I’m Scared

I’m scared.

I know that the parents and grandparents of Protestant Reformed young people read Beacon Lights. The magazine is aimed at young people, but many others read it.

For all of you who read, I am scared.

But especially for you, young people, I am scared.

Maybe the reader of any age will think that it is inappropriate for me to write an article that scares our young people. I disagree. Let me be clear: It is exactly my intent to scare my readers. In the words of Paul (Gal. 4:11), “I am afraid [for] you.” I’m so scared that I have disrupted the normal publication schedule of Beacon Lights. To insure the timely receipt of our magazine, we adhere quite rigidly to a publication schedule. In this instance, however, I have stretched the schedule by postponing the next article in my ongoing series of editorials regarding strangers and sojourners to make room for this article.

I have done this because I am scared. And I don’t scare easily. As the colloquial saying goes, “This is not my first rodeo.” I have observed six decades of history, and not much surprises me anymore.

So what am I talking about? Why am I alarmed?

On Friday, June 26, the Supreme Court of the United States handed down a 5–4 decision legalizing same sex marriage in all fifty states of the union. This means that the marriage of two people of the same gender has the force of law throughout the
nation. Many legal experts and almost all politically conservative people, along with most evangelical churches, believe that the court made law rather than interpreting it, as is their responsibility. No doubt the legal battle will continue into the future. But none of this really matters. The court has spoken.

This decision is the culmination of a long battle over same sex marriages. Those in favor of it based their argument largely on equal treatment under the law. Those against it insisted that marriage is between a man and a woman, not between man and man and between woman and woman. The battle has been fought for a long time on the state level. Some passed laws allowing same sex marriages, while others passed legislation forbidding it. The difference of opinion on this subject was reflected in the division among the various states. Those in favor of same sex marriage unrelentingly pressed their agenda in the state legislatures, in the state courts, in the governors’ offices, and finally in the Supreme Court, all with the aid and encouragement of liberal churches. To his everlasting discredit, we have been burdened with a wicked president who has consistently supported the LGBT agenda, which was a bit like throwing gas on a fire. Although the gays are statistically a small minority in this country, they made a lot of noise and used the courts to further their agenda.

And now they have won the day.

June 26 was a bad day for America. And it was a dark day for all Bible-believing people.

But all of this you already know, young people, if you have paid the least attention to radio, television, and social media.

The situation described above is not unique to the United States. The same battle has been or is being fought in other countries.

Recently the Republic of Ireland (ROI) voted by a margin of 62% to 38% to legalize same sex marriage (I am indebted to Rev. Martyn McGeown for some of this information). The ROI legalized same sex marriage not by judicial fiat, as did the U. S., but by a referendum of the population. We need to remember that Ireland is divided into Northern Ireland (NI), which is predominantly Protestant and still somewhat conservative, and the ROI, which is heavily Roman Catholic. Covenant Protestant Reformed Church, with Rev. Angus Stewart as pastor, is in NI, while Limerick Reformed Fellowship, under the leadership of Rev. McGeown, is located in the ROI. It is the ROI that voted in favor of same sex marriage. Rev. McGeown comments, “The people of Ireland chose to accept same sex marriage by a majority vote. It was not imposed on them by judges. That makes Ireland’s guilt very terrible. Ireland is the first country in the world to do this.”

Last summer, after attending the British Reformed Fellowship conference in Scotland, my wife Ruthellen and I went to Amsterdam for a couple of days before visiting other parts of Europe. When we exited the train station in downtown Amsterdam late at night, we unwittingly walked smack into a gay pride celebration. The huge plaza and the entire downtown streets were absolutely crammed with LGBTs. To say that we were uncomfortable would be an understatement. We were incredulous as we wandered the streets looking for our hotel. And to think this was the land of our Reformed ancestors!

However, the question that confronts you, young people, is not what has happened or what is happening, but what will happen. This is why I am frightened for you. Let’s face the facts: your parents and grandparents have already lived much or most of their lives. This does not mean that they can ignore the matter of same sex marriage. They too must deal with this issue in the present, if for no other reason than that they must instruct you in the truth and encourage you to walk in it. But you are just beginning your young lives, and you will have to face the issue in the future.

Why is same sex marriage such an important issue? Why is it not just a matter of personal choice? Why is it not a question of equality under the law? Because this is not the Bible’s teaching. We must let the scriptures speak to this. Many teachings of scripture could be brought forward, but I call attention to two.

The first is the creation ordinance. According to Genesis 1:27, God created people as male and female, which tells us that God’s intention was not to create people male and male or female and female, but as male and female. Genesis 2:21–24 records the creation of the woman out of the man; in verses 23–24 we read, “And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they two shall be one flesh.” These verses teach clearly that marriage is between a man and a woman:
woman and wife are the same.

The second is Romans 1:18–32. In verse 18 Paul teaches that “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [suppress] the truth in unrighteousness.” He teaches that their unbelief is deliberate, for even from the creation they know God’s eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse (vv. 19–22). They deliberately change the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things, changing the truth of God into a lie and worshipping the creature instead of the Creator (vv. 23, 25). Because they do so, God gives them up to vile affections, so that even their women change the natural use into that which is against nature, and the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burn in their lust one toward another, working that which is unseemly (vv. 26–27). Therefore God gives them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient (v. 28).

Taken together, these two scripture passages teach that marriage between a man and a woman is an integral part of God’s creation ordinance. Homosexuality is a rejection of that basic, fundamental truth. According to Romans 1, homosexuality is the ultimate manifestation of reprobate man’s depravity. When an individual—or in this case, an entire nation—permits, legalizes, and encourages this sin, we know that we are living in the end times.

We must understand all of this in the context of God’s holiness. That God is holy means that he is perfect and pure; there is no sin or defilement in him. Because he is perfect, he is consecrated to himself. That God is holy also means that he demands that man must be holy as he is holy (1 Pet. 1:16); he must devote himself to the service of God by perfectly obeying God’s commandments. When man violates God’s will for him, God’s holiness reacts against him in his wrath, and his wrath is manifest as his punishment of man’s sin.

This means that there will be consequences of this decision. God does not wink at or ignore sin. When God’s holiness is offended, as it surely is in this instance, his burning wrath is inevitable. The exact form it will take we cannot know. Precisely when it will happen we cannot know. But happen it will. God’s judgment on America is sure. God’s judgment on the false church that has supported and encouraged the gay agenda is also sure. And God’s judgment will also be on those who rejoice over this decision, as did an editorial in the Grand Rapids Press: “The LGBT community and its supporters should enjoy and celebrate this moment. It is the culmination of a hard-fought battle, and one of the most significant wins for human rights.”

What open and unapologetic wickedness!

Another consequence of this decision will likely be a law against what is called “hate speech.” This is only common sense. If same sex marriage is the law of the land, it will not be long before Americans are forbidden to speak against equal rights for LGBTs. Canada, among other countries, already has such a law on the books. This law includes any speech, gestures, or conduct, writing, or display that is forbidden because it may incite violence or prejudicial action against a protected individual or group. Just think of the possible consequences of such a law. I could be in trouble for writing this editorial. Ministers could be forbidden to preach the truth of the scriptures regarding same sex marriage and homosexuality in general. You young people could be prohibited from witnessing against this wickedness. We as Reformed Christians must discriminate against all forms of homosexuality in our words and actions because this is exactly what God does and what he requires of us. Yet the civil authorities have or will have the ability to forbid us from opposing this wickedness and to inflict punishment on those who violate this law.

Do you now begin to see why I am scared?

I am afraid that it will not be long before you young people will be confronted with a choice: either keep your mouths shut or face persecution.

What will you do?

By God’s grace and the power of faith I urge you never to compromise, but to stand fast for the truth of the scriptures in the face of the evil that is abroad in the land. There will be consequences, but we rest in the assurance that God will save his church to the very end. In that assurance we go forward, living as strangers and sojourners in this world, always looking toward the salvation that is ours when Christ returns.

Even now we can hear his footsteps.
Interview with Lois Kregel
Part 2

Mark H. Hoeksema: Did you take other trips?
Lois Kregel: Yes. I don’t know what year it was. It might have been 1936 that everything suddenly caught up with my dad. I didn’t notice it, but my mother did immediately. We had communion on a Sunday morning, and he suddenly had a spell of nerves. I didn’t know what was happening. Normally, he would come home from church and he would sit at the old pump organ and he would play. He would love to play with his very short, stubby fingers on that pump organ. But that Sunday he didn’t do that. It was very quiet in our house. Suddenly he had a fear that he wasn’t going to get through it. That fear stayed with him. It was probably a combination of the tremendous load of work that he did on almost no sleep, and he just had a physical break-down. He took six weeks’ vacation that year. That’s the first year we went to Maine. He didn’t know where he was going, but we all piled in the car, and we went out to Portland, Maine and went to Saco and Biddeford. Then we took a little road that headed for the ocean. He thought that the ocean would be his cure. We headed for the ocean. We finally found a huge ramshackle cottage that was run by Christian Science ladies who were unmarried sisters. We knew it by all the literature we found in the house. We stayed there in that big house. It had a wood stove, on which my mother cooked. She did not enjoy going to Maine, but his therapy was the ocean. He would get up early every morning and swim. It was cold. Maine is cold and the water is like ice. He met a priest there. Finally that priest took the temperature of the water. It was 45. Dad had been in it for a good hour—swimming way out to islands where there were seals around him. No fear at all of the water. He felt better, but he never really got over the fear of getting on the pulpit until much later—after he had his stroke. Otherwise, whenever he had to read a form—not when he preached—he could preach and never take notes up there with him at all—but when he had to read one of the forms, either for baptism or for communion where you don’t have to think much about it, then he got thinking about himself instead of what he was reading. He would try to read with lots of emphasis, but nothing worked. He always retained that little fear. He went on to the pulpit anyway. But every year for awhile we went to Maine—every summer for several years.

MHH: What do you think he was afraid of?
LK: It was just an attack of nerves. He was afraid that he was going to run out of breath before he could get to the end of the form. And that’s what he did. When you’re afraid of something, then it happens. That’s nerves.

