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Volume LXXII Number 6

Stangers and Sojourners
Guided by Providence

In last month's initial article on this subject, we began to discuss the identity of strangers and pilgrims. We noted that by this description the life of God's people in the world is pictured. That life has a beginning: through the new life of regeneration, we come from God himself. That life also has an end: heaven is our destination. However, the emphasis in this figure is not on the beginning or the end of our journey of life, but on the trip itself. More specifically, we are different from the world in that we are strangers and sojourners. As sojourners we are those who have no permanent abode in this world, but are only passing through; we are campers, living in tents, and from time to time moving ever onward toward our destination. As strangers we do not fit in this world, but are foreigners; although from an outward viewpoint we are apparently similar to the world, we are different in an essential and spiritual way because of the work of grace in us.

We said that in future articles we will explore various facets of what it means to be strangers and sojourners, with specific application to our young people. This we will do.

But before we embark on this journey, there is one fundamental truth that we must have clearly before our minds. If we do not, then our journey will have no destination. To that journey there will be no purpose or definite direction. Instead, it will become an aimless wandering; we will follow trails that have no end and travel roads that lead only to dead ends.

Concisely put, there will be no purpose in our lives because we have no assurance that we will ever

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attain the goal toward which we are striving; then all is useless and without meaning. But if we know, understand, and apply this truth to our sojourning and our strangering (if I may turn a noun into a verb), then everything makes sense, and our lives have meaning and purpose.

That truth is the truth of providence. Briefly we must understand what it means and how it is related to being sojourners and strangers.

The Heidelberg Catechism defines providence as "the almighty and everywhere present power of God, whereby, as it were by his hand, he upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come not by chance, but by his fatherly hand."

The work of providence follows from the work of creation. In contrast to the wicked and God-denying theory of evolution, we all know and believe that God is the creator who has made all things by the word of his mouth. But his work concerning everything he made did not cease with creation. If it had, all things would instantly have dropped out of existence. He continued his work by upholding and governing all things he had made.

The basic idea of providence is God's omnipresence, which means simply that by his power he is everywhere present. There is no place in the whole universe where he is not. Omnipresence in turn implies two other ideas.

The first is the truth of God's immanence, which means that he is near to all his works. We find this idea in the language of the Catechism: God upholds and governs all things "as it were by his hand." God is so near to everything that he can reach out and touch it. Everything is within his divine reach. This should be of great comfort and encouragement to us as sojourners and strangers. God does not create us and then forget about us. He does not form us, place us on the pathway of life, point us in the general direction of heaven, and give us a push. If this were the meaning of providence, or if there were no such thing as providence, we would be in deep trouble. But the truth is that God is very near us; he walks right alongside us on our journey; if we stumble, he has only to reach out his hand to steady us; being in close proximity, he guides us and keeps us on the path that leads to our goal.

The other is the truth of God's transcendence, which means that he is highly exalted above all his works. There is an infinite difference between the being of God and the essence of the creation. This points us to God's absolute sovereignty over all things. Again, this ought to be a source of encouragement to sojourners and strangers. There is nothing outside of God's control; there is nothing that can oppose him, frustrate his intent or his action, or even challenge him in any way.

As the omnipresent God who is both immanent and transcendent, he both preserves and governs all things. That he preserves all things means that he continues their existence according to his counsel and purpose for them, no matter what part of the universe we can mention. That he governs all things means that he rules them by his everywhere present power in such a way that everything in the universe fulfills his will.

Noteworthy is the comprehensive list of examples mentioned by the Catechism. The various elements are easy to understand and need no explanation. But together they include all aspects of God's creation and our lives. This means that we may not distinguish between things or events that are providential and those that are not, between things that are supernatural and those that are natural, or between things that are planned and those that are random. Sometimes we hear it said, "Stuff happens." No, stuff does not happen. Everything is under divine control, and takes place according to God's wise governing.

When we say that God governs all things, this implies that there is a purpose in his control of all things. In the deepest sense this goal is his own glory; this is always God's purpose with everything. But this is not just an abstract idea, bearing no relation to the creation that he preserves and governs. Rather, God achieves his glory through all aspects of history, from creation and the fall to the final consummation. More precisely, he reaches that goal through the salvation of his elect people. This he does by redeeming them in the way of sin and grace, in the way of their being strangers in a strange land and sojourners of the antithesis, for election always implies reprobation; always the wicked oppose the righteous and seek to destroy the cause of God in the world and deprive him of his glory.

Thus all things, all creatures, and all events, providentially understood, serve God's purpose of salvation and therefore of his glory.

The question then is this: Understanding what

providence is and how it works, and believing in God's providence, what does it mean for us? How does this help us as sojourners and strangers? This is exactly the question posed by the Catechism: "What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by his providence still upholds all things?" The Catechism gives a threefold answer.

First, that we may be patient in adversity. Adversity is anything that from our viewpoint is against us; it is negative, something that we do not like, something that works against us, something that gives us trouble. Life is full of adversity. Because you have not lived for many years, you young people have not yet experienced a great deal of adversity. But even you undoubtedly face difficulties. Maybe school is not going well for you; maybe you are in conflict mode with your parents or your friends; maybe you can't find a decent job. The specific circumstances are not important; what is important is that you will increasingly encounter adversity as you become older, because life is full of adversity for sojourners. What is our reaction to adversity? We want it to go away, preferably right now. Why? Because we don't think adversity is good for us. We do not see that God sends adversity for his purpose, which is always good because he does only good to his people. This is why the Catechism says that we must be patient; we must wait for God in his time and in his way to remove the hardship or even to continue adversity for our good.

Second, we are called to be thankful in prosperity. When prosperity characterizes our lives, everything is bright and sunny and going well. Sometimes this is our lot in life, even if it is only temporary. When this happens, we are to be thankful. Why? Because we are not inclined to be thankful. We are instead quick to give ourselves the credit for our prosperous situation. We easily forget that the same God who sends adversity also sends prosperity, again for our good. Therefore it behooves us to be thankful to our sovereign God when our path of life is smooth.

Third, the benefit of providence is that in all things we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing will separate us from his love. God's love is the key point: he has loved us from eternity, and therefore loves us every step of our pilgrim sojourn on this earth. Even when he sends what we consider to be evil, he is doing us good. In this faithful God we put our trust, knowing that he works all things together for the good of those whom he loves.

Guided by the providence of our covenant God, we walk ever onward as sojourners in the assurance that he is with us on our journey and that he will surely bring us to our eternal destination, where we will be no longer strangers but heirs of everlasting blessing.

Ask Schuyler

How Should We View Bankruptcy?

A reader asks: How should we view bankruptcy? If someone files for bankruptcy and is no longer legally responsible for his debt, does he still have a moral obligation to repay his creditors? Does Scripture address this issue, perhaps in conjunction with the year of jubilee, or is there no connection? May people or organizations file multiple times? Does the church do anything about seeing to their making restitution when possible?

The reader asks about bankruptcy. I will not address the legal ramifications of bankruptcy because I do not pretend to be a legal expert and the *Schuyler* column is designed more for biblical and moral questions. But, since the word of God is profitable for all good works, we can apply biblical principles to this question also.

Perhaps it might be best to begin with some definitions. A creditor, who might be a person, a business or a financial institution such as a bank, is one who lends money to another person. A debtor

is a person who has borrowed and therefore owes money to another. Usually a debtor can satisfy his creditors by giving them regular payments. However, a time may come when a debtor is unable to maintain regular payments. Ideally the debtor should then seek to make some arrangement with his creditors. Often the creditor will agree to lower regular payments over a longer period of time or even waive of part of the debt. A partial repayment is usually better than nothing. If this proves impossible, bankruptcy is an option, but it should only be used as a last resort when all other possibilities have been explored. Bankruptcy allows the debtor to be released from his debt and the creditors to recover some of his money. A judge declares a debtor to be bankrupt, liquidates his assets, and orders the proceeds to be distributed among the creditors. Often some of the debtor's assets (his most essential) are exempt. This enables the bankrupt debtor to make a new financial start and the legal obligation to pay is waived.

Many Christians view bankruptcy as sin. They argue that bankruptcy is a way to avoid paying what is owed. Bankruptcy *could* be sin, and the occasion for filing for bankruptcy *could* be sin as well. However, whether bankruptcy is sin as such and in every situation is debatable.

Bankruptcy is the result of becoming mired in debt. The underlying issue then is the debt itself. The Bible gives us this principle: "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another…" (Rom. 13:8). Some have imagined that this text forbids mortgages, car loans or credit cards. However, the principle is not to forbid all debts. The idea is that we must not take out loans that we have no intention of repaying. *That* would be deliberate theft. To throw oneself deliberately into debt is therefore foolish and wrong. When a Christian enters into a voluntary financial contract he must intend to be faithful to his obligations. He must not do so irresponsibly. Moreover, the Christian must live in the consciousness that he is a steward of God's gifts. We do not actually own anything absolutely. Everything we possess is God's. God will hold us to account for how we have used his gifts and our calling is to use the things of this world to glorify him. We must not squander the goods of this world on ourselves. We live in a materialistic age where instant gratification is possible by simply swiping a credit card or typing our credit card number into an online form. Often we forget that the credit card bill will come back to haunt us. When we buy things we need to ask, do I need this? Can I afford this? Will I be able to afford this when the bill comes? The governments of this world are hopelessly in debt, and the citizenry have followed them by refusing to deny themselves the luxuries of life. Christians must avoid covetousness and must work honestly so that they can support their families, the church, and give to the poor (Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:6, 8–12). A Christian must not live recklessly and irresponsibly and then seek to escape his obligations by running to the bankruptcy court.

