Strangers and Sojourners—Guided

This editorial continues the description of the Christian life under the general theme of our lives as strangers and sojourners in the world. A few words of review will be beneficial.

We have noticed that there are two possible paths of life ending in two possible gates that lead to two ends or goals.

There is the broad way that leads to the wide gate that opens into eternal destruction. Those who walk this way are the citizens of this world. They are not pilgrims in it, but fit comfortably in it. They ride the smooth, wide freeway of the life of this world, and pass through the wide gate into everlasting condemnation. With these we are not much concerned.

There is also the narrow way that leads to the strait gate that opens into eternal life. This way is not a road easily traveled, but a trail often steep and rocky, always difficult to navigate. This is why this trail needs signposts at frequent intervals. Without signs to mark the way clearly, those who walk it would not be able to follow it. Quickly they would deviate from it and become totally lost. It is with those who walk this way that we are concerned.

This earthly figure has a spiritual equivalent. We are those who spiritually walk the narrow way to the strait gate. We are those who struggle to remain on the path of righteousness. We are those who, without
signs to mark the way, would quickly stray from the good way and become spiritually lost.

This is the first reason that we need God’s guidance. God is pleased to use means to keep us on the right way, and those means are described in scripture as his leading or guiding. We are therefore “guided” strangers and sojourners.

The second reason is that you, young people, are the next generation of the church. As such, you must know what the narrow path of the truth is, and you must know how to walk in it. You need guidance so as to be able to do this. We therefore examine what this guidance is.

The idea of guidance in scripture is not difficult to understand (I note in passing that the word occurs most frequently in the book of Psalms). It means to lead, to tend, to take someone down a path. The word makes us think immediately of herding sheep, and rightfully so. We find this analogy in Psalm 78, which recounts the history of Israel. After reading in verse 51 about the smiting of Egypt’s firstborn, in verse 52 we read, “But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.”

A different idea is found in Psalm 32:8, where guiding is associated with instructing and teaching. God through David says to Israel, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go.” Then we read, “I will guide thee with mine eye.” The idea is that God will keep an eye on Israel, that is, he will watch to see that his people do not forsake the way in which he has taught them to go.

A similar idea is found in Psalm 25:9, where God’s people are described as being meek: “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.” Guiding in this verse is equated with teaching. The meaning is that God guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. That way is the path that we must and do follow as strangers and sojourners. God teaches us what that right way is and then leads us in that way.

Guiding is also mentioned in the context of strength and power. In Exodus 15 we find the song of Moses that he composed and sang following Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea and Egypt’s destruction. We all know the story of how God delivered his people against apparently overwhelming odds, thus showing his almighty power and might. Thus in verse 13 Moses praises the Lord for guiding his people safely through the sea: “Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.”

What is the source of God’s guidance of us? The answer to this question is found in Psalm 73:24: “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.” God’s counsel is his eternal plan for all things, with his own glory as its object or goal. God’s counsel, however, is not a dead plan. It is not a blueprint for a house or a script that he wrote and now follows. Rather, his counsel is his active purpose. By the very fact that God wills something, it happens. According to this verse it is his will to receive us to glory. That God guides us by his counsel means that because he wills to receive us to glory, he keeps us on the narrow way that leads to eternal life. As Hebrews 12:2 says, God is the author and finisher of our faith.

How does God guide us?

First and primarily, God guides us by means of scripture, which is the only rule of faith and life. Scripture leads us in the right way. It tells us where to walk and where not to walk. Its many commandments, admonitions, and teachings (doctrines) are so many signposts along our path of life. They say, as it were, “Walk here,” and “Don’t go there.”

God also guides us by the Holy Spirit, as Jesus teaches us in John 16:13: “Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak.” Through the Spirit we know and understand the guidance of the scriptures, and by the grace he gives us we walk in the way that we should go.

God also guides us by means of prayer. He does not lead us apart from or against our will. Rather, he gives us his guidance in the way of our asking for it. This is evident from David’s words in Psalm 31, which is clearly a prayer. In verse 3 David acknowledges God as his rock and fortress, that is, he who by his almighty power is able to guide him. David then asks, “Therefore for thy name’s sake lead me and guide me.”

One more aspect of God’s guidance demands our attention. This is his faithfulness, of which we read in Psalm 48:14: “For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Never does he withdraw his leadership from us. Never does he forsake us when we stumble and fall on our journey as strangers and sojourners.

What a comfort!
Question: The devil tempts the righteous, but does he actually tempt the wicked?

I can see the rationale behind such a question. If the wicked are totally depraved, and if, therefore, they love sin and hate righteousness, why would the devil need to tempt the wicked? Do they not sin without his input? We understand that when the devil tempts us, he is tempting us to depart from God’s truth and righteousness, and that his temptation initiates in us a struggle. But no such struggle exists in the wicked. What then is Satan’s role in the sin of wicked unbelievers?

We need first to explain what temptation is. When Satan tempts, he lures a person into sin, usually by presenting sin in a good light and by presenting righteousness in a poor light. For example, he shows how advantageous sin will be. He presents to us the happiness of sinners, the fun that iniquity offers, and the pleasures of sin. At the same time, he hides the misery that sin brings upon sinners. He fails to mention that the pleasures of sin are deceitful and fleeting, and that the wages of sin is death (Heb. 11:25; Rom. 6:23).

The Bible teaches that the devil tempts both believers and unbelievers. Satan tempted Peter to deny Christ (Luke 22:31), but he also tempted Judas to betray Christ. In fact, Satan entered into Judas to entice him to that heinous deed (Luke 22:3; John 13:27). Satan lured wicked king Ahab to his death by being a lying spirit in the mouths of his (false) prophets (2 Chron. 18:19–22). Satan filled the wicked, covetous hearts of Ananias and Sapphira to lie to the Holy Spirit, thus tempting God (Acts 5:3). Surely, the wicked thieves who robbed Job of his flocks and herds were stirred up by Satan to do that (Job 1:12, 14–17).

Why then does Satan tempt? What is Satan’s role in temptation?

First, we must understand that Satan is not sovereign, nor is he almighty, omniscient, or omnipresent. Satan cannot force a person to sin in a specific way. If he could, man would not be responsible for his sin, but a helpless puppet on Satan’s string. The wicked are “taken captive by [Satan] at his will” (2 Tim. 2:26), but they are still free moral rational agents. Satan could suggest to Ananias and Sapphira to lie to the apostles, but he could not force them to that wicked deed. Satan could take possession of Judas, but he could not force him to betray Jesus.

Second, we must recognize that all men, whether believers or unbelievers, sin because they want to. James explains, “Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (1:14). Sin is willful, wicked, conscious rebellion. Of course, sin is in our nature, but the act of sin is always willful. Judas willfully betrayed Jesus; Ananias and Sapphira willfully lied; Cain willfully murdered Abel. If Satan desires that anyone commit a certain sin, he has to entice, lure, and deceive that person, in harmony with their depraved will. Although men are totally depraved, Satan plants into their minds the suggestion to commit particular sins. To one he suggests the sin of adultery. To another he suggests the sin of murder. To a third he suggests the sin of dishonesty.

Third, Satan is cruel. The devil delights in destroying sinners. Think of Satan as a cat that enjoys playing with and tormenting a mouse before devouring it. The mouse will die (its doom is certain), but the cat makes the mouse suffer. Satan knows that sinners will perish, but he desires to plunge them into as much sin as possible, so that they are as miserable as possible in sin here and in eternity hereafter. That is why he tempts unbelievers, who are already on the broad road to hell, as well as believers, who are on the narrow road to life.

Fourth, there is no reason to believe that Satan knows the identity of God’s elect. Only God knows them that are his (2 Tim 2:19). Certainly, when a person seems to be a Christian, the devil will target that one with great temptations. But Satan tempts everyone, not restricting his temptations to Christians.

Fifth, Satan tempts unbelievers out of his hatred for the church. When Satan tempts unbelievers, this affects Christians. Satan tempts wicked men to persecute the church. Satan tempts the man who mocks...
his Christian coworker. Satan tempts the ungodly judge who condemns the Christian and vindicates the cause of the wicked adversary. Satan tempts the unbelieving legislator to pass laws that make the work of the church more difficult in the world. Satan tempted Pharaoh to cast Israel’s baby boys into the Nile. Satan tempted wicked Nebuchadnezzar to build an image and to threaten Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Satan tempted Haman to seek to destroy the Jews. And Satan will tempt the antichrist to persecute God’s church in the future. Satan will be the instigator of antichrist’s wickedness, as well as the agent of his destruction. In the end God will destroy the antichristian kingdom by turning it against itself (Rev. 16:12–14; 20:7–10).

Satan has a wide scope. “As a roaring lion [he] walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). A useful little book in this regard is Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices, by Thomas Brooks.

Schuyler

Mark H. Hoeksema: It is March 24, 2008. I am at the residence of Lois Kregel and about to begin an interview with her. Could you tell me where and when you were born?

Lois Kregel: I was born in the parsonage on Eastern Avenue in 1925, the month of August. It was before we had been evicted, and I was known by my father [Herman Hoeksema] as the “trouble baby.” I have no memories of that time. It was shortly after that that we were locked out. We weren’t immediately locked out of that parsonage, but we did have to move. So I spent my earliest time in a temporary parsonage on Sherman Street. I don’t even know where it is, but it was before the time that the parsonage on Fuller and Franklin was built. I believe that was done before the church, so that we could move into it.

MHH: Did you grow up in that parsonage of First Church on Franklin?

LK: That’s right. I have no recollection of Sherman Street at all. I do have very early recollections of the parsonage on Fuller and Franklin.

MHH: What was your life like growing up in the parsonage? What are some of your earliest memories of your life and life in the parsonage and life in the context of the church?

LK: My life in the parsonage was punctuated by trips my father had to take for the church for various lectures and mission activities. There were times that I don’t remember at all, and there were times that I must have gone along, but I was too young to remember. I know I did go...my father didn’t get a car till about 1932. But there were many people that drove him here and there. I know that Nick Jonker drove a lot, and Jake VanderWal also took them a lot.

