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Trouble Is Coming

Actually, it's here already.
But it will get worse.
So the trouble will yet come.

The trouble is the global financial situation, and the evidence is clear. Since 2008 the United States has experienced a recessionary economy. The recession is ranked by the experts as the worst downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Large companies, once the mainstays of the economy, have gone bankrupt or have received government stimulus funds to stay in business. The housing market has crashed, taking with it many formerly prosperous small businesses. Unemployment remains between eight and fifteen percent, depending on who is doing the calculating and what standards they are using. In addition, many have insufficient work and struggle to make a decent living.

Most experts think that the worst is now past and that the economy is recovering. But most also concede that at best the recovery is slow and tepid. Some areas, such as west Michigan, seem to be doing quite well, while others are still mired in the mud of stagnation.

But just when there are some positive signs, the financial gurus warn of the very real possibility of a double-dip recession, by which they mean that the potential exists that just when it seems that things are improving, we could fall back into a worse recession. The reason is that the economy is no longer national, as it once was, but global. The nations of

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the world are no longer disparate entities politically or economically, but are closely interdependent. When one of the world's large economies sneezes, the rest of the world catches a cold.

Currently the European Union is in trouble to the point that many nations, including Italy, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, and France, are flirting with bankruptcy. Greece, with perhaps the worst troubles of all, recently tried to impose austerity measures, including wage cuts and reduction of social entitlements, upon its populace. The result was riots in the streets. When the people lost their government handouts, which they did not earn and to which they had no right, they behaved like petulant children throwing a temper tantrum. And this happens in what once was the most highly developed civilization known to man.

In order to avoid being dragged into the depths of a depression, the governments of the world have spent vast sums of money. In the United States the current administration has borrowed $14 trillion (the exact sum depends on who is doing the reckoning) in an effort to lever the economy out of recession.

This is where it gets practical for you, young people. *You* are the ones who are now saddled with this debt. Not my generation, not so much the generation of your parents, but your generation. The sums of money involved are so huge as to be incomprehensible, at least to me. Yet they are bandied about as though they were pocket change. And to think that this is not money we already have; then we could disagree about how to spend it. But this is money we do not have; it doesn't exist. Even worse, no one has a clue as to how this could possibly be repaid. Yet the government plunges ahead, assuring us that we can spend our way to prosperity. But it does not require a financial genius to see that debt is not the problem, but only exacerbates the problem by placing a heavy burden on the economy. And all of this will be your problem, young people. That's a scary thought.

But all of this is not really the problem, is it? I don't mean to minimize the trouble that lies ahead. I do not envy your position, and I haven't a clue how you will dig yourselves out of the deep hole into which you have been thrown. But money, even vast sums of it, is not really the issue. Rather, the *use* of money is the root of the matter.

On a practical level the problem is stupidity, plain and simple. Or as the book of Proverbs calls it, foolishness. Wisdom is the ability and willingness to apply knowledge in a useful and practical manner. Foolishness is the opposite: the inability and refusal to apply knowledge. Foolishness abounds. It is simply stupidity to think and act as if deficit funding is the answer to the problem. Try doing this with your personal finances and see where it gets you. When is the last time you bought something with the expectation that someone else would pay for it? It is no different on the governmental level. But this is more than stupidity. Foolishness includes also an aspect of willfulness: it involves knowing what is right but refusing to do it. Applied to the current situation, it means that one takes the attitude,"I'm going to get mine, and I don't care who has to pay for it." This is precisely what is happening now, and the younger generations will pay the price. To the degree that foolishness is willful, it is sin.

This problem is even deeper than this willful foolishness. It involves the principle of stewardship, which in turn involves two basic ideas. The first is that God owns everything. This follows from the truth of divine creation. God made everything that exists, which means that all things are his alone. Further, he is the God of providence, who continually upholds and governs all things according to his sovereign will and plan. This implies, second, that man owns nothing. He has made nothing, and he upholds and governs nothing. Therefore nothing is his. He is God's caretaker, charged in the cultural mandate to be God's custodian.

This twofold idea of stewardship is reality. That is, it is the truth; it is what is right; it is how God intended all things. The problem is that because of the entrance of sin into the world, man denies the concept of stewardship and changes it into its opposite. Sinful man regards all things as his, not God's. Sinful man asserts ownership over the creation, as well as over its governance and sustenance. He therefore twists the truth of stewardship into its opposite, denying what God reveals to be his will and putting himself in the place of God.

Because he thinks and acts from the principle of sinful selfishness and arrogant denial of the truth, man gets everything wrong. Therefore he acts not wisely, but foolishly. He uses the creation in ways that God never intended, and often ruins it in the process. In every instance that Scripture mentions creation and providence in the context of stewardship and of man's relation to God, it assumes the pres-

ent existence: man is called to manage what God has created, not what God has *not* created. Man is called to work with what God gives, not with what he does not give. This immediately makes the idea of unmanageable debt suspect, if not clearly wrong. This means that when man attempts to live by means of what he does not have, he violates the principle of stewardship and makes himself wiser than God. A passage such as Proverbs 22:7 speaks disparagingly about debt when it states that the borrower is slave to the lender. Positively, in Proverbs 6:6–8 we are given the example of the ant as a model to be followed: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise; Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." We are to work to make provision for the future, not borrow to live for the present. The application to the current financial situation is obvious.

So trouble is now upon us. But more is yet to come, because the current crisis is a sign of the times. We are perhaps most familiar with those signs of Christ's coming that occur in the realm of nature or that are connected directly with the church. But we must not overlook the signs that concern politics and finance, for they are a significant factor in the coming of the antichrist.

The first part of Revelation 13 teaches in figurative language that the antichrist is a beast that arises out of the nations. The nations are portrayed under the figure of the sea when it cannot rest, but is in constant turmoil, casting up mire and dirt. When we put these ideas together, the meaning is that antichrist is a political figure who is willingly hailed as the savior of the world. He will solve all the political and financial problems that continue to plague the world as it is under the dominion of sin. But he does not originate in a vacuum; he does not suddenly waltz onto the stage of history without any background. Rather, he arises out of the nations. Because the nations are chronically war-torn, revolution-plagued, devastated by famine, pestilence, and all sorts of natural disasters, they are looking for a solution. They are tired of the constant problems, turmoil, and uncertainty that characterize their lives in the world. The point is that there must be an occasion, a background, a necessity for his origin and rise to power.

What we are seeing today, and what we will increasingly see as time goes on, is the development of the background and occasion for the rise of antichrist. The fiscal crisis is part of the turmoil of the nations and belongs to the difficulty of maintaining a semblance of stability in the world. It thus helps to prepare the way for the man of sin.

Is there a solution to the current problem? In theory, yes. And it is simple: Fear God and keep his commandments. Be not foolish, but wise. Instead of usurping the place of God, exercise proper, biblical stewardship over all aspects of life. But in reality, will this happen? Absolutely not. Scripture teaches the advance and development of sin that worsens and accelerates as the end becomes nearer. To believe that man will take any steps toward a true resolution of this problem is not according to Scripture, and is incredibly naïve. From a strictly earthly perspective, young people, I do not envy your future, for it does not seem to be bright.

All of this seems so dark and hopeless, and so it is from a human viewpoint. Yet there is a light in the darkness. The very first verse of Revelation 1 puts this into proper perspective when it says that it describes things that must come to pass. The significance of the word "must" should not be lost on us. It means that all things that take place belong to God's counsel and that their execution is part of his will. Nothing at all can happen except according to his counsel, and God must fulfill that counsel because it is his. This implies that all of the signs in nature, in the church, in the world of nations, and in all aspects of history serve to bring the kingdom of Christ. The signs of the times are not merely a list of things that have to happen before the end of time. But because they are according to God's counsel, they *must* happen, because they bring the false kingdom first of antichrist, and then the reality of Christ's eternal kingdom.

Thus, when we are caught up in the turmoil of the nations—and we surely are and will be, for we with the wicked live on this earth—then we see the signs of the times and we hear the footsteps of our Lord. We understand that without the signs of the times, he cannot come. Then we understand the true significance of the events around us. And we are not afraid, but pray, "Come, Lord Jesus—quickly."

Editor's Note

Mark Hoeksema

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Choosing a Vocation

Brendan Looyenga

Seeking a Vocation as a Reformed Christian

"Commit they works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established" (Prov. 16:3).

People work. That's a simple fact of life for most adults, and for many adolescents and teenagers as well. Whether it's in the home, in the field, on the worksite, in the office or elsewhere—people work. In past generations the type of work—or vocation—that one performed had more to do with family history than choice. If your father farmed, so did you. If he ran a small shop or store in town, so did you. And if he was a teacher or minister, it was more likely that you would find a similarly educated vocation that required more schooling than your fellow church members or others in the community. Over the past century, however, the type of vocation one assumed after grade school or high school gradually became more about choice and abilities rather than family history. While this shift in vocational determination enabled individuals to find more than just a "job" in life, it also placed a greater responsibility on the individual to choose wisely when considering what would be his life's calling.

