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Disabled children are a precious gift from God

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What's the Sense of Living with Severe Disabilities?

We may never get the answers we would like to have during this earthly life

Author's note: Some thoughts triggered by having the privilege of conducting a funeral for a member of the congregation to which I belong who had developmental disabilities.

What's the sense of living with severe disabilities? An answer our secular society gives is that there is no point in raising a disabled child. It's best to have an abortion as soon as you know the child to be born is not normal. Get it over with.

As Christians we can be very thankful that the Lord our God enables us to give another answer. Parents of such special children will testify that it is far from easy to raise a child with significant disabilities. There are all kinds of frustrations, challenges, and questions. However, in faith these same parents will also testify that there is much reason for gratitude and joy in the Lord in receiving and raising children with special needs. Such children are a precious gift from God's fatherly hand.

Uncertainty and certainty

Receiving a special child raises all kinds of questions, especially "why?" Does the Lord not love us? Have we done something to deserve this? Is God punishing us? The good thing of such questions is that they are directed to God. He after all is the Giver of life. In his hands is all our existence. He is sovereign and therefore he indeed is the one who gives such children to whomever he pleases. God is the Creator and Giver of life and he is not accountable to us.

We may never get the answers we would like to have during this earthly life. But, with all the questions and doubts that come up, believing parents may know for a certainty that such a child comes from the hand of God and is a member of the covenant community. That reality is signified and sealed at baptism when the triune God himself claims that child as his own precious possession. The One who embraces that child as his very own will also provide in every way. He will use the parents to that end and parents can be sure that God will give what is necessary (2 Cor 12:9). God will also provide by means of the church community, as well as by society's support services. But he will provide. And all things will work out for good for all the promises of the covenant are also for those with disabilities. His Word is true and his promises are sure. All this is a source of great encouragement to the parents.

The Lord of the covenant calls all those in covenant with him to his service

There is another aspect to be noted. The Lord of the covenant calls all those in covenant with him to his service. Also those with disabilities therefore have an office, a task to perform. They have a divine and holy calling!



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An office to perform

The office of those with disabilities varies depending on how the Lord has endowed them. But some elements are common to all who are developmentally or otherwise significantly challenged. For one thing, their very presence testifies to the brokenness of this creation. The results of original sin are very much with us in this present life and this reality is underlined by the special children God gives. Their presence reminds us that we can never underestimate the devastation sin has caused and it keeps us mindful of the need for redemption and renewal through the work of the Saviour. Having a child with disabilities can help in keeping our focus on what's truly important in life. Ultimately this world is a passing stage (1 John 2:15-17) and we need to live close to the Lord in expectation of the full deliverance from all the misery that sin has brought into the world. And the Lord will grant that deliverance! We can now already see how he is restoring life in a fallen world. This is often especially visible in the special needs children he gives.

God makes no mistakes when he entrusts parents with a child with significant disabilities. He himself has designed that child in the womb of its mother (Ps 139:13) and he has designed it in such a way that it could fulfill its office and calling (cf. Eph 4:7). Such special children are often endowed with limitations that enable them to be untouched and unencumbered by many of the concerns that can burden people today. Most of us go through life with many responsibilities and cares. Worries can gnaw away at the joy of life and even rob people of happiness. But this is not the case with special needs people. Because of the way God has made them, these special members of the church have few responsibilities that can weigh others down. As a result they can reflect something of the joy that should be part of everyone's life before God. Those with disabilities may not even be able to speak, but they can communicate a tremendous joy that shines from their

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Church News

Change of Worship Location and Time

Beginning on September 12, 2010, the worship services of the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church will be held at 9:30 AM and 2:30 PM in our newly completed facilities located at 2469 267 Street, Aldergrove, B.C.

Called by the Emmanuel American Reformed Church of Denver, CO:

Candidate Ryan Kampen

life. Parent after parent has testified to the fact that they have been so enriched by the joy that their special child or children have given them. In giving and showing this joy, the special child does his or her office according to God's design for their life. In showing this joy, they give hope for the full joy and redemption that is coming. After all, if such joy is possible in a broken world, how wonderful it must be on the new earth that is coming! Such a joy exuding from a special needs person's life can even affect an entire congregation in which such a child of God is a member.

We bear each other's burdens and share each other's joys

Another aspect of the office of the special children is that they often put others to shame by exhibiting a firm and unwavering child-like faith. There is no doubt in their minds that God loves them and will provide for them. With no hesitation whatsoever they will entrust themselves completely to the Lord knowing that he cares for them. Many a parent has said that they were put to shame by the simple and complete confidence in the Lord and his promises that their child with disabilities demonstrated. Also in this respect, God shows his work of the renewal of life through the

One way to give needed and concrete support to parents of special children (cf. Gal 6:2) is to become a member of organizations like

Anchor

*(<http://www.anchor-association.com>)
in southern Ontario,*

Rehoboth

*(<http://www.rehoboth.ab.ca/>)
in Alberta,*

Bethesda

*(<http://www.bethesdabc.com>)
in the Fraser Valley, and*

Cornerstone

*(Email: cornerstoneccs@hotmail.com)
in Manitoba.*

testimony of those with developmental or other issues. In this way he also encourages us to emulate their faith (cf. Matt 18:3).

