has at His disposal the power behind the laws and processes of creation that enable the seed He has sown to sprout and grow. And through His life, death, and resurrection, He exerts a power equivalent to that of creating the universe as He regenerates people. Through the power of His Spirit He makes them to grow up in Him. Paul says it this way: “If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Rom 6:5). In the covenant of redemption, He has been given people to sow, grow, and reap — all to the glory of God.

Later the same day that Christ told this parable, an event transpired that confirms this point. We read about the great miracle of Jesus calming a terrible storm, in which it seems like all of “nature’s” power is combined against the disciples (Mark 4:35–51). Nevertheless, if the disciples had had Christ’s parable fresh on their minds, they may not have been surprised to find Jesus *sleeping* on the ship. After all, like the sower of the parable, He had completed His day of sowing and now He could sleep, confident that His Word would not return void but accomplish what He purposed (Isa. 55:10).

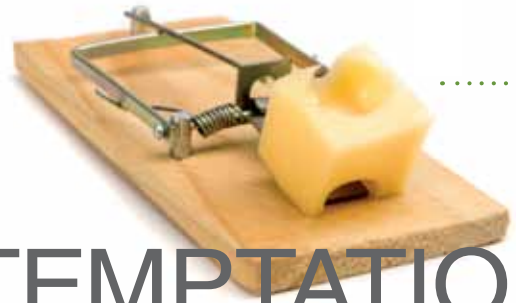
So then, Christ, who at one moment is the sower who can sleep confidently, explains the next moment exactly why He can sleep — and we through Him: He proves that even earth’s fiercest powers are under His control. In other words, “the earth” that grows the seed acts under the control of this human and divine sower. The growth of the kingdom is not left simply to natural laws; the Lord Jesus directs nature. Though hidden in the ground, unseen by men’s eyes, the seed is still taken care of, cultivated, and nourished by Him, who sits enthroned over all creation. Precisely through these storms, He is growing the seed of faith in His people’s life, until He has the growth exactly where He wants it to be (see Mark 4:40).

This parable is useful in examining ourselves on at least three points.

1. Self-reliance. Often we get bogged down with the latest trends, methods, and strategies, thinking to produce spiritual growth in ourselves or in others. We may try to grow the seed in our children or friends or neighborhoods, even working tirelessly as we do so. We may be trying to work up some growth in our lives through self-improvement and the like. The confident sleep of the farmer in the parable proves how vain our self-reliance can be.
2. Faith. Instead of relying on ourselves, do we rest in the gracious providence and covenant of God? Indeed, we are called upon to sow the seed of God’s Word in the lives of our children, friends, and neighbors, but do we carry on with our day-to-day business, knowing that Christ will bring His harvest to fruition through His Spirit’s work? The life of faith is a life lived trusting in Jesus Christ. It is by faith that we must continue, even in the times that seem spiritually to be the driest and most uneventful.
3. Growth. We can’t read this parable without asking: Which stage am I in? Has fruit started to show itself in my life? Or is it perhaps true that my life does not so much as show a blade of new life?

As the searchlight of this parable reads us, we need Christ from heaven to decrease our self-reliance and increase our faith. We are not the shapers of our own destiny. Instead, we need to learn to be content to be seed on His earth, which He is growing from heaven through His almighty grace.

1. So often when the Bible tells us to *believe*, we want to *behold*. Discuss how the parable should convict us on this point.
2. The Bible speaks elsewhere about various levels of faith (weak faith, strong faith, great faith, etc.). Trace how the disciples’ faith might have developed throughout their lives along the three stages (blade, ear, full corn in the ear).
3. After telling this parable, Christ takes the disciples onto the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35–41). There Christ sleeps while the disciples fret. How does this parable of the seed growing shed light on growth in the life of the disciples?
4. Small beginnings often discourage us. How does this parable remind us that they should not? Why do you think God often chooses to work in the way of small beginnings?



Finding Hope

IN THE AGE OF TEMPTATION

Practical Christianity
Dr. David Murray

“But, Mom, you don’t know how hard it is to be a Christian today.” “Oh, Dad, things were much simpler in your day.”

Every generation of Christians thinks it is more difficult to be a Christian in their day than in the past. Well, the present generation now has the *New York Times* on their side (Alina Tugend, *Pumping up the self-control in the age of temptations*, October 8, 2010).

“There is research that shows people still have the same self-control as in decades past, but we are bombarded more and more with temptations,” said Kathleen Vohs, associate professor of marketing at the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota. “Our psychological system is not set up to deal with all the potential immediate gratification,” she reports.

The author of the NYT article, Alina Tugend, points out that although temptation is nothing new, since the Industrial Revolution we not only have increased opportunities and time on our hands, but with almost everything available at a click the physical barriers to temptation have almost disappeared. Tugend asks, “Is there anything we can do about it? Are there ways to build up willpower?” Her answer: “Yes.” How? Here’s her method summarized:

1 DEFINE TERMS.

Unless we understand the process of temptation, we will not be able to resist it. Self-control has two components: will-power (moving from the current place to where you want to go) and assessment (measuring to see how well we’re doing).

2 BUILD UP RESERVES OF WILLPOWER.

Research has shown that willpower, like a muscle, can get fatigued if overused. Two groups were told to watch a funny film without laughing. Then they were asked to resist chocolate chip cookies. Those who succeeded in the first task were more likely to fail in the second. Timothy Pychyl, associate professor of psychology at Carleton University, concluded that those who had to exert more willpower in the first task “exhausted their self-regulatory strength, at least temporarily, and therefore are unable to muster the self-regulation needed for the second task.” That’s why the couch is more appealing than the exercise bike after a stressful day at work!

3 USE EXTERNAL CONTROLS.

If you feel you check your e-mail too frequently, install a program to shut it down temporarily. An extreme example in literature, Professor Pychyl said, was Odysseus asking his men to tie him to the mast to avoid his being lured by the sirens’ singing.

4 SEE SELF-CONTROL AS FUN, NOT WORK.

In experiments where instructions used the word “fun,” even those with low self-control exerted more willpower than expected.

5 DON’T UNDERESTIMATE THE DIFFICULTY.

Trying to convince ourselves that self-control is easy won’t work, says Professor Pychyl.

6 BE AWARE OF SOCIETAL PRESSURES.

As many temptations result from what everyone else is doing, it may be necessary to shield yourself from such pressure or at least identify it as an external danger.

7 TAKE SMALL STEPS.

Rather than resolving you'll stop spending or turn off that computer forever, simply make a choice not to buy a latte today, or to stop checking your computer for an hour or a day (depending on your addiction).

8 TAKE A LONG-TERM VIEW OF TEMPTATION.

Realize that "those temptations will always be there and you don't need to act on them now. Knowing that lessens the urgency, has a calming effect, and helps us resist the constant thrum of 'buy it now' that permeates our lives."

9 SET REWARDING GOALS.

For example, "When I am done with work, I will go to the gym" works much better than "I should go to the gym."

There's some helpful advice here for anyone—yes, even for the Christian—who is looking for practical ways to translate the desire to resist temptation into reality. However, although Christians may use some of these techniques, we have a much more Christ-centered approach to temptation. We do not stand alone in our own weak willpower against the tempestuous tide of temptation. Rather, we stand on and with the Rock. Here are some of the extra resources He gives us:

1 CHRIST'S LOVE

Just as Christ's love for us constrains and compels evangelism (2 Cor. 5:14), so it also constrains and compels obedience (1 John 4:19).

2 CHRIST'S WORD

Just as Christ Himself resisted temptation with Scripture (Luke 4:1–14), so do we (Eph. 6:17).

3 CHRIST'S EXAMPLE

Consideration of Christ's holy life inspires and empowers perseverance in holiness (Heb. 12:3).

4 CHRIST'S SPIRIT

Christ is with and in His people by His Spirit (Gal. 5:16–18). He does not send us into battle; He comes with us.

5 CHRIST'S SYMPATHY

As He was tempted on all points, like as we are, we can go to One who sympathizes with us as we face strong temptation in our human weakness (Heb. 4:15).

6 CHRIST'S GRACE

When we come to Christ, we not only get sympathy, we get strong grace to help in our time of need (Heb. 4:16).