Today we find ourselves in a time and place where nearly any vocation is possible for an individual with the God-given talents and desire to pursue it. It is less common now for high school graduates to question *whether* they should go to college than *what* they should go to college to learn. Given the myriad of educational choices that students are faced with today, it is not surprising that many—perhaps most—of them end up in a career that is altogether different from what they had intended back in high school. This was certainly true for me, and is no doubt true for other readers who find themselves on the other side of college education or vocational training. In hindsight, I can also say that I wish I had been more deliberate in the choice of my career. While I can see the handiwork of our heavenly Father guiding me through my educational and vocational path in life, I now also see that the choices I made on that pathway—though sovereignly guided by God—were not always made from the correct perspective.

So what is the "correct perspective" on vocation? And if one can determine what that perspective should be, how does it help in finding the right vocational path in life? These are questions that every high school and college student should be asking as he or she thinks about adult life. For readers who have only just started high school, perhaps these questions seem to be about something that is very far away. But as any high school senior or college student can tell you, four years is a remarkably short

time. Before you know it, you will be making critically important decisions about your future. And before you reach these big decisions, each and every one of you should be thinking about what God would have you to do with your life. If you have not already begun to do so, I would like to encourage you by pointing to a number of Biblical principles that will help you to understand why choosing a vocation is so important and how to go about doing exactly that in a deliberate, God-centered way.

The importance of vocation in the service of God

When God created Adam and put him in the garden, He immediately gave Adam a vocation, which was to cultivate and develop the Garden of Eden. Even though the creation God made was perfect, he created Adam to work. The work God gave Adam was to create culture. By *culture* we refer to any of man's work with creation using his mind or body. The Bible passage that particularly speaks to this idea is Genesis 1:26–31, which is commonly referred to as the cultural mandate. In this mandate God called the human race—represented by Adam—to develop the creation he had made. All of the physical creation was put under the authority of Adam so that he could shape and mold its contents for the purpose of glorifying God.

The fact that Adam's calling to work in the garden was a call to worship God is emphasized by the word "culture," which we use to describe God's command in Genesis 1:28. The word is derived from the Latin root "*colere*", which carries two meanings in its original form. The first meaning is "to cultivate," which makes sense in the respect that Adam was called to cultivate the creation God had made. The second meaning of *colere* is "to worship," which is less obvious unless we consider that the purpose of everything we do—including our work—is to glorify God.

That "cultivation" and "worship" would be wrapped into a single word may be strange to us, but this was a common theme in the ancient world. Consider, for example, the many religions of the heathen nations surrounding Old Testament Israel, and the names of their many gods quickly come to mind. Names like Baal, Asherah, Dagon and Aphrodite are familiar, but what you may not realize about these idol gods is that all of them were deities of fertility. They were specifically worshiped because they were expected to bless the work of cultivation, which was the central vocation in the ancient world. The work of cultivating and worship of the gods served the same basic purpose, which was to bring fertility to the hills and valleys of the ancient world.

In the modern world we now have a much broader array of vocations available, and have mostly lost the connection between work and worship. But this theme is important if we are to understand the *purpose* of our work. When we work, we are not just earning a living or doing something we find enjoyable. Rather, we are developing the creation that God entrusted to us in the beginning. This development of creation—which we call culture—is meant to glorify God, and as such our work is in its own way a form of worshipping the Creator.

Seeking the right vocation and calling

When we ask what kind of vocation is appropriate for the redeemed believer to consider, we are really asking what *kind* of culture we should be engaged in. This is a difficult question today, as the word *culture* has been largely twisted to refer to things that please man rather than God. As a result, our tendency is to associate culture with the ungodly music, literature, drama and entertainment of the world around us. But if we properly understand culture to mean the cultivation of creation in any way, we can see that this concept really includes any and all callings, and not just those associated with arts and entertainment. With this understanding in mind, it is possible to ask what kinds of vocation and culture are open to the redeemed believer.

The answer to this important question is that *all kinds* of vocations are open to and appropriate for Christians. A strong biblical foundation for this position is clearly developed in Prof. David Englesma's article "The Reformed Worldview on Behalf of a Godly Culture" (*Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, April 2005). In this article Prof. Englesma lays out the importance of Reformed Christians developing godly culture in every sphere of life and in every vocation. Two points from this article are especially worth mentioning.

The first and most important point is that all spheres of culture are acceptable for believers because the creation we are developing was created good. I Timothy 4:4 provides biblical proof for this idea: "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it is received with thanksgiving." From this text we find that the evil of ungodly culture

is not in the creation itself, but in how the creation has been developed by humans. For example, the development of music is a kind of culture, but music can be used for God-glorifying culture or for ungodly culture. There is an appropriate vocation for Christians in music, even though this sphere of culture can be used to blaspheme God as well.

The second point that Prof. Engelsma develops in his article helps us to discern better when a specific vocation within a given sphere of culture is acceptable for a Christian. He contends that our choice of vocation is limited specifically by the *covenantal* nature of the cultural mandate. What Prof. Engelsma intends by use of the word *covenantal* is to remind us that God gave the physical creation to mankind for use and development with the one purpose of bringing glory to his name. Any vocation that is unable to bring glory to God is therefore inappropriate. This concept can be expanded to include professions that bring the believer into conflict with other aspects of God's law, such as Sabbath observance or the command to be joined to a faithful body of believers for worship. Vocations that are at odds with these and other commands of Scripture, though perhaps not improper by themselves, should be avoided by the believer.

It is here that each and every student preparing for a specific vocation should pause to consider whether and how that vocation can glorify God. I challenge students to spend time meditating on God's word and in prayer to discern how they will honor God in their profession. This type of consideration benefits from the insight and wisdom that comes with age, so I also encourage students to discuss this matter with their parents and other adults, particularly those who might already serve in the profession they aspire to. By searching out the wisdom of Scripture and other believers, Christian young people will not only be able to find out what they are called to do as a vocation, but also to determine how they will use that specific vocation in God's service to his glory.

The practical benefits of seeking God's calling in your vocation

When honoring God becomes the central concern in choosing a vocation, it is inevitable that the believer will seek out ways to mold the creation into a fitting anthem of praise to its creator. This is not, however, the only way in which following the divine calling to work serves God. Part of following a calling also involves developing the talents one has been given in the service of that calling. Even more importantly, Scripture makes clear that the main reason for which God has given us gifts is "the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:7–12). And as the parable of the talents reminds us, these gifts are given to be used and developed in service of our Lord, not simply held onto as our own possession (Matthew 25:14–30).

In some vocations, service to the body of Christ is a direct and singular calling. Vocations such as the gospel ministry, teaching, and serving as a mother in the home are specifically mandated by God to maintain and nurture the body of Christ; therefore the talents used in these vocations obviously serve that purpose. At the same time, however, many of the talents or skills that one may develop in a secular profession can also be used in service of the church. For example, leadership skills developed in the business world are often useful for office bearers, and writing skills developed in a career such as journalism may be of great profit to the church when put to use in the various print materials published for evangelism and education. With careful consideration it becomes clear that nearly all professional skills—writing, speaking, organizing and leading, to name a few—are of great use in service of the body of Christ.

Involvement of Reformed Christians in all spheres of culture and society also provides an important voice in the events and decisions that shape our world. While we should never fall for the illusion that our labors will create an earthly kingdom for Christ, we may—and should—nonetheless provide a voice of godly wisdom in directing policies that have an impact on the church. In this aspect a vocation in government or law may well be one that can serve the body of Christ greatly. Even when the voice of biblical wisdom is not heeded, involvement of Reformed Christians in these spheres serves to issue God's own warning against using his creation for something other than his glory.

Another practical benefit gained from the involvement of believers in different vocational spheres is that they gain the knowledge and insights required to offer informed answers to ethical and moral questions that often arise in our modern world. I Chronicles 12:32 speaks of such men in Old Testament Israel—the children of Issachar—who were

able capably to lead their brethren because of their "understanding of the times." While these insights into the times may certainly be of benefit in many different spheres of culture, they are especially important in the spheres of science, technology and medicine. It is nearly impossible for Reformed believers to know whether a given technology or treatment is appropriate to use if they don't understand what these technologies are and how they work. A good example of this is the confusion regarding stem cells and reproductive technologies used in modern medicine. Involvement of Reformed believers in the spheres of science and medicine can provide a resource for others to understand and discern the use of these technologies appropriately.

In summary, there is much to consider in choosing a vocation. But when we keep in mind the purpose of work—to glorify God—this choice becomes a cause for joy and excitement, not anxiety, for the believer. God has shaped and equipped every one of his children for a specific calling in this world, and finding this calling according to his will should be foremost on the mind of young people. As you go forward, be deliberate in considering how your vocation can be used as "reasonable service" to God (Romans 12:1). Think about how your gifts and talents can be developed for service of the body of Christ, and how you will create Godly culture with these skills. Following God's will in your vocational calling will provide a lifetime of fulfillment, contentment, and peace that will make your forty plus years of work life much more enjoyable.

In upcoming issues, Lord willing, examples of how various Reformed believers view and use their different vocations as service to God will be considered in greater depth. Are you interested in science or medicine, in business or finance, in the skilled trades or the field of computers, or in any other of the many available spheres of labor? Keep an eye out for Reformed perspectives on these (and more) vocations for the believer.

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These six things doth the Lord hate:
Yea, seven are an abomination to him:
A proud look,
A lying tongue,
And hands that shed innocent blood,
An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations,
Feet that be swift in running to mischief,
A false witness that speaketh lies,
And he that soweth discord among brethren.
—Proverbs 6:16–19

An Exhortation to Walk Honestly

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (I Peter 2:11, 12).