And finally, although more could be said, special children can also teach us gratitude. It is so easy to become dissatisfied with life and the lot that God has given, until one stands before a developmentally challenged person who is happy and firmly believes in God's good provision for his life. Such people can put those endowed with so many of God's gifts to shame for their ungratefulness. If a person with severe developmental restrictions can be happy with the Lord's provision, should others not be even more grateful and joyous?

Moving forward

It is a great privilege for those who are able to assist the parents of special children in all sorts of ways. It is also a holy duty. After all, we are a covenant community of believers and we bear each other's burdens and share each other's joys. Those special children are precious to all of us for they are children with whom God has his covenant. And he designed each one of them for his or her specific calling and office. It is a privilege to help them fulfill that office!

And when, in God's sovereign disposition, such a developmentally challenged person has completed his or her task, then the Lord calls him or her home to himself. The vacuum that is often left by such a death underlines the vital role that such a person played in the family and often even within the congregation. These special members of the church leave a real legacy, a legacy of reminding God's people of what is truly important in life and of what unencumbered joy can be like, regardless of the outward circumstances of life. Those challenged in all sorts of ways, physically and mentally, are therefore at the end of the day a great blessing for others. They can stimulate us to be of good courage as we all move along life's path towards the perfection that will one day characterize the new world.

C



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MATTHEW 13:52

God Richly Provides Us with Everything (Part 1)

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant.”

1 Timothy 6:17

The Apostle Paul exhorts Timothy, his companion and co-worker, to address those who are rich in this present world. Timothy has to command them not to be arrogant or to put their hope in wealth. It's not a message for those in the midst of society who show themselves to be materialistic. No, it's a message Timothy has to bring to the congregation, to those entrusted to Timothy's pastoral care.

There may not have been many of them; still, Paul wants Timothy to address them directly. Just as in 1 Corinthians 1, the congregation may have consisted of “not many wise by human standards, not many influential, not many of noble birth” (v 26), and not many rich either, most likely. Yet Timothy gets a command to speak a strong message to those who are richly endowed with wealth and treasures.

How many of us would qualify as hearers of this address today? Is this a message for those who fit the shoe, that they may wear it, while the message is irrelevant for the others in the congregation? Paul includes the entire congregation in this exhortation. He directs the attention of all to God, who “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (v 17).

“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” the Lord Jesus exclaimed when that rich young man went away (Mark 10:17-27). We read that he had great

wealth. And the Lord Jesus added, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

Well, that reality seems to be confirmed by the rich young man's reaction to the Lord's words, “Do you want to inherit eternal life? Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven.” The young man couldn't do it, for he had many goods. That's why he was sad, and so was the Lord Jesus. He loved the rich young man for his love, expressed in his life of obedience. Yet his wealth had come in between the LORD and him; he couldn't do without it!

Moses already warned the people of Israel about the danger to which this rich young man succumbed. Before they had entered Canaan, that country flowing with milk and honey, he'd said, “When the LORD your God brings you into the land He swore to your fathers, and you enjoy prosperity: food, drink, clothing, shelter, the fruit of the fields, vineyards, olive groves, and the riches of cattle, gold, and silver – then be careful that you do not forget the LORD” (see Deut 6:10-12).

Likewise in the book of Proverbs we read the prayer of Agur, “Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God” (30:8-

9). Indeed, that's the danger; the rich could become arrogant, says Paul, and forget the LORD, and think they can take care of themselves.

Does that mean it is wrong to be rich, or that wealth is an evil? That cannot be, for the LORD himself makes people rich. He made Abraham rich, and Isaac, and the people of Israel in the Promised Land. In the New Testament as well, we shouldn't only focus on the spiritual blessings that come to us from the heavenly realms. Today too, the fruits of the field, the prosperity in the land, and the wealth of the nations, are blessings of God. Wealth and riches are no curse!

What happens, however, is that people make prosperity a curse. That's what happens when people live for wealth and riches and trust in them. When people's attitude shows, “I am rich, I don't need the LORD; I can look after myself.” Or when people say, “I am rich and I better make sure that I stay rich, for my hope and happiness depend on these things.” That's a danger not just for millionaires, but for all of us. It's in the heart of all of us, that we feel we have to vie for ourselves.

The deep awareness of our total dependence upon the LORD, also in regard to our daily needs, is not strong even at the best of times. That's what Paul is concerned about. Before you know it, you have put your hope in your income or your money-management. Instead, let's put our hope and trust in God alone!





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The Sad Case of Francesco Spiera

There was a time when the name of Francesco Spiera (or Francis Spira) was well-known throughout the Reformed churches of Europe. His story frightened, inspired, and motivated many. It was a story repeated numerous times in all the languages of Europe. His story caught the attention of John Calvin and many other Reformed theologians. Spiera became an example and a warning. Yet today his name is all but forgotten. I'd never heard of him until recently coming across a reference to him in a book written in the seventeenth century. I doubt that you've heard of him. But I think you should know, because his life and death are still instructive, as are the reactions that followed.

The life and death of Francesco Spiera

Francesco Spiera (ca. 1504-1548) was an Italian. We know nothing about his childhood or upbringing. What is written about him focuses entirely on the last years of his life. He appears out of the blue as a lawyer working in the region of Venice. He was an intelligent man with a solid reputation and a faithful Roman Catholic. He was married and had eleven children.

