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## *The Session's Task in* **Discipline in its**

**Broadest Sense**

**H**ere are the words of Hebrews 10:19-25:

“Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh; and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water.

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another — and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.”

I want to think with you about what is involved in stimulating one another to love and good deeds, in certain aspects of church discipline.

When our Form of Government speaks of discipline, it speaks mostly with formal judicial discipline in view. One hundred or more years ago formal judicial discipline at the sessional level may have been fairly common. Today it is exceedingly rare. Just ask yourself how many times in the history of your congregation your session has instituted, let alone carried to conclusion, formal judicial discipline. Most of you won't need more than the fingers of one hand.

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# The Communion of the Spirit

Before he went to his Father, our Lord Jesus Christ promised that he would not forsake his church. If he himself went away, he would send another Comforter, the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; 16:7). Indeed, this Spirit had been present before. At the creation he had hovered over the waters (Gen. 1:2). He had inspired and empowered the holy prophets (2 Pet. 1:21; Acts 3:21). It was he who had descended in the form of a dove at the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16).

Now, however, the time was approaching when the word of the prophet Joel would be fulfilled, that the Spirit would be poured out upon all men, that their sons and their daughters would prophesy, their old men would dream dreams, and their young men would see visions (Joel 2:28). In a way that surpassed all others, this would be the time of the Spirit.

According to the apostolic witness, it is the Spirit who brings into being and who preserves the communion between Christ and his church. The Spirit is the one who imparts to the church the living presence of its Lord. Through him Christ works today. Communion with the exalted Christ is communion through the Holy Spirit.

Those who hold to the Reformed confessions should have a keen appreciation of the truth of the communion of the Holy Spirit. Calvin has been called the theologian of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures clearly describe the work of the Spirit in the person of the believer. The Reformed allegiance to the authority of Scripture should make the Reformed believer particularly sensitive to the Scriptural teaching concerning the mission that the exalted Christ has given his Spirit in the church.

## I. THE SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH

The activity of the Spirit affects the life of the believer in the most intimate and personal way. Representing

Christ, he guides and comforts the believer, interceding for him with the Father (Romans 8:26-27). He witnesses together with our spirit that we are the children of God (Romans 8:16).

It is through the power of the Spirit that the believer is brought into greater conformity to the image of Christ. He works love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (Gal. 5:22).

Therefore the believer is called to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25); not to quench (I Thess. 5:19), grieve (Eph. 4:30), or resist the Spirit (Acts 7:51); and to enjoy the fellowship of the Spirit (Phil. 2:1). Through the sanctification of the Spirit the believer is restored to obedience to the truth (I Pet. 1:2, 22). God himself gives his Spirit to those who obey him (Acts 5:32).

## Personal Nature

The work of the Spirit, beginning with the regeneration of the individual in his heart, radiates out to all of his activities. The believer is called to a conscious exercise of will in the service of God in response to the work of the Spirit within him. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12).

The consequences of not heeding the Spirit are very severe. One who resists the promptings of the Spirit runs the risk that they will be withdrawn. To the human race at the time of Noah God said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh" (Gen. 6:3). Of Saul the Scriptures say that he received an evil spirit from God, and that he was afraid of David, "because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul" (I Sam. 18:12).

Resisting the Spirit can mean that the time of repentance is withdrawn. This happened to Esau, who renounced

his blessing and was unable to obtain it again. "For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it with tears" (Heb. 12:17; cf. 6:4-6). A constant rejection of the entreaties of the Holy Spirit is the unforgivable sin (I John 5:16).

## God's Redemptive Plan

It is a mistake to think, however, that the work of the Spirit is of a personal nature only and that it is related only to the sanctification of the believer. Instead, it must be viewed in the full context of the redemptive purpose and plan of God and in relation to the church in its rich diversity as the body of Christ.

The connection of the Spirit's work with the process of redemptive history is clear from the fact that the New Testament period is distinguished from others as being preeminently the age of the Spirit. More particularly it is clear from the manner in which the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church at Pentecost. Indeed, Christ commanded his disciples to wait at Jerusalem for the gift of the Spirit (Acts 1:4) and they remained there obediently awaiting the fulfillment of his promise (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1).

Nevertheless this gift was not imparted simply in response to their waiting. The Spirit came at a time appointed by God, at a time that was advantageous for the reception of the gospel. The Spirit's descent was accompanied by extraordinary and even miraculous signs. The disciples were emboldened to preach the gospel. They were endowed with special gifts of communication, and their preaching was made effective, in order that the gospel might obtain an immediate following and an immediate entree into the world as the Jews who had come to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover returned to their own lands (Acts 2:1ff.).

## Spiritual Gifts

That the work of the Spirit is not simply correlated with the inner life of the believer is also clear from the way in which the Spirit dispenses spiritual gifts in the church. Describing these spiritual gifts, the Scriptures emphasize the unity of the Spirit but the diversity of the gifts (I Cor. 12:4). Not everyone received the same gifts (I Cor. 12:14, 19-20, 29-30). Some were given the gift of teaching, others of ruling (I Cor. 12:28).

Other gifts were more unusual. Some persons received the power of healing, others the power of speaking in tongues, and still others the ability to interpret tongues (I Cor. 12:8-10). The impartation of such a gift did not bring with it an office in a formal sense. It did, however, give the recipient a special place and function within the church.

So the church, being one body, was nevertheless composed of many members, each with its place in interdependence with the others. Some spoke in tongues; but this ability was one endowment of the Spirit among others (I Cor. 12:30). Those who spoke in tongues depended upon those who could interpret. As the body is one body with many parts, so the church is one church but with many members possessing various gifts (I Cor. 12:12, 20; Rom. 12:4-8). In the multiplicity of the gifts the body of Christ was complete.

## Diversity of Gifts

The church was admonished to understand and to respect this diversity of gifts. In Corinth, for example, members of the congregation eagerly sought after the gift of speaking in tongues, as if its possession were something particularly desirable. The apostle Paul warns them against this mistaken desire. The gift of speaking in tongues, he says, is only one gift among many and that not the best. Preferably the church should seek to receive, to interpret, and to proclaim the Word of God (I Cor. 14:1-19).

In his own life the apostle Paul himself had to learn to understand the nature of the gifts of the Spirit. Significantly he himself did not receive healing although he desired it and prayed for it earnestly. God's word to him was simply, My grace is sufficient for you (II Cor. 12:9).

