This cover design was used for the first issue of Beacon Lights, published 75 years ago.
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Beacon Lights encourages its readers to contact the business office with any questions or comments. Letters may be edited for printing. We will not publish anonymous letters, but will withhold names upon request.

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There have been two somewhat recent news stories that illustrate an ever-growing, disturbing trend. That trend is the disappearance of responsibility, being accountable or answerable for actions within one’s control.

The first story we heard brought to the fore once again the controversial trial of a young man, who in June 2013 killed three people while driving drunk. His blood alcohol content was three times the legal limit. When justly brought to the court of law, he gave an unheard of defense.

Affluenza. Not responsible.

Affluenza is a fictional condition. It refers to one who is raised in such a privileged culture of affluence, he does not understand the consequences of his actions and is therefore not responsible.

As if this young man’s use of “affluenza” as a defense wasn’t unbelievable enough, in December 2015 his mother helped him to flee to Mexico after a video surfaced of him clearly violating his probation by drinking alcohol at a party with some friends.

The second, more recent story you may have noticed was of a Stanford college student, who brutally sexually assaulted a drunk, unconscious, young woman next to a dumpster in an alley. The father of the accused, responding to his son’s guilty verdict and lenient sentence of 6 months in jail, wrote a letter defending his son. The way he described his son seems terrifyingly bold.

Victim. Not responsible.

He described his son as a victim of “the culture of alcohol consumption and partying. This culture was modeled by many of the upperclassmen on the swim team [of which he was a part] and played a role in the events...” He continued by saying that his son’s guilty verdict has shattered his life, adding that his son can’t even enjoy his favorite food, steak, anymore. All this, his father claimed, is a “steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action.” Defending him even further, his father said, “He has no prior criminal history and has never been violent to anyone including his actions [sexual assault] on the night of Jan 17th 2015.”

How is sexual assault not violent? As I said above, terrifyingly bold.

What do these two stories have in common? Not only irresponsibility and sin on the part of the two young men, but also parents who feel that their children are not accountable for their sins. These stories are just two that are a part of a growing trend we are observing in society—irresponsibility. Parents, at the bidding of their children, are willingly giving them over to the modern day Moloch of sexual promiscuity and alcoholism. But the point of bringing up these two news stories is not so that we can look out at this horrifying trend in broader society and dwell on the sins of others. Rather, we must look in. We must examine our own hearts and root out anything from “out there” that has made its way “in here.” Let us remind ourselves of our calling while we sojourn on this earth—responsible living before God, to whom we will give answer in the final judgment.

How do we live responsibly before God? As young people, though sheltered by the church and covenant homes, we are growing up in an affluent culture of sexual promiscuity and alcoholism. But this is not an excuse for us to live irresponsibly or act as if we are not accountable for our own actions. As young Christians we are accountable to God and must live responsibly before him, the one to whom we will give answer. Before we delve into a couple of specific ways we can put into practice in order to live responsibly before God, we should consider the general pattern of life we must live. First, we realize that we are totally depraved sinners, who are capable of and often fall into the same sins (manifested in many different ways) as the individuals described...
above. Second, we realize that we are responsible for these sins. We confess, “I am accountable for my actions.” Our actions are subject to the law of God, the standard of perfect love for God and the neighbor. Third, looking into the mirror of the law of God and realizing that we have failed to uphold the law to the standard it requires, we confess our sins before God. In this confession we acknowledge our responsibility for our sins. Fourth, with tears in our eyes we realize that Christ’s perfect righteousness has accounted for our irresponsibility. Our debt of sin has been paid! Fifth, we rest assured in the promise of his mercy, and in joy we respond in praise to our Redeemer, having even greater cause to live a godly, responsible life of sanctification.

What then are some more specific ways we can practice, aiming toward a life of responsibility before God? The first way is through spiritual discipline. Before we examine spiritual discipline in any detail, we must realize that discipline is not merely a human response to our life of sin, confession, and thankfulness for redemption. The ability to discipline ourselves is itself a gift from God. As fallen human beings, who are by nature irresponsible, spiritual discipline does not come easily. We may wonder how we can possibly live disciplined lives like Jesus, our ultimate example. The answer is that we cannot attain his level of discipline. We can only arrive at a small beginning of the godly discipline he showed while in the flesh and that only because of grace. German theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “the call to discipleship is a gift of grace.” As children of God, we sit at the foot of the cross of our Savior, redeemed and justified by his merciful grace. With that undeserved gift we are enabled to live daily in the shadow of the cross as responsible, disciples of Christ. Not only is our salvation a gift of grace, but also our ability to respond in thankfulness by living godly, disciplined lives.