We should not assume that things will always continue to be the way they are

Spiera's world was turned upside down in the early 1540s when Reformation writings appeared for sale in his area. He apparently purchased some of these writings. He compared these writings with the Bible and became convinced that Reformation theology was biblical. Moreover, he didn't keep his new faith to himself. He taught it to his family and his friends and to whomever would listen.

In November of 1547, some of his neighbours denounced him to the Roman Inquisition. The Inquisition existed to stamp out heresies and errors and whatever challenged the authority and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Spiera was put on

trial in Venice in May of 1548. Among other things, his possession of an Italian Calvinistic classic, *Beneficio di Cristo*, was evidence that he had set out on a road away from Rome. The trial lasted into June of 1548 and at the end he was commanded to retract his Protestant beliefs publicly and to buy an altar-piece for his local Roman Catholic Church building. He appears to have followed these instructions.

Problems set in almost immediately afterwards. Spiera had second thoughts about his abjuration. He reportedly heard the voice of the Son of God accusing him for having denied the gospel and telling him that he was now a reprobate condemned to hell. He fell ill and spent most of his time in bed suffering from physical pain and emotional despair. Friends and family tried to reason with him. Roman Catholic theologians and priests made an effort to convince him, and when that failed, they attempted to exorcise whatever demon was tormenting him. Spiera continued to despair. He died in that condition on December 27, 1548. Some say that he died of despair, others that he took his own life.

The danger of apostasy

We live in a comfortable age at the moment. Stories such as the one about Spiera seem entirely disconnected from our reality. We would never face an Inquisition for being or becoming Reformed. At least not at the moment. However, we should not assume that things will always continue to be the way they are. A day could come when you are dragged before a court and pressured to repudiate the gospel and your Saviour. Spiera's story reminds us that betraying our Saviour comes at a cost.

The story of Francesco Spiera was used by both Protestants and Roman Catholics to advance their agendas. Roman Catholics used Spiera's story to warn their people about the dangers of even departing from Rome in the first place. Protestants used the story to warn people what could happen if they were to abjure

their biblical faith. Historians recognize that the historical accounts are coloured by these agendas. Yet both Roman Catholics and Protestant reports of Spiera's demise highlight the enormous suffering and despair that he endured because he did not stand strong one way or another. I think we can say with certainty that this is a historical fact and it's something instructive for us.

Protestant reflections on Spiera

It's also instructive to survey the different ways in which Protestants have treated the case of Francesco Spiera. One of the earliest commentaries comes from John Calvin. In 1549 Calvin wrote a preface to an account of Spiera's despair. Calvin used Spiera as an example in his struggle with the Nicodemites. The Nicodemites, like Nicodemus, were secret believers. They were people who held to Reformed theology, but continued to remain in the Roman Catholic Church. Spiera was an example of what could happen to such people. But Calvin went further than this and explicitly declared judgment on Spiera. Calvin referred to him as an example of the reprobate who "never fail to proceed from one sin to another." His despair was God's justice on him, a justice that came to full fervour after his death. Calvin essentially asserted that Spiera had been consigned by God to eternal destruction and his betrayal of the faith gave evidence of his reprobation.

Subsequent Protestant theologians and authors took a similar line. The English Reformer and martyr Hugh Latimer (ca. 1487-1555) asserted that Spiera had sinned against the Holy Spirit – committing the unpardonable sin. In 1865, a book of poems was published by the Englishman James Hain Friswell. The first one is about Francesco Spiera and its opening lines clearly indicate where the author believes Spiera ended up:

The words of Francis Spira, man of Law,
A man in sin begotten and conceived,
Reaping damnation, which he much deserved,
Dying with friends about him whose vain words
Would comfort him whose doom is fix'd past help!

Similarly, on a couple of occasions the Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) referred to Spiera and compared him to Judas Iscariot. While he did not come right out and declare that Spiera was reprobate, there is a hint of it.

Another line

However, there is another line in Protestant reflections on Francesco Spiera. It's found both among Reformed writers and Lutherans during the seventeenth

century. The post-Reformation was far kinder and sympathetic to Spiera's case than many before and after.

Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676) is one of the giants of the Reformed faith in the seventeenth century. He taught theology at the University of Utrecht.

He is remembered for his deft blending of serious academic thought with warm-hearted commitment to Christ. Some of his books were written exclusively for an academic audience. Others were written for the common Reformed person. One of those was a book entitled *Spiritual Desertion* (*Geestelijke Verlatingen*), first published in Dutch in 1646. In this book (which has been translated into English), Voetius mentions the case of Spiera twice. The first time is in a discussion about the circumstances that most frequently accompany a feeling of desertion by God. He mentions persecutions, diseases as well as considerable physical weakness which leads to death. And he writes that an example of this is what happened with Spiera. He adds, "This history ought to be read and can be read, since it available in more than one language."