MHH: Like a self-fulfilling prophecy?
LK: Oh, I don’t know. What are nerves? You know, a lot of ministers have butterflies. But he never had them before. Stage-fright. Once it happened, then you knew that it was going to happen again.

MHH: And he didn’t trust himself.
LK: No, no. He always feared that it would happen again. Until he got into his sermon. Then he would forget himself. But reading a form, that was always difficult for him to do. So, anyway, that’s when we went to Maine. One day when he was much older, and after he had his stroke, I said to him, “Do you ever have that fear yet?” He said, “You know what? I’m too old to be nervous.” That was his reply.

MHH: Really.
LK: Yes. He went to the doctor. He tried everything. He didn’t want to take drugs, didn’t want to take anything like that. He did go to the doctor, but there was no help there.

MHH: Moving forward in time a little bit, into the 1940s, and particularly in the context of the history of 1953, what events stand out in your mind? What can you tell me about the decade of the 40s in terms of your recollection of ecclesiastical events?
LK: One thing that I think was gradually happening was that there began to be factions in the congregation. A lot of it was over the preaching. There were people who did not like, for example, his sermons on Romans. It was too doctrinal. But that didn’t matter to Dad. He went on and did it anyway because he thought it had to be preached on. He would talk about how practical doctrine was. But those little rumbles began to be known so that he wasn’t quite on the pedestal that he had been on with everybody before. He would hear it sometimes in consistory. People would complain to elders that the sermons were too deep. They would like lighter sermons. Not everybody. Not by any means the majority at that time, but you would begin to hear it.

Then the workload became heavy. And I don’t know exactly when it was that Rev. Rich Veldman came to be our first “second” pastor. So you had two ministers preaching. Rev. Veldman was a pretty good preacher, but he wasn’t always as deep as Dad was, and that was fine. But pretty soon you began to have that feeling, “I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos.” Both were OK, but, I like this one and you like that one. And that began to grow.

Pretty soon Rich took the call to Southeast. Then First Church called Rev. DeWolf, and that increased the factions. There were people who were friends of Rev. DeWolf. They wanted to get Dad out of the parsonage. They had it all arranged that he was going to go to the house on the corner of Bates and Fuller. My dad was adamant. He had everything in his study. He was not about to move, and there were some in consistory who absolutely were against it. But they worked on that quite a bit because they wanted DeWolf to be in the big house. They wanted Rev. DeWolf to be “head-honcho.” All those things went on. Then Dad had his stroke.

MHH: Which was when?

LK: 1947. We were married in 1947, and we stayed in the parsonage to take care of his garden while he was gone. He went to California with my sister and her husband. They got as far as Sioux Falls, and he had a massive stroke. He couldn’t speak, so he was pretty vulnerable. Many of the preachers from the West would come and visit him; notably Rev. Vos came every day just to be a comfort to the family—cheer them up a little bit and do this and do that and see my dad, who couldn’t speak. But when Cammenga came, Dad couldn’t answer him. I remember my mother was very, very angry because instead of encouraging him to get better, he kept saying, “Don’t worry, we’ll take over, we’ll take over.” That was the attitude he had, which my dad couldn’t answer, but which upset him mightily, as you can imagine. The feeling was there also because of their establishing the paper Church News, which kind of took over as the Western paper. Many people simply started to get that instead of the Standard Bearer, and that was a bone of contention.

MHH: Was that meant to be a competitor to the Standard Bearer?

LK: Who knows? It wasn’t the same kind of material at all. It was supposed to be news, but it became much more than that. In fact, it became the Concordia. That is when Rev. Petter first wrote about conditions [in the covenant] in the Concordia, and that was all about the same time that Dr. [Klaas] Schilder stayed at our house and had many talks with my dad. There were many conferences in the house. In the morning the air would still be blue with cigar smoke (laughter). All those things went on. But that happened before the stroke. Afterwards, there were these underhanded dealings of Kok and DeJong going to the Netherlands and saying that our churches in general didn’t go along with my dad’s theory of covenant theology. All of that went on in the 40s. It was a time of mighty unrest, and sides were taken.

Also Adams Street School was being started. There were many of that same group who didn’t want to go along with the school. They wanted us to get more representation in the local Christian schools. They didn’t see the positive side of having your own covenant education at all. They just thought we were critical of the existing—that was good enough. So we had those factions.

The same thing carried over into women’s groups. The society that became the Mothers’ Club was started before Adams was even organized. Even then there were people who didn’t want to belong to the existing societies any more, and they formed a “Eunice” society.

So, there were just different factions and undercurrents going on all through the 40s. And we could sense it in the house.

MHH: So things were not altogether smooth.

LK: Things were not smooth in the 40s. They were not.

There is one thing I omitted, by the way, from the depression era: the schools got all of our sup-
People with difficulty paying their tuition got all their support. We had an organization called the “Christian School Benevolent Association” which, after things got better, was not necessary any more. But they tried to raise money by lectures. There were many lectures then. Dad usually was the lecturer because it was from our congregation—on various topics about education and things like that. And then there would be a collection. The whole idea was to help the people who couldn’t make it to send their children to the Christian school.

One of those lectures I remember, because we teased Dad unmercifully when he came home. It was on “Order in the Home.” And when he came home, we kids plotted to have total disorder. So when he walked into the living room one was sitting with his feet over the back of the chair and another—total evidence of no order at all (laughter). He wasn’t too pleased with that (laughter).

But at the same time, he probably couldn’t throw a lot of stones, because rumor has it that he was occasionally an instigator of trouble.

One of our “family fun” things was that he always devoted time after supper to some whomping around with the kids. My brothers would try to wrestle him to the floor. No matter how hard they tried, they never succeeded. He would simply take one hand and throw them off—and the other hand and throw them off.

Another favorite game (you probably heard of it): Throw the ball at the circle. I had more broken windows…. The circle was the back of the house. It was just a design in the brick about two feet across in the peak of the attic, and my bedroom windows were just below that. They would stand on the ground and throw the ball up and see if they could get it somewhere inside of that circle. And they would keep track. We didn’t have a lot of toys, but we had a lot of fun. It was something we often played.

His relaxation was his garden. He had flowers. During the war, he went right along with the victory garden. He had a victory garden and raised all kinds of vegetables. That was his recreation.

And going to the beach. By Saturday afternoon, he would be ready to go to the beach. In the summer, when he took vacation after we were gone [from the home as adults], they would get the rottenest cabins you could imagine when there were so many good ones available. But they would stay in these little cabins with a gas plate for cooking and that was good enough. Then they’d go to the beach. My mother didn’t care about it, but she took her knitting.

MHH: Returning a little bit to the late 40’s and into the 50’s, what are your recollections of events surrounding 1953?

LK: Terrible tension. You could feel it when you went to church. You could just feel it.

MHH: And by that time you were certainly old enough to understand the issues involved in it. What are your recollections, other than the tension, of some of the events at the time of the division in the churches?

LK: By the way, Rev. Hanko was there. We had two ministers. He was there during 53.

MHH: That was Rev. C. [Cornelius] Hanko, then?

LK: C. Hanko. Oh, yes. He lived through all that. He was a great comfort, he really was. In fact, he had stomach ulcers, and he had operations for them. He was always skinny as a rail. But half of his trouble was that he was always in the middle of trouble—amid the factions.

He led our Mr. and Mrs. Society during those days, and the factions were so obvious there—the children of the people that were the “DeWolfites.” We were the first Mr. and Mrs. Society to be in First Church—we started it, actually. They would have so many barbed questions, and they would always bring up the subject of conditions. Rev. Hanko would try patiently to explain that it was not a condition, that these were admonitions, they were efficacious. Everything fell on deaf ears. Almost everyone’s mind was already made up.

MHH: So, in a certain sense, the division, the actually division in 1953 was, perhaps, not a big surprise to many?

LK: No. That wasn’t a surprise. It was going on for so long already.

MHH: Did you participate in any of the events, or are there certain things that stand out, incidents or anything that stands out in your mind at that time?

LK: Oh, I remember “Black June 1,” by the way. That was right after the split had happened in the consistory. It was our church picnic held at Dutton...
Park. We debated: should we go or should we not go? We weren’t looking forward to going at all. It was very obvious that there were two groups in Dutton Park. One group was not at all having anything to do with the other group. So it was a very tense, tense church picnic. Infamous June 1.

MHH: How would you describe the personal consequences of the division in the churches?

LK: Well, actually it seemed like a cleansing. Personally, we would wind up on company with friends we had and always arguing till you were sick of it. Afterwards we didn’t have anything to do with them anymore. But in general most of our friends after that were older than we. Before that, our friends were our own age. That was the age group that was missing from the new organized group.

MHH: So most of the younger generation, if I may call it that, did not stay with the Protestant Reformed Churches?

LK: No, very few that were our age, and we were in our thirties. We had started the first Mr. and Mrs.

MHH: So there were personal consequences in the sense that there were a lot of friendships that dissolved on account of this?

LK: Oh, yes. You say they’re not going to. But that’s not the way life goes. You’re not going to the same places; you’re not going to the same meetings; you don’t have the same things to talk about anymore; you talk about church things, but immediately there is disagreement.

MHH: What were the effects on your father?

LK: I think, in a way, disillusionment. My father was very naïve when it came to people. He never realized what was really going on as far as this or that person was concerned. He had the stroke already, of course, and that had also weakened his mental capacity to fight these things, I think. Not that he couldn’t think straight, but the emotional part of it is what gets weaker when you have a stroke. Once I was ready to leave his house (we often would just stop in—kind of for comfort). I stood in the little hall in front of his house, and he said, “I’m ready to quit.” I said, “Dad, you can’t quit, because there’s still work to do. You mayn’t quit. It’s wrong of you to say that.” I talked rather severely to him (my dad!). But he listened. It was hard on my mother. My mother always had to deal with his sadness after that.

MHH: Do you think he was surprised that there was a personal aspect as well as a doctrinal aspect? He understood the doctrinal aspect and he was surprised at the personal aspect?