So how do we begin to live spiritually disciplined lives? If we are to be disciples of Christ, we need to start with what he said. If we are going to discipline ourselves in the way that he has showed us by his example, we need to read about it in the Bible. This is done in catechism classes, Bible studies, Sunday worship, and especially personal devotions. In our personal devotions we must not just read scripture, we must immerse ourselves in it. We must meditate on it so that we can remember it, carrying it with us through the day. Author and pastor Donald Whitney stresses the importance of not just reading, but of meditation on scripture, comparing our spiritual health to a tree.

The tree of your spiritual life thrives best with meditation because it helps you absorb the water of God’s Word (Ephesians 5:26). Merely hearing or reading the Bible, for example, can be like a short rainfall on hard ground. Regardless of the amount or intensity of the rain, most runs off and little sinks in. Meditation opens the soil of the soul and lets the water of God’s Word percolate in deeply. The result is an extraordinary fruitfulness and spiritual prosperity.4

Another way we live spiritually disciplined and responsible lives is through humility. When we meditate on scripture, we look into the mirror and realize how far we have fallen short of what is required. At the same time we realize that we are guilty of the same sins as the irresponsible individuals we mentioned above. Christ gave his life for us, yet day after day we deny any association with him by way of our sins, sometimes even with cursing and swearing as the apostle Peter (Mark 14:71). What is even more humbling is the fact that we sin against knowledge. We have been assured by the Holy Spirit of our salvation through Christ’s suffering and death, yet with this knowledge we still deny him daily. In the way of humility, we learn to crucify our flesh, deny ourselves, and take up our cross and follow Christ’s perfect example.

Spiritual discipline and humility share a common requirement. They must be practiced now. There is no time to wait. We cannot push off spiritual maturity for another day “when I’m ready” or “when I have time.” We must discipline ourselves and practice humility now. Many of us may be blessed with marriage and children in the not so distant future. With these blessings comes huge responsibility. As fathers and mothers we are called to lead our families in the way of godliness. If we do not practice humility and spiritual discipline, how do we expect our children to act? We will give account someday not only for how we lived in the knowledge of salvation, but also for the example our life was to our children. In the end our only hope of being able to

In the Roman Catholic Church, there have been some recent scandals regarding priests who were caught sexually abusing children. The Roman Catholic Church handles these in its own way, but this made me wonder what would happen if this situation were to arise in one of our churches. If a minister were caught abusing a child (and may God graciously forbid that this ever happens), what would be the consequences? Since this is a crime, would the church contact the authorities? Although church and state should not mix, the minister should not be above the law. Would the church simply strip him of his ministerial status and put him through counseling, or must legal action be involved?

Let me echo the reader’s sentiment: “May God graciously forbid!” Abuse of a child is so abominable a sin that even the ungodly world punishes it with heavy penalties. The ungodly tolerate all kinds of perversions and abominations, but (for now) they abhor the abuse, especially the sexual abuse, of children. Abuse of a child is so destructive that the victim is left scarred physically, emotionally, and spiritually for life. Let the words of Jesus ring in our ears: “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6).

We have heard of the scandal in the Church of Rome. Although Rome is a false church, Rome’s sins have tarnished the reputation of all churches, since the world lumps all forms of Christianity together. Basically, Rome has been guilty of a widespread cover-up of abuse. Deviant priests were shuffled from parish to parish, where they were free to abuse more children. Not only did Rome fail to report the crimes of her priests to the civil magistrate, she failed to discipline her own clergy, with the result that the sin spread until it blew up in a massive scandal.

One of the marks of a true church is the faithful exercise of Christian discipline. A member (or even a minister) who abuses a child has committed a gross sin, and must be restored to repentance through Christian discipline. Sin may not be ignored in the church. We have a church order, which we use when ministers of the divine Word, elders, or deacons have committed any public, gross sin which is a disgrace to the church or worthy of punishment by the authorities…” (Article 79).

If a minister were caught abusing a child, he would be immediately suspended from office, and
Gary Buteyn: When people talked about the singing not being very good in Randolph, I experienced that very much (laughter). I think that from 1965 on, some of the young men in the church (and Jean and I were married) bringing other spouses into the congregation—that helped the singing tremendously. It also kept the congregation close together. But being without a minister for a time, I missed that. Soon I was in the consistory. They were looking for additional men who could serve in the consistory. It was all new to me. I was very young when I became a deacon. I think I was 23 years old when I became a deacon. I think when I was 28 or 29 then I was elder. I felt kind of inexperienced in a lot of these things. But the Lord has blessed us through the years too. From ‘65 on, I think there was a lot of growth in the church. Before that or around that time, Sunday School Christmas programs had about three kids in them. You can’t have much of a program with three kids—one has the welcome, another has the speech for the offertory, another has the farewell (laughter), and they certainly weren’t able to sing many songs because three of them....

Jean Buteyn: I think Connie DeVries and Marty DeVries and Leo DeVries were the only three who were really young enough for programs, so those three always had to do something together. When we’d have a singspiration, they’d have just a little piece in there. They didn’t even sing, I don’t think, because with three—it doesn’t work very well.

