Our Inheritance: Developed and Delighted In

Over the past few months we have examined our Reformed heritage. We have seen what it is. We have also seen ways it might get buried. Now we look at our calling in regard to this heritage: To develop in it, to thrive in it, to value it, and to delight in it.

Let’s take a look at why we must develop in the first place. God has given us a portion in his church. That portion is different for all of us. That portion might be just how we conduct our own lives. That might include being a student in high school and the demands that brings. Our portion might be in single life after high school and college. Our portion might be as fathers in the workplace or mothers in the home. That portion might include the responsibilities of being an elder or deacon or pastor in the church. In these things we have our portion, or eventually we will have our portion in them. No matter which portion we are dealt as Reformed believers, we are the future of the church. The older members of the congregations will pass to glory, having served faithfully in marriage, in single life, as elders or deacons. Who is going to take their place? Ours is the next generation. Will our generation be one “which knew not the Lord” (Judges 2:10)? Young people, we are the future elders and deacons and fathers and mothers of the church. I include myself because I am still young. And then when it comes
time for our earthly sojourn here to end, what will be said of our children? Not just our own children, but all the children in the next generation, for we as a church body have a responsibility for all the children of the church. Will those children know the Lord? We are the weak means that God is pleased to use to instill in them a godly fear. Consider how many times such passing down is spoken of in the opening verses of Psalm 78:

I will open my mouth in a parable...Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob...a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God...

The reason we stand today as Reformed believers is that we inherited this truth from the previous generation. This has been happening from the beginning. God has preserved his church from the beginning, even when for the most part his bride forsook him. He still preserved a faithful few to continue passing on knowledge of the truth. One of the beautiful characteristics of our Reformed heritage is that we can trace it back to the ministry of Christ. Look at it broadly. We are Reformed because the Reformed fathers realized that much of the church was going apostate. By the Spirit working in them, they took the church back to the tradition of the apostles, which they knew was true. They held to the truth that the apostles taught, which they learned from Christ.

Now it is our turn. We are called to develop in this truth now, so that when it comes time to pass it on to the next generation, we will be willing and able to accomplish this great task. There is even more urgency added to this when we realize that we may already be in a position to pass on the truth to the next generation. How many of you have little nieces and nephews that look up to you and try to imitate you? How many of you have younger siblings who do the same? Your younger siblings are not the next generation after you, but the same still applies. Some young couples reading this might have children of their own who look up to them. If we have not yet made it a priority in our lives to develop, the time is now.

The church is to be characterized by growth and development in knowledge. We cannot sit back and say, “I have the truth, so I can relax.” There are always new errors that threaten to creep in. To combat this we don’t create new doctrine, but we refine old truths that we hold so dearly, because most of the “new errors” are merely the same old errors in new clothing. In order to be able to do this, we must know what these truths are. They must not be merely a list of definitions that we memorize in Essentials catechism class, but we must see how these truths guide us day by day, how they shape our lives, how we grow within them.

Growth in doctrine often is not the direction many in the church world want to go. Doctrine is viewed as cold, dry, stale, unimportant, and uninteresting. Many even say that preaching doctrine is harmful for the church, and they devalue preaching in general by giving five minutes of fluff to tickle ears instead of strengthening and encouraging God’s people. How are the sheep in the church instructed and built up, but by the faithful preaching of the gospel? Men immersing themselves in a text for a week, and then by the Spirit working in them giving a faithful and true explanation of it. The Spirit uses this faithful preaching to enable faithful living from week to week.

As believers in Jesus Christ and the promise of salvation, and as representatives of the church of Christ, we are called to behave in an exemplary way. If you died tomorrow, what would be said of you? Would people uncomfortably give their condolences to your family, or would they have many good things to say about you? “That young man was faithful to his Lord,” or, “That young woman lived in modesty and purity.” Our lives are to be reflections of the glory of God that is in us. It must shine forth in such a way that those around us notice that we live in accordance with God’s law and with a hope of eternal life. Then they in turn will glorify not us, but the one who works in us day by day to make us shine forth as lights in a dark world.

This is a lot to live up to. How can we possibly live this way, weak as we are? The Spirit enables us and uses means to help us develop in the truth and delight in it. We already mentioned one of those means: the preaching from week to week. But what about in between Sundays? There are many things we can do. One of the most important things we can do is read—not just being in the word from day to day in our personal devotions, but reading good
Reformed literature. There is a lot of good stuff out there that we can read. You are reading Beacon Lights right now. That is good. What about our other church magazines? Remember also that there are decades of material available in the archives of these magazines and on our Protestant Reformed denominational website as well. But don’t stop there. The Protestant Reformed Churches do not stand as the lone defender of the Reformed truth. There are countless other good magazines and books available to Reformed believers, young or old.

Through all our development we learn to value our inheritance as something so precious that we would never give it up. Through our development in the truth we learn to delight in it as well. I doubt our parents looked at our Christian upbringing as a boring task that they felt they probably should do. No, they joyed in our coming to the knowledge of the truth and our expressions of truth faith. Our development in the truth is a part of their development as well. As they bring us up in truth and encourage us in our sanctified walk, they are developing in their walk of sanctification before God as well. They rejoice to see us walking in truth. Part of that excitement for the truth “rubs off” on us, and we in turn delight in the wondrous works of God as we develop in the truth he has preserved from the beginning. Develop in the truth and knowledge of God’s guidance with the words of Psalm 16:11 in mind. “Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

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Implications of Public Confession

IX

Our Bond with the Believers

“The bond of peace.”
Ephesians 4:3

The church has always demanded that certain stipulations be endorsed by those who make public confession of faith. She should still seriously make it a point that these stipulations be explained to those who ask for admittance to the holy supper.

Stipulations are promises. Promises are exchanged between those who ask for admittance and those who have previously been admitted to the holy supper. A covenant or a contract is mutually endorsed. It is always unethical to make a person promise a thing of whose implication he is unaware. The promise in question here establishes a bond between the church and her members in full. Obviously that bond may not be secretly or surreptitiously imposed upon a person. The church must present it for endorsement in clear and defined terms. The person endorsing it has a right to know what he is signing.

Public confession is and should remain the important matter. Yet these stipulations, this contractual relationship may not be ignored. It must be remembered that the affirmative answer given at the time of confession is the same as that which binds the confessor to these stipulations of the church. For that reason the catechetical instruction that antedates the public confession should elucidate all the implications of these stipulations. The church that does not do so fosters the lie within her own organization. By that omission she introduces something mechanical into holy relationships, and has herself to blame if the stipulations she insists upon are later ignored by those who unwittingly agreed to keep them.

In an attempt to absolve the church of responsibility in this matter it has frequently been said that those who make their confession are too young and too shortsighted to understand the nature of these stipulations. That excuse is unsound. Your making confession signifies that you have the right to be given a voice in the matters of church life. By
making your confession you become a consciously independent, contributing member of your church. Because of that you deserve to know what the nature of the bond is that binds you to the church whose full commission you are about to share.

You should not speak of a confirmation of new members, for there is not such confirmation and there are no new members. When you reach your majority in political life, you are given a voice in political affairs. That is a new experience for you, but you are not for that reason spoken of as a new citizen. Similarly confession does not make you a new member of the church. It grants you a voice in her affairs. Your baptism took place many years before your confession, and you know that your baptism was administered to you on the assumption that you were a member of Christ. On that occasion your parents acknowledged that “although our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea, to condemnation itself; yet, that they are sanctified in Christ and therefore as members of his church ought to be baptized.”

Your parents had you baptized in the specific church they thought to be the best and purest revelation of the body of the Lord. By baptizing you, that church incorporated you into herself as a member. Hence, you have belonged to that church since the moment of your baptism. At that time you were accepted into communion with her as an immature member.

Your daily experience presents many illustrations of your pre-confession relationship to your church. A bird, destined to display gorgeously colored feathers on its wings, has only down to exhibit when it bursts from its shell. The beautiful wings are not attached later as separate or independent parts of the body. Nothing new is added. The gorgeous feathers were present in the bird at its birth. They had not grown out at first. So it is among plants, among animals, and among men in natural life. And so it is with the body of the church: there is latent in it that which emerges in full bloom at the time of confession.

A baptized child then is a member of the church—latent, undeveloped, immature, it is true—but a member. He remains undeveloped until he makes his public confession. Then he is no longer a minor. Then he attains his majority. Henceforth he acts by personal initiative. He departs from parental guardianship and expresses himself as desiring to become a contributing member of the church. It is at this time that he consciously and responsibly assumes the privileges and obligations of the bond that unites him with the church and with her other members.

In thinking about that unifying bond, you must distinguish between what the holy apostle called the “unity of the Spirit” and what he designated as “the bond of peace,” for these are not identical.

The unity of the Spirit represents something beyond human power to touch or affect, namely, the working of the one Holy Spirit in the several members of the one body. If the Holy Spirit does not work within those members, they do not belong to the body, even though they may have been inveighed into the external, ecclesiastical organization. The holy apostle tells us that there is one body and one spirit. The Triune God created and formed that body, and God the Holy Spirit dwells and works in it. The Holy Spirit causes that body to be alive and living.

If the Holy Spirit does not work in you, you are not a member of the body, for no one can say he is Jesus the Lord’s except by the Holy Spirit. But let us suppose that by God’s incomprehensible mercies the Spirit of the Lord does dwell in you, that he entered you, whether as a child or as a man, and that he regenerates you. If that is so, then from the very nature of the situation there is a unity not of the spirits but of the Spirit between you and all the other members of the body of Christ. That does not mean that you agree with them always and in all things, but that the same Spirit is in you and in them.

Now it can be true that you and they share the presence of the same Spirit, and that you and they nevertheless frequently disagree about things. Although this is possible, it may not be so. Hence a “bond of peace” should be laid between you and them as the fruit of the unity of the Spirit.