With regard to the distribution of spiritual gifts the Scriptures place the emphasis on the sovereignty of the Spirit. These gifts were not given equally and uniformly, nor were they given according to the piety of the one who received them. The Spirit distributed them according to his sovereign good pleasure (I Cor. 12:11; cf. Heb. 2:4).

## The Sovereign Spirit

The Scriptures teach, therefore, that there was no simple correlation between the subjective, personal condition of the believer—his progress in sanctification—and his reception of the gifts of the Spirit. Without minimizing in the least the importance of personal regeneration and progress in personal holiness, it is clear that the Scriptures emphasize the sovereignty of the Spirit and the multiplicity of the gifts which go to make up the one church, the body of Christ. That one received one gift instead of another had no direct bearing on his piety.

Furthermore, as Paul's discourse on the supremacy of love informs us (I Cor. 13), each of these gifts as a special endowment of the Spirit could be misused instead of being used properly to the edification of the church.

It is, therefore, a mistake to view the operation of the Spirit exclusively in connection with the subjective spiritual condition of the believer. The Scriptures teach that the gifts of the Spirit cannot be considered apart from the relationship of the Spirit to the church and to the particular juncture of God's covenant dealings with men in which they were given. More broadly, all divine revelation is correlate, not first of all to the subjective spiritual state of man, but to the divine purpose and plan in its progressive development.

## Subjective Piety

Failing to understand this truth, many sectarians believe that the great outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and the presence of extraordinary gifts in the apostolic age meant that there

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*This is part one of a revised report submitted to the recent OPC General Assembly by a study committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Robert D. Knudsen.*

Part two will appear next month.

was an almost ideal personal attitude among the early believers. They were supposed to have been especially fervent and dedicated and therefore worthy of special blessing.

The Scriptures do not support this position. True, there was an initial enthusiasm, a first love, in the church. But the early church also had its manifestations of the fleshly mind. It experienced its own bickerings and divisions; it had its own quick descents into unbelief and error; it, too, had to be guided into the truth by the ever-present Spirit who opened the eyes of the believers to the meaning of the Word of God.

That is not to say that the example of the early church may not be an encouragement to churches which have lost their first love and which have become cold and formal in their profession; it is only to deny again that there is a direct correlation between the abundant outpouring of spiritual gifts upon the early church and the subjective spirituality of the believers.

## Preparation for Preaching

This outpouring must be seen instead in the context of the purpose and plan of God, as he was guiding his church and preparing the way for the proclamation of the gospel. Speaking in tongues, for example, the gift that was mistakenly so desired and sought after in the Corinthian church, was a sign of the presence and power of God to those who were outside of the church (I Cor. 14:22). It was, as it were, God's advertising program.

The Scriptures clearly teach, however, that within the church itself this special gift was ancillary to the preaching of the Word, which did not have the same sensational character but which was useful for edification. It is, therefore, not surprising that once the gospel had been established in the world, these special gifts were eventually withheld, leaving the less spectacular but more necessary gifts which are present in the church today.

The above observations do not themselves decide the questions as to which gifts of the Spirit were temporary and which continue on into the present. They cast light, however, on the relation of the gifts of the Spirit to the life of the church and throw doubt upon the extravagant claims of those who view the operation of the Spirit only in terms of the subjective state of the believer.

# Discipline in its Broadest Sense

RICHARD A. BARKER

(continued from cover)

Some, as in my own case, won't need any fingers at all.

In the light of the scarcity of judicial discipline on the part of the session, we might well ask why our constitution makes such elaborate provision for it. We might ask whether discipline at the sessional level is an anachronism.

## Mark of a True Church

Most of us have been taught, and agree, that discipline is one of the three marks of a true church, the other two being the faithful preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. I don't think there is much question but that we are doing the latter two. But on the third point, that of church discipline, we need to ask ourselves some questions.

If the frequency of judicial discipline on the session's part is our criterion, we are in trouble on point three. However, I don't think the frequency of judicial discipline is the best criterion for judging whether we qualify on point three, though I do think that if we were doing our jobs we might see more of it. I do not think that the relative scarcity of such discipline when compared to a century ago is altogether a bad thing.

One line of reasoning suggests that we meet point three because we have careful provisions for discipline in our Form of Government. History decisively discredits this view. The Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. had splendid provisions in its constitution for judicial discipline. The problem was that they were not used against those who should have been disciplined.

Brethren, I submit to you that judicial discipline in the formal sense is only a minor aspect of that discipline that ought to be in view when we say that discipline is one of the marks of the true church. I suggest that the discipline that is a mark of the church is the whole panorama of oversight, programs, activities, inquiries, observations, encouragements, and discus-

sions by which we try to promote holy living and true believing by ourselves and other members of the church.

## Its Broader Aspects

Discipline includes what our Form of Government means in Chapter IX, Section 6, when it says that the session has the "power to inquire into the knowledge and Christian conduct of the members of the church." It is this broadly conceived discipline that ought to characterize a true church.

We need to ask ourselves (1) whether we are exercising this kind of discipline and how well we are doing it. We might also ask (2) what results we should be looking for, in the light of the Scriptural requirements.

It is generally accepted in our circles that the gradual abandonment of orthodox theological training, culminating in the capitulation of Princeton Seminary in 1929, played a major role in the erosion of orthodoxy in the then Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. I don't doubt that such was the case, but I suspect it was accompanied or even preceded by erosion of orthodoxy in both doctrine and life among ordinary church members.

One of the functions of the session is actively to contend with whatever tendencies may be present in a local church that detract from the highest and holiest ideals of Christian believing and living. Our sessions already are doing this, to a degree. We are careful to have sound preaching, sound Sunday school teachers, sound materials for study, sound hymnals, sound examinations for church membership — even sound architecture. But all this is not enough.

## A Neglected Area

I think there is an area that properly is the domain of the members of the session, in which we are not doing so well. That is the area of personal, and if necessary, pointed discussions with our members. There are many, many instances in which such discussions can work to the betterment of our churches and to growth in grace by our people. Let me cite a few

hypothetical examples:

(1) We all know of instances where some member turns up at a service, we ask how he's been, and discover that he's fine now but is thankful to be over a two-week bout with the flu, which none of us knew about. Since he wasn't missed, and no one checked up on him, he became consciously or unconsciously aware that nobody pays much attention either when he misses a Sunday now and then because he's up in the country fishing.