However, not all bankruptcy is caused by careless or reckless spending. Circumstances vary. There are times when by no fault of their own Christians get into serious financial distress. We must not be tempted to judge our brother here. What does a man do when he loses his job but still must pay his mortgage and other bills? When unexpected medical expenses take away his savings? When the small business in which he has labored for many years is no longer viable? Clearly, the Christian must seek to do what is best for his family, equitable for his creditors, and right in the sight of God. If, after exploring every possible avenue, bankruptcy is the only recourse, that avenue is open to him. Does he do it to avoid paying his bills, to swindle his customers and his creditors? Then he sins. Does he do it because he has no other choice, and no way of paying what he owes? Then in my view he does not sin. But since the Bible does not directly address the subject I will not be dogmatic.

We can be thankful that we live when such legal avenues are available. For much of history, debtors were not treated so kindly. Often they and their families were sold into slavery or they were cast into the debtors' prison (2 Kings 4:1ff.). Bankruptcy might not be the optimum solution, but surely it is better than that! The reader asks about the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25) but that is not applicable here. The law of Jubilee applied only to the land of Canaan, only every fifty years, and only to Israelites. It was a law that made sure that the land remained with the families to whom it was allotted in the days of Joshua. The impoverished it was designed to help were not reckless spendthrifts, but God's people who were victims of circumstances (plague, famine, etc). It provided an equitable solution for the poor in their distress and is an example of the merciful provision in God's law, but it does not apply to modern nations.

Remember as well that the church has a role to

play in all this. First, an impoverished Christian must not be ashamed to seek the help of the deacons. They are the representatives of the merciful Christ in the congregation. They do more than distribute alms. They also give advice on good stewardship. Often good management (if a person is not already hopelessly mired in debt) can avoid the case ending in bankruptcy. Second, if the elders have reason to believe that a man is exploiting his neighbor by abusing bankruptcy laws they should certainly intervene and admonish the church member. Church discipline might even be necessary in certain cases (1 Cor. 6:5–10), but each case would have to be determined individually.

I hope this answer, which by no means answers all the details concerning the subject of bankruptcy, has been of some help to our readers. Let us seek to be faithful in our financial affairs as well as in every other aspect of our life as stewards of what God has given.

Schuyler

Choosing a Vocation

Jonathan Drnek

Computer Programming

I first became interested in computers when my Dad took home one of the first "portable" computers from work. It was the size of a suitcase, weighed about 30 pounds, had a fold-down keyboard, and a small green screen. We got to play Flight Simulator on it when Dad was done with work. After a while we bought an early 286 computer. It could actually have more than one color on the screen, and it had a hard drive with enough memory to hold about 3 pictures from a modern digital camera. We played games on this computer as well, but after a while I decided to try to make my own game. I got a book from the library and started learning how to program in the "Basic" language. At this time I really only considered computers a toy.

When I first went to college I was interested in biology and was thinking that would be my major. I enjoyed computers but never really considered making that my job. That changed when I took a programming general education course in college. That is when I realized that I could get paid for playing with computers.

I have worked in two different types of programming jobs. For my first job out of college I went to work for a large manufacturing company. There we would work on programs that the company used internally to process orders, manage inventory, and get orders out to the factory floor. My next job was with a small company where we sell the software we make to external customers. There are some differences between the two environments, but some similarities as well.

As a programmer you are creating code to solve a problem. As support staff in a large company, the problem is usually handed to you. "We need to be able to have our customers enter orders from the Internet;" "We need to be able to get these orders out to the shop floor." When you are selling your software to someone else, you have to work harder to understand what the users want. You will also have many different types of users to try to please. In other situations it may be a problem of your own that you face. Maybe you come across a group of people who are struggling with an issue; maybe you have a great idea for a game.

Once you have a problem to solve, the first step is to understand it and break it down into manageable chunks. A key part of this is to understand what can go wrong and what should happen if and when things do go wrong. Most users will focus on what they want when things work well, but a programmer needs to write code that will handle things falling apart.

Once the problem is understood you then start designing. This can be a fun and creative process. There are usually many ways to solve a problem, and there are always tradeoffs between making something simple or with more features, between quick to write and quick to run, between easy to make and easy to use. Usually this involves working with other

systems as well. You may also be interacting with hardware, a printer, perhaps a robot on the factory floor, or the sensors in a smartphone.

Once you have a design the actual coding starts. This is where you actually see something come together, and it can be very rewarding to see the program come to life before your eyes. It is very rare that you will write code completely from scratch; often you will use other peoples' code so you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Some examples are code that displays pictures on the screen or that can sort data quickly. The coding stage is where you start to run into many of the tradeoffs mentioned earlier.

Once the code gets to a functional point, testing starts. All software has bugs; it is impossible to write any program of significant size without bugs, so testing may take longer than you would first expect. Ideally the end users of the program will help with the testing and be able to give you feedback on if it does what they want it to do.

To help explain these steps I have broken them down. In reality, you rarely will only do one at a time. They usually merge into each other. In order to design you often have to try out some code to see if your idea will work. Often testing will bring out new requirements from the users.

Different vocations will fulfill the cultural mandate differently. One way in which programmers fulfill the cultural mandate is by writing programs that make the wisdom of experts available to everyone. For example, a programmer can work with a financial expert to understand the complexities of a mortgage calculation. The programmer can then create a simple program that allows everyone to figure out their mortgage payment without needing to know all the math behind it.

The digital revolution, the rise of computers and electronic devices, was driven by many factors, but all of these digital devices run programs. People need to program these devices for them to function. These days, almost everything that uses electricity will have some code in it someplace.

Programmers can also make systems that are able to process a large amount of data quickly. One example of this is Google, but the *Beacon Lights* website is another example. You can go to the *Beacon Lights* website and search through every single article in less than a second. Quick access to knowledge is enabling our society to progress faster than ever, for the better and for the worse.

Another way in which programmers subdue the creation is by working with computers and sensors to make systems that can act faster than we ever could. An example is an anti-lock brake system. The programmer writes a program that watches the sensors in the wheels and can detect when a wheel is skidding. The program will then reduce the pressure to the brake of the skidding wheel. This all happens before we even realize the wheel is skidding.

Usually programming is a typical office job, and you likely will not have issues with unions. In my experience working at a large company there was some pressure to work on Sundays. You usually need to wait until people are done using the software before you can make a change, and in a worldwide company with multiple shifts that ends up being on the weekends.

I would encourage most people to take at least one programming course. The ability to write basic computer programs can be useful in many different fields. The office worker will find it useful to be able to create a simple database and reports, or to automate simple tasks. A scientist will find it useful to help analyze data and to automate sensor readings. It is also helpful to have an idea how computers work in this digital age.

It is possible to learn programming without taking college classes, but for someone considering a full-time career in programming I would recommend college. The college classes will give you a good foundation in the basics and in the theories that are not covered in the "For Dummies" types of books. Also, most companies will expect a college degree. If this is something you are interested in, it would not hurt to grab a book and start now. I would recommend something from the "Head First" series.

Once you have a degree, however, you will never quit learning. Programming is a profession in which you will always have to be learning. New languages, new techniques, and new computer systems are always coming out. In the near future, as smartphones become cheaper and more powerful, there are going to be a lot of new exciting opportunities. Computers and computer programs are going to be used in ways never dreamed of before. The world is changing very fast, and programmers are at the center of the change.

Jonathan is a member of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Christianizing the World? (4)

In this installment in the series examining the crusade in Reformed and evangelical circles in North America to Christianize the world, I present the kingdom alternative of genuine Calvinism. Rejection of the project of common grace to influence the culture of the world does not imply rejection of the calling of the Christian to live the life of the kingdom of God in all spheres of earthly life. The Protestant Reformed Christian, although rejecting Abraham Kuyper's and the Christian Reformed Church's theory of common grace, lives and must live in such a way as to honor Kuyper's stirring claim on behalf of Christ, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'" ("Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt, Eerdmans, 1988, 488).

In every sphere of our life, earthly as well as spiritual, in government, education, science, and labor, as well as in prayer and at church, we live the life of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. In every sphere of life, our behavior and speech witness that Jesus the Christ is king. Thus, over whatever sphere of life we enter, we raise the banner, "Jesus Christ is king."

The Kingdom of Jesus

However—and this to us is of fundamental importance—the Christ on whose behalf we raise the banner is the man who was crucified, raised from the dead, and now sits at the right hand of God in heaven.

For Kuyper and his disciples, the Christ who is sovereign over all and whose kingship they suppose they honor is only the second person of the Trinity, not the man Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us. If there were a kingdom of the second person of the Trinity, it would be the kingdom of the absolute power of God triune (not alone of the second person). This kingdom of the triune God exists in perfection apart from any and all efforts of the church on earth to extend it. This kingdom does not *come*, but *is*. It certainly is not promoted by common grace, or for that matter, by particular grace. It is a reality by virtue of the Godhead of God with regard to his creation.

The kingdom that has the heart of Protestant Reformed Christians, as also of all Christians throughout all ages until the time of the speculations of Abraham Kuyper, is the "kingdom of [God's] dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13–14).

The cultural-Calvinists may go on honoring the second person of the Trinity, evidently to the exclusion of the first and third persons. Protestant Reformed Calvinists honor the crucified, risen, and exalted Lord Jesus and in him, the triune God.

Let this be understood: for us, the sovereignty and kingdom of Christ are the sovereignty and kingdom of *Jesus*.

This Jesus reigns in our hearts by his word and Spirit, as the Reformed faith confesses in the Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 123.

Reigning in our hearts, Jesus Christ reigns also in all the spheres of life into which we enter. Thus the kingdom extends to every sphere, and thus the banner of the kingdom flies over every sphere.

The Sphere of the Church

First and foremost is the sphere of the institute of the true church. The citizen of the kingdom of God will be a lively member of a true church, worshiping the triune God in spirit and in truth diligently every Sabbath.

This aspect of living the life of the kingdom in all the spheres is minimized and even ignored by many of the vocal advocates of Christianizing the world. Not only do they not stress this, but also they usually say nothing about this at all in their treatises on the kingdom. This caution on their part is understandable: If you are creating a kingdom with atheists, Muslims, unbelievers, and Roman Catholics, you had best say nothing about church membership.

