

The Standard Bearer

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Dorcas

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and alms deeds which she did.

And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

Acts 9:36-43

The Bible gives us many examples of godly saints. Their lives are recorded to show us how we ought to live.

Dorcas, who was full of good works and alms deeds that she did, is one of these examples.

There is something striking about the example of Dorcas. She was one of the few in history who were miraculously raised from the dead. All miracles are signs that point to the great work of God in Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. As we consider the miracle of Dorcas' resurrection, we must see the particular work of salvation to which this miracle points. And we must see the connection between this miracle and the godly example we find in Dorcas. This will encourage us to follow her godly example.



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There are several things we learn about Dorcas.

First, she lived in Joppa. Joppa was a major seaport dating back to the time of the Philistines. In this city there was a Christian church. The first Christians probably came to Joppa at the time of the great persecution in Jerusalem instigated by Saul (Acts 8:1). It is quite possible that the evangelist Philip labored here for a while. To this church Dorcas belonged.

Secondly, we gather that Dorcas was a widow without children. This is suggested by the fact that she was closely associated with the widows of the congregation. At her death "all the widows stood by him [Peter] weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them." In addition to this, there is no mention of Dorcas' family, not even at her death.

The most outstanding thing about Dorcas was her discipleship. "Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple..."

A disciple is a follower of Jesus.

There are especially three things that characterize a disciple.

First, a disciple believes the teachings of Jesus, which are the sole content of the Bible.

Secondly, a disciple is one who clings to Jesus and His atoning death for all his salvation. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). A true disciple clings to Jesus Christ as the only way to the Father.

Thirdly, a disciple is one who follows Jesus' godly example. Jesus taught us how to live and serve God. He is the example of godliness. A disciple follows Jesus' godly example and does so in the power of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Discipleship is a gift of God's grace. We are not disciples of Jesus naturally. To be a disciple requires a new birth that transforms us by God's grace into the very image of God.

Dorcas was just such a disciple.

Her discipleship was evident especially from the fact that she was "full of good works and alms deeds which she did."

Dorcas was full of good works. Dorcas busied her life doing good. This is an important mark of a disciple. One may acknowledge the truth of Jesus' teachings from the Bible. He may make a beautiful confession of Jesus as his Savior. But if he is not full of good works, his confession is a fraud. He is no disciple of Jesus. Dorcas was full of good works.

Dorcas' good works were primarily "alms deeds which she did." Alms deeds are works of mercy performed for those in distress. Literally the word is "mercy deeds." And these alms deeds consisted at least in part of making coats and garments for others. Of these good works of mercy Dorcas was full. Her whole life revolved around helping others in distress.

Dorcas is set before us here as an example of true discipleship.

When we think of examples of discipleship we might overlook Dorcas and focus our attention on great theologians, missionaries to foreign countries, or martyrs.

But then the Lord sets before us also a Dorcas. She probably had no great, outstanding abilities. But the abilities she had she used. She had the ability to work with her hands the things that are good. By grace she had a heart full of compassion for those in distress. And

so she labored diligently to help the needy, away from the limelight in her little corner of the church in Joppa.

Here we see true greatness. The measure of greatness is not how many people you can influence or bring under your control. The measure of greatness is how much you minister to the needs of others. Jesus made this clear to His disciples in Matthew 20:25-28.

Jesus Himself possesses this true greatness, in that He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28).

May we by God's grace show this same greatness.



Dorcas was raised from the dead!

We do not know the exact circumstances of Dorcas'

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requires a new birth
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by God's grace
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image of God.*

death. All we know is that she was sick and died. Upon her death she was washed and laid in an upper chamber.

The saints of the church of Joppa sent for Peter, who at this time was in Lydda, only nine miles away. Their intention was probably not for Peter to raise Dorcas from the dead, but rather to bring comfort to the church at the loss of Dorcas.

Instead of preaching a funeral sermon and helping the church of Joppa bring Dorcas to the grave, Peter raised her from the dead. Being brought to the upper room, Peter dismissed the widows that mourned over Dorcas. He kneeled down and prayed. Then Peter addressed her by name and told her to arise. Opening her eyes she sat up and gave her hand to Peter, who lifted her up and presented her alive to the saints and widows of the church.

What an astounding miracle!

This miracle is a sign or picture of a better resurrection to come.

The tendency may be to focus our attention on the physical resurrection of Dorcas and wish the same for our own loved ones who die. But don't forget that Dorcas' resurrection was merely a return to this life, requiring her to die again.

Her miraculous resurrection is a sign that points us to a better resurrection to come. This better resurrection is the resurrection that will take place in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. This resurrection is not a return to this life but an advancement. The Lord will raise His people to the life of heaven. He will give them a body adapted to live in the new, heavenly creation. He will bring them into the new creation to live forever with God in perfect joy. To that better resurrection the resurrection of Dorcas points.

We are taught by the miracle of Dorcas' resurrection that all those who live as true disciples of Jesus Christ, as Dorcas did, will in the day of Christ be raised unto eternal life.

Let us understand that all will be raised in the day of Jesus Christ, but not all will be raised to eternal life. When the Lord returns, there will be a general resurrection. Jesus spoke of this in John 5:28, 29: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

Notice that those who have done evil will be raised

unto damnation. They will receive a body fit for hell. And they will be consigned to hell both body and soul for eternal torment for their sins.

Only those who have done good will be raised unto life. The good that Jesus mentions is the good that Dorcas did as a true disciple of Jesus Christ. It is the good that comes from living by faith in Jesus Christ. It is the good that is motivated by gratitude to God for His free salvation in Jesus Christ. Those who have done that good will be raised in the day of the Lord unto eternal life.

This resurrection unto life is a reward for the good that His disciples have accomplished. Jesus makes this clear in Revelation 22:12: "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." The resurrection unto damnation is the proper reward of those who have done evil. But the resurrection unto life is God's reward for those who have done good.

Please understand that the resurrection of life is not a reward of merit but of grace. A reward of merit is a reward that is earned. Certainly the good deeds of Jesus' disciples do not merit the glories of the resurrection unto life. This is a reward of grace, that is, of God's undeserved favor. The resurrection unto life has been earned by Jesus Christ on the cross for all that the Father has given Him. It is given as a gracious reward to Jesus' disciples for the good works they do in the power of their Master.



Dorcas' resurrection was certainly significant for the church of Joppa. They no doubt rejoiced at receiving her back from the dead to continue the good works she had done before. But, more importantly, her resurrection became the occasion for many to believe in Jesus Christ. The fact of her resurrection was spread abroad, and through it the gospel was graphically proclaimed. There is resurrection and life for the disciples of Jesus Christ. And God used it to bring many to faith.

Here we find the significance of Dorcas' resurrection for us.

Let the gospel proclaimed through her resurrection encourage us as disciples to be full of good works, so that we may receive the crown of life.

And to those who are in unbelief, let them repent and turn to Jesus Christ to be His disciples. 

Jehovah Against the Shepherds (2)*

Good Shepherds

God's Word here, in Ezekiel 34, is not intended so much to warn evil shepherds as it is to comfort the flock whose welfare depends on their removal, and to instruct the new shepherds as to their duties. The new shepherds had no examples of godliness; they had no teachers who from experience could speak of their love for God, joy in the ministry, and personal need for Jesus Christ.

There is instruction to you graduates here how to be good shepherds.

The evil shepherds fed themselves. You must feed the flock. This has the emphasis in the text (see vv. 2, 3, 8, 13, 14, 23).

The food is the Word. For four years now we have taught you to bring the Word in all your work. Your place is in the study, poring over Scripture, doing careful exegesis so you are able to say, "Thus saith the Lord God..." (34:1). And, "Hear the word from His mouth; this is warning from Him" (3:17).

* This editorial concludes the (revised) 2010 graduation message of the Protestant Reformed Seminary, more a sermon than a speech. It appears only now in February because other editorials took precedence this fall and winter. May the message, heard by a goodly number last June, also be of use to the churches and the SB community at large. In this new year, please commit us at the seminary to God in prayer.

Whether on the pulpit (your primary work), in the catechism room, beside the hospital bed, or in counseling for a fractured marriage, you must "feed the flock of God."

Feed them in a "good (literally 'fat') pasture" (v. 14). Give them substantial sermons that edify. Prepare well for catechism—no "lick and a promise" preparation, no matter how many times you have taught it. Meditate prayerfully on the Word before bringing it to the hospital or across your counseling table. "Great Shepherd, bless this word. Use me."