MHH: And you went along on these trips?

LK: I went along. Homer [her older brother, later known as Prof. H. C. Hoeksema] and I went along a lot because we were the youngest and they didn’t want to leave us home. I think Etta stayed with my sisters at that time.

MHH: Now you referred to Etta [Kooistra].

LK: Etta came to help my mother when my oldest brother Herm was a baby. Herm is 5 years older than I am.

MHH: Why did she come to help your mother?

LK: I always remember my mother as being rather fragile. Yet she lived to be 76. But she always seemed rather fragile. She lay down every afternoon. Etta did much of the heavy housework, the washing and the ironing. But Homer and I usually went along. We went along, for example, to New York when Mr.
VanderWal drove them to pick up my uncle from the boat. I have vague memories of that trip. I remember going to Hull because I was scared stiff of the siren, the curfew. I remember that, but I don’t remember why we were there.

**MHH:** They blew the siren…

**LK:** Nine o’clock. I was afraid.

**MHH:** It’s amazing that you can remember those things. If we move into the 1930s, what do you remember of your childhood in the 30s? It was obviously the time of the depression.

**LK:** I remember the favorite expression of my mother was in Dutch: “We hebben geen geld.” [“We have no money”] If we needed something, “don’t have any money.” But even before that, when things were good, I didn’t realize that they were good.

I remember my father being gone to the Netherlands in 1928. I used to eat oatmeal for breakfast with my father. I came downstairs asking for oatmeal for papa and me, and my mother reminded me that papa was gone (laughter).

I remember the day the banks closed. My father had all his money in the Grand Rapids’ Savings Bank, and he never recovered it, except for very, very little. My dad didn’t have a lot of money, but in those days, his salary, I believe, was $3,000 a year, which was pretty good. And I had $5.00 of my own in the bank, which I thought was huge. And I never got that back either.

**MHH:** Tell me a little bit about the Etta that you referred to. That would be Etta Kooistra, who was apparently a part of your life and in the context of the church for many years.

**LK:** Etta was a totally selfless person. She had nothing of herself that she ever would push. She took care of her crippled brother, who had a shoe store on Baxter Street. I don’t know what year it happened, he suddenly had a stroke, and he wound up in Saint Mary’s Hospital. She never left his bedside for the week that he was there, and then he died. She would not go any place to eat. If someone brought her something, she must have survived on something, but she could not be pried away from his bedside. She was very faithful. She was the same way with my parents—always faithful. She would not ever talk about anything that she thought was nobody’s business in the house. She faithfully worked, and when the depression came and my mother couldn’t really afford her anymore, they both cried. But she just kept on coming a couple of times a week to help her. She was very, very serious-minded. If we ever used any levity of expression, for example, she would stop us in our tracks—“You may not talk so lightly about such things.” And we obeyed her.

**MHH:** Was she intimidating?

**LK:** No, she was a very little woman who bustled about, and just as kind as could be. After the war when you could begin to send stuff, she almost gave everything she had and sent package after package to the Netherlands. During the depression, she would find out who in the church was in need. Whatever clothes we had that we had outgrown, she would make a basket of it and then she would carry it (she walked all over—nobody could take her anywhere), she would make a package and after it was dark, she would go up and put that package by their door, ring the doorbell, and go away (laughter). Nobody ever knew where it came from.

**MHH:** But you did.

**LK:** But we did.

**MHH:** So she was a fixture at the parsonage for many years?

**LK:** Oh, yes. Even after everybody was out of it, she stayed and took care of my dad.

**MHH:** So she served for many years.

**LK:** Oh, yes. I think she died the year after my parents died. No one could contact her. Finally they found her dead. I know that she often came and helped me. If I was going on a trip after we were married and had children, she would say, “Just leave it all to me. Just don’t even make the beds. I come and I clean your whole house. And when you come home, it will be clean.” The only thing she ever wanted was leftovers to take home. She could have that for her supper. She would also ask if she could have my waste-paper. She heated her house with a kitchen stove. She said, “I put that in my stove in the kitchen and then I light it, and then I’m so thankful.” I can hear her say it.

**MHH:** She must have been a pretty amazing lady.

**LK:** She was an amazing lady. We took her for granted a little bit as children, but the older I got, the less I took her for granted. She often came over, but only one time did she ever come for dinner.

**MHH:** So she was like a second mother.

**LK:** Oh, yes.
MHH: But that certainly must have helped in a busy household to free up, especially your father and possibly your mother to do the work of the church and to do the traveling that you mentioned.

LK: Oh, that’s true. My mother always was president of the Ladies’ Aid and Bible leader. She had an eighth grade education, but she was a reader. So she faithfully studied to lead the Ladies’ Aid, which was very big in those days. Remember the Ladies’ Aid sales, or don’t you? Oh, there was the big Ladies’ Aid sale every year.

MHH: I wasn’t born until 1949.

LK: Well, I know it. But we were still having them—until 1953.

MHH: So what was the purpose of these Ladies’ Aid sales?

LK: I really don’t know where the money went. I think a lot of it went to the schools.

We ought to get back to the depression now. Because, after my parents bought their first car (1932), it was a Chrysler Demonstrator—a black Chrysler. From then on, if Dad had anything to spend at all, he would like to get in that car and take a little trip.

The first thing Dad did in the depression was cut his own salary in half, because he did not want to be in a better position than the people in the church. So his salary was automatically cut, and my mother learned to scrimp. I remember she hid her purse in the clothes chute because she was so afraid she’d lose her money (laughter).

We did manage to take trips. I happened to have the bedroom that adjoined my parents’ bedroom. There was a door in between, and there was also a door to the hallway from both of our rooms. I remember hearing them talk about it—could they afford it or not? I remember also that they said they had $163.00 and we had seven people. We made that trip on $163.00. When we got to stay in a motel, it would be the stinkiest little motel you ever saw. If they were more than 50¢ a person, they wouldn’t stay. We’d go on. One place in particular. We were all dead tired. In Watkins Glen, New York they wanted a motel. The owner was adamant: 75¢/person. My dad tried to jew her down, but not successfully. We went on until we found something for 50¢/person (laughter). I don’t think we even saw Watkins Glen (laughter). Those were the days!

Then we went to Patterson [NJ]. You can imagine we were pretty crowded because those cars were narrow, and there wasn’t a lot of room. My dad built a bench in his blacksmith’s shop and upholstered it with a plush gray kind of velvet upholstery. That bench was Homer’s and mine because we were the smallest. We had to sit on that bench. It didn’t have a back and wasn’t very comfortable, but we did go. We cooked all our meals on the way—a hot meal at noon in a state park. I can remember my parents roasting corn and having pork chops. We did that all on a wood stove in a park. The first day my mother had a prepared meal in a big pan—all together—like a New England dinner. And that was our first meal. But after that we cooked, no matter what. We didn’t cook at night. Those old cabins didn’t have cooking facilities anyway. And we never ate in restaurants. When we got hungry, begging for an ice cream cone, all five kids would sing, “Here we sit like birds in the wilderness, waiting to be fed” (laughter).

Anyway, that’s how we traveled. We got to Patterson, and Rev. VanderKeef was there. My father knew that he was pretty sound and we went to church there. So happened that Mrs. VanderKeef’s sister was Winnie Dykema. She was staying there, and she assumed that she could ride home with us. Now, Winnie Dykema was not a small person. Believe me, from Patterson home, we could hardly breathe (laughter). But my father thought that as a member of his congregation, he could hardly turn her down. So she rode along with us.

MHH: Where else did you go?

LK: We went to California. I think it was 1934, when Bellflower was organized.

MHH: Is that why you went?

LK: Yes, but we all went. We all got out of school for six weeks. My sisters were in high school. The rest of us were in Baxter [Christian School].

MHH: And they took you out of school for six weeks?

LK: They took us all out of school. My father thought little of that at all. He just assumed that we would be at the top of our classes. He never told us anything about report cards. He assumed that we would come home with A’s on our report cards. And if there was anything less in conduct, we really heard it! (laughter). And sometimes there was (laughter). But that’s the way it was. He never told us to study. When we would prepare for a test, he said that was ridiculous: “You learned it once. Why do you have to study for the tests?” But we weren’t like he was that we could retain every single thing in our minds all
the time—many weeks later. But he thought it was stupid to study once we had learned it.

MHH: Because that was a concept that was foreign to him?
LK: That was foreign to him.
MHH: So, if he read something...
LK: He retained it. And we were supposed to retain it, too.
MHH: Whether or not you were able.
LK: That’s right. But he assumed that we were able. And we weren’t. We studied. He couldn’t figure out why we studied (laughter). More people have to tell their kids to study. He had to tell us it was dumb to study. He never asked us our catechism questions. I don’t remember ever, ever, ever. He assumed that we would know those questions, and he probably assumed that someone would tell him if we didn’t (laughter). We had students for teachers at that time. We almost never had a minister for a teacher. He taught the classes at night, but not the day classes. Many others could not keep order as we got older. So he made a habit of periodically and unexpectedly opening the door. And there would be suddenly dead silence (laughter).

MHH: Apparently they knew better than to misbehave in his presence.
LK: That’s right. He never had any trouble with order.

MHH: So, he had no hesitation to take you out for six weeks. Off to California you went.
LK: Right. We stayed in Redlands. My mother said she was never so cold in her whole life because they had just little space heaters or floor furnaces or something—not central heating. Maybe they do now, but they didn’t then. And she was very cold.
MHH: This was, apparently, during the winter months?
LK: Oh, yes. It was February. Another thing: we left in the middle of a snowstorm in February—4:00 in the morning. There were no defrosters in those days. My mother took a little bag of salt. When the windshield got so clogged by fog we couldn’t see anymore, then she would clean it with her bag of salt. That would last a little while. We got as far as Moline [MI], and we could not go any farther. The roads were absolutely full of drifts. We had to wait till noon before the roads were cleaned. We played “Giant-steps” and everything else in an old garage in Moline. That’s where we were stuck. We left at 4:00 in the morning. By noon we had made it to Kalamazoo (laughter). After that it was duck-soup.
MHH: So, at that time he was instrumental in organizing the congregation in Bellflower?
LK: Yes. And we were in Redlands. We spent quite a bit of time in Redlands. We got to know many of the people.

