

REFLECTIONS

Grace OPC

DESPERATE TO BE JUSTIFIED

By Pastor Brian De Jong

At bottom, everybody wants to be justified! This is one of the great longings of the human spirit – to be justified in the sight of all. I sincerely believe this is true, and remains a key to understanding the times in which we live.

For many people, that really boils down to the longing to be considered a “good” person. Such good people are intent on doing good deeds that will bring them some sense of satisfaction and justification. It validates them in their own eyes, at least. “I’ve been a good person,” is the thought that comforts their strangely uneasy consciences.

Such a longing for justification can lead men and women to do almost super-human things in service to others. They choose a cause, and they pour themselves into that cause. They sacrifice time, money, and opportunity in order to advance the cause and serve the chosen purpose.

Many of these pursuits are not bad, in -and-of themselves. People who tirelessly work to eradicate juvenile diabetes, for instance, are performing commendable service. Humans who rescue abused animals and rehabilitate them are performing acts of kindness towards God’s creatures – again we can admire that. There are many and varied forms of social service which have positive results for the human race – we do not disdain them for what they accomplish.

The only problem is that these pursuits are not the one, essential thing. They end up being substitutes for that

great longing – attempts to fill a God-shaped hole with something other than God. Well did Saint Augustine say, “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”

Trying to fill that void with something other than God is a vain and empty pursuit – an effort that is doomed to disappoint. Only God can give us that sense of rest, when we have finally arrived at Him and found our rest in Him.



The fact of the matter is that no one has ever, or can ever, be justified in God’s sight through good works done in obedience to laws, rules or requirements. It is simply impossible to justify one’s self through your own noble efforts, be they ever so sincere and diligent.

The better answer to the longing is this – come to God through Jesus Christ. Believe in Him and rest in Him, and you will find Him to be more than you ever dreamed – more than you could possibly expect. Be justified through faith in Jesus Christ – that is what your restless heart craves!

When we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, then we are set free to be hyper-productive for God’s kingdom and glory. Now we can tackle important goals with zest and vigor! Then we can live unto Him with the knowledge that He approves our works.

Listen to how Solomon describes the contented life of the believer, in Ecclesiastes 9:7-9.

⁷Go then, eat your bread in happiness and

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Volume 11, Issue 5

May 2016

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Mnemonics...

- *Church Work Day, 7th*
- *Fellowship Lunch, 22nd*

Marks of the Smoking Flax

By Richard Sibbes

To determine whether we are this smoking flax which Christ will not quench, we must remember these rules: We must have two eyes: one to see imperfections in ourselves and others, and the other to see what is good. "I am black," says the church, "but attractive" (Song of Sol. 1:5). Those who are given to quarrelling within themselves always lack comfort; and through their infirmities, they are prone to feed on those bitter things which most nourish the disease that troubles them. They delight to look only on the dark side of the cloud. We must not always judge ourselves according to our present feelings, for in temptations we see nothing but the smoke of untrustworthy thoughts. Fire may be raked up in the ashes, even though it is not seen; life in the winter is hidden in the root.

We must beware of false reasoning, such as thinking that, because our fire does not blaze as brightly as others do, we therefore have no fire at all. By drawing false conclusions, we may sin against the commandment not to bear false witness — against ourselves. The prodigal would not say he was not a son, but that he was not worthy to be called a son (Luke 15:19). We must neither trust false evidence, nor deny true evidence; for by doing so we dishonor the work of God's Spirit in us; we lose the help of that evidence which cherishes our love toward Christ, and arms us against Satan's discouragements. Some are as faulty in this way as if they had been hired by Satan, the "accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10), to plead for him in accusing themselves.