But minimizing or ignoring church membership is inexcusable. The reign of Jesus Christ in and over the church is the second explanation of the second petition of the model prayer by the Heidelberg Cat-

echism: "preserve and increase Thy church" (Q&A 123). The church is the institutional form of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The Westminster Confession of Faith declares: "The visible church…is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus" (25.2). The Belgic Confession teaches the same when in its treatment of the church it states, "which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King" (Art. 27). Christ is king of the church, and the church is his kingdom.

The New Testament church is God's "holy nation"—the reality of Old Testament Israel (1 Pet. 2:9). This is a basic truth that the proponents of the Christianizing of the world have a hard time keeping in mind. As they dream their dreams of Christianizing first their own nation and then the world, they invariable identify their own nation with the kingdom of God. Kuyper thought that the Netherlands was God's holy nation, the New Testament reality of the nation of Israel. Jonathan Edwards supposed the same regarding America, especially the New England part of America. Many evangelicals today, in their preaching of the call to make America once again a Christian nation, show that they think that the United States was once a Christian, holy nation.

The Netherlands was never a holy nation. Neither was the United States. No earthly nation, regardless how Christianized it might become, can be God's holy nation. The true church in the world is the kingdom and holy nation of God, the New Testament *reality* (not: replacement) of Israel in the Old Testament.

This is a reason that we doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and spiritual Calvinists so highly regard the true church and prize membership in her. She is God's kingdom, God's New Testament Zion.

In the church on the Lord's Day occurs the chief cultural activity of any human: the public worship of God.

In addition, the church gives the believer the directions and spiritual energy to live the life of the kingdom in all the other spheres of human life. The dynamo of the kingdom of God is not the Christian college, and certainly not the Christian college that thinks to equip the kingdom-builders with some feeble power of a common grace. The dynamo of the kingdom is the true church, and the power with which she equips the citizens of the kingdom is the mighty, resurrection grace and Spirit of the Lord Jesus.

The Sphere of the Family

The second sphere of human life in which most citizens of the kingdom submit to King Jesus and fly his banner is marriage and the family.

Common sense realizes the fundamental importance of this sphere for all of societal life and for the welfare of an earthly nation. That the political leaders of the West are unseeing, indeed actively at work to destroy marriage and the home, is due not only to the natural darkness of their depraved understanding because of unbelief, but also to God's blinding of them in his judicial wrath. Common sense has become senseless in the United States with regard to the basic structure of human life in society.

Scripture insists on the importance of the sphere of the family, and gives thorough instruction concerning the will of King Jesus for life in this sphere. The Creator married one man and one woman in an intimate union of one flesh for life, and blessed the marriage with fruitfulness in bringing forth children, whom the married couple, their parents, must rear (Gen. 1, 2). King Jesus took this ordinance over into his kingdom and made his will concerning our life in marriage and the family known in Ephesians 5 and 6, 1 Corinthians 7, and many other places in Scripture.

The Reformation restored this sphere to its place of honor and importance after Rome had degraded it by monasticism and by the decree that the clergy may not marry, as though single life were a higher, more spiritual state than marriage, to say nothing of the tolerance by Rome of sexual promiscuity.

There is much talk today by the cultural-Calvinists about Christianizing our American society. These same people and their churches tolerate rampant divorce and remarriage in their own churches. There is even open promotion of sodomy in the denominational paper of the Christian Reformed Church and in their flagship college. Their unconcern for marriage and the family is proof that they are not serious about the coming of the kingdom of God. They are not serious about influencing the culture of Grand Rapids and the United States. Marriage and the family are the urgent social issues in North America. The great evils disrupting and destroying the country are divorce, remarriage, and sexual promiscuity, including perversity. Genuine concern for the culture, to say nothing of the kingdom of God, could not possibly remain quiet about these evils.

The man who lives faithfully with his wife, the wife who keeps her vow to her husband, the parents who together raise their children in the fear of the

Lord, the children and young people who honor their parents and heed their godly instruction—these are living the life of the kingdom. These are extending the kingship of the Lord Jesus into the fundamentally important sphere of the family. These are flying the banner of King Jesus over the home for all to see. These are also the beneficial citizens of any earthly nation.

The Sphere of Education

A third significant sphere of human life is the education of children, as both Scripture and nature teach us. Citizens of the kingdom of God submit to the reign of Jesus Christ in the sphere of education. Thus the kingdom extends into the sphere of education. Over the sphere of education, we raise the banner, "Not one square inch about which Jesus Christ does not say, 'Mine!'"

We give our children a godly upbringing at home, including the example of our own lives of submission to King Jesus, and including discipline of the children. We see to it that the children receive thorough instruction in the history and doctrines of the Bible in the solid catechism program of a true, Reformed church. In addition, with like-minded Reformed believers we provide for our children good Christian schools in which trained, competent Calvinist teachers prepare the children to live and work ably in 21st century America as subjects of King Jesus. On behalf of the parents, these teachers instruct the children in all the branches of knowledge in light of the word of God, as most parents lack both time and ability to do.

By this Christian education is brought into subjection to King Jesus the mind of the children.

Here, in a special way, our zeal for the kingdom is evident to all: We pay for these schools ourselves! The state, that is, the other tax-paying citizens, do not support our schools. We support our schools in addition to funding the state schools—an obvious injustice that the government does not redress and that apparently does not trouble the other citizens of the country.

The result of this rearing is that our sons and daughters become good citizens of the United States—the best citizens of the nation: capable, responsible, hard-working, law-abiding, and tax-paying.

But our motive in our rearing of our children is not primarily to influence the United States and the world. Rather, our motive is the kingdom of God. Our children are from birth citizens of the kingdom. They belong to King Jesus, and therefore must be educated in the truths and ways of the kingdom of God: "Suffer little [infant] children to come unto me…for of such [infant children] is the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:16).

Heart, church, family, and education do not exhaust the important spheres in which spiritual and doctrinal Calvinists live the life of the kingdom. Some of the other spheres we will consider in the next installment.

Let no one persuade you that by rejecting the Christianizing of the world you neglect the kingdom of God or come short in living its distinctive life in all the spheres of human life.

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From the Pastor's Study — Rev. Nathan Langerak

Jehovah's Laughter (1)

I remember distinctly two stories about laughter.

One of my seminary professors told the story to his students about when he was preaching on the humanity of Jesus Christ and mentioned the human things that Scripture says Jesus did. After stating that Jesus ate, drank, wept, and tired, he said that Jesus laughed. After the sermon a sharp-eared member of the congregation told him that the Bible never says that Jesus laughed, but calls him the Man of Sorrows. This made an impression on

my professor, and he never preached that again. It also made an impression on me in seminary, and I have never said that off the pulpit either.

Although we never read that Jesus laughed during his earthly ministry, we do read that Jesus addressed the subject of laughter: "Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep" (Luke 6: 21, 25).

The second story about laughter came after I preached on the sovereignty of God. A member of my congregation told me about a sermon on Psalm 2:4 that he had heard in his youth. Preaching on the text "he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision," the minister leaned profoundly over the pulpit as though he had something important to tell his congregation, and he said something like this: "Beloved, we know that God does not laugh at the wicked, because we read in John 3:16 that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." When he said that, he denied the text in Psalm 2. He also gave the reason: the teaching that God laughs did not fit with his Arminian theology. He inadvertently showed too that he grasped the heart of Scripture's teaching about the laughter of God: his hatred of the reprobate wicked. This incident showed my parishioner where his church was at that time in relationship to the gospel. Among other things, this sermon was instrumental in his eventual membership in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Jehovah laughs.

The outstanding scriptural passage that teaches about Jehovah's laughter is Psalm 2:4. There are other passages in Scripture that speak of God's laughter: "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming" (Ps. 37:12–13); "But thou, O LORD, shalt laugh at them; thou shalt have all the heathen in derision" (Ps. 59:8). In the Lord's laughter, Wisdom joins in: "I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh" (Prov. 1:26). The righteous laugh too: "The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him: Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness" (Ps. 52:6–7).

These passages about God's laughter all occur in the context of the wickedness of the ungodly. After telling us of the raging of the heathen, their vain imaginations, and their taking counsel together against the Lord and his anointed in order to break the bands of God and cast away God's cords from them, Psalm 2 says that God laughs. In Psalm 37, God's laughter comes in the context of "evildoers" and "workers of iniquity," who "prosper" and "bring wicked devices to pass," and especially who plot against the just and gnash on them with their teeth. "The Lord shall laugh" at these evildoers. The uninspired but ancient title of Psalm 59 describes it as a psalm of David "when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him [David]." There David describes "mine enemies," "workers of iniquity," and "bloody men" who "lie in wait for my soul" and "belch out with their mouth" with "swords…in their lips." The believer sorely pressed in such straits confesses that Jehovah "shalt laugh at them…[and] have all the heathen in derision."

Those at whom Jehovah laughs are the reprobate ungodly.

The iniquity to which these texts refer is the history-long, general abounding of iniquity, together with animosity and persecution of God's church, with Christ as its head, driven by the hatred of the wicked for God, his Christ, and his church, in which the goal is the complete destruction of the kingdom of God and the establishment of the kingdom of Satan.

This opposition culminated at the cross. In explaining the cross of Jesus Christ, the church confesses in Acts 4:25–28:

Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

The church confesses that the gathering together of Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the Jews against Jesus Christ to condemn and to crucify him was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 2 of the nations' raging and gathering together.

This was the culmination of animosity first evidenced in the relationship between Cain and Abel in which Cain murdered Abel because his works were righteous. To the continuation of this enmity

the Old Testament Scriptures give abundant witness. It was the enmity of the world against Enoch because he walked with God. It was the hatred of the world for Noah. It explains Ishmael's persecution of Isaac, Esau's hatred of Jacob, and Egypt's attempt to destroy Israel. It explains the actions of Doeg the Edomite in Psalm 52, of Saul in Psalm 59, and of the repeated attempts throughout the Old Testament by the wicked nations surrounding Israel to swallow her up: Midian; the coalitions of apostate Israel, Ammon and Edom; and the great nations of Egypt, Syria, Assyria, and Babylon.