Then, whereas the evil shepherds had no care for the distressed among the flock, your work is to bind up the broken; strengthen the weak; heal the diseased (v. 16).

Here, as shepherds must, you show yourself skillful in medicine. With a kind of Hippocratic oath of non-maleficence ("I will do no harm, but with all my power will heal"), bring the balm of Gilead to the sick and the weak.

Sometimes this is unpleasant work, which is why the evil shepherds refused to do it. "What? The call letter didn't say that." Sitting in the study doing the blood, sweat, and tears of exegesis may seem easy compared with this work. It may compare to the dirty and infrequently-spoken-of work of a CNA at an old people's home. Who wants that work? Who will be praised for it?

It may turn your stomach, repulse

you like the gangrene on a sheep that fell long ago, and break your heart. But this is the work of a faithful pastor among Christ's precious, blood-bought sheep.

While the evil shepherds are seeking their own pleasure, you must seek out the lost and scattered sheep. "I will seek that which was lost, and will bring back that which was driven away" (v. 16).

Some sheep were driven away by bad shepherds.

You will see them in the community you move to. They may be the former members of the congregation you serve. They may be the grandchildren of those who are fond of telling you, "O, I used to go to the 'big church.'"

A good shepherd will be interested in them. He is not threatened by them, does not want to speak evil of, or listen to evil about, them. He extends friendly greetings to them, even if they now follow another shepherd and are part of a different flock.

A faithful shepherd seeks to "bring[s] again that which was driven away."

Others have wandered away on their own, the result of their own stubborn nature. They may be the sons and daughters of the congregation. But as the ninety and nine are safe, he does what he can to lead back one who has wandered away.

He is not hindered or halted by rebuffs. (Of course these wander-

ing sheep will rebuff him.) He does not cast pearls before swine, but neither does he stop trying just because he gets the cold shoulder or (worse) a hostile reception. Can he expect anything else from wandering sheep? They are diseased, sick, weak, broken, exactly because they have wandered from the flock.

Then, whereas the evil shepherds were cowards, you must be fearless and bold in your defense of the flock (vv. 22, 28).

The faithful shepherd sees the dangers (chs. 3, 33). The heathen are like wild beasts who would devour the defenseless, weak, vulnerable. They want the sheep for a prey, especially the young people. The faithful shepherd understands that; he knows where and how they lie in wait; and he warns the sheep. He blows the trumpet with no uncertain sound: "BEWARE!"

And then he does battle with these enemies. With the sword of the Spirit he gives battle.

He does so because he cherishes the life that he protects.

Some shepherds leave the impression that they are mercenaries—they have no personal interest in the cause they defend, but fight and do battle because they love to fight and do battle. Of the precious life within the fold they know little; of the delightful experience of peace for themselves and their children, as they fellowship with God and with each other, they seem to know nothing.

Not this shepherd. Willing to fight, ready to do battle at all times and be wounded in the process, this shepherd fights because he cherishes for himself and the rest of the people

of God the delightful quiet beside the still waters—the true church where he and his seed can dwell in peace.

Jehovah's Love for His Sheep

That is your calling, graduates, a calling you will be eager to take up when you see the sheep as God sees them.

God loves His chosen people.

As frequently as God tells the shepherd to "feed" the flock, so frequently does He call the flock "mine" (thirteen times in verses 6, 8, 10, 12, 15, 17, 19, and 22)!

"They are mine according to eternal election. According to that sovereign decree, I love them with an everlasting love. Mine! I regard them with tenderest affection."

My sheep, says Jehovah.

This—they are God's—is what the evil shepherds forgot. This

*It may be difficult
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explains the severe judgment of the evil shepherds! They man-handled God's flock! What did you do with my flock? It may be difficult to understand the wrath of God against the shepherds...until you see whose flock it is, and how He loves His sheep.

This—they are God's—is what will make a good shepherd a good shepherd. He sees the flock as God's flock; and he fears God.

And this—they are God's—explains why God sent *the* Shepherd to care for the flock.

All the warnings of judgment against the unfaithful shepherds, and all the explanation of the duties of the good shepherds, are intended by God to prepare the people to hear the promise of *the* Shepherd.

He is the son of man—Ezekiel's favorite designation. Not an angel, but a son of the fallen Adam, weak, subject to all the infirmities of any other man. A man of ignoble birth and unattractive countenance. God *made* Him the Shepherd, as He made Ezekiel so.

This Shepherd loved the sheep. He gave Himself for them. He did not feed Himself, making Himself fat on their flesh. He fed them in a fat pasture. He bound up the broken, strengthened the weak, healed the diseased. He sought out the lost and scattered sheep, ignoring the pompous nobles among the flock, visiting with the Mary Magdalenes, publicans, and Samaritans. And you and me. Naturally we would "turn his stomach," repulse him by the gangrene of our sinful natures. But who else would care for us? Who else could?

He was bold and fearless in His defense of the flock, because He (Emmanuel) cherished the covenant fellowship with the people whom God loved. He so loved that flock that He did not hesitate to give His life. And God did not spare Him, His beloved Son.

We shepherds follow this Shepherd, God's Son, and depend upon Him. And we are able to be faithful only insofar as we are united to Him, live in Him, depend upon Him.

Synod, TSC, membership of the PRC, family and friends...

Pray that God not judge us with unfaithful shepherds, giving us what we deserve.

Pray that our graduates will be animated by the Spirit of faithful Jesus Christ, and be a blessing on the church of Christ, both here and in all the nations of the world. 

IN HIS FEAR

REV. DANIEL KLEYN

Christ-like Pilgrims

What Would Jesus Do?" "What Would Jesus Drive?" "What Would Jesus Drink?" Although becoming less popular today, such slogans have frequently been buzzwords in Christian circles.

In the 1990s the big question was, "What Would Jesus Do?" (WWJD). In facing decisions, struggles, temptations, or any other circumstance in life, one could determine what to do simply by answering this question. You simply need to follow the example of Jesus' life.

In more recent years a new WWJD arose, "What Would Jesus Drive?" It originates from Christian environmentalist groups who oppose owning and driving SUV's. Their aim is to produce guilt in the owners of such gas-guzzling and pollution-producing vehicles. The claim is that Jesus would not drive a SUV, for He would not want actively to destroy this planet or consume its natural resources.

An interesting precursor to these present-day movements was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in the early 1900s. These prohibitionists challenged people to ask the question, "What Would Jesus Drink?" Their claim, of course, was that He would not (and did not) drink anything alcoholic.

Most of these movements are fads that end up dying an early death. They take center stage for a while, then

soon disappear. Only to be replaced, of course, by a new one. Which makes one wonder what will be next. Perhaps a campaign against obesity, with the question, "What Would Jesus Devour?"

One of the problems with these is that the question itself is absurd. The simple fact of the matter is that the Bible does not record Jesus facing all of the various situations we do. It simply cannot provide an answer to What Would Jesus Do, or Drink, or Drive. The only way to answer the question, then, is through speculation.

More serious is the fact that these movements are a mockery of the gospel. Such so-called "Christian" slogans cheapen and compromise the truth. They promote an external righteousness, for by doing certain things, one is supposedly able, in the end, to save himself (and the planet too, perhaps). More significant is that, instead of Jesus Christ being set forth as the Savior who died an atoning death by which He satisfied the justice of God for the sins of the elect, He is presented as being merely an example to follow, and that in frivolous issues such as driving and drinking.

What the child of God ought to consider is this: "What has Jesus done for me? And how shall I express my gratitude for what He has done? In one way. Not by considering what Jesus would or might do, but by considering what He tells me to do in His Word!"

Having said all this, our opposition to and rejection of the WWJD movements must not lead us to reject altogether the idea of Jesus being our example.

It is true that He is much more than an example. He

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is our Savior. He is that first and foremost. His chief purpose in coming to this earth was to save His church from sin. He suffered and died in our place to earn our righteousness before God and to attain eternal life for us. All of which means that our righteousness is not something we can earn by doing what Jesus did, but is ours only by imputation.

In addition to this, the Scriptures mention that Christ, as our Savior, also left us a powerful example of holiness. He could do this exactly because of His sinless perfection and blameless life. What we must remember, of course, is that this example is directly tied to His saving work. He saved us so that we might be holy. Christ's suffering for us is the spiritual power that enables us to follow His example.

