Scholarship Essay

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Viewing and Interacting with Other True Churches and Their Members

As an aspiring minister in the PRCA, I will inevitably face many questions from members within the congregation. Three questions face us presently. First, how do we treat other true churches of Jesus Christ that differ in doctrine? Second, how do we treat the members of those churches? Third, how can we teach those around us in the church to do that?

The first question assumes that we belong to a true church. Do we? Before we turn our spotlight of inspection on others, we ought to look at ourselves. We ought to examine the church that we belong to and verify that we are members of a true church. If we cannot say we belong to a true church, the first question really becomes a command to belong to a true church of Jesus Christ.

So what then is a true church of Jesus Christ? Many reading this article may immediately think of Question 83 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which answers that the keys of the kingdom of heaven are the preaching of the holy gospel and Christian discipline.1 To think of these as the definition of a true church would be correct, but there is more. To complete the explanation and define what a true church is, we will need to consider the following:

Beacon Lights

church is, we need to read Belgic Confession Article 29, which gives us the marks of the true church. There are three.

First, is the pure doctrine of the gospel preached?
Second, does the church maintain the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Jesus Christ?
Third, is church discipline exercised in the punishing of sin?

Back to the question: are WE members of a true church? Each one of us should take a moment to reflect on his own congregation and think about the three marks just cited. Hopefully we can say, “Yes, I belong to a true church of Jesus Christ.”

Being able to say that we belong to a true church of Jesus Christ gives us confidence. We have no doubt about our position on the truth. We are assured that what we believe is in harmony with the Bible.

However, we must not let this confidence turn into pride. Our pride is checked when we consider our confidence in light of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Westminster Confession says that “the purest churches under heaven are subject to both mixture and error.” What is true for a church is true for an individual. As individuals we are not perfect. We are also subject to mixture and error. We haven’t cornered the market on truth. Sure, we are confident, yes, we confess the truth, but we need to acknowledge that there may be places where we are wrong. We know this to be our personal experience because we are always growing in the knowledge of the truth. We are always learning, correcting our misconceptions, and gaining a fuller understanding of the truth.

The Westminster quotation points to the attitude we must have while answering the question of whether or not we belong to a true church. Our attitude needs to be one of thankfulness and humility. The truth we have been given is a free gift of grace. We don’t deserve to have the truth, yet we have it. We must be profoundly thankful for it.

So we belong to a true church, but are we THE only true church? There is a difference between a single true church of Jesus Christ and THE church of Jesus Christ. The church of Jesus Christ is comprised of the elect, those who are called out, those who are found in every nation, tribe, and tongue.

The fact that the church is universal means there are many individual true churches of Jesus Christ. Who might those be? Two examples of other true churches of Jesus Christ come to mind.

First, churches that are overseas, ones not in the USA. Those true churches confess and practice all the marks of the true church, but they live out their confession in a different way. They have different cultures. They have different histories. They come out of different backgrounds. They hold to the same doctrines we do but emphasize different aspects.

Second, those churches that are less pure in doctrine. They still preach the gospel, administer the sacraments, and exercise discipline; but with less purity. Who might be an example of this? How about a church that holds to common grace? Would this be a true church?

To answer this, let’s back up and consider what a false church is. According to Belgic Confession Article 29, a false church has marks as well. A false church will not submit to the word of God, does not administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ, relies more upon men than upon God, and persecutes those who live holy lives.

There is a difference between a true and a false church. To use an analogy, on a scale of 1 to 10, a false church being a 1 and a true church being a 10, it is reasonable that there are churches in the middle. Our experience bears out that there are such churches. We intuitively know that there are all sorts of churches with all sorts of doctrinal positions.

Churches in the middle of the scale will be either apostatizing or reforming churches. Consider a

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2 Belgic Confession Article 29, in The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and added Chorale Section, 49.
church that is in the middle due to impure common-grace preaching. Is this church casting off the pure preaching of the word in favor of man’s ideas? Is the church apostatizing in the area of its preaching? Or is this church reforming in the area of its preaching?

So back to the question: can we use as an example of a true church one that is less pure in doctrine, one that holds to common grace? Without digging deeply into the particulars of the church in question, we can’t say whether the church in question would be apostatizing or reforming, but we can make a definitive statement about it. Quoting David Engelsma, “The Protestant Reformed Churches do not regard churches that hold the well-meant gospel offer and common grace as false churches.”

Now we have a very clear case in mind to deal with. For the sake of argument, let’s consider a church that is almost the same as ours; one that preaches the word, administers the sacraments, and exercises discipline. Yet these things are not done quite so purely because this church holds to common grace. How are we to treat this church?

On the one hand, we would certainly want to support and affirm the positive. We would compliment and support this church for preaching every Sunday, for administering the sacraments, and for exercising discipline. On the other hand, we would be compelled to be firm and to condemn the error found in the doctrine of common grace. We would need to call the church to reform in this area and sound out the truth of God’s word, citing how common grace is wrong, while vigorously defending and fighting for God’s honor in this area of doctrine.

The biblical example is found in Revelation 2 and 3. Here Jesus is speaking to the seven churches. He commands those churches with impure doctrine to repent. He is adamant; he warns of judgment to follow. He commands those churches with impure doctrine to repent. He is adamant; he warns of judgment to come if they do not.

So how should we treat a person in this common-grace church? We ought not to treat a member of a common-grace church the same as the church itself. A church member is not the same as a church. People often have different thoughts or are ignorant of official policies or doctrines. Churches have official doctrinal positions. A person may or may not agree with that position. So we need to have a conversation with the person. We need to talk to him or her. Primarily, we need to listen.

So when we listen to people, we do not treat them in an adversarial way. If we were to breath out threatenings like Saul did (Acts 9:1), we would cause them to run away from us. An adversarial tone will automatically trigger a negative response. Either they will respond in kind and fight back, or they will avoid us and be driven even further from the truth.

When we listen, we need to stop talking. This may seem obvious, but it needs to be stressed. If all we are doing is waiting for the other person to finish so we can get our point of rebuttal in, we do everyone a disservice. Implied in not talking is to be slow to judge. Casting immediate condemnation on another person will end the conversation. Conversations, done wrongly, will alienate others from us. Our experience tells us that this is so. No one wants to talk to a condescending know-it-all. What’s the point? He knows everything. No matter what is said to the know-it-all, he has a better answer, a better story, a better way of doing it.

When we listen, we need to seek to understand what the other person is saying and thinking, why that person is saying it, and the context of the situation. Listening is more than just hearing. Listening is comprehending. Listening involves complete, undivided attention. Listening is being able to articulate what the person just said to us. We need to listen in meekness and fear. Meekness is what 1 Peter 3:15 stresses. Meekness is speaking not with pride, arrogance, or self-justification, but with gentleness, kindness, and humility. Meekness should remind us of Moses, who was the meekest man (Num. 12:3). Moses listened and was very patient with the people.

We need to listen in a spirit of love. Consider Jesus’ treatment of the rich young ruler. Jesus was teaching. The rich young ruler barged right in and interrupted. So what did Jesus do? Jesus listened patiently to him. Jesus loved him (Mark 10:21). Jesus then instructed him on what he must do next.

This kind of listening creates trust and respect in the person we are talking with. This kind of listening shows that we are taking the other person seriously and placing value on his thoughts.

Having the trust of another person means that we will be approachable and gain credibility. Trust earns us the opportunity to speak. With that credibility we will have the right to ask questions—again done in a spirit of meekness. When we fully understand another person’s view, we will be able to present our alternate, correct view. We will have the opportunity to explain our position. We will have the opportunity to explain

5 David J. Engelsma, Bound to Join (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2010), 10.
the truth. At this point we need to be ready to give the answer of 1 Peter 3:15, which in this case would be to articulate our position on common grace clearly and succinctly.

The result of all these things will be that by listening and teaching, by asking questions in a humble way, and by seeking to understand the other person, we will be creating a positive example. This positive example will serve us well. It will give instruction and guidance not only to this theoretical common-grace-believing person, but also our friends, family members, or anyone else we come into contact with. A positive example, listening meekly, will allow us to explain the truth more often. Instead of being a hindrance to the advancement of God’s church and kingdom, we will be, by our witness, sounding out the truth and glorifying his name.

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Viewing and Interacting with Other True Churches and Their Members

Many churches and different denominations exist in the world today. These include Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, non-denominational, and many others. This is a massive change in the church world that started around 500 years ago. Prior to the Protestant Reformation only a few separate denominations existed, the largest of all those being the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Reformation completely changed that: it created hundreds of different denominations. Sadly, many of these denominations have departed from the truth of the scripture and from the true worship of Jehovah. Many so called Christian churches in the world today worship a god that they call Jesus Christ, but is not the sovereign, holy, just, and righteous Jesus Christ that the Bible teaches. Nevertheless, true churches of Jesus Christ do exist in the world today. They may be few in number, but they do exist and these churches are not just limited to the Protestant Reformed denomination.

While other true denominations exist in the world today, some may have differences in doctrine from the PRCA. So the question that will absorb this paper is: how does someone view other true churches of Jesus Christ which may have differences in doctrine from the PRCA? How are fellow Christians called to view and interact with members of those different churches? It will be found that those of other true churches must be viewed as Christians, and so they must be treated in love and humility. Yet they must also be instructed in doctrine in a polemical fashion so that they can come to a fuller understanding of the scriptures.

Before entering into arguments for this thesis, it must be stated that this is a difficult question. It is made all the more difficult by the fact that there are so many different denominations in the world today, each with its own slightly different perspective on certain issues. This makes it hard to state specifically that there is one hard and fast way to deal with those Christians of other denominations. Individuals dealing with this issue must deal with it on a case by case basis. That being said, there are general guidelines in dealing with each denomination and Christian, and this paper will examine these guidelines.

Let us first examine how we are called to view those true churches of Jesus Christ who may have differences in doctrine from the PRCA. Since this is a discussion of true churches (the definition of which is found in the Belgic Confession, Article 29) of Jesus Christ, then the members of those churches must be treated as brothers and sisters in Christ. It must be assumed that those differences of doctrine are slight and not of vital importance to the purity of true doctrine, the Bible, and the glory of God.

Differences in doctrine from the PRCA do not necessarily make one a heretic. In fact, there have been differences within the church, as the most basic study of church history shows. To list a few examples:
Augustine held to the necessity of baptism for salvation. John Calvin believed that the remarriage of the innocent party was permissible. Martin Luther held to the doctrine of consubstantiation. These are certainly not teachings that the PRCA holds to be true, but that does not make the men confessing them any less Christian. It is certainly a weakness on the part of these men, but they must still be viewed as the elect children of God. So the Christian today must be careful in judging other Christians. In John 7:24 Christ commands the Pharisees to “Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (The Holy Bible: King James Version). That is the calling of every true Christian in the world today regarding those who may be different from the PRCA.

