

KOINONIA KONNECTION

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DAYS FULL OF TROUBLE: A HOLY RESPONSE TO PHYSICAL ILLNESS

It could be something minor. You wake upon in the morning with a stuffed head and you're sneezing like a cannon. Or maybe its something a little more serious. Your doctor informs you that you have a herniated disk in your lower back, or that you're suffering from gall stones. Or, it may be something gigantic, devastating, earth-shattering. You're diagnosed with cancer, permanently crippled in an accident, or struck with a terminal illness of such a character that it's only a matter of time before you're gone.

No matter what the details of our sickness may be, whether minor or tragic, our nature tends to respond in a way far from righteous. Thus, it's important, even before the sorrow of illness strikes, to be prepared with godly principles which may equip us to respond wisely to something that all of us would rather do without. Each of these principles revolve around the idea of "acceptance."

ACCEPT THAT SICKNESS IS A PART LIFE

I remember seeing a commercial once that ran something like this: The viewer was confronted with the image of a person clearly in the throes of deep depression. Whoever directed the commercial was quite skillful in his endeavor to present, through awkward camera angles, gloomy lighting, and other effects, the dreary condition of the afflicted person. The actress, likewise, was very convincing as a soul having no hope. The close of the advertisement (which was for an anti-depressant drug) pictured the same woman, now smiling happily and walking blissfully through the grass in a sun-drenched park. As the sunlight sparkled on the camera, the screen faded to a comforting blue, confronting the viewer with this inviting slogan: "Get back to your life."

Consider the immense assumption in this tiny little motto: Get back to your life. In other words, sickness is an interruption to life. It isn't actually life...but something other than life. Sickness is a perversion, an aberration, a violation of life. And the great reason why we should endeavor to escape the clutches of illness is because of this perverse halt which sickness puts upon "living." Suffering, discomfort, emotional problems, disease...these are all a departure from the acceptable. These are hurdles which disallow us from being fully and freely alive.

A very significant principle to remember when we grow sick is that the above philosophy, so often pressed upon us by our culture, and so easily believed by our warped nature, is completely bunk. Frankly, it's no surprise that such a shallow approach to the issue of illness is proclaimed by our equally shallow society. In our times, anything which interrupts the pursuit of fleshly satisfaction and materialistic hunger is foolishly labeled as "not really living." At its root then, such a view of illness is distinctly anti-Christian and anti-spiritual. It presumes that the pursuit of pleasure and personal comfort is the essence of life. Christians should consciously revolt against such a revolting perspective.

ACCEPT THAT SICKNESS IS PART OF PROVIDENCE

I recall an incident related to me in which a Christian young man, greatly disturbed by an accident which had rendered his mother comatose, said, "God had nothing to do with this." Now, to some degree, we have to sympathize with this young man's efforts to distance God from something he had come to perceive as evil. And yet, the solace he sought to give himself really was no solace at all. The God who "had nothing to do" with his mother's accident may seem more palpable, but lacks potency. This God becomes the powerless victim of circumstances out of His control. God is either swept away by chance, or worse, overpowered or outsmarted by dark powers bent on destroying human beings.

What refuge, however, may be found in God's word in this regard. Consider God's servant Job, who though he was the object of extraordinary satanic attack, never encountered any circumstance or illness which was out of Jehovah's direct control (cf. Job 1:11). Though God's hand toward Job was pretty rough, it was yet God's hand that was doing the "roughing." Our colds are God's colds. Our cancer is His cancer. This profound truth provides us with no small comfort when we are able to remember it.

ACCEPT THAT SICKNESS IS PART OF "MY GOOD"

Closely connected with the above is the testimony of Scripture that God's "roughing" in regard to illness (or any adversity) has, for His people, a good purpose. For boil-covered Job, this purpose was to confront Job with the fact of God's absolute rights over Job's life, and the lives of his family. Sovereignty was the key issue. What is it that our Lord will teach us through our illness? In what ways will we grow in holiness under the unpleasant scourge of sickness? Will we grow more patient in waiting upon the Lord? Most likely. Will we find ourselves more ready to come to Him in prayer and powerless dependence? Without a doubt. And, if recovery is His will, when the difficulty comes to an end won't we be much more likely to praise Him for His goodness and grace in our cure? Most certainly.