The Bible sets before us a few specific ways in which we are to follow Christ's example. In John 13:15 we are admonished to follow His example of humble service to each other. In I John 2:6 we are commanded to follow His example of obedience to the law of God. And in I Peter 2:21 we are instructed to follow the example He gave in suffering.

The latter is perhaps the most striking of these three. We are told that Christ suffered for us, and thereby left us "an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (I Pet. 2:21-23).

The example of Jesus with regard to suffering is of utmost importance to us as pilgrims and strangers on this earth.

It is so because pilgrims must suffer in this life. God puts countless afflictions into our lives. In fact, with a view to our eternal good He often sends more of these on us than He does on the ungodly. But we also and especially suffer because we are Christians. We are hated as Christ was hated. We are reviled and persecuted because we confess His name. We suffer wrongfully. Men say all manner of evil against us falsely for Christ's sake. And all of this will only intensify as the Lord brings us closer to the end of time.

In all this, we must be Christ-like pilgrims—Christ-like

in how we bear the sufferings of this present life. Especially when we suffer as Christians. For Christ's reaction to suffering was completely the antithesis to how the natural man reacts to suffering. Following His example sets us apart as pilgrims and strangers on this earth.

One way in which Christ is our example is that He willingly submitted to suffering. He knew that it came from the hand of God. He knew it was His lot in life. He expected it, and accepted it. He submitted to the will and way of His heavenly Father.

What makes this so striking is that Christ did not deserve to suffer. Suffering is the result of sin, and He was personally without sin. But He never uttered any questions or objections. He realized He was called to suffer, and to this will of God He submitted.

We often struggle to submit, for we convince ourselves that we should not receive suffering, or at least not so much of it. When the Lord makes us sick and brings us low we say, "Why me? Surely I don't deserve this cancer, this stroke, this brain tumor, this imminent death!" When our house

is broken into, or our car stolen, or all our possessions lost in a fire, we say, "What have I done to deserve this? Why didn't this happen to my ungodly neighbor instead?" When our job and income are taken away because we refuse to work on the Lord's day we say, "Why does this happen to me, and not to someone else?"

However, we have no right to expect less trouble in life. On account of our sin, the only proper expectation to have is more suffering. Can you honestly say that you have been so good and godly and upright that you have earned a life of ease? Have you loved God and the neighbor so perfectly that you deserve only good things from the hand of God, and never evils?

We are sinners who deserve the judgments God sends upon mankind. We deserve every sickness and disease there could possibly be. We deserve every earthly affliction. We deserve to be hated by the ungodly, and to suffer extremely at the hands of the wicked. If we deserve anything, we deserve our suffering in this life to be much, much worse.

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If Christ, who did not personally deserve even a small taste of suffering, nevertheless expected and accepted it, so much the more ought we. Let Christ be our example in suffering—the example of submission to the will of God by accepting the suffering He faced. Christ’s response was this (Ps. 39:9): “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.” May we say and do likewise.

Another way in which Christ is an example is that He never tried to avoid suffering by means of deceit. There was no guile found in His mouth. He ruled His tongue, using it only to speak what was good and true.

This does not mean that He said absolutely nothing. He certainly spoke up in defense of the name and honor of God. He certainly used every opportunity He could to bear witness to the truth of God.

But Christ Jesus did not speak using guile or deceit in order to avoid His sufferings. He always spoke the truth, and nothing but the truth. Men tried to find fault in what He said, but they could not. The only way they could condemn Him was to resort to false witnesses. He never lied, or held back some of the truth, so that He might be spared suffering. He was always honest, even though He knew such honesty would result in more suffering. Even when His own life was at stake, He did not try to avoid the awful death and suffering of the cross by deceit.

Christ is our example. We may not use deceit, or fail to testify of the truth and of our faith, in order to avoid suffering. If, for example, an unbeliever asks what you did on Sunday, you may not be silent, or tell half truths, so that you will not face ridicule for attending twice the worship of God. We may never turn to any form of dishonesty whatsoever in the hope of escaping the mockery of the ungodly. Follow in the steps of Christ.

Another aspect of Christ’s example in suffering is that He did not retaliate. When men reviled Him, He did not revile again. When men threatened Him, He did not threaten them in return.

The reviling and threatening happened throughout Christ’s life, but especially at the end. Countless names and accusations were thrown in His face. He was reviled on the cross by every element of society and of the church. Even those who just happened to be passing by mocked Him. No one held back in the abuse they directed against Him.

But Christ did not respond to them in the same way. He was not vengeful, trying to get back at them for what they had done to Him. He did not use the same kind of words as His enemies did. Instead, He did a most astounding thing while hanging on the cross, for He prayed, “Father, forgive them!”

Even more surprising is that Christ did not retaliate by using threats against His enemies. He did not even threaten to bring upon them the judgment of God that they deserved. This is significant, for if

He had, these would not have been idle threats. He was the Son of God, who had the power to avenge Himself immediately of those who assaulted Him. He could have killed all His false accusers in a moment. But this He did not do.

We often fail to follow Christ’s example in this. If we suffer wrongfully at the hands of others, we are quick to retaliate. If we are mocked or ridiculed or threatened because of our faith, we are inclined to become angry, and to express it. We find a way to mock in return. We are quick to point out the faults and inconsistencies of those who ridicule us. And we feel justified in doing this because of how much hurt and anguish they have inflicted on us. We think it is acceptable to give them at least a little bit of what they gave us.

We are called to walk in Christ’s steps when we suffer as Christians. Let the ungodly speak falsely about you. Let them make your life difficult. Let them discriminate against you. Let them drag your name in the dirt. Endure it without becoming angry, without issuing threats, and without desiring or plotting to get even with those who hate and falsely accuse you.

*If Christ,
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nevertheless
expected and accepted it,
so much the more
ought we.*

Finally, we see in Christ's example (as set forth in I Peter 2) that He did not take judgment into His own hands.

Jesus Christ certainly could have. He had the power as the Son of God to avenge Himself immediately of those who assaulted Him. But Christ left things in the hands of His Father in heaven. He knew God would avenge Him (as He will avenge all His people). He knew God would see to it that those who persecuted Him would get what they justly deserved. He did not avenge Himself, but left this to the righteous Judge of heaven and earth.

We must follow in His steps in this. We may not take judgment into our own hands. We may not even do so when it seems heaven is silent and God is not defending us. The wicked may appear to get away

with things now, but God sees it all. One day He will surely give to those who persecute His people their just reward. They will not get away with anything when they face Him on judgment day. We need not throw up our arms in despair. We who are pilgrims and strangers on this earth have the sure hope that God will one day right all wrongs. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). God, the righteous judge, will always judge righteously.

God's Word encourages us to follow the example of Christ. Those who suffer with Him and as He did will also be glorified together with Him. Those who follow Christ through the way of suffering will also follow Him into glory. May that spur us on to be Christ-like pilgrims as we face the many sufferings of this life. 

God Our Father

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 9

Question 26. What believest thou when thou sayest, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth"?

Answer. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (who of nothing made heaven and earth, with all that is in them; who likewise upholds and governs the same by His eternal counsel and providence) is, for the sake of Christ His Son, my God and my Father; on whom I rely so entirely, that I have no doubt but He will provide me with all things necessary for soul and body; and further, that He will make whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to my advantage; for He is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing, being a faithful Father.

What is a father? On a natural and physical level, a father begets, he gives life. But being a father goes beyond that. Sadly, many today who father children fail to see this. For them, fatherhood is simply physical, conceiving

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a child with a woman, and then they drop out of the child's life. We must not let experiences of this sort cloud our vision of who God is as Father.

A father is one who loves and cares for his children, who has a relationship of protection and nurture, of guidance and provision, with his children. When we say, "God is our Father," we are speaking of His loving relationship to us. Our understanding of fatherhood must begin with who God is as Father.

All Our Boast Is in Him

When the sailors in the storm awakened Jonah and asked him to explain who he was and why the storm, Jonah said, "I fear Jehovah, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9). At this, the sailors were "exceedingly afraid." Jonah's God was the "Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." The God who had sent this storm.

Perhaps you remember from your childhood-days the boasting of children about their dad: "My daddy is a policeman," or "My dad is stronger than yours," etc.

The boast of the believer in this beautiful Lord's Day is, "My Father is the one who of nothing made and upholds the universe, and my Father is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" What a remarkable confession.