He comes back to Spiera later. Voetius notes that when it comes to judging what happened to Spiera, he is in agreement with the assessment of the English Puritan William Perkins, the German Reformer Wolfgang Musculus, and even Arminius. Voetius writes:

For certainly one must not give credence to their cries or confessions of despair, because that voice is not a voice of credibility or truth but of weakness; it is not making a statement but expressing a doubt. . . Finally, even if it were the case that they were not restored inwardly before their death but departed during a severe attack of insensibility and temptation, nothing certain could be concluded about their final and total impenitence and unbelief. This could be done only if it were first established that actual, particular, and always ensuring repentance and remorse (renewed after every sin) is absolutely and indispensably necessary to salvation. (*Spiritual Desertion*, 53)

According to Voetius then, it is inappropriate to claim that Spiera was reprobate because of the manner in which he died.



Gisbertus Voetius



Johannes Hoornbeeck

Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617-1666) was a disciple of Voetius. Voetius actually never finished writing *Spiritual Desertion*, so he commissioned Hoornbeeck to complete it. Hoornbeeck wrote a lot more about Spiera, but it was all along the same

lines as that of Voetius. A short quote will give you an idea of what he thought:

[Spiera] did want to return to God but thought that he could not do so. We silently pass by the judgment that others have pronounced. On the basis of his burning desire and his heartfelt longing for God and his grace (longing that he frequently displayed), we consider ourselves duty-bound to suspend our judgment – if not to speak in his favour. (*Spiritual Desertion*, 86)

Hoornbeeck considered Spiera to be a “frightening example” but yet he believed that Spiera’s despair and spiritual struggle could not be evidence of reprobation. After all, the reprobate give no care to their standing before God.

The last author I can mention is Johannes Andreas Quenstedt (1617-1688), an orthodox Lutheran theologian from the seventeenth century. He discusses Spiera’s case in an important academic work entitled *Theologica Didactico-Polemica*. It comes up in a discussion regarding the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This is what Quenstedt concluded:

Spiera must be held least of all to have sinned against the Holy Spirit, because: 1) he defected to the papacy, not from malice, but from weakness; not by his own will and initiative, but through the persuasion of friends. 2) He did not impugn or blaspheme the doctrine of the Gospel, but he was greatly pained that he had defected from the truth. It was therefore assuredly despair, but not blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. . . (*Theologica Didactico-Polemica* (1715), Vol. 1, 1064, translation mine)

Thus also Quenstedt regarded Spiera as a sad case, but not one in which observers can make a definite conclusion as to the Italian’s eternal destiny.

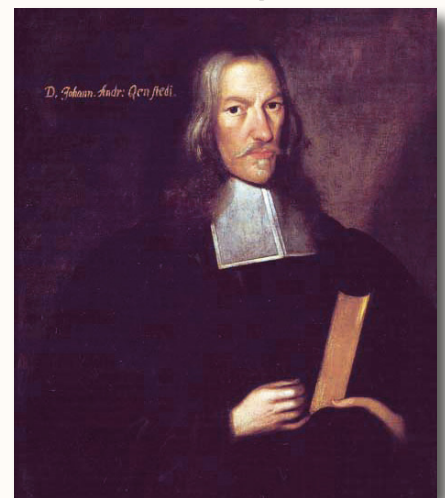
The take-aways

The post-Reformation period showed a remarkable degree of mature, biblical analysis of the Spiera case. There was much more hesitancy to jump to conclusions regarding Spiera’s ultimate destination, whether that be heaven or hell. Instead, the post-Reformation theologians that we’ve surveyed believed that Spiera suffered despair, even a sort of depression. While he brought it on himself through his betrayal of the faith, the fact that he was in so much pain up till his death does not disqualify him from the kingdom of God.

There are still countless people in our churches who suffer with despair and depression

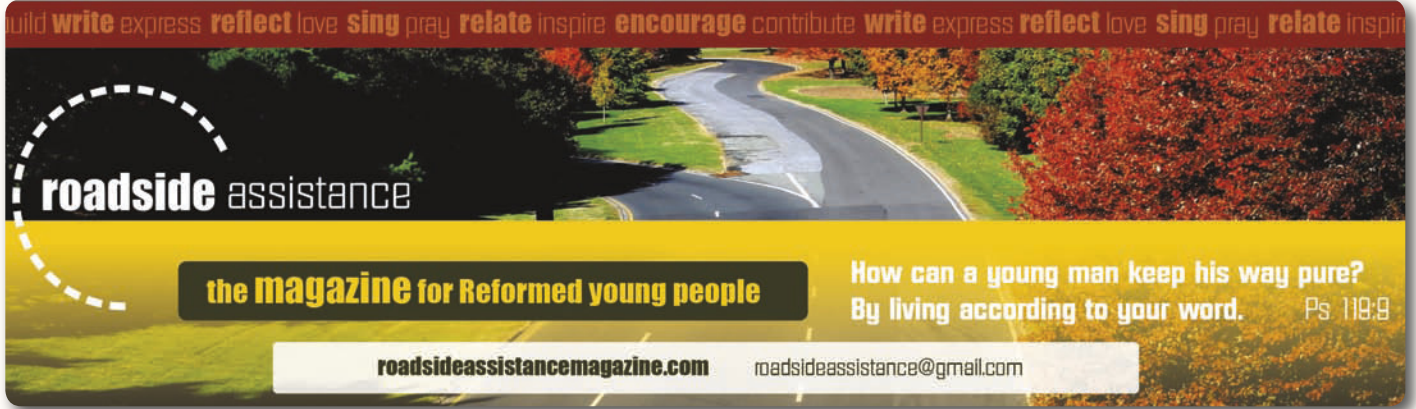
As mentioned above, today we don’t face the immediate possibility of persecution. Yet there are still countless people in our churches who suffer with despair and depression. Sometimes, sadly, we even hear about those who take their own lives – as Spiera may have done. Spiera’s story and the way the post-Reformation writers worked with it teach us to be careful when making judgments about someone’s spiritual state. Struggle, doubts, and difficulties are not indicative of reprobation, even when they culminate in suicide.