This opposition continues today in abounding lawlessness. When the believer sees the sexual revolution taking place by the aggressive promotion of homosexuality in the courts and at the ballot box, by the toleration of every kind of sexual perversion, and by rampant divorce and remarriage, he sees wicked man carrying out his counsel to break God's bands. When the believer witnesses the rise of the god-state or the overthrow by revolution of every authority—state, parental, and employer—he witnesses man's counsels to cast God's cords away from him. When he sees the multiplication of false doctrines and the falling away of many, he is seeing that same opposition in the realm of the church. The rise of false doctrine, the love of many waxing cold, and the abounding of iniquity is wicked opposition aimed squarely at the church in order to swallow her up and to destroy her.

The final manifestation and culmination of this opposition will be the kingdom of the beast from the sea (Rev. 13 and 17). He will oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped and will sit in the temple of God showing himself that he is God (2 Thess. 2:4). He will demand and receive the honors of divine worship. In his opposition to God, he will think to change times and seasons (Dan. 2:21). He will cast the church out of society by instituting the most vigorous and systematic persecution of the church that the world has ever seen.

At all of this Jehovah will laugh. He will have them in derision.

Jehovah's laughter is not that of many professing Christians whose laughter is worldly pleasure with the wickedness of the ungodly. They entertain themselves with the world's movies, television shows, comedy routines, and jokes. They laugh hysterically at the world's taking God's name in vain, and its profaning holy things, so that all that is holy is made the butt of their jokes. They take pleasure in the unfruitful works of darkness, in direct contradiction to the command of Scripture to have no fellowship with them, but to rebuke them (Eph. 5:11). Such laughter by these professing Christians explains their refusal to rebuke and the subsequent friendliness of the world toward them. If they will not rebuke, they will not incur the wrath of the world.

Neither is Jehovah's laughter an expression of his pleasure with the wicked, as many teach today. They say that God is pleased with the deeds and accomplishments of the ungodly, and they themselves have a good word for the ungodly deeds of the wicked. That Jehovah's laughter is not pleasure is clear, because his laughter always occurs in Scripture in the same context with his anger, wrath, and destruction of his ungodly enemies. In no way does Jehovah's laughter either conflict with or mitigate the anger and wrath of God at the opposition, wickedness, and hatred of the ungodly. Psalm 2:5 makes this clear: "Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure."

Rather, the laughter of Jehovah God is a vivid anthropomorphism along the lines of Scripture's description of God's repentance. The laughter of God is the powerfully descriptive revelation of the relationship between the holy God and the ungodly and their opposition to him, his Christ, and his kingdom.

To be continued…

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As cold waters to a thirsty soul,

So is good news from a far country.

—Proverbs 25:25

Watching Daily At My Gates

June 11 ***Read Proverbs 5***

In this chapter Solomon gives to his son instruction concerning marriage. Marriage is a gift from God. As with all gifts, it must be used in a wise way. When we commit any sin against the seventh commandment either in or out of marriage, we walk in a very foolish way. Young people need to prepare for marriage by learning all about a God-fearing walk in this beautiful institution. Adults need to maintain the institution, as well as provide a good example for those young people. We must always remember that marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. To misuse marriage is to spoil that picture. Sing Psalter 360.

June 12 ***Read Proverbs 6***

Throughout the book of Proverbs we have chapters with instruction about a variety of matters. This chapter is no different. One of the areas of instruction is that about work. Simply put, we are not to be lazy. It does not matter what our occupation is; Solomon's exhortation, which is God's exhortation, is to use all of our strength in that work. Young people need to remember this as they go to school. That is their work. Adults too must not be thinking just about days off or vacations. As the fourth commandment states, "Six days shalt thou labor…" Let us remember this admonition throughout all of our lives. Sing Psalter 90.

June 13 ***Read Proverbs 7***

Solomon reiterates his admonition to seek wisdom. He shows that in its seeking and finding, a young person will be guarded from an evil not only in Solomon's day, but in our day as well. That evil is the sin against the seventh commandment in all of its forms. All kinds of media will portray this sin as not only being normal, but also as being desirable. The child of God must fight against this evil all of his life. The only way to win this fight is to use the wisdom that comes from above and that is found in God's word. Joseph won this fight in Potiphar's house, and we can as well. The last verses again show the way to peace not only on this earth, but also in the world to come. Sing Psalter 83.

June 14 ***Read Proverbs 8***

Not only do we have a summary of *what* wisdom is in this chapter, but we also have a revelation of *who* wisdom is. Wisdom is personified in this chapter, and that person is Christ our redeemer. Verses 22 and 23 make this abundantly clear. The chapter also speaks of the value of wisdom. Young people, are you seeking after this wisdom? In your studies and in your daily life are you seeking after the priceless wisdom that can only be found in obedience to the word of God? Seek it and seek it diligently. This was Solomon's admonition, and this is the admonition of God himself. Sing Psalter 332.

June 15 ***Read Proverbs 9***

This final chapter on the subject of wisdom is also a chapter containing a clear picture of the antithesis. Wisdom is contrasted with foolishness, and it becomes obvious for which one we must seek. We must do this as little children led by godly parents, elders, and if God provides, godly teachers. We must do this as young people seeking our way in this world. Young people, do not be fooled by the world's philosophy, which is eat, drink, and be merry. That is the way to destruction. And we must do this as mature adults as we lead our children and young people on the narrow path that leads to heaven. Find true wisdom, people of God, and use it in a right way. Sing Psalter 317.

June 16 ***Read Proverbs 10***

The first nine chapters of this book of wisdom were the doctrinal introduction to the practical part of the book. In chapters 10 to 25 we find various short, pithy sayings which point out to us either a proper aspect of life or an improper one. We could go through this section verse by verse, but that would not serve our purposes with this series of devotionals. In the first verse of this chapter Solomon describes two kinds of people. They may live in the same family. The son who is wise gladdens his parents; a son who is foolish saddens them. Young people, which are you? How do you appear before God? Sing Psalter 89.

June 17 ***Read Proverbs 11***

One of the themes found throughout this section of Proverbs is that of the tongue. How do people perceive us when they hear us speak? Do we break the third commandment and therefore show disdain for God's holy name? Are we found to hate our neighbor by breaking the ninth commandment? The tongue, as James says, is a mighty instrument. We can curse or we can bless. We can speak the truth in love, or we can lie in order to make ourselves look good in man's eyes. We need to guard our

tongues, and we need to ask for grace to speak good things about God and about our neighbor. Sing Psalter 24.

June 18 *Read Proverbs 12*

Another theme in this book of wisdom is the difference between the fool and the wise. The fool is one who has no understanding of God and his ways because he is reprobate. The elect sometimes walk in foolish ways, but by God's grace they are turned from such ways. As you read through this book look at the way of a fool; are you found walking in that way? We need to flee foolishness and pray for grace to walk in the way of the wise. Sing Psalter 96.

June 19 *Read Proverbs 13*

In this chapter we see several references to the poor and the rich. Like the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, we can really term these kinds of people the poor-rich or the rich-poor. Many of God's people in this life are financially poor, but yet they have a richness that cannot be measured by man's accounting. The elect poor can find a peace unattained by the reprobate rich. This peace is found in Christ and applied to the elect by the Holy Spirit by grace. No matter what our financial standing is in this life, let us seek this peace that passes all understanding. Sing Psalter 97.

June 20 *Read Proverbs 14*

Look at verse 19. Is this not the philosophy of much of the world's entertainment today? On the TV, at the movies, or on the pages of many books are the ways of sin mocked or portrayed as the way to live. People of God of all ages, what is your entertainment like? Is it entertainment in which God is glorified, or is it entertainment in which sin is made light of or not considered as sin? We must be wise in entertainment, and we must teach our children and young people to be discerning in their choices of entertainment. Sing Psalter 339.

June 21 *Read Proverbs 15*

There are many ideas that could be explored in this chapter. Let us look at the one found in the first verse. In our conversations with others, especially when confrontation may occur or has occurred, what direction do we take? Do we go the way of inciting fury with the words that we speak, or do we seek to pacify the other with words that do not incite anger? In such conversations no one can say, "It was the other's fault." It takes two to cause a situation that leads to trouble. The child of God needs to be the one who seeks to alleviate a situation by words that do not hurt or anger. This takes much grace. We need to pray for this grace to speak words of peace to all with whom we come into contact. Sing Psalter 343.

June 22 *Read Proverbs 16*

There are many verses in this chapter upon which we could meditate. You might choose a different one than I do. My choices are verses 18 and 19. The subject of pride is addressed quite often in this book of wisdom. Pride was the sin that caused Satan to fall. Pride is the sin that causes many in this world, including in God's church, to fall. When a person's speech is peppered with "I", "me", and "my," that person must be very careful, or he will be heading for the fall described in these verses. The church of God is a body with many members. None of those members can be the whole body. Conquering the sin of pride will help a person to please God and bring peace to God's church. Sing Psalter 206.

June 23 *Read Proverbs 17*

In the day and age in which we live, we do well to consider verse 9 daily. The idea of cover does not mean to cover up, as many would see it today, but rather not to spread the sin around by means of gossip, as is the instruction of the second part of the verse. The positive part of the ninth commandment as described in the Heidelberg Catechism gives good instruction in this matter. We must seek to promote the advantage of our neighbor by a judicious use of our tongue. When we speak the truth in love, we will not seek to hurt him with our tongues. Wise use of the tongue is another way of promoting unity in the body of Christ. Sing Psalter 335.

June 24 *Read Proverbs 18*

In verse 24 we see two truths. First, we have the truth of the importance of friends. For the child of God, those friends must be those who believe the truths of God's word. If this fact is not the starting point of a friendship, usually there will be no friendship. Our young people must seek friends that are like them in faith. Second, we have that last clause in the verse. Who is the friend that "sticketh closer than a brother?" That one can be no other than our Lord Jesus Christ. He has "called us friends," and then he gave his life for us so that we may have life everlasting. "What a friend we have in Jesus!" Sing Psalter 369.