Let us now move on to examine how the Christian should guide his interactions with those of other true churches. A very crucial step in this is to examine the different doctrine that is being taught. The Christian must be like the Bereans when it comes to new doctrine: he must be cautious. As Acts 17:11 states, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” Christians must exercise the same cautiousness with different doctrines, but also to some degree exercise an openness of mind. Not so open that they are “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14), but nevertheless open so that they are constantly examining themselves to be sure that they are in the faith.

A most fundamental principle that should guide the Christian’s communication with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ is love. Love is vitally important here, because other Christians may have differences in doctrine from other denominations, such as the PRCA. Differences tend to bring about anger, suspicion, concern, and ostracization of the other group. Yet all these attitudes and actions ought never to exist around Christians. The Christian has been called to love his neighbour as himself and not only his neighbour, but his enemy as well. That raises the bar infinitely high. It is the hardest thing to love one who is our enemy, the one who is different from us. Humans always get along with those who they agree with, who have similar interests, likes, dislikes, and personalities. But perhaps this one specific church has a slight difference in doctrine, and thus they can be hard to get along with. The calling of the Christian then is not to hate that church, but to show love to its members.

This love will display itself in several different aspects in the Christian. The first is that it will desire to bring them to a fuller knowledge of the truth of God’s word. It will desire to show believers the correct view on topics such as divorce and remarriage, the Lord’s Supper, and baptism, in order to bring them to a greater understanding of God’s word. This evangelistic desire must always be present in the interactions with those of other denominations. It was this desire in part that caused Peter to preach to the Jews in Acts 2 about the death and resurrection of the Messiah. This desire is also found in Paul’s going into the synagogues first on his missionary journeys before preaching to the Gentiles. Paul and the other disciples desired to preach to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, so that they could know the fullness of the gospel, for some of these Jews were true believers in God, but had not yet heard about the Christ. They still needed the fuller revelation of God brought to them; one finds similar circumstances quite often in other true churches of Jesus Christ.

Another example of this desire to bring a fuller understanding of the truth of God’s word is found in Paul’s rebuking Peter for emphasizing the importance of circumcision. Peter was a true child of God. However, he had weaknesses and slid into false doctrine. Paul rebuked Peter for his actions, and so the Christian is also called to rebuke those true Christians for their weaknesses regarding certain doctrines.

As a brief side note here it must be mentioned that the purpose of this sharing of the truth is not necessarily to bring all these people into the PRCA. Membership in the PRCA does not equate with being included in the covenant of God: PRCA membership is not a requisite of being a child of God. The ambition and goal should be to bring them to a greater understanding of the truth. If they desire to join the PRCA after learning of that truth, that is wonderful. But if not, they should not be rejected as not being true Christians.

All that the Christian does in regard to this topic should be done in love. This will mean that ultimately the most important desire for the Christian in bringing the fuller revelation of the word of God to another Christian will be to bring greater glory, honour, and love to Jesus Christ. A greater understanding of truth will cause the name of God to be praised more fully because that person now has a greater knowledge of God. This will only happen if this is blessed by the grace of God: only if God works in the heart of the believer will the person be caused to stop living in
darkness and sin regarding some truth he has had trouble believing. A word of caution should be included. Some people will get angry when one attempts to bring them out of their error and calls a doctrine they believe in erroneous. Some will show great hatred for that. Yet it still is our calling to love them and to dwell peaceably, as much as possible, with all men (Roman 12:18).

Also showing a fellow Christian his error in love will mean that it is done in humility. It is not done in the arrogant attitude that one has a greater understanding of the counsel and word of God. It must not be done in a haughty and prideful attitude that the one individual is more specially blessed by God than the other. It must be remembered that all saving knowledge of God is given only by the grace of God and that God out of his own grace decided to reveal that knowledge to those he did. It was not out of anything that that one person did. God could have just left that person in the absolute darkness of total depravity.

In addition, the Christian must pray. He must bring these other Christians before the Almighty, praying that they might receive the grace to be able to come to a better understanding of the truths of the word of God. God is in control of everything, even in this matter, and so the Christian must daily pray for his fellow saints. He must also pray for the grace to be able to do this heavy task. It is by no means easy to correct someone who is in error. It requires a lot of wisdom and understanding.

Finally, it must be stated that there are great dangers if the PRCA suspends all communications with those who do not agree with us on every single point of doctrine. There is the great temptation to make ourselves an island if this is done, and that leads to the mentality that the PRCA is the only true church. That is a heresy that Rome has long held to, and it would be a great sorrow if the PRCA ever claimed that.

Therefore, in conclusion, the Christian must view other true churches of Jesus Christ in love, patience, and humility. The Christian must exercise an attitude of graciousness that is one of the great qualities of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Christian must also try to lead other believers to a greater understanding of the truth of God. In this way he must be polemical. He must bring him the Bible, he must discuss it with him, and he must pray for the other believer. The only way that the Christian can ever show this amount of love and patience is by the grace of God. So this must be sought daily in order that the name of God can be glorified in every action. May that be the Christian’s desire: that God’s glory be wrought even in bringing other fellow believers to a greater understanding of Jehovah.

Works Cited


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day and age, it is a common, even popular, decision to attend college after graduating from high school. With or without a specific direction in mind, hundreds of students send in their applications and start filling out financial aid forms. But the choice to pursue a higher degree of education should be made with utmost care. There are many dangers to be aware of, as well as great benefits to consider. As children who walk in the light, we must guard against the dangers that accompany higher education, while seeking to obtain its benefits.

Of course, there are dangers in pursuing a higher education and we must be aware of these threats if we are to protect ourselves from them. The greatest danger lies within our own hearts, and it is the sin of pride. Since the moment Eve reached out her hand to take the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, man has desired to be like God. From the building of the tower of Babel to Darwin’s theory of evolution, man in his pride has envied God, sought to be like him, and facing failure, rejected him. Thus began the philosophy known as humanism. Professor Dykstra defines humanism in his Standard Bearer article, “Humanism vs. Protestant Reformed Teachers: No R&R” as, “The belief that man is the measure of all things.”

Humanism is more prevalent in our society today than it has been at any other time throughout history. Prof. Dykstra warns us, “…We live in the end of the ages, in which the root of this evil [humanism] is grown up and producing its ugliest, and most potent fruit.” This dangerous philosophy exalts mankind. It urges men to philosophize, rationalize, and theorize, while dismissing faith as old-fashioned and irrelevant. The power of the mind is celebrated and man’s ability to reason is hailed as the greatest instrument.

This presents to us the greatest danger in pursuing higher education: That in our learning and instruction, we will begin to value the works of man higher than the works of God; that we will place our trust in the theories of science rather than in the infallible Scriptures; and that in gaining knowledge of the world, we will lose our childlike faith in God. For this exact reason, the prophet Isaiah laments the state of the nation of Israel. The pursuit of knowledge had become a stumbling block for the children of Abraham, and Isaiah reproaches them, saying, “For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me” (Isaiah 47:10). In fact, the wisdom and knowledge of the nation of Israel had so perverted them that God allowed them to be destroyed by the Assyrians. A sobering example of the danger of pride.

The pursuit of higher education presents a second danger due to the age at which it is normally pursued. Not in every circumstance, but often, it is young adults who pursue higher education. Newly graduated from high school with maybe nineteen years of life experience, and off we go to colleges and universities that tell us to follow our dreams and build a career and change the world. It is an extremely impressionable time of life, and the grand institutes of learning take advantage of this. We are the perfect testing ground for their theories. We are the blank pages on which they can write their worldly, humanistic philosophies.

In Proverbs 7 Solomon describes the ease with which a young person can be led astray. He depicts a young man “void of understanding” (v. 7) who follows a harlot to her bed. The wisest man who ever lived explains the behavior of the young man, saying, “With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him” (v. 21). The way of the world is similar to that of the harlot. She entices the youth of the church while their minds are still pliable, and under the guise of “liberal arts,” she feeds them her honeyed lies and sweet deceptions.

This leads us to the third danger of pursuing higher education, which is the false teachings that a college or university student will invariably encounter. Upon leaving the sheltered environment of our Protestant Reformed Christian schools, young adults seeking higher education find themselves under a barrage of false doctrine. Whether attending a state institution, a private university, or a Christian college, a student will be presented with information and material that is contrary to what we believe. In a so-called Christian college, the lies may be more subtle and harder to detect. In a state university, they will be displayed with pride. For decades now, the insidious lies of Darwinism have been accepted and promoted in almost every institution of learning. The first chapter of the Bible has been dismissed as a myth and the magnificent power of God in Genesis 1 has been attributed to man himself. Again, we see the menaces of humanism in those “who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served

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2 Ibid.
the creature more than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25).

Also, following the post-modern mantra of tolerance, schools of higher education across the country have spoken out in support of homosexuality, gay rights, and transgender students. Almost every university, including the one I attend, has an LGBT (Lesbian/Gay/Bi/Trans) Resource Center where students who have “alternative lifestyles” can gain support and encouragement. Those who speak out against this sin are accused of hate speech, homophobia, and being “unchristian.”

The false teachings of the world assault students on every side. Leaving the secure parameters of our godly schools and attending a college or university gives the world a perfect opportunity to fill our minds with their earthly philosophies. It is a danger that cannot be taken lightly.

However, even under the instruction of worldly men and women who may have erroneous views concerning science and society, the child of God can profit intellectually. We are reminded of the words of Article 4 in the Third and Fourth Heads of the Canons of Dordt, “There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things…”3 Professor Engelsma explains this in his book Reformed Education, saying,

“He [the ungodly man] can uncover many facts, invent and compose, and do many astounding things in medicine and science. This is not due to grace, nor are these deeds pleasing to God. But we may not react to the erroneous description of them by the advocates of common grace by denying the Christian’s right to use what unbelievers produce. Many are God’s good gifts to us through wicked men.”4

We can attend state colleges, we can learn from worldly publications, and we can use man’s inventions because they are all part of God’s good gifts to us. This is how we see the benefits of pursuing a higher education.

There are wonderful benefits of pursuing higher education. College is a time of learning and maturing for the young adult. Professor Gritters points out in the Standard Bearer in an article entitled, “Should I Go to College?” that “For many, it is the years of college that transform a young person to an adult.”5 Without the direct oversight of teachers and parents, students are forced to be responsible in their studying and time management. It is a time where young people learn to be accountable for themselves and realize the consequences of failing. It is often while pursuing higher education that a student recognizes he is learning because he wants to, not because he has to.

