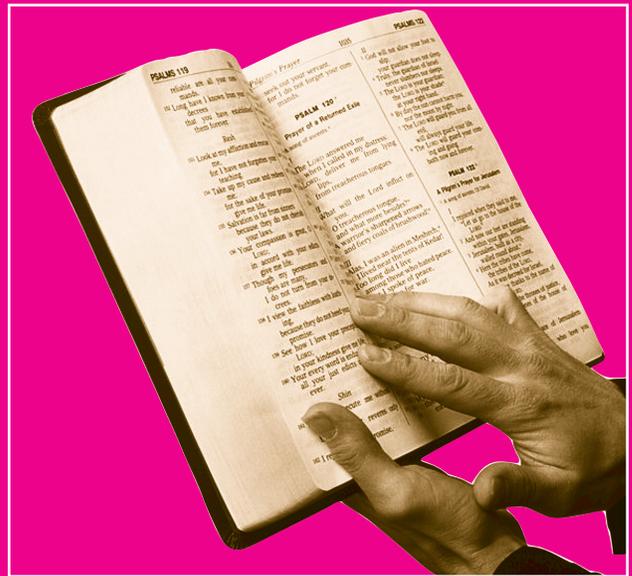
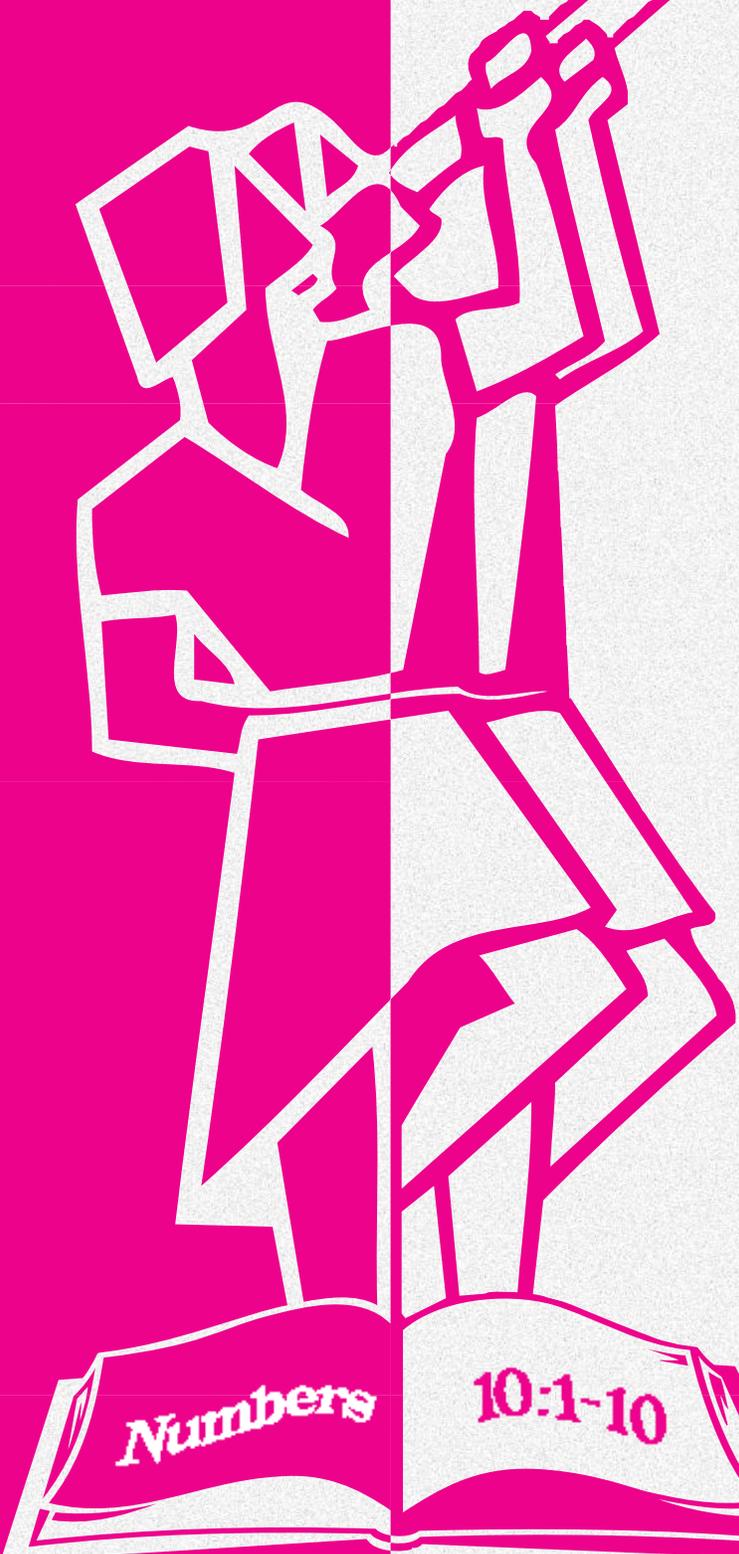


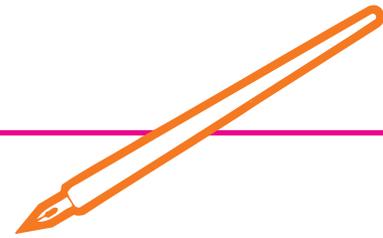
Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
VOLUME 49, NO. 18 SEPTEMBER 1, 2000



Bible Study





Bible Study

Slow down and talk

On a nice summer evening, a father and some of his children are driving along a highway after dropping off some family friends. Soon they are deep in conversation. The father listens attentively as his children speak openly and earnestly, and from time to time he interjects with some of his thoughts. The father is enjoying this moment so much that he starts to slow down on the highway, falling well below the recommended speed. Whether or not he is really conscious of what he is doing, he is in fact trying to prolong the drive and savour every moment of this intimate discussion with his children. Who of us does not recognize this as a beautiful moment? What can be sweeter than a parent and children engaged in an open and intimate conversation?

Conversation with God

Our heavenly Father also enjoys a deep and intimate communion with his children whom He has obtained through the blood of his own Son. It is a really sad situation when Christians are so caught up with the busy affairs of life that there does not seem to be enough time left for prayer and for meditating on the wondrous deeds of God. Our Father longs for His children to talk to Him on a daily and regular basis. Indeed He demands it of us in his Word. A healthy and living relationship with our heavenly Father is demonstrated in both the desire and practice of speaking to the Lord in prayer. Such prayer will give glory to God for all his wondrous works. It will confide in God the struggles and troubles which we face. And it will ask Him for his indispensable grace and blessing in being able to take our life and offer it up in gratitude to our God. It is not unlike the father who slows down on the highway because he savours every moment that his children speak with him. So the Lord savours every moment that we think about Him and speak to Him directly in prayer.

How God speaks

Everyone knows that a conversation comes from two sides. Moreover, fellowship is something enjoyed by two parties. We can picture a father and his children talking in

the car as they listen carefully to each other and respond in an appropriate way. But how do we converse with our heavenly Father? We speak to God in prayer. We do not hear Him speaking back to us. We trust that He hears and responds as He has promised in his Word. But how does He literally speak to us?

God speaks to us in his Word. The Scriptures are the living and abiding Word of God whereby the words from his very lips are communicated to us and laid upon our hearts through the working of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 1, the apostle Paul speaks about his eagerness to preach the gospel, "because it is the power of God for the salvation . . . For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last." He also writes in 2 Timothy 3, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful

for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Everything that we could possibly need to hear from our heavenly Father concerning the way of salvation and the way of living in obedience before Him is clearly spoken by Him to us in his Word. To have the

preaching and personal Bible reading is to hear the voice of our God. It completes and makes perfect the communion between the Father and His children.

Bible study

About the time that this issue of *Clarion* comes to you, many of the Bible study groups will be starting up again after the summer season. Organized Bible study, whether that be young people gathering on a Sunday evening or several sisters on a weekday morning, is a very special blessing that enhances the sweet communion between God and his children. Typically, it is decided beforehand to study a particular Scripture book or a series of passages. In order to be ready for the meeting, one has to do some reading and thinking and get to the heart of the Bible passage. No doubt some questions and special insights will come to mind. This will all be brought out at the meeting. When there is this genuine desire to study God's Word together, Bible study groups can be a tremendous blessing as we help each other to understand the Word of God and to take it to heart. We

Bible study groups can be a tremendous blessing as we help each other to understand the Word of God.