(2) We all know of young people a few years out of high school who suddenly (or so it seems to us) turn up engaged to someone who either doesn't have the vaguest notion as to what Christianity really is, or else is a Roman Catholic, or perhaps a Jehovah's Witness. By the time we point out to them that they are not to be unequally yoked to an unbeliever, it is usually too late. Too often these young people drift away and are not seen again.

(3) Another example is the family that comes more or less faithfully every Sunday morning, but is never seen Sunday evening or midweek. Some of these families go for years without having anyone other than the pastor say anything to them about it.

(4) There is also the person who takes a job with no thought of its impact on his life as a Christian, or the family that decides to move to some other community without giving the slightest thought as to whether a sound church is available.

Something like this happened to us in Westfield some years ago. Our pas-

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*This message was originally given by Elder Barker of Grace Church, Westfield, at the 34th General Assembly. Slightly condensed and revised, it is as timely as the constant need of discipline. Written with ruling elders primarily in mind, it will be of interest to pastors and to all members of the church in their mutual concern for one another.*

tor asked me to go with him to discuss the matter with the couple. It was too late to change anything, because some contracts had been signed. By the grace of God, however, that family was used in the establishment of another Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the man is now a ruling elder. I don't think our discussion had much to do with this happy outcome, but it illustrates the kind of sessional awareness that is a part of good discipline.

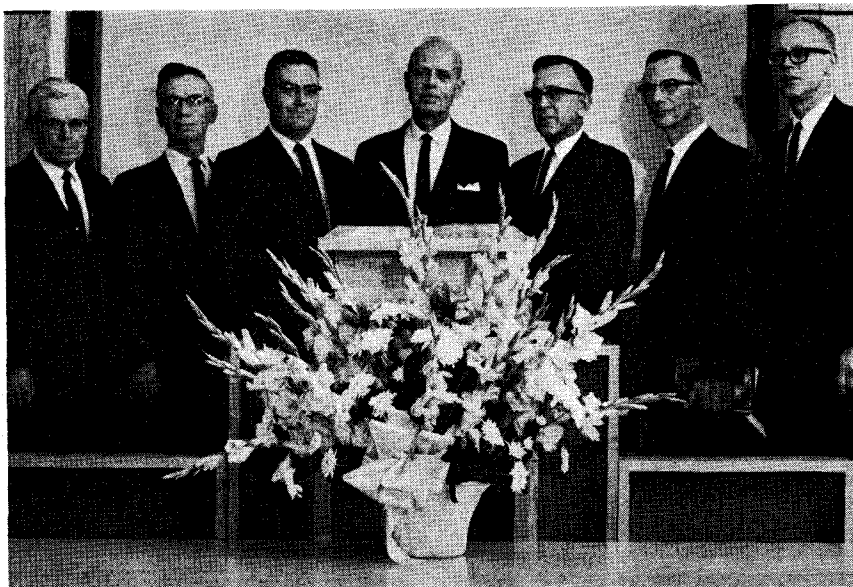
(5) There is, moreover, the man with a steady job, who gives regularly two or three hundred dollars a year to the church — when a tithe would be several times that amount.

### Face to Face

Brethren, the best way for people to realize that as Christians they ought to consider such matters is for somebody to tell them so. No matter how many sermons are preached on these or any other subjects needing improvement, there are people who find it easy to remain indifferent. I am persuaded that the best hope for reaching these members and all the kinds of people I mentioned earlier, is by direct personal confrontation. I don't want to detract from what God has said about the necessity and efficacy of preaching. Preaching is unquestionably essential. However, the power and foolishness of preaching needs to be ministered not only from the pulpit, but also personally and individually to the members of the church.

There are church members and even some ruling elders, who think that this kind of ministering is exclusively the function of the minister or teaching elder. I do not agree with that view. It doesn't square with the Scriptures or our subordinate standards. Where this view prevails, except in a very small congregation the minister labors under an impossible burden, and growth in grace by our members is impoverished.

If the kind of discipline we are considering is to be effective, it must involve more than just the minister. It must include the ruling elders also. There is no single set of rules to determine how elders are to join with the pastor in this type of discipline. It can and ought to take many forms. I know of one congregation where, if I understand correctly, attendance is taken every Sunday, with a view to inquiring after absent members. That



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is a practice that has much to commend it. It provides, in a systematic way, for early detection of any tendency on the part of members to become careless in the regularity of their public worship. It also serves to detect quickly problems that may beset certain families, so that the help of other members may be brought to bear. Elders can and ought to conduct programs like this.

### Participation by All Elders

Another fairly common practice that is properly a part of church discipline is family visitation by the session. We need to work at this more, and to develop the best ways of doing it. There are some things, however, that need to be discussed by the session, or at least some of the elders, with just an individual member.

The session members need to be involved in this broad aspect of discipline for several reasons:

- (1) They may know more about certain problems or situations than the minister.
- (2) If the pastor must do it all, it doesn't all get done.
- (3) We need to cultivate recognition of the fact that discipline is the task of the entire session, ruling elders and minister.

Perhaps the best illustration I can give of the kind of interplay that should exist between the session and

the other members is the sort of thing that goes on in our own session — and I trust in other sessions also — when applicants for church membership are examined.

We explore in as much detail as appears appropriate what the applicant believes and understands about such matters as the importance of the Bible, the plan of salvation, the ultimate end of unbelievers, what is involved in holy living, what are his devotional habits, and what he thinks about such subjects as attendance, Sabbath observance, and tithing. These discussions are pleasant but frank, and they serve to show the applicant what the session regards as particularly important in Christian faith and life as well as to point out to him some things he may never have thought of before as hindrances to godly living.

### Personal Follow-Up

The trouble with these discussions is that we never repeat them. The applicant is publicly received, retires to his pew and to his own particular set of habits, and he may never hear from the session again. The interview with the applicant is an ideal opportunity for exploring any avenue of his life as a Christian. He comes to us in a frame of mind in which he expects to discuss such spiritual concerns, and it is easy to justify to him why we ask such questions.

