

REFLECTIONS

The Monthly Newsletter of Grace OPC

A FRUITFUL INTERSECTION

By Pastor Brian De Jong

Any honest Christian will admit to struggles regarding two disciplines of the Christian life. I am speaking about Bible reading and prayer. Concentration is often the issue—our minds wander when we’re supposed to be praying and reading our Bibles. It can be downright discouraging, for we know in theory how important these disciplines are for Christian growth. Prayer and Bible reading?

They are the chief means of grace – those methods whereby God conveys His grace to our lives so that we can grow. Yet we feel deficient in both areas. We want to improve our practice and increase our participation, but we frequently fall far short.

At the recent NANC conference I attended in Indianapolis, I picked up an idea that I want to share with you. This concept has already helped me, and I trust it will benefit you too. In a pre-conference lecture, Professor Don Whitney spoke about using Bible meditation to transform our prayer life. Whitney suggested that we tend to pray the same old things in the same old ways about the same old subjects. Such prayer can become tiresome, and we grow discouraged. “Been there, done that,” I thought to myself.

Whitney’s constructive suggestion was to simply use the Bible as the basis for our prayer. You can turn any passage into a prayer, with a little careful meditation. I have taught this practice regarding the Psalms, but I hadn’t thought of it on a broader basis, as Whitney was suggesting.

So I took it home and tried it out. Guess what? It has deepened my enjoyment of Scripture and it has helped my prayer life. He’s right – it is easy and it works wonders for your devotional shortcomings.

Let me provide one example to illustrate. I’ve been reading the “pastoral epistles” – Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus. I took a couple of verses from I Timothy 3



which read as follows: “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...” This is especially appropriate for me as a pastor, so my prayers ran as follows: “Lord, you have called me to be an overseer in your church, and that is a fine work you have called me to do. Please help me to carry out my oversight faithfully. And Lord, thank you for calling other men to be overseers also – Rich, Don, Mark, Bob and Roger. Please grant us all the desire and diligence to carry out our offices together. Lord, you have called us to be above reproach. Forgive me for the ways I have brought reproach on your name, on myself and my office. Please help me to be a good husband to my wife, and thank you for my wife. Bless her in her calling as my helper and my companion. Lord, I am also supposed to be temperate and prudent. Please develop these qualities in me

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Inside this issue:

<i>Pastor’s Article</i>	1
<i>Preacher of Good Tidings by Kuiper</i>	2-4
<i>Finance by Joel Moody</i>	5
<i>Birthdays</i>	6
<i>Sad But True</i>	6
<i>Calendar</i>	7
<i>Thank You!</i>	8
<i>Smoke Signals</i>	8
<i>Grace Church—Struggles</i>	9
<i>Rev. De Master</i>	
<i>’Twas the Night Before Jesus Came</i>	10
<i>The Messiah</i>	11
<i>Pine Haven Sale</i>	11
<i>Recipe Corner</i>	12
<i>Did You Know?</i>	12
Mnemonics...	
• <i>Men’s Study, 2nd</i>	
• <i>Meadowview Manor, 10th</i>	
• <i>Sunday School Christmas Program, 29th</i>	

Continued on page 5

Preacher of Good Tidings

by R. B. Kuiper

In a great many churches only the gospel of “be good and do good” is proclaimed. To it applies Paul's scathing description: “another gospel which is not another” (Galatians 1:6, 7). It is a wholly different kind of gospel and therefore does not rate as a second gospel alongside the gospel which the apostle preached. In reality it is no gospel at all.

The word *gospel* means *good news*. That which is preached as gospel in so many churches is not even news, let alone good news. A man has been found guilty, shall we say, of a heinous crime and has been sentenced to death. He is now in prison, awaiting the day of his execution. A friend comes to visit him. This friend calls out: “I have good news for you!” Eagerly the condemned man asks: “What is it?” The answer comes: “Be good.” In that message there is not so much as a shred of good news. It is most cruel mockery. Yet many a self-styled minister of Christ holds forth to sinners under the sentence of eternal death a precisely equivalent message as gospel.

The gospel contained in Holy Writ does not primarily tell sinners what they must do, but, contrariwise, *what God has done and is doing for them*.

To be the bearer of those good tidings — a few glimpses of which follow — is the inestimably great honor of the Christian church.

“GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD”

John 3:16 has often been said to be “the gospel in a nutshell.” “God so loved the world,” we are told, “that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The term *world* as it occurs here has often been interpreted quantitatively. Some have said: “The love of God is so great that it embraces all the elect, and they are a throng which no man can

number.” Others have said: “The love of God is so great that it embraces not only the elect but all human beings that have ever lived on the face of the earth, all that live there now, and all that remain to be born.” Still others have said: “The love of God is so great that it embraces not only all men but the sum total of things created, the whole of the universe.” But all three of these interpretations attempt to measure the infinite in terms of the finite, and that is something which cannot be done. God is infinite in all His attributes, also in His love. In comparison with the infinite the sum total of finite things is precisely nothing.

Benjamin B. Warfield was, no doubt, right when, in a sermon on John 3:16, he insisted that *world* must here be interpreted qualitatively. The *holy* God loves *sinful* humanity — that is the amazing truth here revealed. Amazing it is. God is the Holy One of Israel, the Perfection of Holiness, in whose presence the very seraphs cover their faces as they cry out: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:1-3). That holy God looks down to earth and there sees sinful men, veritable lepers, covered with spiritual leprosy from the crowns of their heads to the soles of their feet. And unbelievable though it may seem, He loves them.

How that is possible no mortal will ever comprehend. Only this do we know: divine love differs from human love in that, while the latter is dependent on its object, the former is not. God loves sinners for reasons that reside, not in them, but in God Himself.

An old legend has it that the only thing that can melt adamant is the blood of a lamb. So, it has been said, the blood of the Lamb of God was required to melt the adamantine heart of God. But John 3:16 teaches quite the opposite. God loved sinful men long before the blood of His Son was shed on Calvary. It was God's infinite love that moved Him to send His Son into the world that He might die for the ungodly.

God had a Son, an only-begotten Son. He loved that Son with all the love of which the heart of God is capable. But so unsearchably great was His love for hell-deserving sinners that He willingly gave

Kuiper Continued...

the Son of His eternal and infinite love to suffer the anguish and torment of hell in their stead. As we contemplate that truth, it behooves us to bow our heads in adoration and to whisper: "Lord God, we cannot understand; we do not begin to comprehend ; but, because Thou sayest it, we believe."

On the ground of the finished work of His Son, God offers everlasting life to sinners everywhere, and He does so freely. Salvation is a gift of purest grace. Man need neither work nor pay for it. He may have it for the taking. Not even by taking it does he merit it. All he needs to do is look away from self and every other creature and look to Christ crucified. In that look there is life, even life eternal, for it is the very essence of saving faith.

Such are the good tidings of John 3:16, and these stammering remarks give but an inkling of the infinite love of God which it declares.

"CHRIST DIED FOR THE UNGODLY"

Another summary statement — and no less profound — of the good tidings which the church is honored to bring to sinful men is contained in Romans 5:6, 8 — "In due time Christ died for the ungodly" and "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Christ's death on the cross constituted at once the very nadir of His humiliation and the very zenith of His obedience to the Father, who had sent Him. Paul tells us: "He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). It was the zenith both of His passive obedience, manifest in His suffering, and of His active obedience, manifest in His keeping the law of God.

Men are ungodly sinners. For such the justice of God demands death in its most comprehensive sense. They are hell-deserving. But Christ "descended into hell" in sinners' stead. When He

was hanging on Calvary's cross He bore the curse that was due to the ungodly. When He cried out with a loud voice: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) He was at the very bottom of the bottomless pit, where man deserved to be, and all the waves and billows of the divine wrath against man's sin rolled over His head and crushed His soul. In consequence there is now no condemnation for those who believe on His name. So far as they are concerned, the justice of God is satisfied and His wrath is appeased. God so declared by raising His Son from the dead.

*"Salvation is a
gift of purest
grace..."*

From the beginning God decreed that eternal life would be the reward of perfect obedience to Him. Implicit in His threat to Adam, the representative head of our race: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17), was the promise of life as the reward of obedience. Adam became disobedient and thus brought death upon himself and all his descendants. And ever since the fall human nature has been so corrupt that no man is able to keep God's commandments. But, lo and behold, in the fullness of time there appeared upon the scene of history another Adam, the last Adam, even Jesus Christ. He kept the law of God to the point of perfection. And to all who believe on Him God imputes His perfect righteousness as their very own. "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). The believer may jubilantly sing: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bride-groom decketh himself with ornaments and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10). Wearing the robe of Christ's righteousness, he may pass through the gates of pearl into the golden city and enter the palace of the King.