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher
 Managing Editor: R. Aasman
 Coeditors: J. De Jong, N.H. Gootjes, Cl. Stam

ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION
 26 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J3
 Fax: (780) 418-1506 E-Mail: raasman@canrc.org

**ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:
 (subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):**

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
 One Beghin Avenue
 Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
 Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202
 Email: clarion@premier.mb.ca
 World Wide Web address: <premier.mb.ca/clarion.html>

**SUBSCRIPTION RATES
 FOR 2000**

| | Regular Mail | Air Mail |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Canada* | \$36.00* | \$60.00* |
| U.S.A. U.S. Funds | \$39.00 | \$52.00 |
| International | \$60.00 | \$90.00 |

* Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT
 Advertisements: \$11.75 per column inch

Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

Agreement No. 1377531
 Publications Mail Registration No. 09907
 ISSN 0383-0438

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

gain insight into the wondrous deeds of God concerning our salvation. We learn how we can take our life and offer it up in gratitude to our heavenly Father. And we are kindled in our passion and enthusiasm for the Lord our God which naturally sends us to the throne of grace to speak with our Father in prayer. In this way, the communion between the Father and his children is made complete and immensely satisfying.

Slow down

For many, the end of the summer holidays signals a busy new season. We should not be so busy that we lose out on what is really important to us: our fellowship with God. Slow down a bit on the road of life. Take time from the hustle and bustle of daily activity. Let us take time to speak with our God, and to hear Him speak to us in his Word. We have the preaching, personal devotions, and the blessing of Bible study groups within the life of the congregation. 

What's inside?

This issue of *Clarion* comes to you just shortly before the beginning of the traditional Bible study season. Of course Bible study is timeless. However our study societies often are not operating during the summer season and begin again in September. We have two articles and an editorial which give encouragement and practical advice for Bible study. The articles are by Dr. J. Visscher and Sarah Vandergugten.

Compromising God's Word is a dangerous thing to do. Sadly it is easily done when one regards God's Word as being too idealistic. Dr. C. Trimp, in the third article of a series, deals with the matter of compromising God's Word and shows how it is unacceptable for the children of God.

It is the 250th anniversary of J. S. Bach's passing away. His music reflected what he believed: Soli Deo Gloria. Peter Buist commemorates Bach and his work.

The meditation is by Rev. J. van Popta. This issue also contains the column, Ray of Sunshine. In addition you will find a letter to the editor regarding the matter of creation days. There is also a report from Classis Central Ontario.

RA

IN THIS ISSUE

| | |
|---|-----|
| Editorial – Bible Study — R. Aasman | 386 |
| Treasures, New and Old – In love with the world — John van Popta | 388 |
| Studying the Word as a congregation — James Visscher | 389 |
| Bible Study with Study Bibles — Sarah Vandergugten..... | 392 |
| Do what is truthful — C. Trimp | 395 |
| B.A.C.H. — Peter Buist | 398 |
| Ray of Sunshine — Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman | 399 |
| Press Release | 400 |
| Letter to the Editor | 400 |
| Our Little Magazine – Aunt Betty..... | 401 |

By John van Popta

In love with the world

*Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings (Colossians 4:13, 14).
Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings.
And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers (Philemon 23, 24).
Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world,
has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia,
and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you,
because he is helpful to me in my ministry (2 Timothy 4:10, 11).*

Are we in love with this present world? Has the world affected our lifestyle? Are we being faithful servants of the Lord, working in the kingdom, advancing the cause of the Lord in the world? Can we love the Lord and love the world at the same time?

In three places in the New Testament we can read of a man called Demas. Twice he is mentioned in the same verses as John Mark. Last time we heard of John Mark, a young man who abandoned the mission work of Paul but who in the end was restored back as a faithful, useful fellow worker. But what do we know of Demas? In the letters to the Colossians and to Philemon we can read that Paul sends greetings from a list of men, fellow workers who are with him. Among them is this faithful worker, Demas. Demas, who along with many others supports Paul and assists him. He is one of the many whom the apostle mentions in his letters. Demas was a faithful worker even as John Mark was. Demas, faithful servant.

Paul is in prison (likely in Rome) when he writes his letters to the Colossians and to his friend Philemon. In his letters, Demas is mentioned as one who is there with Paul in his imprisonment. Even in hardship, this man is there with Paul. In Acts, we read of how Paul had to take care of his own needs as he preached of the kingdom awaiting trial. And Demas was there, assisting.

But Demas who was faithful even when Paul was in prison comes to a

different end than John Mark. We do not know much about Demas. Only this: He was a faithful, helpful servant, but in the end deserted his teacher Paul. In the end, he deserted the Lord. When Paul mentions that Demas and Mark are together, they are faithfully working side by side. But in the end, in his final letter to Timothy, Mark is with Timothy in Ephesus. Paul asks Timothy to take Mark along again to Rome. Why? Because Demas has deserted him. In plaintive words he writes, "Demas has deserted me, because he fell in love with the present world . . ." Demas had fallen in love with the present world. He has deserted Paul. He has deserted the gospel. He abandoned the gospel of grace. He abandoned his Lord because of his love for the world. His love for this present world overshadowed any love for the new world that was coming.

Too many of us are like Demas: in love with this present world. Ask yourself, "Am I in love with this present age?" The apostle John writes in his first letter, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

What of John Mark? He left the gospel and went to Jerusalem but there he was found by Paul and Barnabas and again became a good and faithful servant of the gospel. What of Demas? The last we hear of him on the pages of history is this. "Demas has deserted

me, because he fell in love with this present world . . ."

In the end, Mark asked the question, "Do I love the present world? Or do I, must I, love the Lord?" And in the power of the Holy Spirit and heartened by Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, he turned from his ways and returned to faithful service. What turned him around? The Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, the strict discipline of Paul who refused to take him along, the kind teaching of Barnabas, and the influence of Peter, who calls him "my son" (1 Peter 5:13). What became of Mark? What became of him? He came to Rome. Later Peter did too. Mark became an evangelist, one of the four. He wrote down what Peter *the Rock* told him of the Lord.

John Mark is one who demonstrates the grace of God and the perseverance of the saints, even in their lamentable fall (Canons of Dort V.4). Demas was one who received the word of life, but not into his heart. After the joy of temporary faith had vanished, he turned away. He choked the seed of the Word by the pleasures of this world and brought forth no fruit. This our Saviour teaches in the parable of the seed in Matthew 13 (Canons of Dort III/IV.9).

Are you in love with this present world?

John van Popta is the minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Coaldale, Alberta.



Studying the Word as a congregation

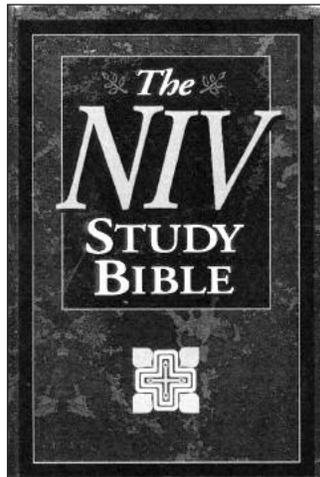
By James Visscher

People of the Book

There are many ways to describe the people of God. Sometimes believers are called “pilgrim people.” At other times they are called “people who walk the talk.” And then too, they are called “people of the Book.” Especially the Jewish people have been known throughout history as a people dedicated to the reading, study and application of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Should it be any different for us who consider ourselves the New Testament people of God? Should we not also be known as “people of the Book?” Indeed, is there not an even greater reason for us to be called this? After all, we today possess the whole Book. The Scriptures of both the Old Testament and New Testament have been given to us to explore, to digest, to shape our hearts and minds, as well as to put into practice on a daily basis. God has made us so rich.

Yet along with riches come responsibilities. If God has really revealed so much of Himself and his will to us, then surely it is necessary for us to busy ourselves, personally and corporately, with this revelation. We need to be like the writer of Psalm 119, praising God for the splendour of his decrees, statutes, ordinances and laws. We need to understand as well that this Word is necessary if we are to walk in the light and tread on the right paths (Ps 119:105). It is required reading for all, especially for those who are still growing in the faith. As we read, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word” (Ps 119:9). Finally, we need to work with and to work out what we confess in Article 5 of the Belgic Confession where we affirm “we receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith.”



Needless to say, then, what we read in the Scriptures, as well as what we confess about the Scriptures, puts a certain onus on us as believers. We cannot afford to neglect this Word. We cannot trade it in for something else. To become “people of the couch” or “people of the tube” or “people of the bar” is to do a great disservice to our God and to what He has given us in his Word. So, our calling is clear: we need to study the Word!

*To become
“people of the couch” or
“people of the tube” or
“people of the bar” is to
do a great disservice
to our God.*

Preparation – heart, lips and spirit

Yet how shall we approach this study? A number of requirements need to be met if our study of the Word is to be profitable.

In the first place, there has to be a *right heart*. What I mean by that is a heart that is under conviction and has been impacted by the Holy Spirit. Bible study cannot be approached solely as

a scholarly pursuit. It is not just a matter of gaining more and more knowledge, not even spiritual knowledge. It is done out of a spirit that lives in daily fellowship with God.

It also means a heart that is eager and determined to learn. All too often the reason why people do not interact with the Word is because their hearts are complacent, dull and indifferent. It can also be that their hearts have become distracted by the things and pleasures of this world. How often are the children of God not too busy with their work, their hockey, or their shopping sprees? A heart that is not hungry is a heart that either will not study or else it will do so only for a time.