*(concluded on page 80)*

# Breakdown in Communication

JAY ADAMS

**G**rowling to himself "What's the use?" John stalked out of the hallway, buried himself in the plush living room chair, and pulled a newspaper down over his head. All day long John Bickering had looked forward to this moment and now *she* had blown it. It had been a long time since he and Nancy had known the joys that they experienced in the early years of their marriage. Somehow the marriage had grown stale. It was hard to remember just how the deterioration began, but there was no question now that things were a miserable mess.

John was a Christian and he knew that this was no way for him to live. He knew he was dishonoring Christ. He was deeply troubled about the influence these conditions were having upon his children. He loved Nancy down deep, and wanted to start all over and try to make their marriage go, but he hardly knew how to begin.

That day at work as usual he thought much about the problem (it was affecting his work adversely) and reached the conclusion that something had to be done. He decided to have a heart-to-heart talk with Nancy in an effort to straighten things out. He knew that he was at fault in many ways and he was willing to change, but he felt that he needed her help and cooperation.

## Not Listening

When he rang the doorbell that night, his heart was warm and full of hope. Nancy opened the door. Earnestly John said to her, "Nancy, you know the problems we've been having lately . . ." Before he could utter another word Nancy spit back, "You're mighty right that we've been having problems, and if you don't begin to shape up, those problems are nothing compared to the problems we're going to have!" It was at that point that John had turned on his heel and headed for the living room.

Nancy's day had been rough. The hot summer weather combined with her period and three squabbling youngsters had all contributed to her thoughtless outburst. She had been edgy and John's reminder was only a spark to touch off the explosion. Actually Nancy desired a reconciliation as much as John. She too had thought much about the baneful conditions under which she and the rest of the family were living. It was only two days ago that she also had decided that she and John must do something about their relationship. Mentally she had chalked up tonight as the time when she would talk to him about it.

Now look what she had done! How could she broach the question after ripping into him that way? "And . . . perhaps . . . yes probably, John himself was making overtures toward reconciliation when he came in the door," she thought as she stirred something in a pot. "Perhaps this was the answer to my prayers and I failed to see it. I've got to tell him I'm sorry," she said to herself as she put down the pot and headed for the living room.

"John," she said, "you know when you came into the house tonight . . ." Slapping the paper down into his lap, John retorted, "I know what happened when I came in the door — and I'd better not come home to anything like that again, or I may not come home."

Nancy wheeled about, stamped into the kitchen, picked up her pot and stirred furiously. In time with the beat of her spoon she muttered, "Now *he's* blown it; what's the use?"

## Counseling Needed

The strange thing is that Nancy and John are so close to and yet so far from making this marriage a success. They both recognize the need for changes, and both want things to be different. Both would be willing to do nearly anything necessary to

bring about those changes. Both are making attempts to initiate the change. Yet change does not come but matters get worse and both are in despair. What is the problem? Communication has broken down, and they need the help of a counselor to reestablish contact with one another's real intentions and motives.

The question is often asked: when does one need counseling? The answer is: whenever your own attempts to solve or handle problems fail. And one of the most frequent signs of such failure is the breakdown of communication. In John and Nancy's case this breakdown has become so serious that even attempts to repair the situation lead to more severe rifts.

Therein lies the dilemma of the communication breakdown: communication is the one essential tool necessary to solve any problems, but when communication breaks down there is no means left to solve the communication problem. And unfortunately it is not long before any unsolved problem may be complicated by resulting in a breakdown in communication.

Communication binds people together; a communication breakdown separates them as the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel so clearly demonstrated. There the problem was one of simple language failure. More serious is the failure of communication on the deeper levels of understanding and motive.

## Sin the Barrier

A wise Biblical counselor will recognize that he must begin with the restoration of communication. He will begin by helping you to reestablish communication with God. If you are not a Christian, he will speak to you of the communication breakdown which occurred in the Garden of Eden, where sin drove the wedge between God and man. He will recall how man and God walked in perfect communion before the fall, and he will point out the disastrous results which man's disobedience brought about. He will show you how man hid from his Creator, feared God, clothed himself because he no longer could face God openly, and lied to his Maker. There was the first human breakdown in communication; and it was the result of sin.

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But the counselor will tell you also how the death of Jesus Christ for his people deals with that sin as well as all subsequent sins which they have committed, and how communication with God may be established by repentance and faith and maintained by confession. Having dealt with that basic question, he will turn to the matter of communication on the horizontal level.

In reestablishing communication, the counselor will want to bring the alienated parties together for counseling. Dealing with them separately only tends to perpetuate the suspicion, lies, and accusations which now separate them. He will want to help them learn how to speak the truth in love to one another.

A discussion of the Christian principles of communication explained in the fourth chapter of Ephesians might be one helpful way of opening the subject. Paul says, "Laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another." We need one another as each part of the body needs the other parts. All the parts work together in coordination only when truthful communication takes place.

## Daily Solutions Important

But there are sinful blocks to such communication. Paul proceeds to deal with several. He commands in the words of Psalm 44, "Be angry, but do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your anger." Problems are solved when they are handled early. We cannot carry yesterday's problems into today. Each day holds sufficient trouble of its own. Moreover, anger harbored turns into resentment and bitterness, which Paul insists must be put away. Each day that day's prob-

lems must be faced and settled before God and man. When differences are kept current, communication problems do not result.

John and Nancy cannot extricate themselves from their difficulties because they have allowed resentments to harden within them for years. Not only has the sun set on their anger, but many moons. With such built-in feelings toward one another, almost any act by the other person is sure to be misinterpreted.

After communication is finally restored, John and Nancy will have to learn to substitute Biblical patterns of daily confession and forgiveness for the sinful patterns that have been characteristic of their relationship in the past. They will have to learn to put off the "old man" with his resentments and bitterness and to put on new habits of daily reconciliation. Unless they learn to do so, they will soon find themselves caught in the same trap again.

## Reversal of Past

But first John and Nancy will have to reestablish communication. Where can they break into the downward cycle that has developed? A counselor who follows Paul will advise them of the need for an immediate change on their part. There must be a reversal of the past. Until now, both Nancy and John have been driving one another away by accusations (often true) and counter-accusations. But Paul in Ephesians 4 stressed the importance of speaking words to one another which help solve the problem which has arisen, and which build up

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NOTE 1: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (vv. 23-24).

NOTE 2: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (ch. 18:15-17).

one another rather than tear down each other. Such cutting remarks as have been so much a part of the Bickering home must cease. How can John and Nancy make such a transition?