OUR RULE IS THE COVENANT OF GRACE

We must acknowledge that in the covenant

of grace, God requires the truth of grace, but not in any particular measure; a spark of fire is as much fire as the flame. Therefore we must look to grace in the spark as well as in the flame. All do not have the same strength of grace, though they have the same precious faith (2 Pet. 1:1) by which they lay hold of, and put on, the perfect righteousness of Christ. A weak hand may receive a rich jewel. A few grapes will show that the plant is a vine, and not a thorn bush. It is one thing to be deficient in grace, and another thing

"A spark of fire is as much fire as the flame."

to lack grace altogether. God knows we have nothing of ourselves; therefore in the covenant of grace, he requires no more than he gives, but gives what he requires, and accepts what he gives: "If she is not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtle doves" (Lev. 12:8). What is the gospel itself but a merciful moderation in which Christ's obedience is esteemed ours, and our sins are laid

upon him? In this, God turns from being a judge and becomes our Father, pardoning our sins and accepting our obedience, even though feeble and blemished. We are now brought to heaven under the covenant of grace by way of love and mercy.

It will prove a special help to distinctly know the difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, between Moses and Christ. Moses, without any mercy, breaks all bruised reeds, and quenches all smoking flax. For the law requires personal, perpetual, and perfect obedience from the heart, under threat of a most terrible curse; but it gives no strength. It is a severe task master, like Pharaoh requiring the whole tale of bricks and yet giving no straw. Christ comes with blessing after blessing, even upon those whom Moses cursed, and with healing balm for those wounds which Moses made.

The same duties are required in both covenants, such as to love the Lord with all our

hearts and with all our souls (Deut. 6:5). In the covenant of works, this must be fulfilled absolutely; but under the covenant of grace, it must have an evangelical mitigation. A sincere endeavor that is proportionate to the grace we have received is accepted (and so it must be understood of Josiah and others when it is said that they did what was right in the sight of the Lord — 2Kg 22:2).

The law is sweetened by the gospel, and it becomes delightful to the inner man (Rom. 7:22). Under this gracious covenant, sincerity is perfection. This is the death in the pot of the Romish religion, that they confound the two covenants; it deadens the comfort of discouraged ones that they cannot distinguish them. And thus they allow themselves to be held under bondage when Christ has set them free, and to stay in the prison when Christ has opened the doors before them.

We must remember that grace sometimes is so little as to be indiscernible to us. The Spirit sometimes has secret operations in us which we do not know for the present, but Christ knows. Sometimes, in bitterness of temptation, when the spirit struggles with a sense of God's anger, we are apt to think God is an enemy. A troubled soul is like troubled water: we can see nothing in it, and as long as it is not cleansed, it will cast up mire and dirt. It is full of objections against itself. Yet we may still discern something of the hidden life and of these smothered sparks. Even on a gloomy day, there is enough light to know it is day and not night. In the same way, there is something in a Christian who is under a cloud by which he may be discerned as a true believer, and not a hypocrite. There is not just darkness in the state of grace, but some beam of light by which the kingdom of darkness does not wholly prevail.

THE PRESENCE OF THE HEAVENLY

FIRE

Applying these rules, we may say:

First, if there is any holy fire in us, it is kindled from heaven by the Father of lights, who “commanded the light to shine out of darkness” (2Cor.4: 6). As it is kindled by the use of means, so it is fed. The light in us and the light in the Word spring the one from the other and both from the one Holy Spirit. Therefore, in the case of those who do not regard the Word, it is “because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). Heavenly truths must have a heavenly light to discern them. Natural men see heavenly things, not in their own proper light, but by an inferior light. In every converted man, God puts a light into the eye of his soul proportionate to the light of truths revealed to him. A carnal eye will never see spiritual things.

Secondly, the least divine light has heat with it in some measure. Light in the understanding produces heat of love in the affections. In the measure that the sanctified understanding sees a thing as true or good, in that same measure the will embraces it. Weak light produces weak inclinations; strong light produces strong inclinations. A little spiritual light is strong enough to answer strong objections of flesh and blood, and to see beyond all earthly allurements and opposing hindrances, presenting them to the will as far inferior to those heavenly objects it beholds. All light that is not spiritual lacks the strength of sanctifying grace; and so it yields to every little temptation, especially when the temptation is fitted and suited to one's personal inclinations. This is why Christians whose quantity of light is little, but whose quality of light is heavenly, manage to persevere when men of larger understanding sink. Light prevails in the soul because, together with the spirit of illumination, there goes a spirit of power in the godly

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The Smoking Flax Continued...