GB: Then, because the families were getting married, the children were coming and the church started growing quite fast. We increased our numbers and soon we were able to get off the [synodical]
subsidy rolls. That helped us along toward building a new church too. We started that in ’72 when Rev. Bekkering came. Now Rev. Bekkering came after Rev. Van Baren, right Jean?

JB: No. In 1965, Rev. Van Baren left, and in 1967 Rev. Dale Kuiper came. At that time we bought a new parsonage. The parsonage had been standing empty for quite awhile again. Gary and I were living in a little apartment in Waupun. One day my mom said, “Well, why don’t you just come and live in the parsonage. They kind of want someone to live in there because it’s better that someone is in that house.” At first we didn’t really know if we really wanted to do that. But we decided that that was a good idea. We could live there rent-free. They just kind of wanted a little donation from us. So we would put a little more in the collection plate. We hadn’t been living there very long and Rev. Kuiper accepted the call. Oh, dear. We started looking for apartments. We couldn’t find anything in Randolph. We really didn’t want to move out of Randolph again because it was kind of handy living there, with the church being there. So we started looking. And it came up in one of the congregational meetings that maybe it would be a good idea to look into getting a different parsonage because they thought this one needed work, and the house that we have now was for sale. It was not all that expensive—I think it was $8,000 something? So they bought that and my dad bought the old parsonage, and we rented it from my dad for awhile. After he died we bought it from my mom. Rev. Dale Kuiper was here for two and a half years. Then he went to Pella.

Then we got Rev. Bekkering. That’s when they started talking about building a new church. It was dedicated on May 24, 1974, and that was a really big day for us. We had an open house, and we invited the community to come in the daytime, because everybody had been watching [the construction]. Everyone would come past and watch because there was so much volunteer work done. It took awhile to get it done. Everyone was really quite interested in that church. So we had that open house, and a lot of people came to see it. Then at night we had a dedication just for the congregation and people who had come from outside. Rev. [Cornelius] Hanko came and talked, and Rev. Lubbers gave a little speech.

GB: We decided to go with building a church that seemed to be quite a big event. We left the old church building standing, which was in the area where our parking lot is right now. We started digging the hole, the basement, and we ran into rock. We took out as much dirt as we possibly could. We had to raise the church building just a little bit. We wanted to have it a little bit lower down so we didn’t have to worry about steps. We were able to overcome that by using a ramp into the front entrance. But our church is built on a rock: we could not get the footings in deep enough. We had to air-hammer rock out as much as we possibly could, so part of the church is right on that rock. There was much volunteer labor. We did hire some men from Westra Construction who came on Saturdays to lay the block for the basement walls. Later on, some of the men from our own congregation laid up the intervals for the bathroom and furnace room area. Much volunteer labor. At the time we hired Jake Regnerus as general contractor, and he and Eugene Braaksma worked a 40-hour week. The church paid them wages to work during the day to get things prepared so that in the evenings and on Saturdays volunteer labor could come and help put up the floors and the walls and rafters and whatever. I was treasurer at that time, so I knew what the wages were for Jake and Gene Braaksma. Really a pittance compared to what it would be today! Now that we’re considering building another addition onto our church, Gene Braaksma’s also on the steering committee for that new building. But he did help quite considerably on the first building as well. We considered getting a crane in to set up the rafters, but we decided to do it manually. That worked out pretty good. I know that on the east side, all the rafters were nailed down by myself. On the west side it was probably Jake Regnerus. I took a week of vacation and that’s what I did during my week of vacation.

Interesting thing is that one of the local business men from Randolph, his name is Joe Bump—he’s Roman Catholic—just about every evening went for a walk and came past the church. He stopped in just to see how things were going along. Usually when he left to continue his walk, he would say, “I say a prayer for you every day.” Kind of interesting, coming from a Catholic. But there was a certain amount of men around. Yet, every Sunday, usually Sunday morning after the service, all the congregation would look over next door to see what was happening. The two buildings were only about six or seven feet apart. It was quite fun working together like that. A very profitable experience, because throughout
the congregation we had an electrician, we had a mason, we had carpenters, we had men who were roofers. So we all worked together, and we saved a lot on labor.

I think we built that church building for about $50,000. Today, the addition that we plan to start on is going to be five or six times that amount.

**JB:** $700,000 is the estimate.

**GB:** It’s probably more than that. But we will not be able to put a basement under the new sanctuary now because the rock is so high it would be cost-prohibitive to get all that rock out of there. Over the years we’ve had to take some trees down to make room for a parking lot, and now we’re taking some more trees down so that we can make room for the new church building. Our congregation has worked together very well. Occasionally we had some misunderstandings, some difficulties, some congregational meetings in which some men became upset about the way we were doing some things. But overall, our congregation has grown considerably to the point that we were able to start our own school fifteen years ago. Building that new school building, there was a lot of volunteer labor in there too. Without volunteer labor, it would be impossible for us to carry on as far as we did. I think Jean has something she wants to say now.