Their counselor perhaps will recall the words of Christ about anger in Matthew 5 and his solution to estranged relations.<sup>1</sup> There he stressed the importance of reconciliation by asserting its priority over worship. A Christian in the very act of worship remembering that he has wronged another must stop what he is doing, go and be reconciled to his brother, and then return to complete his worship. Unreconciled relationships affect worship adversely.

## Confession and Forgiveness

When one confesses his sin and asks for forgiveness and help rather than attacking the other person, he takes the first step toward renewing communication. Talking about one's own sins and asking for help and forgiveness draw others close. Attacking them about their sins and failures drives them away. There is a legitimate time for confronting another about his sin, but the time is rarely during a communication breakdown. One must learn to remove the log in his own eye first, so that he can see clearly enough to remove the speck from another's eye.

If the other person is principally at fault, nevertheless one still may confess any bad feelings and resentment on his part. Certainly he ought to confess the fact that up until now he has not followed the Lord's injunctions in Matthew 5 or 18 for dealing with broken relationships.<sup>2</sup> Focusing upon one's self for the first time orients one in the same direction as the other person who also has been focusing upon you.

Thus the beginnings of communication can come about whenever a counselor has the courage to speak of the sin of communication breakdown and applies the Scriptural principles of Ephesians 4. He will stress in particular verse 32: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." This verse teaches that even the way we deal with our sin should reflect the redemption of Christ to the glory of God!

Next time we shall talk about maintaining good communication in the home through the conference table.



## Discipline

(from page 77)

Yet we need to follow up this type of discussion with people after they have become members. The pattern need not be fixed, though a fixed pattern may be the best way of seeing that it is done. The interview for membership could easily be made the occasion for telling the applicant that we would like to meet with him in two months, or six months, or whatever time seemed desirable, to continue the discussion. However, not many of us do such follow-up with any regularity, do we? I submit that we ought to be doing it, and that our mutual growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ would be more consistent if we did it.

### Excuses

Why don't we exercise this kind of discipline? There may be many reasons of which a few may be cited:

(1) There is the fear of being thought ill of.

(2) We are preoccupied with things that more obviously demand our attention.

(3) Everybody's job is nobody's job. You recall a definition of a committee as a group of people who individually can do nothing, and who collectively decide that nothing can be done.

(4) We view ourselves as a board of directors, expecting others to do the work, instead of as shepherds who must care for the flock.

(5) We live in glass houses. We all may fear that what we do ourselves speaks so loudly that others can't hear what we say.

In the light of our standards, however, all of these at best are excuses. The Larger Catechism, in treating the fifth commandment, shows that the session has the authority and obligation to have this concern for members:

**Q. 129:** What is required of superiors towards their inferiors?

**Answer:** It is required of superiors, according to that power they receive from God, and that relation wherein they stand, to love, pray for, and bless their inferiors; to instruct, counsel, and admonish them; countenancing, commending, and rewarding such as do well; and discountenancing, reproofing, and chastising such as do ill; protecting, and providing for them all things necessary for soul and body;

**and by grave, wise, holy and exemplary carriage, to procure glory to God, honor to themselves, and so to preserve that authority which God hath put upon them.**

Lest we become too impressed with ourselves, Q. 130 warns against dangers in exercising this authority.

Hebrews 10:24, where we are instructed to provoke or stimulate one another to love and good works, certainly applies to all Christians. Surely it applies with even greater urgency to ruling elders.

What are we looking for in this exercise of discipline? Ultimately, it

produces that which the Scriptures commend or invite at many points. To name but one, consider Psalm 29:2: "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

As faith increases, it normally should manifest itself in greater faithfulness. Faithfulness and doctrinal awareness work hand in hand. We need to labor for both, and as we do we will find that they reinforce each other, and that they yield worship and service in a life pleasing to the Lord.

*"He looked for judgment, and behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, and behold, a cry" (Isaiah 5: 7b).*

## WHY THIS HARVEST?

EDWARDS E. ELLIOTT

The cutting down of a young leader, whose life at the nation's capital seemed to be so rich with promise, has brought forth an expression of dismay from men of all parties and groups. Is this type of gunman to say the last word about many of our finer specimens of American statesmen? Is criminal violence to become a way of life in this land? How long is this sort of thing to be on the increase? The President would like to know, and he has appointed a commission to investigate the deeper causes of physical violence among us. Why now is this type of harvest being cut on our land? Of course, this is not a new problem.

Long ago, the Lord himself raised the same question about a similar development in the land of Judah. He told how he had made a heavy investment in that land. It was made with a loving touch, that there might be a flourishing vineyard, bringing forth a delightful fruit of good things. The ground had been spaded, the watchtower was built, the rocks were gathered out, the walls were built, and the prickly hedge was developed as its fence. From the underlying rock, a press was hewn, where the juice could be collected. The choice vines were planted, and the showers came, and there was good hope for a bountiful harvest. But the grapes, when they

appeared, turned out to be sour, wild, rotten. What a rude and shocking development this was. Why does such a death-harvest appear? "What more could I have done to my vineyard that I have not done in it?"

### It Began in Eden

Really, this is once again the story of the garden in Eden, where the stage was set for the production of the crowning achievement of God's creative work. Man, God's own image bearer, would here begin a career of bringing forth fruit unto God. Here would be the place where man would mature into a true son, and enter upon an endless life of communion with God, enjoying a virtual heaven on earth. The harvest would be seen, an earthly harvest, but a harvest of godliness, as man—prophet, priest and king—would worship and serve the Creator in the beauty of holiness.

There would be none to hurt or destroy in all that holy mountain. The earth would be full of the knowledge of the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea. Mankind would be a praise to God in the earth. And God loved to think of such a prospect. And man should have loved to think of such a prospect. For it was not simply that God would enjoy seeing the fruits of the earth in the hands of a man ambitious to fulfil the crea-



tion mandate, but God would enjoy the man himself, as he presented himself before the Lord, in true worship and understanding.

Why then, as God looked for such results, did man hide himself among the shadows of the trees of the garden? Why must God come, looking to see if something had gone wrong? What had spoiled the harvest? "Hast thou eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee . . ." Yes, the reason for this failure was sin. And sin begets sin. It doesn't simply affect one man. It affects his family. It makes a desert of his environment; it begets thorns and thistles which infest and curse the very ground. What a shabby return on such a divine investment! What a pollution of the vineyard!