7 CHRIST'S FORGIVENESS

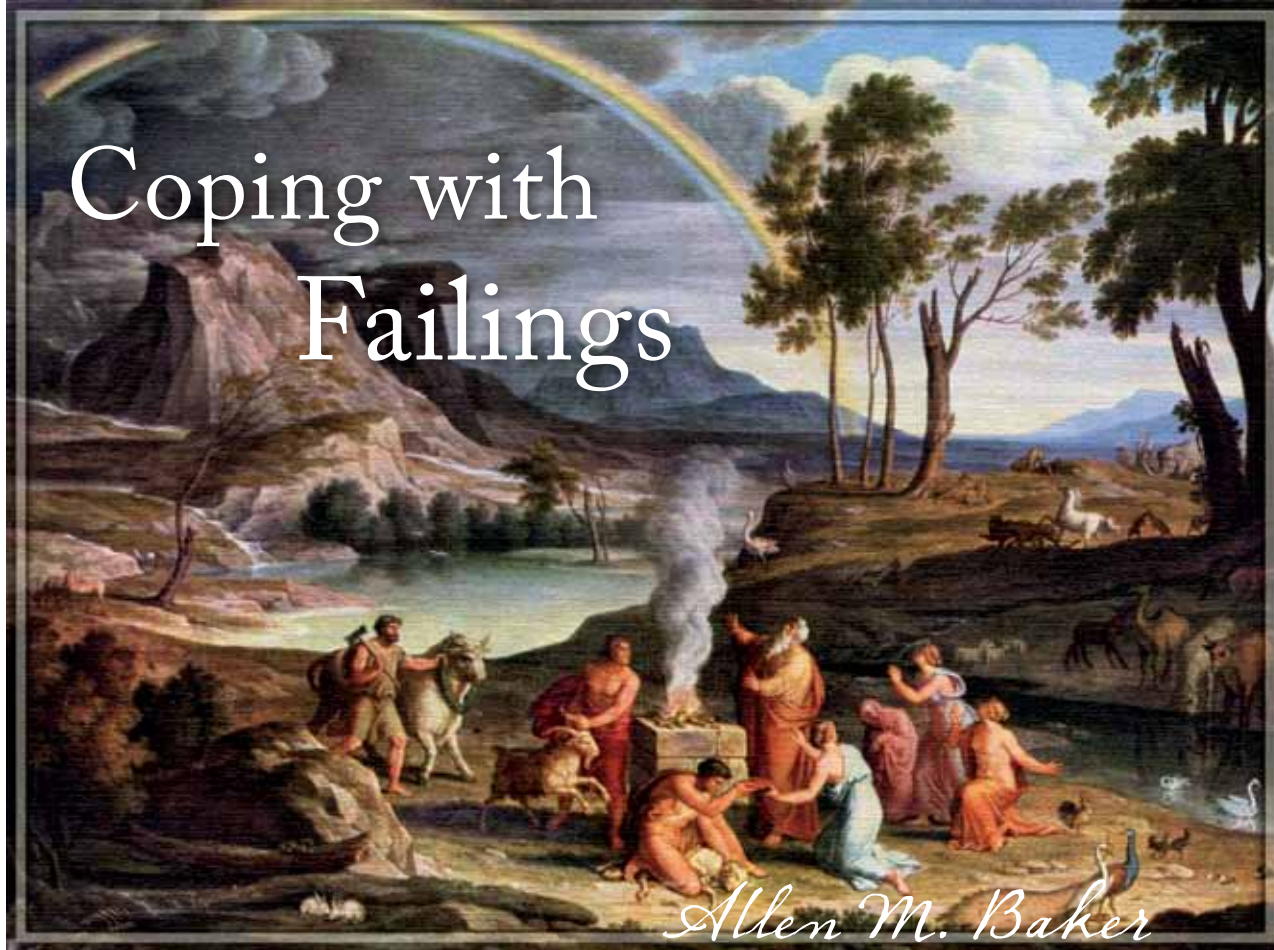
We are going to fail and fall. But there's no need to wallow in strength-draining guilt. We can come to Christ for immediate forgiveness (John 8:11; 1 John 1:9). We start again with a clean slate.

Yes, temptation is greater today. But Christ is greater still.

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Coping with Failings

*All is never lost.
God will restore what we have destroyed.*



• • *Then Noah built an altar to the Lord.* —Genesis 8:20 • • • • •

The year 1995 was a difficult one for me. I was working far too many hours and the idolatry of my work and my children's activities had caused me to drift in my devotion to my wife. We were not in danger of divorce (we agreed early in our marriage to never allow those words to drip from our mouths) but there was a coldness, a distance. While in Africa on a preaching trip, God showed me my sin, the damage I had done to my wife, and the need I had for repentance. I had failed her. What could I do? I wrote her a long letter and when I saw her in Northern Ireland (our church was on a mission trip there) I gave it to her, asking her forgiveness. She still carries the letter everywhere.

I bet you have failed too, perhaps in more severe ways. Maybe your wife has said that she wants a divorce, that you have demeaned her one too many times and she can no longer take your verbal cruelty. Maybe your children have lost respect for you and now pity you, or worse. Perhaps your angry outbursts at work have cost you another job. All seems lost. Your life has left a series of broken relationships in its wake. Is there any hope for you?

Genesis 8:13–22 is a remarkable “Yes and Amen” to that question. God has justly destroyed the earth and every living thing because of people's pervasive sin. In verses 13–19 we find, as Noah and his family disembark from

the ark, the recreative work of Elohim (this is God's name to designate His creative action, see Genesis 1).

The language here is very similar to that used in Genesis 1. The animals are to be fruitful and multiply. So, in spite of the earth's destruction God is telling Noah that He will start over. Then in verses 20–22 we see two more vital elements to God's work of restoration and renewal. Noah worships God by taking from all the clean animals and offering a sacrifice.

No doubt this sacrifice was two-fold in nature. He was giving thanks to the LORD for sparing his life. He had seen the carnage of bloating bodies on the flood waters

and knew he deserved the same. But there is a sense of propitiation and atonement here also. Surely the sacrifice of all these animals took many hours. The blood that flowed must have covered the altar. The animals squealing in agony as they died sacrificially was a sobering image. Noah, acting on behalf of his covenant family, sought God in worship.

Then we note that Yahweh (that is, the LORD—the name used here for God’s covenantal faithfulness to His people) renews His covenant with Noah and creation, saying that He will never again destroy the world, though He knows the sin of the people is evil continually.

The bottom line here is that God will restore all that your sin has destroyed. This is wonderful news, very comforting, but I know what you are thinking: “I have failed and sinned. I see no hope of restoration. And besides, isn’t it true that God’s people sometimes must live with the consequences of their sin, even though they are forgiven through Christ? Can I really expect God to bail me out of the consequences of my sinful actions?” I wonder about that myself sometimes, but we serve a God of recreating grace.

What is this work of restoration He promises to do? Three principles are gleaned from this text—re-creation, redemption, and regeneration. He promises new opportunities, though all seems destroyed (2 Cor. 5:17). The world was destroyed by the flood but God in mercy started over. He gives you the grace to do the same.

But you still may say, “I know I am in Christ, that my sins are forgiven, but the estrangement I feel from my spouse and children came after my conversion.” But the LORD promises new beginnings, though all seems lost. He is a God of redemption (Ruth 4:1ff, the kinsman-redeemer principle).

God also promises new life, though all seems dead. This is regeneration (1 Pet. 1:3) and we see the LORD giving new life to the earth after the flood. God gives new life through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, and He gives new life to damaged or dying relationships.

How does He do so? God’s mercy and grace flow through the death and resurrection of His Son. The flood narrative is a picture of Christ’s passion. Noah and his

covenant seed enter into salvation, safety in the ark, while God’s judgment rages against sin outside. Noah comes forth from the ark, offering sacrifices of thanksgiving and atonement, looking forward to the day when Messiah would once and for all do what the blood of goats and bulls could not do (Heb. 9:13–15). You see—the

death and resurrection of Jesus make possible the application of God’s saving work of regeneration (giving new life), justification (giving us right standing before God), sanctification (making us progressively more and more like Jesus), and glorification (removing the vestiges of sin, making all things new).

But when will this restoration come? It may come partially and progressively in this life. Certainly you should pray for it, doing your part of sincere repentance and restitution, seeking to be reconciled by showing fruits of repentance (Matt. 5:23ff). However, you can be sure that it will come fully on that great day when God will make all things new (Rev. 21:5ff).

What then are you to do if you have failed? Resist the temptation simply to do things. Your spouse, children, or friends have “been there, seen that.” They probably don’t trust you. Take a hint from what the biblical characters

did who failed—men like Adam, Abraham, Jacob, post-exilic Israel, Matthew, and Paul—seek God with all your heart. Your greatest need is to grow closer to God, to know Him more intimately, to ask the Holy Spirit to sanctify you, to kill your idols of destruction, to glory daily in the cross of the Lord Jesus.

How do you do so? Take advantage of the private and public means of grace—public and private worship, the preaching of the Word, and the sacraments (James 4:8). Ask God to develop within you a deeper and more experiential love for Christ. Seek Him, not to “fix” your broken relationships, but to build godliness and holiness in you. Then wait for God to restore what you have destroyed. He will do it in His time. He will restore what your sin has broken.

• • • • •
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• • • • •

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Leading Through Office-Bearing: 1

Godly Manhood in the Home under the Offices of Christ

John Paton (1824–1907) was a Presbyterian missionary to people in the islands of the South Pacific. He faced enormous difficulties and sorrows, but persevered in the name of Christ. One way God prepared Paton for his work was through his father's example.

Paton's father worked in a shop in the family home in Scotland. A small room in the house was used as a prayer closet. James Paton's regular visits to that room deeply affected his son. He said, "Thither daily, and oftentimes a day, generally after each meal, we saw our father retire, and 'shut the door'; and we children got to understand...that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old by the High Priest within the veil in the Most High Place." The Paton children often sensed their father's fervency in pleading for them before the throne of grace.

When John Paton left his home to study theology in Glasgow, he had to walk forty miles to a train station. His father walked the first six miles with him. They spoke about the Lord and his father gave counsel. For the last half-mile, they walked in silence, but his father's lips moved in silent prayer for his son while tears streamed down his face. When they parted, the father grasped his son, saying, "God bless you, my son! May your father's God prosper you and keep you from all evil." Overcome, he could say no more, but his lips continued to move in prayer. John Paton said as he walked the remainder of the distance, "I vowed deeply and oft, by the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or dishonor such a father and mother as He had given me."¹

Oh to be a father like John's! Christian fathers long to impart spiritual good to their children, but how can we do that when we are so foolish, so weak, and so corrupt in our own sins? We can only do it by walking in the anointing of Jesus Christ.

The Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 31) says Jesus is called the Christ because Christ means "anointed," and He was ordained by God and anointed by the Spirit for His work as our Prophet, Priest, and King. What is perhaps more startling is the way the Catechism applies this to us in Christ.

After asking, "Why are you called a Christian?" (Q. 32), the Catechism answers,

Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess his name [that is our prophetic anointing], to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks [that is our priestly anointing], to strive with a good conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for all eternity [that is our kingly anointing].

Jesus is our Mediator. He is our Prophet to teach us; our Priest to sacrifice, intercede, and bless us; and our King to rule and guide us. In union with Him, we share His offices in a limited but important way. If Christ is not yet your living Head, I beg you to be reconciled to God by trusting in Christ alone to save you. You who are in Christ, from the least to the greatest, are all office bearers by union with Christ.