This bond of peace serves as the basis on which the aforementioned stipulations rest. It is a common, reciprocal unity exercised in a communion of saints and in establishing upon earth a peace like unto a heavenly peace. The fact that there is the unity of the Spirit in all does not mean that it has developed in all or that it has fully developed in any. If that were true, he who had received the Spirit would suddenly and immediately be emancipated from the influences of sin, and would similarly be emancipated also from any traces of spiritual blindness. A church composed of such members would not need the bond of peace. Earth would be heaven then, and all things would be perfect.
However, that is not the situation. When God the Lord permits the Holy Spirit to enter a person, that Spirit works very gradually, and his influence is not perfected until after the person’s death. Upon earth therefore, obstacles, hindrances, and retarding influences remain. These proceed from Satan and the world, from our own flesh and from our own sin. Consequently we are often spiritually shortsighted. Much evil intervenes to threaten a disturbance of the peace between us and our fellow believers. Because of that, we, the several members of one body, would fall apart as do the staves of a barrel, if it were not for some unifying bond. That bond is the external church, and the bond of peace is a consciously built covenant of unity you must help to establish.

You see therefore that by your public confession you are most certainly assuming the obligations of a covenant relationship within a specific church. The church in which you desire to be active took you into her care at the time of your baptism. Now she is willing to admit you to the holy supper, to let you take your place at the Lord’s table with the other members, provided that you are willing to confess that their confession is yours. She cannot be satisfied by your assuring her that God gave you the Holy Spirit. There is much blindness in you still, in spite of that. It is a blindness that could lead you to ill conduct and to heresy. In order to offset the possibility of your igniting the church community with these destructive fires of ill conduct or heresy, she demands that you must confess what she confesses.

That is the first of the stipulations you must be willing to endorse; it is the first promise you must make. But you must also make a second promise, and this second promise more specifically pertains to the bond of peace. You have received the Holy Spirit. You can therefore say that you belong to Christ the Lord, and you make that your public confession. But many kinds of sin and evil can still be trying to come to expression in you. These can manifest themselves in the form of envy or of bitterness toward your fellow believers, and that is a condition that may not obtain among brothers and sisters of one church. Again, this sin and this evil can come to expression in the form of disgraceful conduct, of disreputable, overt actions such as would bring shame and reproach upon the church. Naturally the church may have no patience with any of these manifestations. Hence the bond of peace is necessary. You must promise by covenant to regard the other members of your church as your brothers and sisters, and must promise to help them as such, irrespective of whether they are rich or poor, amiable or not amiable. And you must also promise to submit to church discipline willingly in the event that you should ever break that covenant of unity.

That is the way in which this bond, this covenant, is made. It is a covenant that brings you no earthly profits and that secures for you no sensual pleasures. It is a bond of peace that demands that we serve the Lord our God together, that we walk together, and that we bear each other’s burdens, for we are fellow pilgrims to a better fatherland.

Some time ago in Schuyler’s column the subject of the patriarchy movement arose. In reaction to this, some disagreement was expressed by a reader of Beacon Lights, Brenda Hoekstra. While controversy is not the strong suit of the magazine, her argumentation was cogent and persuasive, so I printed her article.

In an e-mail to me, she was not shy about advising me that Beacon Lights should resurrect from the dim and distant past a rubric called Truth vs. Error. Far be it from me ever to throw gas on a fire, but in this case I made an exception. I decided to match her forthrightness with a bit of my own. So I challenged her to put her money where her pen is and write this column. After some consideration, she agreed to do this. Beacon Lights therefore welcomes her as a regular writer. Plans call for her to write for this rubric every other month. In this issue she takes up the historical background of the patriarchy concept, and she plans to write further on this subject.

Brenda is a mother in Israel who is well qualified to address the young people of the church. Young people, please read and take to heart what she has to say. It matters.
Doug Phillips, Doug Wilson, R. C. Sproul Jr., Steven Wilkins, Bill Gothard, the late Rousas Rushdooney, and others are involved with the promotion of the ideal of Christian patriarchy. They did not dream patriarchy up by themselves. To understand their Christian patriarchy we need to look at patriarchy as the world defines it because these men have combined a worldly, cultural patriarchal lifestyle with their interpretations of the Bible. The church, especially in old Europe, has struggled with this before, and it remains in the Roman Catholic Church. The various women’s liberation movements, especially in the 1960s and 70s, were a direct reaction to America’s cultural patriarchy. Psychiatrists and psychologists today understand how the patriarchy of our culture has harmed many women and children emotionally and physically. Patriarchy teaches that there is an order of superiority among humans that includes gender and race. Aristotle is the first known philosopher to formulate and promote this idea. Aristotle lived about 384 years before Christ and was taught by Plato; Plato was taught by Socrates. Aristotle had his own university and personally tutored Alexander the Great. His ideas fell away around AD600 and were revived again around AD1100.

These ancient philosophers studied things without God in their minds. If they were religious, they worshipped the Greek gods of mythology. Their understanding of life and the universe was based on their own study of things around them. Plato was strictly a philosopher, but Aristotle philosophized and also studied animals and dissected many. Plato believed that men and women had the same nature (essence) and were equal in everything except physical strength. Aristotle believed that there was a hierarchy of order among living things and that Greek men had a superior nature over everything. For him, the order of things went from superior, which was defined as those who ruled, to inferior, which was defined as those who were ruled over. He based this idea first on his study of the animal and marine world. In the political and social relationships of his day he saw a similar hierarchical order in which aristocratic men ruled over everything. He assumed there must be a biological reason for this order. Assuming that this order of rule was a principle of nature, he used deductive reasoning to explain those principles. He is credited with inventing this type of logic, which is still widely used as a way to prove things. You would recognize it as the kind of logic that the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes used. Aristotle wrote many books and tracts that still exist today. His biological findings influenced Galen, who was the forerunner of medicine. Aristotle’s impact on today’s thinking is considered to be unparalleled with the exception of the influence of Plato and Socrates. His work, ideas and attitudes were embraced for about half of the Medieval Period (AD476–AD1500) and all through the Renaissance (AD1300–AD1650). Many of his biological assertions have only recently been corrected by modern science and modern medicine. Aristotle was the originator of democracy, which is partly why he is esteemed in countries with this type of politics. His ideal social order known nowadays as patriarchy is still prominent in America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, but not so much in Russia, where Plato’s thinking was followed. Nationalities that are strongly Roman Catholic also embrace patriarchy, but not so much in the Eastern Orthodox religion, since it is primarily in Russia.

During this era before Christ, it was understood that the fundamental powers of everything were based on four elements. These elements were earth, water, air, and fire. These elements were diagrammed with four circles. These circles were inside each other. Earth was the circle in the center, water was around earth, air was around water, and fire was the outermost circle. The gods existed just beyond the outer circle of fire. Also at this time, it was believed that maleness was the norm and femaleness was the departure from normal. Men were considered to be the perfected form of humans and possessed all good and lacked nothing. Women, being the imperfect form, always lacked a characteristic or
ability. For Plato, women lacked only strength. For Aristotle, women lacked heat. He also believed that women were either incomplete men or a man that was deformed before birth. For Aristotle this was the biological explanation of the order of rule that he saw around him.

Aristotle claimed to leave all deity out of his studies because he (and many at that time) believed the deities were impersonal, distant, and unconcerned with humanity since they were too busy being gods. Even though he thought he was not influenced by religion, most of his deductions actually arise from what Greek mythology taught about the origins of humans. Mythology holds that the first generations of humans were male. Mythology also teaches that when Prometheus deceived Zeus by stealing fire and giving it to men, the gods created the first woman out of the earth as punishment. Her name was Pandora. On these ideas Aristotle believed and taught that women were made from the earth. He taught that this made them cold in their essence because earth is naturally cold. This cold essence meant they were naturally and biologically a lower form of life. Men were a higher form of life because they had acquired fire from Prometheus and were therefore perfected because their essence now had heat. To Aristotle, this fire and its subsequent heat made men superior. In his observations he noted that men were “larger, stronger, more rational, not so controlled by their passions, more given to reservation and a more thoughtful approach to life.” He associated these qualities with the higher life form that he believed men were. Being a higher form of life made men naturally superior, but this applied to Greek men who were civilized and educated and not to barbarians, slaves, or other non-Greek men. I did not find any reference to Aristotle’s testing his theory by educating some male slaves or barbarians to see if their nature could be improved.

Prevailing also at this time was a generally held idea that feelings, the mind, and the essences were literally connected to certain physical internal organs. To Aristotle, these organs are different in structure in men, women, and barbarians. Aristotle taught that because females were cold, they had smaller bodies and smaller organs, including brains. This meant they were less developed mentally, emotionally, and in their character. He taught that this limited the woman’s ability to reason and this contributed to their inability to control their desires or choose right over wrong actions. He taught that women had little reason in their minds, slaves had less, and animals had none. Children had immature reasoning ability. He finds further “proof” that women were a lower life form in his observations: “they were given to be more passionate, more opinionated, as well as more apt to scold and to strike.” He stated in his History of Animals book 9, that “women are more prone to despondency, more void of shame or self-respect, more false of speech, more deceptive, and of having a better memory.” A better memory would seem to be a compliment, but Aristotle taught that this was because the fluids in women were underdeveloped and sluggish so they did not “rinse” off the thoughts implanted upon the brain quickly enough. When Aristotle claimed that women were more passionate and emotional, it was not because they had more emotion in his opinion, but that they had a lack of something, in this case, an inner control over their emotions. Their smallness as well as the natural cold within them prevented them from ever having or developing that control. He believed that since women were incapable of having this control, they were also incapable of living out of a principle even if they knew and understood the principle. This is why he taught that the husband should rule the wife. Aristotle did argue that marriage was meant to provide mutual help and comfort, but that this help was just a happy accident and not what we understand as God’s design for mutual sanctification and spiritual growth.

Since women had a moral constitution that was weak and inferior, they needed men to direct them like a tame animal needs people to keep it alive, direct it, and give it purpose. To Aristotle, there was very little difference between women, slaves, and tame animals. These were all naturally weak and they were destined by nature to serve the superior Greek man. It is also because of the woman’s inability to control her deliberative powers (her learning and reasoning) and physical inability to acquire practical wisdom (because her brain was small and underdeveloped) that she should not be educated in anything other than what was needed to run a home. An education such as the men received was considered a waste.