Peter addresses the church here as "dearly beloved" who are "pilgrims and strangers." In the opening verses of this epistle Peter mentions those who have been elected to be strangers. "Stranger" could probably be translated as "boarder," one who lives in a home, perhaps with a family, but does not belong to the family. He has no right in the house; he simply lives in the house. This is the position of true believers in the world: they are in it, but do not belong to it.

"Pilgrim" means almost the same thing. He is one who travels in a foreign country, a country to which he does not belong. He is a citizen of another country, that is, a heavenly country. As long, therefore, as he is in this world, he does not build his foundations deep, but he pitches his tent as he moves from day to day. These strangers and pilgrims are a people who have no country here below, but their homeland is in heaven, where presently they expect to go. These the apostle exhorts to walk honestly. In the midst of the world they are constantly to have a walk or conversation that is praiseworthy.

Our walk as to its outward manifestation is one's conduct with relation to other people and the things about him. This is implied in the word "conversation," which receives the emphasis in the text. Yet it can easily be understood that one's outward display has more to it than mere form, for life and its manifestation is more than what can be seen of it. What is outward is motivated by inward principles. One's walk includes his thoughts, desires, and intents of the heart that always regulate the members of the body with respect to what is without. That the inward, moral character of a man belongs to his walk of life becomes very evident as soon as you observe the walk of a man either in sin or in its antithesis, grace.

Scripture speaks of the walk of both the ungodly and the godly. The walk of the ungodly is motivated by the inner principle of a depraved and wicked heart. He is inwardly corrupt and ungodly at heart. All his thoughts are to do evil; his will is perverse; his root is unholy. Thus, his outward conduct and manifestation of life is revealed in every kind of abominable work. When he speaks, he lies and curses. When he sings, he rejoices in darkness. The difference between him and the child of God is that he does not have grace. He does not possess the grace of faith, and whatsoever is not of faith is sin. This does not mean that the ungodly man always cheats and tells lies when you deal with him. That he does not do so is not due to a certain common grace that is given to check him in his sin and enable him to do good works. He has no grace whatsoever. There may be many reasons why he does not cheat, but grace is not one of them.

The apostle, however, is not speaking of the walk of the ungodly, but of the child of God. He also has a walk that involves his whole conduct in the midst of the world, where he is called to be a light. His outward walk and manifestation of life should be—and in principle is—motivated by the inward principle of grace.

First, he does this, negatively, by abstaining from fleshly lusts that war against the soul. Lusts have their seat in the flesh, that is, man's nature which is corrupt. The flesh is not only visible material of which our bodies are composed, but includes all of our nature through which we are connected to and have contact with the world of sense. Lusts of the flesh are the desires that come up out of that corrupt flesh, that seek to satisfy the flesh. They are as evil as the flesh from which they arise. They are found not only in the ungodly, but also in the flesh of the Christian. As long as the Christian is in the world, he has to contend with his flesh, his old nature. Because he still has an old nature, he also has in a lesser or greater degree the lusts of the flesh that seek to satisfy the

worldly aspect of his nature.

From these lusts we are to abstain. That means that in no sense may we indulge in or make provision for these fleshly lusts. We must fight against them, as suggested by the phrase, "which war against the soul." The soul and its fight refer to the soul of the Christian who has been regenerated. The soul is the intellect and will, and all that pertains to them from the point of view of the dominion that the regenerated principle must have and does have over the soul. These fleshly lusts fight against that soul that is under the dominion of the regenerated principle. From these we must abstain. The Christian has within him a new principle of life. Therefore, he is a stranger and a pilgrim in the world. Fleshly lusts do not belong to the world from which he is reborn, and thus he must fight. In the measure that he fights, in that measure he overcomes and is sanctified; and in the measure that he does not fight, in that measure he is overcome, and walks in darkness.

Second, from a positive viewpoint, one must walk honestly. Literally this means "good in appearance, beautiful." One is honest in his walk when in every aspect he manifests himself to be what essentially he is, a Christian. When a Christian seeks to fulfill the lusts of the flesh, he is dishonest. If his walk is good and beautiful, when he lives according to Christian principles, he is honest. Such a walk that is good and beautiful, and therefore honest, is possible for the Christian because he is renewed by the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit. By grace he is impelled to fight against fleshly lusts and to walk a new and holy life.

This calling is difficult. One must contend with his own flesh. Though he is now a stranger, formerly he was not, living as the Gentiles, quite at home in the world. According to his nature he is a citizen, seeking the things of the flesh and of darkness, but now he has obtained mercy with a changed life and a heavenly citizenship. Though he has the beginning of a new obedience, he finds another law in his members.

The Gentile world speaks against the stranger and pilgrim and actually accuses him of being an evildoer. So it was in Peter's day. When there was an earthquake or pestilence, the Christians were blamed. When they refused to worship Caesar as God, they were treated as criminals. So it always is. The church is either laughed to scorn or persecuted. If she is faithful, what happened to Christ also becomes her experience. Thus the life of a Christian is very difficult.

Now there is a good purpose for this exhortation as delivered by Peter. It is the day of visitation. On the one hand, it is the day of God's judgment that he inflicts upon the ungodly in just retribution for their sin. This is not only meted out at the end of the world, but is being realized in this present time. The very fact that a drunkard experiences delirium tremens is due to the judgment of God. This is true also for the one who lives in vice and consequently suffers a broken home and venereal disease.

On the other hand, it is the day when God visits with his grace and calls the sinner out of darkness into his marvelous light, thus converting the sinner from his evil way. This is the sense that Peter is using in the text. The idea is that the Gentile may see your good works, and glorify God when he visits them also in his grace. This makes the words of our text most meaningful, not only with a view to the walk of the people of God, but also with a view to the children of this world among whom God also has his people, and who must yet be saved.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:16: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Peter says almost the same thing here. Those good works are those that proceed out of true faith, that are done according to the law of God, and unto his glory. They are truly manifestations of an honest walk. The ungodly will not glorify God unless they are converted. But when God visits them in his grace and converts them, they will see the good walk of the Christian in an altogether different light. When once they falsely accused the children of God, and slandered those whom they observed were walking honestly, they will now glorify God for his grace, which they will behold in the good works of the Christian. Therefore, when we reveal ourselves as those who are partakers of the anointing of Christ, when we walk in all good works that God has before prepared that we should walk in them, God is pleased to use that godly walk to bring others to conversion. What a privilege, what a calling! May God give to you, young people, and to all of us that grace to walk honestly to the end.

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Watching Daily At My Gates

July 13 ***Read 2 Kings 10***

We know little more about Jehonadab than what is told us here. But we do know about his family. They were relatives of Jethro, father-in-law of Moses. When we encounter them in Scripture, we find that they were faithful. We find this in Jeremiah as well. In contrast we have Jehu. Look what is said about him in verse 31. As we live our lives on this earth, we must work hard to be like Jehonadab. This is done only by God's grace, which attribute Jehu lacked. Let us keep God's law and let us do it with all our heart. Sing Psalter 73.

July 14 ***Read 2 Kings 11***

The scene in 2 Kings switches to Judah. Evil was flowering there as well. Ahab and Jezebel's daughter Athaliah took the initiative to usurp the throne from the family of David. Satan worked to cut short the line of David so Christ could not be born. For six long years Judah struggled under her leadership. But Jehovah did not forget his promise. The faithful priest Jehoiada and his wife cared for Joash, and when the time was right in God's eyes, placed him on the throne. God keeps all of his promises. He kept them to the Israelites, and he keeps his promises to us. Let us go on in life in the strength of those promises. Sing Psalter 241.

July 15 ***Read 2 Kings 12***

God always cared for his covenant people. This is the testimony of Scripture throughout Israel and Judah's history. After the death of wicked Athaliah, the boy king Joash was guided by the righteous high priest Jehoiada. The temple was repaired by honest workmen. The people could once more go up to the temple to worship Jehovah. Once Jehoiada died, Joash turned to evil. He was killed by an uprising of his own people. May we be as the honest workmen who cared for the things of the Lord. May we care for those things even as God has given them to us. Sing Psalter 27.

July 16 ***Read 2 Kings 13***

God did not leave himself without a witness in apostate Israel. As we read of the wicked reigns of the sons of Jehu, we also read of the righteous Elisha, who even in his death stood as a testimony of the faithfulness of the Lord. The kings of Israel paid lip service to God even as Joash came to visit him on his sickbed. But yet that was all it was—lip service. Even the powerful picture of the dead being brought back to life through the instrumentality of Elisha's bones did not move the hard hearts to change. What about us? Does Scripture testify to us of the necessity to walk in the ways of the Lord? Sing Psalter 326.

July 17 ***Read 2 Kings 14***

There are two contrasting ideas in this chapter. First, we see a king who followed after God, but became proud after God had given to him prosperity and victory over Judah's enemies. He did not continue walking in God's ways and, in the evil way of pride, God humbled him with defeat at the hands of Israel. Second, we see God's grace once more to the "seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal." God was not gracious to Israel as a nation through the strength of Jeroboam II, but God used that power to bring peace to the nation for the sake of his remnant still found there. Let us not walk in pride, but let us seek God's grace in all of our lives. Sing Psalter 386.