Attending a college or university will also give a young person added skills to live successfully in the world. Prof. Gritters goes on to suggest, “A good education gives you the ability to manage your business, communicate with customers, study new methods of your particular field, etc.”6 This does not mean that these things cannot be done successfully without a college education, but it is true that a trade school or business college will offer valuable hands-on experience within the safety of a school program and without the pressures of a real job. Here a student may study mechanics, accounting, nursing, or marketing, and learn how to fix a transmission, create a budget, take blood pressure, or pitch a product—all skills that will truly help them in their future careers.

The greatest benefit of all in choosing to pursue a higher degree of education is that it may help us to use our talents to better glorify God. If we have been given the blessing of a strong mind and the ability to learn and apply knowledge, we should not waste those gifts, but rather put them to use for the good of the church. In 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul encourages his student Timothy to “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Furthering our education must stem from a desire to please God, not to increase our own earthly knowledge.

In addition, we must never forget how much there is to learn and discover about the vast and marvelous creation that God has placed us in. Article 2 of the Belgic Confession declares the universe to be “before our eyes as a most elegant book.”7 It is the pages of this most elegant book that we must seek to study.

6 Ibid.
and it is the words written by Jehovah that we must desire to read.

Although there are dangers that accompany a pursuit of higher education, we must not let those dangers frighten us into a life of world-flight. God has provided us with the tools and instruction to defend ourselves against these dangers. It is true that our corrupt nature can lead us to exalt our own learning above the wisdom of God, but armed with the warnings and admonitions of scripture, we continue to fight against our prideful tendencies. With Solomon’s words from Proverbs 16:18 in our minds, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall,” we strive to keep the glory of God as our goal.

Nor should the impressionability of our youth cause us to discourage a higher level of education. The wise king of Israel laid these fears to rest over three millennia ago when he declared, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). Our work as believing teachers and parents begins the moment a covenant child is conceived. “We have the calling,” Prof. Engelsma asserts in Reformed Education, “to rear our children in...the pure Reformed faith as handed down to the Protestant Reformed Churches and developed by them.”

God instructs us specifically how to do this in Deuteronomy 6:6–7, saying, “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” If we raise our children with the commandments of God always before their eyes, from their first breath in the morning to their last whispered prayer at night, the worldly philosophies taught in schools of higher education will never shake their faith.

The benefits of obtaining a higher education cannot be ignored. We should encourage our young people to examine their God-given talents and abilities to determine whether further education would be an appropriate decision. Young men should consider the availability of jobs and how they plan to support a family. Young women should consider their intellectual gifts, as well as their calling to be a wife and mother in the home.

Higher education can often be used to serve the good of the church. It takes years of study beyond high school, but higher education can grant men the ability to be ministers in our Protestant Reformed Churches or teachers in our Christian schools. Earning a business degree may help a man provide jobs for fellow church members or aid men who might serve as future officebearers. Using our gifts and abilities for the good of the church is one of the highest goals we can strive towards, that we may hear the words of our Lord, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

The great dangers and blessed benefits of pursuing higher education make the decision a weighty one for the child of God. However, with the glory of God always at the heart of our goals and desires, the decision to pursue higher education will be well-guided.

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Devotional

Sarah Mowery

The Daily Press

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

October

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Destruction’s Pit
Read Psalm 40: 1–2

Imagine you are walking through mud so thick and deep that you can hardly walk. Your feet skid and sink, and the heavy mud cakes on your shoes until you lose them altogether: they stay stuck when you wrench your feet free. Now imagine you’re staggering through mud like that at the bottom of a dark, dank pit. The walls of the pit are made of the same slimy mud! How will you ever get out? The psalmist begins Psalm 40 by remembering a time in his life in which he was stuck in a deep, muddy pit. This pit was not a physical pit: he was trapped in the terrible, slippery pit of sin. Sin is deceitful, you see: the devil, the world, and our own sinful hearts continually lie to us, attempting to convince us that what God has called evil is actually good. The psalmist had turned aside to sin’s lies, and now he was in trouble. So what does he do? He cries to Jehovah, and then he patiently waits for the Lord to help him.

In what sin are you trapped today? What lies are you tempted to believe? Pray to Jehovah, and he will help you.

Sing or pray Psalter #111.

9

Master of Disguise
Read Hebrews 3:12–13

How does our three-fold enemy deceive us? By disguising sin. This is a poem that I wrote after reading Chapter 5 of John Owen’s Overcoming Sin and Temptation. The “he” in this poem is sin. As you read it, see if you can decipher the different ways he would deceive you.

First, he’d have you believe his Demise is actually a probability—which it isn’t, though at times you choose to believe it, scraping by as you are on your own self-righteousness and quasi-strength. If playing dead doesn’t work, there’s Disimulation—slander masquerades as concern, pride plays as prudence.

You’re convinced your heart is cleaner, too: in reality, it’s only more cunning.

Then there’s his intent to maintain an appearance of Dignity—to persuade you that as long as you present a sedate exterior, the wickedness within is of no consequence. If you rally on one front, he will attack another; you celebrate at the northern border, only to be conquered from the west; sin’s servant still—your master has merely Diverted. At your periodic disgust or pain-fueled determination, he may withdraw under pretense of defeat: but Discontinuous will strike as soon as your alert abates, in full strength to seek your death.

Sing or pray Psalter #111.

10

Upon the Rock
Read Psalm 61:1–2

When the psalmist is deceived by sin and trapped in its pit, he cries to Jehovah to help him. The Lord doesn’t just pull him out of the pit and set him on the dry ground near its mouth: he brings him to the top of a cliff that offers a breathtaking view. That’s what Psalm 40:2 refers to when it reads, “and set my feet upon a rock.”

The Bible speaks often of this mighty rock on which the righteous stand. We’ve already read of the rock in Psalms 18, 27, 28, and 31. The New Testament confirms that rock is Christ. He is the rock in the wilderness from which flows living water (John 4). He is the cornerstone on which his church is built, the rock cut without hands that will crush the nations and grow to fill the earth. To those who seek to merit righteousness by the works of the law, he is a rock of offence. But whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed (Rom 9:32–33). Do you hear his words and do them? Then you are like a wise man, who built his house upon the rock (Matt. 7:24).

Sing or pray Psalter #111.

11

A Cliff with a Breathtaking View
Read 1 Peter 1:1–9

Rocky Mountain National Park lies just west of our home. As you drive along its winding roads, clinging to mountainsides and climbing to more than 12,000 feet in elevation, you see some breathtaking views. When we stand on the rock who is Christ, we are given an eternal view. That perspective enables us to look beyond our troubles and temptations to the glory that awaits God’s saints. It’s the view of “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us to look beyond our troubles and temptations to the glory that awaits God’s saints. It’s the view of “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us” (1 Pet. 1:4).

That eternal view was the hope of Old Testament saints who endured physical pits. When he reflected on the evil his brothers had done to him, Joseph said, “But God meant it unto good…to save much people alive” (Gen. 50:20). Jeremiah extolled the Lord’s faithfulness and confessed, “Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee…thou hast redeemed my life” (Lam 3:57–58). And Daniel was given a vision of the day when, “The Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom” (Dan. 7:22). Is that the breathtaking view on which you set your gaze?

Sing or pray Psalter #36.

12

Many Shall See
Read Psalm 40:1–3

Jehovah lifts the psalmist out of a horrible pit and sets him on the mountaintop that is Christ. But he doesn’t leave him there alone: he
establishes his goings, makes his steps secure. Do you remember 37:23a: “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord?” What about Psalm 17:5: “Hold up my goings in thine paths, that my footsteps slip not”? “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). It’s when you and I succumb to sin’s deceit that we fall back into destruction’s pit. Let’s pray for sure footing today.

Jehovah does something else for the psalmist: he puts a new song of praise in his mouth. The psalmist has been filled with the Spirit, and his gratitude for what God has done for him spills from him in song. Let’s also pray today that being filled with the Spirit, we might speak to ourselves “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:19–20).

Let’s pray for sure footing today.

The psalmist has been filled with the Lord’s gratitude; he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20).

We are called first of all to love those of his children who are closest to us. If you’re married, that person is your spouse. I read once that Christians who are married should think of God not only as their heavenly Father, but also as their heavenly Father-in-law, who is most delighted when they love their spouses—his sons or daughters—well. Yesterday we considered our calling to exhort, teach, and admonish one another. It’s important that we do those things in love and humility, “in honour preferring one another” (Rom. 12:10). That kind of fervent love “shall cover the multitude of sins” and be the defining characteristic by which all men will know that we are Jesus’ disciples (John 13:35).

Sing or pray Psalter #370.

**October**

**Exhort One Another**

**Read Colossians 3:12–25**

God saves the psalmist from a horrible pit, and his gratitude spills from him in a new song. Others observe these things, are filled with holy reverence for the Lord, and put their trust in him.

We live in an individualistic and self-centered society. But Jesus saves us as parts of a body. You and I must use our experiences of sin and deliverance and our praise of God to encourage and build up our fellow saints. Negatively, that means that we must reprove our brothers and sisters who have been deceived by sin: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12–13). Positively, we must follow the commands that we just read in Col. 3:15–16: “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs…”

Sing or pray Psalter #112.

**October**

**Love My Children**

**Read 1 John 4**

As a mother, the expressions of kindness that I find most touching are not intended for me: they are directed toward my children. Nothing pleases me more than seeing someone go out of their way to engage my children in conversation, comfort them when they’re hurt, or encourage them when they are dejected. The same is true of God: he delights in those who love their fellow saints, his children. “If a man say, ‘I love God,’ and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20).

We’re called first of all to love those of his children who are closest to us. If you’re married, that person is your spouse. I read once that Christians who are married should think of God not only as their heavenly Father, but also as their heavenly Father-in-law, who is most delighted when they love their spouses—his sons or daughters—well. Yesterday we considered our calling to exhort, teach, and admonish one another. It’s important that we do those things in love and humility, “in honour preferring one another” (Rom. 12:10). That kind of fervent love “shall cover the multitude of sins” and be the defining characteristic by which all men will know that we are Jesus’ disciples (John 13:35).

Sing or pray Psalter #370.

**October**

**Look at me!**

**Read Psalm 40:1–4**

Imagine you’re talking to a friend or your mom or dad. You want their full attention, but they’re preoccupied, so you demand, “Look at me!” Now suppose that they’re preoccupied because they’re driving on an interstate highway. The speed limit is 75 mph, and looking at you may mean that they veer into the other lane of traffic and cause a deadly car wreck. In that situation it would be best that they not look at you, wouldn’t it?