Aristotle does claim that rule should not be tyrannical and it should benefit those that one rules over. But let’s not confuse this with biblical servant leadership or its benefits. Aristotle’s benefit for the
It is June 21, 2008, and I am at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Bruinsma in South Holland, Illinois.

Mark H. Hoeksema: Mr. Bruinsma, where and when were you born?
Raymond Bruinsma: I was born in Highland, Indiana, October 10, 1924.

MHH: And who were your parents?
RB: My parents were Louis and Anna Bruinsma.

MHH: Were they born in this country?
RB: My father was born in this country and my mother was born in the Netherlands and came over here at the age of eight years old. My father’s parents were born in this country.

MHH: What can you tell me about your childhood and your youth? Where did you live, what was your church affiliation?
RB: I was born in Highland, Indiana, and grew up there as a young child. We didn’t live too many years in Highland before we moved to Lansing [Illinois]. In the early part of the ’30s my parents were members of First Christian Reformed Church of Highland, Indiana. My father was contacted by my uncle who was already a member of the Protestant Reformed [PR] Churches, and he got my parents interested in the PR Churches.

In the early ’30s we lived in Lansing a few years. I remember my catechetical instruction began when Rev. Peter DeBoer was our pastor. We grew up on the farm in Glenwood, and we were commuting to the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church.

It was kind of difficult for my mother to leave the Christian Reformed Church [CRC] because she had family there: her parents and some of her relatives. And she had friends in the church. My father was a member of the American Legion, and he was in the drum and bugle corps. My mother was kind of disturbed about that because he had to take care of the cloak room at the American Legion. She knew that there were things going on in the American Legion that did not harmonize with a good Christian life. So she said to my father, “If you terminate your membership in the American Legion, I will go with you to the PR Church.” Which my father did.

Being members of the Protestant Reformed Church was a real joy to us. We had difficulty at

lower class of people meant that they were allowed to eat, survive, and make themselves useful by serving the higher class. There was no such thing as a middle class of people in Athens. He taught that it was nature’s design that the least should obediently serve the greater and that for a society to be happy, it should not go against nature. He did teach that women had a certain level of authority in the functions that involved their portion of the running of the home. Aristotle believed and taught that women should not leave the women’s quarters of the house and should be allowed to eat only half of what the men ate, since they were smaller and their inferior natures needed less. I personally think that hunger would have explained part of what Aristotle saw in the nature and demeanor of women. It is reckoned that by the time of Aristotle’s death, the health of women in Athens had greatly deteriorated, and they were living an average of ten years less than men with elevated rates of death through childbirth. Even though Aristotle had a negative view of women, he did treat individual women with kindness. Aristotle did promote faithfulness to a good wife and taught that it was the husband’s responsibility to secure the agreement, loyalty, and devotion of his wife by providing for her.

Brenda is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.
first—the ministers were always preaching in Dutch. Finally the church decided to go to one English service. I don't remember the year, but that was in the ’30s.

The time came that I grew up to be a young person of 18 years old, and in 1942 I had to register for the Army.

I registered in October, and I was inducted on April 14 of 1943. That’s when I really realized what it meant to have a good foundation upon which to build. The catechetical instruction I received equipped me with knowledge as a young person to be very serious-minded in entering into the service, because you enter into the cesspool of corruption. If it wasn’t for the grace of God, one soon would be swept along with the debauchery going on in the US Army. But it just brought it home to me how important your church family was to you, and I just missed that so much. It was only by God’s grace that I returned too because I was on the battlefield. My occupation in the Army was to be a medical technician, and my duty was to dress the wounded soldiers’ wounds and to carry them back to the aid station. In the meantime I had all kinds of bullets and shrapnel and artillery pieces coming in on me.

But it was such a great joy to me to have that knowledge that whether in life or in death, I was not my own, but belonged to my faithful Savior, for from day to day on the battlefield, you don’t know whether your life is going to be spared or not.

MHH: Where did you serve?
RB: I served in the Pacific—Japanese theater of war. In New Guinea I saw my first combat. That was quite an experience, because we were trying to take a rocky point. There was an amphibious alligator that was going around to get the location of an artillery piece. He finally spotted the artillery piece, but it was too late because they zeroed in on this amphibious alligator and blew it right out of the water. Three days later the bodies of the two men who were in there washed ashore. So they came to us medics and said, “Can we have a volunteer to take these bodies to the cemetery?” I volunteered for it, but it wasn’t a very pleasant job. In the meantime, the Japanese zeroed in on our position. I was back with the quarter-masters taking these bodies back to the cemetery, and I was allowed to stay in my camp that night when I got back from the quarter-masters. When I came there, there was just absolutely line upon line of wounded soldiers that were coming back from the front line. I could see how God, in his providential care over me, led me to volunteer for a nasty job, but that the Lord used it to spare my life.

Then we were alerted to go to the Philippines on January 6, 1945. I was in combat, and this is when I was wounded. I was picking a wounded soldier out of a foxhole. Just as we were coming up with him, I was struck with something in my right shoulder. It was a piece of shrapnel that came right past my head, right into my shoulder and come out the top. I was evacuated back to the station hospital and then to the division headquarters to another hospital. And my buddy was there. He came and I said to him, “George, would you get me my Bible and billfold?” And he said my belongings would be under my bunk. I had gone in surgery and I came out and they told me that that’s where I would find my belongings—my billfold, my driver’s license, my songs (Psalter numbers). He went under my bunk and said, “Ray, did you know this? Look here. There’s a bullet hole through the Bible.” And there was a little Dutch coin in my coin purse. The bullet had gone through that. It didn’t as much as touch me because of my thick clothes, and it went in on a slant. So it missed me. But there again, the Japanese were very good sharpshooters. Many of the dead men that we carried off the field had a bullet hole right square center in the forehead—right between the eyes.

So those were the experiences I had as a young man, how that God by his grace and Spirit strengthened my faith in and through all of that, and how I experienced that God guided and directed every one of those pieces of shrapnel, the bullets. Because this bullet was intended for this [points to his forehead]. But I apparently moved at the right time. It didn’t hit me right between the eyes—all by God’s providence. He has our life completely in his hands. We experienced that as we got older too. All the trials that the Lord has sent upon our pathway turned out to be blessings.

Our whole life is wrapped up in the church and the church family. What a blessing it is to have a church family, because you experience that they are there to help you when you’re in need. I hope I haven’t gone off on a tangent because that’s probably not what you’re looking for.

MHH: No, you go off on any tangent you want to.
RB: But, anyway, now let’s get back to my experience in the church.

When we joined the Protestant Reformed Church,
we’d been catechized with Rev. DeBoer. At that time we were attending the Munster Christian Reformed School. I was in the second grade.

Rev. DeBoer would come there on Saturday and teach catechism for us, until we started meeting at the church. But that was such a joy too, because even as a young child, you never really got that instruction in the CRC that you did in the PR churches because we’ve always been faithful in the covenant instruction and the covenant seed of the church.

And it pays dividends because it gives you the foundation upon which to build.

MHH: And you think that was true way back in those days?

RB: It never came as clearly to my consciousness as when I got into my teenage years. Then I really began to realize how important that catechetical instruction was. When I entered the service, I was convinced that it was only that instruction that the Lord used to equip me to be a faithful servant of his in those treacherous times of the war, when it would be so easy to take an eighteen-year-old young man and (because this is exactly what they did) say, “Hey, come on. Go with us to town. Have a good time.” Well, that going to town was drinking and women. And I said, “No. I have all I desire. I have my Bible here, I have my letters to write to my loved ones, I have my church periodicals. That’s where I find my joy.” That isn’t because of me; that’s because of the work of Christ’s Spirit within my heart. That I experienced, and I was so thankful for the foundation which I had to build on.

So that education had continued with Rev. Vermeer. I think it was in ’38 that Rev. DeBoer accepted another call and then Rev. Vermeer came. We continued our catechetical instruction with him. I can remember that sad history when we ran into problems with Rev. Vermeer.

MHH: I’d like you to talk about that.

RB: My father was in the consistory as a deacon at that time. But there was so much turmoil. The elders had gone in the other direction than my father. He spoke up and later on he was ticked on his fingers by the Classis, because he didn’t have the right, being a deacon. But he felt, because of the fact of the desertion of the elders at that time, that he had to speak something.

He was actually siding with Rev. Vermeer. Rev. Vermeer was a likable person. I can remember that as a child. But he appeared to have a problem with his own personal life, and there were those who had knowledge of this. That’s when the trouble all began with Rev. Vermeer. And it all went to Classis.

MHH: What were the issues?

RB: The issue was tipping the bottle too much. Tena’s [Ray’s wife] father brought her to catechism one night, and as he was sitting there waiting for Tena he saw Rev. Vermeer come out of the church building, and he was tipping the bottle. I heard this too. Nevertheless, he was upheld, and he continued to be our pastor.

That’s why many of our members left at that time. Some of them have come back, but sad to say, they lost some of their families, because they never came back with them. This is the thing that always bothered some of these members, because they realized their obligation as a parent. You set the precedent for your children and your children go wrong, it falls within your responsibility because you have misled them by leaving the church.

Nevertheless, those are all sins God will forgive us when we repent of them. There were those who finally came back to the church. One of them made this remark: “I don’t know why it took me so long.” But he couldn’t get over that self-pride and humble himself to the point where he would have returned sooner. This was all in connection with that Rev. Vermeer problem, and they were on the side that was trying to get him to repent of his sins. Apparently he had a way of covering it up because he was upheld by the Classis, if my memory is correct. I remember my father pacing the floor at home after these meetings. He just couldn’t go to sleep.

So after that, we got Rev. Schipper. I loved that man. He was a good preacher.

Tena Bruinsma: He married us.