LK: I think so, because he was very naïve when it came to people—always naïve. He really had no idea. That’s why he could antagonize people too. My mother would sometimes kind of shush him. Not that he was mean, but he was open.

And I believe it was late 1962, maybe early 1963 that my mother had a stroke. My dad didn’t understand at all what was happening to her. We moved her into the back room and took care of her. Dad wouldn’t hear of bringing her to Pine Rest, but there was no other place at that time that could take care of her in their geriatric unit. Finally we enlisted the help of Rev. Hanko, who came and talked him into the fact that she had to go there.

My dad went to see her every single day after that. Not once did she indicate that she recognized him at all. And yet the ladies would go to see her and they said, “Well, she talked to us.” That made it all the harder for my dad. He was just smitten with grief because he couldn’t reach Ma anymore. He would just beg her, “Oh, Ma.” And then at night, if someone would stay with him, as we did sometimes, we would hear him in the middle of the night calling for Ma. When she died in September of 1963, it was a big, big blow to him. After that he went downhill—had little strokes himself. And it got worse and worse. When he couldn’t preach anymore (preaching was his life), then he almost literally gave up. He sat in his chair and smoked his pipe. Didn’t do anything else. I remember that.

MHH: And mostly good memories they are. As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.

—Proverbs 25:25
Christian Patriarchy is a philosophy on how one should live as a Christian. It is a moralism that leads to elitism. It is also a political force. Its political and theological ideas are grown from the teachings of the reconstructionist, postmillennialist Rousas Rushdooney. He desired to re-establish America as a “nation under God” by having the OT Mosaic laws from Deuteronomy re-introduced into modern society. He claimed that the instituted church made itself irrelevant and that the hope and power to conquer humanism and state control and to shape the world is found in the [extended] family unit. He greatly exalted the family unit and viewed it as the way to take control of the nation by out-numbering and out-voting the liberals. He promoted the idea that the tribal, patriarchal commonwealth of Old Testament Israel (before the kings) was the God-ordained style by which modern society should govern itself, especially if it wished to retain a covenant with God. He taught that the Aristotelian roles and hierarchy that had developed in America from Old Europe should be synthesized with that Israelite system of family government with its rule of the fathers. He taught that this system could Christianize the nation when combined with Old Testament laws. He stated that “some people were by nature slaves” and taught that certain people were naturally inferior just as Aristotle, the Dutch and British high societies, and the antebellum South did. Much of his writing fixated on the struggle between state power and family power. He and many who follow his teachings, like the Christian patriarchy movement, regard children as future soldiers in this struggle. He was a strong promoter of home schooling, emphasizing that it was “a waste of our heritage” to use a state school. He taught that the family is “man’s basic government, his best school and his best church.” To him, the home was the training ground for dominion of this nation for Christ. His message strayed from sin and our fight against its dominion in our lives. Rather, it often focused on the Christian family’s fight against the state. He regarded the Christian’s true enemy to be any institution, including churches, that intruded on the family unit and the father’s right to direct his family as he saw fit and according to his conscience. Rushdooney also stated that “gratitude is an unsuitable motive for good works” and that “regeneration comes through education,” which is another reason he strongly promoted home schools.

Like Rushdooney, the leaders of Christian Patriarchy (CP) synthesize the Bible with cultural patriarchy and insist on strict obedience to the roles they give and define. The adherents of CP have taken the good biblical teaching of marital headship and morphed it into a fundamentalist social structure. They embrace the idea that males of European descent are God’s ordained fathers of society. Adherents of CP teach that the family unit is the focus of one’s existence and that the rule of the fathers prevails over other authority structures, including the church and the society they live in. The fathers’ rules can override other rules and laws. The adherents of CP consider themselves as members of a grassroots effort leading and transforming America towards a theocratic rebirth in which biblical laws (Mosaic law) are eventually implemented. The leaders applaud their followers as “quiet revolutionaries doing God’s work, one family at a time.” Many believe the role of the instituted church is to promote moral patriotism, oppose secular humanism, and support Christians in their conservatism by helping them network for their causes and lifestyles. Like Rushdooney, they interpret the biblical mandate for mankind’s dominion over the earth as found in Genesis 1:28 to mean direct, fatherly dominion over families and then nations. They often use phrases such as “God-ordained society,” “God-honoring society,” and “biblical law.” They believe that America has a covenant with God, and they must help to keep it through their obedience to and promotion of their “God-ordained” roles. Their political ancestry can be traced from Rushdooney to the Tea Party of today. Many in CP also promote citizen and church-based militia groups as well as distributing paramilitary manuals. Rush-
dooney’s son-in-law worked with various churches in the south and some western states to build his grass roots efforts. Christian-based militias remain strong in those areas. Much of CP media also speaks more of second amendment rights, patriotism, and freedoms, rather than the gospel. Secular things are treated as sacred and Zionism, dominionism, patriotism, free enterprise, federalism and the next American revolution have become articles of faith. Their leaders have changed Christ’s words of promise to the church into Christ’s word for the nation and its conditional covenant with God. Even though we would like to see this country have moral improvements made, it is not the new Israel, and no other earthly nation had or will have a covenant with God the way that Old Testament Israel did.

Christian Patriarchy is a prescribed lifestyle formulated from passages that are descriptions of Old Testament cultural life and from some Mosaic laws. CP does not have one particular leader or organizational structure, but its many leaders run a variety of organizations and also vary in degree of extremity. Its adherents are predominantly conservative in their walk, church affiliations, and politics. They are usually found in Reformed circles and express Calvinistic leanings. They exhibit a great concern for holiness and purity in their lives, which is admirable, but also is of a Puritan persuasion. They are clean-living, wholesome people and many may be sincere and honestly trying to live godly lives. Many have come out of large and/or evangelical churches that have gotten progressively worldlier or entertainment minded. They often seek a “truer” Christian existence with a holier experience, but are now caught in a theology that is similar to that of the Pharisees. The word of grace is lost in their scramble for obedience. Their message for a holy life becomes their message to society in order to redeem it for Christ’s return.

The leaders of CP promote their belief that racial and gender equality is responsible for the decay of morals and society. They believe that the antebellum South was the last true Christian society because it had maintained a christianized hierarchy. They choose some Old Testament texts to support their idea that the Bible teaches that “it is not the ordinary and fitting role of women to work alongside men as their functional equals in public spheres of dominion (industry, commerce, civil government, the military, etc.),” as stated in their Fourteenth Tenet. This is not male headship or a God-ordained society, but patriarchy with a biblical twist. In America, before the industrial revolution, men and women usually worked alongside each other in their family-run businesses and farms. Many did this as Christians. God appoints the final authority in the church and the home to men, but the woman, as the man’s spiritual equal, is also given significant and varied authority (the right or power to do something). We should note that in scripture, godly women have authority to proclaim the gospel (Matt. 28:7–8; Luke 24:6–10; John 4:39; 20:17–18), prophesy (Is. 8:3; Acts 2:17–18; 21:8–9), run a household (Prov. 31:10–31), manage commercial enterprises (Prov. 31:10–31), give men corrective accountability (1 Sam. 25:18–38; Luke 18:1–8; Acts 18:26) and serve as co-laborers with men in ministry (Judges 4; Rom. 16:1–3, 6; Phil. 4:2–3).

The adherents of CP take their version of what scripture teaches believers about marriage and promote it as God’s directives for mankind. They re-establish among themselves the patriarchal, tribal commonwealth with the extended family power and generational rule that defined Israel; they believe that a larger blessing from God will rest on them for it. They declare their formulations of God-ordained gender roles to be God’s universal and timeless commands. Although the Bible does teach us the calling of husbands and wives in the home, it does not teach that “a God-honoring society will likewise prefer male headship in civil and other spheres as an application of and support for God’s order in the formative institutions of family and church” (Eleventh Tenet). This is stretching biblical teachings above and beyond what the Bible intends. Scripture does not condemn societies for having women rulers, and in the book of Judges, Deborah was placed in a position of authority and civil leadership over men. Patriarchal systems, feudal systems, kings and nobles, tribal living, or communal living are not more Christian or less Christian; they are just man-made social structures or cultural systems that people live within. There is no single God-ordained social order or form of government. The Bible does not endorse any particular social structure. Jesus did not preach a kingdom that affirmed any system of culture; he preached a kingdom that transcends human systems, and in his kingdom the first shall be last. In his kingdom the King girded himself with a towel and washed feet. We believe that God guides and uses the various man-made social structures
for the good of his church. John Calvin, whom they claim to follow, was himself opposed to a theocratic nation, as indicated in his Institutes in Book IV.XX.14 and IV.XX.16.

It is not the calling of the Christian to christian-ize a society, government, or culture or to overtake it in the way that CP promotes. It is the Christian’s calling to live in one’s own society and culture as a Christian. This is evidenced by Paul’s writings. The New Testament church began with an emphasis on communal living while existing and growing in the midst of a very Aristotelian society. Paul’s writings guided the church away from much of the patriarchal mindset of their culture by reminding the new converts that they were equal heirs of salvation in Christ and called to work together to spread the gospel. I also would say that there is a significant difference between those who are of the CP movement and those who happen to be Christians reared with a cultural patriarchal mindset. I believe that many of our European forefathers were of the latter group. Much of the influence of our culture and its effects on our lives also falls into the area of Christian liberty. If some of the Aristotelian roles define our existence and relationships, it is not necessarily sinful. Caution is always recommended because oppression can lurk where authority is not held accountable or made available for outside scrutiny. The world around us makes the dangers and abuses of overzealous patriarchy of any kind clear enough.