The man who penned Psalm 40 says this about the one who observes his experiences and consequently trusts the Lord: that person doesn’t respect the proud. The idea of that phrase is that the believer doesn’t look at the proud, he doesn’t turn to face them. He’s like the person driving down the freeway: the sinful actions of proud men are in the passenger seat, beggining his full attention. Their images are plastered on the billboards that line the highway, but he refuses to avert his eyes from the road in front him. Is that the intensity with which you’re focused on the path to heaven, or do you respect the proud?

Sing or pray Psalter #108.

**October**

**Those Who Turn Aside to Lies**

**Read Proverbs 30:1–9**

Psalm 40:4 defines “the proud”: they are those who turn aside to lies. Several months ago we considered the truth that at the root of every sin is pride. That pride comes to expression then in the belief that men have the right to determine for themselves what they may or may not do, what is good and what is evil. The proud are not only endlessly deceived by sin; they delight in propagating sin’s lies as well. Have you ever watched a dog frantically zigzag from one side of a trail to the other, lured first by one scent and then another? That’s what Christians are like when they follow after those who turn aside to lies. Don’t chase those who are intent on empty pursuits! Instead, make the earnest prayer of Proverbs 30:8 your own: “Remove far from me vanity and lies.” And when you’re tempted to give them your attention—at work, at school, or online—grip the steering wheel and refuse to turn your head.

What characterizes those who don’t respect the proud or such as turn aside to lies? They are blessed: that is, happy.

Sing or pray Psalter #108.

**October**

**God’s Precious Thoughts**

**Read Isaiah 55**

The psalmist’s recollection of God’s deliverance prompts him to praise: instead of speaking about God in the third person, he addresses him directly in Psalm 40.5. Imagine you are lying outside under a starry sky, echoing his praise to God. First praise God for his works in history and creation. He “alone spreadeth out the heavens...which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades.” He alone “doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number” (Job 9:8–10). Then praise God for the thoughts that drive his counsel: they are thoughts of peace toward his people. To our human minds, the value of those thoughts is incalculable. Nor can they “be reckoned up in order”; like the stars, they are innumerable.

Since God cannot be comprehended, should we be silent? No!
“My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof” (Ps. 71:15).

Sing or pray Psalter #112.

**October 18**

**From Deliverance to Dedication**

**Read Psalm 40:5–10**

The psalmist’s deliverance leads to dedication: he commits himself to the service of his Lord. Though he lived in the Old Testament, he recognized that outward sacrifices were no substitute for obedience. God delights in the praise of repentant, obedient people: “O Israel, return unto the Lorp thy God...Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips” (Hos. 14:1–2). The psalmist also recognized that his open ears and willing heart were God’s work. He could say with Isaiah, “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ears to hear as the learned. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ears...” (Is. 50:4–5).

Jesus often used this exhortation to obedience: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt. 11:15). Have you been given ears to hear? Then “by [Jesus] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Heb. 13:15).

Sing or pray Psalter #109.

**October 19**

**To Obey is Better**

**Read 1 Samuel 15**

In 1 Samuel 15 God through Samuel commissions Saul to fight Amalek. He commands Saul to kill every Amalekite and all of their animals, but Saul spares the Amalekite king as well as the best of their herds. When Samuel confronts him regarding his disobedience, Saul insists that he spared the sheep and oxen to sacrifice them to the Lord. Samuel replies, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (v. 22b).

You and I are just like Saul. Instead of cleaning up our bedrooms when we’re told, we decide to draw a picture for Mom instead. We refuse to ditch the grudges we hold toward a brother or sister, but we ease our consciences by volunteering to teach Sunday school. We won’t stop gossiping, but we try to compensate by preparing meals for fellow church members. We don’t stop looking at pornography, but we think that the long hours we put in at work will make up for it. Dear Christian, our obedience must be total, immediate, and from the heart; otherwise it is no obedience at all. When you’re tempted to disobey today and sacrifice instead, remember: to obey is better.

Sing or pray Psalter #109.

**October 20**

**All of Me**

**Read Romans 12:1–2**

We recently read Leviticus 8 in our family devotions. In verses 22–23 of that chapter, Moses dips his finger in the blood of the ram of consecration and puts it on the tip of Aaron’s right ear, the thumb of his right hand, and the great toe of his right foot. That passage elicited some amused glances around our table, but the picture that is makes is a beautiful one. That ceremony symbolized that as a priest, all of Aaron was consecrated for God’s service. He must be ready to hear and obey Jehovah’s word and willing to fulfill the holy duties of his office.

We who live in the New Testament have been anointed to be priests by the Holy Spirit. We’re called to present all of ourselves as living sacrifices of thankfulness to Christ, our high priest, “who by the one sacrifice of his body has redeemed us, and makes continual intercession with the Father for us” (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 12). Be mindful today that your hearing, your willing, what you do, and where you go all belong to Christ. All of you has been consecrated to his service.

Sing or pray Psalter #325.

**October 21**

**Ears Dug Out**

**Read Exodus 21:1–6**

Several of the commentaries that I use noted that Psalm 40:6b—“Mine ears hast thou opened”—can be translated literally this way: “Two ears thou hast dug out for me.” You and I are not only priests, we are slaves! Like the man in Exodus 21, we’ve been brought before the judge by our master, Jesus Christ. There he bored our ears through with an awl: we shall serve him forever. To confess that Jesus is Lord is to confess that he owns you. You must obey him in everything.

The beautiful paradox is that one who belongs to Christ is free. Free from the curse. Free from sin. Free to obey God. 1 Corinthians 7:22–23 puts it this way: “He that is called, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ’s servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.” Knowing this, and knowing that “your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19–20).

Sing or pray Psalter #109.

**October 22**

**Dedication with Direction**

**Read Isaiah 51:1–16**

The psalmist has been delivered, and in gratitude he dedicates his life to Jehovah’s service. That dedication is not without direction: he knows God’s law. That law is written in two places: in the scriptures and on his heart.

Sometimes Christians deceived by sin can convince themselves that they have dedicated their lives to God, but they don’t follow his direction. They deny that they’re owned by Christ, deciding instead to do things their own way. These allow the fear of man to dictate their decisions, and they are able to convince themselves that they can determine how God should be worshipped and which parts of the scriptures apply to them and which are obsolete. This perspective becomes apparent when those who call themselves Christians ordain female office-bearers or condone homosexual activity. But “dedication without direction is delusion.” Only the man who dedicates his life to God’s will, whatever the cost, has truly dedicated himself to the Lord. To them God says, “Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings” (Isa. 51:7).

Sing or pray Psalter #325.

**October 23**

**You Don’t Need to Pray That**

**Read 2 Timothy 2**

Several months ago two young men rang our doorbell on a Sunday afternoon. They were Mormons, and they had one request for us. Receive a free copy of the book of Mormon...
and pray that God would reveal to us whether or not it is true. They became flustered when my husband refused. “I don’t need to pray that,” he said. “Scripture is sufficient. In fact, Jesus taught that anyone who adds to it or subtracts from it will go to hell.”

Those who have God’s law written on their hearts pray according to his will. Are you wondering whether it’s God’s will that you accept a retail position that requires you to work on Sunday? You don’t need to ask him that: he commands us to keep the Sabbath day holy. Are you wondering whether it’s God’s will that you date an attractive but unbelieving acquaintance? You don’t need to ask him that either: he commands that we marry—and therefore date—only in the Lord.

When we rightly divide God’s word and pray according to his will as revealed therein, we can be confident that our prayers are heard (1 John 5:14).

Sing or pray Psalter #325.

October

24

The Vow of the King

Read Hebrews 10:1–18

In Deuteronomy 17 God commanded that the future kings of Israel read in the book of the law all the days of their lives, “That [they] may learn to fear the LORD...to keep all the words of this law and these statues, to do them.” For that reason, some commentators designate Psalm 40 a royal psalm, attributing the psalmist’s vow as a response to that command. Hebrews 10 makes it clear that the words of Psalm 40 are the words of the King, for it finds its fullest meaning in Jesus’ incarnation as our high priest. By his singular offering we are sanctified. “Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said...” (vv. 15–16).

Jesus is superior to any other: not only did the law instruct him, it foretold him! There remains in you and me the law of sin that fights against our delight in the law of God, but he delighted in God’s will perfectly and fully. Praise him!

Sing or pray Psalter #109.

October

25

From Praise to Prayer

Read Psalm 40

Psalm 40 begins with psalmist’s recounting of God’s deliverance from a horrible pit. That memory inspires praise, praise that was perfectly fulfilled in Jesus, who delighted to do God’s will. In verse 11 the focus of the psalmist shifts from praise to prayer. He bases his prayer on the truth that God is merciful. “Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me,” he pleads. What is God’s mercy? We tend to equate mercy with pity—pity that we desperately need. But God is first merciful in himself. Before pity, mercy is “the desire to see someone happy and blessed” (Doctrine According to Godliness). God in his perfect being desires his eternal blessedness and glory above all. God’s mercy is powerful, and it is definite: he has mercy on his elect, and them he saves (Rom. 9:15).

What has caused the psalmist to so suddenly implore God’s mercy? Contrition for his sins, which he acknowledges are more than the hairs of his head. Have your iniquities taken hold of you today? “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil” (Prov. 16:6).

Sing or pray Psalter #110.

October

26

Two Kinds of Vessels

Read Romans 9:14–32

The Psalmist begins his prayer in Psalm 40:11 by pleading the Lord’s mercy. He pleads that Jehovah will once again deliver him, and then he makes this two-fold request: he asks Jehovah to punish his enemies and to bless his fellow saints. Do you remember that God’s mercy is above all a desire for his own eternal blessedness and glory? God is glorified in the redemption of his elect (Isa. 49:3) and in the judgement that he brings upon the reprobate (Ez. 28:22). That’s not a popular teaching today, but it’s the truth. Just as God raised up Pharaoh to show his power in him, that his name “might be declared throughout all the earth,” so, too, he uses the wicked today. And a day is coming when he will exalt Jesus Christ, who delighted to do his will, before them all as judge. Then “every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11).

What a comforting truth to all those who are in Christ Jesus! Sing or pray Psalter #137.