RB: And that’s when we got away from the Dutch service. We were still holding one Dutch service when Rev. Vermeer was there. But then we got Rev. Schipper. He said he knew his Dutch, but after he preached a couple of sermons, the elders said, “Nah. Listen, we’re going to have to go to English services,” because he didn’t know his Dutch well enough to preach a good sermon. So that’s when we got the English-speaking preacher, and from then on we had English.

We had good years with Rev. Schipper. We got that whole business [with Vermeer] calmed down.
MHH: Because those people had left?
RB: Those people had left. And they didn’t come back then yet.
MHH: I heard it said that they were probably right in their contentions but they lacked objective proof. Is that a fair statement?
RB: That’s a fair statement. If they would only have handled it differently, they probably would have been successful in proving what they were trying to say.
MHH: But you were saying that during the tenure of Rev. Schipper that things smoothed out.
RB: Yes, right. I don’t remember any big issues where we had to have it settled by the Classis.

After Rev. Schipper, Homer C. Hoeksema came to us in 1955, and he stayed until 1959. He was there right at the time we were having those difficulties with 1953—the controversy our churches were going through with this conditional theology of those men that had traipsed out to the old country and tried to sell our churches down the stream by saying that was no problem, and these emigrants could easily become members of the PR Churches with no problem at all. That was not an issue. Well, it turned out to be quite a big issue because we don’t believe in the conditional theology as far as the covenant is concerned.

And that is so beautiful too. How our churches have developed that concept of the covenant! We can rejoice in that fact, because how would any believing child of God in his own strength in any way try to make something that he could do in order to attain unto salvation? That is an impossibility—if it isn’t a gift of God. For God is so plain in his word. “For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourself; it is a gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship in Christ Jesus.” That’s how those good works flow forth from the child of God.

These are all things that caused a lot of difficulties in our churches. It was a big mistake in our churches, I think, at the time that Schilder came to this country. I know that your grandfather thought a lot of Schilder. But we opened our pulpits to that man, and I think that was a big mistake as far as our churches were concerned. We should never have done that, because that gave him a little stronghold. Those men that left us thought, “Oh, boy, we got something to really build on now.” Schilder didn’t believe in the same covenant that we did. No way. We’re all human and we’re subject to making human errors. But I think that was a detriment to our churches.

In our churches even today we still have the truth of the word of God preached to us faithfully from Sabbath to Sabbath. I have no doubt about that. Our ministers are well endowed by the Spirit of Christ to bring to us the word, and we hear Christ speaking to us in and through the preached word.

But I fear that our younger generation is losing that antithetical walk that we are to walk—a straight line. ‘Cause, you know, it’s kinda been a bother to me. As I was a child growing up, we were told we may not attend movies. We had to stay away from the carnivals. Today you’ll see an announcement in the bulletin that young people are going to go to Great America for the day. Or they may be going to go out to the Sox game or the Cubs’ game. [If you oppose putting this in the bulletin] people say, “Oh, you’re too old-fashioned.” I like baseball, but I watch it on TV. I don’t think that we should be leading our young people in that direction because they are the future church. If they’re not able to distinguish now between what they may do and not do, what’s going to happen when they become leaders in the church? They’re going to run into a difficulty that they aren’t going to see the evils of the world. You know as well as I do the world is pressing so in upon us from every side. Let us beware of it, because we can easily be turned away. The world is powerful, and the devil is going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

I think he’s working overtime in our churches. From time to time, difficulties that arise in the church—I understand that the last Synod had quite an agenda that they had to cope with because of this here business of home-schooling. I fear for those things. If we’re going to allow our people to home-school their children, we’re going to lose our schools. I know from Scripture that it’s the parents’ duty to train their children in the fear of the Lord. That’s our calling. No doubt about it. But the fact of the matter is, when you have a school of your own, that doesn’t mean that the parents no longer teach their children in the fear of the Lord. They surely do. In fact, your schools are not going to be any better than what our homes are. If our children aren’t getting it in the home, they surely aren’t going to get it in the school.

If we live in the consciousness that we are so

Continued on page 19.
He Has Dealt Bountifully With Me
Read Psalm 13
You’ve likely heard the saying “Prayer changes things.” Some who use that slogan conceive of God as a genie and prayer as the rubbing of a magical lamp. Psalm 13 is a prayer of David, and it’s a prayer that does change things: it changes David.

The trials that David faces are great, and they are ongoing. He wonders if God will forget him forever, and he notes the sorrow that he bears each day. Even though David feels deserted, he knows that he is not alone, for he still turns to God in his trouble. He pleads with God to look upon him, to hear him, and to defeat his enemies. David closes his prayer confident that he will continue to experience the blessings of salvation in the future, and as he looks at the past he exclaims, “I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me!”

Through prayer the Holy Spirit takes the heart of the downcast believer and instills it once more with faith. When we draw near to our Father in prayer, we leave his presence changed.

Sing or pray Psalter #22.

The Fool
Read Psalm 14
I have read or heard read the Bible nearly every day of my life, yet I am amazed how little I know the word of God. Today I realized that Psalm 14 and Psalm 53 are nearly identical. Perhaps I learned that once before. If so, I had forgotten. Such instances remind me of the importance of regular Bible study!

How would you define a fool? In our day, the word “fool” refers to someone who has done something imprudent. The Bible doesn’t use the word fool in that way. Rather, scripture refers to those who lack faith as fools. Foolishness is “not the absence of intellectual capability but the presence of moral perversity” (Alistair Begg). Consequently there are very intelligent, well-educated men and women who are foolish in the eyes of God.

Wisdom is the opposite of foolishness. One who is wise understands God’s word and properly applies it to life. Has God instilled the beginning of wisdom in your heart? Don’t be lifted up in pride over those who are foolish! God has chosen the weak things of the world so that no flesh should glory in his presence.

Sing or pray Psalter #23.

The God Whom the Fool Denies
Read Romans 1:18–32
“Elohim” is the Hebrew name that is translated “God” in the first verses of Psalms 14 and 53. One of the Bible storybooks that I’ve read with my children translates the name “Elohim” as “Strong Creator.” In Doctrine According to Godliness, Rev. Ron Hanko notes that the name “God” teaches us “that there is none like him nor any besides him, and that he alone is worthy of worship, praise, and obedience.” Elohim is the God who framed the worlds by his word and Spirit (Heb. 11:3). He is the God upon whom all men are dependent for their life, breath, and being (Acts 17:28). That God is not only creator and sustainer: he is also judge, the one to whom all are morally accountable (Acts 17:31).

The first verses of Psalms 14 and 53 declare, “The fool hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” It’s true that fools may acknowledge a god or gods. But they deny the Creator, on whom they are dependent and to whom they are morally accountable. They deny him because they love sin and do not want to be reproved for their evil deeds.

Sing or pray Psalter #146.

Speak the Truth in Your Heart
Read Psalm 15
Psalm 15 describes the man who follows “peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). One of the characteristics of such a man is that he speaks the truth in his heart.

Some time ago our Ladies’ Bible discussion group tackled the topic of lying. Our pastor pointed out that at the root of every sin is pride. That pride comes to expression in the form of lies that we speak in our heart. Those lies begin with Satan’s lie: “I will be like the Most High” (Is. 14:14). That is the lie with which he tempted Adam and Eve: “Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). It is the lie that the Israelites believed when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). It is the lie that we believe every time we sin, for at the root of every sin is the belief that we have the right to determine for ourselves what we may or may not do, what is good and what is evil.

As long as we excuse the lies that we speak in our heart, we cannot abide in God’s presence.

Sing or pray Psalter #24.

Liar, Liar
Read 1 John 1
What are some of the lies that we speak in our hearts when we sin?

When we dishonor those who are in authority over us—government officials, officebearers in the church, parents, teachers, or husbands—we believe this lie: They don’t deserve my respect. After all, I could fill their
position more ably than they do. We deny that he who resists the powers that be resists the ordinance of God (Rom. 13:2).

When we steal—possessions from our neighbor, time from our employer, wages from our employees—we believe this lie: Those possessions, time, and wages are rightfully mine! I have more need of this thing or that money than they do! We deny that we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ and answer for everything that we have done (2 Cor. 5:10).

When we deceive ourselves with the lie that we have no sin, we make God, in whom there is no darkness at all, a liar. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Sing or pray Psalter #25.

More Lies We Believe
Read 1 John 2
When you or I gossip or slander, we deny the truth that the tongue is a little flame that is capable of igniting a great fire (James 3:2–13). We deny that we will give account for every idle word that we have spoken (Matt. 12:36). We believe this lie: I know God. I can dwell in his presence even though I backbite or do evil to my neighbor.

When we covet another’s house, another’s spouse, another’s looks, or another’s life, we believe this lie: As long as I’m not doing anything outward, it’s not sin. I can’t be condemned for my thoughts. We deny that though men look on the outward appearance, the Lord looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

Do you desire to dwell in God’s presence? Do you love the truth, and desire to speak truth in your heart? Then do not despair. The word of God will strengthen you to confess in word and deed that Jesus is the Christ. Your sins are forgiven for his name’s sake.

Sing or pray Psalter #26.

Do Good to God’s Saints
Read Psalm 16
One of the glorious truths that scripture teaches us about God is that he is self-sufficient. Nothing that we are or do adds anything to God’s glory, goodness, or love. He is those things perfectly within his triune being. Even “the salvation of the whole church adds nothing to his glory, but is only a revelation of the glory he already has in himself. He is the source, the means, and the end of all things” (Doctrine According to Godliness). David fully recognized this reality. “Thou art my Lord,” he exclaims in Psalm 16. “My goodness extendeth not to thee.”

How does David respond to that knowledge? He resolves to do good to God’s people. He determines to show his love for God by seeking the fellowship and welfare of his fellow saints.

David calls his brothers and sisters in Christ the “excellent of his creation.” Is that the way you view God’s people across the globe? Is that how you view your fellow church members? If so, is your love evidenced by the loving deeds on their behalf?

Sing or pray Psalter #27.