This office-bearing has huge implications for leading our families. As God's ordained representatives to our wives and children, we should serve them as prophet, priest, and king. The word *father* implies that we should be images of the Father of glory, whose brilliance shines fully in His Son. Similarly, if you bear the title of *husband*, God calls you to bear the image of our heavenly Husband who loved His bride, the church, and laid down His life to make her holy. We are to reflect all three aspects of Christ's office-bearing to our family in our homes. Let us consider those roles to see how each relates to a man's domestic life.

Prophet in the Home

After the Heidelberg Catechism asks why Jesus is called the Christ, or Anointed One (Q. 31), the answer begins, "Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher who perfectly reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God for our redemption."

Most of us think that a prophet is someone who predicts the future. Many prophets predicted future events, such as the coming of Christ, but that was not their central role. The essential task of the word *prophet* is to be God's spokesman to people. The Spirit inspired the prophets and apostles to speak and write God's Word. God's Son is the ultimate, omniscient Prophet. As a prophet to your family, you confess your own

1. John G. Paton, *Missionary to the New Hebrides* (1889; reprint Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 8, 25–26. Thanks to Paul Smalley for his assistance in finalizing this article which is slightly enlarged from an address I gave at the Church of the Carolinas, Greenville, South Carolina on November 20, 2010.

faith, and speak forth the counsel of God given in the Bible. You do not add to the Bible; your task is to make its truths known to your children. That is your prophetic task as a father.

The question we must address is: *How* should you teach as God's prophet in the home? Let me give five guidelines.

1. *Teach with passion.* Recently, someone left a message on my answering machine that sounded like it came from a zombie—the voice was cold and mechanical. What a contrast to the zeal of the prophet Jeremiah, who said, “His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay” (Jer. 20:9). The prophet tried to hold his peace, but God's Word could not be kept in. He had to speak it forth.

Likewise, Amos, a farmer, felt compelled to speak when God called him to do so. He said, “The lion hath roared... the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:8). Many times my dad wept as he taught us the truths of God. That was passionate teaching. My father was bringing us the Word of God not as dry, boring information, but as the living word of God, “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12). Likewise, we must teach our children with passion.

2. *Teach as God's authorized steward.* Part of our earnestness in speaking to our children comes from knowing that God has appointed us to teach them. Ephesians 6:4 says, “Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Our children need to understand that God commands us to teach them. We can say to them, “Children, God gave me this task of teaching you. I must follow His commands.” Churches and Christian schools may supplement our efforts, but the primary responsibility of teaching covenant children belongs to parents, especially the father. You cannot delegate all the responsibility to other teachers and consider the job done.

3. *Teach by example.* In addition to our chief Prophet, Jesus was the living Word (John 1:1, 14). He revealed God not only in His words, but also in His life. So did Paul, who wrote to Timothy, his dear son in the Lord, “But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me” (2 Tim. 3:10–11). We are always teaching our children, whether we know it or not, for they are always reading the book of our lives. Besides the Bible, your lives are the most important book your children will ever read. In the book of your life, they will see how important your views on God are, whether worship is a delight or a duty, whether sin is a horrible evil or mere naughtiness, whether we really cherish our families or view them as a burden.

4. *Teach by sharing your life.* Paul openly spoke about his problems, afflictions, and weaknesses. He boasted in his weak-

nesses so that others could see the power of Christ in him and the sufficiency of God's grace in all his trials (2 Cor. 12:9–10). He opened his life to others so that they would open their lives to him (2 Cor. 6:11–13). Happy are the children who can say to their friends, “My mom and dad are pretty neat; I can talk to them about anything.” That does not mean you act as their buddy—that would negate your authority over them as godly parents. But it does mean we should strive to become their confidants in a friendship that grows as they mature. Jesus called His disciples “friends” because He loved them enough to die for them and to share with them the whole counsel of God (John 15:13–15).

Moses said in Deuteronomy 6:4–7, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” God gave us this great commandment. Jesus also gave the Great Commission to His disciples, commanding them to make disciples throughout the earth, beginning at home. Notice that the great context for all of this teaching is life. Consider your prophetic work not just as an event in your schedule but an aspect of sharing all of life with your dear ones.

5. *Teach for holistic maturity.* In addition to training their minds, train the souls and hearts of your children, so they may grow and mature in serving God. Luke 2:52 says, “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” Christ is our model of child development; He was born a baby but grew into an adult in all aspects of His manhood.

Train your children in social graces. A well-trained mind without basic manners or culture is a blunt sword. Our children should show respect to older people, kindness to their peers, and compassion to persons younger than themselves. If you expect your children to behave well, but have not taught them proper etiquette, you will set them up for failure in society. Furthermore, give them opportunities to enjoy fine art, great literature, and good music as gifts of God's common grace. This too will mature them, and enhance their lives.

Train your children physically. Teach your children that their bodies are gifts from God, so they must respect the rules of health and treat their bodies with respect. They need a certain amount of sleep, a healthy diet, and plenty of exercise. Teach your children the facts of life, discussing openly the goodness, spiritual significance, and God-given boundaries of their sexuality. Do not leave that education to their peers. Guide them in matters of personal appearance so that they dress modestly and attractively, but not to draw attention to themselves.

continued on page 283



“THE SISTER OF MY HEART”:

*Esther Edwards Burr
on Faithful Friendship*

CHURCH HISTORY

REV. BRIAN G. NAJAPFOUR

On October 11, 1754, Esther Edwards Burr (1732–1758), the third of Jonathan and Sarah Pierpont Edwards’s eleven children, writing in her diary, called her best friend, Sarah Prince (1728–1771), “the Sister of my heart.” The special spiritual friendship between these two godly young women is largely recorded in Esther’s *Journal*, written between 1754 and 1757. According to Roger Lundin and Mark Noll, this *Journal* “shows us a very busy young mother who yet took time, amid her pressing duties, to reflect on her relationship with God. The life that shines forth in

the diary is one of sincere religion, hard work, family joys and sorrows, nearly overwhelming domestic responsibility, and faithful friendship.”¹ This faithful friendship is the focus of this brief article.

Esther was accustomed to change. When her father was discharged from his congregation in Northampton largely over the issue of the Lord’s Supper, her family was forced to leave Northampton for Stockbridge in 1752, shortly before she married.² In 1752, at the age of twenty, Esther married Aaron Burr, Sr., (1716–1757) a pious Presbyterian pastor and the second President of the College of New Jersey, Newark, New Jersey.³ In 1756, the same year Esther bore her second and last child, Aaron Jr., who would later become the second Vice-President of the United States, the College moved to Princeton and became known as Princeton University.⁴ Esther would then eventually have to move from Newark to Princeton, where she died in 1758 at the age of only twenty-six.

While living in Newark, Esther, although happily married to Aaron, often experienced homesickness caused by her separation from her loved ones and friends. With her husband’s ministerial and administrative work load in the church and school, she spent much of her day alone at home. Finding new friends was difficult for her, especially since the “wives of her husband’s associates tended to be considerably older than she.”⁵ Thus it was her old-time friendship with Sarah Prince, although at a long distance, that became a constant source of comfort. Two years after marriage, while she and her husband were still in Newark, Esther wrote to Sarah Prince in Boston: “It is a great comfort to me when my friends are absent from me that I have ’em some where in the World, and you my dear for one, not of the least, for I esteem you one of the best, and in some respects nerer than any Sister I have. I have not one Sister I can write so freely to as to you the Sister of my heart. There is a friend nerer than a Brother, certainly.... That old proverb is not a true one, out of sight out of mind.”⁶

Esther and Sarah had been acquainted with each other from early girlhood. In fact, Sarah’s father, Thomas Prince, a Congregational pastor in Boston, was a friend of Jonathan Edwards and a leading supporter of the Great Awakening.⁷ It is important to note that the Evangelical Revival of the 1730s and 1740s coincided with Esther’s formative years, and, by the time she became a teenager, she experienced gospel conversion under the ministry of her father.⁸ As she grew up and matured spiritually, her piety became more and more evident. One important area of her life in which this piety can be clearly noticed is in her friendship with Sarah which took root early in their childhood.

Esther’s move to Newark made regular communication with Sarah in Boston a challenge. However, in 1754, Sarah went to visit Esther. What a joyous time this was for the two! It “was probably at this time that they decided

to maintain their intimacy by keeping journals for one another.”⁹ Their main purpose for exchanging journals was to keep an eye on each other’s spiritual life in Christ. They did not use these journals to gossip or talk about trivia, but to talk about religion. As Esther says in her letter to Sarah written on April 20, 1755: “I feel thankful that you are so *blessed*—Tis not fit that I should have everything agreeable. I have already a *Thousand, Thousand*, more mercies than I make a good improvement of—I esteem *religious Conversation* one of the best helps to keep up religion in the soul, excepting *secret devotion*, I don’t know but the very best—then what a lamentable thing that ’tis so neglected by God’s own Children.”¹⁰

In this sense, Esther and Sarah were like the Puritans who regarded journaling as a means of sanctifying grace. And since their journaling was done in the context of their friendship, they no doubt also viewed their friendship as a means to grow in holiness.

Esther and Sarah both took their friendship very seriously. In her letter to Sarah dated October 5, 1754, Esther explains that to break a vow in friendship is sin: “I call it sin, for I look on the ties of Friendship as *sacred* and I am of your mind, that it aught to be [a] matter of Solemn Prayer to God (where there is a friendship contracted) that it may be preserved. And it is what I have done and shall continue to do.”¹¹ This demonstrates Esther’s high and holy view of friendship. Such a view of friendship is rarely seen today even among Christian friends. In this present generation, few are like Esther and Sarah who considered friendship sacred. Certainly, the friendship of the two was not without trials, but by God’s grace, the two remained loyal friends until death. This is faithful friendship!