### Excuses

What now can man answer to God's inquiry? It was much too early for Adam to say, "Society is at fault." But he in effect tried to produce some such excuse. "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me . . ." The woman, in turn, would also pass the blame to someone else — the Satanic environment. "The serpent beguiled me . . ."

Yes, you can try to blame society — and to be sure, society is made up of sinners, and there is a tremendous down-drag when everybody engages in acts of popular sin. And there is racial and material strife. And you may blame the devil — and to be sure, he is the tempter, he is a murderer from the beginning, and the father of lies. And you may blame your environment — and to be sure, it is an environment which will try men's souls. But as you attempt to pass the guilt along, are you not in the last analysis trying to say, "God is ultimately responsible"?

The woman whom *thou* gavest, the serpent whom *thou* created, the tree which *thou* placed — these are at fault, and the God who made them is at fault — so reasons the sinner. The ultimate target of man's blame is God himself. Or man would shrug his shoulders and say, "My genes and chromosomes are that way" or "My determinism is that way" or "My stars are that way" — as though God himself had implanted these sinful motivations. But the Lord (in Isaiah 5) protests that this is wrong. "Judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard. What more could I have done in it?" James also says, "Let no man

say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God."

Israel had developed the proverb, "The parents have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge" — blaming the parents for the awful deeds of the children. Now there is a truth in this. Parents are usually imitated by their children. Sabbath breakers beget sabbath breakers. Gamblers and drunkards often beget gamblers and drunkards. But not always. The prophet would protest that this proverb about parents eating sour grapes should not be used to excuse the sin of any man. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The man who sins, is a responsible man.

The first man born of our first parents, to his parents' dismay, exhibited a hatred of his brother. And God came to Cain remonstrating with him for this hatred. "Why are you wroth, and why is your countenance fallen? Sin is lying at the door of your heart, and desires to overcome you. But you should rule over it." In other words, you are not being carried along as a speck on a wave. You have a responsibility to exercise control over yourself.

### Responsibility

But Cain, instead of ruling his passions, gave them expression. He rose up against Abel his brother and slew him. Once again the Lord came to inquire into this. "Where is Abel thy brother?" This time, the sinner didn't even try to pass the blame on to others. He brazenly denied that he even had committed anything unnatural. "I know not, am I my brother's keeper?" Or as Sirhan said this week, "My name is John Doe."

But God would say, "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth out to me from the earth." "I looked for judgment, and behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, and behold a cry." Outwardly, instead of judgment, there was bloodshed. Inwardly, instead of righteousness, there was a cry. The Lord sees both that which is outward, and that which is inward. The blood which flows outward, yet speaks with an inward voice, crying out protest, crying out for jus-

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*Mr. Elliott is pastor of the Garden Grove Orthodox Presbyterian Church in California. This message was given the Sunday following the assassination of Senator Kennedy.*

tice in the earth. The cry enters into the ears of the Judge. Is this what he is to find as the ultimate yield of this land? Are the likes of Oswald, Ruby, Ray, and Sirhan, to be the pattern here, so that blood will touch blood, and cry will blend with cry? Over half of our citizens are now equipped with deadly firearms. There are those who would *like* to see the nation at war with its own citizens, and there are infiltrators who may succeed in this effort.

### Sin Is Sin

"Whence come wars and fightings among you?" James' question is repeated in the President's decision to erect a commission to investigate why. What is there in human nature which causes this violence? Perhaps after the commission has heard testimony from criminologists, lawyers, psychiatrists, doctors, and clergymen, it will place the blame on the fact that an evolutionary process is as yet incomplete, that there still is very much tiger in the tank. But will the commission give time to God's own analysis? The Word of God says that by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin.

Will this commission agree that "there is none righteous, no not one . . . that their feet are swift to shed blood, that destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace is unknown" to the sinner? Will the commission reverence the utterances of the law of God as it speaks to those under the law? Will the commission tell the nation to call sin by its right name? If it were to do so, there would be some hope of arriving at some right answers. For the Word speaks not only of one man, by whom sin entered, but one man by whom righteousness entered, a second Adam, the last Adam, Jesus Christ. He did for his people what Adam failed to do. Here is the only ray of hope, but it is a ray which has illuminated millions of people and changed the outlook of many a land.

Now the modern church would intrude itself into the picture, as though the church were itself a redemptive force in society. But the church is not a redeemer. The church proclaims a redeemer, and exhibits a redeemer, and seeks to display the outworking of the gospel of the Redeemer in its daily life, but the church is yet made up of sinners. It is like a hospital. These sinners remain totally depen-

dent upon the Redeemer, who alone can speak in righteousness and is mighty to save. And how did he go about the work of our salvation? Strangely enough, it was by the route of being himself the victim of brutality, yea, a police brutality, so that his visage was marred more than any man.

So heinous was the brutality committed against him, that the ones who perpetrated it were not capable of evaluating how wrong it was. And so we hear the Saviour praying, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." They were striking at the one who was the express image of the Father's glory. "Had they known it," said Paul, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." But God, by his marvelous method of grace, is able to take this terrible murder, and make even this work for good. Just as Joseph (in the last chapter of Genesis) told his brothers, who long before had committed an act of brutality against him, "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive."

### The Only Redeemer

The worst thing can become the best thing, by God's method of grace. With the killing of the Son of God, Calvary, the place of the skull, became the place of the opening of the fountain for sin and uncleanness. There was the place where every Christian has been loosed from his sins. And it is with this fountain in view that God says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Is. 1:18).

This is the thing that can change the character of a man, and if a single man can be changed, a whole people can be changed. It can change the face of the nation. We need it. Arabs and Jews need it. Russians and Chinese need it. Parisians and Berliners need it. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

When Peter faced the killers of his Lord, he told them of the enormity of what they had done. But he added, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

There yet can be a recovery of heaven on earth. What this generation needs is this very recovery. But it will

come only if we all are honest enough to say clearly, "I too have sin in my heart. I too would covet and steal and kill. But I'm not going to blame my parents, my society, my national background, my glands, or my fall from a horse, I'm going to come clean and confess my sin."