Sometimes the post-Reformation is wrongly described as a period of aridity in Reformed theology, as a low point in our heritage. The story of Spiera indicates that there is much that we can still learn from men like Voetius, Hoornbeeck, and even Quenstedt (Lutheran that he was). These were men who valued faithfulness and precision in their theology, but it never came at the cost of passion for Christ and compassion for those who suffer. One can only hope that we’ll see more post-Reformation material coming into English translation.



Johannes Andreas Quenstedt





When Meat Ruined Meetings: The Impact of our Actions on Others

By Garret van Dijk

Should we be going to the lake on Sundays? Is watching a movie in a theatre allowed as children of God? Is this type of rock music okay to listen to? While it is good that we ask ourselves what is right for a Christian to do, it may be wise to ask another question. This question finds its roots in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, which says, "Everything is permissible – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible – but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others." It appears that the Corinthian church was using the phrase, "everything is permissible," to excuse their immoral behaviour. With this in mind, Paul uses this refrain, with added restrictions, to teach the Corinthians how to live in accordance with God's Word. He first uses it in 1 Corinthians 6 to condemn sexual immorality. We can see that Scripture here isn't advocating freedom from the law or that everything truly is allowed by God. Rather it shows that there are certain actions, words, and thoughts that we need to avoid. After reading that everything is permissible we see an action, sexual immorality, denounced outright. Clearly, we must submit to the Bible in all aspects of life.

The phrase "everything is permissible" is used to discuss another issue and in a different sense in 1 Corinthians 10. The Corinthian church is unsure if eating meat sold in the market was right for a Christian. The Corinthian Christians asked this question because often this meat had been offered to an idol in some way and thus they were wary of eating the meat. They are told that the meat can be eaten without concern. However, Paul does not consider the matter to be finished at this point. He tells them to

avoid this "market meat" if they were told, by those who had concerns about eating meat sacrificed to idols, that the meat had been offered to idols. In this case Paul tells the Corinthians that they should not eat this meat for the sake of the person who believes that eating meat offered to idols is wrong. Here Scripture explains that we as Christians should not only act in accordance with the law, but also in a way that will cause no one to stumble.

We are not only told that our actions should be lawful, but that they should also be beneficial to our walk before the Lord. Does the music we listen to really help us live a godly life? Will the music we listen to cause someone to stumble? Do the pictures we post or the comments we write on Facebook help bring us closer to God? Do they help to bring our neighbour closer to God? Are we helping our neighbour live a holy life when we don't distinguish Sunday from any other day in the week? If any of these do not aid our walk of faith or if they cause our neighbour to stumble, we shouldn't partake of them.

The summary of the law – love for God and love for our neighbour – is the conclusion of the matter. 1 Corinthians 10:31-32 says, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God. . . ." We are to glorify God with our entire life and thus must strive to obey the law in its fullness. In doing this, we will also serve our neighbour and not cause them to fall on account of us. By constant prayer for the work of the Holy Spirit in us (for we will not serve God by ourselves) we will do not only what is permissible but what is beneficial.



God's One Another Plan

The Forty-Seventh Annual Fraser Valley Women's League Day

Unlike many days surrounding the annual Fraser Valley women's league day, Wednesday June 23 arrived with beautiful weather and some much-welcomed sunshine. Despite the temptation to stay home and enjoy the beautiful weather, 157 ladies representing nine of the churches in the Fraser Valley showed up to enjoy a day of speeches, fellowship, and much good food! The gathering took place in the small town of Yarrow, where the local Mennonite church has a gym that served very well in hosting this exciting day. Despite the desire to stand outside under the warm sun, the scent of flowers on every table and delicious food beckoned at everyone who came through the door. The decorating committee did an excellent job in bringing the outdoors inside, and beautiful flowers were artfully displayed in matching gift bags on every table. Before long everyone had signed in, smelled their way to the table of morning coffee, and found a table to sit at. With that, the forty-seventh annual league day was ready to begin.

Speech

After singing a psalm and praying together, no time was wasted to introduce the Chair Lady, Karen VanSpronsen, who in turn introduced the two speakers of the day: Linda Vane and Leona Huttema. They spoke on the topic "God's One Another Plan," explaining how the words "one another" appeared thirty-seven times in the New Testament and referred to things that should, and in a few cases should not, characterize relationships among believers. While there were different words they could focus on, they chose to spend time on loving, admonishing, and encouraging one another. The following summarizes their thought-provoking speech.

Loving

We can only understand what it means to love one another if we truly believe and understand that God first loved us. Our relationship with others is intricately

tied to our relationship with God. We see what love is in that Christ laid down his life – sacrificed it – for us. In loving one another, we will be asked to give something up also. In order to show love and concern for others, we must put our own concerns aside. Loving always involves sacrifice. While it's perhaps easy to love the lovable, we realize that it takes more effort to love those who have challenging characters or behaviours.