**JB:** I was going to get back to the dedication of our church. I can remember that Rev. Bekkering was really emotional that night. He could hardly talk when he went up there. He was really excited about having that new church.

When Rev. Koole came, that’s when we really started talking about a new school again. There was a society, years back, but nothing had ever been done. They stopped taking collections for it. There was a little nest egg in the bank somewhere. I think the bank finally called and said that we should either take it out of there or add something to it because it was just sitting there. Rev. Koole started talking about it a little bit. And, oh, there was opposition right off the bat. No way were they ready.

**MHH:** Why?

**JB:** I do not know. We had all gone to various Christian schools in the area, and some of the people felt that that was good enough. It wasn’t as bad there as it could have been, I suppose. But it wasn’t getting better. It was getting worse in schools, but a lot of people just felt like they wanted to keep their kids there. I know some of them were afraid of what would happen if we started talking about [starting our own school], and it would get out into the public, so that our kids would start getting teased in school because of that. It was just these silly worries, so Rev. Koole kind of dropped it. He didn’t make too much of it, and it just kind of went by the wayside for awhile.

Rev. Slopsema came, and he tried to get it going again. It was the same thing. There were just too many who were opposed to it, and we really didn’t want a split in the congregation over it, either. So we kind of let it go again for awhile.

When Rev. Key came, he really started pushing for it. While he was here, Joe Van Baren was interested in starting his business. I don’t know who he talked to, but he said he wanted to come to start a business here. But he didn’t want to come unless there was a Protestant Reformed school here. I think we had kind of been talking about it a little bit more. We had started a society again. We were taking collections for it, and we had some money in the bank. He said that if he bought that business, we could use part of that building for a school. That was really what did it in people’s minds. If we have a building, that’s a big thing right there because you don’t always know how you’re going to be able to do it. And with better income, we were better off than we were before. But still, when you’re sending your kids to a Christian school, it’s still hard to keep it all going. I think they were worried that we just wouldn’t be able to do it. But having that building made a big difference.

**MHH:** It definitely would cut the cost.

**JB:** Oh, yes. They did quite a bit of remodeling in the building, but that was a whole lot less than if we had had to start building right away.

**GB:** I think for about twenty thousand we were able to renovate the building so that we could have classrooms in there. That included putting in bathrooms and meeting codes just to make it classroom accessible. It had two classrooms. Later we added another room that started out as a library, but became the kindergarten room. We had some donated materials and a lot of a donated time. We had to tear all the existing walls out—a dirty, dusty mess—and put in a lot of insulation and do some repairs on windows and so on. But we were able to get that building started, and we were still scrambling the day before classes were to start. But we were able to get classes started at the right time and maybe do a few things later on.
That was a very good start for us. I don’t know if it was before we started building, or if it was shortly after that, the school purchased the property where the present building is standing now. That gave us potential for a lot to build on later on, and also provided playground area for the kids. That was a concern that many parents had: Well, what about a playground? We were able to buy that property quite reasonably.

JB: I think we had to ask the city to abandon the street that they were planning to…

GB: Yes, there were supposed to be two streets that went through. One was completed. The north/south street was completely abandoned, and the east/west street was left as it presently is, which was OK because it made it accessible for our church as well.

Now Joe Van Baren purchased and donated another lot to the school so that it wouldn’t become a building lot, but it would make it easier for us to expand the present building if we wanted to expand or in the future to make a parking lot area there.

As I said, working on this project of building a church and building a school sure draws the congregation closer together. Not everybody worked at that, but many of us volunteered vacation time. A lot of Saturday work, a lot of evening work just to get a school building started and church building too.

MHH: When the decision to actually proceed with the school was finally taken, were most people on board with that, even though there had been some disagreement in prior years?

GB: About sixty percent were ready to go ahead with building. Within the next two or three years, more people started coming around. That was a big boost, because we needed that. There was some skepticism because they felt, oh, you’re taking on an awfully big project here; I don’t think you’re going to make it go. But after the bills were all paid and we had money left over, that was a big boost there for everybody. If you can come in under budget, that’s a big help. Then a lot of people said, “Well, who’s going to come to Randolph to be a teacher?” You have to start that process far enough ahead of time so you can get teachers. We were thankful that we had teachers. Between serving in the consistory, and being on the school board I have had very few years in between when I wasn’t in one place or the other. Right now I’m on the present school board. We’re thankful that we have what we have. But had not Joe Van Baren and some of his help moved here to Randolph, we wouldn’t have been able to get that school started.