Thus Christ by His death on the cross

Kuiper Concluded...

made provision, not only for paying the debt of sinners to the uttermost farthing, but also for procuring for them the riches of eternal glory.

“THE LORD IS NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH”

The puny minds of men often insist that the gospel should tell us that in the end all men will be saved. “That,” they say, “would be good news indeed.” And not a few have distorted Holy Scripture so as to make it teach that very thing. Today we are witnessing a mighty resurgence in several churches of the ancient heresy of universal salvation. But the undeniable teaching of the Word of God is that only God’s elect will enter through the gates into the city.

However, let no one conclude that the Word of God contains good news only for the elect. The same Bible which teaches election also contains an abundance of good news for each and every sinner. As striking a paradox as any in Holy Writ is that the very God who from eternity elected a limited number of men to eternal life invites in perfect sincerity to life eternal all to whom the gospel comes. No theologian has ever succeeded in harmonizing the elements of that paradox before the bar of human reason, but the greatest theologians have humbly accepted both as the very truth of God.

John 3:16 and Romans 5:6, 8 were not written for the elect alone. And Scripture tells of a universal love of God which comes to expression, not only in the gifts of rain and sunshine to the evil as well as the good, the unjust as well as the just, but also in the sincere offer of salvation to all who hear the gospel. Swearing by Himself, God says: “As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and

live” (Ezekiel 33:11). And the apostle Peter assures us that “the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9).

In the light of such passages of Holy Scripture the greatest teachers and preachers of the Christian church have proclaimed the glad tidings that God will not only be pleased to save all who repent and believe, but also that He will be pleased to have all to whom the gospel comes repent and believe and thus be saved. Commenting on Ezekiel 18:23, which parallels Ezekiel 33:11, Calvin said:

“Thus Christ by His death on the cross made provision, not only for paying the debt of sinners ... but also for procuring for them the riches of eternal glory.”

“God desires nothing more earnestly than that those who were perishing and rushing to destruction should return into the way of safety.” The Canons of Dort, which are a precise formulation by the Reformed churches of Europe of the so-called five points of Calvinism, insist: “As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For¹ God has most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what will be acceptable to Him: namely, that all who are called should come unto Him” (Heads of Doctrine III and IV, Article 8). Herman Bavinck, that prince of Dutch theologians, has asserted that the call of the gospel “is for all without exception proof of God’s infinite love” (*Gere-formeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. IV, p. 7).

That, too, is a significant aspect of the glorious gospel the proclamation of which is the glorious task of the glorious church. God Himself charged His church with that task when He cried: “O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid” (Isaiah 40:9).

Taken from The Glorious Body of Christ by R. B. Kuiper, Chapter 28, 176-181.

COMMENTS ON FINANCES

written by Joel Moody

General Fund

October General Fund receipts totaled \$14,006.39 as compared to budgeted receipts of \$11,970.89. Actual disbursements for the same period were \$10,015.50. October Year to Date Actual General Fund receipts totaled \$129,989.28 while Actual General Fund Disbursements for the same time period totaled \$101,493.67. Budgeted General Fund Receipts/Disbursements were \$112,526.39.

Benevolences

Actual October Benevolence receipts totaled \$1,174.50 while Budgeted Benevolence receipts were \$1,250.00. For the first ten months of the year, Actual Benevolence receipts totaled \$12,641.16 while Budgeted receipts for the same period were \$12,500.00.

A FRUITFUL INTERSECTION Concluded from page 1...

respect, and help the congregation to respect us and our work. Lord, you know how often I fail to be hospitable – please grant me a heart of hospitality, a willingness to show your love and kindness to others. And lastly, Lord, thank you for giving me the ability and the opportunity to teach your people. Please grant me integrity in my teaching, so that I might not lead any astray. Bring fruit from my teaching, and help your people to learn and grow under my ministry...”