Let us ask ourselves: Are we faithful friends? What kind of friends do we have? Do our friends help us become more like Christ? And finally, how do we view our friendship with others? Do we view friendship as a means to grow in holiness?

1. Roger Lundin and Mark A. Noll, *Voices from the Heart: Four Centuries of American Piety* (Grand Rapids: 1987), 100.

2. See Introduction to *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr 1754–1757*, eds. Carol F. Karlson and Laurie Crumpacker, (1984; repr., Eugene, Orlando: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 13.

3. According to Lundin and Noll, Esther married in 1750 at the age of eighteen. See *Voices from the Heart*, 100. I follow the date given by Gerald R. McDermott, “Burr, Esther Edwards,” in *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730–1860*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 1:175.

4. Esther gave birth to her first child, Sally, in 1754.

5. Introduction to *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr 1754–1757*, eds. Karlson and Crumpacker, 15.

6. *Ibid.*, 53.

7. For a very short biography of Thomas Prince, see Christopher Grasso, “Prince, Thomas,” in *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730–1860*, ed. Donald M. Lewis (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 2:904–905.

8. Introduction to *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr 1754–1757*, eds. Karlson and Crumpacker, 12.

9. *Ibid.*, 15.

10. *Ibid.*, 112.

11. *Ibid.*, 51–52.

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continued from page 281

Likewise teach them a balanced view of sports. Recreational sports are a natural part of a child’s physical development; children enjoy much-needed exercise, strength, and agility in playing them. Participation in sports also teaches them teamwork, leadership, and perseverance. But do not surrender to the sports mania that makes winning everything or allows sports to become a scheduling monster that eats up family time.

Brothers, our prophetic role in the home places great responsibilities upon us. How can we live up to such a calling? Instead of throwing in the towel because of our inadequacies, we should come before God in prayer and say, “I am a sinful

human being, but Lord, help me confess my sin, my inconsistent walk, my ignorance of the Bible, and my failure to evangelize my children. Let me be grieved by these failures, turn to Thee for grace to realize my covenantal responsibilities, and take refuge in Thee, leaning on Thy covenant promises and looking to Jesus Thy Son as my Model, my Guide, and my Strength.” In the long run, the faithful father/prophet will marvel at God’s grace covering his sins and making his efforts bear fruit far beyond the limits of mere human power and wisdom. God is not setting us up to fail as husbands and fathers. He gives us the marvelous grace of being His assistants in teaching our families.

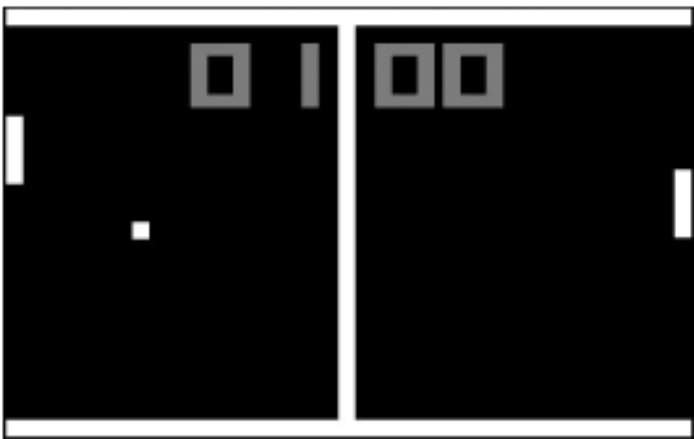
Internet Gaming

I remember programming my first game using a teletype and punch tape for storage around 1977. It was a computer version of the then popular *Mastermind* game and ran on a computer that filled a large room and required a dedicated staff of people to keep it going. Today, a handheld smart phone has more power and significantly more memory capacity than this venerable relic.

A few years later, as I pursued post-graduate study into the uses of Artificial Intelligence, the height of research included developing software versions of the game of chess. One interesting program, called ELIZA, sought to simulate a Rogerian psychotherapist. ELIZA mostly rephrased the user's statements as questions and posed those to the 'patient.' For example, ELIZA might respond to "My head hurts" with "Why do you say your head hurts?" The response to "My mother hates me" would be "Who else in your family hates you?"¹

Ping Pong

In the mid-1970s, games started appearing for the home, the most memorable of which was the game of PONG, a computer version of ping-pong.



Things developed rapidly and were spurred along with advances such as the Sinclair ZX80 and later the Spectrum computers. By the mid-1980s, games were gaining a real entry into people's homes with some 20,000 titles (mostly games) having been released for the Spectrum. Some concern was already being expressed about the time that children were spending playing computer games, though, at the time, other non-computer games such as *Dungeon and Dragons* were still just as popular and no less controversial. The concern was not only with the depiction of witchcraft in such games, but also with role-playing described as games "in which the protagonists create and control the actions of a cast of characters."²

Fast-forward 30 years

Thirty years later, gaming technology has progressed beyond recognition. Today's games involve lifelike realism of 3D computer generated environments. The bestselling game "World of Warcraft" involves realistic battle action in a multi-player scenario with hundreds of thousands of simultaneous users joining in from around the world (though each game may only have a few dozen players). From modest beginnings, worldwide sales of games are now estimated at \$50 billion, growing to nearly \$100 billion by 2015.³ In America, 68% of households own video games, with an average gamer spending 18 hours a week playing. Interestingly, the average age for a gamer is 35, of which 60% are male.⁴ Games come in all shapes and sizes, and now include parental ratings—from "suitable for everyone" to "mature themes." One recent example of a game with "mature themes," based on Dante's *Inferno*, allows users to explore all nine levels of hell. One gamer said that he "loved the voice of Lucifer!"

Gaming communities

Many games now require users to join teams. Winning teams are those most effective in developing strategies and cooperation between players. In other words, they require the same type of real-life skills that are found in industry (or on the battlefield!). Some game consoles, such as the wildly successful Nintendo Wii, have opened up a new world of opportunities. Families get together to play games of tennis against each other. Millions of people have purchased the Wii Fit to help them lose weight. Game consoles have even been installed in nursing homes to allow residents to challenge others over the Internet at bowling!

While serious gamers may sneer at the seeming simplicity of the Wii, another online phenomenon has been the arrival of massively popular Facebook games. An estimated 30 million people play the game Farmville every day!⁵ Zynga, a startup founded in 2007, creator of Farmville and other games such as Mafia Wars, claims to have more than 100 million unique monthly users for its social games on Facebook. All of its games are simple two-dimensional titles that are popular because friends can play them with each other. Commenting on Mafia Wars, *Time* magazine explained that "you don't play Mafia Wars alone. Your friends on Facebook who also play Mafia Wars make up your family. They help you with your business and fight with you and send you gifts. The bigger the family, the better for business." The same is true with Farmville, a game in which players plant and grow crops on a virtual farm surrounded by virtual neighbors that are also Facebook friends. The games cost nothing, though players can purchase things with real money if they want to speed things along. It is clear, therefore, that some games can have beneficial

effects, providing much needed relaxation and developing skills of strategy or coordination.

The psychological impact of games

There is also a dark side to gaming. Not only are some games clearly inappropriate for Christians of all ages, others can induce compulsive or addictive behavior in some people—the world's first game addiction clinic opened in Amsterdam in July 2006.⁶ There is also the much-studied question of the impact of violent games on children and adults. A study by the American Psychological Association concludes that “fantasy violence is often perceived (incorrectly) by parents and public policy makers as safe even for children. However, experimental studies with college students have consistently found increased aggression after exposure to clearly unrealistic and fantasy violent video games. Indeed, at least one recent study found significant increases in aggression by college students after playing E-rated (suitable for everyone) violent video games.”⁷

Biblical principles

There is no doubt that we (adults and children) should stay away from games that promote gratuitous violence or sexual themes. These are inappropriate and sinful. It should also be noted that the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, is full of violence. Some of this violence is sanctioned by God Himself and, at times, described in excruciating detail (see Judg. 3:21–22, 4:21, Deut. 2:34)! While violence in Scripture is always there for a reason (2 Tim 3:16) and is not there to entertain us, we should also remember that children often do not see things the same way as adults do. They are seeing only the game rather than the more sinister side we may be aware of. We should also remember that what we may think of as an addiction in our children may be no more than a normal passing fad, part of a normal developmental process and something that they will grow out of rather quickly.

Nonetheless, there are real dangers. One study speaks of games blurring “the boundaries between reality and fantasy, leading people to engage in immoral or anti-social activities, or...leading young people to Paganism or Satanism.”⁸ Another study for the Centers for Disease Control, published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, found, among adult gamers, “a higher BMI (increased weight problems) and a greater number of poor mental-health days” as well as other negative physical and mental health issues.⁹

Practical Advice

We should remember that gaming is much like other leisure activities. All of these come with dangers and require self-discipline. There are three specific practical steps that we can take:

- 1 Pay attention to labels! Games, like movies, often come with ratings. These should be read and considered.
- 2 Know what your children play. Placing a game console or computer in an open area rather than allowing the child to

play in their room is always wise. Better still, play the game with your child. Game consoles such as the Wii encourage family participation. This will turn gaming from a negative “you can't do that” into something positive that you can do together.

3 Limit the time. For some, the danger of addiction lies just under the surface. This applies to both adults and children. Setting a time limit on recreational activity (of any sort) is always a good principle.

These principles will become increasingly important in the future as games become much more immersive, blurring the line between fiction and reality. An example of this is called “Project Natal,” a game console that not only includes a motion detection device but also has facial recognition, voice recognition, and many other things. In an online demonstration,¹⁰ a subject can be seen interacting with a computer as if it was another person, even passing a drawing over to the computer to have it comment on it. Milo is a digital being that can recognize face and voice, and with which people can have a conversation. Milo can even see emotions and respond in kind.