For consider how insignificant you are. "All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity" (Is. 40:17). Think of the expanses of the universe, and your size, your vulnerability, your insignificance even among men. God is your Father. How remarkable!

And consider, too, who you are by nature. Our natural parents are Adam and Eve, and their fall into sin would, following its natural course, lead them and all their children to become children of the devil (John 8:44). By nature we are all the children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). And yet, God is your Father. How remarkable.

The parentheses shows how amazing it is that God is my Father. His might is seen in the great work of creation. He made the heavens and the earth and all they contain—the spiritual world of angels and souls as well as everything tangible. From the vast expanses of the universe, down to the tiny details of the functions of the human body, he not only made it all, but He holds it all together. He made it all "out of nothing," by the Word of His power. In the creation we see the greatness of God. This creator God is my Father. How remarkable!

The Father of Jesus Christ

Even more remarkable is that my Father is the "eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

He is the eternal Father. Eternal means He didn't *become* a Father. Rather this is a part of the essence of His being as God. He always was the Father of the eternal Son. When we call Him Father, this is not a simile or a manner of speaking, but it describes Him as the ultimate Father, not patterned after an earthly father, but the other way around. As eternal Father, He is my eternal Father, the one who elected His sons and daughters in eternity to glory.

He is an exclusive Father. First, He is the Father of Jesus Christ, and through Jesus Christ He becomes my Father. He is not the father of all mankind. We become the children of God only through Jesus Christ and faith in Him.

But how extensive, also, is His fatherhood? How many are the children of God (Heb. 2:10)? The New Testament expands the Fatherhood of God to people from all the nations of the earth, the spiritual seed of Abraham (Gal. 4:4-6).

At a great price, God becomes my Father. How expensive? God gave all that He could to make me one of

His children! The price was the blood of His own, only begotten, Son. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten son into the world" (I John 4:9). It means I can be confident of His love. It means that He loves me with the same eternal love that He has for His own Son. He brings me

into a position of sonship by adoption, adoption sealed with the price of His Son's blood.

How remarkable, that the eternal Father, who is Father of some only and not all, should send His own Son, and that His gospel should reach me, to make me one of His children! How amazing that I can stand with Jesus and call God "my Father!"

Wonderful Promises

This Lord's Day has been called "The Psalm" of the Heidelberg Catechism. How similar it is to the first question and answer: personal, rich, and filled with

*How amazing
that I can stand
with Jesus
and call God
"my Father!"*

comfort. Two great promises are ours as the children of God.

The first is that God will provide me with all the things I need for both body and soul. “Need” refers to things that I really cannot do without. When we expect more than what we need and are disappointed, the fault lies with us, not God. He promises what we need, and often goes beyond that, but we should never see the extras as part of our need. “Body and soul” shows the completeness of His fatherly care. A cruel father will spoil his children with physical things, without any care for their souls. But God’s care is complete. Without this care, we would be empty. All we need for our earthly life comes from Him, and He also gives our souls all the care they need, salvation and grace, which bring us to glory.

The second promise is that God as Father will make whatever evils He sends on me in this valley of tears turn out to my advantage. What is true of all *good* things is true also of the *evils* that come to me in life; they are all from Father’s hand. Evil does not just happen to us, but God sends it (Amos 3:6). Not only has He decreed it, but in His love He brings it to us, just as a loving parent would tell his resistant child, “Son, eat your vegetables, they’re good for you,” or “Take these meds, they will help” (Heb. 12:5-6). “This valley of tears” refers to our life, our human existence. None of us will escape the evils that bring tears. Grief, disease, death, pain, spiritual struggles, family woes—all these things are realities. But, “all things work together for good” under Father’s sovereign, loving hand and purpose.

Sure Comfort

Can you be sure of this? How can we know that the Father will always provide? How can we be sure that evil will turn to our good?

Because of who our Father is. He is willing, and He is able.

Some fathers have the will, but they lack the power. They would do anything and everything for their children and their well-being, but an earthly father cannot do anything and everything. In some instances, fathers cannot even feed their children. Every earthly father knows this helplessness from his experience. “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear” (Is. 59:1).

Other fathers have it in their power to help their children, but they lack the will. Then, instead of the father’s heart bleeding for the child, the child’s heart pines away and longs to be satisfied, but there is no response of love. The child is abandoned.

With God there is complete ability and complete willingness. He is able, because He is almighty God, and He is willing, being our loving Father.

Knowing this, we can be confident and comforted in this valley of tears.

Questions for Discussion

1. Define fatherhood. What does it teach earthly fathers?
2. List some things that make the confession, “God is my Father,” such a remarkable confession. Now thank God for these things.
3. How did God create the heavens and the earth? How does this display His might?
4. Can a believer (a person with faith) be an evolutionist? Why/why not?
5. Is God the Father of all mankind? Why/why not?
6. What price did God pay to secure our adoption?
7. What does God promise to supply us? Why is it dangerous for us to expect more than this from God?
8. How does God turn evil for our good?
9. Discuss the willingness of God. What has God done for you that shows you His willingness?
10. Discuss the ability/power of God. Where is His ability evident to you? What is God willing to do for you?
11. Find some Bible passages that demonstrate the greatness of God, our Father, toward us.



Serving God to the Best of Our Ability

Matthew 25:14-30

The well-known parable found in Matthew 25:14-30 is often called the parable of the talents, as it speaks of the faithful and slothful servants and what they do with the talents that God gives them.

As you young people are aware, a parable is an earthly story with a deeper, spiritual meaning. It is important to look at the details of the parable so that we can figure out which details are important to the spiritual meaning, and which details are not important.

The household is the kingdom of heaven. The householder or master is Jesus Christ as He went to a faraway country, to heaven.

The servants are a picture of the people who occupy the church on earth and who are given different roles in God's kingdom. There are some who are faithful servants, but there are also others who are unfaithful servants. Both are found in the outward, visible church.

The talents are a reference to the opportunities that God gives members of the church to serve in His kingdom. These are the goods of the household, according to verse 14, that are delivered to the various individuals. The talent has to do with the place and calling of each individual, which is in conformity with his abilities, according to verse 15.

Jesus gives this parable in the context of instruction concerning the end of the world. The disciples asked what things would come to pass. Jesus instructs them as to what it means to watch for the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus tells them what their calling is as they wait for His coming.

As we begin 2011, we confess that Jesus is coming again. We don't fall into the temptation to predict His coming, as Mr. Harold Camping has done once again.

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Mr. Camping tells us that Jesus is coming on May 21, 2011. He bases this on God's words to Noah regarding the coming of the flood in seven days recorded in Genesis 7:4. Mr. Camping claims that the seven days are seven thousand years, and he applies the warning to us regarding the end of time. Doing the math, he figures that 7,000 years after the year of the flood, which he dates as 4990 B.C., brings us to 2011, after subtracting a year going from B.C. to A.D., because there is no year zero. Then he figures that the 17th day of the second month, when the flood began, is May 21. So he concludes that Jesus is going to return in judgment on May 21, even though there are so many biblical signs, including the Antichrist and the great tribulation, that have not yet been revealed.

We are not deceived by this so-called prophet. You young people know your Bibles well enough to show the error of Mr. Camping's reasoning. Although the signs of Christ's coming are sufficient to show that He is not coming on May 21, you know that His coming is drawing near, and you are called to look and pray for that coming. God gives to each of you different responsibilities and abilities, as you wait for the final return of Christ. God gives natural abilities, and He gives specific places in which you are called to use those abilities in the service of Christ and His kingdom.

God calls some to teach, others to preach, others to serve in the home or in the work place. To each of us God gives a calling. God calls most of you to be students. Your place in His kingdom is to be obedient children in the home and faithful students in the schools. You need to be faithful as you work on the farm, in the factory, or at the store; as you bag groceries, landscape, work in the nursing home, do construction work, remove snow, or babysit.

Notice that everyone receives talents. Not just ministers and teachers, but every one of God's children receives

a certain place in His kingdom. And God requires that everyone labor, according to his ability, in that particular place. This comes out especially in the wicked, lazy servant. He is not satisfied with the place that God gives Him. He refuses to labor in that capacity. It is not simply that he labors but does not do it very faithfully, or does it with a wrong motive. No, he wants nothing to do with the position and calling God has given him. He hides it in the earth. He is saying: "I don't want to have this job. This is too lowly. I want a better place in God's kingdom." He is proud. He has no place in God's kingdom after all.