Admonishing

From a relationship directed by love, we can move onto the topic of admonishment. When we realize that relationships with God and with one another are the most important things in our lives, and if we desire to follow God's plan, we will see that offering guidance, instruction, cautions, warnings, and occasionally something stronger is all part of being faithful in our relationships. Teaching and admonishing must always be for spiritual development and growth, because the goal of admonishing is to help another person grow and be transformed more fully into the image of Christ. This means that the time will come for confessing our sins to one another. Of course, having a good relationship with the person will come a long way in admonishing them when the time comes. However, the command to carry each other's burdens doesn't only refer to the burdens of those we are close with. Not all women have the same gifts. Some can cook, bake, babysit, clean, or just lend a listening ear. There are many different ways we can help, but it must all keep in step with the Spirit. Most importantly, we must pray. This can result in reconciliation and forgiveness. There is no sin that we cannot forgive wholeheartedly and generously when we so clearly see how he who knew no sin became sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Encouraging

Encouragement is the key component of relationships, because the day of the Lord is

approaching. We need to be part of a functioning body of Christ to grow into well-balanced Christians. We cannot grow if we are isolated from each other. Jesus promised his disciples that his Father would send the Holy Spirit, the great encourager. We need to encourage one another with the truth. To speak the truth we need the tongue. However, there must be caution in using our tongues though, because for a variety of reasons there may be misunderstanding. Being corrected goes against our human nature, the choice of words may be incorrect or misinterpreted, or the time or place might not be appropriate. We must be sensitive to the person's circumstance and realize that all of us need encouragement. God intends that we be a people who use words to encourage one another and build each other up. A well-timed word has the power to urge a runner to finish the race, to rekindle hope when despair has set in, to speak a bit of warmth in an otherwise cold life, to trigger healthy self-evaluation in someone who doesn't think much about his shortcomings, and to renew confidence when problems have the upper hand. Words have the power to effect people deeply. We need encouragement to keep us sharp and on our toes, always ready to fight the battle and to remain faithful to the end, for the day of the Lord is approaching.

Afternoon

After this thought-provoking speech the day continued with singing Hymn 34, where after we had round table discussions. After some time everyone had a chance to ask questions to all present and all were encouraged via little gifts to ask or provide comments on the question asked. The questions ranged in degree,



from discussing how to deal with an issue when you don't know the problem and avoid gossip at the same time, to honouring one another in humility and what that actually means, and the room for professional counselling. After another song, lunch announcements and devotions opened way to a long lunch break that provided lots of time for enjoying the tasty food, catching up with old friends, and meeting new ones. Thanks a lot to Jenny Janzen and her entourage of Yarrow ladies who did much work in preparing food and cleaning up the place!

After lunch, Linda and Leona once again made their way on-stage to answer or comment on any remaining questions and comments provided by the ladies. This was a good way to review the morning's material. We then sang a hymn together, once again to the beautiful accompaniment of Joy Vanvliet. Susan Onderwater then provided some DPA – Daily Personal Activity – to combat the deliciousness of the lunchtime calories in a game which involved asking the ladies questions, and if the question applied to them, they had to stand up. For example, if you have grandchildren, if your children are all below the age of five, if you're from Cloverdale church, to name a few. This game brought quite a few laughs, as did the following entertainment. Cloverdale ladies provided entertainment in the form of a telephone conversation between an environmentally friendly granddaughter, a true child of this day and age, and her elderly Dutch grandmother, a good representation of the simplicity of basic household ingredients and tools for cleaning, as well as enjoying a homemade cup of coffee in contrast to the granddaughter's Starbucks coffee.

This brought the day to a close, at which time we sang the "Servant Song," had a few minutes for general business, closed in prayer, and then sang the traditional "Women's League Day" song. All in all, many positive comments were to be heard and it truly was a day of encouragement and fellowship for all who attended. We thank God for these opportunities!

C



Retirements at PICS

As the calendar is flipped to August, and “Back to School” flyers appear in our mailbox, relaxing days of summer and a slower routine will be replaced with a more structured schedule including making school lunches, seeing school friends and teachers, and doing homework. Teachers play a major role in school and the development of our society. They inspire, motivate, and pass on knowledge. Teachers have great influence on their students and their job is a difficult one. To have some idea of the classroom teacher’s job, Donald D. Quinn, an educator, made a comparison to a doctor, lawyer, or dentist having forty people in his office at one time, all of whom have different needs, and some of whom don’t want to be there and are causing trouble. The doctor, lawyer, or dentist, without assistance, would treat them all with professional excellence for more than nine months. Just imagine!

Every school day, teachers awaken students’ curiosity and create the joy of learning; they shape minds while exercising copious amounts of patience. The job of a teacher has never been categorized as an ordinary job, or as a profession that can make you rich. It is simply impossible to teach if you don’t like that activity, or if you don’t care for your students. Care – that’s the word! Teachers care by taking the time to listen and to discuss issues students have, to pray with them, and to guide them in a Christian manner, as well as discussing academic concerns. Teachers can be mentors for students during their school years and well beyond graduation.