But if proper study requires a right heart, it also requires *right lips*. By that I mean lips that know how to pray. Why prayer? Because it is impossible to study this Word in isolation or divorced from the Spirit of God. He wrote the Word. He is its primary author. He caused men to take up their pens and parchments. He has preserved his Word in the face of threats and conspiracies. In addition, He is the One who illumines our hearts so that we can understand and grasp what He is saying.

In short, there can be no profitable study of this Word as long as its real Source is ignored. We need to involve Him, and we do that especially through our prayers. We need to acknowledge Him and to ask Him to open up his Word for us. So, before you study this Word, whether it be in a study group or in a society meeting, call on the Father through the Son in the power of the Spirit. Ask for light, for insight, for direction, and for a blessing.

A right heart and right lips bring us in turn to a third thing, namely a *right spirit*. What is meant by this is a spirit that is humble, willing to learn and

ready to obey – whatever the Word teaches. In other words, we study the Bible not simply to add to our store of religious information and insight. No, we also do so in order to conform our lives more and more to the will of God. What the Lord wants to see in us is that our lives become “living sacrifices” with renewed minds (Rom 12:1, 2). Bible study should lead both to informed and transformed lives.

The tools of Bible study

To help achieve this, however, certain tools are fundamental.

1. Study Bible

Purely in and of itself the Bible is not a tool, but when the Bible is combined with cross references, marginal notes, graphs, maps and other aids, it does become a type of tool. If it comes with extra wide margins where you can scribble in, it becomes even more so.

So which study Bible is best? There are three that stand out, and they are the *NIV* or *NASB Study Bible*, the *Life Application Bible* and the *NIV Thematic Reference Bible*. From strictly a resource point of view, one of the first choices is the best. If you are looking for more application, turn to the second. If you want to trace certain words, concepts and themes, opt for the third. If you have a lot of money, buy all three.

What about translations? Here too there is room for variety. If you want to stay as close to the original text as possible, get hold of a copy of the *American Standard Version* of 1901 (Most likely, you will have to try the used book market to find it). If you want a free translation or paraphrase, make careful use of the *New Living Translation*. If you want a reliable middle of the road translation choose either the *NASB*, *NKJV*, or the *NIV*. Each has their strengths and weaknesses. For serious Bible study it is usually recommended that you consult more than one translation.

2. Concordance

The best concordances for the *KJV* are either Young’s or Strong’s Analytical Concordance. For those who use the *NIV*, the best concordance is The *NIV Exhaustive Concordance*.

3. Bible software

Better even than the above concordances is some of the Bible computer software that is currently on the market. I know believers who have profited

tremendously from the Online Bible, the Logos Library System, or Bible-Works for Windows.

4. Dictionary

There are any number of Bible dictionaries that can also be very helpful to the diligent Bible student. There is the one volume *New Bible Dictionary*. There are also multi-volume dictionaries available like *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (four volumes).

There can be no profitable study of this Word as long as its real Source is ignored.

5. Commentaries and study aids

Here the list is endless, for there is an abundance of commentaries and study guides available today. There are one volume commentaries like the *Eerdmans Bible Commentary* and the *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*. There are also whole series by Calvin, Hendriksen/ Kistemaker, and others. There are also series produced by Baker, Eerdmans, IVP, Tyndale, Zondervan and Word written by many different scholars.

Then too there are any number of study guides and outlines produced by the ILPB, Outlook, Inter-Varsity and other organizations.

In short, then, there are many tools available for Bible study. Some are essential and some are optional, but none can do the work for you.

The purpose of congregational Bible study, after all, is to get as many members as possible into the Word.

The context of our Bible study

In addition to various tools, there is also a certain context in which our Bible study takes place. For each and every believer there is first of all a personal context. All who confess to follow Christ need to be committed to the study of His Word. In one way or an-

other we all need to find the time to read and research, to meditate and absorb the Word. It may be early in the morning or late at night. It does not matter when or where, but it does need to be done.

But then there is also a congregational context. Believers need to study the Word together as well. They need to learn from each other’s questions, comments, insights and feedback. They need to do what the early church did with the apostles’ teaching, and with the entire Word, and that is, devote themselves to it (Acts 2:42).

Now, as to exactly how this is done in a local church, that is a secondary matter. Some churches organize their Bible study along the lines of Young People’s, Men’s and Women’s societies which meet in a church building. Other churches have small groups that meet in the homes of members. Other churches have both.

Does it matter? Is there a required setup? Not really! What works in one church may not work in another. Be flexible and innovative. After all, the Scriptures do not teach that a particular structure for this study has to be implemented. They leave that up to the wisdom and freedom of the office of all believers. So rather than worship a certain structure, go out of your way to devise one that will meet the needs of as many members as possible. The purpose of congregational Bible study, after all, is to get as many members as possible into the Word.

The method of our Bible study

But if the structure or context in which we study sometimes creates controversy, so does the method that is used. In the past this was often not the case for then one method was quite common. The Bible study meeting would begin with Scripture reading and prayer, sometimes a song would follow, and always there was an essay. After the essay, the discussion would start. Once the passage was deemed to have been exhausted, it was on to other miscellaneous matters and the closing.

1. Diversity

These days, however, the method is much more diverse. There may or may not be an essay. There may be an outline which is read and discussed. There may be a whole series of questions that are discussed and answered.

Is there a problem with this diversity? Not if the particular Bible passage is really thoroughly dealt with. For that is surely the aim.

Yet, here again, there are some who insist that a certain procedure has to be followed. Some even say that the problem these days is between the inductive and the deductive methods of Bible study, and then they proceed to insist on the one at the expense of the other.

2. Deductive versus inductive

How are we to evaluate this kind of disagreement? For starters, we should define our terms. Many people love to use words like “inductive” and “deductive” but have little grasp of what they mean. “Inductive” refers to that process whereby we move from the particulars on to a general rule. “Deductive,” on the other hand, refers to the opposite, namely to moving from the general rule back to the particulars.

So how does this work in Bible study? It is claimed that the traditional way of doing such study is the deductive way. Why was it called “deductive?” Probably because the essay or “introduction” held centre stage. What the participants would do is argue about whether or not the essayist had a right understanding of the particular Bible passage or chapter. In other words, they would discuss and debate the essay (i.e., the general rule), and then, if they disagreed, they would refer to this verse or that one (i.e., the particulars). So you moved in the meeting from the general to the particular and thus worked deductively.

The inductive way, however, does not do this. Often there is no essay or “introduction” at all. Instead the participants have a whole series of questions before them that deal with the verses or chapter under study. First, they try to get a correct and complete grasp of what the Bible passage is saying, summarize its teaching, and then concentrate on what the application might be for today. What they are thus doing is moving from the various verses (i.e., the particulars) to the teaching and application (i.e., the general). Hence, they are working inductively.

3. The correct way

So which is correct? Here again, it is not really a case of either - or. We should not pit these approaches over against each other and then label the one “reformed” and the other “unreformed.” Why not? Because there is

room for both, and in a sense, we are all busy with both. There is no such thing as pure deduction or induction.

Let me illustrate this by referring you to a Catechism Class. Almost all would say that there the minister is at work in a deductive manner. He takes the particular Lord’s Day (i.e., the general rule) and moves to the various Bible passages from which the teaching of that Lord’s Day originated (i.e., the particulars). Nevertheless, that is not always true. There are times when the minister will start his lesson with a particular Bible story or stories (i.e., the particulars) and then move finally to the Lord’s Day (i.e., the general). In such a case, is one approach right and the other wrong? Hardly, they are both permissible.

The best method of Bible study is always that method which forces you most to read and reflect on what the Bible says.

And the same applies to Bible study methods. Both deductive and inductive methods have their place, as well as a host of others. I have a book in my library that outlines at least ten different approaches, and they all have their strengths and weaknesses. So let us not be so conceited as to think that the way we do our Bible study is the only way it can be done. If Scripture outlined and demanded a certain method, you would win the argument, but as long as it does not, you are merely elevating human opinions.

Still, this may leave open the question as to which is the best method. I would answer this by saying that the best method of Bible study is always that method which forces you most to read and reflect on what the Bible says. A good essay or “introduction” can be helpful in this connection, but not if it becomes the focal point of the discussion. After all, it is not the human essay that is inspired but the divine Word. Interact constantly, my friends, with the biblical text. Any method which compels you to do that is to be promoted for it will prove to be of immense profit to your soul.



Called by the church of Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA:

Rev. W. den Hollander

of Toronto, Ontario.

Accepted the call to the church of Guelph, Ontario:

Rev. J. VanWoudenberg

of the church of Kerwood, Ontario.

Accepted the call to Houston, BC:

Candidate Dirk Poppe

The goal of our Bible study

Finally, we come to the goal of our study of Scripture. Here I can be very brief and to the point. Turn to Ephesians 4. There the apostle Paul speaks about Christ’s gifts to His church and then he identifies those gifts as men and as office-gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. All of these men have a certain task to perform in the church.