October

27

Magnify the Lord

Read Acts 19:1–20

How does the psalmist desire that the righteous be blessed? He wants them to say continually, “The Lord be magnified.” What does it mean to magnify Jehovah? Well, a magnifying glass makes something small look big. As sinful human beings, we tend to make God smaller than what he is. We minimize his greatness and instead vainly attempt to glorify ourselves. The psalmist wants God’s people always and forever “to feel, think, and act in a way that will make God look as great as he really is” (Piper). In Acts 19, the name of Jesus is magnified by the fruit that the gospel produces in the lives of the Ephesians. One of the fruits that magnifies God is worship (see Ps. 29). Another fruit that magnifies him is gratitude. Psalm 69:30–31 reads, “I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs.” We noticed just a few days ago that to obey is better than sacrifice. To be grateful is better, too! “O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!” (Ps. 34:3).

Sing or pray Psalter #110.

October

28

The Lord Thinks on Me

Read Psalm 139

Eleven days ago, we considered God’s precious thoughts: they are as innumerable as the stars. Since I wrote that meditation, our family vacationed in the San Juan mountains. My husband and I watched the Perseid meteor shower there in a night sky so clear and vast that the misty arc of Milky Way seemed closer than the trail of smoke from our own campfire. As we sat there with our necks craned back, I thought of Psalm 40:17 with awe. Not only do God’s thoughts direct all of creation, and not only are they thoughts of peace toward his people as a whole: Jehovah thinks on me. Poor and needy me. His thoughts are “thoughts from all eternity, thoughts of my fall, my restoration, my redemption, my conversion, my pardon, my upholding, my perfecting, my eternal reward; the list is too long for writing, and the value of the mercies too great for estimation” (Spurgeon).

“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how
great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand” (Ps. 139:17–18).

Sing or pray Psalter #387.

**October 29**

**A Broad View**

**Read Psalm 41**

While in the San Juans, we took a jeep trail to a remote mountain basin. I put a wide angle-lens on my camera, intent on capturing as much of the view as I could in a single photograph. The man next to me took out his macro lens and stooped to capture the detail of the columbine flower at his feet. We considered Psalm 40 through a macro lens; today we’re going to look at Psalm 41 with a wide-angle one.

The psalmist first declares that the man who cares for the poor is blessed. “Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17). He then pleads for forgiveness, describes his evil enemies, and recounts the painful treachery of his “own familiar friend.” Jesus again speaks clearly in this psalm. He cares for his people in their spiritual poverty. Though sinless himself, he endured the great burden of the sins of his elect, and he was betrayed by his own disciple. But God raised him from the dead and has highly exalted him. Blessed be Jehovah from everlasting, and to everlasting!

Sing or pray Psalter #113.

**October 30**

**Not the Holiday You Might Think (1)**

**Read Ephesians 5:8–21**

Tomorrow, October 31, is a holiday. Do you know what holiday? Most people refer to the day as “Halloween.” Halloween originated before Jesus’ birth as part of a pagan festival. Later, a pope moved the Roman Catholic “All Hallowed Evening” to coincide with the festival. Eventually, “All Hallowed Evening” was condensed to “Halloween” and came to the U.S. along with immigrants in the 1800s. In recent decades Halloween has become a multi-billion dollar industry, a day that more and more adults are celebrating. On the surface Halloween may seem fun and harmless, but at heart it celebrates death, the just and terrible punishment for sin. What a horror.

Ephesians 5:8–12 reads, “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light…and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.” Paul originally wrote those inspired words to the Ephesians, who had once practiced things which are done by them in secret.” Paul originally wrote those inspired words to the Ephesians, who had once practiced pagan magic but burned their books in response to the gospel those inspired words to the Ephesians, who had once practiced pagan magic but burned their books in response to the gospel those inspired words to the Ephesians, who had once practiced pagan magic but burned their books in response to the gospel those inspired words to the Ephesians, who had once practiced pagan magic but burned their books in response to the gospel.

Sing or pray Psalter #322.

**November 1**

**The Beginning of Knowledge**

**Read Proverbs 1:1–19**

We end our public worship services by singing a doxology, “a brief ascription of praise to God…and an expression of his infinite nature.” Psalm 41 concluded with a doxology as well: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.” That doxology not only marked the end of Psalm 41: it concluded Book 1 of the five books of Psalms. Before we begin Book 2, we’re going to spend two months in the book of Proverbs.

My children and I read from the book of Proverbs every day. There are 31 chapters in Proverbs, and most months have 31 days. Each morning we read part of the chapter that corresponds to the date. When we are finished reading, all but the youngest children select part of the passage and apply it to daily life or ask for clarification regarding its meaning. My verse for today is verse seven. I pray that you desire to grow in wisdom. Know that the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of all wisdom. Do not despise the instruction of your godly parents, and take heed to the proverbs we will consider in the days ahead: they will impart to you knowledge and discretion.

Sing or pray Psalter #128.

**November 2**

**Seek Her as Silver**

**Read Proverbs 2:1–9**

How do you approach your reading and studying of God’s word? What about your catechism or Sunday school lessons? Jehovah gives wisdom to those who earnestly desire it: “He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb 11:6). That’s why the wise writer of Proverbs enjoins us to seek wisdom like a man searches for silver (Prov. 3:13, 14).

The San Juan mountains are mining country. While we were there we heard stories about men who gave their lives for silver and gold. There is a chapter in the Bible that speaks about mining. In Job 28:1–11 Job describes the work of the miner in the dark, deep recesses of the earth, and then he says, Where can wisdom be found, and where is understanding located? It cannot be found in the land of the living; neither gold nor silver can be exchanged for it. But God understands the way to wisdom: he knows its location. And unto man he says, “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28).

Would you give your life to seek so great a treasure?

Sing or pray Psalter #40.
Jehovah’s Chastening
Read Proverbs 3:1–20

How does God chasten us? My study Bible notes that “The Hebrew word, ‘chasten,’ is also translated ‘instruction’ (Prov. 8:33), ‘correction’ (Prov. 22:15), and ‘rebuke’ (Hos. 5:2). We’re chastened not only through difficult circumstances, but also by the very word of God, which is living, “and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

We tend to respond to any kind of rebuke in pride. But we must “hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not” (Prov. 8:33). Jehovah chastens as many as he loves: that is, all of his elect (Rev. 3:19). His chastening yields the fruits of peace or righteousness in its recipients (Heb. 12:11). It ensures that they will not be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:32). Therefore, “My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD, neither be weary of his correction: for whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Prov. 3:11–12).

Sing or pray Psalter #329.

With All Your Getting
Read Proverbs 4:1–13

What are your plans for today? My day is going to be spent washing clothes and dishes, preparing and cleaning up food, changing diapers, and storybook reading. The day will be full of activity from sun-up to sun-down for my husband, too, full of the work that provides for our family, full of the production and acquisition of goods we will shortly consume. Here’s a text to consider as we begin this day: “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.” In other words, you and I should “be more in care and take more pains” to get wisdom than anything else (Henry).

Fathers, as you work today, be mindful of Ecclesiastes 7:12: Wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense, but wisdom is better: it “giveth life to them that have it.” Dear mothers, so quick to be troubled about many things, make time for the one thing needful today (Luke 10:42). And children and young people, as you go about your day, muse on Mark 8:36: “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

Sing or pray Psalter #339.

Obey Your Teachers
Read Proverbs 5:1–14

The wise father pleads with his son to heed his instruction in Proverbs 5. He tells him to flee fornication, and warns him that if it doesn’t listen, at the end of his life, when his money and his body have been squandered, this will be his lament: “How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!” (vv. 12-13).

We live in a day in which submission to authority is rare. This shouldn’t surprise us. 2 Tim. 3:1–2 alerts us: “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy…” Children and young people, do you honor your mother and father? What about your teacher or teachers? Adults, are you willing to heed the instruction of others? Do you submit yourself willingly to those in authority over you? If your answer to those questions is yes, this promise is yours: your days will be long in the heavenly land which the Lord your God will give you (Ex. 20:12b).

Sing or pray Psalter #215.

Do You Need an Overseer?
Read Proverbs 6:1–15

Solomon praises the ant in 6:6–8. He does so in order to instruct the sluggard, the slothful, the slacker. How responsibly do you employ your time and talents? Do you always need someone looking over your shoulder, keeping you on task, holding you accountable? The ants don’t need a guide, overseer, or ruler: they are diligent even when no one’s watching, and so they have provision when they need. But “an idle soul shall suffer hunger” (Prov. 19:15b). Not only that: he will stand before God to give account for his indolence.

We’re warned throughout Scripture not to be slothful, but to redeem our time and talents for the benefit of others and to the glory of God. Do you remember Jesus’ parable of the unprofitable servant? The man who buried his talent in the ground was cast into hell (Matt. 25:30). So I beseech you, brethren, “that ye increase more and more; and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing” (1 Thess. 4:10–12).

Sing or pray Psalter #90.

Thanksgiving Instead
Read Proverbs 7

The book of Proverbs is replete with warnings against sexual sin. Sadly, sexual sins define our society. Thanks to television, the Internet, and filthy literature, the accessibility to pornography and all sorts of perversions in our day is unsurpassed. Men, do not be like the youth “void of understanding.” Don’t frequent the house—literal or figurative—of the immoral woman. Young women, do not take your cues from her: the godly woman is not brazen, loud, stubborn, or flirtatious.

At the heart, sexual sin is covetousness, and covetousness is idolatry. When we wander in that way, we show that we’ve been deceived by the lie that God isn’t our greatest need: sex is. But the cost of sexual sin is high: the price is that of your life. How do we keep ourselves from staying down that deadly path? By heeding to God’s Word and by displacing the covetousness in our hearts with thankfulness: “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks” (Eph. 5:3–4).

Sing or pray Psalter #330.
Since the beginning of time, the church of God has cherished education. Already Adam and Eve gave instruction to their children, as is evident from the fact that Cain and Abel knew which type of sacrifice the Lord required of them. Although there were times in the history of the church where the church began to grow cold in her love of education, the love was once again restored in the Reformation. Luther thought that education was so important that he said:

When schools prosper, the Church remains righteous and her doctrine pure. Young pupils and students are the seed and source of the Church. If we were dead, whence would come our successors if not from the schools? For the sake of the Church we must have and maintain Christian schools.1

Ever since Luther and Calvin, Reformed churches have highly regarded education. Why does education have such high regard among Reformed people? I believe that there are especially two reasons. First, the covenant forms the basis of our schools and calls us to learn more about God’s creation. Second, the creation is a means by which we can know God. Belgic Confession Article 2 states:

We know Him by two means: first, by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, His eternal power and divinity, as the apostle Paul saith (Rom. 1:20). All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse.2

These are reasons for education in general. This is why we have established Christian day schools. Whether we are talking about grade school, high school, college, or anything beyond, these reasons can be used to support the cause of education.