(2Tim. 1:7). It subdues the heart to revealed truth, and puts a taste and relish into the will, suitable to the sweetness of the truth. Otherwise, a will that is merely natural will rise up against supernatural truths, having antipathy and enmity against them. In the godly, holy truths are conveyed because there is a taste for them; gracious men have a spiritual palate as well as a spiritual eye. Grace alters the spiritual taste.

Thirdly, where this heavenly light is kindled, it directs us in the right way. For it is given for that purpose: to show us the best way and guide us in the particular passages of life. Otherwise, it is common light, given only for the good of others. Some have the light of knowledge, yet they do not follow that light; they are guided by carnal reason and policy. These are the ones the prophet speaks of, "All you who kindle a fire . . . walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks you have kindled. This is what you shall have from my hand: you shall lie down in sorrow" (Isa. 50:11). God delights to confound carnal wisdom as enmity towards him, robbing him who is God only wise of his prerogative. We must therefore walk by his light, not by the blaze of our own fire. God must light our candle (Psa. 18:28) or else we will abide in darkness. Those sparks that are not kindled from heaven are not strong enough to keep us from lying in sorrow, though they make a greater blaze and bigger show than the light from above. Madmen do greater things than sober men, but it is done by a false strength: in the same way, the excess of these men's joy arises from a false light. "The light of the wicked shall be put out" (Job 18:5). The light which some men have is like lightning which, after a sudden flash, leaves them more in darkness.

“ A little holy light enables us to keep Christ's Word and not betray religion.”

They can love the light as it shines, but they hate it as it reveals and directs them. A little holy light enables us to keep Christ's Word and not betray religion, nor deny his name, as Christ speaks of the church of Philadelphia (Rev. 3:8).

Fourthly, where this fire burns, it severs things of diverse natures, and shows a difference between them, such as between gold and dross. It severs flesh from spirit, and shows that one is of nature, and the other of grace. Everything in a bad action is not bad, nor is everything good in a good action. There is gold in ore, which God, and his Spirit in us, can distinguish. A carnal man's heart is like a dungeon, in which nothing can be seen but horror and confusion. This light makes us judicious and humble, as we gain a clearer sight of God's purity and our own uncleanness; and it makes us able to discern the work of the Spirit in another.

Fifthly, the more spiritual a man is, the more light is delightful to him. He is willing to see anything amiss that he may reform, and discover any further service that he may perform, because he truly hates ill and loves good. If he goes against the light he has discovered, he will soon be reclaimed, because light has a friend within him. Therefore, at a glimpse of his error he is soon open to counsel, just as David was open to Abigail's counsel in his intention to kill Nabal; and he blessed God afterwards when he was stopped from his ill way (1 Sam. 25:32).

In the case of a carnal man, the light breaks in on him, but he labors to block its entrance. He has no delight in coming to the light. Before the Spirit of grace has subdued the heart, it is impossible for the heart not to sin against the light, either by resisting it, or by keeping it prisoner under base lusts, and burying it, as it were, in the earth; or by perverting it, and so making it an agent and broker for the flesh, searching out

The Smoking Flax Continued...

arguments to plead for it; or by abusing that small measure of light which men have, so as to keep out a greater, higher, and more heavenly light. So at length they make the light they have a misleading guide into utter darkness. And the reason is because the light has no friend within them. The soul has a contrary frame, and so light always hinders that sinful peace which men are willing to promise themselves. Hence we see that light often enrages men more, just as the sun in springtime brings on feverish illnesses when it stirs up bodily reactions, rather than overcoming them.