Even though they claim to have biblical support for their ideas of hierarchical and separate gender spheres, what CP promotes is cultural and straight from Aristotle, ancient Greece, the Victorian era, and the antebellum South. If the ideas of CP were Christ’s message, he would have upheld the Pharisees with their rigid formulations for how obedience should be expressed in the lives of the people. Like the Pharisees, CP has developed a very outwardly holy lifestyle that is full of obedience while bereft of mercy. Like Rushdooney, CP adherents brush aside the church, while they idolize the family unit in the name of the Bible. When we use the word family, we should think first of the family of God, since that is the most important family to God and to believers. Christ calls many to forsake their earthly families in order to follow him. God’s covenant is with his family, the church, and not our nation. His family may include our earthly families in the line of generations, but his covenant is not based on our earthly families. Psalm 87:2, “The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob” teaches us that God loves his family unit, the church, above our earthly family units and so should we.

Christian Reconstructionist tendencies and theonomist ideas play a significant role in the approach to family relationships among those involved in the CP movement. It may have the temptingly sweet smell of the Old Testament, but it creates a father rule that stretches through the generations and disregards the command of God for men to leave their fathers and mothers and cleave unto their wives with a nurture and cherishing that is like Christ’s nurture and cherishing of his bride, the church. Last, we will see their theology for family relationships.

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

Federation Board Update

The current Federation Board year is coming to a close, and it is time to introduce our new nominees. First, a word of thanks to the members who will soon be retiring from their 2-year terms. Thank you to Rev. Langerak, Matt DeBoer, Brad Ophoff, Lynette Bleyenberg, and Lydia Koole for the time and effort that you have put in. We greatly appreciate all of your hard work! Now we look forward to another year with our new nominees.

Our two nominees for the spiritual advisor position are Rev. Spronk and Rev. Overway. Rev. Overway came to Grand Rapids from Doon PR Church in Iowa.
to be minister of Hope PR Church of Grand Rapids a few years ago. Rev. Spronk was ordained as minister of Peace PR Church in Illinois in 2007, and recently took the call to Faith PR Church, where he has been serving as their pastor since November of 2014.

For vice president, Taylor Dykstra and Zach Kuiper were nominated. Taylor is a member of Trinity PR Church and currently attends Grand Valley State University, studying Mechanical Engineering. He enjoys fishing, reading, and carpentry. Zach Kuiper is a member of Hudsonville PR Church. He graduated from Covenant Christian High School and currently attends Davenport University for accounting.

Nominations for vice treasurer include Joel Langerak and Austin Brower. Joel graduated from Covenant Christian High School in 2013. He is currently attending Calvin College, majoring in math and secondary education with a minor in music. He hopes to become a math teacher at one of our Protestant Reformed schools. He is currently a member of Hope PR Church of Grand Rapids. Joel is happy to have the opportunity to serve on the Federation Board; he sees it as a great way to become involved in the work of the church and to serve the young people of the church by encouraging growth in both their faith and in their godly relationships with one another. Austin is a member of Hudsonville PR Church. He currently attends Grand Valley State University with a sales/marketing major with plans to go into the business field of sales. Austin likes to hunt, fish, golf and play any sports you can think of. He currently works as a lab technician at Vibration Research Corporation.

Next, the nominations for vice secretary are Sharon Kleyn and Miriam Koerner. Sharon is a member of Grace PR Church. She graduated from Covenant Christian High School in 2014. She currently works part-time as a secretary for Jonathan Kamps Carpentry and also part-time at Motman’s Greenhouses in Allendale. Sharon looks forward to being vice secretary on the Federation Board; she sees it as a great way to become involved in the work of the church and to serve the young people of our denomination if it is the will of God for her at this time. Miriam is a member of Southeast PR Church. This fall, she plans to transfer to Grand Valley State University from Grand Rapids Community College to pursue a degree in elementary education. She works part-time as a server for Russ’ Restaurant. She is excited about the possibility of serving on the Federation Board because it would give her much joy to serve the church and especially the young people, promoting a love for Christian fellowship among the saints.

Finally, the Fed Board has nominated Taylor Noorman and Elizabeth Ensink for the position of librarian. Taylor is a member of Faith PR Church. She recently graduated from Grand Rapids Community College with a degree in dental assisting. She currently works at McMahon Family dental. She enjoys spending time with her family and staying active with sports. Elizabeth is a current member at Trinity PR Church. She is a junior at Hope College, where she is pursuing a double major in biology and creative writing. Her goal is to write or edit in the field of science research or public health. This summer she plans on doing biology education research at Hope and will work in Hope’s writing center in the fall. Liz is thankful for this possible opportunity to be on the Federation Board after being blessed with their work while in young people’s society. She looks forward to serving if she is elected.

Thine own friend,
and thy father’s friend,
forsake not;
neither go into thy brother’s house
in the day of thy calamity:
for better is a neighbor that is near
than a brother far off.
—Proverbs 27:10

Nicole is Secretary of the Federation Board.
Devotional

Sarah Mowery

The Daily Press

“press toward the mark...” (Philippians 3:14)

August
8

The Bread of Life
Read John 6:22–63

When we’re physically sick, it’s sometimes wise to refrain from eating for a little while until our health improves. That’s not the case when we’re spiritually ill, however. When we find that we have no appetite for God’s word, we must not fast from Bible study or prayer. The word for which we have no appetite is also the cure for the virus that plagues us. Consider Psalm 107:19–20: “Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses. He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.”

One who eats God’s word and tastes and sees that he is good is one who partakes Jesus Christ by faith. He is the Living Bread who nourishes us unto salvation. The words that he speaks are spirit and life. He alone is the cure for the deadly virus of sin.

Sing or pray Psalter #292.

August
9

Come, Ye Children
Read Psalm 34:11–22

Psalm 34 can be split into three sections. In its first verses David recounts his experience and declares his intention to praise the Lord continually. In verses 11 and 12 he calls members of the congregation to learn the fear of the Lord from him. He addresses children in particular: “Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.” Parents, do you zealously and prayerfully teach your children the fear of the Lord? How easily we are distracted from that high calling! Children, do you heed the godly instruction of your parents? You must fight the temptation to despise them.

Sometimes God in his providence saves men and women when they are old. But more often he saves them when they are young. “A twig is brought to any form, but grown trees they are young. ” (Prov. 22:6).

Read Psalm 34:17 the inspired psalmist David declares, “The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.” Notice: the Lord does not prevent the righteous from experiencing afflictions. In fact, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all” (v. 19).

What is your affliction at present? Do others persecute you? Maybe the pain of injury or disease wracks your body. Perhaps sorrow overwhelms your soul. It could be that at this very moment you walk through the terrors of the valley of the shadow of death. Take heart, dear Christian! Our Father will preserve you through those trials. Though your outward man perish, through those afflictions your inward man is renewed—sanctified—day by day. Though our troubles seem insurmountably great, they are light in comparison to the glory that awaits us. So we are called to look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. So we must walk by faith, and not by sight, knowing that it is through much tribulation that we enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

Sing or pray Psalter #89.

August
10

Keep Thy Tongue From Evil
Read 1 Peter 3:10–12

The third section of Psalm 34 consists of verses 13–22. There the psalmist instructs the congregation how to achieve long life and the blessing of the Lord. Several days ago we read how David resorted to deceit twice in the events that are recorded in 1 Samuel 21. He learned from that experience, for he first commands God’s saints, “Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.” The apostle Peter quotes this text in 1 Peter 3.

Throughout the scriptures we’re admonished to guard our tongues. Do you find that you resort to lies and flattery? Are you prone to gossip or embellishing the truth? You must examine your heart and life, for “if any man among you seem to be religious, and brideth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain” (James 1:26). Those who will be gathered to the Lamb on Mount Zion are those in whose mouths is found no guile. But all liars have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (Rev. 14:5; 21:8).

Sing or pray Psalter #89.

August
11

This Light Affliction
Read 2 Corinthians 4

In Psalm 34:17 the inspired psalmist David declares, “The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.” Notice: the Lord does not prevent the righteous from experiencing afflictions. In fact, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all” (v. 19).

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Sing or pray Psalter #89.

August
12

Not a Broken Bone
Read John 19:28–37

David uses a metaphor to illustrate the exhaustive character of the Lord’s deliverance of his saints: “He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.” This promise is made to all God’s people, but it points primarily to Jesus Christ the Righteous. We are righteous only as we are covered by his atoning sacrifice. He is the fulfillment of all the Passover lambs sacrificed throughout the Old Testament, regarding which God commanded, “Neither shall ye break a bone thereof” (Exodus 12:46). “The Hebrew word for the bones signifies the strength, and therefore not a bone of Christ must be broken, to show that though he be crucified in weakness his strength to save is not at all broken. Sin breaks our bones, as it broke David’s (Psalm 51:8); but it did not break Christ’s bones; he stood firm under the burden, mighty to save” (Matthew Henry).

“Christ our passover is sacrificed for us,” writes Paul in 1
Praising God from A–Z
Read Psalm 34
There are 22 verses in Psalm 34. That’s significant because there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the language in which the psalms were originally written. Psalm 34 is an acrostic poem: the first letters of the verses follow the Hebrew alphabet in order.

Sometimes our family plays what we call “The Alphabet Game.” Playing the alphabet game is similar to writing an acrostic poem. You can play the alphabet game with Bible texts or phrases. “Awake thou that sleepest” (Eph 5:14); “Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord” (John 12:13); “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee” (Ps. 55:22). You can play it with psalms or hymn lyrics. “Defend me, Lord, from shame” (Psalter #82); “Every day the Lord himself is near me” (Day by Day); “Fools in their heart have said, ‘There is no God of might’” (Psalter #146). You can play it by naming attributes of God. Our God is Gracious. He is Holy. He is Immutable.

Today’s devotional is an assignment. Work your way through the alphabet as you meditate on our glorious God and his holy word.

Sing or pray Psalter #89.

August 13

Hated Without a Cause
Read Psalm 35:1–17
Psalm 35 is another imprecatory psalm. To imprecate is to plead that God will justly reward evildoers for their wickedness. In this passage the inspired psalmist prays for the destruction of those who have joined together to falsely accuse him. He desired their welfare, but they have rewarded evil for his good.