I think back to when we were first married. Most of those older people who were in our congregation in ’65 have died. A lot of the children have left the congregation too. It wasn’t until our children who were born in, say, 1964–1965 on up that the church really started to grow. That’s why we had enough children to start classes too. We started with 21 or 22. I think we’re right at 43 now, and we have real good support.

JB: That’s what I was going to say. We virtually have a different congregation now than we did when I was a little girl. I had a lot of relation in the church at that time. There were a lot of Fishers and a lot of Huizengas in there. Some of the Fishers left. Not too many Huizengas any more.

MHH: The generations of the old people have drifted away from the church then?

JB: Some of them, yes.

MHH: Why do you think that is?

JB: I don’t know. I have one uncle who had five children, and every one of them left our church. One of them claims to be an agnostic in doctrine. One of them didn’t go to church for a long time, but now he goes to a church but I don’t know—Congregational or something like that. The other ones go to Reformed churches, but none of them ever came back to the Protestant Reformed Churches.

GB: If you were to look at those numbers and their children and grandchildren again, we would certainly have a congregation that would be, I would think, right around 80–90 families.

MHH: Wow. And you’re at what?

GB: 48, I believe.

JB: In my generation and then in the next generation, the children of some of the families that are parents our age left too.

GB: I think we can say that more people left than stayed. And that’s a thing that saddens me somewhat. But being in the consistory, you see that things like that are probably good. It would probably not have been well to keep some of them in our congregation—it would have been a troublous congregation then—very troubled. So, this is the Lord’s will for us, too.

MHH: Thank you both for this interview.
There is nothing more beautiful in the whole world than the grace of God. God's grace! Grace that takes hold of a man, a man who is dead in sin, and revives him; grace that takes the spiritually deformed and refashions him in the image of Jesus Christ; grace that takes an ugly sinner and beautifies him, causing him to reflect the beauty and holiness of God. God's grace: sovereign, free, unmerited—that is what makes a saint! The life of every one of God's people testifies to this truth. We see this beautifully illustrated when we look back at church history and the work of God in the lives of the saints who came before us. In this short article, we will look at the story of Augustine's life and conversion, a wonderful story about a man once lost, but caught up and captivated by the grace of God. Augustine's life is a testimony to the truth of Romans 8:28, that God works “all things for the good” of his chosen people. Augustine’s every step was ordered by God for the purpose God had for him in his church. Augustine, the man whom God would prepare to be the church's greatest teacher and defender of the doctrine of grace, God first caused to experience, in the midst of his profound misery and sin, the power of that sovereign grace to rescue him from himself, as a firebrand is plucked from the burning. In Augustine’s life we also see ourselves: poor ugly sinners, of ourselves lost, yet who have experienced the saving, renewing, life-giving grace of our God in Jesus Christ.

The story of St. Augustine begins three and a half centuries after Christ’s ministry on earth. On November 13, 354 AD, Aurelius Augustine was born to a humble family residing in Thagaste. Thagaste was a small town located in the northeastern hill country of Numidia on the Northern coast of Africa (near the border of modern Algeria and Tunisia). It served as a market town on the crossroads between larger, more important cities. The countryside was very fertile, the breadbasket of the Roman Empire. Here, surrounded by rolling hills of olive groves and grain fields, one of the church’s greatest theologians grew up as an ordinary country boy with an uncommonly keen mind. Under Roman rule and protection North Africa was guaranteed a permanent market for its agricultural goods. The region soon became very prosperous, and with prosperity there came opportunity. But Augustine’s parents were poor. His pagan father Patricius was a low-level civil servant who owned a small estate of but a couple of acres. Patricius was a proud and unpleasant man who took little interest in Augustine beyond his hope that his son would one day obtain a prestigious secular career. To that end, Patricius secured the resources needed to give Augustine a classical education—something that in those days was absolutely necessary if one was to get anywhere in society. At age twelve Augustine was sent to a nearby town for further schooling. Augustine’s mother Monica was quite different. A devout Christian, she did everything in her power to guide Augustine in the way of faith. In spite of the worldly-mindedness of her unfaithful husband, she taught him by word and godly example and brought him to church. Daily she prayed for the conversion of her son. Augustine loved his mother deeply, but as a young man he followed more in the footsteps of his father, preferring the things of the world over the things of God. Soon his family’s money ran out. Augustine had no choice but to discontinue his schooling and return home. However, a wealthy citizen of Thagaste noticed Augustine’s great potential and provided the funds he needed to resume his education. Soon Augustine was bound for the bustling city of Carthage, the capital of Roman North Africa, to attend university.