June 25 *Read Proverbs 19*

There are several references in the book of Proverbs to the Christian and worth ethic. In this chapter, as well as others, we are warned not to be slothful. Laziness and carelessness in work are marks of a fool. Our children must learn from an early age that the way that they work is evident to the world. Our children and young people must know that their schooling is their work. Those who use the talents and abilities that God has given to his honor and glory will find blessing in that way. Those who do not will be scorned of man and not approved by God. Let us establish good work habits that please our God and let us exhibit them all of our lives. Sing Psalter 246.

June 26 *Read Proverbs 20*

There are two verses in this chapter that speak of divers weights. This refers to a business practice of that time. A merchant would weigh some type of merchandise for a

customer. A fraudulent seller would alter his scale weights, and the customer would be cheated. False business practices are sins against the eighth commandment. So is the practice of cheating in school. God's people are admonished to love their neighbor according to the second table of the law. We must not steal by any method, whether in business or in school. If we do not love our neighbor, we do not love God. Sing Psalter 25.

June 27 *Read Proverbs 21*

It does not matter if you are a king or the lowest of subjects. All hearts are in God's hand. As he directs heads of states, so he directs ditch diggers. We must realize this as we go through our daily lives. God directs all things for his glory and for the good of his people. Government makes the decisions it does even when the leaders of that government do not know God. We also make decisions directed by God. We know God; therefore we must bow to his wisdom. Let us not rebel against God and his work, but rather let us look to him to direct our way. Sing Psalter 265.

June 28 *Read Proverbs 22*

Are we guilty of tearing down the ancient landmarks? Does the admonition found in verse 28 apply today? There are many of these ancient landmarks found in this book of wisdom. One of them is found in verse 6 of today's chapter. In Israel of old the landmark was a memorial to what had been given to the Israelites as they came into the land of Canaan. Naboth refused to sell his. What can be said about us? Are we giving up the landmarks such as verse 6 and others so that we can be more at home in this earth instead of looking ahead to the heavenly Canaan? Let us not tear down those landmarks; let us pray for the grace to live as strangers and pilgrims on this earth. Sing Psalter 228.

June 29 *Read Proverbs 23*

Another theme found throughout the book of Proverbs is the misuse of alcohol. Alcohol is one of God's good gifts. It is our use of it that must be tempered by the word of God. Are we prone to misuse it? If we are, then we need to leave it alone until we can control our lusts and desires. In other places of scripture, wine is shown to be the picture of spiritual joy found in the church. But when this symbol is not used correctly, it becomes a way for Satan to infiltrate our lives and bring us into his grasp. Use God's gifts, but use them in a way pleasing to him. Sing Psalter 322.

June 30 *Read Proverbs 24*

Verses 28 and 29 give instruction concerning the Christian's calling toward the wicked. They are very much like the instruction given by Christ on the same subject, though they are given in the negative while Christ's instruction is given in the positive. This instruction is best summarized in the second great commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." How do we treat our neighbor? Do we treat him as we wish to be treated, or are we always trying to get even or ahead of him? God places these neighbors in our paths. Children, young people, and adults must show a reflection of the love that God showed to us when he sent his Son to die on the cross. Do we love God? Then we must love our neighbor. Sing Psalter 201.

July 1 *Read Proverbs 25*

Here we have more of Solomon's proverbs. There are many comparisons or similes found in this chapter. Some of them are very graphic and give us a good picture of what our behavior should or should not be. We find one of these in the last verse of the chapter. In the list of the parts of the fruit of the spirit, our KJV calls this attribute *temperance*. Some translate it as *self-control*. We must apply this attribute to all areas of our lives. Excess usually brings to us sin. Some of these sins lead us into a way that destroys not only our lives, but also the lives of those around us. We must pray to God to receive grace to control our spirit. In doing this God's Spirit will shine in us and we will bring glory to his name. Sing Psalter 156.

July 2 *Read Proverbs 26*

In this chapter we find at least two kinds of fools identified, and the child of God is warned to stay away from their folly. First, we have the lazy or slothful person. God had given to us the calling to work. It does not matter if we are a young person or a mature adult. Each child of God has work to do in this life, and with God's grace can carry it out to God's honor and glory. Second—and maybe the two are related—a talebearer is identified. We must guard our tongues and use them in accordance to the ninth commandment. A talebearer and his listeners can stir up trouble not only in society, but also in God's church. We need to flee this sin and seek to love our neighbor as ourselves. May we daily seek to walk in God's way in these two areas of life. Sing Psalter 190.

July 3 *Read Proverbs 27*

Verse 17 gives us a description of the kind of friend we must seek. It must be someone who can help us in our daily spiritual life. If our friends are those who have no care for spiritual things, we will never get better in that area of our lives. Just as you need a strong stone or piece of metal to sharpen some tool, so the child of God needs a friend that will help him to get stronger in God's ways. One way that we can do this is to attend Bible studies. Sitting across the table from other saints and helping each other through the Bible is a good way to become stronger in the faith. We need to be sharp to wield the sword of the spirit against all the wiles of Satan in the last days. Sing Psalter 371.

July 4 *Read Proverbs 28*

Throughout the book of Proverbs come injunctions to help the poor. We have that in this chapter in verse 27.

What is our attitude when the benevolence offering is taken in the worship service? What is our attitude when we see or hear of our neighbor who has needs? Do we remember the words of our Savior that we have the poor among us always? Once again we must be reminded of the second great commandment of the law's summary, that we love our neighbor as ourselves. Who do we look after first: one's self or the neighbor? Do we follow the injunction of God for our lives or our own desires? May God be glorified even as we seek to help those in need in our midst. Sing Psalter 398.

July 5 *Read Proverbs 29*

This seems to be the last chapter that contains the proverbs of Solomon. However, there are some who think those identified in the next two chapters are using pen names for the wise king of Israel. If these are the last words of David's son, we do well to see his concern for the parent-child relationship. Parents are instructed to teach their children the way they must go. If they do not, the child will come to ruin, and the parents will be shamed before God. Children and young people must walk in an obedient way before God. Again, ruin will come upon them if they do not. Parents and children, we have an urgent calling from God in this matter. May we pray for the grace to heed this call and walk in a way pleasing to our heavenly Father. Sing Psalter 215.

July 6 *Read Proverbs 30*

Throughout the book of Proverbs the natural creation is used as an example for the child of God. Just as God led Job through creation to show him that God was sovereign, so the writers of Proverbs give to us the example of God's creation to show how we must walk. Reread verses 25-31 and see what God through these men is teaching us. Take time to observe creation to learn the way we must walk to please God. Paul tells us in the book of Romans that the whole creation awaits Christ's return. May we walk in its example as we desire that coming. Sing Psalter 375.

July 7 *Read Proverbs 31*

Some say these final words are words of instruction of Bathsheba to her son Solomon. They instruct him in the way of seeking a wife who is fit for the child of God. We know that Solomon was beset with the sin of seeking many wives, and many wives not fit for the child of God. All of God's church can take instruction from this chapter on seeking a godly wife. Girls can take much instruction on what they must do to prepare themselves to become such godly wives. God has given to his church the beautiful institution of marriage to picture the relationship between Christ and the church. How do we see this relationship? Do we seek one that is pleasing to God? May our marriages be those beautiful pictures of the spiritual union of Christ and the church. Let none of us do anything to break that bond. Sing Psalter 360.

July 8 *Read Ecclesiastes 1*

The wisest man on earth, excepting Christ who became man, put his wisdom to use trying to describe life in its many ways. Many think Solomon wrote this after his decline into sin and before he died. Throughout the book we find the words, "vanity of vanity, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." That was Solomon's conclusion of life without out God. If we try to go through life on our own we will find the emptiness that Solomon did. If we seek to live our lives with God as our help, we will find the meaning that he has put into our lives on this earth. Let us seek God and fear him every day of our lives; in that way life will have meaning. Sing Psalter 135.

July 9 *Read Ecclesiastes 2*

After considering the natural creation as man uses it and finding it empty, Solomon decides to see if there is any worth in man's idea of pleasure. Solomon had the means to do this, as he was not only the wisest man that lived, but he was also the richest. He tries all kinds of pleasure to find peace in them. He finds nothing. He realizes that corrupt man uses God's good gifts in a wicked way. In using them in that way, there is not peace for the soul. As we seek entertainment of any type, we must seek to glorify God and not ourselves, for there is no good "under the sun" without God. Sing Psalter 108.

July 10 *Read Ecclesiastes 3*

In the first part of this chapter Solomon gives a summary of life. Life is changeable. It may have birth or death, sadness or happiness, or building or destroying. God, however, is not changeable. Because he does not change, we can go through all the changeable things and know that he will deliver us from this valley of the shadow of death. It does not matter what God brings upon us. He brings it upon us for our good, as we read in Romans 8:28. Also, God will be glorified, which is the goal of all things upon this earth. Let us seek to follow his way in whatever way he leads us. In doing this we will find true peace and joy on this earth. Sing Psalter 186.

July 11 *Read Ecclesiastes 4*

As we read Solomon's conclusions on many aspects of life, we can find little nuggets of wisdom that will help guide us in our lives. In this chapter consider verses 9–12. The church is a communion of saints. A child of God must not go throughout this life on his own. Solomon has enumerated some of the troubles into which we can fall. When we fall by ourselves, there is no one to help us recover from the fall. He finishes the thought in verse 12 by saying that three friends are better yet. Let us seek to have fellowship with those of like faith. In doing so we can ward off Satan's attacks, which will grow stronger and stronger as the world draws to a close. God has given to us help in the form of Christian brothers and sisters; let us use it. Sing Psalter 194.