July 18 ***Read 2 Kings 15***

In this chapter we have an accounting of the reigns of two kings of Judah and the last six kings of Israel. Of both of the kings of Judah it is said that they did what was right in God's sight. From the accounts in 2 Chronicles we find that they also walked in ways of sin. We will return to their history when we reach 2 Chronicles. Of the kings of Israel we must conclude that Israel's cup of iniquity was reaching the brim. Several of those kings were removed by revolt. Foreign nations plagued Israel during this time. Israel would soon go into captivity because of their refusal to obey God. What about us? Sing Psalter 204.

July 19 ***Read 2 Kings 16***

After giving his people a period of relative spiritual peace, God gave Judah over to their desire to worship idols. Jotham's son Ahaz reigned. Ahaz was a very

wicked king. He was so wicked that he copied the idol god from Syria and had it placed in God's temple. The high priest was party to this great sin, further showing to us the depths of sin into which Judah had plunged itself. And if that was not enough, the articles that God commanded to be used in his worship were set aside. God is jealous towards his name. He will not be mocked. Let us preserve the true worship of Jehovah until Christ returns on the clouds of heaven. Sing Psalter 308.

July 20 *Read 2 Kings 17*

In this chapter we read of the captivity of Israel. Its cup of iniquity was full. For all of its sin, Israel would be taken into captivity and scattered throughout the world. Nothing Hoshea could do would forestall this judgment. Israel continually refused to walk in the way that God had commanded them. God also showed to the heathen that he was God alone by the lions that ravaged the lands. God will not be mocked, people of God. We must walk in his commandments. In this way we will feel the peace that he has given to his people alone. Sing Psalter 205.

July 21 *Read 2 Kings 18*

After the dark times during the reign of Ahaz, God gave to his people a king who followed God's commandments. This king was Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a busy king. He brought reformation to Judah's spiritual life, and he was busy in other matters as well. All was not prosperous in Judah, however. The people were not ready to give up their idolatrous ways. God sent Assyria, Israel's captor, to oppress Judah. God also had to show Hezekiah what to do under such afflictions. After trying to buy off Assyria, which just brought more trouble, Hezekiah went to God in prayer. Do we have to be brought to our knees at times? May we ever know what to do in times of distress. Sing Psalter 329.

July 22 *Read 2 Kings 19*

Are we ready to pray when we are in trouble? Do we think about prayer? Do we think about turning to the word of God during such times? This is what Hezekiah did. As he had heard the words of the wicked Rabshakeh, he sent for a word from God's prophet Isaiah. When Rabshakeh heard of Judah's reluctance to bow to his wishes, he sent a scathing letter to Hezekiah. Once again Hezekiah went to Jehovah in prayer. We, too, must cultivate this grace. We must always go to the word of God as found in Scripture, and we must go to God in prayer. Do we? Sing Psalter 272.

July 23 *Read 2 Kings 20*

The events of this chapter occur during Assyria's oppression. While the Assyrian army is camped outside the walls of Jerusalem, God tells Hezekiah to prepare himself for death. Hezekiah is devastated. This was not because he feared death. From a study of his life, we can conclude that he had no son at this time. The line of David that was to end in the Savior would be broken. Hezekiah's prayer is for the cause of God's people. God heard that intercessory prayer and gave to Hezekiah an answer of peace. May we have such concern for the church of God that we make it a part of our daily prayers. Sing Psalter 231.

July 24 *Read 2 Kings 21*

The reigns of two very evil kings are depicted in this chapter. Manasseh reigned for a very long time, and his son Amon reigned for a very short time. Notice the description of Manasseh's reign. He did more evil than even the heathen nations around Judah. There was a prophecy given of the Babylonian captivity during his reign. The evils that God would bring upon his backsliding people would cause all, both in Judah and outside of Judah, to shake their heads. Do we learn from such pronouncements? What is our response? Sing Psalter 216.

July 25 *Read 2 Kings 22*

Following on the heels of the wicked reigns of Manasseh and Amon came the righteous king Josiah, who took the throne at the tender age of eight. There is much on which we can ponder in this chapter. Let's look at two verses. In verse 7 we have mention of very faithful workmen. How faithful are we in our work? How faithful are we in work we do for God's kingdom? Let us never forget that we all have work in that kingdom. Second, look at verse 8. Does the Bible have to be discovered in our church or in our houses? They should not be covered in dust in either place. Let us pray for the grace to be faithful both in our work and in our use of Scripture. Sing Psalter 24.

July 26 *Read 2 Kings 23*

We continue with the account of the reign of Josiah. After hearing the words of God's law, Josiah went to work. He cleared Judah of much of the idolatry that polluted the countryside. He got rid of those men and women who practiced the evils that were forbidden in the law. To the faithful in Judah, he was a breath of fresh air after his wicked fathers. By the wicked he was hated. But God would still carry out his chastisement of the backsliding nation. Josiah died in battle, and his two sons were like their grandfather. Sing Psalter 42.

July 27 ***Read 2 Kings 24***

Here we have the beginning of the end. Judah, like Israel, was filling its cup of iniquity. Josiah would be the last good king that they would have. All of those who followed him would be wicked. Now it is time for Babylon, who had been prophesied about long ago, to take its place as the ruler of the world. Antichrist would reign, and Babylon would be the tool in God's hand to chastise his people. Some would never see the promised land again. Others would have to serve in Babylon. But God is faithful and would return a remnant to the land to bring forth the Christ. Sing Psalter 273.

July 28 ***Read 2 Kings 25***

In this chapter we have a short summary of the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and the land around it. Many tears were shed as family members were killed or forced to march to Babylon. Imagine the feelings of the faithful as they saw the flames lick around the temple of God. But in the midst of the destruction there is hope described. In the last few verses God moves the king of Babylon to let Jehoichin out of prison. From him continues the line that would culminate in Christ our Savior. Sing Psalter 379.

July 29 ***Read 1 Chronicles 1***

We come to the part of Scripture that some of us groan as we encounter it. Yes, there is a time that we might omit it in our daily Bible reading. But there are also nuggets of information that are important in our lives. Let us take the time to be instructed and to know what the Spirit says unto the church of Christ. Sing Psalter 333.

July 30 ***Read 1 Chronicles 2***

1 Chronicles 1 showed to us the genealogy of Adam through Isaac and his sons. Much history is covered in that line. These genealogies show to us the sons of Jacob. It was Jacob in whom God established the covenant promise. Out of Jacob came those 12 patriarchs who began the church. Much history is covered here as well. How much of it can you recall? Sing Psalter 213.

July 31 ***Read 1 Chronicles 3***

Now the line gets a little more focused. It focuses on the line of David. From David you can follow the line to Christ, especially if you use the New Testament genealogies found in Matthew and Luke. In following the line to Christ we see God's covenant faithfulness to his people. Do you see that in your line? Does our line lead back to Christ—not physically for most of us, but spiritually? Sing Psalter 214.

August 1 ***Read 1 Chronicles 4***

After the focused account of the family of David in chapter 3, we begin to learn of other of the various families in Jacob. We see the lines of Judah and Simeon. We also see where some of them settled in Israel. Once again by reading these names we see evidence of God's covenant faithfulness to his church not just then, but the church of all ages. Of that church we confess that we are and always will remain a living member. Sing Psalter 215.

August 2 ***Read 1 Chronicles 5***

In this chapter comes an account of the lines of those tribes who were given permission to settle east of the Jordan River. We first have a parenthetical remark about why Reuben, Jacob's first born, did not receive the birthright blessing that should have been his. In the end of the chapter we see that these tribes were carried captive by Assyria. The cause of both of these events was sin. May we constantly be on guard against sin in our lives that would harm the promise given to us. Sing Psalter 253.

August 3 ***Read 1 Chronicles 6***

Here we have the line of Levi. Principal in that line is Aaron and those sons of his who became high priests. Can you pick out the ones of whom we have significant historical accounts? Do you remember which ones God used to strengthen his church spiritually in a time of moral decay? This is also a line of Christ. It is not one of blood, but spiritually, as he was the last high priest, who not only offered the sacrifice, but also was the sacrifice. Sing Psalter 109.

August 4 ***Read 1 Chronicles 7***

Here are accounts of six more tribes. Less is known of these men, but we see a few judges. Can you find them? We also see men of valor. This could be either physical valor or spiritual valor. In Israel God used both. Today we must be men and women of spiritual valor. Did you see the women mentioned here and there, not only in this chapter but in the others as well? Sing Psalter 70.

August 5 ***Read 1 Chronicles 8***

We might say when reading the first part of this chapter that we have studied this already. We would be right. So we must see if we can discern for what reason God places this here. We see several men of note. First we see Ehud, the judge. Then we see Saul the son of Kish, the first king of Israel. In both of those men God placed authority over his people. However, those people did not always obey. Do we? Sing Psalter 290.

August 6 ***Read 1 Chronicles 9***

We come to the final chapter of the genealogies that are given in 1 Chronicles. Here we have an account of some of those who returned to Israel from captivity. By this the Holy Spirit gives to us evidence of God's covenant faithfulness. He did not let the covenant line die out in Babylon. He saved a remnant out of which would come the Christ, the Savior of the church, including us. At the end of the chapter we see a further genealogy of Saul, whose last days are told in the next chapter. Sing Psalter 291.