Yes, and what can be said of them and their tasks can just as well be said of the role of the Holy Scriptures in our lives. They are given to build up the body of Christ, to produce unity of faith and unity in the knowledge of Christ, to bring about maturity, and to usher us into the fullness of Christ.

Readers, God has blessed you richly in giving you the revelation of His Son Jesus Christ. If you intend to busy yourself with Bible study in this new season, that is great. May God bless you. If you have not decided whether to do so or not, get off the fence on the right side and commit yourself. If you have decided against it, you need to wake up, smell the coffee and change your priorities.

God bless our churches in such a way that we may become known far and wide as “the people of the Book.” 

Bible Study with Study Bibles

By Sarah Vandergugten

Yesterday, Peter and I, most of our children and our five grandchildren went on a nature walk, or better yet, a creation walk. Before supper, we marveled at the Seven Sisters, a stand of seven enormous trees located in a sheltered, sun-dappled grove in the provincial park where we were camping. Some of the Sisters were vibrantly alive; some were lying where lightning or disease had felled them. After supper we strolled to the Giant Douglas Fir, also near our campsite. We became tree huggers. It took eight of us, with arms outstretched and fingers clasped to hug the biggest tree we'd seen in a long time. We craned our necks, but could not see the top. We wondered what this part of British Columbia might have been like several hundred years ago, when this Giant had been a tiny seedling. We were convinced once more of the truth of Paul's words in Romans 1:20, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." Indeed, that Sunday evening, nature was "before our eyes as a most elegant book."

But summer holidays will soon be over. "Normal" life will begin once more. (It may be well underway as you read this.) The classroom beckons. Bible lessons will need to be prepared and taught five days a week. Bible Study groups will distribute their rosters at the church doors or insert them in the weekly liturgy sheet. This is not to say that Bible study is ignored during the summer months, but in September we tend to become more structured and rigorous. We move from enjoying the book of nature to a more thorough study of the Book of Life. Men and women, teens and students will come to meetings and classes with their favorite Bible

in hand. There are many to choose from. This article will take a look at three: the NIV Study Bible (Zondervan, updated in 1995), which has become almost commonplace, the Life Application Study Bible (Zondervan, Tyndale), on the scene since 1991, and the NIV Thematic Reference Bible (Zondervan, Hodder & Stoughton), first published in North America in 1999.

*There is no substitute
for the reading of the
text itself.*

The old standby

One good thing about being requested to write an article such as this is that you take time to do more than glance at the valuable introductions to the various study Bibles. The introduction to NIV Study Bible (NIVSB) notes that this work is a result of the efforts of a transdenominational, international team of Biblical scholars, all of whom confess the authority of the Bible as God's infallible word to humanity. They are quick to note that there is no substitute for the reading of the text itself: "nothing people write *about* God's word can be on a level with the word itself. Further, it is the Holy Spirit alone – not fallible human beings – who can open the human mind to the divine message." Yet, they suggest that the Holy Spirit uses people to explain God's Word to others. It was the Spirit who led Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch's chariot, where he asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" To which the Ethiopian replied, "How can I, unless someone explains it to me" (Acts 8:31)? Philip then showed him how an Old Testament passage in Isaiah related to the good news of Jesus

Christ. This interrelationship of the Scriptures, which is so essential to the understanding of the complete Biblical message, is a major theme of the NIVSB study notes.

Doctrinally, the NIVSB reflects traditional evangelical theology. If the editors were aware of significant differences of opinion on key passages or doctrine, they tried to give an even-handed approach by indicating those differences. For example, the notes on Revelation 20:2 offer the three major views of the millennium without designating one as *the* correct interpretation. In finding solutions to problems mentioned in the book introductions, they went only so far as evidence (Biblical and extra-Biblical) supported.

Features of the NIVSB

The NIVSB features the text of the NIV, nearly 20,000 notes keyed to and listed with Bible verses, introductions and outlines to books of the Bible, text notes, a cross-reference system (100,000 entries), notation of parallel passages, a concordance of over 35,000 references, charts, maps, essays and comprehensive indexes.

The outstanding feature of this version is its 20,000 study notes, located on the same pages as the verses and passages they explain. Among other things, they provide the following: explanations of important words and concepts, interpretations of difficult verses (cf. notes on Mal 1:3 and Luke 14:26 for the concept of hating your parents), drawing of parallels between specific people and events (cf. note on Ex 32:30 for parallels between Moses and Jesus as mediator), descriptions of historical and textual contexts of passages (cf. the note on 1 Cor 8:1 for the practice of eating meat sacrificed to idols), and demonstrating how one passage sheds light on another (cf. note on Ps 26:8

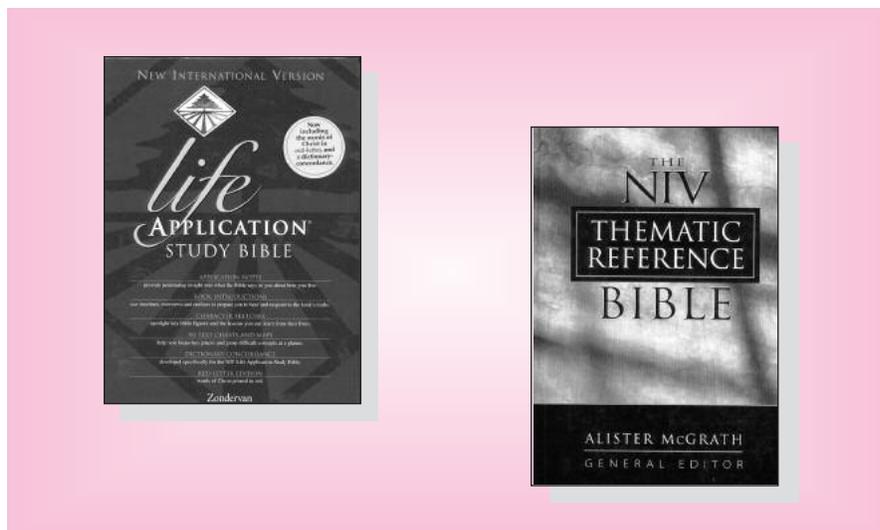
for how the presence of God's glory marked His presence in the tabernacle, in the temple and finally in Jesus Christ, Himself).

The study notes are the main reason why people buy and use the NIVSB. In addition, it includes text notes that examine alternate translations, meanings of Hebrew and Greek terms, and variant readings in ancient Biblical manuscripts. Its cross-reference system can be used to explore concepts as well as specific words. The concordance (the largest ever bound together with an English Bible), the 60 maps, the 35 charts, diagrams and drawings, and the five background essays (the Minor Prophets, the Synoptic Gospels, the Pastoral and the General Letters, and the 400 Inter-testamentic Years) round out the NIVSB into a broad ranging, useful source for studying and teaching Bible. I've used it profitably, though not exclusively, for years.

The Life Application Study Bible

The Life Application Study Bible (LASB) first appeared on the scene in 1991. With its most recent revision (1993), it is now available in five versions: the King James, the Living Bible, the New International Version, the New King James Version and the New Revised Standard Version. Those who use this Bible appreciate its practical approach to Bible study. It answers the "so what" questions we often have as we read Scripture. The organization Youth for Christ enlisted the aid of editor Bruce B. Barton and more than a dozen theological reviewers from well-known evangelical institutions to generate the material for this work. Young people especially seem to enjoy the LASB's more pragmatic approach, although it was recommended to me by a mother my junior by only a couple of years.

Practicality is the main purpose of the LASB. The Introduction begins with questions such as: what does this passage really mean? How does it apply to my life? Why does some of the Bible seem irrelevant? What do these ancient cultures have to do with today? What's going on in the lives of these Bible people? The LASB was developed to show how to put into practice what we have learned. Its goal is to bridge the gap between the past (when the Bible was written) and the present, and between the conceptual and the practical. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so de-



ceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22).

The LASB suggests that it is different from other Study Bibles, many of which only attempt application. Over 75% of the LASB is application-oriented. The notes answer the question, "What does this passage mean to me, my family, my friends, my job, my neighborhood, my church, my country?" Each application note is divided into three parts: "(1) an *explanation* that ties the note directly to the Scripture passage and sets the truth that is being taught, (2) the *bridge* that explains the timeless truth and makes it relevant for today, (3) the *application* that shows you how to take the timeless truth and apply it to your personal situation" (p xviii). The intent is that knowledge will lead to action.

Tracing the great Biblical themes through Scripture allows the reader to appreciate the essential unity of Scripture.

Not just application

The LASB also does what any good resource Bible should do. In addition to the thousands of application notes, it offers explanatory notes that help the reader understand culture, history, context, theological concepts and the interrelationship of various Scripture passages. Particularly helpful is the placement of maps, charts and dia-

grams on the same page as the passages to which they relate. Every book comes with an introduction that includes the following: a *Timeline* giving the historical setting, *Vital Statistics* listing straight facts about the book, an *Overview* which summarizes the book with general lessons and application, a *Blueprint* or a simple outline designed for memorization, *Megathemes* which give the main themes of the book and explain their significance then and now, and a *Map* which shows the key places found in that book and retells the story from a geographical point of view.