There is nothing in the world more uneasy than the heart of a wicked man who is made to listen to spiritual instruction until, like a thief, he puts out the candle so that he may sin with less restraint. Spiritual light is perceptive. It apprehends spiritual good and applies it to ourselves; but common light is confused, and it lets sin lie quietly. Where any fire is found, it fights everything contrary to it. God put irreconcilable hatred between light and darkness from the first; as he put between good and ill, flesh and Spirit (Gal. 5:17). Grace will never join with sin, any more than fire will join with water. Fire will mingle with nothing contrary to itself, but preserves its own purity; it is never corrupted as other elements can be. Therefore, those who plead and plot for liberties for their flesh, show themselves to be strangers from the life of God. Feeling this conflict, gracious men often complain that they have no grace. But they contradict themselves in their complaints, like a man who sees poorly might complain that he cannot see at all, or that he is asleep. The very complaint he makes, which springs from his own displeasure with sin, shows that there is something in

“Where any fire is found, it fights everything contrary to it.”

him which opposes sin. Can a dead man complain? Some things, though bad in themselves, still reveal good, just as smoke reveals the presence of fire. A violent reaction in the body shows bodily vigor. Some infirmities show more good in us than some seemingly beautiful actions. Excess passion in opposing evil, though it is not to be justified, still shows a better spirit than being calm when we ought to be moved. It is better that the water runs somewhat muddy, than not run at all. Job had more grace in his ill temper than his friends had in their seemingly wise demeanor. Actions stained with some defects are more acceptable than empty compliments.

Sixthly, fire, where it is present, is in some degree active. This is how the least measure of grace works, springing from the Spirit of God who is compared to fire in his operations. Even in sins, when there seems to be nothing active but corruption, there is a contrary principle which breaks the force of sin, so that it is not boundlessly sinful, as it is in those who are carnal (Rom. 7:13).

Seventhly, fire makes metals pliable and malleable. So too, where grace is given, it makes the heart pliable and ready to receive all good impressions. Obstinate spirits show that they are not even smoking flax.

Eighthly, if it can, fire sets everything around it on fire. Grace labors in this same way to produce a gracious impression in others, and make as many good as it can. Grace also makes a gracious use even of natural and civil things: it spiritualizes them. What another man does only in a civil way, a gracious man will do in a holy way. Whether he eats or drinks or whatever he does, he does it all to the glory of God (1Cor. 10:31), making everything serviceable to that ultimate end.

Ninthly, sparks by nature fly upwards. The

The Smoking Flax Concluded...

Spirit of grace likewise carries the soul heavenward and sets before us holy and heavenly aims. As it was kindled from heaven, so it carries us back to heaven. The part follows the whole: just as fire climbs upward, so every spark rises to its own element. Where the aim and bent of the soul is towards God, there is grace, even though it is opposed. The least measure of it is seen in holy desires, springing from faith and love; for we cannot desire anything which we do not first believe exists (Heb. 11:6), and the desire for it issues from love. Hence, in some measure desires are considered part of the thing desired. But these desires must be (1) constant, for constancy shows that their nature is supernatural, and not forced; (2) directed toward spiritual things, such as believing and loving God; these are not born out of a particular emergency, like thinking one might escape some danger if he had grace; but they are born of a loving heart that is carried to the thing it loves, for the sake of its own excellence; (3) accompanied by grief when the desire is hindered, which stirs us to pray: "Oh that my ways were directed, that I might keep your statutes!" (Psa. 119:5); "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" (Rom. 7:24); and (4) the kind of desires that drive us onward still: "Oh, that I might serve God with more liberty. Oh, that I were more free from these offensive, unsavory, and hateful lusts!"

Tenthly, fire, if it has any material to feed on, enlarges itself and mounts higher and higher; and the higher it rises, the purer the flame becomes. Where true grace is found, it grows in measure and purity. Smoking flax will grow into a flame; and as it increases, it discards what is contrary to itself, and it refines itself more and more. *Ignis, quo magis lucet, eo minus fumat* (As fire gives more light, it gives

less smoke). Therefore, it indicates a false heart when we set ourselves a low standard in grace, and rest in beginnings, alleging that Christ will not quench the smoking flax. This merciful disposition in Christ is joined with perfect holiness, shown in perfect hatred toward sin; for rather than sin not receiving its deserved punishment, he became a sacrifice for sin. In this, his Father's holiness and his own shone most of all. And besides this, in the work of sanctification, though he favors his work in us, he does not favor sin in us; for he will never remove his hand from his work until he has removed sin from our natures, even in its very being. The same Spirit that purified his holy human nature, cleanses us by degrees, making us suitable for so holy a Head; he molds the judgment and affections of all those to whom he shows mercy to his own, laboring to further his end of abolishing sin from our natures.