God has given each of you an important place in your home, school, and work place. Those places and callings are different according to the different gifts and abilities that He has given you. God in His sovereign good pleasure has made you all differ-

ent. Some of you are better at some things than others. Some have a better memory, others are better at writing, the next person is a quick thinker, the next is able to explain and teach. One is good with music, another is better with words, and another is good with numbers. Yet another is better with his hands and has a strong body. The devil likes to use these differences to make us fight with our siblings and classmates or parents and to be bitter against God.

Your parents give you certain obligations in your homes. Your teachers assign different jobs and responsibilities to you in school. Your employers give you various responsibilities. They do it according to your abilities. Admittedly, parents and teachers and employers sometimes fail, but their calling is to take your abilities into consideration and to expect of you no more than you are capable of performing. God has not made all of you the same. Your teachers and parents know that. You need to be willing to admit it and to confess your weaknesses and appreciate other people's strengths.

Look at the parable. God gave five talents to one man and two to another. There was no envy or covetousness. God knew that the one man could not handle five talents. God knows some of you can handle many responsibilities.

Others of you cannot handle as much. Some of you have to prove yourselves before you are considered worthy of more responsibility. God gives the talents based on His good knowledge of His people. God makes use of teachers and parents and employers in assigning those opportunities and positions.

Behind everything in your life is the perfect, loving hand of Jehovah God. He is working all things in His providence for good. Everything is with a view to the

return of Jesus Christ. It may not seem fair that God gave different talents to different individuals. But God is God. He can do whatever He chooses. And, again, even though it may seem unfair from our perspective, it does not appear that the men in Jesus' parable cared. They didn't fight. They didn't make an issue of it. Similarly, it must not bother

us. Someone else has a better job. We envy another's home life. Yet another does not need to work very hard for good grades. We bow before God's sovereignty and accept the position and calling in which God has placed us for now.

The one who was given two talents returns with two more, and the one given five talents returns with five more. Both of them receive the same praise. No distinction is made between them. Both pleased their master. Both were faithful in the callings that were given to them. They studied hard. They obeyed their parents. They did all the work that was set before them to the best of their ability. The one who had more was able to do more. The other was able to do less. But both were faithful.

The fact that the one had more than the other made no difference. If it does not matter to God, it must not matter to you and me or to your parents either. More is going to be required of some of us, but that is because we can do more. God gives more in the way of natural gifts and opportunities.

But, notice, the one given five did not come back with four. He might have argued that four was still better than two. He would have been wrong! Two would not have been good enough for him. It might have been easy

God requires that everyone labor, according to his ability, in that particular place.

for him to gain only four, but that would not be good enough.

It is very easy for us in our different jobs and positions not to do our best. You are told to sweep the floor—you give it a quick brush with a broom. You talk or text on your phone, or go on e-mail or facebook—while you are supposed to be working. You have an assignment to do, so you rush through it so that you can get on to something else. Instead of gaining four, you do work that is suitable for gaining only two.

The man given one talent thought he knew his master well, but he was fatally wrong. He never really knew him at all. He refused to do what was set before him. Sometimes, tragically, that can be like us. God says through our parents or teachers, this is what I am calling you to do. We respond by not doing it. It is too lowly. We look down on that job. We are proud. We want a better place in God's kingdom. We show ourselves to be sinful and proud and we offend God.

The faithful servants knew what was expected of them and did it. Your heavenly Father knows what He expects of you, and He uses your parents and teachers and employers to set that before you. Don't look at others to see if your situation is the same or fair. It will be different. God has dealt with each of you very differently. Do you know yourself well enough to know what God expects of you?

You are not responsible only to your parents or to your teachers for the use of your talents. You are responsible to your Master, who has given you everything and will require of you an accounting when Jesus comes back. You and I need to be able to stand before God and say, "I have used my position and my abilities faithfully, and in doing so I have brought forth godly fruit." If you can stand before God and say, "I have done my best and used my gifts to the best of my ability," then you will have peace in your heart and soul.

Jesus is coming back. He expects each of us to be busy until He returns. There is no place for being lazy or refusing to do the work of the calling He has given us. So often we waste time. We do not try our hardest. We are not willing to give attention to doing our homework and developing our organizational and study skills as we should. So often we are not faithful stewards of what God has given us.

Be thankful that there is forgiveness. Even though we don't feel very faithful, our faithfulness is seen in Jesus Christ. I'm sure that the servants in the parable did not think of themselves that they were good and faithful. But that was the testimony of the Lord of the servants. A gracious testimony, for Christ's sake! A testimony that encourages us to continue in faithfulness to our heavenly Father until Christ returns. 

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

REV. THOMAS MIERSMA

The Burden of Wisdom

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 (please read)

In a world of constant change under the judgment of God upon sin, all things come to vanity. This is the reality of a fallen world. Nothing satisfies so that it truly fills the heart, because the things of this life are not an end

in themselves. Only that which God does in Christ can truly satisfy.

To understand this takes spiritual knowledge and discernment. It is in this context that the preacher, which is Solomon, stands forth as an instructor in wisdom. God set him as king over Israel in Jerusalem. When anointed as king, he had sought of God the gift of wisdom to rule God's people, and God gave him that gift. It is from that viewpoint that, having set forth the principle of vanity, Solomon would now also stand be-

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fore us as the preacher among God's people to teach us wisdom. He sets before us, as it were, his credentials as a preacher and instructor in wisdom—spiritual credentials, of one to whom God had given the gift of wisdom in an extraordinary degree.

That gift was not automatic; it was one that he developed through the exercise of thought, discernment, and contemplation. He tells us as the preacher, "And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven" (1:13). He says, "And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly" (1:17). Wisdom is knowledge applied with skill. As Solomon speaks of it in Ecclesiastes, the focus is on knowledge and understanding put to use in the things of this life. The focus is "concerning all things that are done under heaven." He would set before us certain aspects of a believer's world-and-life-view of the things under the sun and our place and calling in them.

That seeking of the things that are done, that searching of them by wisdom, of what is wise and what is folly, involves a serious spiritual effort. It also involves study and reflection upon the relationships of life, the place of things—earthly treasures and possessions—and their proper use and end. He has in view man's natural life, its science and discovery, and yet with spiritual discernment. By nature we often walk through the world about us without really seeing it. Solomon did more than simply observe the things of life. He writes, "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun" (Eccl. 1:14). That is, his mind was engaged in analyzing, and seeking to understand them.

He did so, moreover, not only to understand what was wise but also to understand what was madness and folly. His searching had an antithetical character. That does not mean that he entered into all the world of sin around him, by walking in sin. The argument is sometimes made that one cannot understand something unless one has directly experienced it. That is not true. We do not need

to experience sin to see it as sin. But observing sin and its consequences in the world does belong to a believer's contemplation of the world he lives in.

Solomon did indeed enter into all the activities of life and labor and will speak of it in the next chapter in Ecclesiastes, but what he sought was to

know and understand the place of them. Wisdom takes knowledge and puts it to practical use. Yet the wisdom of which he speaks is not mere practical common sense, for he speaks of giving his *heart* to seek and search. The heart is the spiritual center of a man's life. The heart of a child of God, though he is a sinner, holds within it the fear of God, his creator, the reverence of faith, which is the spiritual foundation of true wisdom. That wisdom we are to seek. Its practical use has a spiritual dimension to it.

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though he is a sinner,
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spiritual foundation
of true wisdom.*

The world of men is also engaged in searching the things that are done under the sun so as to understand them. Sinful fallen man engages in science and develops technology and art. He develops his man-centered philosophies. He seeks to understand the nature of things: the psychology, form, order, and design of things. Searching out by wisdom, though it be the wisdom of this world, is done by the wicked also. Solomon points this out. It is something given to men. He says, "This sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith" (1:13). The text could also be translated, "to the sons of Adam."

In forming man of the dust of the ground and giving him the breath of life, God gave to man dominion over the earth as a rational moral creature. As he was created in the image of God, he could exercise that dominion in the service of God. But man, now fallen, has lost the spiritual substance of the image and the right to exercise that dominion. He cannot in himself serve God, for he stands at enmity with God by nature. His wisdom he cannot use aright.