God in His Mighty Power Created No Possibility for Evolutionism

(8) Evolutionism's Effects

When you take away the literal historical meaning of Genesis 1–11, much more is lost than only the truth of God's creating in six days and his destroying the wicked world that then was with a flood. One of the most important things that has been lost along the way or is in the process of being stifled is the historicity of Adam. With the removal of Adam comes the inevitable destruction of many basics of the Christian faith.

Removing Adam

I recently attended a lecture at Cornerstone University's seminary (Grand Rapids Theological Seminary) given by John Walton, a professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College. Walton is a post-modern higher critic. He says Paul (and therefore we) could not possibly have understood what Moses wrote in Genesis. He makes the claim that Paul completely misinterpreted the story. He bases this assumption on what he calls the Israelites' cosmic geography or basically, "how they saw it." Walton says that God through Moses used language that only the Israelites would understand, therefore neither Paul, nor you and I could possibly understand what he was talking about. Walton posits that because it was a completely different time and culture, the creation account in Genesis is not what it appears to be. Obviously Walton holds to some idea of inspiration, because he states that God used Moses. What about Paul then? He wasn't inspired by the Holy Spirit? Walton not only has a skewed view of Paul's Spirit-driven interpretation, but also he says that in the beginning God did not create anything material; he merely took control of the disorganization and created functions (nothing material) such as time. Apparently the church has been wrong about this for thousands of years. Who knew? Walton parallels the account in Genesis 1 and 2 to the construction of a house. He says God did not build the house, he merely made it a home when he "moved in" and "took control" by creating function. He says the cosmos is "sacred space" and God "moved in" on the seventh day, which was the goal of his taking control of chaos. This is a clear denial of the sovereignty of God's *creative* hand. God created all things and he still controls all the events that occur. He didn't take control, he always was in control.

With Walton's denial of material creation in Genesis 1, he removes the possibility of a historical creation of Adam and merely designates him as the first person whom God adopted. He states (truthfully) that verses like, "All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again" (Eccles. 3:20) don't imply that each of us as individuals was created from dust, but that we are all of this earth. He wrongly takes this a step further and says that since God did not create each of us from the dust, therefore Adam as our archetype (representative) couldn't have been created out of the dust of the earth.

If you go down this wrong road, the question then must be asked: When was man created? Walton doesn't really take a stance on this. Although he says he doesn't agree that it was evolution, he says he is open to it. He does not provide a straight answer to what and when the "real" origin of mankind was; he mostly just raises questions and stirs the pot. If this isn't post-modernism, then I don't know what is.

Walton lets ancient near eastern culture influence his view of Scripture. This is not surprising when we live in the age when many claim the name of Christian but do not live by Scripture. They quickly shove aside Scripture in order to make room for what some ancient document or modern scholar has to say. What ever happened to validating all things in the light of Scripture? The apostle John sounds a clear warning about those who like Walton would

have us believe something other than what is taught in Scripture. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 9–11). The Belgic Confession also addresses John Walton's higher criticism in comparing ancient near eastern texts to Scripture.

> We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein...it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures. [Walton would agree with this, but his understanding of what is taught in Scripture is wrong] Neither do we consider of equal value any writing of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity [Walton's ancient near eastern texts]...as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all. (Belgic Confession, Article 7)

To sum up Walton's teachings, we see he stresses that Scripture is unclear and inconsistent on most things because it was written for us but not directly to us. This is why he throws Paul's inspired (as we see it) interpretation of the connection between Adam and Christ out the window. We insist that Scripture is entirely consistent with itself: Scripture interprets Scripture. We are convicted of this because the Holy Spirit is the author of the entire canon of Scripture.

Salvation does not make sense without Adam

Let's refresh our minds regarding the creation and fall of Adam and its effects on all mankind. Adam was created as the first man by God on the sixth day. Adam was created in the image of God, that is, he actually possessed some of the virtues of God. "Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright; all his affections pure; and the whole man was holy" (Canons III/IV, Article 1).

When Adam sinned, he sinned on behalf of all mankind. Man by way of Adam lost the image of God but still had "glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the differences between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment" (Canons III/IV, Article 4). As children of fallen Adam our lives are to be a continual putting off of the old man and a putting on of the new man, the restoration of the image of God in us. Ephesians 4:22–24 sets before us this relation between the image of God and sanctification: "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Because of our fallen nature we are wholly incapable of doing this and therefore must seek for our salvation outside of ourselves. This is where Christ comes into the picture as the second Adam. Now in your mind take away everything you have just read: Adam as a created person with the image of God who fell from his glorious state and stands in the need of redemption. If there was no historical, created Adam, there is no need for salvation in Christ. Many in the name of Christianity are rejecting the reality of an historical, created man called Adam. They claim to do this without removing Christ from the picture. It doesn't work like that. Christ is the answer to Adam's (elect man's) inability to pay for his sins. Remember that when Adam and Eve sinned, they sewed fig leaves in an attempt to cover their nakedness, because they were ashamed. These vain coverings were not enough. After God talked with them about their sin, he provided them with animal *skins*. Two important points must be made here. First, *God provided* them with animal skins for clothing. This shows that blood needed to be shed so that payment could be made for their sins. Second, God provided them with *animal* skins. God was showing Adam and Eve and all mankind after them that in his justice payment must be made for sin, and only he can provide the means to remove the debt we pile up with our sins. He accomplished this on the cross through the death of his Son. Deny the first man Adam and you subsequently deny the second Adam, Christ. Adam sinned on behalf of the rest of mankind after him, but Christ came on behalf of God's chosen elect as payment for all their sin. The Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul in Romans 5 makes a clear paral-

lel between Adam and Christ. You would do well to read the chapter in its entirety as we will quote only a few verses here.

> Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (v. 12)... But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many (v. 15)...Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life (v. 18). For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous (v. 19).

Evolutionism destroys the sanctity of marriage

Marriage is a creation ordinance given to us in Genesis 2: "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (v. 18). God created woman as a help fit for man because none of the animals Adam had named were "meet for him" (v. 20). So God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam and took a rib from him and formed a woman. God did not take a part from his foot so that men may now trample on women. God did not take a part from his head so that now the woman turns the man wherever she pleases. God took a rib, close to man's heart. A wife is close to a man's heart. He loves her and cares for her and leads her with the authority given by God.

Removal of the truth of this chapter has destroyed the sanctity of marriage. Men do not care for their wives as they ought. Tentacles of the feminist movement turn wives against their husbands. Marriage is not for one male and one female anymore, but homosexual couplings are recognized as marriage, even in the mind of some who claim to be a part of the church. The Lord said, "therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife" (v. 24), not his husband.

If you are going to promote an idea such as evolutionism, as the theistic evolutionist does, then why believe in God at all? Why worship God if he is not the Creator (Isaiah 40:28)? Why worship God if he is not "the most high over all the earth (Psalm 83:18)? Why would anyone worship a God who is not Most High? Those who hold to the world view of evolutionism do not abide in the doctrine of Christ and do not have God (2 John 9). They do not worship God, they worship man: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Romans 1:21–23).

With a belief in the world view of evolutionism comes utter destruction of the gospel. With evolutionism comes the removal of the first man Adam. The result of this is the destruction of the creation ordinance of marriage. With the destruction of the ordinance of marriage comes the rampant divorce and remarriage and sexual immorality we see in today's society. With the annihilation of the marriage ordinance also comes the homosexual movement. With the removal of the marriage ordinance comes denial of the headship of man in the feminist movement. With the removal of Adam comes the removal of original sin and guilt of all mankind. In the end there is no need for Christ to come and make payment for sin, so he is treated as irrelevant as well. And at this point we have reached something that is not Christianity at all. This is the bitter fruit of evolutionism.

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The legs of the lame are not equal:

So is a parable in the mouth of fools.

As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard,

So is a parable in the mouth of fools.

—Proverbs 26:7, 9

Whales

The whale and dolphin families have always fascinated me. Why? Because some are so large, most are very intelligent, and they are so graceful in their aquatic environment. But many are very shy and live out in the vast ocean, so that we may never see one in our lifetime. Television, DVDs and the internet mean we can see and appreciate these creatures in our homes .The other quite extraordinary features that they have in common with us humans, are that they breathe air (through blow holes on the top of their head), are warm-blooded, and being mammals suckle their young with milk for up to a year.

The largest (and also the loudest) animal ever to have lived on earth is the Blue Whale. They measure up to 100 feet in length and weigh up to 200 tons (400,000 pounds). Their hearts are the size of a small car. They can live up to 80 years. I mentioned the blue whale also being the loudest: apparently they can hear each other 1000 miles away.

They belong to the animal order *Cetacea* (from the Latin *Cetus*, meaning a large sea animal) that includes whales, dolphins and porpoises. They are further divided into two types: toothed (72 species), and non-toothed or baleen (14 species). The baleen species, which are all whales and include the blue whale, sift seawater in massive gulps and force it out through the fine sieve of their baleen (compressed hair) plates and bristles, made of keratin, like our nails and hair. They must catch 4 tons a day of microscopic shrimp called krill, which are then licked off the inside of their plates by their enormous tongues. They can submerge for 2 hours at a time. The blue whale travels thousands of miles from its Arctic or Antarctic feeding grounds to the warmer winter breeding and birthing grounds in the tropics. The cooler waters are rich in plankton because more oxygen and carbon dioxide are dissolved. During the migration they will have to fast, living off their blubber. The migration is vital, as the newborn have little blubber like their parents to insulate them. Baby blue whales consume over 600 liters of milk a day for up to 7 months. Imagine that grocery bill!

For decades whales were hunted in vast numbers for their blubber to make oil and their baleen for "whalebone" corsets; 30,000 blue whales were slaughtered in 1930 alone. This period in human history, which continued until recently, exhibited the greed of fallen man and his misuse of his kingship and stewardship over God's creatures of the sea. The "Greens" and conservationists have a point in their opposition to whaling. These magnificent animals are now protected.