While the technology may be exciting, we need to be ever vigilant as Christians. Not only should we take care that we do not get absorbed into unreality or into a virtual world that seems better than the one we live in, we must also understand that, for many people, this kind of escapism is a new drug that they cannot do without. In contrast, we know that the answer lies not in escaping the world, but in turning to the Lord Jesus Christ who alone can support us in this world, and who will one day take us to the place where there will be no more need to escape reality (Rev. 21:4).

1. A good description of ELIZA can be found at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ELIZA>

2. This quote comes from a 2005 paper published in the *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* entitled “Role-Playing Games and the Christian Right” www.usask.ca/reilst/jrpc/art9-roleplaying.html

3. www.vgsales.wikia.com/wiki/video_game_industry

4. “Essential facts about the computer and video game industry,” published by Entertainment Software Association, 2009.

5. venturebeat.com/2009/11/23/zynga-crosses-100-million-users-and-expands-beyond-facebook-games/

6. Laura Parker, “Video Addiction.”

7. Craig A. Anderson, “Violent Video Games: Myths, Facts, and Unanswered Questions,” *Psychological Science Agenda*, Science Briefs, October 2003.

8. David Waldron, “Role-Playing Games and the Christian Right: Community Formation in Response to a Moral Panic,” *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 9 (Spring 2005).

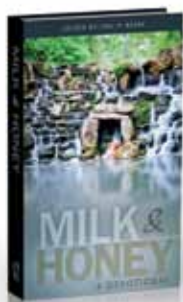
9. James B. Weaver III, et al., “Health-Risk Correlates of Video-Game Playing Among Adults,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 37, 4 (October 2009).

10. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_txF7iETX0 and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2g_U02Pz0P4

David Clark lives in England where he has served on the Boards of Evangelical Press and *Evangelical Times*. He has worked with information technology for over thirty years. This article is reprinted from the British newspaper *Evangelical Times*, May 2010. The author would appreciate receiving questions on this series of articles from readers via email to ParentsAndTheInternet@googlemail.com. These will assist him in writing future articles and where possible, posted contributions and emails will be answered anonymously in the final articles of this series.

BOOK TALK

New RHB Books



Milk and Honey

Joel R. Beeke, editor

In the Bible, “milk and honey” speaks of God’s bountiful provision and symbolizes our basic need for solid spiritual food and sweet communion with the triune God through Christ. With that in mind, this devotional book dwells on God’s sustaining grace revealed throughout Scripture, providing brief devotional thoughts that cover the major contours of Scripture in the course of a year. Bible books are divided among twelve pastors (including Gerald Bilkes, Bartel Elshout, David Murray, and Maurice Roberts) so that each month covers a particular portion of Scripture.

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Graham Ashworth, compiler

Philip Doddridge is best known today for his book *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, and perhaps by some for his *Family Expositor*, which is an extensive commentary on and paraphrase of the New Testament. He also served as principal of an important ministerial academy for non-conforming churches. However, one part of Doddridge’s legacy that has been sorely neglected in recent years is his hymns. This book contains 375 of Doddridge’s hymns, which provide poetic reflection on Old Testament texts, New Testament texts, and various occasions pertaining to Christians and the church. It also includes a timeline of Doddridge’s life, a number of helpful indexes, and various compatible hymn tunes.

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What He Must Be If He Wants to Marry My Daughter—*Voddie Baucham*

What will you say when that certain young man sits down in your living room, sweaty-palmed and tongued, and asks permission to marry your daughter? The search for a husband should not be left to the sole discretion of the daughter; her father, who is called to protect her physically, emotionally, and spiritually, has a vital role to play. The Bible gives fathers criteria of what a biblical man looks like. This book is a must-read for fathers, mothers, daughters, and young men pursuing marriage. (PB, Crossway, 213 pgs.) \$16.00 | \$12.00



The Visitor’s Book of Texts: A Vital Tool for Pastoral Visitation—*Andrew A. Bonar*

Visiting the sick and sorrowful has for its purpose to bring the Word of God to those in need. Bonar gathers together wise counsel for those who would console the afflicted, encouraging simplicity in the text and in prayer. He offers explicit guidance by outlining several helpful passages for various occasions. This book can be profitably considered before embarking with the Word to the sick and sorrowful.

(PB, Banner, 280 pgs.) \$12.00 | \$10.00



Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It

Ken Ham and Britt Beemer

Statistically, more than two-thirds of young people sitting in church today will soon be gone. But what can be done? This book explores the alarming statistics of our day and shows families how to fight back for our churches.

(PB, Masters, 189 pgs.) \$13.00 | \$9.75

About two thousand years ago, a baby was born and laid in a manger. What was so special about this baby? He looked just like any other Jewish baby. No one paid attention to his poor parents, Mary and Joseph; no one opened their home for them. No one was with them as Mary gave birth to her first child; this newborn baby spent his first night in a home for animals. Why was this story written in the Bible? Why is it important for us to know this story? I think you know the answers to those questions. This baby was Jesus, born to Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem. This baby was the Messiah promised thousands of years before. He was sent by God the Father to pay the price for the sins of His people. When He was born, He took on our human nature, but without sin. This baby, despised and rejected already before He was born, was the Son of God. He left His glorious kingdom in heaven and came down to this sinful earth to suffer and die for sins He never committed.

Though most people didn't seem to care about Jesus, there were some who longed for His coming. And then, one night in the fields near Bethlehem, God sent angels from heaven to praise and glorify a newborn baby. They sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14) to some poor shepherds in the surrounding fields, watching their sheep during the night. Can you imagine what that must have been like, seeing and hearing this heavenly choir? The shepherds must have been stunned to hear the message of the angel of the Lord, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (verses 10-12). What... a Savior who is Christ the Lord—lying in a manger? Did the shepherds shake their heads in disbelief and say, "The Messiah—in a manger? That cannot be!" No, they believed the words of the angel, and, forgetting all about their flocks of sheep, rushed into Bethlehem to find the baby. It did not bother them that Jesus was wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a feeding trough for cattle. They did not turn away when they saw his parents, who were certainly not dressed in rich clothing and who had taken shelter with animals. The shepherds saw only *the Savior!* The Holy Spirit helped them see and understand that this baby, though He was poor and despised, was their Redeemer and Messiah.

The shepherds were so happy that they wanted everyone to know the good news. "And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child" (verse 17). Everywhere they went, the shepherds told people about the birth of the Savior. How do you think people responded to the news? Did they hurry to Bethlehem to worship the Messiah who had come to save sinners? You know the answer, don't you? "And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds" (verse 18). We don't read about a single person (except the wise men from far away) who went to visit the baby in Bethlehem. People *wondered* about this strange news, but they didn't *do* anything about it. And this shows that they didn't really care about the baby in the manger.

"What dreadful people," you say. "How could they be so foolish? *I* would certainly go and find the baby and *I* would fall down before Him and worship Him!" Would you? Take a good look at your life and into your heart. Every Christmas, you hear the news of the baby, Christ the Lord, born in Bethlehem. Every Sunday, you hear the good news of salvation. Every day, you hear the Word of God read or you read it for yourself. The shepherds heard only one message; you hear this message countless times. What is *your* response? What do *you* do about this news? Do you merely *wonder* about the things you hear? Do you ever *do* anything about it? Do you worship the baby in the manger?

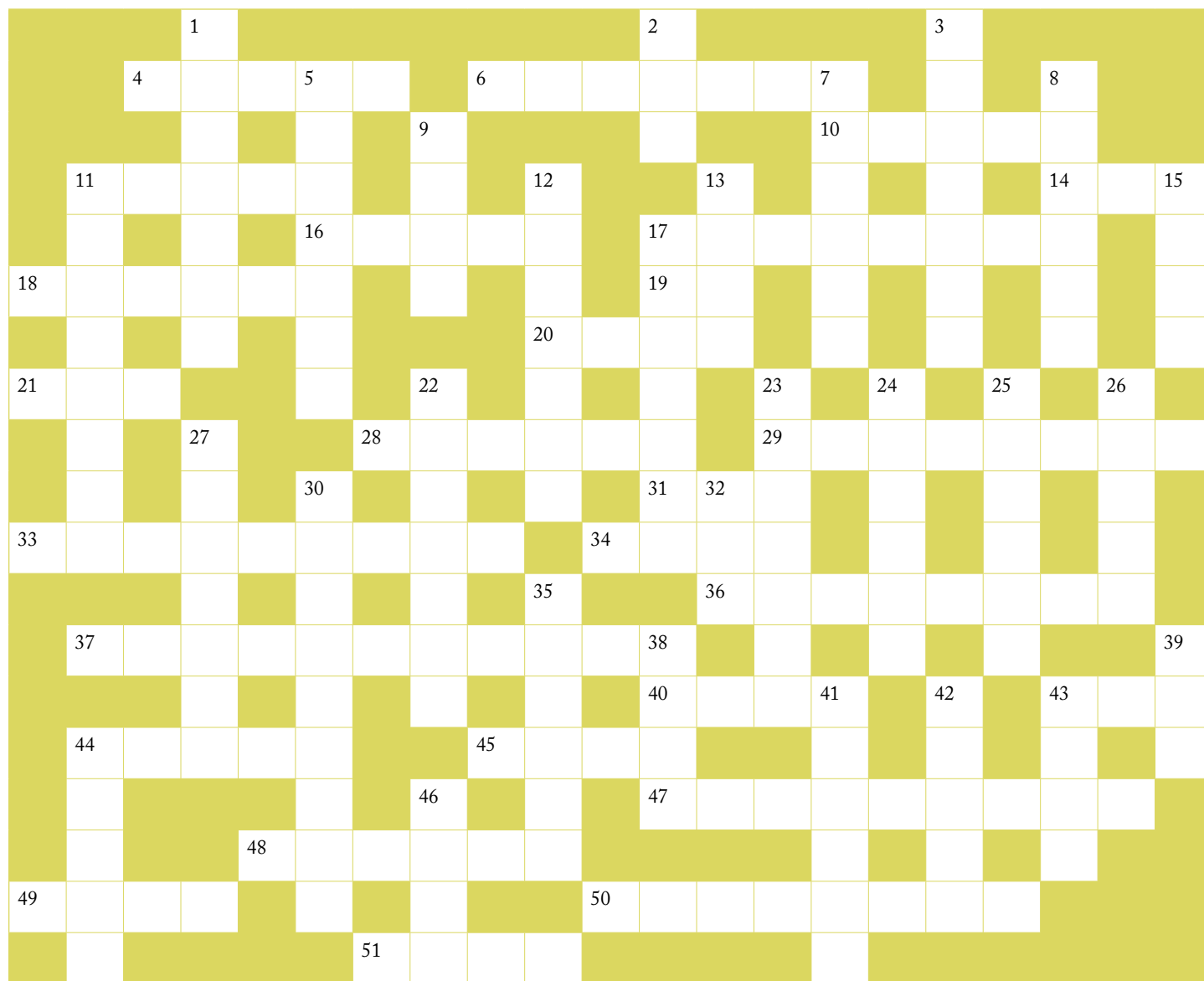
"How can I go to Jesus?" you ask. "He isn't in Bethlehem's manger anymore." That is true, children. The baby in the manger grew up to be a man—fully man and fully God—who died on the cross and rose again three days later. Then He ascended into heaven where He sits at the right hand of His Father. How do you go to Jesus today? You may go to Him in prayer, dear children, through Spirit-worked faith. You fold your hands, close your eyes, bend your knees, and pray to Jesus. He hears you when you pray, wherever you are. Don't be like those foolish people in Bethlehem who heard the glorious news about the Savior but never did anything about it. Instead, be like the shepherds, who hurried to the manger to worship the newborn Messiah. Ask Him to make you His child and to wash away all your sins. Ask Him to give you a heart full of love to Him, willing to serve Him and flee from sin. Do not wait another day. "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us" (verse 15b).