### Repentance

And God has a way of begetting people who are willing to do just this — people in every kind of background, to be a testimony to each generation that a man need not be a victim of sin, even though he is affluent, or poor, or white, or black, or Arab, or Jew. God is pleased to prepare a harvest among men, which will indeed be truly representative, a testimony to all that it is possible to live godly lives whatever the circumstances may be. The ultimate harvest from among all nations and kindreds and people and tongues will find these people ascribing their salvation to Him who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb.

"These are they who came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple." What a grand harvest this is! It in every way will vindicate the manifold wisdom of God in human history. Human history in fact will produce a two-sided harvest. Revelation 14 speaks in terms of a wheat harvest and a grape harvest. The one

represents the harvest of God's elect, into his everlasting garner, and the other represents the harvest of the grapes of wrath.

### Your Harvest

As you think of these two harvests, should you not also think of yourself, and where you will be found in that great day? Will the question be asked of you, Why did your vineyard produce the wild, rotten, grapes? Did not the Lord endow you with sufficient favors to produce a sufficient and good harvest? Why this? And what then will you say? All creation will judge between the Lord and his vineyard, that the Lord of all the earth has done rightly. But if this is true, the terrible judgment of which Isaiah speaks, is also on the way.

Now is the time to repent of such rotten fruitbearing, and to seek renewal in righteousness. The Lord may yet make of you a praise to God in the earth. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit. So shall ye be my disciples." For this we pray and hope. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed, and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt."

The Lord can do this, in fact, in your own life. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," said Paul, "that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

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## Here and There in the ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

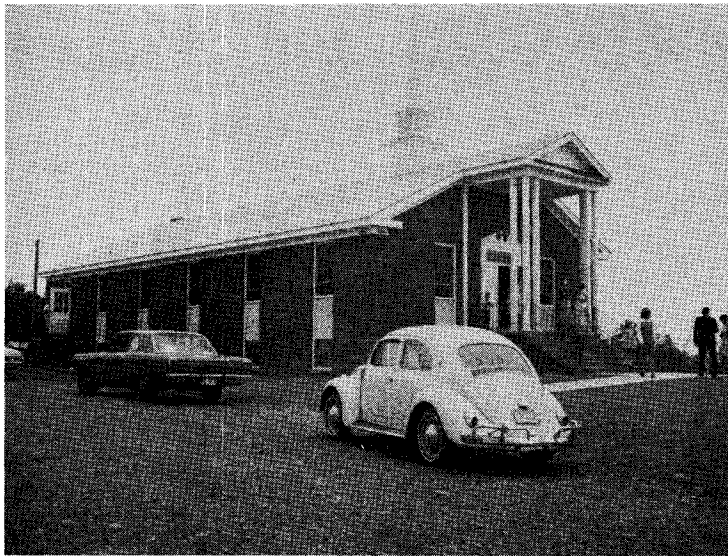
**Omaha, Nebr.** — Pastor Reginald Voorhees reports that the congregation was saddened by the death at the age of 52 of Mr. Howard Hair, elder and Sunday school superintendent. Mr. Hair united with the church by profession of faith and baptism 17 years ago and "since that day has been a faithful and enthusiastic working member, giving of time, energy, and money generously."

**Edinburg, Pa.** — The spring meeting of the Auxiliary of the Ohio Presbytery held at Nashua Church was addressed by both Mr. and Mrs. Bruce

Hunt. An offering of \$175 was divided between the leper seminary library in Pusan and the publication of commentaries by Dr. Yune Sun Park.

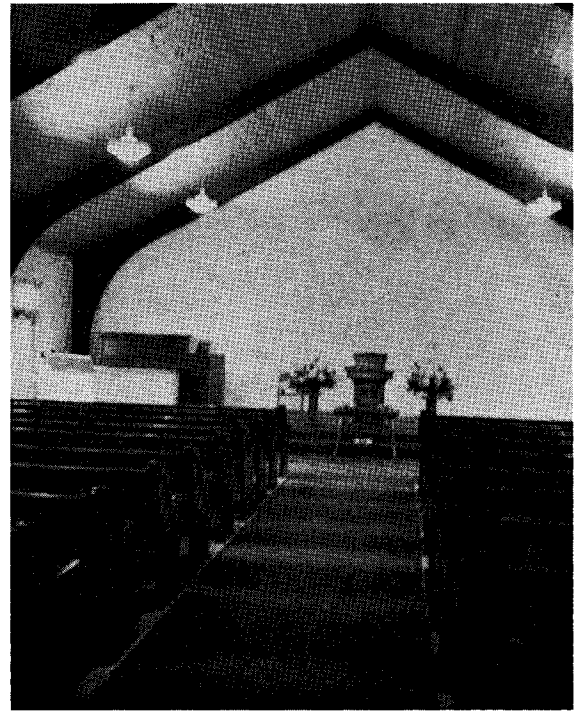
Pastor and Mrs. Arthur B. Spooner's daughter, Judith, was married August 3 to Gordon College graduate David Hosman. Both will be teaching in Indianapolis this fall.

**Hacienda Heights, Calif.** — "Evenings Under the Stars" was the theme of a series of films shown in the church parking lot during the summer on Tuesday evenings, free of



#### NASHUA ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The red brick building, 72 x 36 feet, cost \$52,000. A spacious foyer, with adjacent restrooms, a classroom, and a pastor's study, opens into the auditorium, which has a meadow green carpet from wall to wall.



#### Nashua Church Dedicates New Edifice

charge and open to the public. Among the films were "City of the Bees," "Without Onion," "Question 7" and "The Paul Carlson Story."

**Burtonsville, Md.** — Knox Church has extended its outreach this summer with the beginning of services in the Burtonsville Elementary School. This Covenant Chapel work is under the leadership of Mr. Barry Hofford, Westminster '68. Another of this year's graduates, Mr. Robert Marshall, is the summer assistant for Knox Church, Silver Spring.

**Kirkwood, Pa.** — Mr. Arthur Steltzer, examined and received by the Presbytery of Philadelphia this spring, is supplying the pulpit here from time to time. Missionaries for eight years in Nigeria under the Sudan Interior Mission, Mr. Steltzer and his wife have applied to the Committee on Foreign Missions for service. He is working on his doctoral dissertation at Westminster.