Comfort Them Which Are in Trouble
Read 2 Corinthians 1:1–11
Sometimes the Lord instructs us with negative examples. An elderly couple lives across the street from us. She has heart disease. He is deaf, has emphysema, and suffers the side effects of several strokes. But worst of all, our neighbors have no faith and no church family to care for them as they face the trials of old age. They have no fellow saints who pray for them or bring them food for their stomachs and their souls. They face a mountain of medical bills, but they have no compassionate deacons who would assist them financially. They shudder at the thought of death, yet reject the truths of the gospel. We assist them as best we can, all the while praying for the welfare of their souls.

Sing or pray Psalter #259.

Love the Least
Read Matt. 25:31–36
Take a moment to think about the members of the church to which you belong. Think about those to whom you gravitate every Sunday after the worship service. Remember those who are sick. Consider the families with many children, and those who haven’t been given children. Think about those who are singled, widowed, or divorced. Consider those who are wealthy, and those who have less. Take note of those who are easy for you to like and the ones whose personalities get on your nerves. Remember the popular and the misfits.

The congregation to which you belong is a small manifestation of the glorious body of Christ as it exists throughout time and over the face of the earth. Christ loves the members of your congregation, from the greatest to the least. You are called to show your love for him in your conduct toward and care for your fellow saints, including those whom you are prone to dislike, ignore, or slander. After all, you love Jesus Christ only as much as the ones you love the least.

Sing or pray Psalter #369.

Thou Wilt Show Me the Path of Life
Read Psalm 16
Young people, I’ve written the next few meditations specifically with you in mind. What are your plans after high school? When I was your age, that was the question I dreaded most. I remember wondering, How do I know God’s will for me? College? If so, what college, and what major? Marriage? If so, to whom? Work? Where?

I once read a quotation of young Jim Elliot, who had determined that he was called to be a missionary. How did he know that this was “ Ned’s will for him”? “No visions,” he wrote, “No voices, but the counsel of a heart which desires God.”

How are you to determine God’s will for you? God’s Spirit speaks to you through his word. When you utilize “the spectacles of scripture,” he will speak to you through occurrences in your life, all of which come to pass as a result of his will. He speaks in your heart and conscience, and, yes, he even speaks through the audible voices of your pastor, parents, and teachers, who preach his word to you or offer godly counsel.
Dear young person, set the Lord always before you in prayer and in the study of scripture. He will show you the path of life. Sing or pray Psalter #322.

March 18

He Will Direct Your Paths
Read Proverbs 3: 1–8
Our Father promises that he will direct our paths, and he is always faithful to keep his promises. You and I can be as sure of his direction as we are of his salvation! True, he leads us only step by step. We are able to see only the part of our path that is right before us. So we live today as God’s gift to us, and we trust that he will continue to make the way plain as it unfolds before us.

There have been times in my life when I have struggled to know God’s way. In those times I have followed David’s example in Psalm 16. He begins by mediating on the goodness of God. As he meditates on God, he is filled with the realization that he is fully satisfied in God, who is his inheritance and his full cup. He reflects on God’s goodness to him in this life. Even when he is awake in the night and likely tempted by anxious thoughts, he considers these things, and the Holy Spirit gives him the counsel of heart that is filled with peace.

When you have a big decision to make, set God before you. Prayerfully consider what would best honor him, and go forward, trusting that he will bless godly decisions with a peaceful heart.

Sing or pray Psalter #28.

March 21

The Press of Sin
Read Psalm 17:1–9
Last month we considered “The Daily Press” from the point of view of our daily press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Today we consider another daily press. That press is the press of sin and temptation that you and I face each day.

Have you ever asked God’s forgiveness for a particular sin (or for protection from its consequences) even though you continue to cling to other sins? That’s a prayer that God does not hear. To use the words of John Owen, God demands “universality of obedience.” We cannot expect to be delivered from one sin if we are consciously negligent in other areas. That would be like treating a single symptom of a virus that rages throughout one’s entire body! Consider David’s example in Psalm 17. The fruit of Christ’s Spirit is evident in his life: he has purposed that he will not transgress. He has kept himself from the paths of the destroyer by following the words of God’s lips.

Are these things true of you? Then, like David, you can rest assured that God will defend you from the sins that compass you about.

Sing or pray Psalter #33.

March 19

Rest in Hope
Read Acts 2:1–36
Ultimately the path of life that God shows to the believer is the path that leads him or her to glory. The Lord is so very good to us! Even though we do not know exactly how he will lead us, we have an “expected end.” He knows the plans that he has for us, and they are thoughts of good, not of evil. He will show us the path of life, and bring us safely to our destination, where there is “fullness of joy” and “pleasures for evermore.”

How can this be true?

David’s words in Psalm 16:10 are a prophecy of our Lord Jesus Christ: “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” God did not leave our savior in the grave. Because he raised our head, we can toil in the garden of our own life. We’re called to fight those enemies and to lay aside the weight of those sins that so easily beset us, in order that the Lord may press on. That’s what David did. Yet David recognized something about those enemies: he calls them the sword and the hand of God. Those enemies were means that his sovereign Father used to try him, to chastise him, and to strengthen his faith. No doubt you are familiar with Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Do you remember the verse that follows? What exactly is God’s purpose? It’s this: to conform his saints to the image of his Son.

Sing or pray Psalter #32.

March 20

A Prayer of Childlike Faith
Read Psalm 16
When my dad prays, he sometimes uses this phrase: “Father, we don’t know what the future holds, but we know that thy hands hold the future.” David makes the same confession in Psalm 16, and so does Anna Waring in the following poem:

I would not have the restless will that hurries to and fro,
E’er seeking some great thing to do or secret thing to know;
I would be treated as a child, and guided where I go.
Sing or pray Psalter #30.

March 22

The Hand of God
Read Psalm 17:8–15
What enemies press about you today? Perhaps you are tempted to impurity. Maybe discontent pervades your heart. Maybe lethargy, doubt, or self-pity threaten your spiritual life. Your three-fold enemy presses close, seeking to snuff out the life of Christ in you, intent on hindering your steps down the narrow way.

We’re called to fight those enemies and to lay aside the weight of those sins that so easily beset us, in order that we may press on. That’s what David did. Yet David recognized something about those enemies: he calls them the sword and the hand of God. Those enemies were means that his sovereign Father used to try him, to chastise him, and to strengthen his faith. No doubt you are familiar with Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Do you remember the verse that follows? What exactly is God’s purpose? It’s this: to conform his saints to the image of his Son.

Sing or pray Psalter #33.

March 23

The Apple of God’s Eye
Read Zechariah 2
“Keep me as the apple of the eye,” writes David in Psalm 17. That’s one of scripture’s memorable metaphors. What exactly does it mean?

The “apple” of your eye is the pupil, its little black center. It’s a precious part of your body, protected by your eyebrow and eyelashes, the shape of your eye socket, and your rapidly responding eyelids. If you’ve ever had an object thrown in your face, you know how quickly the rest of your body reacts to protect
your eyes. Instantaneously your arms go up and your head ducks in attempt to protect your eyes and their precious ability to see.

God calls his people the apple of his eye. Because he loves his people, he not only uses their enemies as his sword or hand, but he will also punish those wicked for their evil deeds. That’s the truth with which the prophet Zechariah comforted the Israelites who rebuilt the temple in the face of opposition. Like them, we look for the day when God will dwell in the midst of us and be our God.

Sing or pray Psalter #31.

March 24

**God is Greater Than Your Heart**
Read John 3

I love my children. I love them in spite of their weaknesses and sins. I love them regardless of their abilities in certain areas and their lack of skill in others. They are the apple of my eye. The truth that God’s children are the apple of his eye is easy to understand. After all, most people conceive of God as a loving God. “Jesus loves you” is the material of bumper stickers. But for one who truly is God’s child, sometimes that truth is hard to confess. We might wonder how a sovereign God could afflict the apple of his eye with cancer, the death of a loved one, or financial troubles. Or perhaps the recognition of the sin that still cleaves to us causes us to despair. We may find ourselves unable to trust that we are covered in Christ’s righteousness. Instead, our hearts condemn us. That kind of doubt may sound pious, but in fact, it’s ugly unbelief.

You are God’s child. He loves you in Christ. Nothing that he sends and nothing that you do or fail to do can change that.

Sing or pray Psalter #278.

March 25

**Jewels For His Crown**
Read Malachi 3

My children—in the plural—are the apple of my eye. Nothing gives me more joy than watching them play with one another, read to each other, or laugh together. Nothing brings me more grief than when they argue or fight. The same is true of God. His children— in the plural— are the apple of his eye. Nothing gives him greater joy than when love prevails among his people. Nothing brings him more grief than when we act spitefully toward one another, allowing envy or hatred to pervade our thoughts of each other.

In the passage that we read today, the prophet Malachi brings God’s word to the people of Israel. It is a word of promise as well as a word of judgment. The Messiah will soon come, but when he comes, he will witness against sin. Those who love the Lord respond to this word by speaking often to one another, encouraging and edifying each other. The Lord noted their loving concern for one another and took pleasure in his people, the precious jewels that adorn his crown.

Sing or pray Psalter #375.

March 26

**Christ’s Perfect Bride**
Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–16

There once was a prince, and he was the most kind, loving, and powerful prince that ever was. The prince loved a lowly beggar maid, and he chose her to be his bride (Ez. 16). But a terrible dragon deceived the princess and kidnapped her. When the prince came to rescue her, a deadly fight ensued. The prince was badly injured, yet he crushed the dragon’s head. But alas! He failed to rescue his bride before she had been disfigured. Her hands and feet had been severed by the wicked dragon.

Wait. That’s not the way the gospel account of Christ’s rescue of his bride goes. After Christ throws the dragon into the lake of fire (there to be tormented day and night forever) the God of heaven will present him with his bride (Rev. 20–21). She will be perfect and complete in every way, adorned for her husband and radiating the unsurpassed beauty and glory of God. Not a member will be missing.

Yet you and I think, say, and act as if we do not need certain members of Christ’s bride! If God left us to our sinful, self-centered ways, Christ’s bride would be maimed and disfigured.

Sing or pray Psalter #138.