Sibbes, Richard, The Bruised Reed, Chapter 6, Marks of the Smoking Flax



May Birthdays



Pizza Ranch Fundraiser

The Pine Haven Women's Auxiliary will be having their Pizza Ranch Fundraiser on Monday, May 16 from 4:30– 8:00 p.m. at the Oostburg Pizza Ranch. 10% of all food purchased will be donated to benefit the residents of Pine Haven.



Comments on Finance

by Joel Moody

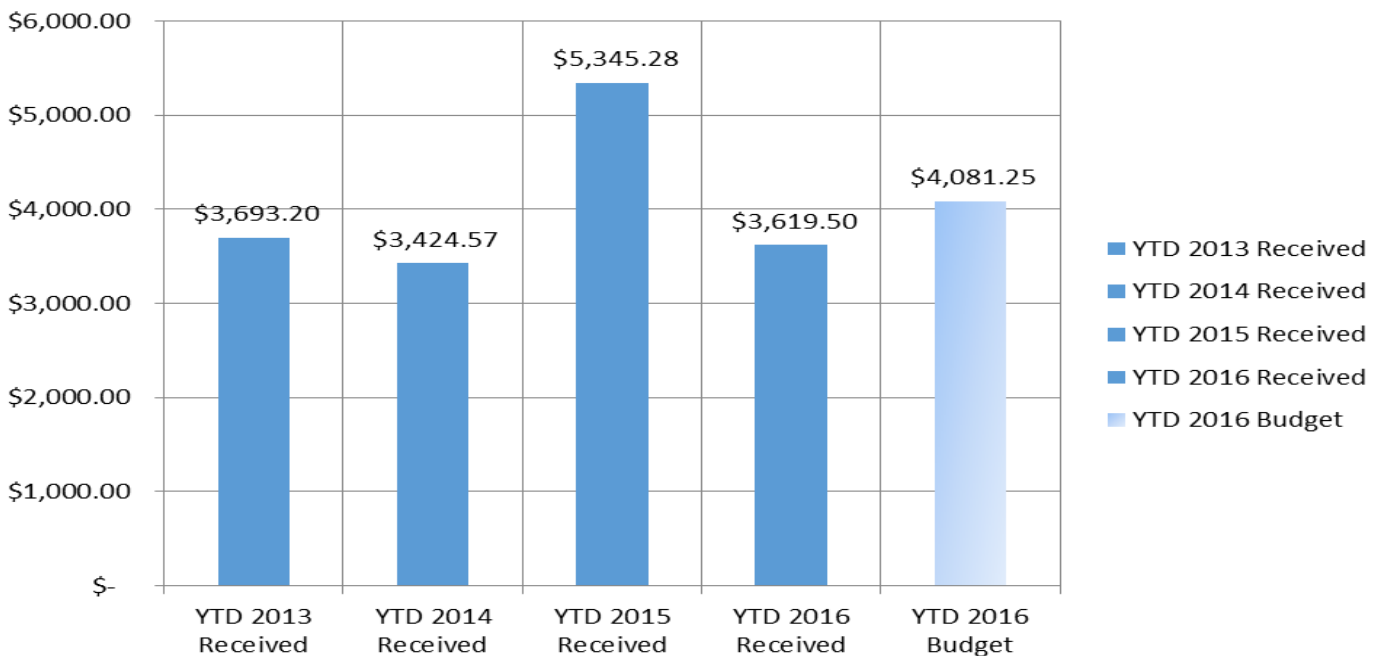
General Fund receipts for March totaled \$13,397.45 as compared to the budget of \$12,893.70, while General Fund disbursements for March totaled \$16,522.21. March year to date General Fund receipts totaled \$44,452.77 as compared to the budget of \$41,904.50 (an excess of \$2,548.27), while March year to date disbursements of \$44,048.99 were \$2,144.49 above budget. Through the end of March, the General Fund has increased by \$428.67. Year to date General Fund receipts for March were 21.6% above last year's total on an average Sunday while disbursements were 10.5% above the prior year.