Says the Lord in regard to His people: "I will set my eyes on them for good." (Jer. 24:6) What's truly amazing is that these words were spoken in the context of a very severe judgment against God's people, specifically the exile. The exile, rather than destroying God's chosen folk, would purify and enliven them spiritually...draw them back to their God. How much more may those of us who suffer under illness, which cannot generally be attributed to some particular sin on our part--I say again, how much more may those of us who are sick comfort ourselves with this assurance of His: "I will set my eyes on you for good."

ACCEPT THAT SICKNESS IS DESTINED TO END

Though I would by no means retract what was said above, there is a very real sense in which sickness is an interruption to life as it should be. Our race was labeled "very good" when we were set at home in the Garden (Gen. 1:31). Part of our "very goodness" was a complete lack of illness of any kind. No colds. No stomach aches. No bad backs. And certainly no

terminal sickness. Yet, when sin entered into the world, death came with it as a curse upon our whole race. Says Paul in his letter to the Romans, "Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin." (Rom. 5:12) God provided for us the hope of an immortal life filled with vitality and health, both spiritual and physical. But alas, our race's sin in Adam brought forth a tragic end to that hope, at least for a time.

And yet, through the Cross of Jesus Christ, the debilitating results of sin and the curse are being brought to an end. To quote the thunderclap phraseology of the poet John Donne: "Death, thou shalt die!"¹ True enough, Mr. Donne! How powerful and full is the redemption of Christ! His is a salvation which extends to bone and flesh as well as soul! As sin shall die so shall cancer! As depravity will come to an end, so will injury! As guilt will become a stranger, so will aging, weakness, depression, neurotic disorders, colds, influenza, tuberculosis--so shall die any and all afflictions of body, mind, or spirit. Think with me, friend, on what such news tells us about the power of Christ's blood! Think, friend, how potent must be his intercession! How full and complete his labor as Messiah! How great a Savior we truly have! Praise the Lord! When He moves to save us, He saves the whole of us! So does the Apostle testify, "We are complete in Him." (Col. 2:10) Our every part, our ever principle will be filled to the brim with the living water of health and vitality by the grace of God in Jesus Christ!

As one might think upon the final demise of a despised enemy, so we may look upon our sicknesses as having but only so much time--so much time until the hand of God does away with them once and for all in glory.

A FINAL WORD

Sickness is a very sober and serious experience. By all the means in our power, it is proper for our race to seek to combat it. Likewise, it is perfectly fitting that we should submit ourselves, with wisdom and discernment, to the great gift of medical science, which to some small degree is able to alleviate our suffering.

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¹From "Death, Be Not Proud" by John Donne.

FAMILIES IN FOCUS

THE DUTIES OF PARENTS - PART 7 OF 7



XVI. TRAIN THEM REMEMBERING CONTINUALLY THE PROMISES OF SCRIPTURE.

I name this also shortly, in order to guard you against discouragement.

You have a plain promise on your side, "Train up your child in the way he should go, and when he is old he shall not depart from it" (Prov. xxii. 6). Think what it is to have a promise like this. Promises were the only lamp of hope which cheered the hearts of the patriarchs before the Bible was written. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, all lived on a few promises, and prospered in their souls. Promises are the cordials which in every age have supported and strengthened the believer. He that has got a plain text upon his side need never be cast down. Fathers and mothers, when your hearts are failing, and ready to halt, look at the word of this text, and take comfort.

Think who it is that promises. It is not the word of a man, who may lie or repent; it is the word of the King of kings, who never changes. Hath He said a thing, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good? Neither is anything too hard for Him to perform. The things that are impossible with men are possible with God. Reader, if we get not the benefit of the promise we are dwelling upon, the fault is not in Him, but in ourselves.

Think, too, what the promise contains, before you refuse to take comfort from it. It speaks of a certain time when good training shall especially bear fruit, "when a child is old." Surely there is comfort in this. You may not see with your own eyes the result of careful training, but you know not what blessed fruits may not spring from it, long after you are dead and gone. It is not God's way to give everything at once. "Afterwards" is the time when He often chooses to work, both in the things of nature and in the things of grace. "Afterward" is the season when affliction bears the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb. xii. 1 1). "Afterward" was the time when the son who refused to work in his father's vineyard repented and went (Matt. xxi. 29). And "afterward" is the time to which parents must look forward if they see not success at once, you must sow in hope and plant in hope.