March 27

**In His Feathers**
Read Deuteronomy 32:1–14

David employs another memorable metaphor in Psalm 17:8. He writes, “Hide me under the shadow of thy wings.”

When I was a child, it was my job to take care of our family’s chickens. Have you ever observed a mother hen with her chicks? One moment, a hen and her brood are busily scratching and pecking in the sunshine. Suddenly, danger slinks by, and in the blink of an eye, those chicks disappear. Where tasty little morsels scurried about only moments ago sits a formidable mother hen, twice her normal size and very much on alert. The only sign that chicks even exist is an occasional ripple beneath the mother hen’s fluffed-out feathers.

That’s the way God cares for us. In the face of trial or sorrow we can run to him and hide beneath his wings. There in his feathers we find protection from our predators, security in our salvation, and shelter in our sorrow.

Sing or pray Psalter 154.

March 28

**Abounding Grace to Chief Sinners**
Read Romans 5

Throughout the coming week, we’re going to study the days that immediately precede and follow our Savior’s crucifixion, days marked by his passionate suffering on behalf of his elect.

We confess that our Jesus suffered to save us from our sins, but, to our shame, we often cannot even discern our own sins. John Bunyan concludes his spiritual autobiography, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, with the following list: “I find to this day seven abominations in my heart: 1) Inclinations to unbelief. 2) Suddenly to forget the love and mercy that Christ manifesteth. 3) A leaning toward the works of the law. 4) Wanderings and coldness in prayer. 5) To forget to watch for that I pray for. 6) Ape and murmur because I have not more, and yet ready to abuse that I have. 7) I can do none of those which God commands me, but my corruptions will thrust in themselves, ‘When I would do good, evil is present with me.’”

Bunyan’s list is a record of offenses of which we all are guilty. They are sins that we easily overlook, yet they are abominations for which our Savior suffered. Our sins abound, but praise God for his abounding grace! While we were yet sinners, Christ died...
condemn the self-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:37–39). Jesus went on to respond with the summary of the law that is likely very familiar: “Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus answers to us: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:37–39). Jesus went on to condemn the self-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in one of the most fearful chapters in all of scripture.

John Bunyan was grieved that he found within himself a leaning toward the works of the law. Such Pharisaism plagues you and me too. We are called to trust in Christ’s righteousness and not our own, for even our very best deeds are as filthy rags (Is. 64:6).

Scripture doesn’t record anything from Wednesday of passion week, so today we consider more of what took place on Tuesday. After teaching in the temple and answering the Pharisees, Jesus and his disciples make their way to the nearby Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives lies just to the east of Jerusalem. The village of Bethany, in which Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived, is located on its eastern slope. Jesus likely crossed over Olivet (as it is sometimes called in the KJV) to make his triumphant entry. He slept there (Luke 21:37), and he resorted there on the evening he was arrested, to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. This place was a haven for our Savior. It is also the place where he answers his disciples’ question, “What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

Humanly speaking, the signs of Christ’s coming are fearful. But the Lord has always been a haven for his people, and so he will be in the last days. He who has prepared his throne for judgment will also prove himself a refuge for the oppressed in times of trouble.

Our Lord spent Tuesday of passion week teaching and preaching. According to various passion week timelines, most of Matthew 21:18 through Matthew 26:16 took place on this day. It is on this day that the Pharisees confront Jesus: “Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus responds with the summary of the law that is likely very familiar to us: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:37–39). Jesus went on to condemn the self-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in a warning to us. Be not proud, for all people.”

Christ went to the cross mindful that his death and resurrection would fulfill all to which the Old Testament prophecies and temple pointed. The hands that were pierced with the nails were engraved not only with Jewish names, but also with names of Gentiles—your name and mine.

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April

Crucified With Christ
Read Matt. 27:57–28:15

Saturday, the Sabbath day, was likely a silent, somber day. The disciples of our Lord must have been filled with bitter grief, untold confusion, and intense hopelessness. Do they remember Jesus’ declaration that he would rise on the third day? The chief priests and the Pharisees remember, and in vain they seal the dead.

Romans 6:6 reads, “Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” Why then, you might wonder, must we still battle sin in this life? Bunyan offers seven reasons for his seven abominations:

“These things I continually see and feel, and am afflicted and oppressed with; yet the wisdom of God doth order them for my good. 1) They make me abhor myself. 2) They keep me from trusting my heart. 3) They convince me of the insufficiency of all inherent righteousness. 4) They show me the necessity of flying trusting my heart. 5) They press me to pray unto God. 6) They show me the need I have to watch and be sober. 7) And provoke me to look to God, through Christ, to help me, and carry me through this world. Amen.”

Sing or pray Psalter #203.

April

Because I Live, You Will Live Also
Read John 14

Apologist Ravi Zacharias grew up in India as an unbeliever. At the age of 17, he attempted suicide. As he lay in the hospital, Ravi was given a Bible, and Ravi’s mother read to him from the gospel of John. Ravi clung to the words of John 14:19 with a believing heart: “Because I live, you will live also.” Later, Ravi’s mother also became a believer. When she died, Ravi had John 14:19 inscribed on her tombstone.

Years prior to Ravi’s birth, Ravi’s grandmother had converted to Christianity after hearing the gospel from foreign missionaries. Though he had never met her, Ravi determined to find her grave when he returned to India years later. The keeper of the cemetery located her grave on a plot map. As he stooped to clear years of dust and debris, his grandmother’s name became visible, and Ravi’s breath caught in his throat. Engraved beneath her name were these words: “Because I live, you will live also.”

Do you fear the future? Do you wonder what lies ahead for your children or for God’s church? We belong to a sovereign, risen, and ascended savior. Because he lives, all who are his children will live also.

Sing or pray Psalter #29.

April

He Comes With Clouds
Read Psalm 18:1–19

Back in January, the fire chief of Atlanta was fired for publishing a book in which he had written that God hates sexual sin, including homosexuality. A New York Times editor responded to the incident, arguing “that claims of endangered religious liberty for conservative Christians are ‘absurd.’” He complained about ‘religious people getting a pass that isn’t warranted.’ Religious liberty, he claimed, is being used as ‘a fig leaf for intolerance’” (Dr. Al Mohler). In the same column, the Times editor insisted that freedom of religion should be confined to “pews, homes, and hearts,” while implying that churches should not be allowed to discriminate among clergy on the basis of sexual orientation. Very callously, very rationally, he presented his intolerance of the Christian faith. My response to his column was that of David in Psalm 18:4: “The floods of ungodly men made me afraid.”

But the wicked will not have the last word. Our living and ascended Lord is coming again on the clouds of judgment. He will deliver his people and judge the wicked for their wickedness.

Sing or pray Psalter #34.

April

An Advent Calendar
Read John 15:18–16:15

“So what do you believe about the Holy Spirit?” Our neighbor asked my husband and me that question several weeks ago as he helped lay new flooring in our kitchen. That’s not a question one hears every day, and I was disappointed by my inability to express clearly what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit.

While Jesus was in the upper room with his disciples, he told them it was expedient, that is, advantageous, for them that he helped lay new flooring in our kitchen. That’s not a question one hears every day, and I was disappointed by my inability to express clearly what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit.

One of my uncles used to give my siblings and me an advent calendar every December. For those of you who haven’t seen one before, the dates of an advent calendar are printed on little cardboard doors. Behind each door is a chocolate candy. From now through Sunday, May 24, I intend to devote these devotionals to the study of the Holy Spirit. Think of it as an advent calendar counting down to Pentecost. Each day we’ll savor a different truth about the Holy Spirit. It’s my prayer that our study will better equip us to answer the question, “What do you believe about the Holy Spirit?”

Sing or pray Psalter #391.
prone by nature to hate God and the neighbor, that we are incapable of doing any good, but for the grace of God, where would you and I go? We’d go just like the world. But God’s grace is sufficient to gird us with strength to keep us on that straight and narrow way. There are a lot of difficulties that arise in your life, and you have to fight them. [I have here redacted a fair amount of material of a personal and family nature. While Ray successfully uses this information to support his point, it is not appropriate to include his comments.] To be continued…

Poem

Thelma Westra

Pleasure?

Come with me, let’s drink and dance and play; Life is so short—take pleasure while you may. We pass this way but once, you know; Let’s live it up before we go.

Hey, what is that which I just said? “Before we go.” Go where? To realms of dead? I do not want to think of that just now; I’ll put it from my thoughts…but how?

That thought must be suppressed. It doesn’t fit. I want to think of fun! Don’t make me quit. All right—so if I die today, where would I be? ‘Tis heaven or hell. Which would it be for me?

The Lord calls back from evil ways his own; He does not let them wander all alone; He takes them by the hand and lifts them high, From depths of sin to heights beyond the sky.

I thank thee, Lord, that in thy mercy thou Hast changed my heart, hast quickened me, and now I know real joy. There’s peace beyond all measure. I’m owned by Jesus Christ—the one, unfailing treasure.
In his fine essay on the providence of God, Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield mentions the frequent saying of a certain woman familiar to him. That housewife was fond of saying, “We will not be robbed of God’s providence.” That quotation and its source are instructive for the consideration of the doctrine of providence, especially that doctrine’s comfort to the believer.

First, the quotation makes very real the threat to the church’s and the believer’s confession of the doctrine of providence. The threat to the doctrine is old. It was present among the Israelites already in the wilderness when they tempted God with the question whether he was among them or not. Today especially the crisis in the doctrine of providence becomes acute because many new threats to the doctrine have arisen. There is open theism, which teaches that God is open to the inputs of man in his government of the world. There is process theology, which teaches not an immutable God, but an idol that develops with the world. There is also reassertion of Arminianism, which is the mother of those gross heresies and denies providence by teaching that God is dependent on the will of the sinner in salvation, a blatant denial of God’s sovereignty over all things. This makes no mention of the serious attack on the doctrine of providence that is leveled by the acceptance of evolutionary theory in nearly all North American Reformed denominations. Evolutionism necessarily denies providence because it enthrones chance, providence’s mortal enemy, on the throne of the universe as the explanation of the appearance of the species.