**So. San Francisco, Calif.** — Coming upon a group of teenagers "hunting psychedelic Easter eggs" in an open field last spring, two men of Brentwood Church who were walking on a Sunday afternoon with their children found an opportunity to strike up a conversation that soon got into questions about the Bible. Promising to return the following week to an-

swer more questions, elders Robert Santo and Paul Brown found eighteen teenagers waiting, and on succeeding Sundays more than twenty with queries "showing real interest, sometimes frustration, or a sincere desire to learn."

**Spencer Mills, Mich.** — Attendances of nearly one hundred have been reported at services here during the summer. Mr. John Barnett, Westminster '68, is pastor-elect of this new congregation.

**Silver Spring, Md.** — At one session of the spring women's auxiliary Mrs. Stanley Dea, "a charming little Chinese lady" who is a member of Knox Church, challenged her hearers to evangelize foreign students in the United States. Mrs. Dea herself came to know Christ as Savior after she came to this country to study. Many such students are outstanding scholars, she pointed out, and many will return to their own lands to be leaders. "Now is the time," Mrs. Dea emphasized, "to introduce them to Christ and pray that they may go back as Christian leaders."

**Valdosta, Ga.** — Mr. Cromwell Roskamp, after teaching for three years, has accepted the call of Westminster Church to serve as its pastor.

Ten years after its founding the Nashua Orthodox Presbyterian Church, between Edinburg and Pulaske, Pennsylvania, entered its new building and observed a service of dedication on July 14. The first minister of the church, Mr. Wendell Rockey, Jr., now of South Hamilton, Mass., returned to preach the dedicatory sermon and to speak at a public meeting the following evening. Mr. Henry Tavares, moderator of the Ohio Presbytery, gave a charge to the congregation.

It was during Mr. Rockey's pastorate in Grove City that he began meetings in the old No. 5 schoolhouse in the Nashua area, and that name has been retained along with the school bell from the building used by the congregation until their recent move. Mr. Arnold Kress, now a missionary in Japan, was the congregation's first full-time pastor, and he was succeeded by Mr. Arthur Boyce Spooner in the fall of 1966.

Work on the new building, which can seat nearly 200, began last summer and it was first used this winter. The lower level of this modified "Pioneer" structure has a large assembly room, a nursery, two side classrooms that can be divided, with a kitchen and furnace room at the rear.

Return Requested

**Santa Cruz, Calif.** — The church has purchased a site on Capitola Road about two and one-half miles from its Pennsylvania Avenue location with plans for a new sanctuary and educational unit.

Pastor Melvin Nonhof reports the death of a charter member, Mrs. Verna Sprecher, at the age of 89; and the recent loss of Messrs. Reuben Edwards, 83, and J. W. Marcus, a former elder and Sunday school superintendent.

**Westfield, N. J.** — Mrs. James Orr of Scotch Plains, who went to be with the Lord in June after a long illness, and her husband were charter members of Mediator Chapel in Philadelphia. Mr. Orr and his daughters requested that memorial gifts be made to the James Price Literature Fund, as they were close friends of his in earlier years.

**Portland, Ore.** — More than fifty persons from First Church and Gladstone gathered at a late spring banquet in honor of nine graduates. They heard Mr. Lee Robbins, an elder from the Gladstone Church, speak on "Thumb Wrestling and Map Reading," urging involvement with enthusiasm in the paths of the Bible.

Lowell Arno and Peter Schmurr are operating the church's printing press to produce the monthly "Tidings" and Pastor Albert Edwards' Bible correspondence course on "Important Truths of the Christian Faith."

**Ringoes, N. J.** — Two youth groups have had increased activity and attendance at Calvary Presbyterian Church of Amwell, reports Mr. Lee Benson, pastor. Mrs. Reba Higgins, bedridden for sixteen years, died at the age of 97.

**Lincoln, Nebr.** — Mike Brady, young member of Pioneer Church, was the one person chosen out of 200 applicants for a position as chaplain's assistant. Among his qualifications were his activities as Sunday school teacher, leader in youth groups, and counselor and athletic director at Bible camp. After eight weeks of special training he will serve perhaps in Vietnam.

*for young people . . .*

*where the ACTION is!*

*. . . Georgia, December 27-30, 1968*

There's nothing wrong with wanting to be where the action is. Youth is a time of excitement when it's great to be alive.

It's pretty hard for one person to develop a lot of action. It's like one hand clapping! Action takes people, in the plural. When young people who are in touch with the source of real action, Jesus Christ, can get together, the potential is tremendous. So here's the news about where the action is. There's a big youth conference coming up, one that you won't want to miss.

This conference is being planned for the Christmas vacation period. It will begin Friday, December 27, and run through Monday, December 30. It's a big weekend, filled with opportunity for Christian fellowship and for really getting to know some Christians with different backgrounds.

Where do you go in December for a conference? To Georgia, to the fabulous layout of the Georgia Baptist Conference Grounds near Toccoa, about 80 miles northeast of Atlanta. The airlines will take you to Atlanta for half-price (youth fare — stand-by, of course). From Atlanta, buses will take you to the Conference Grounds for a terrific time.

The different thing about this conference is that it will include young people from the Christian Reformed Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America. What do you know about the two churches to which you don't belong? About as much as their young people know about yours! Because young Christians who share the Reformed faith ought to know more about each other, the Reformed Ecumenical Synod is planning this conference.

Will you be there? That depends. You see, the limit on those who attend is 200, and those 200 will be divided between the three churches. Any high school senior and post-high youth are eligible. If this sounds like the action you'd like to be a part of, start planning now and get your registration in early. We'll correspond with you about your travel plans.

See you in December . . . in Georgia . . . where the action is!

**CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS**

Sharing with youth of three churches —

- Panels, small groups—get to know Christian youth of other denominations.
- Inspiration and information: Leaders include Ken Smith (Reformed Presbyterian), Frank Breisch (Orthodox Presbyterian), Jim Lont (Christian Reformed), Paul Schrotenboer (General Secretary, Reformed Ecumenical Synod).
- Folksinging, recreation (200-acre lake and recreation area).
- Final Fellowship Luncheon, Monday noon, December 30.

Registration Blank. Send to:

R. E. S. YOUTH CONFERENCE  
1677 Gentian Drive, S. E.  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49508

Count me in on the action!

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Church \_\_\_\_\_

Enclose \$18.00 registration fee before November 1; \$20.00 after November 1.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Pastor's signature