The impulse in man to seek out in the creation the things that are done still remains. We sometimes refer to this impulse in the original state of righteousness as the "cultural

mandate.” The trouble with that term is that it sets the matter forth as being first of all a commission. Rather, this impulse is first of all something increated in man’s nature, something “given” to the sons of man. The calling to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth was not given to man alone. It was given likewise to the fish and the birds (Gen. 1:22) and is imbedded in the creation itself. That impulse is one “given to the sons of men” by God, though in man, it is given to him as a rational moral creature.

But in a world that lies fallen under the curse, this impulse is a “sore travail” that God in His judgment hath given to the sons of man. The wisdom of this world does seek out the order of things and develops the creation. It also seeks understanding and searches out a wisdom. The wisdom of this world, as it is from below and not above, is “earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:15). It turns to “madness and folly.” For fallen man uses his knowledge, skill, and wisdom in the service of sin. He strives for mastery with his neighbor. He walks in covetousness and envy. He heaps and gathers, as Ecclesiastes will show, and does not ask, “whose shall those things be.” Jesus may well have had Ecclesiastes in view when He summarized this madness of pride and folly in the parable of the rich fool. For death, and the judgment, stand before the fool of this world.

The preacher would have us as God’s people to see, “behold,” as those who walk through the labor and toil of life and through the same sore travail in a fallen world, that “all is vanity and vexation of spirit” for a reason. That reason is “that which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered” (1:15). The world does not want to see this or hear it. They strive in the pride of the flesh to make the crooked straight. They believe that man in his wisdom can supply that which is lacking. And when they fail, as they must in the vain madness of the world’s wisdom, it leads them to despair.

We too need to see the problem. The solution cannot come from man. It cannot be found “under the sun.” Only God, the creator and savior of His people, can make that which is crooked straight. God’s grace, wisdom, and

mercy alone can supply an answer. He would impress on us this reality of the world about us, not to lead us to despair, but to seek God our creator. In a world fallen in sin, what is lacking cannot be numbered; you cannot count it all up or reckon it. Man cannot cure it.

The preacher’s example testifies that it is so, as he will show us in coming chapters. He speaks in a manner that reflects on his own understanding. He says, “I communed with mine own heart, saying Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: Yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge” (1:16). Solomon will call to mind his many works and the labor and toil in them. He reminds us of his riches, wealth, and honor in coming chapters. Could Solomon in all his glory and wisdom make that which was crooked straight? Could he by his toil supply what was wanting? The answer is manifestly, no.

Also he as a child of God, with all of his gifts and abilities, in all of his earthly glory and power, could not supply what is lacking. It is not in man to do so. This is reality, not pessimism. Sin, after all, is that which is crooked and bent. Sin is that which is lacking in goodness and virtue. Man cannot take away sin. The effect of sin in a world under the curse of God upon sin is that

the whole life of the creation and of man lies in the midst of death. Man cannot cure it. He cannot deliver himself from the vanity of a world that lies in the midst of death.

In this connection he points also to the limitations of wisdom itself, particularly as he will speak of it, from the practical point of view of living from day to day in a world that

is subject to vanity. He had “more wisdom,” than others. He studied to know wisdom. He says, “And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly” (1:17). Did wisdom itself find a cure? Did his study and development of his gifts and exercise of wisdom in his works supply what was wanting? No, rather he says, “I perceive that this also is vexation of spirit” (1:17).

Why? He gives the reason, “For in much wisdom is

*Only God, the creator
and savior of His people,
can make that
which is crooked straight*

much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow” (1:18). Understanding the vanity of a world lying in the midst of death causes sorrow. Growing in that understanding in spiritual wisdom and discernment increases sorrow. This is true, and the preacher will show us more fully what he means by this also in coming chapters. This does not mean we should flee from knowledge, for the sorrow of which Solomon speaks

works our spiritual good. It leads to spiritual sobriety in a true assessment of life. It leads us to hold loosely to the things of this world and put them in the proper perspective. It must lead us to the cross also, where the only answer to a world that lies in sin and death can be found. This sorrow is ultimately bound up with turning to the Lord in repentance, that in His grace we might walk daily in the fear of the Lord. ☞

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA

Twilight series, by Stephenie Meyer. New York: Little, Brown. ISBN 0-316-16017-2. Reviewed by Lael Griess.

No doubt many readers have seen or heard of the fantastically popular *Twilight* series. These recent best-sellers, whose basic story line is a love affair between a teenage girl and her vampire boyfriend, have inspired a cultural vampire mania complete with movies, copycat books, television series, and even a new shade of lipstick suggestively called “just-bitten.”

Teachers in our Christian schools have reported that these books are popular among our young people as well, and though these books target an adolescent, primarily female audience, perhaps some of our adults have read them as well. Having just finished the saga in its entirety, I have some concerns to share with the people of God regarding these books. These warnings increase in gravity as they progress.

Twilight promotes a twisted and worldly view of romantic love.

This warning is obvious before even reading these books. A vampire as the hero and lover of a tale should make godly readers squeamish from the start. However, as the books progress, we learn that the hero, Edward, is a vampire of incredible self-control. In fact, he voluntarily drinks animal blood to avoid taking human life, and he refuses to consummate his physical relationship with the

heroine, Bella, until after they have lawfully wed. This, coupled with the minimal bad language and censored violence, has fooled many Christian readers into believing these are “clean” books.

Don’t be duped. The connection between Edward’s desire to drink Bella’s blood and his love for her is nothing less than pornographic, a mixing of romantic love and violence. The lack of fornication in the books may be commendable if it were not for the fact that Edward and Bella continuously tempt each other to test their physical boundaries. Furthermore, the couple’s obsession for each other is pure idolatry, an ugly counterfeit for the sacrificial and lovely biblical love between a godly husband and wife.

Twilight idolizes youth.

American pop culture, with its marketing, products, music, movies, clothing, and books is decidedly youth-driven. The young are worshiped for their beauty, freshness, and strength, while the wisdom of the elderly is scorned. The *Twilight* books tap into this idolatry of all that is youthful. The main characters are all teenagers. In fact, the vampires in the story are frozen in their adolescence for eternity, and the surrogate “parent figures” of Edward’s vampire family are merely in their early to mid-twenties. Bella is disconnected from her parents, and the other adults in the books are portrayed as clueless and out-of-touch. At the end of the series, when Bella sacrifices all to be transformed into a vampire herself, she also becomes immortally 18 years old, beautiful, and youthfully radiant.

Mrs. Griess is a member of Calvary Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.

Twilight is poor literature that discourages critical thinking and discernment.

The *Beacon Lights* recently republished a copy of a speech Rev. Hoeksema gave to young people years ago in which he urged them to use their “thinking caps” (June 2010, pp. 9-12). His exhortation was for the youth of the church to think deeply, particularly about doctrine. In that connection, he briefly lamented that young people read too many shallow novels. His speech is as pertinent today as it was then. Reading fiction that is deep and that speaks of timeless truths encourages using one’s “thinking cap.” These types of books foster discussion, encourage critical thinking, and develop skills of discernment, all of which are necessary skills for Bible study, intelligent sermon listening, and discerning the signs of the times.

The *Twilight* series does not encourage the use of the thinking cap. The characters are predictable and two-dimensional, the descriptions are often repetitive, the plot is at times sensational, at other times tedious, and the overall message of the books lacks depth or complexity.

In these ways, the *Twilight* books are very similar to many so-called “Christian fiction” novels that are frequently read in Christian circles. One wonders if a steady diet of these popular Christian novels, with their simple characters and love stories, leads to embracing books like the *Twilight* series. Certainly enjoying an occasional simple book is no sin. However, a steady diet of them may dull thinking skills.

Twilight disguises Mormon theology within the plot.

Stephanie Meyer, the author of the *Twilight* books, is a professing Mormon educated at Brigham Young University, and her *Twilight* series smacks of her religious affiliation. Mormonism is primarily a religion of works, which explains why the main vampire characters of *Twilight* work so hard to fight their darker desires for human blood, choosing instead to feed on animals. In *Eclipse*, the third book of the series, Edward and his vampire family explain to Bella that they choose this lifestyle because they hope their souls have not been lost, and perhaps they can obtain salvation through their good works.

Mormonism also teaches that those who live the most

exemplary lives will spend eternity in the “third heaven” as gods along with their spouses. Meyer’s vampires seem much more like gods than they do vampires. Edward and the rest of the vampires in the books are described with telling language; they are “perfect,” “godlike,” even “angelic.” In addition to their godlike physical beauty, they possess superhuman strength and speed, and some even possess special abilities such as mind-reading, predicting the future, and changing weather patterns. When Bella becomes a vampire as well, she is able to mimic the Mormon dream, spending eternity as a god with her mate.