Diana Kleyn is the author of several books for children.

Fill in the crossword puzzle using the clues found in your (KJV) Bible. It is a long puzzle, so please do only as much as you are able to, or ask someone to help you.

Puzzle

Please send your puzzle answers to:
Banner Puzzles and Questions
Attn: Mrs. Diana Kleyn
540 Crescent St., NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503
e-mail: cdkleyn@charter.net



Across:

4. "And his name shall be called...The Prince of ____" (Isaiah 9:6).
6. "Behold, I bring you good ____ of great joy" (Luke 2:10).
10. "And they came with ____" (Luke 2:16).
11. "Come, buy wine and milk without money and without ____" (Isaiah 55:1).
14. "Let us ____ go even unto Bethlehem" (Luke 2:15).
16. "And, lo, the ____ of the Lord came upon them" (Luke 2:9).
17. "And all they that heard it ____ at those things which were told them by the shepherds" (Luke 2:18).
18. "And no man hath ascended up to ____, but he that came down from ____, even the Son of man which is in ____" (John 3:13).
19. "____ despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering?" (Romans 2:4).
20. "Therefore ____ thou to thy God" (Hosea 12:6).
21. "If ye shall ____ any thing in my name, I will do it" (John 14:14).
28. "And Jacob begat ____ the husband of Mary" (Matthew 1:16).
29. "And the LORD hath laid on him the ____ of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).
31. "Because there was no room for them in the ____" (Luke 2:7).
33. "But thou, ____ Ephratah" (Micah 5:2).
34. "The chastisement of our peace was ____ him" (Isaiah 53:5).
36. "He is despised and ____ of men" (Isaiah 53:3).
37. "Through this man is preached unto you the ____ of sins" (Acts 13:38).
40. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly ____ praising God" (Luke 2:13).
43. "Glorifying and praising God ____ all the things that they had heard and seen" (Luke 2:20).
44. "Lift up your heads, O ye ____" (Psalm 24:7).
45. "And now, Lord, what wait I for? my ____ is in thee" (Psalm 39:7).
47. "The ____ from on high hath visited us" (Luke 1:78).
48. "He hath ____ out his soul unto death" (Isaiah 53:12).
49. "When ye ____, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24).
50. "I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy ____, the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 41:14).
51. "And when they had ____ it" (Luke 2:17).

Down:

1. "Dost thou _____ on the Son of God?" (John 9:35).
2. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the _____ of the world" (John 1:29).
3. "Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the _____ of thine heart" (Psalm 37:4).
5. "_____ thou me from secret faults" (Psalm 19:12).
7. "And I have covered thee in the _____ of mine hand" (Isaiah 51:16).
8. "For he shall grow up before him as a _____ plant" (Isaiah 53:2).
9. "All our righteousnesses are as filthy _____" (Isaiah 64:6).
11. "The LORD taketh _____ in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy" (Psalm 147:11).
12. "Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling _____, lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12).
13. "For unto you is _____ this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).
15. "And the _____ was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).
17. "O come, let us _____ and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker" (Psalm 95:6).
22. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is _____" (Psalm 32:1).
23. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save _____; of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15).
24. "The exceeding _____ of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).
25. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is _____ of all" (James 2:10).
26. "We pray you in Christ's _____, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20).
27. "Good Master, what shall I do that I may _____ eternal life?" (Mark 10:17).
30. "To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the _____ of their sins" (Luke 1:77).
32. "He will not fail thee, _____ forsake thee" (Deuteronomy 31:6).
35. "_____, a virgin shall be with child" (Matthew 1:23).
38. "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is _____ for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28).
39. "He shall not strive, nor _____" (Matthew 12:19).
41. "O thou afflicted, _____ with tempest, and not comforted" (Isaiah 54:11).
42. "_____ me with hyssop, and I shall be clean" (Psalm 51:7).
43. "And ye shall seek me, and _____ me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).
44. "_____ to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).
46. "That was the _____ Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9).

Here are the answers to last month's quiz.

- | | | |
|---------|------------|----------|
| 1. Seek | 5. Turn | 9. Trust |
| 2. Joy | 6. Ashamed | 10. Call |
| 3. Wide | 7. Waited | 11. Lord |
| 4. Nigh | 8. Cast | |
12. "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3).

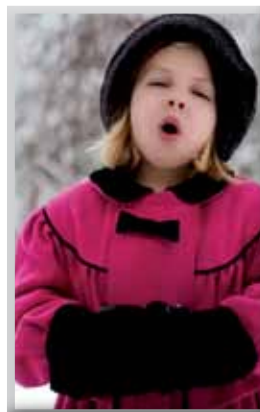
Thanks again to all who answered last month's quiz!

| | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Robert Boatwright | Janae denHertog | Kelly Overbeeke |
| Leah Boerkoel | Matthew denHertog | Karl Rogers |
| Phillip Boerkoel | Lindsay Fintelman | Kaitlyn Stubbe |
| Silvia Boerkoel | Richard Hilley | Leah VanBeek |
| Becky Boot | Jacob Koppert | Colleen VanDalen |
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A Prodigal Brought Home

On December 24 almost two hundred years ago a ship carrying immigrants from Europe plowed its way through the Atlantic Ocean. The passengers had gathered in the beautiful dining hall, singing one Christmas carol after another. Afterward, a delicious dinner was served. In a corner near the doorway sat Paul, his blue eyes flashing with anger. He had no love for God or for the Savior. "I won't sing," he thought angrily. "If there were a loving God in heaven I wouldn't be poor and despised. I refuse to work like a slave any longer just so the rich can live in luxury while we struggle to find enough food and clothing. I will find work in America and I will return a rich man so that my mother will be well cared for!"

Paul paid no attention as the captain's young son read about the birth of Jesus from Luke 2. But when the captain's daughters, aged two and four, began to sing, he listened:



Hark! A voice from yonder manger,
Soft and sweet, doth entreat:
"Flee from woe and danger!
Brethren, from all ills that grieve you
You are freed; all you need
I will surely give you!"

Hither come, ye poor and wretched,
Know His will is to fill
Every hand outstretched;
Here are riches without measure;
Here forget all regret;
Fill your hearts with treasure!¹

1. These are two verses of the song, "All My Heart This Night Rejoices" by Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676) based on Luke 2. It was written in 1653, and translated by Catherine Winkworth in 1858.

A minister on board preached about the baby born in Bethlehem's manger. "Most people were, and still are, too proud to humble themselves before the Savior. Yet, He offers salvation, full and free, to the greatest of sinners. Are there some gathered here tonight who have been too proud to kneel before this child-King? Are there any here who have fled home, church, and family in order to reach a land of freedom? The riches and liberty that America offers can never save your soul. Only in Christ Jesus can you find lasting freedom! He only can fill you with true peace and joy. Bow before Him; humble yourselves and worship Him!"

The travelers sang another song, but Paul heard nothing else. He did not even join them for the meal, though earlier he had been very hungry. For about an hour he sat in the corner without moving, his arms over his face. At last he jumped up and hurried back to his cabin. Frantically, he searched among his luggage, till a smile spread over his face. "Thank you, my dear mother!" he exclaimed, holding up a small New Testament. Though Paul had protested, she insisted on tucking the little Book into a corner of his battered suitcase, saying, "You never know when it will be needed."

Returning to the warmth and light of the dining room, Paul found a private corner, and began to read Luke 2. It was as if the Bible was a new book to Paul, and he drank in the gospel. So intent was Paul on his reading that he did not realize that a pair of dark eyes were watching him intently. When he finally looked up, he noticed the boy who had been studying him. Instantly Paul was filled with concern. "Hello! I'm Paul. Are you alright? Are you homesick?"