Benevolence Fund Receipts for March totaled \$1,500.50 as compared to the budget of \$1,360.42 (an excess of \$140.08). Year to date Benevolence Fund Receipts through March totaled \$3,619.50 and were below budget by \$461.75. Please refer to the graph for a historical trend of benevolence receipts as well as the current benevolence budget. During March, \$500.00 was sent to Worldwide Outreach (WVO) for the General Missions outreach of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and \$200.00 was sent to the Midwest Presbytery's Church Extension Committee (CHEX). In addition, \$600.00

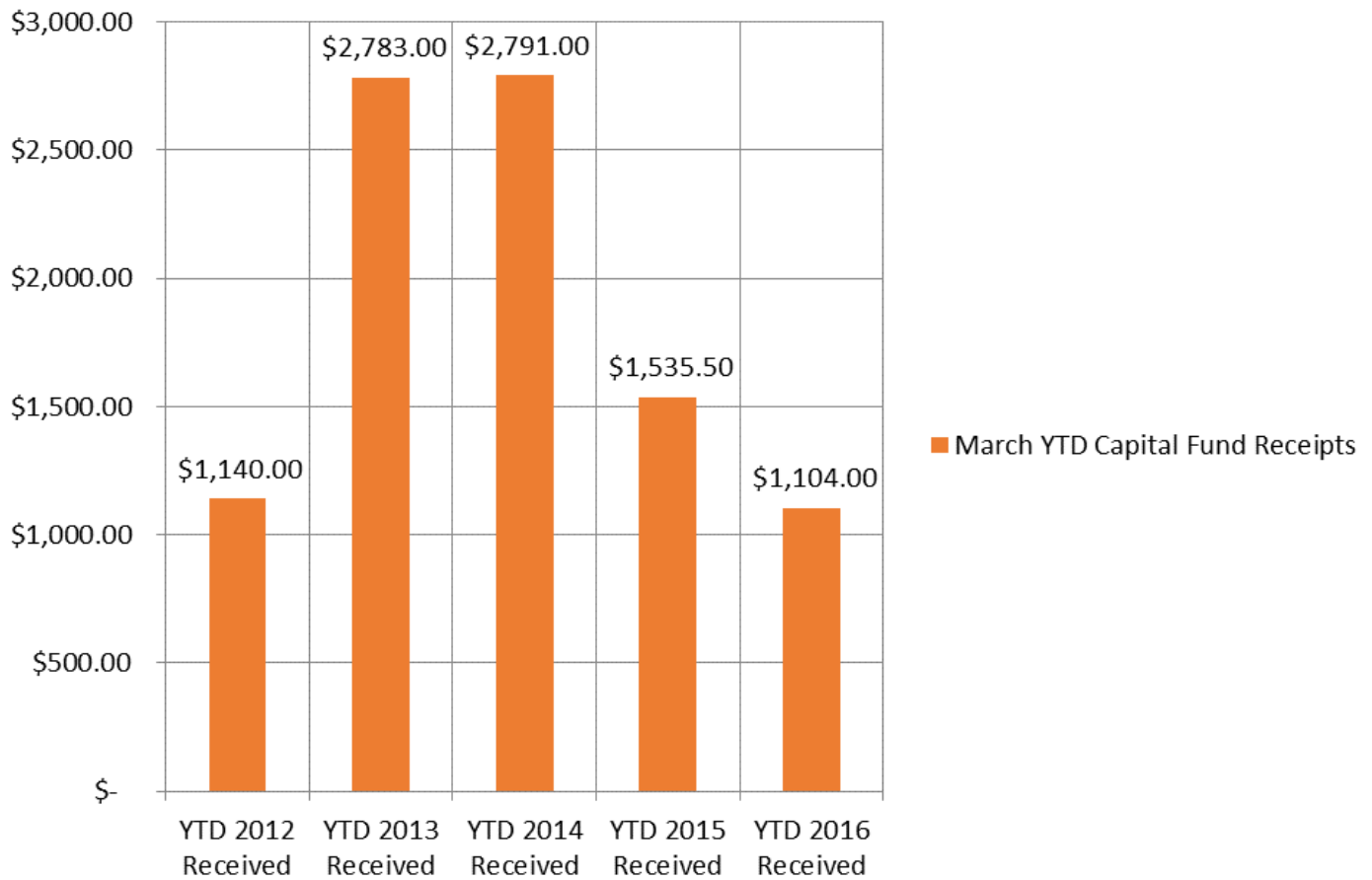
was provided towards the support of Menomonee OPC. During May, we plan to disburse funds of \$2,625.00 for the Hub-Spokes Program which supports the work of the Wingards in South Africa, the Hopps in Haiti, and Don Ritsman's work with Miami International Seminary.