Serving the Church

Kate Lubbers and David Gagliardi

Young People as Godly Examples

Why must our young people be godly examples? One reason for this is to show siblings and students under us that we must not act foolishly. They look up to us and they follow what we do because they want to act “cool.” As we age, we must grow in wisdom and truth, putting away things of this earth and thus living sanctified lives.

We must show others that we live a godly lifestyle. People might ask, What does that mean? We reply by telling them that in every little thing that they do, from playing tag, to eating lunch, to talking with their friends, they must glorify the name of God. Our only response in this life is thankfulness to God for sending his only begotten Son to die for us.

As Christians, both young and old, we must live according to Matthew 5:16: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” We let our lights shine by doing deeds of kindness, doing daily devotions, or by helping a fellow believer. It would
be a joy for us to be like the Christians of old, who were kind even throughout persecution.

Our works can never accomplish salvation. Out of thankfulness, by what we do and say, people should know that we are different from others. Why act this way? We do so in order that as witnesses we might gain others to the faith, and that we might glorify our God in heaven. Christ in his sufferings gave to us the Holy Spirit, making it impossible for us not to do good works and be good examples to those around us.

We have this light that we spoke of earlier, as true believers, given to us by God through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Lord’s Day 24, question 64 asks, “But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?” The answer is, “By no means; for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.”

Young people, do not go dormant! We are to flourish in good works. This is proof our faith is growing and that we are different. That is our calling as representatives of the true church of God. We must set a standard for ourselves. We should not try to look good in the eyes of our peers by doing something sinful in order to look good. That's the work of a hypocrite.

We may ask, “How can I as a Christian perform this calling?” It is impossible of ourselves to do so. We are fallen and born in sin. It is only through the work of the Holy Spirit whom our Savior has given us that we can do any good at all!

First, we can set standards for ourselves, which proceed out of God-given abilities. Don’t fall into sin out of peer-pressure when people around us are trying to persuade us to sin. Know that Christ has sanctified us, and we must glorify him in all that we do. Others will see our faith and see us shining as lights of God. We pray that God will use our examples to work in them to become faithful members of the church. Young people, we should not be lackadaisical. We must have determination to do what is right in the sight of God, for he is gracious.

Second, look hard at what doing wrong leads to. If you go around doing bad things, what do you think the next generation of the church will do? They will follow in our footsteps. If we are only godly when we are at church, our light will never shine. We must remain examples in all that we do, never thinking in certain circumstances that now we can sin and do whatever we want.

Third, we must build each other up and show others what is right and what is wrong. That doesn’t mean go and scream at someone who has stumbled off the straight and narrow path. Rather, we go to them and in love speak to them. We show them how we must separate ourselves from the world. James 1:27 says, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” We are to show the kindness of Christ to the world around us, but we should not go into the world and become best friends with them, because we are called to be unspotted.

Fourth, we must be godly examples not just sometimes, but at all times. As students, we must show our faith, and prosper, for without it we are no better than the unbelievers. What good is a Christian education if we renounce it the second we leave school? We must cherish our Christian education, for by following it we may be godly examples. Thankfully we study church history from a Christian perspective and living as examples of what is right.

Last, we must let the love of Christ show through us. In Greek there are three words for love: agape, philia, and eros. Agape is love without expecting anything in return. Philia is love between siblings. Eros is love between husband and wife. The love we must show to all around us is agape love. Christians should be the ones helping the sick and comforting the dying even through times of persecution and plague. People in the age of the early church were in awe of this love, and they wanted to be a part of it. God used these Christian witnesses to cause others to join the church. We are called to let Christ’s love for us shine through to others. As we go forward as godly examples, we look to God for the strength to do so. Scripture tells us that even our best works are as “filthy rags.” Thus we don’t take the credit for living godly, but give all glory to God. Our purpose on the earth is to live a thankful life and glorify our Father in heaven. The Holy Spirit works in us and through us, making our light shine. For this we are thankful, and in thankfulness we live as godly examples, that our great God in heaven may be glorified.

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Leviticus 18:3–5 “After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Ye shall do my judgments and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD.”

In the verses above, the Lord was calling the people of Israel to live according to his statutes and ordinances and not according to the ways of the world. These words still hold powerful truth for God’s children today, especially his young people.

Pop culture is defined as the combination of interests and activities that a group of people share. Knowing how we should live in this world and its pop culture in the light of scripture is vitally important to our spiritual health and life.

1. What do you think are some interests and activities that are popular with teens in your circles today? What do you think the appeal of social media is? What is your motive for social media, God’s glory or your own? For example, what is the purpose of your Facebook home page?

2. Do you feel that the devil could be present when teens in the church are involved with these interests and activities? Give some examples of how the devil could or even has presented himself in your personal experiences.

3. If you feel the devil is present with a certain activity or interest, how should this be handled? Avoid all together or continue with vigilance and caution? How do we decide? John 17:15–18; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 2:15–17

4. Why do you think the devil would like it when teens in the church are interested in the same activities as teens of the world? Mark 4:9. Note for thought: When you look at the lives, behaviors, and appearance of pop musicians and actors, is this the type of person that you want to associate yourself with? Is this the music that you want to sing?

5. Think about how much time you spend on these things of pop culture (e.g. texting, social media, popular music, movies). Why do you think the devil likes it when these things consume most of our time? How do we be good stewards of our time? Matt. 16:25, 26; Eph. 5:15–16 Note for thought: What if we used our Bibles the same amount of time we used our phones?

6. Many things in pop culture can be innocent or even beneficial. What are some examples of useful things in pop culture for Christians? However, the devil can also use these as a tool for sin. What are some of the ways you think the devil specifically uses pop culture? 2 Cor. 2:11; James 4:11

7. What can we do to ensure that the devil is not a part of our interests and activities? How can we help our friends with this as well? Eph. 6:10–18; Gal. 6:1

8. How can we not just avoid the devil but better glorify God in our interests and activities? What good habits could replace your bad habits? Gal 5:16; Hebrews 4:12

9. Define the antithesis. How can we be better witnesses to the world with our interests and activities? Romans 12:2; 1 Peter 2:9; Matt. 5:16.
The Devil and Our Relationships

Our Lord and heavenly Father has seen fit in his infinite wisdom and counsel to bless us with relationships. This is born out of the perfect fellowship and communion that he enjoys in his triune self. We have so many and varied relationships in our lives that serve to test and strengthen our faith and grow our covenant bonds with one another. We have our relationships in our families with our parents and siblings. We have our relationships with friends. We have our relationships with those in authority over us in school, church, and work. And we have our relationships with our neighbors, those outside the church.

In Proverbs 1:8–9 we read of the relationship between parent and child: “My son, hear the instruction of thy father and forsake not the law of thy mother. For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.”

Throughout 1 Samuel we read of the beautiful friendship between David and Jonathan. 1 Samuel 18:1 reads, “The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” What a close friendship!

In Romans 13:1–2 we read of our relationship with those in authority: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”

In 2 Corinthians 6 we read of our relationship with those of this world. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness....”

**Friendships & Dating**

1. We know the influences our friends and those we date have on us. We must be wise and thoughtful when choosing our friends and those whom we date. What are some characteristics of a godly friend and of those whom we should date?

2. What are some ways the devil can tempt us in our friendships and in our dating?

3. What are things that we can do to glorify God in our friendships and in our dating?

**Authority**

4. As Christian young people, what is our calling with respect to those in authority? How does Satan tempt us to sin against this calling?

5. How does God bless you through your parents? How does the devil tempt us in our relationships with our parents in the home?

6. In light of the sin and wickedness that abounds in our government, how do we heed the call to respect those in authority? When our own president makes decisions that go against our Reformed beliefs, how do we pray for our leaders, as we are called to?

**Our Neighbors of the World**

7. What is God’s calling to us in regard to our worldly neighbor?

8. What is the devil’s relationship to our unbelieving neighbor?

9. How might the devil attack us and negatively affect our relationship with God and the church through our unbelieving neighbor?
Rev 12:9, 12–13, “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Therefore rejoice ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabiters of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.”

In the above verses, the apostle John warns of the persecution that the woman (the church) will face at the hands of the dragon (the Devil). Discussion of the end times as it pertains to the young believer in the New dispensation is both pertinent and critically important as we see history rushing forward to that end of history when Christ will return.

1. Eschatology is the term that means the study of the end times. Why is the study of the end times important for our young people? What are signs that you, as a young person, see that we are in the end times? What are specific current events that you see are the work of the devil?

2. Knowing our enemy is very important. Based on scripture, what do we know of Satan? By what names is Satan known to us? What do his many names tell us about Satan?

3. The devil’s attacks are numerous and varied (1 John 3:8; Eph. 6:12). What are his attacks in the lives of young people? In your own life?

4. How does he attack our churches? How does he attack your own personal congregation? Is a strong denomination like the Protestant Reformed churches a target for his attacks? How are we vulnerable to his attacks?

5. Where do we find our comfort facing such a terrible foe whose attacks are so varied and whose minions are so numerous?

6. In Ephesians 6:10–18, we read of putting on the whole armor of God. How do we prepare our defenses against the attacks of the devil upon our churches? In the lives of young people? In your own life?