With that being said, is there any reason why we need to get an education beyond high school? If our grade schools and high schools are doing a good job, which I have no doubt that they are, then we should already know quite a bit about the world that God created. However, we are called to be life-long learners. Therefore we should never reach a point in our lives where we stop learning and seeking out knowledge. Beyond that, however, there are especially three reasons why higher education is important.3

First, at college you gain information and knowledge. Most colleges and universities have a core program that all students are required to take. In the core program at Dordt College there is a wide variety of classes that must be taken in order for a student to graduate with a bachelor’s degree. In this variety of classes, you can learn a lot about the creation of God. You study the creation and created orders. In studying these things, you learn more about God. There is a covenantal reason for studying these things. Prof. Engelsma writes about this in his book Reformed Education:

God’s covenant is cosmic. It extends to, and brings into its compass, the entire creation of God and all creatures in the creation, organically considered.... There is a need for a positive development of the truth of the cosmic covenant in its own right and for an application of it to the Reformed life in general and in Christian educa-

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1 Quotation taken from PowerPoint presentation in Prof. R. Dykstra’s class “History and Principles of Protestant Reformed Education”. (May 27, 2015)


3 Three reasons taken from Prof. R. Dykstra’s lecture in the class, “History and Principles of Protestant Reformed Education.” (May 29, 2015)
We do not learn more and more information just because we want to make ourselves look better. We do not even first learn information so that we can further ourselves in this world in our careers. Instead, we study the creation because God created it and he loves it. We see the love of the Creator in the creation.

The second reason that higher education is important is because it develops the ability to think and reason. People often think that you should go to college for the degree, so that you can join the career that you feel called to. If you do not need a degree for your career, then do not bother with going to college. However, this is not necessarily true. Colleges and universities do much more than just prepare you for your career. They develop your ability to think, analyze, and reason, which will help you in every area of life. This does not mean that those without a college degree do not have any ability to think or reason. However, going to college will make you personally better at thinking and reasoning than you would be if you do not go to college. Therefore no matter your occupation or calling in life, it is beneficial to receive higher education.

The third benefit of higher education is that it exposes you to other ideas and philosophies. Although we need to be careful with how far we take this, there is some benefit to exposing ourselves to what others in the world believe. We are not Anabaptists, who believe in world-flight. We are in the world but not of it. Therefore we ought to be aware what others are teaching and believing. There are a number of different reasons that we need to know what others are teaching and believing. This will always have an influence on us, whether or not we recognize it. For example, postmodernism is influencing us. Therefore we need to study postmodernism and analyze it so that we can recognize the negative influences of it and combat against it.

Another reason why we should be exposed to other ideas is so that we can give warning and instruction to those who will follow after us. For example, I was well warned in high school of postmillennial views that I would face at college. Who warned me of this? It was those who had been to college themselves and experienced it already. Our ministers typically do a great job of knowing the ideas and philosophies of the world and then warning the congregation of them. Many times in sermons the minister would point out the wrong philosophies and teachings that have arisen from the specific Bible passage from which they are preaching. However, it is not just the responsibility of ministers to warn others. Parents have a responsibility to give warning and instruction to their children. Therefore parents can be better prepared for this by going to college themselves.

A third benefit to exposing yourself to ideas is that when you personally encounter ideas that are contrary to your own, you feel a greater need to analyze and critique the views. Think of all the wrong theological teachings that are present in the world today. There are many different sects, cults, denominations; there are Lutherans, Calvinists, Pentecostals, and many other different religious teachings in the world. Yet if you would look at which false doctrines Protestant Reformed authors spend the most time writing about, most likely you would find that it is common grace and a conditional covenant. Why these two topics out of all the false doctrines that are out there? It is because as a denomination we have personally encountered these teachings. Therefore we feel a great need to speak out against them. In a higher educational setting, you will personally experience many different ideas and be able argue against them.

While there are benefits to higher education, there are also dangers for which we need to be on guard. There are especially two dangers of higher education. The first danger is the exposure to sin apart from parental supervision. Although some of us attend Christian colleges, sin still abounds in the campus life. Perhaps it is not as common or as blatant as the sin at the non-Christian colleges and universities; yet there is still sin. There is pressure put on you to lower your standards of godliness. Group members become frustrated that you will not meet to work on a project on Sunday. People give up on trying to hang out with you if you will not go to the movies with them or drink excessive amounts of alcohol with them. Not only are there ungodly lifestyles, there are also many false doctrines. While there is some benefit to being exposed to these so that you can better fight against them, there is also a danger that they will lead you astray if you are not on guard.

Some ways to combat the danger of the exposure to the sinfulness of the college campus is by maintaining a healthy relationship with your parents, your church friends, and the minister and elders of your church. These are all people who are concerned

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with your well-being and equipped to help you. Your parents especially are concerned and have the responsibility to watch out for you. Therefore I think that it is wise to go to a campus that is near home. This allows you to talk frequently with your parents and to discuss what you are encountering at college with them. It also gives your parents a better opportunity to encourage you in your godly walk.

A second danger of higher education is pride. With more knowledge comes the temptation to be proud. Scripture speaks of this in 1 Corinthians 8:1–2: “Knowledge puffeth up...And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” This text speaks about having knowledge that puffs us up. This is the same type of knowledge that Satan had. Satan is a very knowledgeable fallen angel. Yet it was his extensive knowledge and power that made him proud so that he sought to become as God. We must also be on guard against this as we strive to get more knowledge of God.

The primary way in which we can fight against this danger is through the means of prayer. Jesus taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.” John Calvin also gave a beautiful example of how to pray specifically against pride in the pursuit of higher education. In his prayer, he states:

And seeing thou promisest that thou wilt bestow wisdom on babes, and such as are humble, and the knowledge of thyself on the upright in heart, while thou declarest that thou wilt cast down the wicked and the proud, so that they will fade away in their ways, I entreat that thou wouldst be pleased to turn me to true humility, that thus I may show myself teachable and obedient first of all to thyself, and then to those also who by thy authority are placed over me. Be pleased at the same time to root out all vicious desires from my heart, and inspire it with an earnest desire of seeking thee.5

This is the humility that we, as college students, must continually ask of the Lord so that we do not fall into pride and think ourselves to be as god.

In summary, higher education is a good gift that I believe should be utilized whenever possible. While you need to be on guard for the dangers, you can grow in diverse ways by receiving higher education. If you receive higher education, employ yourself diligently so that you do not waste the opportunities that you have to learn more about God and his world. Follow the command of God given in Proverbs 4:7: “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.”

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Additionally we must be aware of how we interact with individual members of such churches; that is, we treat them with love and respect. This is something that Christian adults obviously must be cognizant of, but it is also of utmost importance that our children and young adults have a right understanding of these things; teachers, as leaders in our Christian community, must be ready to give instruction and guidance regarding these ideas.

How do we know the difference between an apostate church, and a true church that may be subject to error? The Belgic Confession, Article 29, examines this difference: “The marks by which the true Church is known are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin: in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church.” This particular definition of a true church does not exclude any denomination by name, nor does it hold one specific church as the only true church. In fact, this encompasses many church institutes.

The same article addresses what makes a false church: “As for the false Church, she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does she administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in his Word, but adds to and takes from them, as she thinks proper; she relieth more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry.” The Roman Catholic Church is an example, along with the mega-churches so popular today, and countless others.

How do we view other true churches of Jesus Christ, which may err in doctrine, or otherwise hold to doctrines that the Protestant Reformed Churches do not? They are not apostate churches, but still may have some discrepancies or differences compared to our own denomination. Prof. David Engelsma, in his book Bound to Join, examines this. He states as an example that the churches holding to the well-meant offer or common grace are not necessarily false churches. “The doctrine of the well-meant offer, adopted and taught by a Reformed or Presbyterian church...does not, by virtue of this fact, make that church a false church” (Engelsma, 16). Apostasy, though, is a slow process, and a church holding to such heretical doctrines may very well fall into apostasy over the course of a few generations. Of course it is important for these churches to repent and turn to the truth. But, a church holding to false doctrine may still have the marks of a true church. (For example, they may not have a formal stance on the matter; they may have some ministers still preaching the truth alongside the heresy) (Engelsma, 32). That is not to say a believer ought to stay in that church; God’s elect must search out the purest preaching of the gospel in order to stay spiritually nourished and strong in faith.

There are several historical and biblical examples of this. Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians addresses the church’s error of rejecting the bodily resurrection of the saints, and the church of the Galatians was beginning to err towards justification by works with faith. Obviously one could not say that these early Christian churches of the New Testament were apostate. Rather, they were in need of guidance; and it was this guidance that the apostle Paul provided, with his instruction grounded firmly in scripture. Farther along in church history, during the Protestant Reformation, the Reformed faith did not agree with some of the Lutheran doctrines, such as consubstantiation. Yet Reformed churches did not discard the Lutheran church as one of the false churches of Rome (Engelsma, 31). There are always going to be some churches that are in need of repentance and guidance, but this does not necessarily categorize them as false churches. They may be in need of direction, and may have members crying out for help. Despite this, if with the resistance of the remnant the church still falls short, chances are the church will eventually descend the slippery slope of apostasy. Then God’s people must be urged to find a church wherein they may confess that they may be in need of direction, and may have members crying out for help. Despite this, if with the resistance of the remnant the church still falls short, chances are the church will eventually descend the slippery slope of apostasy. Then God’s people must be urged to find a church wherein they may confess that they wholeheartedly believe the preaching “taught here in this Christian church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation.”

Once we understand how we ought to view the many other true churches of Jesus Christ, the next question is how we ought to view and interact with the individual members of these churches. As children, churches outside of our own denomination often seem very distant and detached; but the more our young people grow and develop in the world, the more contact they make with members of other churches. As maturing Christians, it is important for our covenant youth to have a proper mindset when it comes to this.