Unique to the LASB is a Harmony of the Gospels specifically developed for this Study Bible and the first to be incorporated into the text itself. Through a simple numbering system that highlights 250 events in the life of Christ, you can read any gospel account and see just where you are in relation to the entire life of Christ. This harmony also outlines where to find the parables of Jesus and Jesus' miracles. There is a list of eighteen Messianic Prophecies and where they find their fulfillment in the New Testament. Also unique to the LASB are the well over a hundred personality profiles – Aaron to Zerubbabel – which highlight the major events in their lives and place them in the context of the history of salvation. Further aids include numerous maps, cross-references, textual notes, a dictionary/ concordance, and complete indexes to the notes, charts, maps and profiles.

A tentative evaluation

My first interaction with the LASB was in preparation for writing this review, so my evaluation will be necessarily tentative. I would argue that there

is much good to be found in this Study Bible. The introductions to the Bible books are thorough, yet accessible. The personality profiles are lively and thought provoking. Many of the application notes are right on the mark. The Harmony of the Gospels is an outstanding and valuable feature. The layout has good eye appeal. The indexes make all the special features easy to find.

I do have two areas of concern. The emphasis on application can lead toward a shallow exegesis of the text itself. This may tend to making direct moralistic applications from Biblical times to today, without digging enough into the meaning of the text itself. Often the events in people's lives simply become examples for us to live by. The over-arching story becomes fragmented. A lack of attention to exegesis will also give greater opportunity for the writer's own biases to become apparent. Secondly, the emphasis on application can also over-emphasize the role of people. It's true that God uses human beings to work out His plan of salvation, but the glory rightfully belongs to Him. So, would I use the LASB? Yes, but as a secondary study aid.

The NIV Thematic Reference Bible

A recent arrival on the Study Bible scene (1999) is the NIV Thematic Reference Bible (NIVTRB), under the General Editorship of Alister McGrath. The Introduction informs the reader that this Bible was planned to allow its users to identify and explore the leading themes of Scripture – themes such as God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the human race, sin and salvation, the Christian life, and the church, among others. The NIVTRB identifies these and related sub-themes, and traces them throughout the course of Scripture. The Bible is allowed to speak for itself, with a minimum of comment and explanation. This approach allows its users to come into contact directly with Scripture, rather than having to approach it through the views of commentators, as is the case with a version like the LASB. The main themes are identified, key Biblical references are provided and the mutual relationship of themes is set out clearly. More than 2000 themes detailed in the NIVTRB cover doctrinal, ethical, historical and cultural subjects. The themes deal with both the great themes of the Christian message, as well as the more practical issues of Christian living.

The thematic approach differs significantly from a more lexical approach found in older works. The thematic method is based on related ideas, not on individual words. An example may help clarify this. Consider the theme of "assurance." A word-based approach would be limited to identifying Biblical passages in which words such as *assure* or *assurance* appear. A thematic approach goes beyond this and explores all the basic elements of the theme: the grounds of assurance (the knowledge of God, the certainty of his word, the work of the Holy Spirit), the nature of assurance (of a relationship of God, of salvation, of eternal life), and the relationship between assurance and the life of faith. An extensive system of indexing and cross-referencing allows the dynamic relationship between many Biblical themes to be understood and further explored.

Let's re-commit ourselves to another season of structured and rigorous Bible study.

Tracing the great Biblical themes through Scripture allows the reader to appreciate the essential unity of Scripture. As we trace the unfolding of God's purposes of redemption throughout the pages of the Bible, we learn to appreciate more fully how Scripture bears witness to the same God and his same purposes, throughout its entirety. The NIVTRB also avoids the widespread tendency of more recent study or devotional aids to the Bible which contain notes on the text of Scripture that are provided by authors of different (and sometimes conflicting) theological persuasions and of varying degrees of theological competence. Of course, any study aid will be flawed by the limitations of its contributors, but the position of the NIVTRB is that "Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture."

How to study a theme

It's not that easy to explain how this system of studying themes works, unless you have the NIVTRB in your hands, but I can assure that the system is clearly laid out in the introduction. There are nine main groups of themes, designated by four digit numbers. E.g. 1000 – God, 2000 – Jesus Christ, 3000

– Holy Spirit, 4000 – Creation, etc. to 9000 – The Last things. Other sub-themes will also have a four-digit number, which will fall under one of the nine main categories. The themes are noted and numbered in the margins of the text itself and correlate to the numbers in the Thematic Section. This section consists of 730 pages, providing a gold mine of Biblical references and information for each theme.

Other features include an alphabetical index so that you can quickly and easily find the number of the theme you're interested in studying. As in most study Bibles, each Bible book begins with an outline and a summary. There are over a 150 feature articles, located at appropriate points in the text, providing succinct accounts of leading Biblical themes. Also included is a basic repertoire of thirteen maps of Biblical lands. Unfortunately, the map index is completely unrelated to the maps in this Bible. I suspect that this index is for the 1996 British Hodder and Stoughton version of the NIVTRB and not for this North American version.

Re-commitment for the new season

I bought my NIVTRB on the recommendation of a pastor who has found it a valuable resource for preparing sermons and catechism lessons. I have used it fairly regularly during the past year. It was especially useful in the study of a book like Proverbs, where a chapter by chapter study is difficult, but a thematic approach works well. Using the NIVTRB takes more effort than the LASB. No one is doing the pre-digesting for you, but the rewards are significant. As you follow a theme through Scripture, you become increasingly aware of the unity of Scripture and of the awesome God who unfolds his plan of redemption before your eyes.

So as we move into the regular study season, perhaps it does not matter so much which type of study Bible you use. Perhaps you prefer to stick to your old favourite one, which may not be a study Bible at all. No matter. But let's re-commit ourselves to another season of structured and rigorous Bible study. Read the Word together, and heed the Word together.

Sarah Vandergugten is a member of the Canadian Reformed Church of Cloverdale, BC. She teaches Bible and Comparative Civilizations at Credo Christian High School in Langley, BC. 

Do what is truthful

By C. Trimp

John 3:21: “But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

1 John 1:6: “If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.”

The Spirit and Christ’s church

In the two previous articles we have considered a number of aspects of the degeneration of the church and her restoration. It proved to be a process that could not be put to rest. Moreover, it is one that unfolds between two extremes: the love of Christ and our lovelessness. We could also say: between God’s good commandments and our minimal capability for obedience. Or we can put it another way: between Christ’s power and our incompetence.

If it were not for the fact that the exalted Lord of the church pours out his Holy Spirit continually, there would not even be a church on this earth. He is the Holy Spirit whom the Father bestowed on his Son. This is what the apostle Peter teaches us in his Pentecostal sermon (Acts 2:33), after Christ himself extensively instructed his disciples about this great gift of God (see Luke 24:49; John 14-16; 20:22; Acts 1:4,5,8).

It is this Spirit who gives us a deep, inner delight in the good law of God (Rom 7:22). In this last text the apostle uses strong words, “in my inner being.” That is exactly what the Heidelberg Catechism aims at with the words “earnest purpose” (Answer 114). It is with this joy in the law of the Lord that the book of Psalms begins (Ps 1:2). At the same time this joy is also the assurance (we could also say, the verification) of the fact that we know Christ and his Father in the way of 1 John 2:3 which means living with God in love.

We encounter the same image in Art 29 of the Belgic Confession. Here we see believing church members who pursue righteousness, continually fight by the strength of the Spirit, flee from sin, crucify their flesh and its works, and appeal to Christ. In short, what we have

is a picture of people who have come to action and who want to show that they have been “born of God.” This work of the Spirit, the causing of delight in God’s law, collides head-on with the reality of our incompetence. This results in a terrible friction. It brought the apostle to despair (Rom 7:24). But the Spirit of the glorified Christ will conquer—that is the triumphant message of Romans 8.

Ours is the task to let ourselves be brought along in this battle of the Spirit.

No compromise

This Spirit will not settle for a compromise. He *continues* to fight against the power of sin and will work in *us* what we have in *Christ*: the final victory over sin. Ours is the task to let ourselves be brought along in this battle of the Spirit. Because, if the law of God remains in us, we will remain in the love that Christ the Lord has given us. Father, Son and Spirit want to bring us to the day where our degraded lives will be made equal to the glorified Christ (Rom 8:11-17; 18-21, 29; etc.). That will be the crown for the centuries-long work of “imparting to us what we have in Christ!” We have to let this Spirit work in us (compare answer 103 of the Heidelberg Catechism in connection with the fourth commandment).¹

This Scriptural wisdom becomes concrete with regard to all the commandments of the Lord, according to answer 114 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

In the context of this article we will clearly have to limit ourselves. We will therefore focus our attention on the tasks which God has given us with regard to his church. This will bring to light situations of verification (these concern our living with God in truthfulness) and also situations of falsification (these concern the moments when we are not truly “delighted” with God’s commandments—in the sense of Rom 7:22).