August 7 ***Read 1 Chronicles 10***

After we read this short chapter that recounts for us the circumstances surrounding the death of Saul, we would do well to reread the last two verses. After we read those verses, we need to ponder them and see how they fit into our lives. Where we fall short, let us pray for the grace not to walk in the way of the world as Saul did, and let us pray for the grace to walk in the way in which God will lead us. Sing Psalter 366.

August 8 ***Read 1 Chronicles 11***

As we begin reading the account of the kingdom of Israel and then of Judah, we might say we have read this already. We saw many of these stories in Samuel and Kings. But yet there are different aspects that we will encounter. There are things that we must see to learn more of our salvation. David did become mighty, but only because God was with him. We can become spiritually mighty, but only because God is with us. Sing Psalter 361.

August 9 ***Read 1 Chronicles 12***

God gave to David help as he became king. Some of the men mentioned in the chapter came to him as he fled from Saul. Others came to him as he dwelt in Philistia. Still others joined him after the death of Saul. God uses men of spiritual valor in his church. They may be those who hold the special offices. It may be a strong parent or grandparent who leads the family in the right way. There may be someone else who is given certain gifts and talents to help in the church. Are you one of these people? Do you need the help of one of these people? Sing Psalter 398.

August 10 ***Read 1 Chronicles 13***

Unlike Saul, David was concerned about the correct worship of Jehovah. One of the earliest matters he worked at was that of moving the ark back to its rightful place. After securing the kingdom, he worked at moving the ark. But it was not time to do so, because the people of God, including David, had not made their hearts right with Jehovah. He has prescribed a proper way of worship not only for Israel of long ago, but also for the church today. Do we seek to find that proper way of worship? Do we following individually and corporally? Sing Psalter 367.

August 11 ***Read 1 Chronicles 14***

This short chapter recounts for us a summary of David's early kingship. It does not give us an evaluation of it; that will come later. But in the last verses we see something that is worthwhile to note. David was able to prepare his kingdom for the next type of Christ because God was with him. God not only gave him victory over the nations around him, but he also gave to Israel the respect of those nations. In the peace and quiet that ensued, Solomon could construct the temple and lay the groundwork for proper worship of Jehovah. May we pray for such peace in order that we can worship God in the way that he has commanded. Sing Psalter 200.

August 12 ***Read 1 Chronicles 15***

After the interlude of the last chapter, David once more turns to his chief desire. He wishes to bring the ark to Jerusalem. This time, however, he makes a proper work of it. He studies the regulative principles concerning the ark and carries them out properly. It was a time of great rejoicing in Israel. One person, however, did not rejoice. His wife Michal, the daughter of Saul, shows her true colors. She despises David at Satan's instigation for his care of the things of Jehovah. May we worship God with all our hearts even when some around us despise us for worshiping as God has commanded us. Sing Psalter 137.

August 13 ***Read 1 Chronicles 16***

Here we have the final part of the great celebration surrounding the return of the ark. David proclaimed Psalm 105 as a song of praise to God that was to be used from that day on. In it God's name is given the glory, not Israel's or David's. When the public celebration was finished, David went home to bless his family. He cared for their spiritual needs just as every head of the house must do whether or not he is an office bearer. Fathers must be spiritual leaders in their houses. In that way God, who is our covenant Father, will be glorified. May we pray for the grace to glorify him in the way of the proper leading of our families. Sing Psalter 359.

Postmodernism Simply Explained

Introduction

Before we enter into a brief treatment of postmodernism, let's ask the question, "Why would we even have a treatment of postmodernism? Isn't this just some heady concept that does not really matter to us in our everyday life?" The answer to that question is that a discussion of postmodernism is vitally important for us. It is so for at least three reasons.

First, we are called as God's people to be as the sons of Issachar, who, 1 Chronicles 12:32 says, "were men that had understanding of the times." We must know the times in which we live. We must not be ignorant of what is going on around us. And if we are to understand the times, we must understand something about postmodernism. In fact, I would go so far as to say that it is impossible really to understand the world around you right now without understanding something of postmodernism. It is the underlying idea, the root, the molding influence that shapes the way people think and act and respond to things in our day, even if not everyone shaped by it knows they are being shaped by it.

Second, we must give a treatment of postmodernism because postmodern thought attacks the very foundation of our faith. There are many very significant false doctrines that attack the faith that we hold dear. But postmodernism is a doctrine that attacks the very idea that this faith may even exist.

Third, it is important to understand postmodernism because its effects are pervasive in our society. Certain pockets of Dutch Reformed churches are perhaps immune from some issues of modern American society. But I submit that even these pockets are not immune from the effects of postmodernism. It is everywhere, and affects almost everything and everyone.

With that in mind, let us take a brief look at this teaching, this mindset, and this worldview called postmodernism.

What Is Postmodernism?

Postmodernism is difficult to define. There are many aspects of it, and various threads to it. However, to retain accuracy and yet keep things simple, I am going to define postmodernism as the idea that there is no such thing as Truth (and do take notice of the capital T). What postmodernism means when it says that there is no Truth is that there is no such thing as absolute Truth—Truth that is true for all people in all times and in all places. There is no such thing as changeless Truth. There is no such thing as an all-encompassing Truth that stands above us and rains down upon all of us from above and is the same for all of us.

Instead, there are only individual perspectives and opinions. Everyone determines what truth is for himself. Whatever a person decides is true for him is true for him. But it may not be true for another. There is no Truth above us all that all must believe; there is only personal preference. Everyone should be allowed to have his personal preference. No one should try to impose his personal preference for what is true on anyone else, for to do that would be to assume that there is a Truth that is valid for all people.

Thus for postmodernism truth only ever has a lower case t. It is never consistent for all peoples in all places and all times. It is not objective. It is never something outside of the individual that he must reckon with, but it comes from within the individual and is merely the product of his desires.

While certainly some things are subjective in this life, the idea that all things are subjective is destructive and makes no sense even logically. One can destroy postmodern claims with one argument. All one has to say to someone promoting this idea is this: "You have just said there is no Truth, and that everything depends upon perspective. But by declaring that there is no Truth, are you not making a statement that you claim is absolutely True? Are you not declaring for all people, all time, and everywhere a Truth when you say that there is no Truth? So how do I know that that statement is True if there is no Truth? The very thing you are saying destroys what you are saying. What you declare to be True destroys what you declare."

Nonetheless, the postmodernist will simply say

that there is only one thing that is True above all of us, which is that there is no Truth. This is the way the world is for the most part thinking and living today, even if not everyone in that world knows to call it postmodernism.

How Postmodernism Came About

To understand how we have come to believe this as a society, we have to understand something more about postmodernism. That is, we have to understand why it is called postmodernism. The technical definition of postmodernism is quite simple: postmodernism is the general outlook of people in the West after modernism. That's the literal meaning of the word: post (after) modernism. Therefore, to understand postmodernism, I must say something about modernism. To do that, I am first going to go back even further—to the time of the Reformation.

At the time of the Reformation, most people agreed on one thing. There is Truth (with a capital T) out there. Truth is not something that we fashion inside of us. Truth is something outside of us. It is something that is above us and that comes down to us. We do not decide it for ourselves; it is already decided for us.

Most people at the time of the Reformation also believed that that Truth rained down upon us from God in his word, the Bible. The Bible was deemed Truth. It was seen as an explanation for all of life. There is a way we are supposed to live. There is a way to understand who we are and why we are alive. And that way is found in the word of the God who is in himself Truth.

Man is given reason in order to understand God's word and God's Truth. Nonetheless his reason is subject to God's word. At the time of the Reformation, men understood that some things were a matter of perspective, and God's word made clear either explicitly or by its silence which things could be a matter of perspective. But many things, the most important things, are found as absolutely True in God's word. He has given us absolute Truth applicable to all people at all times irrespective of culture or geographical location.

God gave mankind reason, enabled by the Holy Spirit, to understand his word and discover Truth with a capital T in that word. That is the way true churches view Truth today.

After the Reformation, during what is called the Enlightenment, men began to say that while, yes, there is an absolute Truth out there for all people for all times, we don't need God's revelation to find out what it is. They said the Bible is unscientific. It has so many stories in it that cannot be True; it is just a book of myths and fables. If we want to find out what is really True for all men in all time we need to get rid of the Bible, and instead rely solely on the use of our pure reason. That is modernism.

Modernism said that man's mind is like a calculator, purely objective, and could (at the end of the day) produce error-free conclusions. Through science and discovery therefore, modernists said we will put facts, data, into man's mind, and out will pop the Truth. Man is able by himself to discover what is really True. They were still saying that there is a Truth out there for everybody, only now the word of God is not the way to find it. We must as men band together and make discoveries, throw off God's word, and we will find that Truth on our own.

However, when they did that, eventually men began to discover that it really didn't work that way. They started to think and they started to discover things, but what they found was that not everyone agreed on what was True. They thought if they got rid of the Bible and used only reason, then everyone would come to the same conclusions regarding Truth. After all, if you put the same data into 1000 different calculators, no matter where those calculators are, you will get the same answer every time. They thought they would all discover that Truth that is above all of us, and that explains everything. They thought they would all agree on what is right and wrong simply by their use of reason. However, in the end there was no unanimity. They had not all come to the same conclusions. That perturbed them. They started to think, How can this be? If we all have the ability to reason, why do we not all come to the same conclusions?