The boy smiled. "I'm Max. And no, I'm not homesick—I don't have a home!" Suddenly, Max began to cough and wheeze. Paul was worried. "Let me help you to your room. You don't look well."

Though Max protested, Paul gently helped his new friend to his cabin and made him lie down. Almost instantly, Max fell asleep. Paul sat nearby, thinking and praying. He thought about the life he had tried to flee. Paul was a carpenter, and made little money. Filled with self-pity, he hated and envied anyone who had more money than he did. He thought no one could possibly have a worse life than he did. Now he met Max, who had no home and seemed ill. Paul felt ashamed.

After a long nap, Max opened his eyes.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked Paul.

"No, nothing!" Tears spilled down Max's face. "That sermon, and the songs tonight—they were beautiful, but I am such a sinner! I have never bowed before the Savior. You were reading your Bible, and it made me feel so ashamed of myself." He paused, and then asked quietly, "Is there anything in your Bible that can give me hope?"

Paul was surprised. Only a day earlier, he could not have helped Max. With a sense of wonder, Paul told Max what had happened to him that day: only hours before, he himself had begun to seek the same comfort and peace that Max now longed for. Together they talked, prayed, and searched the Scriptures. What a blessed Christmas they shared!

As the ship sailed onward to the "land of liberty" Paul and Max began to think of their futures. One day Paul said, "I think I will find a ship going back to England. My mother needs me. I was wrong to run away."

Max turned pale. "What am I going to do without you? I have nobody to help me!"

"I've thought about that, my friend," smiled Paul. "You're coming with me."

"But I have no home in England!" exclaimed Max, in panic. "My father is a drunk; my mother is dead; I have no other relatives who want me! I cannot go back!"

"I meant that you're coming with me to my home," replied Paul. "My mother will welcome you as well as me."



In a little house in a small village in England, a widow wrestled with God in prayer. "I commended Paul to Thee in holy baptism twenty years ago. He is Thine; please find him and bring him back, if not to me, then at least to Thy heart!" She wept and prayed a long time. She brought Paul to her Father, just as the four men brought their paralytic friend to Jesus (Mark 2:3–12). Then peace flooded her heart, and she believed her prayer had been heard.

Weeks later, a knock was heard at the door. Calling, "Come in!" the woman ran toward the door. How surprised she was to see her son Paul standing there! His eyes were filled with tears and he could hardly speak. "Mother, can you forgive me?"

Sobbing, the widow exclaimed, "Of course, I forgive you! God has brought you back to me, safe and sound!"

Then she noticed Max standing behind Paul. "Who is your friend?"

"Mother, this is Max. Let me tell you all about him." Over a delicious meal, Paul and Max told Paul's mother all that had happened. The widow laid her arm around Max's shoulders and said, "You are welcome to make your home with us as long as you like." Then they read the story of the prodigal son and sang a hymn. Paul closed the meal in prayer, praising God for His grace and mercy. "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22–23).

Adapted from *Heart's Treasure: Stories for Christian Young Folks*, gathered and translated by Theo Graebner (New York: Ernst Kaufmann, n.d.).

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Providence Christian School invites applications for the position of full-time Jr./Sr. High teacher for the current school year. Providence Christian School is situated in a beautiful, southern Alberta rural community, minutes from Lethbridge. PCS has grades K-12 with about 120 students attending and 12 staff members. We offer a four-day school week, competitive salaries/benefits, a growing, committed school community, and a dedicated team of teaching staff.

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Please send your resumé, references, statement of faith, and philosophy of Christian education to Mr. G. Van de Haar, Principal, Providence Christian School, Box 240, Monarch, AB T0L 1M0. For more information, e-mail: vandehaar.g@pcsmonarch.com, or phone: 403-381-4418 (school), 403-824-3182 (home).

VOLUNTEER TEACHER IN ZAMBIA

The Molenaar family is looking for a volunteer teacher who can take responsibility for the homeschooling of Joas (10) and Rhoda (8) from January to June, 2011. If you are interested or know someone who might be, please contact us for more details: ceesmirjam@gmail.com

HERITAGE RETREAT

The 3rd annual Spring Heritage Retreat will be held on May 23-26, 2011, the Lord willing. The theme will be "Questions." Final speaker arrangements are being made and we trust that by our next notice we can inform you of speakers, topics, and workshops. Reserve this spot on your calendars now. Updates can also be seen at www.heritagetretreat.ca.

Obituary notices, church events, and marriage and anniversary notices will be printed free of charge and under no obligation of a gift received. Other announcements and/or requests will be approved by the editorial committee on an individual basis as received.

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NCFIC CONFERENCE

December 9-11

The National Center for Family-Integrated Churches (NCFIC) is hosting its major annual conference (last year more than 2000 attended) in Asheville, N.C. on the theme, "Love the Church." Thirty addresses will be given by Scott Brown, Paul Washer, Doug Phillips, Joel Beeke, and several others. Visit www.ncfic.org/lovethechurch for more information and for registration. Bring your family! For those not able to afford the conference fee, "scholarships" are still available to reduce the cost. Everyone is welcome.

NATIONAL NEWS....

Vermont DMV Accepts John 3:16; Kentucky Rejects "In God We Trust" License Plate

The Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has told Vermont that license plates referring to "religion" or "deity" are constitutional. The case against the Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles officials, which began in 2005, involves a rejected request for a vanity license plate that referred to a popular Bible verse. Though the DMV has approved applications that refer to both religious and secular belief systems, Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) attorney Jeremy Tedesco reports that it denied the application for a plate to read 'JN36TN.' "Shawn Byrne in Vermont wanted to put 'JN36TN' [John 3:16] on his license plate, and the state said that he could not do that because they banned all references to religion on vanity plates," Tedesco explains. "We had not prevailed in the court below, but the Second Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with us and found that the restriction on Mr. Byrne's speech was unconstitutional."

Meanwhile, a faith-based group is suing Kentucky for rejecting its proposed "In God We Trust" license plate. Reclaim Our Culture Kentuckiana (ROCK) applied for the plate in 2007, but the state transportation cabinet rejected it, claiming the plate bearing "In God We Trust" over the background of an American flag advances a particular faith or religion. ROCK notes that the state does permit other groups and initiatives to have license plates, including several private Christian colleges, veterans, Kentucky specialty groups, the Masons, and breast cancer awareness. When it is all added up, eighty-eight specialty license plates are permitted throughout the state, but "In God We Trust" has been rejected. The ROCK spokesperson believes that is unconstitutional. She also finds it ironic that if a person pays for a specialty plate in cash, the currency reads "In God We Trust," which is acceptable. (*OneNewsNow*)

Jail House "Literature Ban" Goes Too Far

A lawsuit has been filed against the Berkeley County Detention Center in Moncks Corner, South Carolina, which operates under a policy that bans books and magazines but permits the Bible to be sent to inmates. Mat Staver of Liberty Counsel tells *OneNewsNow* the fact that someone is behind bars does not mean he should lose all access to literature. "Now that doesn't mean they have access to all literature," the attorney explains. "What we usually encounter is access being restricted with regards to religious literature—and in fact, that's why the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act was passed: to make sure that there's still some religious freedom in the prisons for those who are incarcerated." Staver says it is when access to religious materials is restricted that Christian lawyers have to go to court to gain inmates' rights. But, in this case, only the Bible is permitted—and the rest are barred. "I think the prison is going to lose this lawsuit," states the Liberty Counsel founder. "Clearly, they don't have to allow all literature; but a ban on all literature goes too far." (Charlie Butts — *OneNewsNow*)

Tennessee Recess Bible-ban Case Appealed

An appeals court in Tennessee will soon hear a lawsuit filed several years ago on behalf of a fourth-grade student who was barred from reading the Bible at recess. The boy and his parents initially filed suit

in Tennessee in 2005 against the Knox County Board of Education, alleging that the principal of Karns Elementary School ordered a teacher to put a stop to the Bible discussion that was taking place during recess between the then-10-year-old and some other students. The case, now being appealed, was heard at the district court level one year ago. (Bill Bumpas — *OneNewsNow*)

Landmark Pro-Life Law Goes into Effect in Nebraska

A landmark fetal-pain law that bans abortions after 20 weeks went into effect today in Nebraska. According to scientific studies, preborn children have pain receptors throughout their bodies and nerves linking them to the brain at and after 20 weeks. Mary Spaulding Balch, National Right to Life director of state legislation, said the law shows there's a state interest in the lives of preborn children. "Nebraska's law sets the course for the nation," she said. "In a groundbreaking and life-affirming step by the Nebraska Legislature, 20-week-old pain-capable unborn children will finally be protected in law. We look forward to consideration of similar legislation in other states during the spring legislative session." Bolstered by passage of the law, Sen. Mike Johanna (R-Neb.) recently introduced the Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act in the U.S. Senate. The bill requires that a woman seeking an abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy be informed that her preborn child may feel pain during an abortion and be offered anesthesia if she goes forward with the abortion. (*CitizenLink*)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS....

North Korean Christians Unlikely To Fare Better Under New Leader

The future remains uncertain for North Korea and its Christians, following Kim Jong-Il's appointment of his son, Kim Jong-Eun, to the rank of four-star general and as vice-chairman of the Workers Party of Korea's central military commission. The appointments place the 27-year-old, with no prior military or leadership experience, on what is believed to be the path to be his father's successor. Observers remain skeptical about any change the appointment of Jong-Il's heir apparent can bring to a county notorious for human rights violations. "Surely, a person with Western education cannot be as evil and non-caring as Kim Jong-Il," said Sam Kim, executive director of the Korean Church Coalition for North Korea Freedom. "[Yet] Kim Jong-Eun has not earned the true respect from North Korea's communist party leaders to effectively govern North Korea. As such, he will be nothing more than a figurehead and his uncle, Chan Sung Taek, will be the person who is really in control.... Unfortunately, Chan Sung Taek is just as ruthless as Kim Jong-Il. As such, Christians can expect to face the same level of persecution."