Edward and Bella marry while she is yet a human, and on their honeymoon Bella conceives a half-human, half-vampire child. This is reminiscent of the Mormon story of Christ’s birth: that Mary conceived, not by the Holy Spirit, but by God engaging in a physical, sexual act with her. Unlike the Christian Savior who is fully human and fully God, the Mormon Jesus is half human and half god. Just like Bella’s child, he is a half-breed.

Twilight exploits the weaknesses and insecurities of adolescent girls.

The main character of the *Twilight* saga is teenage Bella. She thinks of herself as plain and uninteresting, and indeed she has no interests, hopes, dreams, or ambitions outside of becoming a vampire so that she can be with her boyfriend for eternity. She is awkward and clumsy, and as the new girl in school is uncomfortable and isolated. Her parents divorced when she was an infant, and though she loves them both, her relationship with them is disconnected and distant.

Enter Edward. He is the handsome heart-throb of the high school. He drives fast, cool cars and hangs out with other teenage vampires who are equally suave and good-looking. More importantly, for no apparent reason, he loves Bella.

The author knows her target audience well, and that is why this is my final and most serious warning. What teenage girl hasn’t felt awkward and unattractive? What teenage girl doesn’t desire to have the perfect guy admire her just because? What teenage girl hasn’t at times felt disconnected and lonely? As Edward and Bella establish themselves as a couple, their world shrinks smaller and smaller until they see only each other. This also strikes

a chord with adolescent girls, who are tempted to obsess about boys in general, and more specifically about the possibility of experiencing such an exclusive relationship.

However, our teenage daughters are special not because a cool vampire loves them, but because, by His grace, the all-powerful God of the universe has set His irresistible and everlasting affection upon them. They may be tempted to be enamored of a love story like Edward and Bella's, but in reality they possess a Divine love so much

deeper and more beautiful that it makes the love story of the *Twilight* books seem shallow and empty. We pray for our daughters that their emotional security comes not from a boyfriend or the dream of one, but from their communion with the heavenly Father. We also pray for our daughters that, if it be His will, the Lord would provide them godly husbands, not so they can live a narcissistic love story, but so that together they can serve each other, the church, and the Lord. 

Written in Stone: The Ten Commandments and Today's Moral Crisis, by Philip Graham Ryken. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010. 240 pages. \$14.99. Softcover. ISBN 9781596382060. Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.

This book is highly recommended.

Every Christian family should have at least one book that explains the ten commandments and helps us apply them to our daily life. This book does that.

Those desiring to study the ten commandments in Bible study would also do well to use this book. Its questions at the end of each chapter are an aid, not just in studying the book, but in applying the ten commandments to our daily life.

While pastoring the Tenth Street Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Philip Ryken preached on the ten commandments; this book is the fruit of that preaching. In two ways, the book makes this plain. First, it is intended to be read by Christians, sinners by nature, as greatly in need of a right understanding of the ten commandments as was Israel of old, and as greatly in need of guidance in applying them as God's people have ever been. This explains the words of the book's subtitle: "and Today's Moral Crisis." Second, the book is not merely about law; it is about the gospel of salvation from sin in Christ. I love the quote from Samuel Bolton that summarizes this point (p. 225):

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

The law sends us to the gospel that we may be justified; and the gospel sends us to the law again to inquire what is our duty as those who are justified.... The law sends us to the gospel for our justification; the gospel sends us to the law to frame our way of life.

Three introductory chapters underscore that the Ten Commandments are binding in our lives today, that they have a threefold use, and how rightly to interpret them. The next ten chapters treat each commandment individually. In each chapter, Ryken explains the commandment; explains why we need the commandment; explains how we transgress the commandment; refers to one historical narrative from Scripture as illustration that God's people are prone to break the law; and brings to our attention that Jesus Christ died for sinners such as we are. The last chapter again underscores that Christ is our Mediator to deliver us from God's wrath.

Ryken's understanding of the place that the law has in our lives, and application of it, is refreshingly sound.

One critique: in treating the second commandment, he refers to "image worship" as "idolatry." The chapter makes clear that Ryken does properly understand the distinction between the first two commandments, but the terminology is misleading and confusing.

Do not begin reading the book until you desire to see your own besetting sins, and the depth of your sinful nature.

Do not finish reading the book until you rejoice in the mercies of God in taking our sin away, and bringing us into His fellowship, family, and church. 

January 12, 2011
Trinity Protestant Reformed Church

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, January 12, 2011 at the Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI. All churches were represented by two delegates. Rev. A. denHartog served as the chair of this session.

The business of classis was routine for a January session. Classis spent most of its time voting. The following were chosen as delegates to Synod 2011: Ministers: *Primi*: G. Eriks, C. Haak, K. Koole, J. Slopsema, R. VanOverloop; *Secundi*: A. denHartog, M. DeVries, W. Langerak, A. Lanning, A. Spriensma. Elders: *Primi*: Tom DeVries (Hope), Gary Kaptein, Dave Ondersma, Ted Pipe, John VanBaren (Hope); *Secundi*: Gary Boverhof, Jon Engelsma, H. Jay Kuiper, Ed Ophoff, Jr., Ken Vink.

In other elections: Rev. R. VanOverloop was elected to a three-year term as a *primus* delegate *ad examina*; Rev. C. Haak was elected to a one-year term as a *primus*

delegate *ad examina*; Rev. A. denHartog was chosen to serve a three-year term as a *secundus* delegate *ad examina*. Rev. A. Lanning was chosen to serve a three-year term on the Classical Committee. Revs. K. Koole and R. VanOverloop were elected to serve as church visitors, with Revs. A. denHartog and C. Haak as alternate church visitors. J. Huisken was appointed to serve another three-year term as Stated Clerk; Rev. M. DeVries was elected to a three-year term as the Assistant Stated Clerk.

Classical appointments were given to Cornerstone, Trinity, and Wingham. Subsidy requests were approved for Cornerstone (\$53,782 with a pastor, no subsidy without a pastor), Kalamazoo (\$33,000), and Wingham (\$38,000 with a pastor, \$10,000 without a pastor).

The expenses of classis amounted to \$185.57. Classis will meet next on May 11, 2011 at the Southwest PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huisken,
Stated Clerk 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Mission Activities

The delegation of Gerald Brummel, representing our churches' Foreign Mission Committee, and Alan De Boer, representing the calling church, the Doon, IA PRC, arrived in the Philippines in mid-January for their annual visit with missionary pastors Rev. D. Kleyn and Rev. R. Smit and their families. This visit is part of the ongoing work of our churches in the oversight of the

missionaries and the mission field. In the time spent there the men were busy conducting family visitation with the missionary families, observing and discussing the work of the missionaries, and meeting the saints in this field.

They were scheduled to arrive late Wednesday evening, January 12, but were unable to set their feet on Philippine soil until early Friday morning (around 1:00 A.M.). Ice on their plane in Sioux Falls resulted in a missed flight out of Minneapolis, so they were rerouted to Detroit, spending the night there. Then they were rerouted again. Finally after more than 48 hours of travel, they arrived

safely in the Philippines, glad to be there and thankful for the warm temperatures and warm hospitality extended to them. From Sharon Kleyn's blog, available through d.kleyn@prca.org, we learn that the one thing that could not keep up with all their rerouting was their luggage. It eventually turned up at the Kleyns 24 hours later, at 12:30 Saturday morning.

On their first Sunday in the Philippines, the delegation planned to accompany the Kleyns as they together worshiped in the morning at the First Reformed Church of Balacan. In the afternoon they hoped to attend the second worship service

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

of the Berean PRC in Quezon City, Manila.

Sister-Church Activities

The Committee for Contact with Other Churches sent its annual delegation to our sister church in Northern Ireland, the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, in January. Rev. Doug Kuiper, from the Randolph, WI PRC, and Mr. Jim Holstege, member of our denominational Contact Committee, made this year's visit. Their plans included conducting the requested annual church visitation with the Session of Covenant PRC. Rev. Kuiper also preached at Covenant twice on January 9 and gave a lecture mid-week on the subject, "Grieve Not the Spirit: Sins Against the Holy Spirit." After a congregation dinner on Friday evening, the delegation accompanied Rev. M. McGeown back to Limerick in the Republic of Ireland, where Rev. Kuiper preached twice on Sunday, January 16, for the Limerick Reformed Fellowship, and gave a lecture the next day on: "What Does It Mean To Be a Christian?" before returning home on Tuesday, January 18.