Cast thy bread upon the waters," saith the Spirit, "for thou shalt find it after many days" (Eceles. xi. 1). Many children, I doubt not, shall rise up in the day of judgment, and bless their parents for good training, who never gave any signs of having profited by it during their parents' lives. Go forward then in faith, and be sure that your labour shall not be altogether thrown away. Three times did Elijah stretch himself upon the widow's child before it revived. Take example from him, and persevere.

XVII. TRAIN THEM, LASTLY, WITH CONTINUAL PRAYER FOR A BLESSING ON ALL YOU DO.

Without the blessing of the Lord, your best endeavours will do no good. He has the hearts of all men in His hands, and except He touch the hearts of your children by His Spirit, you will weary yourself to no purpose. Water, therefore, the seed you sow on their minds with unceasing prayer. The Lord is far more willing to hear than we to pray; far more ready to give blessings than we to ask them; but He loves to be entreated for them. And I set this matter of prayer before you, as the top-stone and seal of all you do. I suspect the child of many prayers is seldom cast away.

Look upon your children as Jacob did on his; he tells Esau they are "the children which God hath graciously given thy servant" (Gen. xxxiii. 5). Look on them as Joseph did on his; he told his father, "They are the sons whom God hath given me" (Gen. xlvi. 9). Count them with the Psalmist to be "an heritage and reward from the Lord" (Ps. cxxvii. 3). And then ask the Lord, with a holy boldness, to be gracious and merciful to His own gifts. Mark how Abraham intercedes for Ishmael, because he loved him, "Oh that Ishmael might live before thee" (Gen. xvii. 18). See how Manoah speaks to the angel about Samson, "How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?" (Judg. xiii. 12). Observe how tenderly Job cared for his children's souls, "He offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all, for he said, It may be my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually" (Job i. 5). Parents, if you love your children, go and do likewise. You cannot name their names before the mercy-seat too often.

And now, reader, in conclusion, let me once more press upon you the necessity and importance of using every single means in your power, if you would train children for heaven.

I know well that God is a sovereign God, and doeth all things according to the counsel of His own will. I know that Rehoboam was the son of Solomon, and Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, and that you do not always see godly parents having a godly seed. But I know also that God is a God who works by means, and sure am I, if you make light of such means as I have mentioned, your children are not likely to turn out well.

Fathers and mothers, you may take your children to be baptized, and have them enrolled in the ranks of Christ's Church; you may get godly sponsors to answer for them, and help you by their prayers; you may send them to the best of schools, and give them Bibles and Prayer Books, and fill them with head knowledge but if all this time there is no regular training at home, I tell you plainly, I fear it will go hard in the end with your children's souls. Home is the place where habits are formed; home is the place where the foundations of character are laid; home gives the bias to our tastes, and likings, and opinions. See then, I pray you, that there be careful training at home. Happy indeed is the man who can say, as Bolton did upon his dying bed, to his children, "I do believe not one of you will dare to meet me before the tribunal of Christ in an unregenerate state."

Fathers and mothers, I charge you solemnly before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, take every pains to train your children in the way they should go. I charge you not merely for the sake of your children's souls; I charge you for the sake of your own future comfort and peace. Truly it is your interest so to do. Truly your own happiness in great measure depends on it. Children have ever been the bow from which the sharpest arrows have pierced man's heart. Children have mixed the bitterest cups that man has ever had to drink. Children have caused the saddest tears that man has ever had to shed. Adam could tell you so; Jacob could tell you so; David could tell you so. There are no sorrows on earth like those which children have brought upon their parents. Oh! take heed, lest your own neglect should lay up misery for you in your old

age. Take heed, lest you weep under the ill treatment of a thankless child, in the days when your eye is dim, and your natural force abated.

If ever you wish your children to be the restorers of your life, and the nourishers of your old age, if you would have them blessings and not curses joys and not sorrows Judahs and not Reubens Ruths and not Orpahs, if you would not, like Noah, be ashamed of their deeds, and, like Rebekah, be made weary of your life by them: if this be your wish, remember my advice betimes, train them while young in the right way.