North Korea holds an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 prisoners for political and religious reasons, according to the U.S. State Department's 2009 report on international religious freedom. An estimated 40,000 are religious prisoners treated worse than other inmates, according to the 2010 annual report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. (*ChristianityToday*)

John Goudzwaard is a member of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Are you Raised from the Dead?

REV. MARK KELDERMAN
REV. MAARTEN KUIVENHOVEN

As we continue our study of how God saves sinners, you would expect a discussion on conversion which deals with repentance and faith. However, before we transition from the previous articles on calling and regeneration to those dealing with repentance and faith, there is something we need to address. Perhaps just a brief description would be helpful. Repentance is the sorrow over and turning from sin to God, and faith is the believing and trusting in Christ and promises of God for salvation. These two, repentance and faith, are the gifts of God. These are consciously experienced in the life of the sinner so that we say we actually do repent and believe. In regeneration, on the other hand, we saw there was no involvement of the sinner; it is the work of God alone.

It is very important and necessary that as Reformed believers we maintain this scriptural teaching. We can err in two ways. We can either give to sinners the thought they have the power in themselves to believe and thus be regenerated, or we discourage sinners from even considering that conversion is possible because we overemphasize the one-sided work of God in regeneration as something extremely rare.

Perhaps a biblical example will help us better understand the relationship between regeneration and conversion. The example we will consider is Lazarus, found in John 11. In this history, Jesus performed one of His greatest miracles: raising a man who had been dead three days. While that was the natural reality, it points out glorious spiritual implications. Think of Lazarus in the grave. He was dead. He was actually already decaying. When our Lord comes to the grave, it is obvious that Lazarus did not hear Him nor any of the others approach. This is no less a picture of unrepentant sinners. Paul clearly states this in Ephesians 2:1, 5, and it was already pictured in the Old Testament in Ezekiel 37. It is only the powerful authority of the Word through the Spirit of God that creates and brings life. When Jesus spoke these words, "Lazarus, arise," we know that Lazarus heard these words because he came obediently out of the tomb, struggling to remove his grave clothes.

The implications are as radical in spiritual life. God speaks to sinners by calling them through His Word and Spirit. Those who are made alive have heard the voice of the Son of God and they live. The evidence of their being alive is that they consciously come to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As Jesus Himself said in John 5, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." It is evident therefore that there is an immediate effect of the power of God which is life and hearing. We realize as well that without this power there would be no life. We realize that dead people will not and cannot respond. We maintain therefore that the work of God in salvation is His

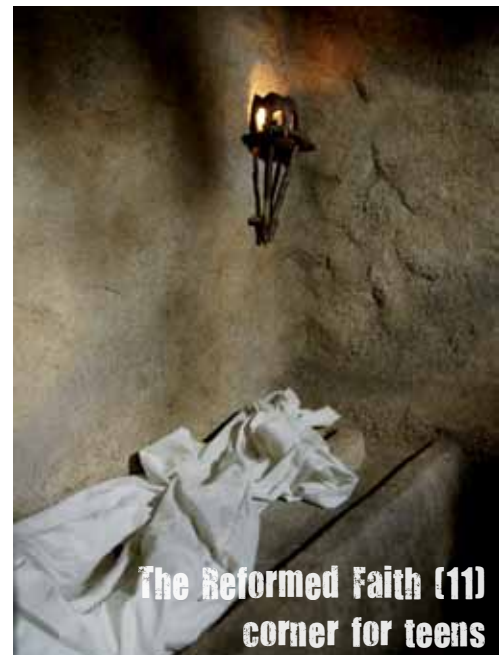
free and sovereign work.

One of the most assuring and comforting words for believers to hear is that their salvation is secure. Having said that, unbelievers who hear this have a tendency to over-

look their responsibility to repent and believe. Therefore, the message from God that comes to dead sinners, or unbelievers, is the call to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ. Sinners who hear, and, by grace, respond to this call need not worry about whether or not God has regenerated them or if they really heard His voice. The proof of that will be in the fact that they repent and believe. Take the example of Lazarus again. Can you imagine him lying there dead in the tomb and, upon hearing a voice calling him to come out, thinking to himself, "Did I really hear that? Should I listen more?" Of course not. The immediate result of this word of Christ was that Lazarus obeyed, and so with sinners. When they hear the call of the gospel through the Word, when they hear of a rich Christ for a poor sinner, their heart goes out to Christ; they have seen their sins as hideous and wicked and they repent and believe.

This also means that we cannot place some space of time between being regenerated and having faith. There cannot be any person who is regenerated without any indication that he is born again. The question may certainly be asked, to what extent does this person realize this and how does assurance of faith come into the picture, but those questions lie outside the scope of this simple article. Rather, the question that you need to ask yourselves is, have I come to conscious repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, having been born again through the Word and Spirit? If not, our Lord and Savior stands and calls you once more, "Come unto me, you who are laboring and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If you by faith lay hold of His promise, you can be sure He shall never disappoint you. "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25–26).

Rev. Mark Kelderman is pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Burgessville, Ontario. **Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven** is a pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and a Th.M. theological student at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Feel free to email either of them: makelderman@exculink.com; kuivenhoven.maarten@gmail.com.



From Our Mailbag



THE BANNER OF SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

From a chaplain in Colorado:

Greetings. We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to your ministry for the many generous contributions. The men in the church greatly appreciate the blessing of being able to read your monthly magazine. We hope that we will continue receiving *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* magazines. We are also richly blessed by the Lord's Day Sermons from the Heidelberg Catechism. The various topics and studies are always influential to the men, and the growth we witness day to day in their theological understanding would not be possible without your invaluable help. Thank you so much and God bless you and the ministry for God's glory.

From a friend in prison:

Greetings to you in the wonderful name of Jesus. Hello and God bless you!

Thank you for the puzzles; they keep me in the Word of God. I can't wait until the next one when mail call comes. I wait to see if the *Banner* magazine is in the officer's hands, if not I go sit back down.

Well, keep up the great work the Lord has for you. Thank you again for the magazine and the puzzle. May God bless you in all you do!

CONFERENCE MINISTRY

It is with great joy that we write to tell you of the blessings received at the conference in Pensacola, Florida. Our hunger for sound preaching was satisfied in the exposition of the Westminster Confession on "Assurance", and our souls were fed and humbled by the many references to our exalted Lord wherein we stand! We thank God for you and your ministry and pray that our triune Savior will continue to bless your work for His kingdom in the days to come.

PURITAN REFORMED JOURNAL

From a pastor in Michigan:

Having received the first four volumes of the *Puritan Reformed Journal*, I have been systematically making my way through them. (Hywel Jones encouraged us as students to make the reading of theological journals a regular practice; he strongly recommended yours!).

I just finished reading the article by Donald John MacLean entitled "James Durham (1622–1658) and the Free Offer of the Gospel" in volume 2, number 1 (January 2010).

I found the article to be one of the best, and most liberating, articles on the subject of the Free Offer of the Gospel that I have ever read. It has made me exceedingly eager to enter the pulpit again this Lord's Day. Thank you so much for publishing it!

PURITAN REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

From a friend in Arkansas:

It was with great pleasure that I received *Living for God's Glory*.

I have come a long way in my 73+ years and often feel like the workman called at the ninth hour. What wages can I possibly expect when I have only labored one tenth of the day? The answer always thrills me as I read Matthew again! I truly believe that *Living for God's Glory* should be the theme and goal of every Christian.

I am retired from the world of business now and have been called to pastor two small churches. Remaining here is a difficult thing for me, as the level of apostasy at our denominational headquarters is truly awesome.

Nevertheless, I stay and preach Jesus Christ, our King and risen Lord. I have found that the faithful saints in the pews need and want to hear what God has spoken and ordained. In this way, I faithfully serve my Lord and await His return.

If my donations to the seminary have fallen on good soil and are helping to bring in another crop of men devoted to rightly dividing the Word of God, then God deserves the glory because it is His bounty that has enabled my support of this work.

REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS

From a friend in California:

Thank you for your foreword in the reissued book of James Janeway, *Heaven upon Earth: Jesus the best friend in the worst times*. I purchased several of these books as Christmas gifts for my family. I enjoyed your foreword comments.

I stumbled across the history of James Janeway during a search of my patriarchal lineage. The father and brother of James (both named William) are in my direct patriarchal line. This makes James my uncle... a few hundred years ago! I was surprised that James was a Puritan minister and author. I was more surprised that his books are reprinted!

From a friend in Brazil:

I would like to let you know the fruit of the book *Meet the Puritans* in my life. That book really got me hooked, so I have now purchased 90 titles by or about the Puritans. I am sure that this discovery of the Puritans, in my 44th year, was God's great blessing in my life.

From *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*
Publication Number (USPS 010584)
540 Crescent St., NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

PERIODICAL
POSTAGE PAID AT
GRAND RAPIDS, MI

WHILE ON THE VERGE OF LIFE I STAND

While on the verge of life I stand,
And view the scene on either hand,
My spirit struggles with my clay,
And longs to wing its flight away.

Where Jesus dwells my soul would be,
And faints my much loved Lord to see:
Earth, twine no more about my heart,
For 'tis far better to depart.

Come, ye angelic envoys, come,
And lead the willing pilgrim home!
Ye know the way to Jesus' throne—
Source of my joys and of your own.

That blissful interview, how sweet,
To fall transported at His feet:
Raised in His arms to view His face,
Thro' the full beamings of His grace.

—PHILIP DODDRIDGE

the **Banner**
of Sovereign Grace Truth

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
HERITAGE REFORMED CONGREGATIONS

A Periodical for Young and Old