Orcas or killer whales are spectacular creatures with their black and white coloring, size up to 8 metres and 6 tons, large peg-like teeth, and predatory ways, in which often in teams (pods) they will hunt seals, penguins, dolphins, other whales, and fish. They are the fastest sea mammal, reaching 55 km/hr (25 mph).

The dolphins are probably the best known and loved of all. They are friendly and gregarious creatures, often belonging to huge schools of up to 500. They are very intelligent, social animals who hunt often in groups and are amazing to watch speeding though water and leaping high in the air. They are beautifully streamlined for gliding through water.

All whales and dolphins propel themselves by the up and down movement of their tail flukes (unlike fish).They give birth to a single calf after 10 months, tail first. The newborn has to get to the surface quickly for its first breath, and "aunties" help protect it from sharks who might detect blood in the water. Dolphins can stay submerged from 3 to 15 minutes, depending on their species, and like the bigger whales have very efficient lungs that extract up to 90% of the oxygen in the air compared with us humans at 15%. The dolphin was the emblem of the city of Corinth; incidentally, it is also the emblem of the Scottish clan Kennedy. They communicate with each other by clicks and whistles and can be taught to do extraordinary clever tricks. They use echo-location (sonar) in which high-pitched clicks or ultrasonic waves bounce back from an object to detect prey and predators. They live

up to 25 years. They feed on squid, shrimp, eels, and other fish, and can be seen on YouTube with amazing pictures of them herding and eating a bait ball of myriads of fish, herding them with either bubbles or sand. They also help each other with midwifery and when injured. You may wonder how they sleep. The females float on the surface, blowhole uppermost, and the males stay just below the surface and come up to breathe by a reflex every so often.

The Belgic confession includes these wonderful animals in its statement regarding the creation (Article 12):

> We believe that the Father, by the Word, that is, by his Son, hath created of nothing, the heaven, the earth, and all creatures, as it seemed good unto him, giving unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator. That he doth also still uphold and govern them by his eternal providence, and infinite power, for the service of mankind, to the end that man may serve his God.

Most Bible scholars believe the creature named in Psalm 104 as leviathan is one of the whale family; this is the only reference to one in Scripture. We read in verses 24–31:

> O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, *both small and great* beasts. There go the ships: *there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein*. These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth. The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever: the LORD shall rejoice in his works.

Have you ever contemplated that God rejoices in the works of his hands? We should also rejoice when we observe or read about these amazing creatures! Solomon was a keen naturalist, and many of his wise proverbs come from lessons animals teach us. The diversity, beauty and various abilities of these creatures as well as God's provision for them should make us marvel. Well has the Psalmist said in Psalm 111:2 "The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." That is a good reason for every Christian to have an interest in the natural world!

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Our Goodly Heritage

Lynette Kleyn

The Church in the Philippines

My brother Peter and I were privileged to take two weeks to travel around the Philippines and Singapore. All of it was an experience that we will never be able to forget, and I would love to share some of what we did and learned with you. I hope that as you read this, you will understand not only what life is like in these parts of the world, but also how important a role the people play in the body of Christ and as part of his beautiful church. There is a significant contrast between the Philippines and Singapore, and yet the people share a strong love and zeal for God that brings them together and that goes beyond their contrasting earthly circumstances.

After 23 hours of traveling, going through customs and getting our bags, we were ready to experience the Philippines for the first time. Walking out of the airport, we were struck by the crowd of people trying to find each other, shouting, running to meet family and friends, laughing, singing, and in general, making plenty of noise. Humid heavy air

enveloped us, and immediately we began to sweat. We pushed through the crowds and were relieved to see the familiar faces of our aunt and uncle, Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn, who stood tall and blond in a sea of short, dark Filipinos. Once we were out of the airport and on the road, we were struck by the traffic, horns honking, brakes squeaking, people running in between the traffic without getting hit. Motorcycles weaved in and out of the chaos, and it seemed few vehicles paid any attention to the lines on the road, or the traffic lights. We were in some shock. No pictures or videos prepared us for this different culture.

This was not the end of the surprises that would greet our eyes and ears. The day after we arrived, we took a train to Manila, the capital city of the Philippines, and really not too far from where Rev. and Sharon Kleyn live. The population of the greater Manila area is a mere 20 million people, and if you think you can imagine what it is like, you had better try harder. The poverty of the people was one of the most striking things to us. Many of these 20 million are crammed into tiny little tin and cloth huts that probably measure no more than 12 x 12 square feet and that share walls with neighboring huts. There is no privacy and no quiet spot; children run around in their bare feet, playing with each other and their pets. And the most beautiful thing is that even in their lack of earthly possessions, they wear smiles on their faces and laughter in their eyes.

Sin and the work of Satan was evident in this country, as it is in ours and even in our lives, but in contrast, Christ's beautiful work also takes place in the Philippines. Peter and I spent Sunday in First Reformed Church of Bulacan, a church that shows a great interest in the Reformed teachings of the PRCA, and is working toward joining with the Berean PRC to form a denomination in the Philippines. There are 50 or so members in this group, and they meet in a small building that also serves for a family's home during the week.

Let me describe a chaotic and yet at the same time very peaceful scene for you. Imagine you are sitting in hard plastic chairs, the heat and humidity envelopes you, even though fans blow, trying to cool your sweat-drenched skin. The laughter of three little girls floats in the open window behind you as they play their games in the alley. Roosters crow. Dogs bark and yip at each other. Horns blare. Cars and trucks rumble past, and you hear the voices of people visiting on the streets. But in the midst of all these distractions, you notice that the Filipinos around you are focused very intently and quietly on the minister, who is bringing them God's word. And then you feel guilty for letting these things get in the way of your worship.

That is the kind of place those people have to worship in. No nice church building with air condition and comfy pews, or closed doors and windows to block out the noise. They don't have much, but they are content and thankful. They still can worship God the way that he wants us to worship him – in love and out of thankfulness. That is the beauty that we experienced in Bulacan that day.

We were also privileged to visit the Berean Protestant Reformed Church in the Philippines that day. They meet on the third floor of an office building, which serves nicely as a sanctuary and catechism room for them. Rev. Ibe, whom some of you might know from when he and his family lived here, was just recently called and ordained to be pastor there. Before that, Rev. Smit worked mostly with the Bereans, preaching and teaching catechism to them. Now Rev. Smit and his family are free to visit some of the other contacts and churches in the Philippines.

All the people that we met in each of these churches were very friendly and made us feel comfortable, even though we were in a totally different country and culture. The food they fed us was tasty, even if we didn't always know what we were eating! But it wasn't the outward hospitality that we enjoyed the most. These people are united with us in Christ, and his beauty shone brightly through them. We were blessed not only by going to the Philippines, but also by witnessing these people's love for God and devotion to him, even though they have few earthly possessions.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12 we read, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." This passage and many others speak of the diversity of the body, yet the beautiful unity that the members of that body share. We experienced that in so many ways as we got to know the people of the Philippines. Their culture, language, way of life, and skin color are all so different from ours, yet Christ is their head, as he is ours, and that is the beautiful truth that binds us together in brotherly love.

Our prayer is that through reading this your eyes too may be opened to see the world around

you, even if you may never travel out of the United States. God's people are gathered from every nation, tribe, and tongue, and that is something we so easily forget as we live in our close community of Christians and fellow believers. Pray for the people of the Philippines. They covet your prayers as they learn more and more about the Reformed faith. And pray for the missionary families there, that they may continue to wisely and carefully bring these people the truths of God's word.

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Gem of the Month

Julie Bergman

Pathways

Taken from Proverbs 3:6

Walking down life's pathways
you will come across many
bumps and divots along your journey.
Do not get discouraged my
dear child for the Lord
is with you as you walk life's pathway.
When things get rough always
remember In all your ways
acknowledge Him and
He shall direct your paths.
So when it comes to the straight
and narrow He will see you through.
When the storms of life are raging
He will protect you and pull you out.
And when life comes to a crossroad
remember God is also with you
no matter what path you choose.
Pathways, are just God's way of
preparing us for the highway
which leads to heaven.

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Visit the Elderly

How often in the busyness of our lives do we give place to the visiting of the elderly in our churches? Are they just in our passing thoughts and prayers? Do we see them at church and then forget about them altogether during the week? We must never forget the important place God has given the elderly in the church of Jesus Christ. The elderly are those who have stood strong in the battle for the truth God has given our churches. They are the saints through whom God has continued his covenant with his people in their generations. They are the ones who set examples for how to live godly lives to the following generations. They are fountains of knowledge and wisdom to us who are just starting to travel the life of a pilgrim and stranger here below, while their travels are soon coming to an end. Young people and fellow children of God, make time in your lives for these elderly saints who show forth to us the faithfulness of our Father in heaven.

God makes known to us in Psalm 92 that the elderly will still bring forth fruit in old age. Young people and fellow saints in the Church, when we do not visit the elderly, we leave them with the feeling that they are of no value to us anymore. By physical standards of health, they are weak and do not seem to have much more worth in this world. They have lost many of their physical abilities and talents, and often need help to go about day-to-day activities. Yet God has given them an honored position in the church. They are to teach the younger generation of the beauty of God's church (Zion), and how the God we serve is our God forever, and a guide to them and all of us as we approach death (Ps. 48:13–14).

The work of the elderly is not finished until they depart this life here below. They are examples to us of our heavenly Father's faithfulness. Go and visit an elderly person, and start asking questions about their history in our churches, and you will find a fount of information and a wealth of knowledge concerning the great work of God in preserving the church of Christ. Also, in trials you may face, go to them. They have gone through many of the troubles and trials of life that we now face. They will listen with a sympathetic ear and give you sound spiritual advice, much of which is based on the lessons God has taught them in their own pilgrimage here below.

Let us also remember God's Word to us in James 1:27, which teaches us, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Many of our elderly have lost their spouses and live alone. They are lonely, and have few possessions with them to keep them busy. Most of their friends have already departed from this life, and they know that for themselves as well, death is soon approaching. Our visits show them that we care about them and esteem them in the position God has given them. Our visits take their thoughts off their infirmities and uplift them.