7. 2 Thess. 2:3: “Let no man deceive you by any means, for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.” The son of perdition refers to the antichrist. Please describe your understanding of the antichrist and the role that he will play in the persecution of the church. (Rev. 13).
Love for the Lord’s House
Read Psalm 27:1–6
When he was a young man, David lived as a vagabond in the wilderness, fleeing from wicked King Saul. When he was king, frequent wars took him away from his home in Jerusalem. Yet none of his troubles grieved him more than his absence from Jehovah’s house: “One thing have I desired of the L ord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the L ord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the L ord, and to enquire in his temple” (Psalm 27:4). God dwelled with his people in the tabernacle. Every element of its worship pointed to their gracious salvation. There David knew he would be safe from his troubles.
Throughout his life David’s actions were consistent with his claim to love the Lord above all else. When his battles ceased, he determined to replace the tabernacle with a temple. Though God denied him that privilege, he still troubled himself to gather the materials out of which Solomon would build later build it (1 Chron. 22:14).
Can you confess that there is none upon earth that you desire beside the Lord (Ps. 73:25)? Is your life consistent with that claim?
Sing or pray Psalter #71.

One Thing
Read Luke 10: 38–42
Psalm 27 was my grandma’s favorite psalm. She died when I was a child, and verse four was her funeral text. She sought the one thing that David desired, and when she died, she entered the glorious house of the Lord of which the tabernacle was only a dim picture. The saints in heaven experience “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forevmore” in God’s presence (Ps. 16:11). This text is not only a victory shout as we pass on, “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forever” in God’s presence (Ps. 16:11). This text is not only a victory shout as we pass on, “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forever” in God’s presence (Ps. 16:11). This text is not only a victory shout as we pass on, “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forever” in God’s presence (Ps. 16:11). This text is not only a victory shout as we pass on, “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forever” in God’s presence (Ps. 16:11). This text is not only a victory shout as we pass on, “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forever” in God’s presence (Ps. 16:11). This text is not only a victory shout as we pass on, “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forever” in God’s presence (Ps. 16:11). This text is not only a victory shout as we pass on, “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forever” in God’s presence (Ps. 16:11). This text is not only a victory shout as we pass on, “fullness of joy” and “pleasures forever”. (See Rev. 12.) The congregation to which you belong, though only a minuscule manifestation of that great and glorious church, is your spiritual mother. She nourishes you through the preaching of the gospel and the sacraments. When you go astray she disciplines you through the work of the elders. When you lack she willingly and generously provides through the hands of the deacons.
Do you belong to such a mother? Do you honor her? Then this promise is yours: your days will be long in the land which the Lord thy God shall give thee (Ex. 20:12).
Sing or pray Psalter #72.

The Lord Will Take Me Up
Read Psalm 27:7–14
We live in the perilous times of which Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3. All about us live men and women who are lovers of their own selves. They are unthankful and unholy. They lack natural affection, even affection for their own children and spouses. Sadly, almost all of us know someone who has forsaken or someone who has been forsaken. And even if you or I do not know personally the sorrow of being abandoned by parent or spouse, we’ve certainly experienced the pain that comes when one whom we love and trust sins against us.
Why is forsaking such an affront to our God? Why does he hate divorce? Our God is faithful. Those who are unfaithful tell lies about him with their unfaithful examples. Jesus is the bridegroom who never forsakes his bride. Jehovah is the God who made an unconditional covenant with his people. He is the gracious Father who pities them that fear him (Ps. 103:13).
Have you been forsaken by father or mother, or husband or wife? The Lord will take you up. He is a father of the fatherless (Ps. 68:5) and the husband of those whom he has redeemed (Is. 54:5).
Sing or pray Psalter #72.

The Daily Press
“press toward the mark…” (Philippians 3:14)
trials, too. Even when we don’t understand his way, we can rest in the knowledge that he works all things for the good of those he’s called. May that truth spur us on the path of obedience, for when we walk obediently we will have peace that passes all understanding.

Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart. Here and now, in this life. In the land of the living.

Sing or pray Psalter #72.

July

13

Render to Them Their Desert
Read Psalm 28
The biblical doctrine of double predestination, the truth that God saves some and some he damns, is a difficult truth to confess. Many contend that this doctrine makes our God unjust, a God who delights in arbitrary and cruel spite. Perhaps we are sometimes inclined to agree with that evaluation. But the scriptures testify that God is just. He punishes the wicked for their wickedness. They deserve their terrible sentence.

According to Psalm 28:3, the wicked speak peace to their neighbors, but mischief is in their hearts. They disregard the works of the Lord (v. 5). Psalm 21:11 teaches that God destroys the wicked and their children because they intend evil against him. Proverbs 21:12 declares, “God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness.” Do you remember this prayer from Psalm 7? “Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end; but establish the just: for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins. My defense is of God, which saveth the upright in heart. God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day” (vv. 9–11). He is angry with them on account of their wickedness, and he will render to them their desert.

Sing or pray Psalter #75.

July

14

The Voice of the Lord
Read Psalm 29
Psalm 29 begins with a command to the mighty: they must give unto the Lord the glory that is his due. No man, no matter how powerful he may be, can compare to our God. Jehovah is the one who spoke the universe into existence. His voice continues to sustain his creation. He ruled at the time of the flood, and he governs all things still today. He is not only creator: he is also judge. His just wrath against sin and sinful men is heard in thunder and seen in lightening.

Are you afraid of thunderstorms? Several years ago our family experienced an incredible thunderstorm while we were camping. The lightening flashed so brilliantly that it illuminated the terrified faces of our children as we lay trembling in our tent. Again and again the thunder began as a series of distant rumbles, then swelled to a roar that seemed to ricochet its way around the earth.

We do not need to fear the storm. Jehovah’s voice is not only a creating voice and a judging voice: to us who are in Christ Jesus, his voice is also a saving voice. To us he says, “Peace, be still.”

Sing or pray Psalter #76.

July

15

Everything Beautiful
Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–11
In Psalm 27:4 David expresses his desire to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life, for he longs forever to “ behold the beauty of the Lord.” Psalm 29:2 commands the mighty to “worship in the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” We are surrounded by beautiful things. Flowers. Birds. Sunrises and sunsets. Music. Snow-capped mountains. A bride on her wedding day. The soft skin and sweet smile of a child. We’re drawn to beauty and moved by it. How much more shouldn’t we be moved by and drawn to God himself? He is the infinitely and everlasting beautiful one. Everything that is lovely — in creation and in his children — is a reflection of what he is.

To the natural eye, our Lord has “no beauty that we should desire him” (Is. 53:2). But there is coming a day when all “shall see the king in his beauty” (Is.33:17). On that day all that is ugly and evil will be vanquished from his kingdom forever, and those who are his will worship him for eternity in the beauty of holiness. What a day that will be!

Sing or pray Psalter #76.

July

16

God’s Wonderful Temple
Read Psalm 65
Toward the end of the Psalmist’s observations about the mighty voice of God in the thunderstorm and throughout creation, he inserts this phrase: “And in his temple doth every one speak of his glory.” Perhaps you’ve noticed that Psalter #76 interprets the word “temple” in that phrase to mean “creation.” In the third stanza of that song we sing, “And through all creation, his wonderful temple, all things he has fashioned his glory declare.” According to the second article of the Belgic Confession, we know God by the “creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God.”

God’s temple is the place where his name is praised and his glory dwells. God’s temple includes his creation, which earnestly longs to be delivered from the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:19–21). As they wait, the little hills rejoice, and the valleys shout for joy: they also sing. Do you join them in praising our great Creator God?

Sing or pray Psalter #171.

July

17

The Lord is in His Holy Temple
Read Habakkuk 2
Though the testimony of the elegant book of creation is enough to leave men without excuse (Rom. 1:20), we know God more “clearly and fully…by his holy and divine word” (BC, Art. 2). That’s why Psalm 65, which speaks of creation praising God, also teaches, “Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple” (vs. 4). That’s also why John Calvin doesn’t equate the word temple in Psalm 29:9 with the creation:

“God’s voice fills the whole world, and spreads itself to its farthest limits; but the prophet declares that his glory is celebrated only in his church, because God not only speaks intelligibly and distinctly there, but also there gently allures the faithful to himself. His terrible voice…causes…men to…shrink from rather than approach him…The faithful sing the praises of God in his temple, because, being familiarly instructed there by his fatherly voice, they devote and consecrate themselves wholly to his service…In his word alone there shines forth the truth which may lead us to true piety, and to fear and serve God aright.”

Sing or pray Psalter #170.
The Beauty of Holiness
Read Proverbs 31:10–31

The beautiful things that we see or hear are inadequate reflections of our God’s immeasurable loveliness. Yet we must not follow nonbelievers in basing a person’s worth on his or her physical appearance. We live in a culture that’s obsessed with figures and fashion. We must take care of our bodies, but, like our heavenly Father, we must also value beauty that lies within. “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). “Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised” (Prov. 31:30).

In Psalm 29:2, we’re commanded to worship God in the “beauty of holiness.” Holiness is separation from sin. Hatred of sin and a desire to do what’s right: that’s what is beautiful to God. Those who are renewed in his image exhibit righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:24). So let’s not obsess over our outward adorning. Instead, let’s focus on adorning our hearts with treasures that cannot be destroyed. Though our physical beauty may fade as we age, may our inward beauty continue to grow into something that is worth a great price to God.

Sing or pray Psalter #76.

A Dedication Song
Read Psalm 30

Let’s say you’re a king, a mighty king, and you’ve just built a brand-new palace for yourself. It’s an expansive, beautiful, and well-fortified home. You’ve invited a host of guests to enjoy the first of many get-togethers there. At that celebration, you plan to lead everyone in song. What will you sing?

David hosted a similar celebration. Here’s what he sang at his feast:

There was a time when I relied on my own feeble strength, But worldly wealth cannot sustain, as God showed me at the length.

For Jehovah, intent on saving me from my self-centered pride, Chastised me: the peace I had enjoyed was now by him denied.

I was troubled then and turned to him: I cried to him in prayer. I recognized how I depend upon his gracious care.

Friends and fellow saints, he was not angry long! He saved me from my sinful self and turned my mourning into song.