Jesus Christ speaks in this psalm. Wicked men conspired against him, desiring his death. Because we belong to him, we also are hated, as he said we would be (see Matt. 10:22). In some parts of the world, Christ’s people are imprisoned, tortured, and martyred. In the Western world, we’re scorned because we confess the truths of the Bible with regard to morality and marriage, while graver persecution gathers like a thunderhead on the horizon. We need not fear: our God fights against those who devise the hurt of his people, and he delivers the poor and needy from those who spoil them.

Sing or pray Psalter #92:1–5.

August 14

Pray for Them Who Persecute You
Read Romans 12:17–21
Yesterday we considered the truth stated in Matthew 10:22: “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake.” The passage that we read today instructs us how to respond to those who persecute us or our fellow saints. Like the writer of Psalm 35, we don’t take justice into our own hands. Rather, we plead with God to justly judge those who wrong us, for vengeance belongs to him. But we don’t pray only for their judgment, either. Mindful of the great salvation that God has wrought for us, we pray for their salvation also, if that be the Lord’s will: “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44).

Sing or pray Psalter #92:1–5.

August 15

Falsely Accused by Family
Read 1 Peter 3:8–17
It’s painful to be falsely accused by the wicked, but it’s far more heartbreaking to be betrayed by someone you love. Frequently we are tempted unjustly to assign motives to our family members and slander our brothers and sisters in Christ. We must guard against those sinful tendencies. But what is our calling when we are the ones who are wronged in that way?

First, we must not return evil for evil: we’re called not to hate or grudge those who are fellow members of Christ’s body. We must not imprecate them like we do the wicked. Second, we’re not to spread the sin around. Third, if the sin is one that we’ve prayerfully determined needs to be addressed, we humbly confront our brother or sister alone (see Matt. 18:15). In that way we “seek peace, and ensue it” (1 Pet. 3:11).

Leviticus 19:17–18 reads, “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord.”

Sing or pray Psalter #92:1–5.

August 16

The Young Lions Suffer Hunger
Read Psalm 35:15–17
The psalms are rich with imagery. In Psalm 35 we read, “Rescue…my darling [that is, my life] from the lions,” from those who gnash “upon me with their teeth.” Our enemy, the devil, prowl about as a roaring lion, “seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Throughout scripture our enemies are described not only as lions, but as young, ravenous lions.

Psalm 10:9a: “He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor.” Psalm 57:4: “My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword.”

Though they are young and ravenous, the psalm that we just considered reassures God’s saints: “The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing” (Psalm 34:10).

Sing or pray Psalter #92:6–8.

August 17

Every Sin Aims at the Utmost
Read Proverbs 27:1–20
Do you regard your three-fold enemy as a ravenous lion? The devil, a lion? Sure. The world? Maybe. Our own sinful hearts? That seems a bit extreme. The reason it seems extreme to us is that we’re callous to the terrible sinfulness of
our own sin. We forget: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jer. 17:9–10).

In Overcoming Sin and Temptation, John Owen explains the insatiable nature of sin. He asserts that sin, like the grave, is never satisfied: “Sin aims always at the utmost; every time it rises up to tempt or entice, might it have its own course, it would go out to the utmost sin in that kind. Every unclean thought or glance would be adultery if it could; every covetous desire would be oppression, every thought of unbelief would be atheism, might it grow to its head.” That’s the unappeasable nature of the sin that lies in your heart. Like a ravenous lion, it seeks to destroy you, would God permit it.

Sing or pray Psalter #92:6–8.

**The Match**

**Read 1 Corinthians 9:24–27**

Every sin aims at the utmost. Your old man of sin has an appetite as voracious as that of the horseleech in Proverbs 30:15. You have no time to loiter on your race against him.

Nor should you waste your strength beating at the air.

The horseleech has two daughters that are never satisfied: Like them, the sin within your heart will no way be denied. Every idle word you say would be a blazing fire, Every envious glance you cast would murder to acquire. Every lustful thought you think would cause you to fear doing anything that would offend him. The hate you hide within your heart would have your neighbor dead.

The clenching of your stubborn jaw would be a bloody coup, Your thoughtless use of God’s own name would pierce the Savior through.

Your fixation—with this or that—that wants you before it prone. Every “little” sin, at heart, puts you on Yahweh’s throne. And until your body breathes its last, sin will seek your death. So you must jab this challenger with every single breath. Do not beat at empty air if you desire to live—

Aim each blow right at your foe, who’s crying, “Give, give, give!”

Sing or pray Psalter #92:6–8.

**No Fear of God**

**Read Romans 3:9–20**

Psalm 36:1 is quoted in Romans 3:18. This section of scripture is similar to the first four verses of Psalm 36, with one exception: Psalm 36:1–4 speaks of the wicked; Romans 3:9–20 is about all men. This is God’s evaluation of every person who has ever lived, Jesus Christ excepted: “There is none that doeth good, no, not one... There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

But thanks be to God, he implants the fear of himself into the hearts of his elect! When you look into your heart, do you also find the fear of God implanted there? If so, your love for him will cause you to fear doing anything that would offend him. “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate” (Prov. 8:13). “O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him” (Ps. 34:9). But the end of those who do not fear God is terrible: “Those eyes which have no fear of God before them now, shall have the terrors of hell before them forever” (Spurgeon).

Sing or pray Psalter #93.

**The Sin of Self-Flattery**

**Read Romans 12:1–16**

The description of the wicked in Psalm 36:2 is striking: “For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful.” You can likely think of unbelievers whose actions are repulsive—even destructive—to those around them, yet in foolish pride they persist in their self-centered and foolish ways.

Sadly, self-flattery is a sin to which we are also prone. We need the warning in Romans 12:3: “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.” The sins of the wicked are hated by others; likewise, our sins will bring us to
shame. “When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom” (Prov. 11:2). To the prayer of the publican, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” our Lord responded, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:14). So “let us daily beg of God to preserve us from self-flattery” (Matthew Henry).

Sing or pray Psalter #93.

Out of the Abundance of the Heart
Read Luke 6:39–49

The self-flattery of the wicked produces evil speech and actions. “The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit: he hath left off to be wise, and to do good (Ps. 36:3).” Unwittingly the unregenerate prove Jesus’ words in Luke 6:45: “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.” What do your words reveal about your heart? Too often mine reveal a heart that is discontent and self-centered. And are you only a hearer of God’s word, or are you a doer also? (James 1:23–25). When you and I obey the word that we hear, we are like the man who built his house upon the rock.

“There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none besides thee: neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed” (1 Sam 2:2–3).

Sing or pray Psalter #164.

The Devising of Evil
Read Micah 2:1–3

The unbelieving man loves evil. In fact, he so loves to sin that he spends his idle hours in wicked scheming and conniving. “He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil” (Ps. 36:4). “Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds” (Micah 2:1). To them God says, “Your thoughts are an abomination to me” (Prov. 15:26). “While ye are thus busying yourselves on your beds…I have my thoughts too, and those are different to me” (Prov. 15:26). “While ye are awake to devise wickedness, I am awake to contrive judgment” (Calvin). These “evil” thoughts of God are not sinful. Though their outcome is terrible for the unregenerate prove Jesus’ words in Luke 6:45: “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.” What do your words reveal about your heart? Too often mine reveal a heart that is discontent and self-centered. And are you only a hearer of God’s word, or are you a doer also? (James 1:23–25). When you and I obey the word that we hear, we are like the man who built his house upon the rock.

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Sing or pray Psalter #164.

The Devil’s Workshop
Read 1 Timothy 5:1–16

We concluded yesterday’s meditation with the prayer that God would not draw us away with the wicked, who spend their idle hours devising evil. In light of that prayer, how do you spend your free time? A Christian sister that I know likes to say, “Idleness is the devil’s workshop.” In 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul admonishes those who refuse to work: they walk disorderly and busy themselves in other men’s matters (see also 1 Pet. 4:15). In 1 Timothy 5:13 he similarly reproves the young widows: “And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.” Not only idle hands are a problem, however; idle minds are also at Satan’s disposal: he would fill them with all kinds of detestable thoughts. “If we willingly banish holy meditations in our solitary hours, Satan will soon occupy our minds with sinful imaginations” (Matthew Henry). Notice: those who are “widows indeed” continue “in supplications and prayers night and day.” Likewise, the psalmist confesses, “My soul shall be satisfied…When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches” (Ps. 63:5–6).

Sing or pray Psalter #164.

Redeem the Time
Read 2 Peter 3

It used to be that when someone asked, “How are you?” he could expect this response: “Good.” But now there’s a more common response: “Busy!” If “idleness is the devil’s workshop,” then it must be good to be busy, right? Interestingly, the four times that the word “busy” is used in the Bible (KJV), it’s used negatively, to describe people who are wandering about, refusing to work and being nosy.

Before we continue in Psalm 36, let’s spend several days considering the use of our time. Ephesians 5:15–16 reads, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time.” According to Barnes and Matthew Henry, the Greek word translated “redeem” in this passage means “to purchase” with the intent of “setting free from service or bondage.” It’s our calling as children of light “to rescue or recover our time from waste; to improve it for great and important purposes.”

Let’s free the time we’ve been given today from its bondage to sin and use it for the Lord’s purposes instead!

Sing or pray Psalter #251.

Go to the Ant
Read Proverbs 6

Have you ever taken the time to watch ants? They look so very busy as they scurry about, but if you actually crouch down and press your finger to the concrete directly in the path of a tiny ant, you realize that it is not bustling mindlessly about—it is on a serious mission. It will immediately bypass your intrusive finger and press on in the direction that it was going before.

When my husband and I first married, we lived in a basement apartment. One day we noticed a two-lane trail of ants—one
emerging and the other returning from under the trim of our kitchen window. Those ants marched like little black soldiers across the kitchen wall and up into the ceiling. We went upstairs to discover their destination, and we found it: the sticky, crumb-loaded tray beneath our landlords’ toaster. Those ants by-passed all tempting morsels in our kitchen downstairs and trekked what must have been many ant miles in order to reach their destination. They would not be thwarted from their difficult task. 

Ants are not busy, they are diligent. Likewise, we are called not to be busy, but to be diligent. There is a difference.

Sing or pray Psalter #251.