Recently, Parkland Immanuel Christian School (PICS) in Edmonton had a retirement celebration for two teachers whose life was teaching. Both these teachers viewed teaching as their special calling from God and couldn’t imagine doing anything else. Mr. Rainier Van Delft and Mr. Bernie Van Raalte retired after teaching at PICS together since the school opened its doors thirty-three years ago. The retirement celebration was opened with reading part of Deuteronomy 6; the text was chosen because the most important aspect of teaching is impressing on our children’s hearts the Word of God.

Throughout the evening God was given the honour and glory for allowing these teachers to be part of the education of students both at PICS and other locations they taught. As Aron Van Delft mentioned in his speech, parents hand their children over to teachers, for six hours or more a day, to tend, nurture, prepare and build up students’ hearts, minds, and souls, and steer them toward a way that is pleasing to the Lord.

A surprise part of the retirement celebration included a class representative from all but four of the graduating classes as well as all the current classes. It was a delight to see over forty representatives thank the teachers and present Rainier and Bernie with roses. The long line of congratulators concluded with Seth Van Delft, who is a grandson of Rainier, as representative of the 2010 kindergarten class. Even Jadon Van Raalte, two and a half years old, presented both of his grandfathers with a rose.

A teacher’s highest reward is feeling the true appreciation and gratitude of his or her current and former students. Teachers’ memorable moments consist of students who say the course taught changed their life or students telling a teacher that the course taught



Rainier Van Delft and Bernie Van Raalte



Jadon's
presentation

was the best one they've ever taken. What joy it is to a teacher when comprehension dawns on a student's beaming face. Good teachers teach because they couldn't imagine doing anything else; they truly enjoy teaching. They respond to their calling from God to equip their students with all they need, not only to be and make a positive contribution to society, but more importantly, to further God's kingdom until the return of the great Teacher.

As a new school year approaches, we encourage and pray for those who are starting their first year teaching, who are returning to teaching, who have taught for many years, and who are entering their final year of teaching before retiring. We encourage you to keep sharing his light with each student. May each student hear instruction and be attentive, that they may gain insight, for he gives good precepts; may his teaching not be forsaken.

C

Letters to the Editor

Letter to the Editor

I am writing in response to Rev. Kampen's article in the May 7 issue about catechism preaching and teaching. He stated in that catechism is the instruction in Christian doctrine to both the youth in catechism classes as well as the catechism preaching. And that "catechism is really the wielding of the two edged sword of God that penetrates even to dividing the soul and spirit" (taken from Hebrews 4:12). And also that "catechism is preaching from the bible." Where do we get this wisdom that something man has written, in addition to God's Word, could penetrate to dividing the soul and spirit? Only God's Word is "living and active," taken from the same text, Hebrews 4:12. Nowhere in God's Word does he tell us that the Bible is not enough. Or that we need to seek wisdom from another source. On the contrary, he tells us in Proverbs 30:5, 6 that "every word of God proves true, do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you, and you be found a liar." We need to be reminded of the words of 2 Timothy 3:14-17 (KJ), "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation

through faith which is in Christ Jesus. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*" Here we see that God's Word is all we need, even from *childhood*, for preaching, doctrine, instruction, and wisdom. May God direct us to what our physical and spiritual bodies need, and that is *his* Word, and the preaching of it.

Sincerely,
Andy Bouwers

Response

I appreciate that br. Bouwers has taken the time to interact with my editorial. His remarks indicate that his issue is not so much with my editorial as with the practice found in our churches as agreed upon in Article 52 of the Church Order. The concern about catechism and the use of catechisms expressed by br. Bouwers can be heard more often. This concern, however, is a false dilemma. It fails to acknowledge that catechism simply takes the truths of Scripture and presents them in a logical, systematic way. In the process of catechism, the church has developed catechisms and other creeds but these are not an

addition to the Word of God but a summary of the teaching of the Word of God. The Scriptures are the only source from which all Christian teaching is derived.

Rev. Eric Kampen

Dear Editor,

In the August 13, 2010 edition of *Clarion*, Rev. C. Kleyn has an article called "Humbly Ready to Obey." It is with interest that I read this article and can well agree with the author as to his intent. We should all be ready to humbly serve our Lord and Saviour at all times just as the seraphs do.

I would like a further explanation why Rev. Kleyn thinks that the seraphs cover their faces because they can not look at God. It is true that we can not see God because we are sinners, but the seraphs are not sinners, so why can they not look?

Scripture tells us to look to God for his mercy. It does not tell us to cover our eyes. Psalm 123:1-2: "I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven. As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy."

We tell our children to close their eyes when they say their prayer but that is so that they have no distractions. "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'" (Acts 7:55-56). Stephen says that he saw Jesus and God and he was a sinner like we all are. He could not have seen this if he covered his eyes.

It also says that the seraphs covered their feet because that is a less honourable part of their body. But if we read Scripture God seems to have no problem with uncovered feet, so maybe there is another reason for covering their feet. We read that Moses was to remove his sandals. "So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up.' When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' And Moses said, 'Here I am.' 'Do not come any closer,' God said. 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground' (Exod 3:3-5). Also, "After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off

your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground' (Acts 7:30-33).

Also we see that Jesus himself washed the feet of the disciples before eating with them. "So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him" (John 13:4-5). Later Jesus praised the woman for washing his feet with tears and then anointing them with perfume. So I can't see where feet are a less honourable part of the body. "When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them" (Luke 7:37, 38).