And so to him I dedicate this temporal dwelling place, All my wealth, and all my strength, for all my earthly days.

Sing or pray Psalter #79.

Weeping May Endure for a Night
Read 1 Chronicles 21:1–13

1 Chronicles 21 records a specific incident in David’s life in which he was lifted up in pride and trusted in his own prosperity. David exulted in the growing multitude over which he ruled, and in his arrogance he ordered Joab to number the people. God demanded that David choose from three terrible punishments for his sin. David chose three days of “the sword of the Lord,” because, as he said, “Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord; for very great are his mercies” (vs.13).

Do you find comfort knowing that even as you face trials, you are in the Lord’s hand? It is of his mercies that we are not consumed: his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is his faithfulness! “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord” (Lam. 3:24–26).

For weeping may endure all the days of this night, but joy will come in the morning!

Sing or pray Psalter #79.

Let Thine Hand Be on Me
Read 1 Chronicles 21:14–30

I’ve referred to David frequently as we’ve moved through the first 30 Psalms. After all, he is credited as the author of most of them, and he typically writes his songs in the first person. It’s important to remember, however, that Christ’s voice is the voice we hear above all others in the Psalms. He is the Word of God. All of the scriptures testify of him. That’s true of 1 Chronicles 21 as well. Unlike his father David, our Lord Jesus Christ never sinned, yet he requested our punishment: “Let thine hand, I pray thee, O Lord my God, be on me... but not on thy people, that they should be plagued” (v. 17). Thanks be to God for granting that sacrificial request!

Christ speaks through David throughout Psalm 30, too. He is the one who faced God’s anger, the one from whom God hid his face. He is also the one whose cry God heard: “O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave” (v. 3). It is an account of his atonement and resurrection that we can exclaim, “O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee forever!” (v. 12). Sing or pray Psalter #79.

Into Thine Hand I Commit My Spirit
Read Psalm 31

Yesterday we noted instances of Christ’s voice in 1 Chronicles 21 and Psalm 30. I’m sure you heard his voice as you read Psalm 31, too, did you not? Our Lord was rejected not only by his enemies, but also by his neighbors and his brethren. On the night before his crucifixion, his disciples fled from him (v. 11). His strength was consumed, not on account of his own iniquity, but on account of the iniquity he bore for the sake of his people—that is, on account of your sin and mine (v. 10). His enemies conspired against him with lies and devised to take away his life (vv. 6, 13). When his work on earth was finished, he prayed, “Into thine hand I commit my spirit” (v. 5).

Oh, how great is God’s goodness, which he has laid up for them that fear him! How wonderful the salvation which he has wrought before the sons of men for all who trust in him! (v.19). Sing or pray Psalter #82.

For Thy Name’s Sake
Read Isaiah 48

Psalm 31:3, “For thy name’s sake lead me, and guide me,” sounds a lot like Psalm 23:3: “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” Not only does Jehovah lead us for his name’s sake, but he also blots out our transgression for his own sake (Is. 43:25). He sends chastisements to us for his name’s sake (Is. 66:5). Though our iniquities testify against us, he is faithful to us for his own name’s sake (Jer.
Repentance Means Running
Read Psalm 119:25–32

Today I received a beautiful letter from a friend. She wrote of a difficult trial in her life, and then she noted, “But I run in the way of God’s commands” (Ps. 119:32). When presented with the temptation to doubt God’s sovereignty and his goodness to her, she turned around and ran the other way. Repentance doesn’t mean that when we sin, we half-heartedly commit to “do better next time.” It means that we prayerfully owe up to our sins, we form a battle plan to follow the next time temptation confronts us, and we turn 180 degrees around and whole-heartedly run in the way of God’s commands. It’s a difficult run—a daily press, remember—but it’s also a joyful run, an eager and energetic pursuit of a life of obedience. That kind of running is possible only when the Holy Spirit enlarges the heart. He makes it free, delivers it from all hindrances to what is right, fills it with noble and holy purposes, and stimulates and animates it. “The heart is contracted…by selfishness, pride, vanity, ambition, covetousness; it is made large by charity, love, hope, benevolence” (Barnes).

Which way are you running today?
Sing or pray Psalter #324.

Repentance Is Not a Condition
Read Luke 3:1–18

What is repentance? Repentance is a change of mind: it is a change of mind that results in a change of actions. That’s why John the Baptist commanded, “Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance” (Luke 3:8). That’s why Paul preached, “That they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20). Most basically, repentance results in the action that is conversion. One who converts turns around. One who repents stops excusing his sin. He turns from it and to God.

We must be careful to not treat repentance as a condition for salvation. Though we experience God’s forgiveness in the way of repentance, repentance, like faith, it is not a work that we must do in order to be saved. Repentance is the fruit of the Holy Spirit’s work in the totally depraved sinner. It is God who graciously grants repentance unto life (Acts 5:31; 11:18). Does he convict you of your sins? “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).
Sing or pray Psalter #83.

I Will Instruct Thee
Read Psalm 32:8–11

The inspired psalmist David speaks directly to you and me in Psalm 32:8–11. Having experienced the restoration of the joy of the Lord’s salvation, he purposes to teach us God’s ways. He desires that as a result of his experience, sinners will be converted to God (Ps. 51:13). He cries, “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul” (Psalm 66:16).

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus foretold that Peter would shortly deny him. Though Peter stubbornly objected, Jesus, knowing the grief that would soon threaten to overwhelm his disciple, spoke these beautiful, comforting words: “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32).

As one who has also known the forgiving grace of God, do you share in David’s desire to teach transgressors God’s ways? From what sins have you been converted? Go, and strengthen your brethren.
Sing or pray Psalter #84.

I Will Confess My Transgressions
Read Psalm 32:1–7

If you read Psalm 32 in a chronological Bible, it would be placed near the following three chapters: 2 Samuel 11, which records David’s adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband, Uriah; 2 Samuel 12, which records God’s confrontation of unrepentant David through the prophet Nathan; and Psalm 51, which, like Psalm 32, is a penitential psalm that David penned at this time. In the first verses of Psalm 32, David recounts the anguish that he experienced when he refused to acknowledge his sin, and the great peace that he knew when he confessed his sin unto the Lord.

Do you confess your transgressions to the Lord? We’re far too prone thoughtlessly to tack the phrase “Forgive my sins” onto our prayers. Take some extra time today to consider your sins. Call to mind your more blatant sins. Remember the sins you’ve committed in your thoughts. Don’t forget the things God calls you to do that you’ve omitted, nor the respectable sins to which you’re prone. Confess these sins in prayer to God. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).
Sing or pray Psalter #82.

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I Will Confess My Transgressions
Read Psalm 32:1–7

Repentance is Not a Condition
Read Luke 3:1–18

He Spoke, and it was Done
Read Psalm 33:1–9

Several days ago I read a review of a book about the first chapters of Genesis. This book was recently released by a popular Christian publishing company. In it three authors share their opinions about the literary genre of Genesis and how they think the opening chapters of the Bible should be interpreted. Strikingly, not one of the contributors to this so-called Christian book believes that God created the universe in six literal days. We do well to heed Paul’s warning, “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith (1 Tim. 6:20–21).

God’s infallible, inspired word is one. If one chooses to in-
interpret Genesis 1 as myth, what does he do with Psalm 33? “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth...For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (vv. 6, 9).

That powerful creator is the God we serve. “Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him” (v. 8).

Sing or pray Psalter #86.

**July**

**The Counsel of the Heathen**

**Read Psalm 33:10–11**

Psalm 33:10–11 refer to two counsels. The first is the counsel of the wicked. They set themselves together, refusing to acknowledge God’s rule over them and their accountability to him (Ps. 2:3). God laughs at their counsel, for he knows that their plans will come to nothing, “He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong” (Job 5:12–13).

That’s the teaching of scripture, yet we don’t have to look far to find evidence that seems contrary, do we? Evil prevails: it seems the ungodly prosper (Ps. 73:3). “The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted” (Ps. 12:8). We must heed the admonition of Psalm 37:7–9: “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.”

Sing or pray Psalter #86.

**The Counsel of the Lord Stands Forever**

**Read Isaiah 44**

In contrast to the futile counsels of the wicked, the counsel of the Lord stands forever, “the thoughts of his heart to all generations” (Ps. 33:11). As we read in Isaiah 44, the one who makes the wisdom of the heathen futile is sovereign over everything from the forming of life in the womb to the redemption of his chosen people. He not only created, but he also decreed every detail of history. He works all things, turning even the hearts of kings, to accomplish his purpose. And what is his goal? “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ” (Eph. 1:10-12).

Sing or pray Psalter #86.

**The Blessed Nation**

**Read Galatians 3**

Psalm 33:12 reads, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.” In the Old Testament God’s chosen people were the nation of Israel. That doesn’t mean that all of the Israelites were elect: they weren’t (Rom. 9:6). Nor does it mean that God didn’t save any Gentiles in the Old Testament. Melchizedek wasn’t a Hebrew, yet “he was the priest of the most high God” (Gen 14:18). Rahab and Ruth, both Gentile women, are woven into Jesus’ genealogy. So is Bathsheba, who, if not a Hittite herself, was originally the wife of Uriah, a Hittite. But the Israelites had this advantage: “unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2). God saved the majority of the Old Testament saints from the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God made the promise of his covenant to Abraham and “his seed.” In Galatians 3 the inspired apostle Paul names Abraham’s seed: Abraham’s seed is Christ, and in Christ, “there is neither Jew nor Greek.” Men, women, and children of all races are made one in Christ. All who are Christ’s are Abraham’s seed and “heirs according to the promise.”

Sing or pray Psalter #49.

**August**

**Them That Fear Him**

**Read Psalm 33:12–22**

Yesterday we considered the truth that Christ’s bride, the church, is composed of people from all races and nations. Psalm 33 teaches that “the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy.” Every one of God’s children is precious to him. He cares for his saints who face persecution, death and famine. He provides for those of us who live in nations of material prosperity and spiritual dearth. All of his saints make this confession, “Our soul waiteth for the Lord: He is our help and our shield” (vs. 20).