One thing we must remember is that there is a dif-
We recite in the Apostle’s Creed, “I believe an holy catholic church; the communion of saints.” That is, we believe that there are Christians found all throughout the world, members of innumerable denominations, holding to hundreds of differing doctrines and confessions. God never intended for his people to all belong to one singular earthly instituted church. We cannot ostracize or patronize fellow believers because they have a different church background than we do. We believe in communion of the saints. But we cannot achieve this if we don’t honor, love, and respect our brothers and sisters in Christ. John 10:16 makes it very clear that there have always been many elect that will be united together: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”

So how do we speak with such fellow believers of other churches? Obviously, we must treat them with love. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:29–32). When we speak, we must speak out of kindness, and our words must be words of edification. As members of the body of Christ, our goal is always to glorify God (Romans 15:1–7): “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like minded one toward another according to Christ: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is good for us to commune with other saints. It is good for us to make friends with believers from other churches. The Protestant Reformed Churches have correspondents in Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Singapore, Myanmar, etc. And we can witness and fellowship with other Christians right in Western Michigan just as well. It is true that perhaps some people we meet may be in need of guidance and instruction, or perhaps even repentance from false doctrines. Likewise, others may be able to teach us a great deal as well. A true child of God should be able to read God’s word and discuss it with a fellow believer in a God-glorifying conversation. And by searching the scriptures together, we can hardly be considered a Christian (not to say it’s impossible for the individual to repent). But we may come across a stout Christian who holds dearly to his salvation and the sovereignty of God, but has a lax view on divorce. They know the infallibility of the word of God, but simply have been taught from childhood to explain away passages like Mark 10 and Matthew 19. Do we view such a person as an unbeliever, a heretic, a deceiver? Do we group the church in which she is a member in the same category as Rob Bell’s mega-church, or the Church of Rome? There is such a spectrum on which “Christianity” is defined; there are millions and millions of people who call themselves Christians, with vastly differing beliefs. What we must look for is someone who has a genuine love for God, whose only hope is in Jesus Christ who mercifully saves from all sin, who believes in the absolute authority of scripture, and who strives to live a God-glorifying life separate from the world.

Article 29 of the Belgic Confession puts this concept in our Confessions. “With respect to those who are members of the Church, they may be known by the marks of Christians: namely, by faith; and when they have received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof. But this is not to be understood, as if there did not remain in them great infirmities; but they fight against them through the Spirit, all the days of their life, continually taking their refuge in the blood, death, passion, and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom they have remission of sins, through faith in him.”

This confession is summarized in Romans 10:9–13. “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved…. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Salvation is not dependent on the denomination one attends. Attending a true church is necessary and invaluable, but being an elect child of God is not dependent on one’s church membership papers.

We see that there have always been many elect that will be united together. So how do we speak with such fellow believers of other churches? Obviously, we must treat them with love. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:29–32). When we speak, we must speak out of kindness, and our words must be words of edification. As members of the body of Christ, our goal is always to glorify God (Romans 15:1–7): “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vv. 5–6).

It is good for us to commune with other saints. It is good for us to make friends with believers from other churches. The Protestant Reformed Churches have correspondents in Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Singapore, Myanmar, etc. And we can witness and fellowship with other Christians right in Western Michigan just as well. It is true that perhaps some people we meet may be in need of guidance and instruction, or perhaps even repentance from false doctrines. Likewise, others may be able to teach us a great deal as well. A true child of God should be able to read God’s word and discuss it with a fellow believer in a God-glorifying conversation. And by searching the scriptures together, we can hardly be considered a Christian (not to say it’s impossible for the individual to repent). But we may come across a stout Christian who holds dearly to his salvation and the sovereignty of God, but has a lax view on divorce. They know the infallibility of the word of God, but simply have been taught from childhood to explain away passages like Mark 10 and Matthew 19. Do we view such a person as an unbeliever, a heretic, a deceiver? Do we group the church in which she is a member in the same category as Rob Bell’s mega-church, or the Church of Rome? There is such a spectrum on which “Christianity” is defined; there are millions and millions of people who call themselves Christians, with vastly differing beliefs. What we must look for is someone who has a genuine love for God, whose only hope is in Jesus Christ who mercifully saves from all sin, who believes in the absolute authority of scripture, and who strives to live a God-glorifying life separate from the world.

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may grow more and more in our faith, and become more and more aware of the beautifully complex and diverse church body to which we belong.

Our young people are going to come into contact with believers of other churches, whether they be friends, family, significant others, or fellow classmates. As teachers, it is our responsibility to rear covenant youth, guiding them and instructing them as they mature into godly young men and women. Instilling in them a right understanding of the catholicity and unity of the true church and body of Christ is extremely important, and there is no better place to engender this truth than in our Christian schools. Our Christian schools are an invaluable part of our lives as covenant children of God. Let us use this means to its fullest capacity to impart a proper godly worldview in our covenant children.

Bibliography

All Bible verses are quoted from the King James Version

Alyssa is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan. She is a college senior studying to become a secondary teacher.

Scholarship Essay

Jori Wieringa

Viewing and Interacting with Other True Churches and Their Members

My first two years living at Calvin College have forced me to engage deeply with the topic of the true church of Christ. I have been blessed with the opportunity to learn from Christian professors and to learn alongside Christian students. Furthermore, attending a Christian college rooted in Christian Reformed Church traditions has required me to define my own faith and commitment to the Protestant Reformed Church. By becoming more exposed to other true believers from churches with differing doctrines and positions, I have had to determine how God was calling me to view other believers and interact with them.

My roommate this past year has forced me to enact on this calling, and as a result, she has helped me grow as a Christian believer. My roommate has grown up in a Christian Reformed Church and has always been involved with her church community. I have visited her church and seen evidences of a true church – being faithful to scripture and administering the sacraments. Additionally she has been a great Christian friend to me, praying with me and encouraging me in my faith. She has helped me grow in my relationship with God, and she has shown her own true faith and relationship with him. However, we have also had more difficult conversations discussing differences between our doctrines. Our definitions of God’s grace are different; our positions on divorce and remarriage contradict; and our understandings of predestination differ. So, what now? We don’t see eye to eye on all things—some of them doctrinal truths that I firmly believe in. What does God want from us both within this relationship? Through prayer, scripture, and doctrine, God has brought me answers to these questions regarding how to interact with other believers outside of the Protestant Reformed Churches. I have found these answers to be quite beautiful, reflecting God's love and grace. I would like to share and further develop the thoughts I experienced while searching for answers to these questions.

First and foremost, we need to understand God’s meaning of the “true church” in order to form our position on interacting with other believers. As stated in the Apostles’ Creed, we believe “an holy catholic church” (The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 9). The Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 54 further develops the meaning of this statement and explains that this church is chosen by God “out of the whole human race” and agrees in “true faith” (The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 104). Similarly, the Belgic Confession argues that the true church of God...
is not “confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons,” but rather is spread throughout all countries and peoples (The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 59–60). The true church of God does not lie within only one denomination or congregation. In Doctrine According to Godliness, Ronald Hanko states that “there is a wide range of churches, more or less pure and true, that represent, at least to some degree, the church of Jesus Christ” (Hanko, 245). Therefore, members of God’s true church can be found within a wide variety of churches: Protestant Reformed, Christian Reformed, Baptist, Presbyterian, and so on.

If a true church can be found amongst diverse people and places, how does one determine whether a church is true or not? The Confession of Faith lists the three essential characteristics of a true church:

If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary to rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the church. (The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches 62–63)

Moreover, God outlines what he desires for relationships among churches in scripture. He is calling us to reach out in love and support for the other members of his true church. In Ephesians 2:18–22, Paul encourages Gentiles and Jews to share in their faith together as one church, “an holy temple in the Lord” (v. 21). Paul promotes this because Gentiles and Jews are “fellow citizens” (v. 19) who are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (v. 20) with Christ at the center of their faith. Despite differences between Gentile and Jewish believers, Paul encourages unity between members who share in the Spirit of God. If two congregations display a true faith and devotion to Christ, God encourages us to join together as “fellow citizens” despite differences we may have.

This same message is also given by God through Paul to the church in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul reminds the church that both Jews and Gentiles have been baptized by the Holy Spirit to form one body (v. 13) and that there should be no divisions within the body (v. 25). Paul demands “that the members should have the same care for one another” (v. 25). The true church is to encourage love and care between all true members, regardless of denomination or congregation, because we all confess the same faith.

Additionally we are called to hold each other accountable and encourage one another in remaining faithful to scriptures. The true church is rooted in scripture, preaches that scripture, and administers the truths of scripture through sacraments and discipline. If a church is straying from scripture, they are straying from the truth and from being a true church. In 2 Timothy 4:2–3, Paul warns Timothy of the necessity of preaching the gospel and encouraging members in studying doctrine to prevent church members from turning from the faith. When rooted in scriptures and sound doctrine, the church can thrive together, as the scene is described in Acts:

And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:44–47).

True churches commune within their congregations and between other congregations, in joint unity
and praise to our Lord.

This is the beautiful answer as to how we are called to interact with members of other true churches: to interact with one another in love, encouragement, and praise to our great God. God desires us to join together, to form relationships together that are based in our shared faith and confession in “Christ, the Son of the living God.” As a future educator, I desire to encourage my students to embrace other true believers in love and support, and allow themselves to grow in faith through these relationships. I will encourage my future students to discuss their faith with other believers, to evaluate differences between congregations and denominations, and to value and promote the importance of scripture within a true church. My prayer for them is that they may stand together praising God and singing the familiar words of Psalm 133, “How good and pleasant is the sight when brethren make it their delight to dwell in blest accord.”

**Works Cited**


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**Scholarship Essay**

Kevin Warner

## Dangers and Benefits of Higher Education

Education is very important in any Christian’s life, and especially in a Reformed Christian’s life. God reveals himself in many ways through creation and in his word, and we have many Protestant Reformed grade schools and high schools to instruct our children in a Reformed Christian world view. The churches and families go to great lengths to ensure our children receive a God-glorying education from Sunday school through graduating from a Protestant Reformed high school. The question after graduating is what to do once the diploma is received. The option of higher education is a popular one, but the Protestant Reformed Churches do not own or operate a college for general education. This means the graduates must attend a “Christian” college or a secular college in order to continue education. There are many benefits to continuing education, such as learning more about God’s creation and developing personal skills and talents. The dangers of attending higher education are many as well, including being instructed by wicked professors and being taught a false world view. With the proper attitude and discretion, a Protestant Reformed student would be able to attend such institutions without fear of being led away from the true church.

The benefits of higher education are much more than simply the earning potential a college degree brings you. God’s creation is vast and complicated; his handiwork is found in every cell and atom that makes up this universe, and the rules that God has placed to govern his creation are still being revealed to man even in this time in history. In Job 12:7–10 God tells us that he reveals himself in the creation: “But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the L ord hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.”

Through the study of biology, geography, geology, chemistry, history, and mathematics in a college we may more deeply understand God’s handiwork in nature.

A better understanding of God’s creation also serves as a constant reminder of his power and might. Knowing the things of which God is capable leaves us with no excuse to doubt his power. Paul tells us in Romans 1:20: “For the invisible things of him from
the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understands by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse”. Studying the sciences in college reveals many things to the Reformed Christian, leaving us in awe of what God is capable of. The laws of gravity, magnetism, the position of the sun, moon, and stars all serve as examples of how God so intricately created this world to sustain life and a college education reveals this to us more and more.