**August**

**Your Chief End**

*Read Psalm 50:1–23*

In order to be diligent, we must first define our goal. Question and answer one of the Westminster Shorter Catechism succinctly and memorably summarizes the goal or chief end of man: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” When or how do we praise and glorify God? Psalm 50:23 says, “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordeth his conversation [his daily walk] aright will I show the salvation of God.” God is glorified when we love him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Luke 10:27). One who loves God:

- has faith in him (see Romans 4:20).
- is thankful to Him and shows that thankfulness by praying to him (see Psalm 50:14–15).
- obeys his word (see 1 Samuel 15:22).

These are fruits that one must bring forth if he is a believer. They are the fruits to which Jesus refers in John 15:8: “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”

Sing or pray Psalter #397.

**August**

**Be Diligent**

*Read 2 Peter 1:5–10*

One who is diligent with the time that God has given doesn’t simply occupy himself every minute of the day; he occupies himself with the right things. We must discipline our time, prioritizing our activities each day, mindful that our Lord is coming again. We’re strangers and pilgrims here below. The most critical moments of our day are those that we spend in fellowship with him.

In the passage that we read for today, the apostle Peter uses the word *diligence* twice. We’re to diligently cultivate these fruits in our life: faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. In that way we are diligent to make our calling and election sure. Consider these texts also:

Psalm 119:4: “Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.”

Hebrews 11:6b: “He [God] is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

Proverbs 4:23: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”

Sing or pray Psalter #397.

**September**

**The Counsel of the Lord Shall Stand**

*Read Proverbs 19:1–21*

As a mom of six young children, I feel as if I’m unable to do anything without being interrupted. Dealing with these interruptions in a godly manner, rather than reacting in anger or frustration, requires that I be aware of my own limitations. That is necessary for you too! We need to remember that:

- Only God gets his to-do list done every day. God gets it all done every day. You, on the other hand, will go to bed tonight with your list incomplete and with little confidence that you will make it all the way through tomorrow’s. Only God can have that confidence. And that’s okay. God made you to be limited and he knows that your sin has limited you even further.

Dealing with interruptions requires an awareness that God is sovereign and you are not. When you trust a sovereign God you know that no interruption has caught God by surprise. This frees you from outbursts of anger or depths of despair. It allows you pause and to consider whether each of these interruptions has been brought by God as an opportunity to do good to someone else. It removes any right to automatically refuse them (Challies.com).

Sing or pray Psalter #306.

**September**

**The Conclusion of the Matter**

*Read Ecclesiastes 12*

Solomon concludes the “whole matter” of the fleeting nature of our lives this way: “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” These are the criteria we must use to ensure that we steward our time and resources well.

The call, then, is to find the best things I can do with the time allotted to me, while waiting for the great day when time will no longer be finite, when opportunities will no longer be limited. It is to prioritize those few things I can actually accomplish, and
to learn to let go of the rest. It is to live the life God has for me, and not to attempt to live a different life altogether. It is to obey the words of God: “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15–16). Evil, and far too few. No, that’s not it. Evil, and just enough to do all He calls me to do (Challies.com).

Sing or pray Psalter #94.

**From the Baseness of the Wicked to the Glory of God**

**Read Psalm 36**

David focuses on the baseness of the wicked in the first four verses of Psalm 36. We might expect him to move on to extolling the goodness of the righteous. But he doesn’t. He knows personally that believers possess the same corrupt nature as the reprobate. Instead he contrasts the wicked with the object of our faith: Jehovah, our covenant God.

How great is our God? Verses 5–9 reveal him as the one who is “unsearchable (heavens, clouds), impregnable (mountains), inexhaustible (the great deep); yet, for all that, welcoming and hospitable” (Ross). Throughout scripture clouds signify Jehovah’s judgment. In this life we live under the clouds of affliction, but “far, far above all comprehension is the truth and faithfulness of God. He never fails, nor forgets, nor falters, nor forfeits his word. Afflictions are like clouds, but the divine truthfulness is all around them. While we are under the cloud we are in the region of God’s faithfulness; when we mount above it we shall not need such an assurance” (Spurgeon).

Sing or pray Psalter #94.

**Men Love Darkness**

**Read John 1:1–9**

Psalm 36:9 reads, “For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.” Several months ago our pastor preached on John 1:4–5. In that sermon, he taught that God is the source of life for all creatures. Only if he wills do we live (James 3:15). Not only does God sustain the physical life of men, however: he created them to serve him. But men live in the darkness of sin: they are totally depraved. Their fall into sin was instigated by Satan, who disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). “There remain, however, in man since the fall the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God…and of the differences between good and evil…(Canons of Dort, Heads 3&4, Article 4). Those glimmerings render the reprobate’s unbelief inexusable. God sent his Son, who is the true light, into the darkness, to expose the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

Do you believe in the Light of the world?

Sing or pray Psalter #94.

**We See Light**

**Read John 12:34–50**

By God’s grace, the elect comprehend the light that unbelieving men hate. By God’s grace we confess, “In thy light shall we see light.”

Jesus taught, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (John 12:46). Our lives must testify to that reality, for “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 John 1:6). “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Those who put their trust under the shadow of Jehovah’s wings will reign forever in the city lit by the Lamb. They will drink from the pure river and the fountain of the water of life freely. (Rev. 21 and 22). Reread the last five verses of Psalm 36. All of those promises are alluded to there. Those promises are “Yea” and “Amen” in him who is the Light of the world.

Sing or pray Psalter #94.
“You need to grow up!” Many of you young people have heard these words before. Most of the time you who really do need to grow up give a smirk, a grin, laugh it off, and go on living in the same immature way as before. Along with our worldly society enamored with youth and immaturity, you go on taking nothing seriously and amuse yourself with your disrespectful, impulsive, irresponsible life, living with a swagger as though you are proud of it. If that describes you, then you need to grow up!

Not only do your teachers and parents call you to grow up, but your God and Father in heaven calls you: “Be no more children!” But rather, “Grow up!” Let every young person (and adult too!) take heed to God’s injunction. For all of us, young and old, have some growing up to do.

Proper Childlikeness

There is a certain kind of childishness that all of us need to put aside. However, there are times when God calls us to be child-like. Let’s remember Jesus’ words, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3–4).” The disciples in Jesus’ day, along with many leaders of the church, looked down upon the young children. They thought of themselves as better. They spoke and thought those words in pride, “These children are so immature. They need to grow up.” The church back then was arguing over petty matters—even over who had the better minister! Some argued, “I was taught of Paul. He is a better preacher.” And others contended, “I was taught of Apollos, and no way is Paul a better preacher than he!” Paul says, “You are behaving like babies! How childish!”

We know this is how children behave. As they are playing together, suddenly you hear a bossy voice say, “My toy is better than your toy,” or, “My dad is better than your dad.” Fights break out over the smallest issues.

Is that the kind of childish behavior that we are engaging in? Do we compare ministers as though there is some kind of competition between them? Are we ripping on each other’s churches by calling one “liberal” or another “legalistic”? Do we divide ourselves over petty issues or separate ourselves into cliques even within our own congregation? If so, God says we need to stop behaving like spiritual babies. We need to grow up! The mature Christian will engage in controversy over truth and righteousness, but not over trifles.

Petty Fighting

The first kind of childishness we are to put aside is petty fighting. 1 Corinthians 3:1 says, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.” Yes, Paul tells the church in Corinth that they are behaving like big babies! He explains in verses 3–4, “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal?”

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We know this is how children behave. As they are playing together, suddenly you hear a bossy voice say, “My toy is better than your toy,” or, “My dad is better than your dad.” Fights break out over the smallest issues.

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**Legalism**

The second type of childishness we must put away is legalism. This term is frequently used wrongly, so we must understand it carefully. Legalism is not a love for God’s law or a dedication to obeying God’s law. It is not a stringent application of God’s law in every part of our lives, or even a rebuke of others who stray from God’s law. That’s not legalism—that’s godliness! Even if your godliness is called legalism, I encourage you to continue living in your piety in the midst of a church world that disdains those who uphold God’s law. Beware, however, of true legalism. Legalism is the proud belief that your obedience to God’s law saves you. It is also the addition of man-made rules to God’s law in such a way that you see yourself as better than those who do not obey your man made rules. Scripture calls that legalism childishness.

Paul says in Galatians 4:3, “Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.” Before Christ came, both Jews and Gentiles lived as though their obedience to God’s law and their man-made laws saved them. Because of that childishness they were in bondage—they had become slaves to the law. Paul says that Christ came to redeem us from that bondage and childishness, so that we realize that we are sinners saved by grace alone!

Young people who sing, “Oh how love I Thy law!” be careful that your healthy love for God’s law does not morph into legalism. This is a danger for us. As children who grow up in godly families we are taught distinctly what is right and wrong. But maybe we begin to feel after a while as though obedience somehow saves us. Perhaps we begin to feel that our obedience to certain laws makes us better than others around us. We are by nature totally depraved sinners and must be constantly reminded that though we emphasize thankful obedience to God’s law, Jesus alone saves us. Are we legalistic? We need to grow up by constantly repenting of our legalistic tendencies by remembering the simple gospel of grace.

**Shallow Thinking**

A third childish behavior is shallow thinking. In Hebrews 5: 13–14 we read, “For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” The author of Hebrews compares the most simple teachings of God’s word to milk. He calls the more difficult doctrines of God’s word meat. As young Christians, we drink in the more simple truths: the milk. But as we grow up, while we continue to drink in the milk, we also need to eat the meat of God’s word. We need to grow up and learn how to take meaty chunks of doctrine, the deep things of God’s word, and chew on them. Oh yes, such are more difficult to ingest intellectually, sometimes harder to accept emotionally, but chewing on deep truths is what a mature Christian does.

You have seen that child before, who loves to drink his milk but leaves all his meat on his plate. When his mother puts a piece of meat in his mouth, you see a grimace after the first few chews as the child stores it in the side of his mouth (we call it “chipmunk mouth” in our home). He refuses to do the work of ingesting that protein. Instead he will eventually just spit it back out. Is that who you are spiritually?