Practically, this means there is no room for racism in the life of the child of God. It means we don’t esteem our Dutch neighbor higher than our Hispanic neighbor. We don’t entertain derogatory jokes about those whose skin is a different color from ours. We allow for cultural differences in worship. Indeed, we seek to learn from the example of our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. And we look forward to the day when all of the members of Christ’s body—red and yellow, black and white—will be united as one. They are precious in his sight.

Sing or pray Psalter #49.
Magnify the Lord
Read Psalm 34:1–3

David fled to Philistia because he sought refuge from one enemy—Saul—in the territory of another enemy. The Lord led David to Philistia because he would have him learn this lesson: “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man” (Ps. 118:8). David learns his lesson well. In response to his experience he pens Psalm 34, which exalts Jehovah as the savior of the righteous.

In the first three verses of Psalm 34, David employs five different synonyms to describe his adoration of God. My study Bible includes definitions of these words. We bless God when we speak well of him on account of all his benefits. We praise him when we declare his divine perfections. We make our boast in the Lord when we speak of his worth and value in the face of our own worthlessness. We magnify him when we celebrate his infinite greatness. We exalt him when we raise him above and beyond all others in our thoughts and words.

What a mighty God we serve! He is infinitely worthy of all our praise. “O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!” (v. 3).

Sing or pray Psalter #90.

O Taste and See
Read Psalm 34:4–10

I cook a lot of meals, but I’m often so preoccupied with filling plates and spoon-feeding others that I don’t even savor the food that I’ve prepared. Perhaps that’s why I’m struck by Psalm 34:8a: “O taste and see that the Lord is good.”

John Calvin makes this assessment of unbelievers in his commentary on this text: “They devour the gifts of God without relishing them.” In fact, they don’t even have a palate that’s capable of appreciating his goodness. After all, the sun that warms their face and the rain that falls on their fields are not the gifts of a loving, heavenly Father. In contrast, the righteous can taste the goodness of God. His Holy Spirit enables us to recognize his benefits and experience his presence. It’s true, we’re often also infected with the same “malady of dullness” that plagues the wicked. Our own unbelief prevents us from being satisfied with the abundance of all good things that he gives us. Daily he heaps our plates. Do you savor those gifts, or do you merely consume them to satisfy your own lusts? (James 4:3) “O taste and see that the Lord is good!”

Sing or pray Psalter #90.

Praise the Lord for His Goodness
Read Psalm 107:1–15

Pretend you’re a wife and mother. You’ve spent all afternoon cooking for your hungry family, and you set the food on the table with a sigh of relief. Every dish has turned out just right! But only a few bites into the meal, and you begin to feel disgruntled. Not only has no one thanked you for your efforts; they’re grumbling about what’s on their plates instead!

Now let’s apply that picture. Every gift that God prepares for his children and bestows upon them is good. In fact, his gifts are perfect! (James 1:17) He loads each of us with the particular spiritual and physical blessings necessary for our sanctification and salvation. Yet we are ungrateful children. Either we devour his gifts without tasting them, or we grumble about the fare that he’s given us in his grace. “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” (Psalm 107:8)

Take time to taste all of the benefits that our Father has heaped on your plate today. And then take the time to thank him for them.

Sing or pray Psalter #90.

Desire the Milk of the Word
Read 1 Peter 2:1–3

Has your mother ever served food that didn’t look very appetizing to you? Maybe instead of tasting it, you chopped it into little pieces and spread it around your plate, hoping that she wouldn’t notice. But she noticed, and then she insisted that you try a bite. Perhaps you nibbled the tiniest little bit, and to your surprise, it tasted good! Soon your plate was empty. That’s the experience of the believer with God’s word. When we spend time reading the Bible and meditating on his promises, our appetite is whetted. Not only do we clear our plates, we ask for seconds! God’s word is an endless mountain of delicious, sustaining food, and the healthy believer has a voracious appetite. When we taste his grace, our spiritual stomachs will cry for more.

When the Holy Spirit directs us in Psalm 34:8 “to taste and see that the Lord is good,” he immediately adds this promise: “Blessed is the man who trusteth in him.” That means God will never disappoint those “who seek his favor” (Calvin). “He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness” (Psalm 107:9).

Sing or pray Psalter #90.

The Spiritually Sick
Read Psalm 107:15–22

Have you ever been sick with the stomach flu? When your stomach’s upset, the mere smell of food can make you vomit. Your family may be gathered around the dinner table, enjoying a feast, while you lie in the living room on the sofa, sipping ginger ale. But not even a soda cracker sounds good to you. As bad as the stomach flu is, it’s a picture of something far more terrible. When we’re spiritually unhealthy, we have no appetite for God’s word. We daydream through our pastor’s sermons and fidget during family worship and personal devotions—who has time for that?!

Yesterday we read from 1 Peter 2. Did you notice the list of viruses that prevent one from desiring the sincere milk of the word? Malice, guile (deceit), hypocrisies, envy, and evil speaking. Psalm 107:17–18 reads, “Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death.” Sin causes one to lose his spiritual appetite. Do you hunger for God’s word?

Sing or pray Psalter #292.
How often do we stop to consider our greatest foe, the devil? God tells us over and over again in scripture to beware of this mighty enemy. We have a most timely warning to our young people found in 1 Peter 5:8 “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” Whom do you think the devil targets? The children of the God whom he hates. He targets each and every one of us daily. Do we consider how much hold we let him have when we don’t even consider the fact that he lurks, waiting to pounce at any second? It takes only one small little turning away from our Father in heaven. The devil will grab hold of that door that is opened to sin and start to pry it as far open as he is able. So sly is he that he often uses the word of God itself. He twists it just slightly so that we think that what we do is ok and agreeable with the word of God. Young people, beware of this foe!

In order for us to beware of the devil, we must know this mighty foe that we are up against. We turn to God’s word, which reveals to us exactly who we are up against. Satan, who was created by God and was made the highest commander in the angelic world, turned against the very God who created him, convincing many angels to follow him, and was cast out of heaven with a significant part of the angelic world. Until Christ accomplished his work on the cross, though, the devil was still allowed access into heaven. When Satan was finally, fully cast out, the church sang a great song of victory because their adversary was cast out fully, never to return. The heavens belong to God, but the devil still seeks to make this earth his own.

Young people, we are those who are called to represent the cause of Christ against Satan. We see how he tried to convince even Jesus Christ, our savior, to turn against God. He slyly twisted God’s word, and had he been able to be successful, it would have resulted in every one of us being destroyed. We know that he could never have been successful with Christ, but we see how yet today he uses this same ploy on us, saying he will give us the whole world and its pleasures if we will just heed him and bow down to him. We know from scripture that Satan will never win over God’s elect, but so wicked and hateful of God is he that even though he knows he will never win, yet he tries with all his might to succeed. Revelation 12 speaks of how the devil knows his time is short, and so now he turns in fury against us trying to destroy the cause of God. If we look outwardly at the circumstances of this earth, it appears to be that the devil is succeeding as the world takes his side. The apostatizing church also fights on his side against the true church. The devil often uses our own human natures as well to seek to turn us against God. He holds before us young people the allurements of this wicked world. Satan loves it when we go through the motions of being a Christian, but our hearts are not in the right place. The devil has access to our minds so that he not only shows us how “good” the world is, but whispers the lie in our ears. Our minds and hearts often dwell on all kinds of corruption. Satan’s goal is the destruction of God’s children, and he holds great sway and power because of our depraved natures.

How are we to resist this powerful enemy? If it were not for God’s saving work within us and the guideline he gives us in his word, we would give in and fully succumb to the devil’s rule. In 1 Peter 5:8 God makes known two specific ways by which we can be sure to resist this great foe of ours.

First, we are called to be sober. According to the dictionary this means negatively not to be drunk, and positively to be clearheaded. Of course being sober spiritually will be affected greatly if you are physically drunk all of the time. You will not be on your guard against Satan and thus will easily be snared by him. I want to focus more on the positive aspect though. We are to be clearheaded. This means to see things as they really are, as shown to us in scripture. We understand that what is real is in heaven and is sitting at God’s right hand. Our savior who has earned our salvation sits there ruling over the whole
world, and in time he will take us also to dwell there with him forever. We weigh this over against the lie whispered in our ears, as the devil seeks to lead us to find happiness on this earth. We see that the way the devil leads us is the wide path of ease here below, slipping ultimately down to the pit of destruction.

The other way that we resist, which is closely connected to soberness, is by being vigilant. This, according to the dictionary, means keeping careful watch for possible danger or difficulties. As young people we must be aware of what is going on around us, and not close our eyes against the realities of sin all about us, and even of the old man within us. If we think we can rest, we will be caught unawares like the five foolish virgins who were caught unaware when the husband arrived. Every moment we must be on our guard. The devil constantly looks for weakness and strikes us when we are weakest and least expecting it. He is deceitful and knows how to use our weakness in favor of his cause. Constantly we must watch, looking at the circumstances in which we are placed, making sure to be on our guard against him and his sly tactics.

In order to be able fully to resist this mighty enemy of ours by being sober and vigilant, God tells us in 1 Peter 5:9 that we must be steadfast in the faith. Faith is the root out of which soberness and vigilance grows. The devil is too smart and powerful for us, but God has given us the gift of faith, which is the bond that unites us to Christ, and by faith we will most surely win. Satan cannot do us any harm when we resist him. We rebuke him with the words of Christ. We tell the devil to go away because we belong to Christ and even though we sin and are no better than any others by nature, God sees us as righteous in Christ. He has paid for our sins and earned our deliverance. We must follow the instruction of Ephesians 6, putting on the whole armor of God to resist the devil. In this way the devil will not be able to find a weak point. Faith is victorious, and in faith we go forth as soldiers of the cross, resisting the devil all our lives long.