And as for me, I will conclude by putting up my prayer to God for all who read this paper, that you may all be taught of God to feel the value of your own souls. This is one reason why baptism is too often a mere form, and Christian training despised and disregarded. Too often parents feel not for themselves, and so they feel not for their children. They do not realize the tremendous difference between a state of nature and a state of grace, and therefore they are content to let them alone.

Go forward then in faith, and be sure that your labour shall not be altogether thrown away.

Now the Lord teach you all that sin is that abominable thing which God hateth. Then, I know you will mourn over the sins of your children, and strive to pluck them out as brands from the fire.

The Lord teach you all how precious Christ is, and what a mighty and complete work He hath done for our salvation. Then, I feel confident you will use every means to bring your children to Jesus, that they may live through Him.

The Lord teach you all your need of the Holy Spirit, to renew, sanctify, and quicken your souls. Then, I feel sure you will urge your children to pray for Him without ceasing, and never rest till He has come down into their hearts with power, and made them new creatures.

The Lord grant this, and then I have a good hope that you will indeed train up your children well, train well for this life, and train well for the life to come; train well for earth, and train well for heaven; train them for God, for Christ, and for eternity.

-by J.C. Ryle

BOOKS IN REVIEW

This book is the first of a series of reviews of three volumes written by Thomas Watson which are a collection of sermons based on the Westminster Shorter Catechism. These volumes are excellent study aids for anyone who desires to study the catechism to help them better know and understand the foremost doctrinal and experimental truths of the Christian faith. As in all of these works there is a good mixture of sound doctrine, heart searching experience and practical wisdom. In each section the author first gives an explanation of the question and answer being discussed and then concludes with giving several practical uses that will strengthen the believer's faith as well as give encouragement and direction as to how the doctrinal truths apply to a daily walk with the Lord. This volume begins with an introduction, and has sections on God and his creation, the fall, the covenant of God and its Mediator, the application of redemption, and death and the last days.

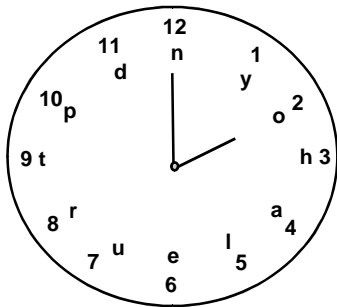
A BODY OF DIVINITY
Thomas Watson
The Banner of Truth Trust

-submitted by Cope Jonkman

YOUTH'S CORNER

GENESIS 12:1,4

God called Abram to do something special, yet difficult. Abram had faith that God knew what was best. When it was time, Abram followed God's instructions. Use the clock to decode God's instructions and how Abram responded. Then use the code to see how Abram's response is a challenge to all believers.



9 3 6 5 2 8 11 3 4 11 s i
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9 2 4 b 8 4 m " 5 6 4 v 6 1 2 7 8

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w i 5 5 s 3 2 w 1 2 7 ." S 2 4 b 8 4 m 5 6 f 9 ...

4 b 8 4 m w 4 s 6 v 6 12 9 1 -fiv 6 1 6 4 8 s 2 5 11 Gen.12:1,2

Challenge: 3 2 w c 4 12 l f 2 5 5 2 w C 3 8 is 9 's c 4 5 5 ?



MISSION SPOTLIGHT

SAMARITAN'S PURSE

WHO WE ARE

The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) gives a clear picture of God's desire for us to help those in desperate need wherever we find them. After describing how the Samaritan rescued a hurting man whom others had passed by, Jesus told His hearers, "Go and do likewise."

For over 35 years, Samaritan's Purse has done our utmost to follow Christ's command by going to the aid of the world's poor, sick, and suffering. We are an effective means of reaching hurting people in countries around the world with food, medicine, and other assistance in the Name of Jesus Christ. This, in turn, earns us a hearing for the Gospel, the Good News of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Our emergency relief programs provide desperately needed assistance to victims of natural disaster, war, disease, and famine. As we offer food, water, and temporary shelter, we meet critical needs and give people a chance to rebuild their lives.