Another benefit of a higher education is the development and honing of our God-given talents. Each one of God’s children is born with strengths and weaknesses as well as talents and gifts that they can use to give back to the church. Again we can turn to scripture for what God has told us. In Romans 12:6-8 Paul speaks on the gifts God has given us:

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

These verses can be applied to any talent that we may have, such as public speaking, teaching, engineering, mechanics, or information technologies. These talents can be further developed and sharpened by taking classes in college or by going to technical schools after high school. Once developed, these talents can easily be used in the church community for the glorification and service of God.

The Protestant Reformed Church needs men and women with a higher education in order to teach the students in the many covenant schools that we have been blessed with. Reformed education is one of the most important things a young child needs in his growing years. In order for our schools to continue to operate, we need certified teachers with a firm grasp on the subjects that they teach. This is accomplished through continuing their education in college. These teachers must also maintain closeness to the Reformed doctrines while they are in college and of course while they are teaching in the classrooms. Prof. David Englesma tells us in Reformed Education (2000) that “We certainly desire our children to have a good education; to develop their abilities to the utmost; to prepare themselves to take their place in life, according to their calling” (9). The covenant education of the children is a high calling, and as such we as a denomination should make sure that the teachers are as qualified spiritually and mentally as they can be through higher education.

One of dangers of attending a higher education institution is that these colleges do not give God the glory and do not teach that God created and governs all things. The focus is no longer on God and what he has accomplished, but on man and his accomplishments. The professors and students in these colleges do not profess Christ crucified, and some may deny that God even exists. In 1 Peter 5:8 we are warned to beware these professors and classes because the devil uses them to attack the souls of the righteous like a lion hunting its prey. The professors in these classes sing the praises of scientific discovery and inventions to men like Newton and Edison or Tesla, never mentioning that it was God who caused these men to make those discoveries to shed light on his creation. The professors in history classes mention religion as a passing fad and teach evolution as if it is a fact. These teachings are dangerous attacks on the faith of God’s people.

Another danger is the fact that professors and colleges wish to develop your talents into lucrative careers for personal gain. Colleges routinely ask for donations from their alumni, and if the alumni are successful in business, they can donate more to the college in the future. This takes the glory of God out of the equation and makes higher education more about making money and nothing else. The world with its greed and lust for material wealth gives no thought for the things of heaven or the new earth. The Reformed student attending a college should not be blinded or attracted by the potential money-making ability of his career, but should focus on how he can service the church and fellow saints with his talents.

A danger that students at colleges also struggle with is that they are no longer under the supervision of their family and sometimes no longer attending their regular church. This lack of parental supervision can lead some students to fall into temptation quickly and to turn to the entertainment and pleasures of this world. The Reformed student may be forced to live with ungodly or anti-Christian roommates, and this also makes it far harder to stay on the straight and narrow path of righteousness. In this situation, the Reformed college student should remember to “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2). In colleges, peer pressure may be
far stronger because the student does not have his parents or covenant friends there to steer them away from evil and back into the light. The constant temptation to skip church and to do homework instead or hang out with friends is a struggle many Reformed students have been given over to.

The benefits of Protestant Reformed Christian students attending an institution of higher learning can be easily exploited by applying their learning directly into the godly instruction or labors in the church itself. Future teachers can use their education in their fields of study and in turn teach the students in our Protestant Reformed schools what they have learned from a Reformed perspective. Another way to exploit the higher education is to use the knowledge of business, construction, technology, or engineering to serve on the many committees in our churches and school boards to improve the building and operating of our facilities. If the Reformed student learns languages in college, the direct use of those languages in the translating of texts for the mission work is another clear exploit.

The fact that the covenant student is placed in an ungodly environment could also be exploited as a reason and opportunity to witness their faith to those around them. God tells us in Matthew 5:16 to “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” As we know, God calls his people from every tribe and creed, so Reformed students can witness their faith in an ungodly environment in order to gain members for the true church. Friends and classmates made in the universities could easily be brought along to Protestant Reformed churches and exposed to the true word of God and could lead to the conversion of those attending.

The dangers of being forced into an ungodly classroom and being taught worldly views and theories can be mitigated by holding fast to the teaching of the Protestant Reformed student’s parents. God tells us in Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it”. This is the calling of all of the Sunday school teachers, grade school and high school teachers, parents, and catechism instructors to teach the Protestant Reformed students to guard themselves against these evil professors and to put on the armor of God to fight off the assault of the devil on their souls (Ephesians 6:11). The covenant child should have the mental and spiritual defenses to distinguish between the truth and darkness when confronted with information in the classroom.

The danger of being separated from Reformed friends and family while in college can also be mitigated by attending a college that is in close proximity to a Protestant Reformed church. This allows for the student to live in the home or to frequent the home on weekends or on the Sabbath to flee the temptations of wickedness on the college campus. Attending a Protestant Reformed church while in college is very important, as is attending Bible Study during the week. There are many opportunities for the Protestant Reformed student to stay close to the church and to keep participating in the church community while attending college.

A godly, Christ-centered education in a Protestant Reformed operated facility is only available through high school at this time, but Lord willing we will have the capabilities to extend that past the twelfth grade. Learning about God’s creation through the teaching of Reformed Christian teachers is a blessing that should be celebrated. The teaching of covenant children to live the antithesis should be stressed through their schooling so that when and if they are faced with attending a wicked establishment, they have the tools to not only defend their faith, but to let their light so shine in the classrooms of higher education (Engelsma, 2000, 56).

**Bibliography**


Kevin is a member of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa. He is a college sophomore studying to be a secondary teacher.
God’s Warrior

Danny waved the stick in front of him. He was a warrior and fought huge armies of enemies. Stab. Slash. Whack.

“Danny!” His mother called from the door. “Time to come in and practice your catechism.”

Danny heaved a huge sigh and trudged to the house, dragging his stick behind him. “Do I have to? I was having fun. I was a knight and I was fighting and winning and stuff.”

His mother sat down on the front step. “You don’t have to pretend to be a warrior. You are already a part of God’s army.”

Danny wrinkled his nose and plopped onto the grass. “Really?”

“All Christians are a part of God’s army. We fight sin, Satan, and the world.” His mother pointed at his stick. “Just like a warrior has to practice with his sword to get good at it, we have to practice and train to get good at fighting with our spiritual weapons. That’s why you need to learn your catechism and memorize Bible verses. You are training to be God’s warrior.”

“But it’s boring.” Danny frowned. Learning his catechism wasn’t as fun as swinging his stick around.

“Training isn’t always fun, not even for warriors. They’d have to march in rows for several hours, all hot and dusty and without stopping. Then they’d practice with their swords until their arms ached.” His mother stood and handed him his catechism book.

Danny got to his feet, rested his stick on his shoulder, and opened his catechism book. Then, marching back and forth across the yard, he practiced being God’s warrior.

Questions to think about:
1. Read Ephesians 6:10–17 by yourself or with your parent. What does it mean to be God’s warrior? Whom are we fighting?
2. What things are you doing that help you train to be God’s warrior?

Find the following words in the puzzle below.
AMY
CATECHISM
ENEMY
PRACTICE
TRAINING
WARRIOR

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
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:

Justine Norman, son of Bro. & Sis. Norman & Janice Yambao—Bulacan, Philippines
John Matthew, son of Sr. Marican Ballesteros—Bulacan, Philippines
Russell James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Eric & Tiffany Van Baren—Crate, IL
Jeremiah David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy & Kathy Ward—Crate, IL
Constance Vivian Violet, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Adam and Beth Fennema—Edgerton, MN
Andrew Norman, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kent & Anne Deemer—Faith, MI
Brady Alan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle & Lyndsay Corson—Georgetown, MI
Annabelle Faith, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Alex & Amy Mowery—Georgetown, MI
Joelle Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric & Heidi Mowery—Holland, MI
Aiden Tyse, son of Mr. & Mrs. Andrew & Jessica Ezinga—Loveland, CO
Daston Allen, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim & Sarah Dykstra—Providence, MI
Ava Elise, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joe & Heather Regnerus—Randolph, WI
Andrew Ryan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan & Laura Kearney—Sioux Falls, SD
Easton Jude, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Laura Noorman—Trinity, MI
Owen James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Stephanie Dykstra—Trinity, MI
Adult baptism was administered to Clark Christoffersen—Spokane, WA

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:

Diane Baguhin, Martin Zuniega, Jireh Marcondo—Bulacan, Philippines
Pam Regnerus, Paige Van Den Top—Doon, IA
Dylan VanDyke, Jonathan Cammenga, David Cammenga, Kelsey Kuiper, Dana Mulder, Katy Beiber—Faith, MI
Arika Engelsma, Tiffany Holstege, Taylor Lubbers—Georgetown, MI
David Braaksma—Randolph, WI
Ryan Kearney, Laura Kearney—Sioux Falls, SD
Jesse Griess, Cara Vink, Nichole Vink—Trinity, MI

MARRIAGES

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

Mr. Casey Korenstra and Miss Kylie Mulder—Faith, MI
Mr. Justin Hienstra and Miss Natalie Monsma—First, MI
Mr. Jason Boone and Miss Brandi Oostra—Hull, IA
Mr. Daniel Miersma and Miss Rachel Moelker—Redlands, CA
Mr. Dale Schipper and Miss Kara Tiejema—Southwest, MI
Mr. Craig Ferguson and Miss Erika Schipper—Southwest, MI
Mr. Anthony Bauman and Allis Corinne Brucato—Southwest, MI/Pittsburgh, PA
Mr. Preston Crich and Miss Karissa Feenstra—Trinity, MI

A Public Lecture:
Theistic Evolution
Should the Church Make Peace or War?

Oct. 9, 2015
Grace Community Church
3500 New Holland St.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
7:30 PM

Speaker: PROFESSOR RONALD CAMMENGA
Professor of Theology at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

The teaching of the theory of Theistic Evolution is one of the most discussed teachings troubling the church today. Theistic evolutionists teach that God created all things by a process of evolution:

• Does God’s Word as it is revealed in the Bible allow for the teaching of Theistic Evolution?
• Or is theistic evolution a fatal compromise of biblical truth, with far-reaching consequences for churches, theologians, and individuals who are willing to make this compromise?
• Does the teaching of Theistic Evolution affect the doctrines of salvation?
• What must be the biblical and confessional response of Christians to the teaching of the theistic evolutionists?
• For the sake of peace in the church, should the church and its members tolerate this view and those that hold it? Or should she make war against it and those that hold it?

These and other questions regarding this controversial issue will be examined in the lecture.

A Question and Answer period will follow the lecture.

For more information and to stream live visit: CreationOrTheisticEvolution.com

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