We have taken a moment to stop and consider this greatest foe, the devil. I encourage you young people to continue to do so. In all situations of life, be aware of this mighty enemy who stands against our God, seeking to cause us to fall away from the Lord who has saved us. Use the tools God has given to us in his word to resist this enemy. Pray to God that he will strengthen your faith that you may be sober and vigilant, and may stand strong against Satan.

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Christian Living

Come and Hear!

What is your response to good news? What happens when you receive good news? You post it on Facebook. You call your friends. You talk to your family. Good news excites you, and it should. Such news you want to spread, not hide.

What is your response to the best news? Not engagement, a baby announcement, or acceptance into a college program, but something much higher, something eternal. The best news in the world is that God’s people—sinners, miserable in their woe and darkness—are saved from their sin in Jesus Christ. The gospel is the best news in all the world.

What is your response to that news? This news ought to excite us more than any other earthly event or accomplishment. But we are sinners. Often this news receives very little response. This gospel good news does not always grip the soul as it should.

Because we know our sin and failure, we go to the light of God’s word and see how the psalmist in Psalm 66:16 responds to this good news: “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.” His inspired response is instructive for us.

The psalmist declares what God has done for his soul. What God did for his soul is outlined in verses
9–12. This man was tried like silver in the furnace of God’s affliction (v. 10). This was the proving of God that prepared him for heaven. The psalmist felt like a trapped bird or animal, for God had brought him into a net and laid heavy, nearly crushing afflictions upon him (v. 11). God caused his enemies to ride over his head, as the trampling of a horse and chariot; he traveled through fire and water (v. 12). Yet in all these afflictions, God held his soul in life, and did not allow his feet to be moved (v. 9). Not only did God hold him in life, but God brought him through the trials into a wealthy place, that is, heaven, the place of relief (v. 12).

This was God’s marvelous deliverance of the psalmist’s soul. This was not an abstract, disconnected-to-life truth that he declared, but a very personal, real truth. This is what God did for him spiritually, in the very core of his being.

Is not the psalmist’s experience yours? Have you felt the fires of God’s affliction-furnace? Have you experienced the heat of his furnace in the loss of a good friendship—the betrayal of a life-long friend? Have tears streamed down your face as you stood in the receiving line at a funeral home, with a family member lying in a casket only feet away? Have you been persecuted, facing the mockery and ridicule of the world? When these fiery trials descended upon you, perhaps you felt like an animal in a trap, unable to break free. Perhaps the pressure of these burdens was a weight almost unbearable to carry.

Yet, this is the good news: no matter what fire you pass through, God holds your feet so that they do not move. He holds your soul in life, and he will bring you through these hardships to a place of relief—heavenly glory. Though you suffer in this life, in Jesus Christ you have salvation from sin. Though you undergo manifold trials here below, God loves you in Christ, and he will bring you home to be with him. This is good news. This is the best news.

What will you do with this news?

In response to this good news, the psalmist says, “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.” He beckons over, as if with the wave of a hand, those who are standing around him. He tells them to come near to him, for he must tell them the matter that is weighing upon his soul. He must communicate to them the joy of his heart. The psalmist will declare with his mouth what God has done for his soul.

This, then, is to be your response to God’s work for you and in you: declare it to others! Beckon to others around you to come near and hear what you have to say.

The ones whom you beckon are those who fear God. The text calls you to declare or witness to fellow Christians what God has done for your soul—those you meet and talk to at school, in church, in Bible society. When we say the word witnessing, we usually think of our missionaries in foreign lands, or our duty toward unbelievers in the world. But you must witness of your salvation also to those who fear God. This requires, young people, that you fellowship with and keep good, Christian friends. How will you live in obedience to Psalm 66:16 if you commune with the young people of the world?

The text tells you to declare to others of like faith what God has done for you. Declaring has to do with knowledge—being able to recount or express truth in a logical way. If you are to tell others about what God has done for you, then you must be able to communicate that. If you are zealous for the truth, but your zeal has no content, your witness is almost useless. How do you grow in the knowledge of God’s work and salvation? Diligent preparation for catechism is a must. Faithful church attendance is fundamental. Christian schools, and the instruction given in them, is absolutely key. God uses these means to build you up in the knowledge necessary to witness effectively to others of like faith. Do you value these means?

But declaring also involves zeal. This declaration of what God has done for your soul is not made with a long face, nor is it said in a whisper. But communicating to others what God has done for your soul is a truth that expresses itself on the face—excitement! It is a truth that the voice proclaims, loudly and with conviction! You must be as a pot of boiling water on the stove, ready to spill over! If you know the truth, but do not proclaim it with zeal, your witness will be ineffective.

Is this your zealous declaration after the worship service as you stand in the narthex? Is this mine? We have just heard the gospel of the kingdom preached…but do we talk about sports, hunting, and work instead? Is this our heartfelt witness at Young People’s Society? We have the grand opportunity to discuss God’s word…but do we sit without a word to say, eager to get home for lunch more than anything? You and I must work at this witness. We are witnessing, but we must always be growing in it.
You must know that Satan, the world, and your sinful flesh will seek to oppose you at every point, so that you do not carry out this witness to others of like faith. The obstacles are at least three.

One obstacle is embarrassment. Are you embarrassed to declare what God has done for your soul? This is certainly a problem that people of all ages experience, but it is more acute in the teenage years. As a student in high school, do you want to share with others what God has done for you? It is easy to have doctrinal debate—but doctrinal debate is not what Psalm 66:16 has in mind. Are you ready, without embarrassment, to declare to others what God has done for your soul?

Another hindrance to this activity of declaring has to do with the ones to whom you witness. “Why must I witness to others in the church? They already know for themselves what God has done. Witnessing to unbelievers? That I can understand. But witnessing to believers? Why must I do that?” Nevertheless, Psalm 66:16 is clear: you ought to find it your delight to tell others what God has done for your soul!

Furthermore, social media makes it increasingly difficult to talk about important matters face to face. Let us not allow social media to take away from our responsibility to witness, face to face, what God has done for us. Do not let your witness hide behind screens. Make this declaration personal, as the psalmist’s witness was personal.

But, to make this all concrete, one more question is necessary: what occasions lend themselves to such a witness?

This declaration can be made at times of trial. When you visit a loved one or a fellow church member in the hospital, this is a time for spiritual reflection and conversation about God’s goodness. Visit the widows and widowers in your congregation, and drop by the local rest home where the elderly saints live; you will have good opportunity to hear the testimony of God’s people—how God has been faithful to them in all the periods of their life. Use visitation at the funeral home—whether you stand in the receiving line, or are the one visiting—to talk about God’s faithfulness and grace.

This witness of what God has done for your soul can be made among your friends. You might choose to set aside Sunday nights, when there is opportunity, to discuss the sermon, or to sing psalms. In the summer months when church societies have stopped for a time, consider starting a Bible study with your friends, taking one night each week to discuss the word and declare to others what God has done for your soul.

Be a witness in your writing. Write in Beacon Lights. Write for the Young Calvinists blog. Write for your church newsletter.

God will bless that kind of witness.

What is your response to the best news?

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The slothful man saith,
There is a lion in the way;
a lion is in the streets.
As the door turneth upon his hinges,
So doth the slothful upon his bed.
The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom;
it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth.

Proverbs 26:13–15
As much as the people of God would have liked to have lived forever under a godly king who brought earthly peace and prosperity to the nation, such life was still corrupted with sin and death. The life that the church had enjoyed under King David and now under Solomon was only a taste of something far better that God had in store for her. The king under whom they experienced peace was only a picture of the Prince of Peace who was yet to come, and who would conquer the real enemy, Satan. It is a beautiful and wonderful picture that the people of God will cherish and cling to as they wait for Christ to come in person.

The coming years before the glory of Christ shines forth will be dark and frightening for the church, and God has one more picture to give to his people to sustain them through this time: the temple. The temple is a picture of the church herself in covenant fellowship with her God. God will use King Solomon to build this temple and decorate it to express the great glory and beauty of this reality of God with his covenant people. When this temple is complete, the Old Testament church will have everything she needs to await the coming of Christ and recognize him when he comes. She has three precious gifts to carry her through the painful and frightening walk deep into the coming dark valley: 1) the promise of the seed who would crush the head of the serpent to destroy the power of sin (Genesis 3:15); 2) the glorious picture of Christ as prophet, priest, and king; and 3) the beautiful picture of the church fellowshipping with God in the temple. The next 500 years or so will be a painful and frightening walk deep into this dark valley. During the last 400 years even the speaking of God through prophets goes silent and the church is left only with that promise of the gospel, the picture of Christ, and the picture of the church.

The thirty-first century begins midway through the glorious reign of Solomon. Two outstanding events that take place during this period are the building of the temple and the apostasy of ten northern tribes who forsake the picture and the promise of Christ when they say, “What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse” (1 Kings 12:16). It spans the reigns of eight kings and queen Jezebel, and ends midway through the reign of king Jehoshaphat when he seeks peace and fellowship with the wicked king Ahab, who was ruling the ten apostate tribes.

By the time the thirty-first century began, Solomon was known far and wide for his wisdom and the glory of his kingdom. The people were happy and at peace. “And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon” (1 Kings 4:25). As a picture of Christ nourishing his people with truth and wisdom, Solomon “spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree
that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom” (1 Kings 4:32–34). During this peaceful time Solomon set in motion the great desire of his father David, to build a temple unto Jehovah God who had revealed to the church his plan of salvation from the bondage of sin in Christ.

David had devoted the latter part of his reign to the gathering of materials for the building of this temple. The design of this temple did not come from the wisdom of man, but came from God himself who made David “understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern” (1 Chron 28:19). God inspired David to record every detail, from the room dimensions to the size of the court and details of the tools used by the priests, and David gave these to Solomon along with all the gold and silver needed. Now Solomon organized the project and had the neighboring king Hiram supply timber and craftsmanship. Everything was well organized, and no detail was overlooked in this important work. “And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building” (1 Kings 6:7).