They decided that the reason was not that they were depraved sinners with depraved motives that controlled their thinking, as the Bible says. The reason, they concluded, was not that their own reason was affected by the fall as the Scriptures state. The reason, they decided, was not that the Reformers had it right, that God's mind was the only mind big enough really to explain everything and therefore we must simply use our reason to understand God's mind in his word. Such a conclusion would require humility, which man does not have apart from Christ.

Instead, they concluded the reason they all came to different conclusions through the use of pure rea-

son was because there was no Truth with a capital T out there to discover. There is no Truth above us all that applies to us all, they said. There is nothing absolute. There is only my opinion and your opinion. There is only what is true for me in my own experience and situation, and that changes from person to person, culture to culture. Everything is simply personal subjective experience or opinion. Therefore, at the end of the day all that matters is that we eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

Some Effects of Postmodernism

You can easily see how this idea affects what people think is right and wrong in our society today. Have you ever really sat and thought about the fact that we actually kill our own children in this country? Have you ever thought about how that is possible in a modern, "enlightened" society? The answer, at least in part, is the depraved notion of postmodernism that undergirds how the world thinks of right and wrong.

The Reformation said that the word of God tells us what is right and what is wrong for all times and for all places. Modernism said there is a right and wrong that applies to everyone, but we do not need the Bible to figure it out; we will do it ourselves. Postmodernism says there is nothing that is right for all times and all places. We just make it up as we go along. If we decide it is wrong for now, it is wrong for now. But if we get up tomorrow and decide what was wrong yesterday is now right today, then it is right. There is no Truth above us. All is relative. There is no standard for right and wrong outside of us. Right and wrong is merely what the majority decides it is at this point in time. We used to think it was wrong to kill babies. But then we decided that now it is right to kill our children if we want. Because we have decided it is so, it is so. Right and wrong is whatever we decide they are. There is no absolute. Who are you to say we are wrong? Today it is wrong to rape, but tomorrow who's to say it is wrong? In fact, there is one postmodern thinker who has wrestled with that very question—can we really say that rape is wrong? Who are we to say? If enough of us agree that it is ok, it will be ok.

What postmodernism is really hit me in college the day after 9/11. I entered my psychology class at a secular university on 9/12. People were very somber, as one can imagine. Nobody said much. There was a general seriousness about what had just happened to our country. Then the psychology professor walked in, and the first thing he said was this: "Now whatever you're feeling right now, I don't want any of you to say that what those people did flying the planes into the towers was wrong. It feels wrong to us. We don't think it is right in our society to fly planes into towers and kill people at this point. But to them in their society that was the right thing to do. Who are we to say? It's all relative." I couldn't believe it. Even murder is relative. The only evil is to say that something is evil. The only wrong is to say that something is wrong. The only Truth is that there is no Truth.

This is what is being taught in many colleges and universities today. This mentality, I dare say, lies behind most if not all classes taught in the humanities at secular universities. There is a reason that in many literature classes there is little or no attempt anymore to discover the intent of the author. There is a reason that in many classes as long your paper on that famous book has some coherence, it gets an A, even if it really has nothing to do with what the author intended the book to communicate. The subjective perspective rules.

Religion also becomes simply a matter of personal preference. The goal in religion is not to find out what is True. The goal for the individual is simply to find something that he likes, and if he likes it, then it becomes true for him. No one is right and no one is wrong in religion, for no religion comes down to us from above. All religions, including Christianity, they say, have their source in man, and represent various ways man tries to make sense of his own existence. None of them are True. What you like may be the exact opposite of what I like. For you that is truth, whereas for me this is truth. No matter if they contradict each other, for truth is private, personal, relative. Perhaps you have discovered that people today do not so much mind your personal beliefs. They don't really care all that much about what you think. What they mind is if you say they must believe what you believe because the Truth you believe is not True just for you, it is True for everyone. This makes them angry, for this breaks the cardinal law of postmodernism—there is no Truth that applies to all.

The effect of postmodernism is felt not only in the universities, and not only in the world's view of religions, but also in the church of Jesus Christ. I am sure you have noticed that people in the church world (your church and mine?) do not want to talk about doctrine nearly as much as they used to. They do not want to talk about what is right and wrong.

They do not want to open the Bible and discover Truth from God's word. Many times, if you show God's word to people who claim the name of Christ, and point out to them that God's word says this, it is shocking how often you hear this response: "Well, I just don't think God is like that. I just don't believe that." And you say, "It says it right here that he is." "Well, I just don't think so." Fifty to sixty years ago (I am told) people who called themselves Christians would sit down with you and open the word of God and discuss positions on the basis of God's word. Now, often they do not really care if the word says it or not. I am generalizing, of course; this is not true of all. But this is a weakness in the church.

Why is that? It is because the thinking of the world has affected the church. People may not know what postmodernism is, but it has affected them. They think that Truth is whatever they decide it is. Truth is my personal preference. It is not something outside of me that comes down upon me. It is whatever I like and don't like. That is postmodernism in the church.

The Root of this Thinking

What is the root of this thinking? Is postmodernism just a fad, a movement in our world today? The answer is that postmodernism and all its effects is and will continue to be the full flowering of human depravity. Do not get the impression that the idea that one can determine Truth to be whatever one wants it to be is only a recent notion. It has recently become an "ism," but it has been around as long as sin has been around. The essence of the appeal of postmodernism to human beings is that it tells every man the same thing the devil told Adam and Eve in the garden: "You will be as God."

The devil's temptation in the garden is the same temptation of postmodern thought. The devil told Adam and Eve, "You do not need to submit to God and Truth as though God were above you and Truth rained down upon you. Eat, and you can be god yourself, knowing good and evil. You may determine what is right and wrong for yourself. Who is God to tell you what is right and what is wrong? Who is he to rule over you? Eat and you will be able to throw him off and determine for yourself what is true and right. Whatever you want Truth to be, that is what it will be. You will be as God, determining good and evil."

That is why even if people have never heard of postmodernism they are affected by it. This is why it is a temptation for you and me too. It resonates with our depraved nature's pride. It is the idea that I may be god, and every man loves that idea in his own nature and will follow it apart from Christ.

Pablo Picasso illustrates postmodernism's connection to the temptation in the garden. Picasso, who embodied postmodernism, painted as though there was no Truth. He also lived as though there was no Truth. He was, in the words of someone close to him, "a monster." Anyone interested may read for himself. His life is too graphic to describe here. What accounts for his art and for his life? Picasso apparently used to walk around muttering the words, "Truth does not exist, Truth cannot exist. I am god. I am god." The devil uses what works, and his first temptation has always been his greatest.

Whereas the idea that I may be god has been around since the time of Adam and Eve, I submit to you that the present age is an age in which that idea from the pit of hell has affected almost everything. The cup of iniquity is almost full. There has never been a time since the days before the flood when the idea that man is god has had such a thorough complete control of the thoughts of so many men's hearts. It has not yet reached its fullest potential in everyone everywhere, but it is getting close.

The Answer

In days like this, how important it is that we study God's Truth, know it, believe it, confess it, and teach it to the generations following us. How important are the things we have always deemed important: thorough catechism training, Protestant Reformed education, parental responsibilities, developing a truly Reformed world view, preparing the youth for the world they will face. These things are necessary, vitally important, that in the midst of this world we may confess that Jesus and his word is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

According to John 18 Jesus is brought before Pontius Pilate to be tried, because the Jews were not allowed to crucify Jesus unless Pilate approved. Pilate interviews Jesus to see if he is worthy of crucifixion as the Jews claim. In the course of the one-on-one trial Pilate asks Jesus, "Art thou a King then?" And Jesus answers in John 18:37, "Thou sayest that I am a king. (Yes, I am, Pilate. But your Ceasar doesn't have to worry. I am a different kind of King…) To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the Truth. Every one that is of the Truth heareth my voice."

How does Pilate respond? He responds like

postmodernism responds to Christ and his Truth today. John 18:38: "Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?" No genuine question. More like this: Truth! Jesus? Ha, there are only opinions, only perceptions. There is no Truth.

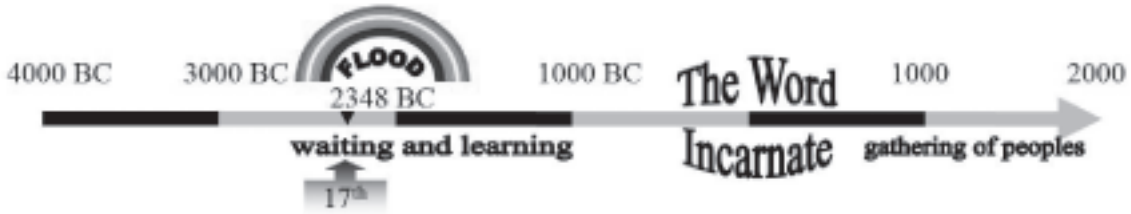
It was not until Pilate died that he learned that Truth with a capital T was standing right in front of him. The Son of God made flesh is Truth. Because of that he is the Way and he is the Life.