The doctrine of providence today then is worthy of a fresh defense because there are forces that would rob the church of providence. If you and I are spiritually sensitive to these attacks and the threat they pose to the Christian doctrine of providence, our conviction must likewise be, “We will not be robbed of God’s providence.”

Second, when that farmer’s wife said, “We will not be robbed of God’s providence,” she revealed her conviction and the conviction of the Reformed faith that the doctrine of providence is a precious possession. For believers to have the doctrine taken from them is to have taken from them a precious possession. Providence is a possession of the Reformed and Christian faith because it is revealed in scripture. It is a precious possession because it is the source of rock-solid comfort in the church’s and believers’ tribulations. In their confession of providence, believers rest in the God and Father of Jesus Christ their Lord who with a gracious regard for them rules over the world, and over every detail of their lives, especially the evil events. To lose the doctrine is to lose that confession, and to lose that confession is to be thrown back into the hopelessness of unbelief, as the apostle describes the condition of the unregenerated man and the believer by nature: “Ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh…ye were without…hope, and without Christ in the world” (Eph. 2: 11–12). If to have your possessions taken away is robbery, to lose this aspect of the faith, which is the source of such comfort, taken away is the worst robbery. Theologians and ministers who take the doctrine away are thieves who break through and steal one of the most precious possessions of the believer in this life.

Third, that quotation is revealing because it was the confession of a housewife. There are hundreds of books on providence. Many of them consist of scholarly debate, mostly friendly, between philosophers who are loosely connected to the church, do little or no preaching, and serve in institutions of higher learning that are loosely connected to the church. There in the ivory tower debates are held and books are written. There are notable exceptions.

But the doctrine of providence is the possession of the church and of the believer. It is not the possession of dry theologians who can debate endlessly about the relationship between causes and God, or
God and evil, like the medieval ones debated about how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. It is not the possession of philosophers who debate ad nauseum whether there is such a thing as providence at all, or who do all in their power to mitigate it, deny it, or overthrow it, and with that to rob the church.

Providence is not the possession of those who are earthly and carnal, isolated from the sufferings of the world, are blissfully unaware of pain, or who in that pain merely acquiesce like grim stoics. But providence is the possession of believers who live in the midst of a valley of tears, in the midst of death, suffering, and sorrow, but who confess God’s sovereignty for good and that all things come not by chance, but by God’s fatherly hand.

They are believers who in their daily lives, whether as mothers or bricklayers, as housewives or truck drivers, have crying children and very sick loved ones, who experience death and loss and grief of spirit and anguish of soul for the straying loved one. Those believers stand in such troubles, sorrows, and tribulations, and with uplifted head look to their God and Father who now rules over all things in Jesus Christ for their good and salvation. Because of the truth of providence they confess in that sorrow that all things work together for good to them who love God and are called according to his purpose.

If we know in the midst of our trials the severe temptation to doubt God’s goodness, then let us have the same conviction of that housewife who gripped the princely theologian, so that we say with her and the church of all ages, “We will not be robbed of God’s providence.”

The comfort of providence in the language of the Belgic Confession in article 13 “affords us unspeakable consolation, since we are taught thereby that nothing can befall us by chance, but by the direction of our most gracious and heavenly Father, who watches over us with a paternal care.”

The comfort is for the believer. It comforts the believer with God: his power over against my weakness and frailty; his greatness over against my puniness; his steadfastness over against all the vicissitudes of this life; his good will over against great evil.

The comfort of providence for the believer is not a vague, warm, or fuzzy feeling. The comfort of providence is not that I will have no trouble in this world. The comfort is that in Jesus Christ the God of providence is my God and my Father and is favorable to me in the world in all things, just as surely as he stands against the wicked and gives no peace to them in all things.

That comfort means that as the believer stands in the world that is exceeding sorrowful and sinful and in which he suffers much misery, over against all the evil, sorrow, misery, and suffering of the world and of himself individually, by faith he posits the truth, I belong to Jesus Christ, and my Father is in absolute control of all things, from the death of my child to the falling of a hair from my head to the violent, cruel, and deadly opposition of the wicked.

That comfort means that I stand in that world and this side of the grave and confess on the ground that he is my God and my Father that he is working this and all things for my good, for the good of his elect church, and for the glory of Jesus Christ and his own name, so that on the basis of this confession I am assured that nothing can be against me, and that these present sufferings work for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

For the believer then, the doctrine of providence is, in this sin-cursed and miserable world of unspeakable consolation, good news for the afflicted, and the promise of a new day that will dawn in the coming of Jesus Christ from heaven.

Because of the sanctifying power of faith in providence I am able to be thankful in prosperity and patient in adversity.

Confessing providence, I am thankful in prosperity. In prosperity it is only by faith that I receive all these things from the hand of my Father that also makes me serve him and not things.

Confessing providence, I am patient in adversity. Faith in the doctrine of providence silences my rebellious heart and lips. I acquiesce to his will. I endure it. That is patience. I submit to it and begin to will it and to glory in tribulations, also knowing that God works all things for good to those who love him and are the called according to his purpose.

It is comfort in providence that in the midst of evil I sing as the farmer—or maybe his wife too—in Habakkuk 3:17–18: “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

There you see vividly demonstrated a believer who will not be robbed of God’s providence. He sang not as a stoic for whom life and death were the
same, for whom suffering and prosperity were the same. He did not sing as some untried and naive man. He was definitely aware of suffering; he was intensely aware of it; like Job he was in the midst of it.

He sang because like Job he was also intensely aware of who did this: he did not say the devil did it, the weather did it, or the world did it. He did not say either that God did it and then blaspheme his name. He said, “The Lord gave and the Lord took away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” He sang, “God is king forever, let the nations tremble.” He sang of a hope that is reserved in heaven for him, of a city that hath foundations, and of a newborn world.

He sang because this was all the work of his heavenly Father and the God of his salvation who gave him Jesus Christ, and with Christ turns all things to his profit. He would not be robbed of God’s providence because it was the source of unspeakable consolation to him. Let us confess it and so be comforted in that confession.

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Dealing with Difficult People

What does the Bible say about dealing with difficult people? Considering when the Bible was written, it is hard to think that its authors would have taken the time to write about such petty issues. God in his eternal wisdom and providence knew that as a result of the fall, his people would struggle with this certain sin and not always get along with everyone. For various reasons, not everyone I cross paths with is easy to get along with. It is easy to think it is not my fault, but the truth is that thinking lowly of someone is a sin. In the Bible, the Lord gives instructions on dealing with difficult people the right way.

“Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul” (Prov. 22:24–25). An angry person can be very difficult to get along with. It may seem easier to be a friend to someone who is always angry out of fear; however, the people I choose to surround myself with affect the way I live. Just like hanging out with an overly positive person can give a more positive outlook, making company with an ornery person can and will give a more ornery outlook. This case, it is better to avoid the problematic person.

A huge step to dealing properly with a difficult person is realizing that the only one who sits on the judgment seat is God. As a sinner, I must realize the difference between judging others’ choices and judging to damnation. “Judge not, that ye not be judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7:1–2). Judging the choices of others is not wrong, as long as it is done out of love, with an intention to approach the person about a particular sin, and to help them realize the error of their ways. Judgment to damnation, however, is wrong. A person is only as difficult as I let him be. I make a personal choice to let a particular person bother me. It is not my job to judge anyone’s motives but my own. For example, I got annoyed with a girl at my work who happens never to smile. I deemed her to be unpleasant, but who am I to say she is that way? Who am I to say there is not a reason she does not smile? A right way to handle the situation would have been to ask her if everything was okay. But I didn’t ask her. Just as I judged her, I will be judged. Judging someone this way is a sin, and the one who judges will be held accountable before God.

Is there a right way to respond when a person earns himself the label of being difficult? “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25). God gave his children the ability to come to him with any
problems they might have with others. He also gives them the strength to forgive. As hard as it may be, I am called to forgive those who trespass against me and pray for them. Sometimes it is easier to hold a grudge than it is to forgive, but it must be done. If I do not forgive, why should I expect God to forgive me?

To put it simply, just live with the least amount of conflict as possible. “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). It is incredibly hard to live peaceably with every single person with whom I come into contact. As a result of the fall, there will never be world peace. Humans became creatures of conflict because of it. This verse was meant to encourage the chosen, the elect of God, to live peaceably. The apostle Paul understood how hard it was to live with no problems with other people, and that it would take a tremendous amount of strength to live that way. God is encouraging his children through the apostle Paul to press on and be the exception to all the conflict and hate around them. I pray to God for the strength to live this way.

It is amazing how much a perfect, sovereign God cares enough to understand every little petty issue people face. He loves his children enough to give instruction on how to live correctly. He understands that because of the fall, getting along with everybody is nearly impossible, and running into somebody difficult is bound to happen. Through the Scriptures he gives instruction for his people on how to deal with difficult people by making no friendship with them if they lead to sin, abstaining from judging them, forgiving them, and living peaceably.

Danielle is a senior at Covenant Christian High School in Walker, Michigan, and a member of Grace Protestant Reformed Church.

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Poem

Remember Your Creator

Remember in your youthful days
The Lord your God alone;
He formed you long before your birth
And chose you for his own.

He shaped your body and your mind,
He gave you talents too,
That you might render thanks to him
In everything you do.

The time allotted you on earth
Is not your own to use—
It’s his; and only for his praise
And glory must you choose.

And when, because of sinful lust,
You follow evil ways—
Repent; resolve to do the right
In all succeeding days.

He hears the prayers of those who seek
Forgiveness for their sin;
In fact, contrite we come to him
Because he works within.

Assurance of his love and grace
He gives with liberal hand.
His strength upholds you in your need
And causes you to stand.

You cannot face the onslaughts of
The devil and his host,
For there is nothing of yourself
On which your soul can boast.