In Carthage Augustine fell into loose living and the foolishness of youth. He gave himself over to the carnal delights available in the thoroughly pagan and immoral city. He became enamored with the theatre and filthy plays held there. At the young age of 18 he took a mistress and with her fathered a son. Drifting from one pleasure to the next, he found that they all left him empty. Restless, he dedicated himself to his studies with renewed zeal, hoping to find in the world’s wisdom a strong foundation for his life. In the course of his studies he discovered the Roman
orator Cicero, who taught that the good life was to be found in the way of self-restraint and the pursuit of wisdom. Still his soul could find no rest. He saw that the way he lived fell far short of the restrained lives of the philosophers he so admired. He felt ashamed of his disordered and undisciplined life. Yet he found himself powerless to break the chains of sinful pleasure. He loved his sins, yet at the same time was haunted by them. Augustine recalls this time of his life in his Confessions, and describes the wayward and godless life he led during those years:

To Carthage I came, where there sang all around me in my ears a cauldron of unholy loves.... I sought what I might love, in love with loving, and safety I hated, and the way without snares. For within me was a famine of that inward food, Thyself my God; yet, through that famine I was not hungered...but the more empty, the more I loathed it. For this cause my soul was sickly and full of sores, it miserably cast itself forth, desiring to be scraped by the touch of objects of sense.¹

While studying in Carthage, Augustine turned to Manicheism for the answers to his life questions. Manicheism, a religion founded by the Persian sage Mani, gathered and mingled ideas from Christianity, paganism, and philosophy. Mani taught that the universe was marked by an eternal conflict between good and evil. Mani identified evil with the creation and identified good with the spiritual realm. Manichean teachers promised their disciples secret knowledge that would liberate them from the chains of the material world and allow them to cultivate the “spark of the divine” within them. This cult attracted Augustine, and for a while he became enthralled with the Manicheans’ mysterious theology. But Manicheism too left him empty and searching. It could neither answer his hardest questions nor satisfy his deepest longings. Where was truth to be found? Augustine continued to wander, unable to find a resting place for his heart. From Manicheism he drifted to the books of the skeptical philosophers. “Perhaps truth cannot be found,” he thought. “Perhaps it is impossible to know.” Augustine’s own sense of being lost drove him to seek solace for a time in the miserable teachings of the lost. But the more he learned, the more he wandered, the more lost he felt. No matter how much knowledge he obtained, no matter how hard he applied his powerful intellect to the questions of life, he could not find the rest his heart yearned for. To add to the internal chaos of his life, during his days in Carthage one of his closest friends was suddenly seized with illness and died shortly thereafter. The loss of his close friend was nearly too much for Augustine to bear. Despair clawed at his soul. All of these things were the goods by which the Holy Spirit spurred him on toward the truth. As Augustine would later recognize, even in his deepest darkness God was there with him, ordering his steps, so that he would not perish in the darkness, but emerge into the glorious light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Even in the darkness of unbelief, God held Augustine in his hand.

Augustine finished his schooling in Carthage at the top of his class. His brilliance in literature and public speaking gained him no small fame, and he became a teacher of rhetoric in Carthage. But Augustine had bigger ambitions. He set his sights on a more prestigious career in oratory in Rome. Thus in 383, at 29 years of age, he took his leave of Carthage and set sail for Rome in search of greater public honor. A year later a teaching post opened up in the city of Milan, and an oratory competition was held. In God’s providence, Augustine won the competition and moved to Milan to take up the position as the city’s new teacher of rhetoric. Here in Milan, God would bring this prodigal son, long lost and wandering, home at last. Not long after settling in Milan, Augustine heard about the city’s famous bishop, the saintly Ambrose. Ambrose was renowned not only for his godliness, but also for his eloquent preaching. That piqued the ambitious orator’s interest. Augustine began attending church, not out of interest in the gospel, but in the hope that he could pick up a few tips on public speaking from Ambrose. But God had another purpose. He used Augustine’s carnal motives for the salvation of his soul, to bring Augustine under the means of grace, and by those means, the Holy Spirit operated in Augustine’s sickly heart. As Augustine sat under Ambrose’s preaching, his former interest in the bishop’s eloquence melted away. The unanticipated began to happen. Augustine found himself more and more captivated by the word of God that Ambrose preached. He had come to hear a man’s eloquence, but instead he was conquered by the simplicity of Christ. Sovereign grace laid hold of him. There was no escaping it.