In this way, I have meditated more deeply on those two verses and come to a better understanding of their meaning and application to my life. I have also engaged in sustained and concentrated prayer regarding important

subjects. The prayers have included confession, adoration, intercession, thanksgiving and supplication.

Recently I was sharing this with one of our members who loves the book of Proverbs. We looked at a proverb together, and found that you could easily use this method in the Proverbs. Obviously some of the Prophetic books might be more challenging, and narrative sections of the Old Testament would also require some thought. Yet I am convinced that, with practice, this method could be used on virtually any passage of Scripture. The benefits and blessings would abound. So let me encourage you to try this, and let me know your experiences!

December Birthdays



*Happy
Birthday!!!*

Sad But True

Submitted by Ellen McNeese

Unfortunately many homes, yes even so-called Christian homes, are like the one in which the little girl pointed to the Bible on the mantle that was never opened, and said to her mother, “Whose book is that?”

Her mother quite startled by her daugh-

ter’s question replied, “Why honey, don’t you know? That is God’s book!”

The child demonstrating that she had a very practical mind, turned to her mother and said, “Don’t you think that we had better give it back to him?”

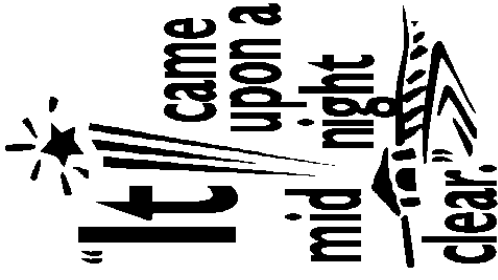




Grace OPC

December 2006

Showing forth the excellencies of Jesus Christ



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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
3	4 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.	5	6 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	7	8	9 Men's Bible Study 7:30 a.m.
10 Missions Sunday <i>Meadowview Manor 2 p.m.</i>	11 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m. <i>Theology 4 p.m.</i>	12 Pine Haven Study, 1:30 p.m.	13 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	14	15 Catechism Class 8:45 a.m.	16
17	18 Women's Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.	19	20 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	21	22	23
24 Christmas Program (p.m.)	25	26	27 Prayer Meeting, 7 p.m.	28	29	30
31 Lord's Supper						

Thank You!!

Kathy Rodencal would like to say thank you to all of the Youth Group members & friends who helped her out in her home in a variety of ways on the Youth Group Work Day (October 28th).



Smoke Signals

The only survivor of a shipwreck washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store a few possessions. But then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling into the sky. The worst had happened; everything was lost. He was struck with grief and anger. "God, how could you do this to me!" he cried. Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island. It had come to rescue him.



"How did you know I was here?" asked the weary man of his rescuers. "We saw your smoke signal," they replied.

It is easy to get discouraged when things are going bad. But we shouldn't lose heart. Remember next time your little hut is burning to the ground—it may just be a smoke signal that summons the grace of God.

The more you give, the more you get—The more you laugh, the less you fret.

The more you do unselfishly, the more you live abundantly.

HISTORY OF GRACE CHURCH - STRUGGLES

written by Rev. Ivan De Master

The third pastor of Grace Church was Rev. William Laun. Pastor Jonathan Falk left for Maine at the end of April, 1986. The pastoral search committee first presented the Rev. Thomas Church, former intern of Bethel Church, Oostburg, and RHM in the Presbytery of the Northwest. The vote to issue him a call fell one vote short of the required 2/3 majority. The next candidate presented was William Laun. The congregation on August 31, 1986, voted unanimously to call him as their next pastor.

William Laun was born in Sheboygan and grew up in Kiel. He attended the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Sensing a call to the ministry he attended and graduated from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. After graduation the Launs had become part of the New Life Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.

William and Kathy Laun arrived in Sheboygan the end of September and began to serve at Grace Church. Bill was not yet ordained and therefore had to prepare for his ordination exams. These he successfully completed and he was ordained by the Presbytery of the Midwest on March 7, 1987. On Sunday, March 8, Samuel Brian Laun was baptized. Their second child Caitlin Anne was baptized on April 24, 1988.