But he who comes in sorrow clothed
Shall not be put to shame.
The cross of Christ erases guilt.
All glory to his name!
The Thirtieth Century of His-Story:
The Church Enjoys a King after God’s Own Heart

The 30th century of His-Story begins with the rather strange scene of a tall and robust young man hiding among the baggage of his family and the people who had come to crown him king. His name was Saul. God had sent Samuel some days earlier to anoint him king privately, and now it was time to make the first king of Israel known to the nation. His name was called out from among his brethren, but strangely he had disappeared. He was not exposed until God made clear exactly whom he wanted and search was made to find him out. There he stood before all the people who had come, perhaps with a sheepish grin, standing a full head taller than everyone. He looked like a king, even if he didn’t act like one, but appearance was enough for the majority of the people. This was the kind of king they were looking for; here was a man after their own heart. They shouted “God save the king,” and went home satisfied that a “worthy” king would soon be leading them to fight against and conquer their enemies—just like the other nations. Something was missing in Saul, but enthusiasm for a king and his impressive looks distracted any inquiry into his spiritual character.

Any doubts about Saul’s leadership qualities and bravery were soon put to rest by his courageous call to arms and crushing defeat of Nahash the Ammonite. With this confirmation of his kingly qualities, the people gathered at Gilgal and had a real coronation ceremony for Saul. In his noble speech that day, he confessed “The Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel.” See, he was even a godly man! Then “they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly” (1 Sam. 11:15). The only critic of Saul and the people on that day was Samuel, and he did not hesitate to speak boldly about the fact that this type of king was not at all what would be good for the people of God. He even declared that the heart and attitude of the people had been wicked in asking for this king. God had revealed to Samuel that in their request for this king they were rejecting God (8:7). He told them straight to their faces, “Ye have this day rejected your God” (10:19). The people had too much respect for Samuel to throw him out of the party, but they nodded politely and tried to assure old Samuel that everything would be alright. Nothing could have been farther from the truth.

Samuel watched in grief as Saul followed his own will, and not the will of the true King of Israel. The courage and strength necessary for godly rule departed from Saul and he cowered before the Philistines (13:6–7). He trusted in his own personal judgment, and was willing to compromise in his
obedience to God. Finally Samuel had to confront him and tell him that God himself had removed from him the authority to rule his people (15:23). The only king suitable for rule over God’s people would be one who loved God, and such a man is not one who will get the natural approval of men. While Saul was fighting battles his own way against the Amalekites, sometimes attacking but more often cowering before the Philistines, God was preparing a young boy to be the king who would serve as a picture of Christ, the King. God himself was preparing him for this work by working within his heart to make him a man who walked with God in covenantal fellowship.

God had already revealed to us some of the family history of David in the story of Ruth and Boaz, the great-great-grandparents of David. Jesse was their grandchild, and he now had a busy family with eight boys. David was the youngest, and he was now old enough to take on the responsibility of leading the sheep out into the wilderness and finding the green pastures. Despite his youth, David made an excellent shepherd with all the right qualities of love and care for the sheep along with wisdom and musical talents. Above all, he walked closely with Jehovah God, who gave him the courage and boldness to fight off the lions and bears that would attack the flock. In fact, a top-notch shepherd was exactly the kind of man who would make a good king for the people of God.

After Saul had been given enough time to make clear that a king after man’s own heart would only lead the nation farther from God, we find Samuel again with a horn of anointing oil. He had been mourning over the direction Israel was being led by Saul (16:1). This time God told him to go to Bethlehem to the house of Jesse. Once again the one whom God had chosen to be king seemed to be missing, but this time he wasn’t hiding. He was still out caring for the sheep because even his father could not imagine that he was the one whom God had chosen to be king. There was nothing outward in him that marked him as a king. He was the youngest. There was a certain youthful attractiveness to him; he was “ruddy, withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to (16:12), a similar description of our Lord in the Song of Solomon 5:10, 16. But he did not strike anyone as “royalty” the way Saul had done. The royal qualities were deep within his soul where they needed to be. His heart and thoughts as a young man caring for sheep were deeply concerned for the glory of God (Psalm 132).

Here, some three thousand years after Adam’s fall into sin, the Old Testament church was on the verge of seeing and experiencing the full and complete picture of the one who would crush the head of the serpent and deliver them from the terrible bondage of sin. These were very exciting days! After this relatively brief glimpse of the brilliant picture, the picture will be shattered, leaving the church in a dark and stormy world with only lightning flashes of God’s word in the prophets directing them to dwell not on the picture, but on the reality of the coming Christ. So this is it! This is the picture of the coming Savior. In this young man God will reveal to his church a glorious picture of the coming Savior from sin as a victorious king who delivers his people from all enemies and tenderly cares for them as a shepherd does his sheep. The church also learns that the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent will be born from the line of David. The church must keep her eyes on the line of David. The picture is glorious, but relatively brief. It reaches a climax at the end of this century and the beginning of the next when Solomon builds the temple.

We know well and love the stories of David. God has been pleased to reveal many details of his life so that we grow to love him even as we love Jesus who experienced all of life even as we experience the joys and trials of this life (Heb. 4:13). David boldly fought the enemies in the name of God. He suffered and willingly gave of his life for the people of God just as he did for his sheep. In David we especially see that part of the office of king that fights and defends against the enemy. David was so involved in warfare all his life that God used his son Solomon to build the temple. David desired to build a house for God where God would dwell in covenantal fellowship with his people, but David was a man of war and God gave this job to Solomon (1 Chron. 28:3). The part of the office of king that brings peace and comfort to the people under his rule belonged to Solomon.

By the time David grew old and the time for Solomon to take over the throne came, the people were beginning to enjoy the fruits of a king who ruled under God as a man after God’s own heart. They were eager to taste of this blessed life with God within the sphere of the covenant by joining in David’s desire to build the temple. We read in 1 Chronicles 29:9–12: “Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart
they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy. Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all." In these words we clearly see what it means to have a king ruling in harmony with God’s rule.

At the peak of Solomon’s rule, we find the picture of the glory and majesty of Christ’s rule as king come into full brilliance. The battles are over. Peace reigns. Every want is satisfied. All glory and honor are directed to the author and finisher of such joy and happiness. We read in 1 Chronicles 29:25, “And the LORD magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel.” Dreamers might imagine that heaven was existing here on earth. If there ever was a time in history when the church came close to heaven right here on earth, it was during the reign of Solomon. But anyone with his spiritual eyes open could plainly see that it was but a picture. Sin was just as powerful. The child of God could smile and rejoice with the taste of heaven, but his yearning to be without sin and living in perfect fellowship with God only intensified and he longed for the new heavens and the new earth.

There were many indications that life under David’s and Solomon’s reign was only a picture. Both David and Solomon clearly fell deeply into sin, but Christ is without sin. Peace under an earthly king is exceedingly costly, but peace under Christ our king is perfectly free. “Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1). The righteousness we have is freely imputed unto us. The church under Solomon enjoyed peace, but began to groan under the oppressive taxation that paid for it all. Like a dream, the picture quickly faded away and the people of God were called to cling to the promises and wait for the reality of Christ. The picture and promises gave hope and encouragement even as we also wait for his return in glory.

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

BAPTISMS
“...that He will dwell in us and sanctify us to be members of Christ, applying unto us...the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives.”
The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:
Brendon Cole, son of Mr. & Mrs. Troy & Danae Karsemeyer—Faith, MI
Katelyn Joelle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dan & Lori DeJong—Faith, MI
Miriam Christine, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kevin & Jill Koole—Grace, MI
Alexa Ruth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Gerald & Deb Feenstra—Grace, MI
Cole Steven, son of Mr. & Mrs. Steve & Carrie Huizinga—Grandville, MI
Lydia Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bill & Linda Pipe—Loveland, CO
Carter Wesley, son of Mr. & Mrs. Derek & Ginelle Griess—Loveland, CO
Abigail Rae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Raphael & Joanna Neff—Lynden, WA
Stella Rose, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Todd & Abby VanSolkema—Trinity, MI
Jacob Hale, son of Mr. & Mrs. Hib & Missy Kuiper—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH
“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”
Proverbs 3:6
Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:
Andy DeJager—Doon, IA
Aaron Tolsma—Faith, MI
Casey Korenstra—Faith, MI
Justin Looyenga—Southwest, MI
Nicholas Looyenga—Southwest, MI

MARRIAGES
“For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14
Mr. Alex Thompson and Miss Lorelei Buiter—First, MI
The Cast Down Sheep

One warm day, the sheep lay down in a comfortable hollow in the ground. She dozed off as the rays of sun warmed her fleece.

Suddenly, she felt herself rolling over. She flailed her legs, but she still tipped onto her back. The hollow in the ground held her in place, and her fleece weighed her down. She kicked her legs and wiggled, but she couldn’t get off her back. She was a cast down sheep. No sheep wanted to be cast down. They couldn’t roll off their backs when they were stuck like that.

She stuck her legs in the air and tried to breathe. Her legs were already going numb. She tried to move them, but she couldn’t.

Her eyes closed. Gold spots burst in front of her eyes.

She heard footsteps. She forced her eyes open. Her shepherd stood over her. With strong arms, he picked her up and set her on her feet. Her knees buckled, but he held her up. With gentle fingers, he rubbed her legs until feeling was restored.

When she could walk, the shepherd led her back to the rest of the sheep. She skipped back to her friends, safe once again.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:
1. Read Psalm 42:5–6 and Psalm 43:5 by yourself or with your parents. The phrase “cast down” is a phrase that is used to describe a sheep that is stuck on its back. What does it mean when the Bible says that our soul is “cast down”?
2. Read Psalm 23 by yourself or with your parents. The word restored, when talking about sheep, refers to a shepherd’s placing a sheep on its feet and helping it walk. What does it mean when God restores our soul?

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Cast  Fleece
Grass  Hollow
Psalm  Restore
Sheep  Shepherd
Soul  Stuck

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
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Be Vigilant: The Man-Eating Lion Survival Guide
August 10-14, 2015
Michindoh Conference Center
Hosted by Southeast PRC
www.prcconvention.com
www.facebook.com/pryrc2015

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:” 1 Peter 5:8