Our community development and vocational programs in impoverished villages and neighborhoods help people break the cycle of poverty and give them hope for a better tomorrow.

We impact the lives of vulnerable children through educational, feeding, clothing, and shelter programs that let them know they are not forgotten.

We provide first-class treatment in the Name of the Great Physician through our medical projects, as well as supplying mission hospitals with much needed equipment and supplies.

As our teams work in crisis areas of the world, people often ask, "Why did you come?" The answer is always the same: "We have come to help you in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Our ministry is all about Jesus--first, last, and always. As the Apostle Paul said, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5, NIV).

DEAR FRIENDS,

Sandwiched between China and India, the country of Nepal is defined by the majestic Himalayan Mountains. A land no bigger than Michigan contains eight of the world's 10 tallest peaks, including the highest spot on earth, Mount Everest. No wonder Nepal is known as "the rooftop of the world."

Seeing those snow-capped ridges reminds me of these words from Isaiah: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings good tidings, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Isaiah 52:7, NKJV).

Much like scaling the Himalayas, Nepal has been a steep and slippery climb for the Gospel. In 1953 when Sir Edmund Hillary became the first man to conquer Mount Everest-leaving a small cross on the summit-Christians were not even allowed to live in the world's only Hindu kingdom. On my first trip there in 1976, there were only a few thousand believers. More recently, as the Christian faith finally gained a foothold, Nepal has been shaken by the assassination of the royal family and the rise of radical communists. Only in the last two years have Christians been allowed to hold evangelistic meetings.

Now God has opened doors for Samaritan's Purse to minister to the people of Nepal through a remarkable group of believers led by Pastor Pradeep and his wife, Maya (names changed for security reasons).

Pradeep once was a high-caste Hindu with a privileged position in Nepali society. Then he broke his back in a bad fall and spent many months in recovery at a missionary hospital. To provide for their family, Maya took a job cleaning the floors of the hospital's leper house. Life could not have seemed more hopeless.

Then God intervened. Pradeep and Maya heard the Good News of God's love from the missionaries and committed their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. Pradeep was so excited about the Gospel that he would yell out the window of his hospital room to people passing by, "I have an amazing story. Come and hear it!"

By the time Pradeep was released from the hospital, the couple knew the Lord was calling them to open a church for the poor, the disabled, and the outcasts of society. Today that congregation packs an old factory every Sunday to worship God with a joy that's hard to imagine. Many are in wheelchairs. Others are blind or infected with HIV. Lepers lift up their deformed hands to praise the Lord. What little they have, they share with their neighbors.

As part of its ministry, this amazing church has built one-room apartments in part of its building to provide housing for people who have nowhere to stay. That's where Samaritan's Purse comes in.

Through our Children's Heart Project, we've brought more than 430 children to America for life-saving heart surgery that could not be performed in their home countries. Although some surgery is available in Nepal, many families shy away for various reasons. Some followers of traditional religions believe in reincarnation, and consider their children's illness to be a vestige of sin in a previous life. Others are rural families who are simply afraid to go to the city-much less to travel overseas like our other heart patients.

Samaritan's Purse is working with this special congregation in Nepal to welcome families from the surrounding region and house them at the church while their children undergo heart surgery. Surrounded for weeks by caring Christians, they will experience the love of Jesus in a powerful way.

Our goal is to work with the church to provide them with the facilities and resources to care for these families. We are trusting God that the lives of many boys and girls will be saved through surgery-and that many children and family members will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

In the months ahead, Samaritan's Purse will be developing more ministries in Nepal. We want to lift up the Name of Jesus higher than the Himalayas. As God's Word says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other Name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, NIV).

'MANNA FROM HEAVEN'

When political and ethnic violence rocked Kenya in early January, hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes to escape angry mobs. With little more

than the clothes on their backs, many found themselves in makeshift camps, where food and clean water were scarce.

With the aircraft we have based in Kenya, Samaritan's Purse was uniquely positioned to offer immediate help to those in difficult-to-reach parts of the country. When the violence first erupted, road transportation came to a halt. Our planes were able to evacuate more than 30 missionaries from western Kenya, which was the scene of some of the worst brutality.