Maybe Rev. Kleyn is right in his observation and I definitely can't prove that he is wrong, but I do have difficulty with it, seeing that Scripture seems to tell us different, at least the way I read it. I do hope that this will not discourage Rev. Kleyn from writing more articles because the article in it self is worth reading. An explanation on how he arrived at this would be very helpful.

*With brotherly greetings,
Martin Onderwater*

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Response

Dear Brother,

I want to thank you for your comments and thoughts on my article "Humbly Ready to Obey." Isaiah 6 is certainly a chapter full of mystery surrounding the throne of God. Who can claim to understand it all? I do however want to clarify the conclusions I came to in my article.

First I want to interact with some things mentioned in the letter to the editor:

1. Brother Onderwater seems to conclude from the article that I asserted we cannot look to God at all (not even for mercy). And that we always have to cover our feet. I agree that such assertions would go right out against Scripture (such as the passages he quoted). This is not stated in the article at all. The seraphs are primarily a symbol to Isaiah (and us) of faithfully serving the Lord. They recognize themselves finite before God and express this by covering feet and eyes. We can conclude from this, that even the fact that we are finite (let alone that we are sinners), is enough reason to humble ourselves before God and feel small. Keeping this in mind, it is so much more

amazing that our great and holy God was willing to take on finitude to pay for sin.

2. Brother Onderwater does not give possible alternative interpretations of the wings that are more satisfactory. Someone may, for example, argue that covering the feet could mean these seraphs are being cheeky and doing underhand handling. Proverbs 6:13 talks of a signal with the feet and winking with the eye and so on. This text in Proverbs refers to the common practice of secret underhand handling. Could the seraphs not be hiding their feet to hide some secret from God? The very thought of this interpretation is ridiculous. Such interpretations are way out of line. The interpretations I gave seem to me to be the only ones that work and do justice to the context of God's holiness.

Let us secondly consider some reasons why I argue that the covering of the seraph's faces is because they cannot look at God. The main principle here is: "God is too holy to look at in his glory."

The context makes clear that these seraphs are shown to Isaiah by God just before he is given his difficult commission to preach to the people to "be ever hearing but never understanding" (v 9). Isaiah needs to be prepared for this and so needs to see the holy God – set apart beyond categories. Part of the vision of the holy and awesome God are these seraphs he sees.

Moses also had to avert his eyes from God in Exodus 3:6 because he was afraid to look at God. In fact, often when God appears to someone in the Bible, He is displayed as glorious – like bright light. These seraphs cannot look at this brightness surrounding God, simply because they are finite creatures.

Being finite is enough to make an angel avert eyes from the glory of God. Job – the righteous man who is terribly afflicted by God – talks of how finite he is on more occasions than one. He says among other things: "How can a mortal be righteous before God" (Job 9:1b). Job goes on to explain that God does whatever pleases him. Even though Job is innocent of major transgression, he still has no right to plead himself innocent. Mortality is already enough to put him and us into such a different category from God, that we do not dare to face his glorious majesty.

We must remember the primary function of this passage is not to tell us whether angels can look at God or not. The function of this verse (at least from my perspective) is to display to the prophet Isaiah an example of how he is to act before God in preparation

for his ministry. Understood in this way, the seraphs cover their eyes as a symbol for Isaiah to realize that God is too holy to look at.

Finally I also want to give some reasons why I argue that the seraphs covered their feet as a less honourable part of the body. The main principle here is: "God is so holy that a creature cannot help but be self-aware when they recognize the immense difference with the Creator."

God always has a purpose in revealing particular details to us. And again I believe the purpose here clearly is to make Isaiah and us be more aware of the holiness of our awesome God. What else can the covering of feet mean – in the context of the awareness of God's holiness that the seraphs most certainly had?

The texts br. Onderwater quotes from the New Testament do prove that God does not look badly on uncovered feet. But some of these texts also point to the fact that feet were considered "a less honourable part of the body." Christ humbles himself so far to go and wash this less honourable part of the body (John 13). And the woman of Luke 7 does not anoint Christ's head with oil, she does not dare. She does dare to anoint his feet however, since they are a less honourable part of Christ's body.

The action of the seraphs here is parallel to that of the cherubs in Ezekiel 1:11 where two wings of the cherubs cover their bodies. They also are aware of their finitude before almighty God.

The seraph covering feet are primarily symbolic for Isaiah the prophet. We do not have to understand from this that angels and humans always have to cover their feet in awareness of God. That is simply not a truth we can conclude from this text.

Scripture talks of feet as a less honourable part of the body in the following ways: Kissing feet meant being subservient to someone. At that time kissing the feet of princes was a token of subjection to them (see Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible*: 414; cf. Luke 7:38, 45). And bowing at someone's feet meant much the same. Sitting at the feet of someone meant submitting to someone as a pupil (cf. Luke 10:39; Acts 22:8). Feet washing was usually done by servants and considered a very low category job (cf. 1 Sam 25:41; John 13).

I hope this adds some clarity as to what was meant in the article and why such conclusions were reached. Once again I appreciate the interaction. God's blessing in your tasks.

Rev. Cornelis Kleyn

Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.