Young people, do you read your Bible regularly? If not, you should start. When you do so, you will find some parts that you will understand easily, but you will also find difficult concepts. If you pick up Beacon Lights, Standard Bearer, or another good Christian magazine or book you’re not always going to “get it” immediately. When you sit in church on Sunday, it’s going to be difficult at times to understand everything the pastor says. What are you doing with the meat? Are you leaving it on the plate for someone else to chew? Are you storing it the side of your mouth half chewed ready to spit it out? That’s childish! You need to grow up. Read! Listen! Then THINK to digest the deep and beautiful truths of God’s word. These kinds of mature Christians are dwindling in number.

**Lack of Conviction**

The final childish behavior we must put aside is a lack of conviction. Ephesians 4:14 says, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” The picture of that verse is of a ship on the sea in a storm. Paul, who had been shipwrecked three times, knew what this was like. The wind would form huge waves that would smash against the boat. And whatever way the wind blew, the boat would blow, out of control, up and down, side to side, soon to crash on the rocks. That
is a picture of childish behavior. For example, take a child who is in second grade and allow her to be taught evolution by a nice teacher. Put her in front of the television and let the world teach her all about beauty. Any parent knows that a young child at that age is going to believe almost everything she hears. Children are easily swayed, are not very discerning, and will be like that ship tossed this way and that, if their parents do not carefully guide them.

But young people, you’re not in second grade anymore. You aren’t new to the faith. You’ve been taught the truth of the scriptures by faithful parents and churches. You ought not be like children or boats in a storm tossed to and fro, believing everything new that comes your way. Hold on to your convictions. Be discerning of what is truth and what is lie. Don’t doubt what the word of God, the confessions, and the creeds teach. Be convicted about these truths, believe them, love them, and never give them up. As Paul says, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them” (2 Timothy 3:14).

As you live in this world you will come into contact with many who call themselves Christians. You will surely hear new teachings, interesting perspectives, and persuasive logic from very nice people. The temptation on your part will be to doubt everything that you have been brought up with and open your mind to all that others say. They will say things like: “Don’t be so black and white!” or, “Be more open-minded.” What will you do? Your childishness will want to doubt what you have been taught in your formative years. Your childishness will want to oscillate from one doctrine to another. Your childishness will want to refuse to take a stance and to flip-flop to what the majority of your acquaintances believe. Your childishness will want to take on that post-modern mentality that no one really knows for sure what is right. Childishness is dangerous. If you are unwilling to take a stance for the truth, then the winds of false doctrine will shipwreck your faith. You must grow up. The mature Christian will be resolute and unwavering in his convictions of the truth.

To be continued…

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The Comfort of Assurance

M any of God’s people doubt their salvation at some point during their lives. In fact, article 11 in the fifth head of the Canons of Dordt states that God’s people will suffer from various carnal doubts in this life. However, the article does not stop right there; that would not be comforting for God’s people. Instead, the article keeps going and says that God will not leave his people in the misery of not knowing if they are his children. Therefore those who are at a time like this in their life must not despair. They can look in their lives to find the fruits of the Spirit that prove they are children of God, and rest assured that they can once again gain comfort in the assurance of their salvation.

This type of doubt arises in the mind of a child of God when he looks at his life and sees that he is not very holy. He notices how incapable he is of serving God the way he commands. He sees a lack of faith in his life and a lack of assurance in his heart. Instead of focusing on the fruits of the Spirit in his life, he sees only his faults and sins, and sees them as proof that he cannot possibly be saved. He starts to wonder if perhaps the promises of God’s word are not for him after all. When caught up in these terrible thoughts, a child of God may start to fear that he is in fact reprobate and doomed to eternal damnation. He becomes terrified at the mention of hell and begins to despair because he fears that is
his end, rather than everlasting life with God.

If you are a child of God going through doubts like these right now, do not despair. You can find your help and strength in God’s word. It is at this time in your life when God’s word comes to you in Matthew 11:28: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” What beautiful comfort! The rest that one receives when he puts his trust in Christ his Savior is true, blessed rest. You need not be afraid then. You need to re-direct your thoughts and stop relying on what you can do. Rather, look to what the word of God and the Canons say about an elect person.

First, an elect person has true faith in Christ. Basically this means that a person finds in himself that he truly does believe in Jesus Christ and in his sacrifice. You can know that you are a child of God if you believe in Jesus Christ and all the work that he did on your behalf. No reprobate person will ever find a belief in Christ in his heart. Rather, a reprobate man is capable only of hating Christ.

Another mark of a child of God is that he has childlike reverence and fear for God. This childlike reverence is called filial fear, and it is the way we fear God as our Father. It is the same with an earthly child. An earthly child looks up to his father and respects and loves him. The same is true of an elect person. He sees God as his Father through Christ. He does not, however, view him as a kindly old gentleman, as some people in the world would have it. No, the child of God truly respects and loves God as his Father.

A third mark that a child of God may find in his life is that he has true, sincere sorrow for his sin. Notice that I did not say sorrow for the consequences of sin. There is a difference between being truly sorry that you sinned before God and being sorry because you are being punished for your sin. An elect child of God will always, to some degree, feel truly sorry that he sinned against the most holy God.

A true child of God will also find in his life a hungering and thirsting after righteousness. There is a reason that a child of God does not run with the world in sin and live in whatever way he chooses. The reason is that all God’s people, whether they are assured of it or not, have a desire to be more holy. None of God’s people actually desire to live in sin unrepentantly. Instead, they have within them a desire to flee from the sins that cleave to them and a desire to live as God commands.

Finally, a person may know that he is truly elect if he finds that he longs for heaven. The child of God longs for heaven because it is a place of perfection. It is a place in which we will no longer have to fight against the sins that we battle daily in this life. A child of God would give anything to be holy and no longer feel guilty, and that is what awaits him in heaven, so he longs to go there to be with God everlastinglty.

All these are sure signs that a person is elect.

So, child of God who is doubting: search your heart and life. Do you find these marks present? If so, you may be assured that you are most certainly saved. There is not a single reprobate person living on this earth who will find even one of these marks in his life—not that a reprobate would even be looking. If that is not enough to convince you that you are indeed a child of God, consider the fact that you are even worried about not being saved. Once again, no reprobate person spends his time worrying that he might not be saved.

Aside from seeing evidence in your life that you are a child of God, there are many things that you can do to strengthen your faith and once again gain that assurance you crave. First, whatever happens, you must continue to use the means of grace. That is, continue to go to church and listen to the preaching. Prepare yourself for church on Sunday so that you can be edified. Even if you do not feel that it is helping, keep going to hear what God has to say. Another thing that can help is reading God’s word and meditating on it in personal devotions. Do not slack in your personal relationship to God. God’s word is your defense against the seeds of doubt that the devil plants in your mind. He has given you his word as your sword for the battle. Do not go to battle and leave your weapon in its sheath—use it! You cannot expect your prayers to be answered if you do not spend time in the word. Instead, you will again start to feel his presence only when you search his word and spend time with him in prayer. Bring your spiritual needs before him in prayer and ask him for the grace to strengthen your faith. I would also encourage you to read through the Canons during your personal devotions, especially heads one and five. They have much to say on the matter of election and perseverance and are meant to comfort God’s people in their times of need. Also, do not be afraid to seek help from your minister or elders. They are there for a reason: they are to see to the spiritual needs of the flock. As members of the flock, we as young people must feel free to talk to them whenever
we are struggling.

Finally, child of God, do not lose heart. God may not answer your prayers right away or in the way that you expect. Despite this fact, you must continue to wait upon God, as the psalmist says in Psalm 27:14: “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he will strengthen your heart: Wait, I say, on the Lord.” These words are written for you. Wait upon him and trust that he cannot and will not change the promises of his word. They are for you! Realize that God will not allow you to fall away from your salvation. God’s saints will always persevere. You can be assured of this because the Bible says that God will not let you be tempted above that which you are able to handle, nor will he leave you with no way of escape.

It may be that you are not at a point in your life

in which you struggle with knowing that you are saved. Continue in your personal devotions with God and in listening attentively to the preaching every Sabbath. However, it may be that you are at a point in your life in which you are struggling with these doubts. Do not despair! Wait upon the Lord, and humbly wait upon him for a season of richer grace. He will not leave you in that pit of doubt forever. He will give you what you need to be assured once again that you are his child. 

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“And It Was Good”

G od has many attributes which are unobtainable by any man. God is a God who is high above us all, and none is like unto him. We as Christians can look at the simplest things and see God’s handiwork. The creation is a beautiful thing that only God could have created. A person can look out the window and see nothing but green grass and trees, but Christians see more: they see that in every little thing there is a purpose, and in that purpose we glorify God.

Those purposes differ from object to object. For example, a Christian’s purpose in life is to glorify God in all we do and say, but for other things that may be different. God created this world perfect, but he also willed that the fall of Adam and Eve would take place. He willed that Satan would take the form of a serpent to tempt Eve to sin and therefore cause this world to be cursed. He also wills everything that happens in your life and in every person’s lives. This is shown in the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1: “And so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head.” How mind-boggling that not even a single hair can move without the will of God. The creation is in perfect order, and it could not have been created by anything other than a perfect being. Just sit and think that in his infinite power he can control all things at one time! Due to our totally depraved nature, we cannot even wrap our minds around that extreme fact.

God’s sovereignty is a huge part of the creation. In Genesis 1 we read that in only six days God created what we see today. It takes a person months to build a house. How much greater, then, is the creation. This passage also proves that evolution is completely false. God in his power and wisdom performed this miracle so that we as Christians can stand in awe of his mighty power, but man in his human nature perverts the name of God. No “Big Bang” occurred that out of pure luck formed the universe.

How often do we go about every day and not even think of God’s power, and then not even think of how he is leading us through life? The sad answer is, too often. We so easily spurt out a prayer that we pray every time just to say that we prayed. But how about we stop and think about how much control
God actually has in our lives and while we think about that, rejoice in him.