That is not just what we happen to believe as Protestant Reformed people. That is Truth for everybody, whether they grew up in a village in Bangladesh, in a high rise apartment in New York City, or in a farming community in Iowa. Jesus, embodied now in his word, is Truth—Truth that stands above all men in all situations. The reason we deem the things listed above, such as catechism, Protestant Reformed education, parental duties, etc., important is so that by God's grace we and our children never respond along with Pilate of the Bible and the postmodern world of our day: "Truth? What is Truth?" But so that we say, "Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, thou art the Way, the Truth, and the Life." May it be so among us until the day he returns.

Rev. Griess is pastor of Calvary Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.

Church History — John Huizenga

The Seventeenth Century of His-Story:
Saved by the Flood



By this time in history, the cup of iniquity for the wicked world was completely full. The church appeared, from man's perspective, to be all but destroyed, and Satan victorious. God had promised to Adam and Eve that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, but as Noah finished the ark, and the unbelievers mockingly looked around for the great flood Noah preached about, and all things continued as they had from the beginning of creation (2 Peter 3:4), it looked like the reverse had happened: the serpent was crushing the head of the seed of the woman. Noah had done what God commanded. He built the ark. He gathered "all food that was eaten" for every creature, as well as for his family. All that remained to do yet was gather the animals. He did not question how he would ever be able to gather all the animals any more than he questioned the possibility or magnitude of God's ark-building instructions. God again spoke to Noah and told him to go with his family into the ark with the clean animals, and there to receive two by two the rest of the living creatures that breathed.

If anything would shake the ungodly man's "faith" of unbelief (faith in man's wisdom and pride), it would be the strange stirrings in the forests and air as the living creatures converged upon the ark as they were called by God into it. It was now plain for all the ungodly to see that things were not continuing as they had since the day of creation. The spiritual work of salvation was now manifest in a miracle among the creatures of the earth. But even this astounding process did not open their blind eyes to see nor their deaf ears to hear the word preached by Noah. They were spiritually dead, and soon their earthly life would follow.

For seven days, creatures of every sort funneled into the ark, and after the very last pair scampered up the ramp to find its place, Jehovah shut them in

(Gen. 7:16). Here in this ark, gathered into one spot on the whole face of the earth, was the beloved church and the creation that God would save. At this moment when all the eyes in the ark looked up to the Creator, we hear the words of comfort that Moses gave to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 33:26–27, "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them." The church, the beloved of God, would be redeemed in the way of terrible judgment upon the wicked.

The judgment was swift and violent. God did not give to the wicked one more moment than necessary to walk in wickedness, nor did he make the righteous wait another moment for deliverance. God shut the door, and that very day, the skies quickly obeyed the will of God, became black, and began to pour out the flood. The windows of heaven were opened, unleashing the waters reserved there for the flood. God opened up all the fountains of the great deep within the earth and the waters gushed with relentless fury to destroy quickly the wicked world. Day and night the great fountains of the earth and windows of heaven thundered forth, making the devastating tsunamis we've witnessed in our day as nothing in comparison. As the great walls of water in foaming torrent ripped up the forests and dashed in pieces the wicked world and their cities, the ark was lifted and went upon the face of the waters. Water gushed forth in judgment without stopping for forty day until the tops of the high hills were covered. The waters did not stop rising until the tops of these high hills, the mountains, were fifteen cubits below the surface.

The haughty voice of the wicked had been silenced. The roar of destruction was complete. The entire earth was now a vast ocean without a single island. Only the ark contained the sounds of creatures that breathed. The earth that Noah, his family, and the creatures of the earth once knew, no longer existed.

As Noah and his family cared for the creatures in the ark during the year of floating, a new earth was being prepared for the great demonstration of God's love for his church. This would be an earth with a diverse geography for the scattering of diverse peoples and for pictures to be used for the describing of the wonder-work of God's salvation. Beneath the waters of the flood, continents were being pushed into place. Mountains began to push upwards and the ocean floors pressed down to new depths. Instead of a watery world, the depths of the earth would be molten rock. It would be an earth that would be characterized by fire and reserved for the final judgment by fire.

In the fullness of time, God would send his only begotten Son to be born on this earth, speak to and teach his church about the way of salvation, and suffer and die on the cross to redeem them. And after gathering every last one of the elect into his body, Christ will work final deliverance and judgment to bring them into everlasting covenant fellowship with him in the heavenly life of the new heavens and new earth.

The ark floated over this world of water for 150 days before a sudden jolt brought an end to the motion of the ark floating freely on the waves. It would still be another two and one half months before the tops of any of the surrounding mountains could be seen. Noah waited another forty days before opening a window to send out a raven and a dove to learn to what extent the waters had diminished from the earth. Two more weeks would pass before the dove was able to find sufficient food to survive outside the ark. But the waters continued to evaporate into the atmosphere and flow into the deepening oceans, and three months after the tops of the mountains were seen, the waters had drained even from the valleys, leaving a soggy and muddy desolation. At this point Noah removed the covering from the ark, but stayed in the ark for another two months until God told him to go out with the animals into this new world.

The church had been saved, according to God's promise, and by a wonder of his grace. This is the God who calls us his own and promises to deliver his church from the spiritual enemies of sin and the power of death.

As Noah watched people depart from the church in apostasy and the old pillars of faith, Methuselah and Lamech, grow older while the youth flocked to the thrills of the ungodly world, God looked upon Noah in Christ with singular delight. Noah found grace in the eyes of Jehovah because God had chosen him from all eternity, grafted him into Christ, and delivered him from the power and guilt of sin so that he in thankfulness walked with his God in covenant fellowship. Clinging by faith to the promise of God to crush the head of the serpent with the seed of the woman, Noah waited and looked to God. By the 16th century of history, Noah was about 450 years old; and God blessed him with three sons when he was 500. As he faithfully taught his young boys the

fear of Jehovah, God himself spoke to Noah. "The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood" (Genesis 6:13–14a).

God then gave to Noah instructions for building the ark, and Noah did "according to all that God commanded him, so did he." (v. 22) He followed the astounding instructions to every last detail, and openly declared his faith by preaching the contents of his faith (2 Pet. 2:5; Heb. 11:7). "The promised seed will be born! You who mock and believe that the church will soon die out and free you from the preaching of God's judgment will soon be destroyed with a flood of water. God is righteous. Your rebellion will not stand before him. God sovereignly works out the salvation he has prepared for his church. I build this ark at the command of the God who has created this earth, and will save his church with a flood."

With great zeal and care Noah saw to it that the great gopher wood trees of the forest round about were cut down, shaped, and fitted according to the measurements revealed by God. We can be sure that this new flurry of activity and news of a great building project aroused the attention of the ungodly. They were experts at building cities and anything else to satisfy their desires, but what was this? What is this huge, pointless box Noah is building? Noah was not embarrassed to explain the coming judgment of God. The same God who had faithfully and consistently revealed himself in the church to Noah's fathers had now revealed his will and purpose to Noah. God's purpose was to destroy the monstrous wickedness of man that had developed, scour the earth with water, and preserve the righteous in Christ along with the life of birds, animals, and other creatures in this ark. According to man's reason, this preaching was foolishness, and the ark simply a monument to a dying and soon-to-be dead church. God restrained their impulse to put a quick end to the sting of Noah's preaching, prolonged their entertainment of mockery as they watched and perhaps even helped to build the ark, and in doing so filled the cup of God's wrath upon them.

Throughout the 120 years of building, the sun came up the same every day. Noah's three boys grew up in the shadow of this growing ark. The chopping of wood, the moving of ingenious ramp and crane mechanisms to hoist huge timbers into place, and the preaching of their father was all they knew. As the roof went on, and barrels of pitch were gathered and prepared to seal the ark, a new and increasingly frequent line of scorn cackled from the lips of the wicked, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (2 Pet. 3:4). Once this ark is built, they reasoned, and nothing happens, the ark will serve as a final coffin and monument to a dead church, and we will dance around it in victory.

Noah faithfully built the ark in those final days of the old world, and today we labor as well to build up the church in the final days before the final judgment. Christ comes quickly, and God has given us clear direction in the work he would have us do to prepare for his coming. It is a work of proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the world, and also a work of bearing covenant children, rearing them in the fear of the Lord, and having fellowship with one another in the church. This work is clearly explained to us in 1 Thessalonians as a "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father" (1 Thess 1:3). This is a labor of faith, not family planning. It is a labor of love, not the selfish accumulation of wealth for our own enjoyment. It is a labor rooted in the hope of Christ's return to gather his church. In doing this, the church of Thessalonica itself gave testimony to the world around to her faith and hope (vv. 7–8) The instruction continues with the words "walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory" (2:12). We are "to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men," (3:12).

The earthly occupations we have to provide income may not so absorb our time and energy that we don't have time for this work in the church, but neither do we neglect our daily work in the home, factory, or business. The Thessalonians made the mistake of stopping their work and waiting around for Christ, but Paul exhorts them to "study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing" (1 Thess. 4:11–12). Providing for the children God gives to us requires hard work and sacrifice. We work together to build schools where we can hire and support godly teachers. This work requires diligence, patience, and love toward one another.

Noah lived every day in the conscious awareness that God was soon coming in judgment and redemption. He did not become so absorbed in the

work that he fell asleep spiritually. The living word of God was actively preached as he worked. Paul reminds the church, "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6). We must be active in the church, supporting one another as well as the office bearers. We read in 1 Thessalonians 5:11–13, "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves."