In this context *verification* means that the truthfulness of what we say will be confirmed by the facts. When we say that we want to serve Christ and build up his church through the Spirit, the truthfulness of these words will be shown and known in our actions. “This is how we know that we have come to know him and that we are in him” (1 John 2:3,5; compare as well 4:13 and 5:2).

Falsification means: to demonstrate the opposite. The facts expose our solemn words. They turn out to be empty and hollow. Compare the words of the apostle: “If we claim . . .” (1 John 1:6, 8; 2:4, 9; 4:20. See also 3:18 about the proclamation of true love: “not with words or tongue but with actions and in truth”).

We know and confess that the Church of Christ owes her complete existence and continuation to the love of God, the glory of Christ and the victory of the Holy Spirit. Every quality of the church is received out of the hands of the triune God. We can concentrate on and limit ourselves to these four qualities of the church: her unity, sanctity, catholicity, and apostolic character.

1. The unity of the church

The unity of the church is given in Christ. He is the unique Mediator

between God and man. Therefore, there can only be one church: the church of the one Christ (see for example John 17; Rom 3:30; 5:15; Gal 3:16, 27; Eph 2:11; 4:1;). Especially Eph 4:3-6 is a clear scriptural testimony of this unity.

We should strive to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

We know that the Holy Spirit imparts to us all that we have in Christ. He sanctifies us, wants to dwell in us and wants to make of us living members of Christ, as it is said in the form for baptism. Thus it follows that the Spirit does not just want us to desire the unity of Christ's church, but also that we actively pursue this (as a part of our pursuing righteousness, Phil 3:12; Rom 6:2).

We have not been told to force this unity at any cost or to create it through diplomatic formulas and cleverly construed church order regulations. We should strive to *keep* the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). Moreover, living in Christ and abiding by the truth, we should grow in love toward Him. When we live in Christ we grow up into Him as well, "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge" (Eph 4:13,15).

In view of these words from the apostle we would like to add a few points in concrete terms.

- If a church member does not honestly desire this unity, he is lacking in the earnest purpose to actively fulfil God's covenant. For that reason it still is puzzling that the "wish for Christian unity" (which K. Schilder talked about) would not be part of the mark of the church (members).² After all, in the closing sentence of Art 27 of the Belgic Confession it is confessed that Christ's church is not confined to one particular place or to certain persons, but—dispersed as she is over the entire world—is however joined and united with *heart* and *will* in one and the same Spirit.
- If no safeguards are created with regard to keeping the unity of the faith, and if a church member will not bow his neck under the yoke of the instruction and discipline of the church (including that of the church

federation), that is also evidence of a lack of "earnest purpose."

- When there is no willingness to remove obstacles within the church order (for example with regard to the offices and the office bearers in the congregation), this also demonstrates a lack of earnestness concerning the keeping or restoring of unity.
- When church members are satisfied with a status quo, then they settle in their own culture, language and song collection, or they endeavour to keep personal or congregational traumas alive. This kind of contentment with the present reflects types of self-interest and a sect-like introversion which go against the work of the Spirit of Christ.
- When, in the pursuit of church unity, church members show no willingness to collective self-examination and furthermore are not willing to discuss their preference for their own name and institution, they place rocks on the road of the Spirit.

Christ wants a people who live in the newness of life.

All these and similar instances of verification will reveal the human opposition against God's work in us. Instead of verification we are confronted with a falsification factor regarding our functioning as Christ's church. We will have to admonish each other so that we will not live below the standard which Christ has imparted to us. Especially in these and similar issues, we are accountable to each other, because resistance against the Holy Spirit, grieving Him or putting out his fire, is just as threatening for the church as a heart attack for a feeble man (see Is 63:10; Acts 7:51; Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). Resisting the Spirit is blocking the way that God wants to go to make his love in us come to completeness (1 John 2:5; 4:12; 5:2,3). When someone professes the unity of the church with his mouth, but with his heart does not desire it in love toward Christ and his fellow believers, then the question has to be asked, "how can the love of God be in him?" (see 1 John 3:17).

2. The sanctity of the church

Christ wants a people who live in the newness of life. His Spirit is the

Spirit of sanctification. God cannot dwell together with sin. This demands that we, within our own responsibility, eagerly strive to find the sanctification of life in the blood and Spirit of Christ. It would indicate a lack of humility if we would not show this eagerness and only had a mediocre interest for the realization of God's commandments in our secularized society. In this regard we think especially of the ethics of sexuality and finances. It should much rather be expected of us that we endeavour together to devote our lives to God, worship and serve God in a cautious life style and a God-fearing upbringing of our children.

A church that constantly makes concessions to the trends of the day and the delusions of a century demonstrates in all her tolerance a lukewarmness and a lack of devotion, which are typical of degeneration of the church. How can the Spirit of sanctification ever dwell in a neglected and contaminated house?

3. The catholicity of the church

In accordance with a centuries-long tradition we think of matters like the following when we talk about the catholicity of the church:

- the *global* character of the church (as opposed to nationalistic or racist prejudices);
- the *total* instruction of the great mystery of salvation in Christ;
- the healing of *all sorts* of sins, *across* the board of human life;
- the search for *all* mankind with the teaching of the true faith;
- the possession and display of *all sorts* of spiritual gifts and virtues worked by the Holy Spirit.³

This catholicity of the church is founded in the "fullness" of Christ which the Holy Scriptures speak about (especially in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians). Catholicity draws the attention to the many universal bonds in which God causes his church to live. It opens our eyes to the fact that the church of

God lovingly turns to his own world with the gospel.

Christ has existed since the beginning of the world and will continue to be there until the end. It teaches us to realize that the great variety of histories and cultures is also demonstrated in a variety of manners and conventions within

church life—here and elsewhere. The catholicity of the church gives us a deep understanding of the fact that God lovingly turns to his own world with the gospel in which the healing cure for the nations and society is offered.

This quality of catholicity causes a tendency to maximize the doctrine of the church (in the sense of its width and depth). It directs our thoughts to the universality of the Christian doctrine. As such, it frustrates every attempt aimed at Christ's church to turn it into a fair where every religious denomination can put up a stand and receive the opportunity to sing the (louder or softer) praises of their merchandise.

This quality also makes us break with the habit of always making our own customs and history the norm and to content ourselves with our own precious particularities. Catholicity puts us within the wide universe of God's creation and obligates us to call the nations to faith and conversion based on the beneficial Word of God – the only and eternal gospel (Acts 4:12; Rev 14:6).

When someone does not recognize Christ in this catholicity, then he does not know what the true nature of Christ's church is. Sooner or later he will start to hinder the functioning of the church. Especially with regard to this quality of catholicity, the church must become what she is allowed to be in Christ.

4. The apostolic character of the church

The church in Rome presumes that the apostolic character of the church is safe guarded through the preservation of the apostolic succession. In other words, Rome presumes that there is an unbroken line of succession from Peter and the group of apostles which continues in the bishops of the church. These bishops keep clerical communion with the pope who is the bishop in Rome, successor of Peter and representative of Christ on earth.

This apostolical succession is realized by the laying on of hands every time a bishop is ordained. The reformed churches have parted with these ideas in Art 7 of the Belgic Confession. The apostolic character of the church does not depend on submission to the pope or preservation of the succession in the way that the list of bishops demonstrates it ("succession of times and persons," Art 7). That the church has an apostolic character should be manifested in the preservation of the apostolic testimony – the testimony about the humiliated and exalted Christ.

A church that keeps the words of the apostles is told: "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas . . . all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God" (1 Cor 3:2-23). Christ builds his church on Peter and the other apostles, as they confessed Him to be the Son of the living God (Matt 16:13-19).

Because of this, it is impossible to separate the apostolic character of the church from obedience to the words of the apostles, the testimony about the only Son of God. Consequently it follows that the church has the duty to preserve the testimony of the apostles.

The "earnest purpose" to live according to God's commandments (with regard to the apostolic character of the church) teaches us how cautious we must be when we use the apostolic testimony in the battle against discords that undermine the unity of the teaching, and also, in resisting the temptation to implement and carry through church order regulations by means of "councils, decrees or statutes" (Art 7 BC). This holds true even though these

The false church starts with you and me.

regulations are not directed toward the furthering and preservation of harmony and unity and are not meant "to keep all in obedience to God" (Art 32, BC).

When the Scriptures are broken up into a number of very distinct "faith models" (of which more than half are outdated), the unity of the Scriptures is damaged and the objective is at the most a so called "pluralistic" church. Furthermore, the work of the Holy Spirit, who gives us a living doctrine in an apostolic church, is hindered. It is exactly when we direct ourselves to the true Word of God and reject everything that comes in conflict with it (Art 5, BC) that the church will be guarded against the falsification that shows its real nature so arrogantly in the false church (Art 29 BC).

Where we are at

So far we have explored the rough terrain between "true" and "false" and we have discovered a number of patterns with regard to the qualities of the church which—individually or in combinations—can have a falsifying effect on the church and hinder her to "do what is truthful."