As Augustine sat under the preaching, the vanity of his life was again thrust before his eyes. He was convicted. He was stricken with a mounting sense of

¹ Confessions, 3.1.1.
guilt over his immoral lifestyle, his inability to control his passions, and a sense of the meaningless vanity of his life. Like the apostle Paul, the good he willed to do he found himself powerless to perform, and the evil he desired not to do he found himself powerless to keep himself from doing. He yearned for holiness, but despair of ever reaching it. Augustine at last began to turn to the scriptures for help. For years Augustine had disdained the Bible that his mother loved much. He despised it as an inelegant book of Jewish fables. But now he had nowhere else to turn. So it was one day that as he sat in the courtyard of his home mulling over the agony of his spirit and weeping over his inability to do good, Augustine opened the Bible. He turned to the thirteenth chapter of Romans and read. Augustine tells us of his experience in one of the most moving passages of his Confessions:

So was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighboring house a voice, as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting and oft repeating “Take up and read; Take up and read” ……So checking the torrent of my tears, I arose; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. Eagerly then, I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I laid the volume of the Apostle when I arose thence. I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: “not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.²

As the word of the gospel flooded into Augustine’s heart, the work of grace that God had long been working in Augustine’s heart blossomed. The long process of his conversion had reached its climax. Augustine stood before the face of God with all his sins, and experienced their weight lifted from his shoulders. In place of his sins, the peace that passes all understanding filled his heart, the peace that dispels all fear, the peace that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Finally, after years of wandering and searching, he found the only resting place for his heart. In the scriptures, Augustine found Christ, the way, the truth, and the life, from whom for thirty years he fled. This was the turning point of his whole life.

With his conversion to the faith and baptism into the church, Augustine’s old life came to an end. But his new life was just beginning. God had great plans for him. Augustine was quickly thrust into the center of the church in Africa. Filled with zeal for his new faith, he quit his teaching post in Milan and returned to his hometown with a group of friends, hoping to establish a small community of Christians dedicated to living together and studying the scriptures. Augustine hoped to retreat from public life to the contemplative life of study and writing. Such would not be the case. One day, when Augustine was visiting a vacant congregation in the busy port city of Hippo, the people of the church laid hands upon him and had him forcibly ordained as their minister. Although Augustine did not seek the office, he took it up with utmost seriousness and dedicated himself to the work of pastoring the congregation of Hippo. Augustine’s charge was not an easy one. Many of the members of the church in Hippo were uneducated laborers, given to superstition and inconsistencies in their Christian lives. Vices such as drunkenness were a common problem. In order to address and remedy the sins of his flock, Augustine committed himself to preaching the gospel. He vigorously addressed his people, admonishing, rebuking, instructing, and comforting. God caused his faithful labors to bear fruit. Under his care the life of the church of Hippo was much improved. The transformation he found in the gospel, he brought to others.

It was not long before Augustine’s gifts, not just as a theologian, but as a pastor, became well known. As a result, he was elected the new bishop of Hippo in the summer of 395 and given pastoral oversight over all the churches in the city. As bishop, Augustine’s labors only increased. He took a personal role in caring for the widows and orphans of his city. He visited the sick. He oversaw cases of discipline in the church. Above all, Augustine devoted himself to preaching the gospel. He preached at least twice a week, often for well over an hour, instructing the people God had entrusted to his care. Augustine discharged his office faithfully as the bishop of Hippo for the rest of his life. He died peacefully in 430 shortly before the conquest of his city by the Vandals. Augustine’s influence reached far beyond the churches of Africa. Indeed, Augustine shaped

² Confessions 8.12.29.
not only the African church, but also the mind of the entire western church. By his study of the scriptures and his deep theological writings, Augustine contributed to the development of almost every important area of Christian doctrine. A man saved powerfully by sovereign grace, he became the church’s greatest theologian and teacher of grace.

There is much we can learn from Augustine’s life: his experience of grace, his spirituality, his love for God, and his biblical teaching. The story of Augustine’s life is really a story of all of our lives. The details of the plot may differ, but the themes remain the same for every one of us. We all were lost, but have been rescued. God has made us for himself; he has made us for the praise of the glory of his grace. That grace captivates us, draws us to him, and causes us to enter into the joy of his fellowship. It is there, in God’s fellowship, by grace, that our restless hearts find everlasting rest. In his grace alone there is rest, the rest of being caught up in the everlasting arms of God, safe beneath the shadow of his wings. Augustine’s life is a vivid picture of this beautiful story of saving grace. Every one of us, God’s adopted sons and daughters by grace, can say with St. Augustine, “Thou hast made me for thyself! How restless I was till I found my rest in thee, O Father, the light and love of my heart, my soul’s refuge, the God of my salvation.”

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Rendering to Caesar

Recommended reading: Mark 12:13–17

At this time of year we again see the voting for the president of the United States of America. We need to remember that no matter who becomes our next president, whether it is Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton, we must show respect to that person. In Mark 12:17 Christ dealt with the Pharisees who tried to tempt him in asking the question about paying tribute to the authorities. Jesus answered the Pharisees, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

The purpose of the Pharisees in coming to Jesus was to “catch him in his words.” The Pharisees came and twisted the meaning of Christ’s words saying, “Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth...” The Pharisees knew that Christ regarded not what the laws of man said but rather what God, his Father, said in his law.