Let us cheerfully take up the work that God has given to us, and work like Noah did, in faith. Compared to the billions of people around us, the church that holds to "the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle (2 Thess. 2:15), is very small. Unlike Noah who worked virtually alone with his family, we have brothers and sisters in the Lord to give encouragement and comfort. We also have faithful preachers for whom we are called to pray, "that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified" (3:1). Let us pray for peace and harmony in the church that this work continue until it is completed and Christ comes to redeem his people with judgment.

John is the former editor of Beacon Lights *and is a member of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.*

Church News

Melinda Bleyenberg

BAPTISMS

"For the promise is unto you and to your children…." Acts 2:39

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

Cole Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jared Doezema—Faith, MI
Calvin Bernard, son of Mr. & Mrs. Rockford Wigger—Faith, MI
Dillon James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Hop—First, MI
Arwen Melanie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Julian Escamilla—Georgetown, MI
Kelsi Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Daryl Brands—Holland, MI
Emmitt Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. John Cleveland, Jr.—Hope, MI
Alyssa Faith, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mike Boverhof—Hudsonville, MI
Landon Zachary, son of Mr. & Mrs. Curt Gritters—Hudsonville, MI
Lily Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan Maassen—Hull, IA
Isaac Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tomm Heyboer—Providence, MI
Kurtis Brad, son of Mrs. Heather Mowery—Providence, MI
Josiah and Micah, sons of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Alderden—Randolph, WI
Reed William, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kent Hoksbergen—Randolph, WI
Kinley Reese, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Christian Flikkema—Southeast, MI
Kadence Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan Dykstra—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses." I Timothy 6:13

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

Douglas DeJong—Crete, IL
Kendra Lubbers, Amanda Verbeek, Nathan Lubbers, Matthew Fisher—Georgetown, MI
Solomon Bosman, Brad Ellerbroek, Titus Mahtani—Holland, MI
Courtney Andringa, Dana Burgers, Rebecca Gritters—Hull, IA
Amanda Zylstra—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Joanna Koerner, Kailey TenBrock—Southwest, MI

MARRIAGES

"For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death." Psalm 48:14

United in the bond of holy matrimony were:

Mr. Derek Bruinsma and Miss Liane Barnes—Crete, IL
Mr. Jacob Andringa and Miss Anna Van Donselaar—Crete, IL
Mr. John Van Baren and Miss Rachael Crater—Faith, MI
Mr. James Kuiper and Miss Renae Bruinsma—Faith, MI
Mr. Thomas Barnhill and Miss Kelly Langerak—Grace, MI
Mr. Matthew Oosterbaan and Miss Jordanna Oosterhouse—Hope, MI
Mr. Don Lotterman and Miss Hillary Van Overloop—Hudsonville, MI
Mr. Jacob Wesorick and Miss Rebecca Kuiper—Hudsonville, MI
Mr. Travis Feenstra and Miss Kayla Schwarz—Loveland, CO
Mr. Justin Langerak and Miss Jessica Brecker—Southeast, MI

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Connie Meyer

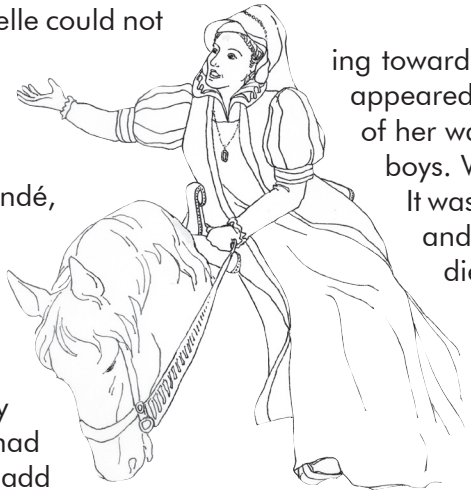
A Royal House (6)

La Rochelle, a city on the western coast of France, housed some of the most important—and hated—Huguenots in France: Prince de Condé, Admiral Coligny, and Jeanne d'Albret. La Rochelle could not escape being the target of the Catholic Queen Mother of France and of her son, the very young King Charles IX. Armies were on their way.

Louis de Bourbon, the Prince of Condé, was a talented general who went out to meet the challenge. On March 13, 1569, the armies clashed in Jarnak, near a river outside La Rochelle. Condé led a well-trained Huguenot army, but it was far outnumbered by the Catholic one. The Queen Mother had hired thousands of German soldiers to add to her troops, and they brought a surprise attack from the south. They defeated the Huguenot army and the Prince of Condé was killed. It was a hard loss to hear reported inside the city walls of La Rochelle. Even though many Huguenot soldiers had escaped, they all were left in despair. What could be done now?

Jeanne d'Albret, Queen of Navarre, did not give up. She dried her tears. She mounted a horse and rode out to meet the troops. She took her son, Henry, with her, along with Condé's own son. Henry rode on her right, and Condé's son rode on her left.

The men of the Huguenot army still sat saddened and stunned when they saw three horsemen coming toward them. Who were they? A woman appeared to be in the middle. On either side of her was a young man. Maybe they were boys. Who were they? They drew nearer. It was the queen! The Queen of Navarre and the sons of the royal line! The soldiers were heartened. They gathered round their queen.



"Children of God and of France," she said, "Condé is dead, but is all therefore lost? No. The God who gave him courage and strength to fight in this cause has raised up others worthy to succeed him. To those brave warriors I add my son…I offer you everything I have to give—my dominions, my treasures, my life, and what is dearer to me than all, my child. I swear to defend to my last sight the holy cause that now unites us!"[1]

The men cheered and committed their loyalty to young Henry. It was as if all La Rochelle sighed in relief.

Henry was only fifteen years old when he began to lead them. He learned the necessary skills of a soldier while the more experienced military leaders helped him. In time it would be shown that he had inherited his mother's courage for the battle, if not her consistent defense of the Reformed faith. But for now, the men needed to regroup, and more battles needed to be fought. Admiral Coligny, an able man who was of the highest military rank in France, was on the side of the Huguenots, and on Henry's side now, too. No, all was not lost.

Not yet.

All of the words in the following verses, including "Proverbs," can be found in the puzzle on the previous page. Some of the smaller words may have more than one possibility.

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear. As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his masters" (Proverbs 25:11–13).

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

1 Quotation is from *Ladies of the Reformation* by J. H. Alexander, page 31.

Connie is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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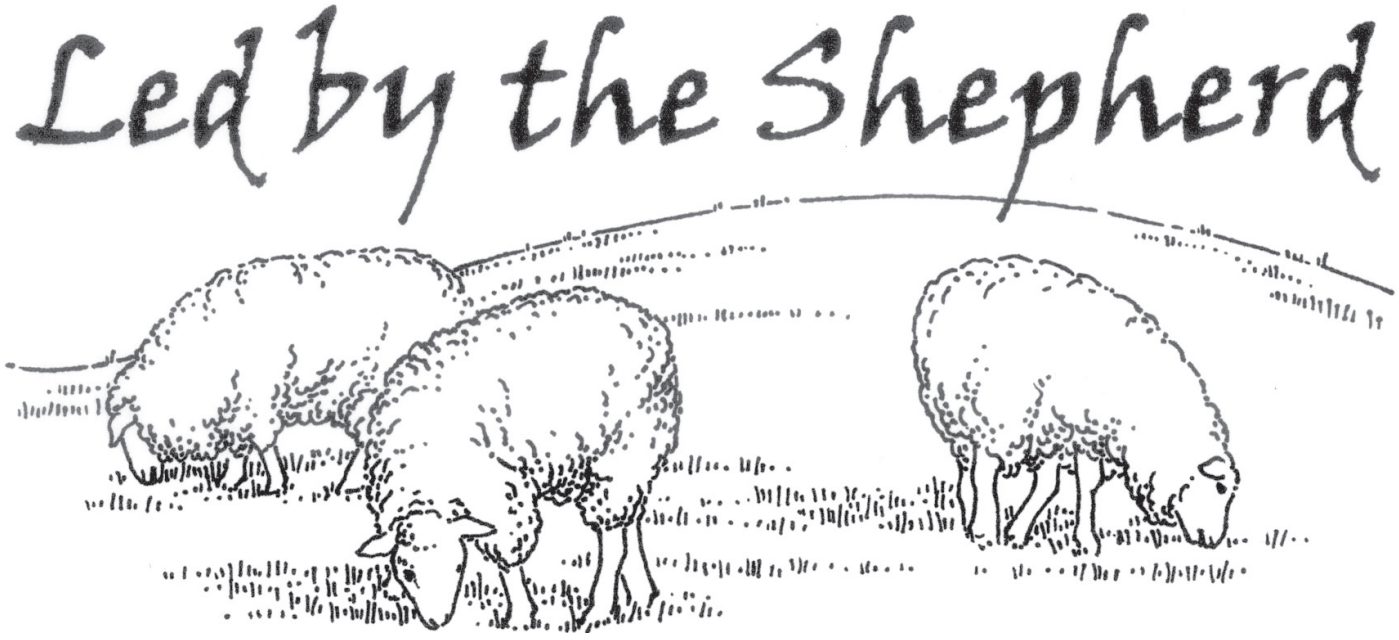

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Check out the convention website www.prcconvention.com to see what fun things are being planned and to get ideas for the "Garden Party" banquet!

Registration forms are also available online.