When we received an urgent request from a Christian orphanage on an isolated island in Lake Victoria, we flew in tons of food to sustain the children until the security situation became more stable.

"We are overwhelmed by the love of Christ you have shown us," said the director of the orphanage. "People were amazed by the God who can give so much good food. To the children, it was manna from heaven."

Samaritan's Purse staff and volunteer doctors from our World Medical Mission ministry mobilized to meet other emergency needs. The physicians treated the wounded at our partner hospitals in western Kenya. We provided food and medical supplies in the strife-torn town of Eldoret, and distributed food, tents, bedding, medicine, and other items to displaced families in the capital city of Nairobi and the surrounding area.

Samaritan's Purse has been working in Kenya for decades, and we have an extensive network of church partners. Despite the recent difficulties and dangers, our teams were able to continue our ongoing relief work, including a therapeutic feeding project for malnourished children, a clean water project, and HIV/AIDS programs.

HOPE IN THE AFTERMATH OF TORNADES

The tornadoes that tore across the South the night of February 5 were the deadliest in the United States in the last 20 years. Sixty people lost their lives, and over 1,000 houses were destroyed in five states.

Samaritan's Purse dispatched our Disaster Relief Units to some of the hardest hit towns, where we cut trees, repaired roofs, and comforted survivors. In the

wreckage of one house in Lafayette, Tennessee, where a father and daughter died, some of our volunteers were able to help the mother recover priceless keepsakes as they surrounded her with prayer.

In Clinton, Arkansas, we found a newlywed couple who had somehow survived in a pickup truck that was tossed 300 yards. One team of volunteers from Florida reshingled their roof, and another team from Americus, Georgia-hit by a tornado last March-led the couple in prayer to recommit their lives to Christ.

Spring is the height of the tornado season. We don't know where storms will strike next, but our Disaster Relief Units and volunteer teams are ready to respond immediately. In the past year, our four tractor-trailers have covered 30,000 miles. Thanks to your prayers and support, Samaritan's Purse has been able to assist hundreds of families in their hour of need.

www.samaritanspurse.org/WhoWeAre_Index.asp
www.samaritanspurse.org/Newsletter_Index.asp
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DAYS FULL OF TROUBLE

(CONTINUED FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER)

And for those who are the friends and loved ones of the ill, we ought not to be insensitive in the manner with which we remind those we love of the above principles. A crass, lighthearted series of Bible quotations is a far cry from the empathy and prudence required of those who seek to comfort the sick. On the other hand, silence is not the answer either. It is not the place of faith to minister to illness without comment from the God of Those Who Suffer. He's given His word, with all its precious promises and encouragements, so that those we love may have hope. And further, it is not for the sufferer to turn a deaf ear to what our God has to say about His providence and purpose in regard to our sickness. Illness has, for the people of God, a great and holy end. It's designed to teach us about God, not drive us away from Him as we wallow in fear and self-pity. May our Lord and God, Who gives all wisdom and courage, empower us to respond to sickness as the people of God, not as those who have no hope.

-by Edward W. Ludt

Elders: Pastor Ed Ludt
179 Howell Road, RR#1
St. George, ON
N0E 1N0
(519) 448-3129
eludt@sympatico.ca

Mr. Barry Everts
1405 Seaton Road, RR#1
Cambridge, ON
N1R 5S2
(519) 623-8208
beverts@execulink.com

Mr. Cope Jonkman
76 Harrisburg Road, RR#1
Paris, ON
N3L 3E1
(519) 448-1068
cjonkman@execulink.com

Deacons: Mr. Gary Everts
789 Sheffield Road, RR#2
Branchton, ON
N0B 1L0
(519) 623-9674
gteverts@rogers.com

Mr. Evert Winkels
121 McMillan Road, RR#6
Brantford, ON
N3T 5L8
(519)647-9833
ewinkels@sympatico.ca

GRACE COVENANT CHURCH

For Christ's Crown and Covenant

Services: Sundays at 10:00 A.M. and 6:00 P.M.

1260 Sheffield Road, Sheffield
(formerly Sheffield Public School)
mailing address - P.O. Box 12-4 Sheffield, ON L0R 1Z0
phone - (519) 621-1577
email - gcc@execulink.com
web site - <http://www.gcc-opc.org/>