Young people, in the busyness of your lives, make time for the elderly in the church. We often get so caught up in the cares of our own lives that we don't make time for others. Don't ever let yourself take an easy out and say, "But I am too busy." Instead of making those plans with your friends to go out to eat, make plans with your friends to visit an elderly saint and have supper with him or her. Get together in small groups to go and sing to the elderly. They love to hear the songs of Zion. Set up a casual game night with elderly saints. God will bless those who take time for the elderly. Often when one visits an elderly saint, he goes with the attitude that he is benefiting that saint, but when he leaves he sees how much the communion with that saint has been a blessing to him.

Mothers, in the busyness of your life with young ones, don't forget to set aside time to bring your children to visit the aged. The elderly love to see their children's children, who witness to them of God's faithfulness in continuing his covenant in the line in generations. Also, by taking your children to visit

them, you will instill in their hearts at a young age a great respect and love for the elderly of the church. Families, visit the elderly, and invite them over to your homes, so that they get to experience the communion of the saints in the sphere of family life.

In all your life here below, remember that we are pilgrims, and that the life we have been given is to be used to God's glory. We live life here below with a view to what awaits us in heaven. Who has more knowledge about what is truly important in life and death than those who are nearing the end of their pilgrimage? Go and visit the elderly, and they will speak of how quickly the years of their life have passed by, and how vain this life here below is. They will speak of the glory of heaven to which they look forward, where they will have perfect communion with God. Visit these dear elderly saints. Learn from them and treasure their advice, applying it to your life. Follow their godly examples and long for the day when we shall have perfect communion with them and with our heavenly Father.

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Christian Living — Dr. Julian Kennedy

The Race of Life

The first time we come across a word in Scripture is important and seminal. In this case it is in Psalm 19:5 where the sun coming up to move across the sky is likened to a bridegroom coming out of his changing room in anticipation of his imminent marriage and a runner who has trained and is joyfully ready and strong and glad to run his race (be it 100m or a marathon).

In Ecclesiastes 9:11 a spanner (wrench) is thrown in the works, as we read that the race "is not to the swift," but "time and chance happen to them all." The fastest runner may fall or get tripped just before the finishing line. He may get "spiked" or his shoe may come off.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24 Paul has his eyes on the race in the stadium and the fact there is only one winner. He exhorts us to be those who strive to win.

The writer to the Hebrews in chapter 12:1 exhorts us to lay aside excess baggage, which might be cumbersome clothes like the flowing robes of a man in a middle eastern costume, or baggage we are carrying, so that we can run. Have you ever seen a runner in a heavy coat carrying a briefcase? What he is referring to are weights or hindrances to our Christian lives, which may be inordinate relationships, inordinate worldly cares, wrong priorities, time-wasting, or besetting sins that slow us down and hinder us from running the race that is set for us individually and is lifelong, i.e., requires endurance. Why is the Christian life likened to a long distance race? Because unlike short distances, which are over in seconds or minutes, the temptation is to stop or give up. Running a long distance is a prolonged effort, and pain has to be endured for perhaps hours. What should encourage us? First, our election in Christ. Our forerunner, Jesus Christ, has already finished (Hebrews 6:20). Second, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses—the heroes of faith, a cheering crowd, who have finished their race (Hebrews 12:1). Finally, we have in us the guarantee we will finish—the Almighty Spirit of Christ (Ephesians 1:14). So let us lay aside every impediment and run!

Note that Jesus has finished his race, and Paul could say the same in 2 Timothy 4:7. We must finish; we cannot step off the track or stop and get a cab or buggy, and by God's grace we will. Those of us who jog or run will particularly appreciate these metaphorical allusions to running the race in the Bible. Running, and indeed any physical sporting endeavour requiring discipline has important lessons to carry over into the life of the Christian disciple! How's your training? See table below.

A comparison between running a race and the Christian race of life

	Running a race	The Christian Race of life
Recruitment	Decision to run	Effectual call
Rest	Rest/easy recovery days	Sabbaths
Training	Daily training alone and also periodically in a group	Daily devotion, Church attendance (praise and preaching), Bible studies
Trials	Inclement weather; injury; illness	Tribulation; battle versus world, sin and Satan; times of trial
Fuel	Good balanced diet	The Word
Clothing	The lightest possible/club or country colors	Righteousness of Christ
Coach	Club coach	Christ's Spirit/church office bearers
Objective	Race day, to win	Last day (of judgement)
Start	Gun fires	Conversion
Running	Correct pace; speed, plus or minus stamina	Dependence on God (prayer), Wisdom, Patience
Hindrances	A fall, obstacles, adverse incidents	Cast off every weight (hindrances/sin)
Finish	Crossing the line	Death
Fellow runners	Competitors	Brethren
Reward	Perishable wreath/medal	Imperishable wreath/crown, reassurance in heaven, Christ's "well done", crowns.

Dr. Kennedy is a member of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland.

Church News

Melinda Bleyenberg

BAPTISMS

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Psalm 51:7

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

Mason John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Patricia Lenting—Crete, IL
Lucas Joshua, son of Mr. & Mrs. Philip & Susan Hall—Balleymena, N Ireland
Josiah John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Michael & Jill Fennema—Edgerton, MN
Anabelle Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tyler & Marcie Kooienga—Faith, MI
William Richard, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron & Molly Cleveland—Hope, MI
Kaylie Ruth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Troy & Mandy VandenBosch - Lynden, WA
Ashlyn Nicole, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brian & Stacy Bruinsma—Peace, IL
Hunter James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joseph & Erika Dykshorn—Peace, IL
Jade Renae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tim & Sarah Dykstra—Providence, MI
Collin Dayne, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brian & Faith Brummel - Sioux Falls, SD
Vaughn Alan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Andon & Angie DeBoer—Sioux Falls, SD

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:

Rob Koll—Byron Center, MI
Brandon Meelker—Grandville, MI
Alaina Van Overloop—Grandville, MI
Renae Veldman—Grandville, MI
Brad Vogel—Hope, MI
Bill Reinholt—Kalamazoo, MI
Dan Ophoff—Southeast, MI

TULIP: U (Unconditional Election)

"Fancy Lures"

"Well, Evan, which ones do you want to buy?" Evan's father asked.

Evan had waited a long time for this day. Now he stood in front of a display of fishing lures with his father. Evan had saved up enough money for a new fishing pole and lure or two, and after they would make their purchases, they were going to drive to a small, little-known lake. But Evan could not decide.

"How do I know which lure will be best?" Evan asked. "Do fish like orange, or pink, or flashing silver? They all look like good fish food to me."

"Yes," Father said, "It's hard to tell. But the bigger the lure, the bigger the fish—sometimes."

Evan nodded. Finally he chose a large silver one with a red tail, and one that was bright orange. He was going for the big fish!

At the lake, cast after cast, Evan's lure came up empty. Three good-sized bass swam in the pail between himself and his father in their little row boat. Father had caught them all.

"Maybe you should try another lure," Father suggested. "You can use this one." He held out a small, yellow, wormy looking lure.

Evan's arm was getting tired. Neither of his lures had attracted any fish. "Okay. But first, just one more cast."

Splash went the silver lure. Evan reeled it in. There was a little extra tug. A fish?

No, it was a piece of seaweed. Evan took the lure off the line and began to attach the yellow worm.

"Evan, did you remember you have catechism class tomorrow?" his father asked.

Evan nodded as he scrunched his brow trying to tie on the smaller lure. "Yes, it's about election," he said.

"Election—the source of our salvation," Evan's father smiled, "and it's unconditional."

Evan peeked at his father while he made the final touches on the lure. His father loved that doctrine.

"So why did you choose to buy the orange and silver lures?" Father asked.

Evan shrugged. "I wanted to catch a big fish."

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

His father nodded. "Why did God decide to choose us?"

Evan thought a moment. It wasn't because we were better than anyone else. It wasn't because He saw into the future that we might do good things. We weren't like a big, fancy lure; we were only horrible sinners. It had nothing to do with us. "God just wanted to," Evan finally answered. He cast his line into the water.

"Yes," his father said. "God just wanted to. That doctrine gives all the glory to God."

Evan nodded and began to reel in his line. Suddenly he felt a tug—a big tug…

"This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause or condition on which it depended, but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc., therefore election is the fountain of every saving good…" (Canons I, Article 9).

Find all the words from Canons I, 9 (as quoted in the story) in the puzzle below. Two-letter words may have more than one possibility.

R	E	H	T	O	Q	G	N	I	V	A	S	M	E	N
F	V	F	A	I	T	H	N	E	E	S	E	R	O	F
D	E	P	M	K	D	O	O	G	E	W	H	I	C	H
O	R	R	T	H	I	S	B	N	H	L	D	Q	C	P
B	Y	E	A	T	S	V	I	E	T	H	E	H	N	E
E	T	R	C	C	P	L	B	H	D	L	P	O	E	R
D	I	E	A	F	O	U	N	T	A	I	N	L	S	O
I	L	Q	U	H	S	N	U	H	E	F	E	I	O	F
E	A	U	S	T	I	B	D	E	A	C	P	N	H	E
N	U	I	E	I	T	O	V	I	T	F	E	E	C	R
C	Q	S	W	A	I	G	T	I	T	A	D	S	F	E
E	A	I	A	F	O	H	O	R	E	I	Y	S	N	H
W	N	T	N	O	N	N	O	P	U	T	O	N	G	T
V	D	E	D	N	U	O	F	N	C	H	C	N	A	M

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

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2013 Young People's Convention

NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

Romans 1:16

August 12-16, 2013

Lake Williamson Christian Center
Carlinville, IL

Rev. Nathan Langerak: Not Ashamed of the Gospel
Rev. Cory Griess: Paul, a Servant of Jesus Christ
Rev. Jonathan Mahtani: Living Unashamed of the Gospel Today

Speeches

Please check out the updated convention website for more information!

Hosted by Crete PRC | www.prcconvention.com