March Year to Date giving for the **Capital Fund** was \$1,104.00. Please refer to the Capital Fund Graph that shows the historical giving for the years indicated in the graph. You may contribute to the Capital Fund by marking your gift as "Capital Fund" and placing it in the offering plate. Please note that the Capital Fund is used to pay for current and future needs that may exist to purchase additional equipment (such as computers, the sound system, tables and chairs, etc.) or building-type items (such as a parking lot, driveway, furnace boiler, etc.). Since some capital needs are quite substantial in nature, resources to finance and pay for these projects can take years to pay for them. Even though capital needs may not be large in the current year, we should wisely allocate our giving not only to current needs, but also to these future needs as well.

March YTD Benevolence Receipts Actual vs. Current Budget



March YTD Capital Fund Receipts



Bridal Shower

Save the date for Emile Doro's bridal shower, which will take place at the church at 6:30 p.m. on June 9th! All the ladies in the church are invited to attend. Emile is registered at Target and Relish Kitchen Store (on N. 8th street in Sheboygan.)



Bibles for Haiti

by Tim Voskuil

The Sunday School offerings given each week are dedicated to special projects, and every 4 months the session chooses another project to give our offering to.

During the months of May – August we will be dedicating our offerings to an OPC project called Bibles for Haiti.

We wanted to inform the congregation about this project so that you are informed as to where your offerings are going.

We contacted Ben Hopp who is our missionary in Haiti and asked him to give us an update about this project. He sent us an update and I want to include his response in this article.

“The OPC Haiti Mission put in place the Bibles/Reformed Literature Fund as a special project years ago. It was in response to the fact that many church members did not have Bibles or hymnbooks, or that there was very little in the way of Reformed literature available in Haiti. Bibles are available in both French and Haitian

Creole (the two official languages of Haiti) but not always affordable.

We already have the Westminster Standards in French and Haitian Creole, but want to make other important books and documents available to distribute to church members, theological students, and others who might be interested in knowing more about the Reformed faith.

In the past money has been used to purchase Bibles and hymnbooks for members of the church on the rural island of La Gonave where Pastor Ben Hopp preaches at least two Sundays per month.

The Funds have also been used to hire a translator to translate Morton Smith’s Systematic Theology for use in theological training.”

As you can see these monies have been put to good use in the past.

We also will have an opportunity to meet Pastor Ben Hopp this summer as he is currently on furlough and will be visiting Grace Church.



Session Digest

April 2016

The Session met on Tuesday, April 12 for our monthly meeting. As usual, we spent time reflecting on God's word from I Timothy 6:13-15 and had a season of prayer for the congregation. Several decisions were reached concerning our Christian education efforts. The Sunday School offering for May through August will be Bibles for Haiti (see Tim's article). Also, the adult class will be studying Thea Van Halsema's biography of John Calvin entitled "This Was John Calvin" during the summer. Two membership matters were also

handled. At the request of John and Sally Henderson, their membership was transferred to the PCA church in Omaha where they attend. Also, at her request we erased Amy Gross from the membership roll of Grace Church. We later communicated to Amy our action, our concern for her wellbeing and our prayers for her. We also discussed the family visits scheduled for the Spring, and other membership matters.