Minute details and dimensions were important for the earthly temple, and they were also important for the spiritual temple that was measured in the visions of Zechariah 2, Ezekiel 40–42, and Revelation 11 and 21. The earthly temple was a picture of the wonder of God dwelling in covenant fellowship with each and every child of God and living together as members of the body of Christ. Every covenant child is important, and not one will be lost or forgotten. The measuring and attention to detail is to show the great value, the glorious extent and prosperity of what is being measured.

When the temple was finished, Solomon continued with building projects. He built the king’s house, a navy to explore the world and bring back treasures from afar, and cities for defense and storage for all the wealth that poured into the kingdom. As a picture of the church, the only kingdom of God under the rule of Christ, Solomon’s kingdom exceeds every earthly kingdom. “So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom. And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year” (1 Kings 10:23–25). God will gather his people from every nation of the earth, and every member of the body of Christ will give of himself or herself to serve. For anyone who is really able to see the blessedness of life within the body of Christ, the queen of Sheba says it all when she says “Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the L ORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the L ORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice” (1 Kings 10:8–9)

The picture is indeed beautiful, but it is limited by the fact that it is but a picture.

But...

“But King Solomon loved many strange women” (1 Kings 11:1).

After describing the beauty and glory of the picture in chapter 10, chapter 11 begins with the very small but significant word But. This word signals a contrast, not simply between the good in Solomon with the bad, but rather between the weakness and limitation of the picture of Christ with Christ himself. Solomon was a seed of the woman, but he was not the promised seed who would crush the head of the serpent. Solomon had great wealth and wisdom, but these things could not touch the power of sin. Ironically, for the man who had everything his heart could desire, sin raised its ugly head in Solomon in the form of covetousness, “which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). We read simply “But king Solomon loved many strange women.” This desire for something God had forbidden him opened the floodgates to further idolatry and sin, which swept Solomon farther and farther from the experience of covenant fellowship with God. The church must not live in the picture, but must look forward to the reality of life with God in Christ. It was time for the picture to fade.

Even though Solomon floundered in his sins and their consequences, God assured him that he would be faithful to his promises. The kingdom would be rent in two, but the line of David would continue until the promised King, who would be able to destroy the power of sin, was born (1 Kings 11:13). God now records the history and the means he used to
erase the picture so that his church would increasingly direct their attention to the reality of the coming Savior. We read that it was Jehovah who stirred up adversaries against Solomon (1 Kings 11:14, 23). These adversaries began as individual men who gradually gathered likeminded men around them and waited for the right opportunity to strike and begin to erode and dismantle the glorious picture of Christ, his wisdom, his spiritual riches, and his glory.

Shortly after Solomon’s death, Jeroboam made his move, and God used him to drive away the majority of the nation whose heart was not looking ahead to Christ, but left a small remnant with the house of David. God made it clear to Jeroboam that all this history was under the sovereign control of God and served his purposes in Christ. The majority in Israel under the rule of Jeroboam quickly followed his leadership into a false and apostate worship of Jehovah through Jeroboam’s altar and an image of a calf.

The temple in Jerusalem continued to attract the godly in Israel, and a steady trickle of people fleeing the apostasy of Israel came to Judah and joined the people of God in their worship and looking forward to the promised Savior. But even in Judah apostasy was taking hold, and the kings did not all serve their role well as a picture of Christ fighting against sin. Rehoboam as the king did nothing to fight against the sinful developments of idolatry and homosexuality in Judah (1 Kings 14:23–24). Rehoboam’s son Abijam was not much better, “Nevertheless for David’s sake did the LORD his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem” (1 Kings 15:4). King Asa did much as a godly king to fight against the sins of idolatry and homosexuality that had flourished under Rehoboam, but his power was limited to a superficial suppression of these sins.

While God preserved his church in Judah, a succession of wicked kings in Israel after Jeroboam drove the nation of Israel deeper into apostasy and farther from the promised salvation in Christ. In a number of places, we read that there was continual war between the house of Israel and the house of Judah. This warfare served to insulate the church from the influence of apostate Israel until King Jehoshaphat foolishly “made peace with the king of Israel” (1 Kings 22:44 ), so that they could unite their forces against Syria. The battle ended with the death of wicked King Ahab in Israel, and brought the apostate church dangerously close to the church, leaving her vulnerable to the attempts of wicked Athaliah to destroy the line of David and the promised Christ. This history, however, belongs to the next hundred year segment.

Before we close with this hundred year span of history, I want to reflect a bit on the significance of the temple that had been built. The temple as a symbol of God’s dwelling with his people in covenant fellowship was the only physical symbol that continued until the promised Savior came and performed his saving work. Even though the nation of Israel came to an end with their captivity, and the ark of the covenant and much of the furnishings were lost forever, God commanded that the temple be rebuilt by those who were allowed to return to Jerusalem under Cyrus and Darius. All the other elements of Israel’s life as a nation were means to the end of life eternal with God, so that picture of life with God would stand as a beacon of light and hope in an increasingly dark nation. It served this role until Jesus himself made clear that he is the eternal temple when he said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). At that point there was no longer a need for an earthly temple.

God gives the temple a great deal of attention in the books of the prophets, but the attention is shifted to something far more glorious than a physical building. The prophet Ezekiel was taken in a vision from Babylon back to the destroyed temple to measure every detail of the temple (Ezek. 40–48): “And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever,” (Ezek. 43:7). After taking detailed measurements to underscore the great significance of God’s dwelling with his people, we read, “It was round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there” (48:35). Time shifts to eternity, and we read in Joel, “But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the LORD dwelleth in Zion.” (Joel 3:20–21) Jeremiah looks forward to the saving work of delivering his people from the bondage of sin and the gathering of the nations into one body at the throne of Jehovah. We read, “And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD:
neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart” (Jer. 3:16–17).

Zechariah uses language to describe the new and heavenly Jerusalem as “Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her. … And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee,” (Zech. 2:4–5, 11). The spiritual reality is made clear in Christ, of whom we learn, “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb. 9:11–12). God’s full and complete revelation of the significance of the temple comes in the book of Revelation: “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall be their God” (Rev. 21:3). Finally we have no more need even of the picture of the temple in heaven: “And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it” (Rev 21:22).

The temple that had been rebuilt by the returned captives was enlarged by Herod the Great shortly before Jesus was born, but finally destroyed completely in AD 70 under the leadership of the Roman general Titus. Since the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in the seventh century, the temple site has been for some 1300 years under the Muslim Dome of the Rock. This false religion may imagine that having a mosque over the site of the temple of Jehovah God is significant, but they, as well as Christians who are offended by Muslim control of this site, fail to see that the true and eternal temple is the body of Christ, a temple of living stones, each and every elect child of God with Christ as the head. With Christ at the right hand of God, the people of God have no more interest in the temple Solomon built other than as a glorious picture of the blessed covenant fellowship the church begins to enjoy now.

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

Church News

Melinda Bleyenberg

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:

Graci Belle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan & Michelle Haak—Crete, IL
Jenna Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Phillip & Kristin Kleyn—First, MI
Haylee Ann Michelle Szendre, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Emily Bomers—Georgetown, MI
Jedidiah James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Bill & Joanna Leep—Grace, MI
Melanie Renae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Rebecca Laning—Loveland, CO
Anna Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kenton & Lisa Kalsbeek—Providence, MI
Jessalyn Ruth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. John & Sherry Pipe—Providence, MI
Brooklyn Jean, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Travis & Kayla Feenstra—Redlands, CA
Reid Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Casey & Kristina Meelker—Redlands, CA


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:

Ben Andringa—Crete, IL
Brent Newhof—First, MI
Katie Bleyenburg, Shelby Lubbers, Mitchell Lubbers, Chelsea Kuyers, Amber Van Overloop, and Jori Wieringa—Georgetown, MI
Mason Compagner—Grace, MI
Mitchell Coppell—Grace, MI
Matthew Meulenberg—Grace, MI

MARRIAGES

“For this God is our God forever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14

Mr. Glen Regnerus and Miss Elizabeth Birkett—Crete, IL
Mr. Andy Talsma and Miss Kristin Mol—Faith, MI
Mr. Kyle Noorman and Miss Francesca TenHof—Faith, MI
Mr. Alex Overbeek & Miss Kendra Lubbers—Georgetown, MI
The Tablelands

Early in the spring, before the shepherd led his flocks from their lowlands pastures and before their long trek through the dark valley, the shepherd walked the path up the valley by himself.

All alone, the shepherd slowly walked over every inch of ground. Every so often, he stooped and pulled out a plant that was poisonous to his sheep. It was back-breaking and foot-aching work, but the shepherd willingly walked the pasture to clear the way for his sheep.

When he had searched the entire pasture for poisonous plants, he filled in the holes made by rodents and snakes. A sheep could break its leg if it stepped in one of these holes. It was back-breaking and hand-aching work, but the shepherd willingly hauled the dirt and filled the holes to clear the way for his sheep.

When all the holes were filled, he got rid of all the poisonous snakes and chased away the wolves that lurked in the mountains waiting to eat the sheep. It was back-breaking and shoulder-aching work, but the shepherd willingly faced the dangers to clear the way for his sheep.

When the pasture in the tablelands was prepared, the shepherd led his sheep through the dark valley into the mountains. In the tablelands he had prepared, the sheep were safe and satisfied.

Questions to think about
1. Read Psalm 23:5 and Hebrews 4:15–16; 12:1–3 by yourself or with your parents. How did Christ prepare the way before us?
2. Which sacrament is the sign and seal of Christ’s sacrificial work in preparing the way before us?

Find the Words in the Crossword Puzzle

Grass  Mountain
Pasture  Plant
Poisonous  Prepare
Sheep  Shepherd
Snakes  Table
Wolves

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
August 10-14, 2015

Michindoh Conference Center
Hosted by Southeast PRC
www.prcconvention.com
www.facebook.com/pryprc2015

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