A church does not become "false" because every church member is an imperfect human being with limited capabilities, and yet is able to derail things

in all kinds of ways because of his unsteady and straying heart. The Holy Spirit protects the church people and congregations against these risks through his daily faithfulness. Also, when God, through his Spirit and Word, chose himself a congregation and called it to eternal life, "He knew very well that we were sinners" (cf Art 26 of the Belgic Confession). But when we grieve the Holy Spirit through one of the following means:

- through our stubbornness, opposition and arrogance, or
- through our slowness, indifference and carelessness, or
- through our ambition, contentiousness and dilettantish behaviour

then the Holy Spirit may turn away from us or become our enemy (Is 63:10). That is the start of "spiritual abandonment." At that very same moment the church is delivered to herself. We could also say: delivered to falsification.

Pious resolutions become pious wishes and consequently pious talk. In a short period of time this church, which at first distinguished herself by her desire to serve God truthfully, becomes unrecognizable because of her loss of character. This is a reality that everyone can see if they are capable of spiritual discerning.

We should not file this disaster with the many horror stories of the past. Neither should we look for this degeneration among people and authorities outside our own congregation or blame it on the weakness of human nature in general, because the false church starts with you and me—with your and my lack of "earnestness" in the "purpose" of our heart. This process ends with the joined forces of these hearts against the objectives of the Spirit. Romans 11:22! 1 Cor 10:11,12!

Next time we hope to bring what we have explored so far into the focus of our own church situation.

¹This has been called the "passive cult", see W. Vajta, *Die Theologie des Gottesdienstes bei Luther*, Göttingen 1954, 223-224.

²See J. van Genderen in: W. van 't Spijker, *De kerk*, Kampen 1990, 295; H.J.D. Smit in: J. Douma et al (ed.), *K. Schilder, Aspecten van zijn werk*, Barneveld 1990, 89.

³In this passage we mentioned some elements of the classical description of the catholic character of the church by Cyrillus of Jerusalem (end of the 4th century). See amongst others: H. Berkhof, *De katholiciteit van de kerk*, Nijkerk 1962, 13; J. Kamphuis, *Verkenning I*, Goes 1964, 39-89; W. Balke in: W. van 't Spijker, *De kerk*, Kampen 1990, 272-279; W.D. Jonker in P.G. Schrottenboer (ed.), *Catholicity and Secession – A Dilemma?*, Kampen 1992, 16-27. 

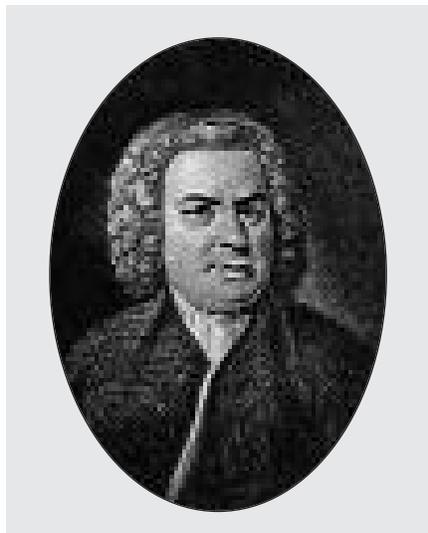
B.A.C.H. 2000

By Peter Buist

It is the moment I've been waiting for. A hush falls over the Marktkirche as the sombre, descending notes of the *Crucifixus* fade away and the white-haired conductor pauses to prepare for the challenge which lies ahead. My dozing neighbour opens his eyes and then shudders awake as the Jugendchor der Stadt Halle suddenly erupts with the exuberant ascending notes of *Et resurrexit*. This is a poignant moment: the gospel of the risen Christ preached to the citizens of Saxony – a region still emerging from the economic and spiritual fallout of the Cold War era. Truly, there is a balm in Gilead. And who better to proclaim the message of salvation than one of their native sons, Johann Sebastian Bach? As I look around the packed cathedral, I observe that any one of these sturdy folk could be his direct descendent. But I wonder how many still share his faith in the God to whom he dedicated his music. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

The performance of the *Mass in B minor* comes to a close and I join the crowd streaming into the dark November night. I pass by the massive statue of George Frideric Handel which dominates Halle's central square and am amused by the irony of having listened to Bach's masterpiece in the church where Handel served as a young organist. I am also reminded that while performances of Handel's *Messiah* have become standard community events at Christmas time, (and deservedly so), Bach's *Mass in B Minor* is acknowledged as the pre-eminent musical offering for all times and seasons. As its title suggests, this work is rooted in the Lutheran liturgy but the scope of this music is so broad that it is performed as a stand-alone concert piece. Of special interest is the balance between the joyous articulation of Christian truths and the insistent prayer of the penitent believer: *Kyrie eleison* – Lord, have mercy upon us and *Dona nobis pacem* – Give us peace. The lat-

ter elements serve as brackets around a number of confessions including the *Gloria*, *Sanctus*, *Osanna* and an extended treatment of the Nicene creed. The use of the Latin text gives the work a timeless quality which leads us back through the centuries to the early Christian church. In 1817, a noted critic called Bach's *Mass in B minor* "the greatest work of music of all ages and of all peoples." *Soli Deo Gloria*.



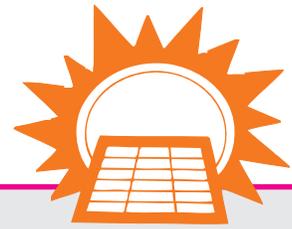
Johan Sebastian Bach

On the occasion of the 250th anniversary of Bach's passing, it is useful to reflect on the genius of one of the most important composers of all time. In fact, a recent analysis placed Bach among a list of the 100 most influential people of the last millennium! Capturing the essence of Bach in words is an awkward task – much like attempting to describe a fine dry wine, aged to perfection. An acquired taste. One can speak of the sheer volume of his artistic output – Teldec will require 153 CDs to produce the "Complete Bach" edition for its Bach 2000 project. One can consider the amazing variety of the Bach repertoire – from the simplest

piano inventions to the incredibly challenging pieces for organ. There is subtlety, complexity and mystery in the rich counterpoint – not unlike that of a rose, the swirl of wood-grain, a protein structure or a Hebrew poem. A lifetime of listening to Bach is to feast on a series of wonderful melodies found in such pieces as the Anna Magdalena Notebook, Air on G String, Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring, Sleepers Awake, Sheep May Safely Graze, the Brandenburg Concertos, the Great Fugue in D Minor, the *Agnus Dei* of the B Minor Mass One could go on at length. Above all, the most impressive aspect of Bach's music is that its creation flowed out of his faith in God. Bach practised what was preached. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

What is the significance of Bach for us today as we begin the third millennium? Some years ago, a noted Bach scholar wrote: "For society and the individual, to keep level with Bach is a sign of strength and progress; to drop behind is a sign of slackening ear and failing hands and lips." These words are still valid today. In general, an appreciation of great music begins in the home and an early introduction to Bach is a priceless gift. In addition, many of Bach's Chorale Preludes for organ are beautifully suited for the serene dignity of the worship service. Arrangements of some of the 200 Church Cantatas are also available. The true significance of these pieces can only be gained through a re-discovery of the chorales which were sung in Bach's time. There is much work to be done in this regard. Perhaps more importantly, one can hope that the considerable musical talent now emerging in our circles will follow in Bach's footsteps and compose pieces of similar artistry in *his service*. Ultimately, the task at hand is not just to entertain but to inspire the congregation to sing their songs anew – a foretaste of the heavenly concert. *Soli Deo Gloria*. 

RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

*“Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise the Lord all my life, I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.”
(Psalm 146:1,2)*

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

When we look around the world in which God has placed us, we see many different people. Some are from other countries. Some even speak different languages – ones that we do not understand. Yes, and when we look closely at these people they all have different characters. Some may be very sad, because they lost someone who was very dear to them. Others may be angry, because something happened in their lives that did not work out the way that they had hoped. Others are obviously very happy. It is indeed wonderful to see happy people who enjoy life.

What is it that makes these people so happy? What do you see in the eyes of these happy people? Is it that they are simply having a good day? Is it because they have lots of money and feel rich, and now they can enjoy all that the world has to offer? What about those people who are happy to begin their day in prayer to the Lord and ask Him for a blessing over that day, and over the daily work of their hands? How can I begin each day in happiness?

Let us remember what our Saviour has done for us. He has given us the greatest gift we could ever receive, which we did not deserve at all: Christ humbling Himself on the cross for us, for our many sins, so that we might become children of his Father. This is such a rich gift. Therefore as children, we must remember why Christ put us on this earth. No, we are not on this earth to worry about how we can be happier by getting wealthier, or being more well liked by others. This can be especially difficult because we live in a world where money and financial security play a big role. A lot of people want to have a bigger home, or drive a better car, and walk around with nicer clothes. In itself there is nothing wrong with this, but what if we are making this our main focus? Is this what Christ wants us to be so busy with in our lives? What is it that gives happiness?