During this time the congregation was finding it difficult to meet the church's budget commitments. Some members had moved or left so that the pressure increased. A special congregational meeting was called for June 26, 1988 to consider the question: "Should Grace Church continue?" The moderator, elder Steve Nyenhuis, pointed out 3 difficulties facing the church: 1. Membership

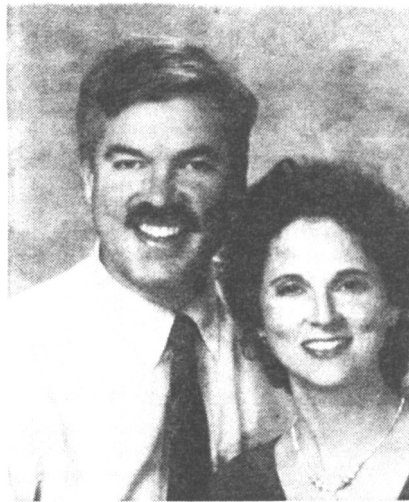
decline 2. Financial problems 3. Differences in philosophy of ministry. Discussion followed on the calling of Grace Church, financial consideration, and philosophy of ministry. No conclusion was reached at this meeting.

Following this meeting Pastor Laun came to the conclusion that he should present his resignation. A special meeting was held on July 10, 1988. The congregation agreed to accept his resignation and to request presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship. At a subsequent special meeting of the congregation, held August 7, 1988, a motion was passed to continue Grace Church and also continue with interim plans. (The vote was 16 yes, 2 no and 4 abstain.) A further motion was passed to request presbytery to return Grace Church to chapel status under the oversight of the Session of Bethel Church in Oostburg.

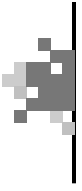
Presbytery approved the request from Grace Church and a

steering committee consisting of Harlan Harmelink, Tom VerVelde, and Mark Berenschot worked with the Bethel Session to carry on the ministry of Grace Church. In this way and with the financial help from Calvary and Bethel Churches, Grace Church moved ahead.

The Rev. Bill Laun accepted a call from New Life OPC, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, to serve as associate pastor where he served from 1988 to 1994. (This congregation transferred to the PCA in 1990.) In 1994 he accepted a call to be organizing pastor of Valley Spring PCA mission in Appleton. He served there until 1996. Since then the Launs have been living in Kiel and he is without call.



Rev. William & Kathy Laun



Pine Haven Christmas Bake Sale

It's time again for the annual Pine Haven Christmas Bake and Craft Sale. The sale will be held on Friday, December 1 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. in the lobby of the Oostburg State Bank. All proceeds help support the residents of Pine Haven.

Donations of homemade baked goods and handmade arts and crafts are needed. Please contact Marge Halbach

or Kate Nagle if you would like to help. Prepackage your baked good in quantities ready for sale. Attach a label naming the item and if it contains anything of health concern i.e. peanuts or nuts.



The Messiah

On Sunday, December 24, Christmas Eve, the "Christmas Messiah" will be the Sunday School Christmas Program. This version of the "Messiah" will be joyfully sung by many

adults and children. Please come to hear the music and join in celebrating and remembering our Savior at His birth through these familiar and majestic songs.





**Proclaiming the
Excellencies of our
Lord Jesus Christ.**

The Monthly Newsletter
of Grace OPC

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WWW.OPC.ORG



★ The Nicene Creed was written to expose the error of the idea that Jesus Christ was merely a creature by affirming the truth of His diety?

★ Aruis was the man responsible for promoting the erroneous opinion that Jesus was not divine but created?

★ Athanasius worked to defend and explain that the Christ was divine?

★ The Council of Nicaea met in 325 A.D.?

★ Emperor Constantine was the one who asked people to come together for it?

★ This resulting Nicene Creed is actually “the first written creed of the Church.”¹

*Information found at http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=177 and
¹ *The Church in History* by B.K. Kuiper. Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951; p. 56-58.*

Tom Thumbs

Cream:

- ★ 1 cup butter
- ★ 4 large Tbs. sugar

Add:

- ★ 1 Tbs. water
- ★ 2 Tbs. vanilla

Slowly add:

- ★ 2 cups flour (sifted)
- ★ 1 1/2 cup pecans (chopped)

Preheat oven to 325°. Shape cookies into the size of nickel or thumb crescents or balls. Bake for 20 minutes. Bottom of cookies must be golden brown. Then roll in sifted powdered sugar.

Megan Boss



“There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God. For who can have enjoyment without Him?”