Denomination Activities

Eleven of the professors and student body of our PR Theological School attended a conference at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, CA the second week of January. Plans for that trip included also spending a weekend with the congregation of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA. Seminarians Jon Mahtani and Nathan Decker brought a word of edification on

Sunday, and Professors Dykstra and Gritters presented the pictures of their trip to South Africa and Namibia after the evening worship service. In connection with that visit, Hope also organized a Bean Bag Toss tournament, and then served dinner, that Saturday afternoon, as a way for their congregation to enjoy fellowship with the seminarians and professors.

Congregation Activities

The Hope congregation in Redlands was not the only congregation that recently enjoyed the presentation of the trip made to South Africa and Namibia last summer by Professors Dykstra and Gritters. It appears that Prof. Dykstra made a slight detour on the way home to Michigan from California to the Loveland, CO PRC, where he, on behalf of our Contact Committee, gave a presentation on Monday evening, January 17. There was a collection taken for the Contact Committee to help offset the costs of Prof. Dykstra's travel expenses for that presentation.

The Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA received the good news that ACN radio had graciously given them an extra two hours of broadcast time (4 half-hour slots) on Sunday evenings at 6 P.M. in January. The radio station planned to rerun the introductory interviews that Revs. Bruinsma and Kleyn recorded in September. Covenant's new broadcasts on the entire ACN network have brought some immediate responses, with phone calls from Spokane Valley, Yakima, and Pasco, requesting materials and sermons.

The Council of the Calvary PRC in Hull, IA informed their congrega-

tion that the completed engineered drawings for their church building have been received, and that their New Property Committee is now soliciting bids for the church building. That information will be brought to the Council for review when it is completed, and then, we assume, on to the congregation for their review as well.

The Council of the Hudsonville, MI PRC invited all of the members of their congregation to a meeting on January 20 to provide information about the proposed expansion of their church building. Hudsonville's young people invited the congregation to stay after the meeting for a dish of ice cream with toppings, as a fundraiser for their 2011 convention expenses.

The Consistory of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI decided to start "Pre-service Singspirations" prior to their evening services on the first Sunday of each month. This was seen as a means to encourage the communion of saints and an aid to preparation for the worship service.

The Consistory of Grace also responded positively to a request from the seminary to take responsibility for the internship of Seminarian Vernon Ibe for six months beginning July 1.

Minister Activities

Rev. G. Eriks declined the call from the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI.

The Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN extended a call to Rev. R. Van Overloop to serve as their next pastor. ☺

Wedding Anniversary

■ The Lord willing, on February 24, 2010 our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents,

JOHN and MYRA KAMPS,

will celebrate 50 years of marriage. We are thankful to God for His care of them and pray for God's continued blessing on them. "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. 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. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I have hope in him" (Lamentations 3:21-24).

* Thomas and (Laurie Buiten/Kamps, in glory) Nancy Buiten

Thomas

Derrick and Heather Buiten

Dalton, Lance

Miranda, Lorelie, Kyle

* Luanne Kamps (in glory)

* Les and Beverly Kamps

Roxanne, Lee

* Michael Kamps (in glory)

* Matthew Kamps (in glory)

Hudsonville, Michigan

Notice

■ Complete your *Standard Bearer* bound volume set today! The RFPFA has a surplus of the following bound volumes:

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Each of these volumes is available for \$20. Please contact the RFPFA office at (616)457-5970 or mail@rfpa.org to place your order.

Notice

■ In keeping with vows made at baptism, the Loveland Protestant Reformed Christian School Society plans to begin providing Protestant Reformed high school education for their students, in the 2011-2012 academic year. For a small community of supporters, this is a costly endeavor, involving, as it does, expansion of facilities and of teaching staff. 'Outside' support will therefore be much appreciated. Interested parties who would like further information about the project, and about how to contribute to it, are invited to contact Craig Poortinga at craigtiffanyp@hotmail.com or (970) 593-1658. Heartfelt thanks for your generosity!

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Peace PRC express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to Don and Mary Terpstra, Daniel and Mary Jo Terpstra, and Greg and Elizabeth Bruinsma and their families in the death of their dear son, brother, nephew and uncle,

BENJAMIN TERPSTRA.

May they be comforted in these words from Isaiah 43:1b: "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine."

Rev. Clayton Spronk, President

William De Jong, Clerk

Teacher Needed

■ The Protestant Reformed Christian School of Dyer, IN is accepting applications for lower grade teaching positions for the 2011/2012 school year. Interested applicants can send a letter of inquiry and resumé to the school. If you have questions regarding the positions, contact Ryan Van Overloop at 219-558-2660 (school) or 219-374-6547 (home).

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thanks to God, our parents, and grandparents,

CHARLES and BETTY VAN MEETEREN,

celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary on February 3, 2011. We thank our sovereign Lord, who has worked through our parents to bring us up to fear Him in all our lives. The love shown to us in their godly rearing of us was and continues to be a constant reminder to us of God's faithfulness to keep His covenant with His people. May God's faithfulness continue to be their strength and comfort as they continue their earthly pilgrimage together. "Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:13, 14)

* Charles and Beth Van Meeteren

* Randy and Nancy Hendriks

* Donald and Shelly De Vries

* Gary and Mary Gaastra

* Steven and Beth Potjer

19 grandchildren

(1 granddaughter in glory)

8 great grandchildren

Redlands, California

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Hope PRC in Redlands express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Janice Feenstra, Mr. Chris Feenstra, Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Feenstra, Mr. and Mrs. Marlin Feenstra, Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Buiten and their families in the loss of a dear husband, father, and grandfather, and to Mr. Bill Feenstra, Mr. and Mrs. Everett Van Voorthuysen, Mr. and Mrs. John Feenstra and their families in the loss of a dear brother and beloved uncle,

MR. DONALD FEENSTRA,

whom the Lord brought home to be with Him on January 4, 2011. May their comfort and confidence be found in Scripture, including in these words, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25, 26).

Rev. Martin VanderWal, President

Peter Smit, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Calvary PRC wish to extend their sincere Christian sympathy to Henry and Jane Hoksbergen, following the passing of Jane's brother,

TOM VAN MAANEN.

May they find comfort in God's Word in Psalm 23:4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Pastor Cory Griess, President

George Hoekstra, Ass't. Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Mary Martha Society of Hope PRC in Redlands expresses its deepest sympathy to fellow members Janice Feenstra, Michelle Buiten, Beth Feenstra, and Sarah Feenstra and their families in the loss of their dear husband, father, and father-in-law,

DONALD FEENSTRA.

May the family be comforted by these words found in Psalm 17:15: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

Rev. Martin VanderWal, President

Janine Meelker, Secretary

Call to Aspirants of the Ministry

■ All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2011-2012 academic year should make application at the March 17, 2011 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith and upright in walk, and exhibits the qualities and personality necessary for a gospel minister; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school.

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 17 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW
Grandville, MI 49418.

Jon Huisken, Secretary
* * * * *

The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Faith PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. Clarence Prince in the passing away of his wife, and to Mr. and Mrs. Herm Schipper in the passing away of her sister,

MRS. ANNE PRINCE.

May they and the family find their comfort in the truth that they belong to their faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: 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. Andrew Lanning, President
Richard Flikkema, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express their sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Harold VanMaanen, Mrs. Margaret Hoekstra, Mr. and Mrs. Ted Hoekstra, and Mrs. Bernice VanMaanen in the death of their brother and brother-in-law,

MR. TOM VAN MAANEN.

"He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off the earth; for the Lord hath spoken it" (Isaiah 25:8).

Rev. Laning, President
Brian Gritters, Clerk of Records

Congratulations

■ The Consistory and congregation of the Grandville PRC congratulate **REV. JASON KORTERING** on the 50th anniversary of his ordination into the gospel ministry. Rev. Kortering served for 8 years as our first pastor. He served in 5 churches as pastor and also served as minister-on-loan to the ERCS. We thank God for the many years He has given Rev. Kortering and his wife, Jeanne, to our churches. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings" (Isaiah 52:7).

Rev. Kenneth Koole, Pres.
Daniel Key, Clerk

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