Let us all be very careful. We cannot find happiness in money. Even if we had all the money in the world this would not bring us true happiness. Moreover it will not save us on the day when Christ returns.

Christ put us on earth so that we could be happy and show our joy by daily thanking Him for all that He has done for us sinful children. We must praise and glorify his Name in all that we do. Continue to seek true happiness, by remembering the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Only then can we be thankful for what He has done for us by delivering us from being slaves to sin.

Our life on earth is not always free of difficulties. Many sad things may cross our path. It can at times be difficult to wake each morning with a smile on our face. Let us never forget that Christ will return one day, deliver us from this world, and take us to Himself. Only then will we experience

eternal joy in perfected happiness. Together with all of God’s children we will stand before God’s throne, arrayed in garments that are washed in blood, and to Him loud thanksgiving raise: “Worthy the Lamb, for sinners slain, Through endless years to live and reign; Thou hast redeemed us by Thy blood, And made us kings and priests to God.”

*O come with thanks, God’s goodness praising;
His firm and steadfast love endures.*

*Let Israel and the house of Aaron
Proclaim His love forever sure.*

*Let all who come to Him in worship
Be in His steadfast love secure.*

*Come to the Lord with your thanksgiving;
His everlasting love endures. Psalm 118:1*

Birthdays in October:

6th Henry VanVliet
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON LOR 1B0

17th Alan Breukelman
19th Street
Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4

22nd Nelena Hofsink
Bethesda Clearbrook Home
32553 Willingdon Crescent,
Clearbrook, BC V2T 1S2

25th John Feenstra
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON LOR 1B0

28th Mary Ann DeWit
Bethesda
6705 Satchel Road, Box 40
Mount Lehman, BC VOX 1V0

Henry will celebrate his 33rd birthday, Alan will celebrate being 34 years of age, Nelena will be 40, brother John will be turning 42 years young, and Mary Ann will be celebrating her 44th birthday. Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday this month. May our Heavenly Father surround you all with his love and care throughout this new year.

Till the next month,

Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

Mailing correspondence:
548 Kemp Road East
RR 2 Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
1-905-563-0380



Press Release of Classis Central Ontario held on June 9, 2000.

Opening

On behalf of the convening church, the Fellowship Church at Burlington, Rev. C. Bosch calls the meeting to order and opens it with Scripture reading and prayer. After a word of welcome, the delegates from the Ebenezer church at Burlington report on the credentials. Classis is constituted. As suggested by the previous classis, Rev. J. de Gelder serves as chairman, Rev. G. H. Visscher as vice-chairman, and Rev. C. Bosch as clerk. The agenda is adopted.

Church visitation reports

In accordance with article 46 of the Church Order, reports are read on visitations made to each of the six churches of Classis Central Ontario. In response

to these reports, appreciation is expressed for the faithfulness of the Lord.

Question period according to Article 44 of the Church Order

In closed session, the Ebenezer church at Burlington requests advice regarding two matters of discipline, and the Fellowship church at Burlington requests advice in one matter of discipline. In each case, Classis advises these churches to proceed with the disciplinary procedure. Open session resumes.

More hymns in the *Book of Praise*?

The church at Toronto proposes that Classis support their overture to General Synod 2001 to add nineteen hymns to the *Book of Praise*. In connection with this request, the Fellowship church at Burlington suggests that General Synod appoint a special committee which would "study and recommend hymns for inclusion in the

hymn section of our *Book of Praise*." After ample discussion, Toronto's proposal was defeated; as Fellowship's submission was dependent on Toronto's, it was also considered defeated.

Next classis

Convening Church for next Classis: the church at Burlington Waterdown. Date of next Classis: September 15, 2000. Suggested officers: Rev. W. Den Hollander, chairman; Rev. C. Bosch, vice-chairman; Rev. J. de Gelder, clerk.

Closing

Question Period is not utilized. Mutual censure is not needed. The Acts are adopted and the Press Release approved. After singing, the chairman leads in prayer and classis is closed.

For Classis,
Rev. G. H. Visscher,
vice-chairman 

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address. They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length. Please include address and phone number.

On Tolerating a Non-literal Genesis

Rev. Wynia¹ disputes my remark that the URC tolerates non-literal views of Genesis 1. He asserts that only personal opinions have been expressed, which do not constitute official toleration by the URC. Let me elaborate. Toleration, by definition, needs no official endorsement. By "tolerate" I mean its usual sense of a passive "to put up with." This is evidenced by the fact that no official censure was incurred by Dr. Godfrey² and Rev. Heerema [3], who publicly contended that non-literal creation days are permitted by the Reformed confessions. The URC has no official posi-

tion on Genesis. Rev. Heerema worried that "the URC could be hurt by continued argumentation over this issue,"³ suggestive of a divided house. The perceived tolerance of non-literal views of Genesis 1 within the URC hindered both the OCRC⁴ and the Independent CRC of Ancaster⁵ from joining the URC. Unhappily, the URC has done little to dispel this notion. On the contrary, two members of URC's ecumenical committee, responding to the OCRC literal position on Genesis, objected to "extra-confessional" binding position papers.⁴ Another URC minister asked for flexibility, charging that "the stand of the OCRC would exclude Warfield, Hodge and others."⁶ Presumably, he

deemed Warfield's views, heavily influenced by evolution,⁷ to be acceptable within the URC.

Hopefully, the URC will reconsider its reluctance to endorse and enforce a literal Genesis. Until then, denominations seeking unity with the URC would be remiss not to press it for official clarification.

¹Clarion 49(11):246.

²Christian Renewal 16(9):5 and 16(14):3.

³Christian Renewal 17(4):4.

⁴Christian Renewal 18(5):4.

⁵Christian Renewal 18(11):8.

⁶Christian Renewal 18(7):3.

⁷Christian Renewal 18(9):5.

John Byl

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Your school holidays are almost over. And then back to school. Possibly to a new teacher. Possibly to a new school. Possibly to new friends and acquaintances. Doesn't that sound like fun to you? I remember always loving school at the beginning of the year, when everything is new and fun and exciting. Do you get that too?

What are your goals for the year? Are you planning to study hard, to get really good marks in your reports? I certainly hope so. After all, God gave you the talents which you have, and you have to make use of those as best you can. Don't try to get out of doing any of the work because learning is a wonderful gift you have. Some have God's gifts in some areas, some in others. But everyone has gifts which should be put to good use. Remember also to write me a letter and tell me about your school, friends, classroom, teacher and lots of other things that I love to hear about.

Lots of love, Aunt Betty

Backwards

by Busy Beaver Rhonda Wiersma

Instructions:

Do you know what a backword is? It's a regular word that becomes another word when it is read backwards. For example LIAR becomes RAIL. Try these out.

1. A wild animal that howls at the moon and looks like a dog is a _____.
2. People use sand bags to block the _____ of water.
3. You _____ down a glass of water and use a _____ for keeping water in the tub.
4. When you are _____, you are really angry. A _____ blocks off a stream of water.
5. _____ is the fifth month of the year. Spelt backwards, it is a type of sweet potato called a _____.



FROM THE MAILBOX

Thank you for your letter and lots of riddles, Rhonda Wiersma. The riddles were funny. I'll put some of them in today and some in another time, okay. You obviously are having a wonderful holiday away from school. But very hot too. 35° is very

hot. Did you know that in some countries that is not even very hot? I have friends in the Southern Hemisphere (you know where that is, don't you) who say that 35° is not too hot. But in Canada it is a real heat wave. It's a good thing you can swim in the dugout. You also had a fun time in Kimberly, BC. It sounded like fun. Bye for now, Rhonda.

RIDDLES

by Busy Beaver Rhonda Wiersma

- What do you call a ghost on crutches?
A hoblin goblin!
- What did the chocolate bar say to the lollipop?
"Hello sucker!"
- What would you have if your car's engine went up in flames?
A fire engine.
- What isn't your nose 12 inches long?
Because then it would be a foot!
- Why did the lady chase her nose?
Because it was running!

Craft Time . . . Junk Bank

DRUMS

HAVE READY Boxes, tins or plastic containers
Sticks, pieces of dowelling or wooden spoons
Scissors or a hole punch
String or ribbon

GET SET Make two holes, opposite one another, near the top of your drum. Cut the string or ribbon long enough to go around the neck and thread through the holes. Make knots in both ends of string, inside drum, so strap does pull out.

GO

MARACAS

HAVE READY Paper plates
Dried beans, pasta or rice for rattle
Stapler
Stick
Tape

GET SET Cover a paper plate with an upturned plate of the same size. Staple around the edge, about three quarters of the way around. Put beans inside the plates and complete the stapling around the edge. You can tape a stick to the plates or between the plates to be a handle.

GO

TOOTERS

HAVE READY Cardboard cylinder
Paper (greaseproof is quite good)
Glue or paste and brush
Elastic band

GET SET Put paste around the outside of one cylinder. Cover the end with a piece of paper. Hold the paper in place with the elastic band. Make a hole in the paper.

GO