Let’s consider the atom and the control God has over that as well. The atom is the smallest particle known to man on earth. So small is the atom that a human cannot see it without the help of a very powerful microscope. God has created this tiny particle for a purpose, and that purpose is to form all things. Everything from the house you live in to the pieces of paper that you are holding is formed by this smallest particle. God wills what happens in the atom from the electrons that revolve around the nucleus, to the protons and neutrons that make up the nucleus. God’s wisdom is seen in the beautiful design of these tiny particles, and in it we see the beauty of God’s creation.

We need to look deeper into this and understand that God does not just guide the atoms for no reason; he does it for a purpose. He makes all the functions happen in a certain order and at a certain time for us. He does it so that we can live a life pleasing to him. If he is controlling the smallest particle on earth for us, then how can we not feel the love he gives to us? How can we not know that God controls the atom along with us? If he is focused on that tiny particle, why would he not be controlling our lives as well? We should not worry if God is going to be there for us; rather, we need to have faith and understand that God is all-powerful.

Man often does not realize the extent of God’s power. The universe is something that is mostly unknown to mankind. It is far bigger than we can comprehend, but it is not too big for God. Just to compare the earth and how vast the universe really is, I will use the star. Anyone can look up at night and see a star. It looks like a speck of dust, but in fact it is the size of, if not bigger than the earth you are standing on. And if that star, which looks like dust to you, is that massive, then imagine how big the universe is with an uncountable amount of stars in it. Stop and think that God did this in only six days. To us, it is unfathomable how huge the universe is that God has created for us.

As Christians, every time we look out the window or walk outside we should immediately see the glorious work of God. He alone created us. “Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture” (Ps. 100:3). It is noticeable in everything you see and do. God is good and, there is nothing that is more perfect and divine than he. We belong to God, and he created us through his everlasting love.

So look out the window whenever you get the chance, but do not see only what is on the outside, look closer. See the marvelous handiwork of your Creator and stand in awe of the world he created for us. He loves us, and that love is everlasting. The creation is filled with proof of the sovereignty, power, and love God has for and over all his creation. We are so blessed. Let us not take it for granted.

Nicholas is a graduate of Covenant Christian High School in Walker, Michigan, and a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church. This article was originally written as an essay for a senior English class.
unique ways young people contribute, and one that is often overlooked is reading. Young adults not only help the church now in being well-studied, but help the church of the future as well by spiritually preparing themselves.

There are different mindsets in the young people in the church on the topic of reading. There are a few who read often because they really enjoy it, many who read only the most popular books, and some who rarely read a book from cover to cover. Whether reading is something one enjoys or something that one makes a point to avoid, it is an important and practical way we can serve. Reading is a fundamental way to gain knowledge, which is vital for the roles of the future leaders of the church. Hosea 4:6 says, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” While this phrase is often used when referring to the loss of fundamental doctrines seen in the church world today, it is also an important truth that we must apply to ourselves. While our Christian high schools give us a tremendous amount of knowledge, this fact cannot be used as an excuse not personally to pursue further knowledge.

This pursuit is done well by studying books of good, solid material. While reading for leisure has its place, it is not the type of reading that is necessary here. Why is the work of this type of reading important for young adults? It is important because we must understand what we believe. This knowledge must come from personal study of the scriptures. Personal devotions cannot be stressed enough. Our Christian relationship with God is very personal. That personal relationship cannot be fulfilled only by sitting in catechism and memorizing Lord’s Days. While that is very important, a well-rounded amount of knowledge is important. Along with reading of the scriptures, good sources to read to help serve the church can also be found in reading works from Augustine, John Calvin, Jerry Bridges, C. S. Lewis, and other men of faith. Reading these kinds of works can be a heavy task. Dictionaries, commentaries, and a wise parent are often needed when forging through the pages. Why are the works from former men helpful? Ecclesiastes 1:9 states, “There is no new thing under the sun.” Many of the questions that these Christians struggled with are questions we ourselves have faced or will face in the future. They also were blessed with the gift eloquently to explain complicated ideas that the Bible holds in ways we can better understand them.

The work of reading is not just limited to the works of theologians. It can also be found in simply keeping up with what is going on in the world. In 1 Chronicles 12, David is about to be crowned king in Hebron. The chapter lists many mighty men who join David. Among them are the sons of Issachar, who “…were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.” This is a lesson we can learn ourselves. It is easy as a young adult or college student to be sheltered from news or growing fads that are going on outside our community. It is important to have knowledge about the political scene, world events, and different movements that are going on if we are to understand them better, support positive things when found, and when necessary, refute unbiblical things. It is important to find the core ideas and feelings that are driving movements, ideas, and beliefs, and compare them to our Biblical world view. Reading is a major key to staying informed. There are millions of blogs, online articles, and newspapers that are at our fingertips with a few key strokes that can be read in order to understand the world and times that the Lord has placed us in. Like the sons of Issachar, this understanding of the times will help guide in the knowledge of what things ought to be done and what decisions made.

The blessings of this work will be two-fold. The knowledge we gain from being Biblically grounded and well-informed will help us to gain discernment and perspective in a world that serves a different master. This benefits our homes, our churches, and our brothers and sisters in Christ. When questions are asked, we can speak with informed, engaged intelligence, and we know where we can point others for solid answers. It also gives us the knowledge to sharpen each other as friends and give biblical advice. But this is not the most important reason.

Any relationship that grows in a deeper knowledge and understanding will grow stronger; this fact applies also to our relationship with our heavenly Father. In Philippians 1:9–11 Paul prays that the Philippians’ love would “…abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” Young adults not only help the church now in being immersed in the scriptures and well studied, but help the church of the future as well by spiritu-
ally preparing ourselves to pick up the banner and continue in the march to Zion. The prayer Paul prayed was for the Philippians’ love to grow with knowledge and discernment, which would lead to being able to discriminate right from wrong. The church of Christ is called to be wise and discerning, to value the truth. Searching out knowledge through reading is an important tool to guide us personally in our relationship with Christ, and to aid us in best serving the church body.

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Elisabeth is a member of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

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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:

Micah Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Richard & Joanna VanDenTop—Doon, IA
Tyson Fredrick, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jon & Rachel Huizing—Edmonton, Alberta, CAN
Brielle Ava, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Steve & Shelia Griffioen—Faith, MI
Graham Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan & Megan Koole—Faith, MI
Peyton Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan & Rachel VanBaren—Faith, MI
Ezra Grey, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jim & Susan VanBaren—Faith, MI
Vera Jayne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Caleb & Sandra Meulenberg—Grace, MI
Charlotte Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Derek & Lynette Bleyenberg—Grace, MI
Reuben Grady, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brent & Audrey Meyer—Hull, IA
Miles Eliot, son of Mr. & Mrs. David & Amanda Rozeboom—Hull, IA
Colton Jay, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Paula Kamminga—Loveland, CO
Hudson David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nate & Megan Tanis—Loveland, CO
Asa William, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mike & Kelly Jabaay—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:

Tayler Parmelee—Byron Center, MI
Mercy Chesebro—Byron Center, MI
Ruthie Chesebro—Byron Center, MI
Caleb Maatman—Crete, IL
Ryan Buiter—Doon, IA
Matthew Bleyenberg—Edgerton, MN
Deanaa Tanis—Hope, MI
Libby Kalsbeek—Hope, MI
Karmin Boonstra, Sarah De Roon, Nicole Gritters, Justin King, Ryan Kroese, and Blake Meyer—Hull, IA
Ryan Griess—Loveland, CO
Jessica Bleyenberg—Redlands, CA
Elisabeth Haan—Redlands, CA
Anne Kuiper—Southwest, MI
Ethan Brunmel—Sioux Falls, SD
Whitney Maas—Trinity, MI

MARRIAGES

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

Mr. Dean Brunmel and Miss Anna VanEgdom—Doon, IA
Mr. Trent Wierenga and Miss Chelsea Kuyers—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Tyler Langerak and Miss Laura Hekstra—Hope, MI
Mr. Carl Broinsma and Miss Nicole Groeneweg—Hull, IA
Mr. Charles Hopkins and Miss Karietan Wigfield—Redlands, CA
The Horn and the Oil

The heat of summer beat down on the high mountain meadow where the sheep grazed beneath the sharp eye of their shepherd. Each night, he herded them into the corner of the meadow where a low, stone fence had been constructed.

But with the heat also came the flies and other biting bugs. The sheep pawed at their faces as the flies flew into their eyes and wiggled into their noses. The flies were annoying and took their attention away from eating the good grass and following their shepherd to water. Instead, the sheep scraped their skin on the rocks and scratchy bushes to itch the flies away.

The shepherd walked among the sheep carrying a ram’s horn filled with oil. Whenever he saw a sheep annoyed with flies, he would pour the oil over its head and spread it around their eyes and noses. The oil protected the sheep from the annoying flies.

The heat also made the sheep angry towards each other. They would ram their heads together so hard that they would hurt each other.

The shepherd walked among the sheep once again with his ram’s horn filled with oil. He poured it on the angry sheeps’ heads. Now when they rammed their heads into each other, they slipped off before they could hurt each other. The oil protected the sheep from harming each other.

Looking over each sheep, the shepherd spread the oil over each of their scratches and wounds so they would heal. The oil protected the sheep from infection.

The sheep wondered at the shepherd’s horn of oil. All that summer he poured out his oil, but his horn never seemed to run out. It flowed over them whenever they needed it.

Questions to think about:
1. Read Psalm 23:5, 92:10, 133:1–2, Isaiah 44:3, and Acts 2:17–18 by yourself or with your parents. How is the Shepherd’s oil like Christ’s Spirit?
2. The flies, the heat, the scratches, and the anger of the other sheep were all annoyances and troubles that distracted the sheep from the important things. How do the annoyances of our lives distract us? How does Christ’s Spirit protect us?

Unscramble each of the clue words.

Take the letters that appear in circled boxes and unscramble them for the final message.

MAAR’S HRNO
SEIFL
VEOLI LIO
NANNOTI
DEAH
CASTCHR
DESHHER
EPHE
DAWOME
HAET

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/prypc2015

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