Fellowship Lunch

We will be having a fellowship lunch on Sunday, May 22nd after the morning service. A sign-up sheet will be on the bulletin board as the day gets closer. All are welcome to come!





Grace OPC

May 2016

Showing forth the excellencies of Jesus Christ



Church Office:
4930 Green Valley Ln
Sheboygan, WI 53083

Phone: 920-565-2160
Website:
graceopcsheboygan.com
Email:
graceopc@tds.net
revbriandjong@gmail.com

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	5	6	7 Church Work Day, 9:00 a.m.
8	9	10 Session Meeting 6:30 p.m.	11 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	12	13	14
15	16	17	18 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	19	20	21
22 Fellowship Lunch	23	24	25 Prayer Meeting, 7:00 p.m.	26	27	28
29 Lord's Supper, a.m.	30	31				

Peach Cake

- ★ 1 pkg yellow cake mix
- ★ 1 lb. sliced peaches in juice
- ★ 3 eggs
- ★ 2 Tbsp. oil

Put all ingredients in a bowl and beat for 5 minutes. Bake in a greased 9 x 13 in. pan for time on back of cake mix package.

Top with:

- ★ 3.4 oz. instant vanilla pudding
- ★ 1 1/4 cup milk
- ★ 8 oz. Cool Whip

Beat pudding and milk until thick. Add Cool Whip. Spread on cake.

Megan Boss



“The eyes
of all look
to You,
And You give
them their food
in due time.
You open
Your hand
And satisfy
the desire of
every living
thing.”

Church Work Day

Church Work Day is upon us. Roll up your sleeves and come on May 7 at 9 am and help with the list of projects. Many hands make light work!





Showing forth the excellencies of Jesus Christ

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Church Office:
4930 Green Valley Ln
Sheboygan, WI 53083

Phone: 920-565-2160
Website: graceopcsheboygan.com
Email:
graceopc@tds.net
revbriandejong@gmail.com

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GRACEOPCSHEBOYGAN.COM



Spurgeon Corner

"I know that my Redeemer liveth. "
(Job 19:25)

The marrow of Job's comfort lies in that little word "My"—"My Redeemer," and in the fact that the Redeemer lives. Oh! to get hold of a living Christ. We must get a property in him before we can enjoy him. What is gold in the mine to me? Men are beggars in Peru, and beg their bread in California. It is gold in my purse which will satisfy my necessities, by purchasing the bread I need. So a Redeemer who does not redeem *me*, an avenger who will never stand up for *my* blood, of what avail were such? Rest not content until by faith you can say "Yes, I cast myself upon my living Lord; and he is mine." It may be you hold him with a feeble hand; you half think it presumption to say, "He lives as *my* Redeemer;" yet, remember if you have but faith as a grain of mustard seed, that little faith *entitles* you to say it. But there is also another word here, expressive of Job's strong confidence, "*I know.*" To say, "I hope so, I trust so" is comfortable; and there are thousands in the fold of Jesus who hardly ever get much further. But to reach the essence of consolation you must say, "I know." Ifs, buts, and perhapses, are sure murderers of peace and comfort. Doubts are dreary things in times of sorrow. Like wasps they sting the soul! If I have any suspicion that Christ is not mine, then there is vinegar mingled with the gall of death; but if I know that Jesus lives for me, then darkness is not dark: even the night is light about me. Surely if Job, in those ages before the coming and advent of Christ, could say, "I know," *we* should not speak less positively. God forbid that our positiveness should be presumption. Let us see that our evidences are right, lest we build upon an ungrounded hope; and then let us not be satisfied with the mere foundation, for it is from the upper rooms that we get the widest prospect. A living Redeemer, truly mine, is joy unspeakable.

Morning, April 21st, by C. H. Spurgeon

Front Page Concluded

drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. ⁸ Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. ⁹ Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.