The Pharisees then asked another question to tempt Jesus, saying, “Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar? Shall we give, or shall we not give?” In other words, if you don’t care about man’s laws, do we still have to pay tribute to Caesar? Jesus answered the foolish question by asking for a penny (vs. 15). He then asked whose superscription was on the coin (v. 16). Jesus commanded and instructed both the Pharisees and his people to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” Jesus gave wise instruction to a foolish question.

The question then arises, how does this apply to us? In Romans 13:1–7 (which I recommend reading as well) God instructs us to “be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: for the powers that be are ordained of God.” God uses these authorities to bear the sword power. They are a terror to those who do evil and are also ministers of God to us for good. Verse 6 of Romans 13 says, “For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.” If we are commanded to pay more taxes, we must pay, because we must obey God who tells us to pay tribute to our rulers.

Included in paying tribute is the manner in which we speak about our leader. Even though we may think that our leader is wicked, we must remember that God has given our leader the authority that he or she has. We must speak well of our leader, as hard
and difficult as that may be. Even when we cannot obey because it goes against God’s law, we must submit while still seeking to honor the leader God has placed over us. Lord’s Day 39 states, “show all honor, love, and fidelity to my father and mother and all in authority over me and submit myself to their good instruction and correction with due obedience; and patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.”

As we look towards the 2016 presidential election we must have no fear in anything, because the focus of history is Jesus Christ and his church. God will use the coming leader for the good of his church. He calls us to obey and submit to the coming president. We must obey in all things that the government commands, except when we are commanded to do something against the will and law of God. This is where the second part of the verse (Mark 12:17) applies, “and to God the things that are God’s.” Even when we cannot obey, we are still called to submit.

We need to remember that the authority that is above us is ordained by God, and that authority is his instrument in the rearing of his church. We must submit, and even be thankful that here in this country we can still serve our God faithfully and without fear. So out of thanks we pay our taxes and render tribute, submitting to and obeying the authority willingly, because God has placed them over our heads for our safety and benefit.

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5. Pray that God may protect your good name and keep you from sin, sickness, and bad company.
6. Pray for the fatherland, for your dear parents, benefactors, friends and all men, for the spread of the Word of God; conclude always with the Lord’s Prayer...
7. Be reticent, be always more willing to hear than to speak and do not meddle with things which you do not understand.
8. Study diligently...history, philosophy, and the sciences, but especially the New Testament and read daily three chapters in the Bible beginning with Genesis.
9. Keep your body clean and unspotted, be neat in your dress and avoid above all things intemperance in eating and drinking.
10. Let your conversation be decent, cheerful, moderate and free from all uncharitableness.

Rules of Christian Conduct
For Young Scholars

Originally published in August, 1964 and was taken from Philip Schaff’s History of the Christian Church.

These are Bullinger’s Rules of Conduct for his son who was going away to Vienna to continue his theological studies. Let us who are attending college or High School attempt to make these rules our own, especially if we leave the protecting care and guidance of our parents.

1. Fear God at all times and remember that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.
2. Humble yourself before God and pray to Him alone through Christ, our only Mediator and Advocate.
3. Believe firmly that God has done all for our salvation through His Son.
4. Pray above all things for strong faith active in love.

5. Pray that God may protect your good name and keep you from sin, sickness, and bad company.
6. Pray for the fatherland, for your dear parents, benefactors, friends and all men, for the spread of the Word of God; conclude always with the Lord’s Prayer...
7. Be reticent, be always more willing to hear than to speak and do not meddle with things which you do not understand.
8. Study diligently...history, philosophy, and the sciences, but especially the New Testament and read daily three chapters in the Bible beginning with Genesis.
9. Keep your body clean and unspotted, be neat in your dress and avoid above all things intemperance in eating and drinking.
10. Let your conversation be decent, cheerful, moderate and free from all uncharitableness.

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Have you ever thought about how amazing it is that the minister can preach an entire sermon on one verse? Not only that, but if you heard the sermons of two different ministers on the same verse they would probably be very different! Every time we open God’s word there are new truths to glean and new applications to be made. Thankfully, we have our creeds that help explain the scriptures to us and the Psalter that helps us commit the words of the psalms to memory. Besides, our spiritual leaders past and present have provided us with so many spiritually edifying books, commentaries, and magazine articles. We could read for hours every day and never get through it all.

The point is that we all have so much to learn spiritually, no matter how much studying we have done. David, a type of Christ, understood his need for spiritual growth. In verse 7 he says, “I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.” David still saw himself as a little child spiritually, just as we must.

Sing or pray Psalter #323.

Technology is advancing exponentially. Just think about how drastically the world has changed in the last century, or even the last decade. Things like self-driven cars and drone package delivery seemed like extremely futuristic concepts ten years ago, but they are here now. With these advances in technology come more opportunities to sin. The internet is a wonderful tool that God has given us to spread the gospel, but it also throws temptation into the face of our tech-savvy teenagers, though others are affected as well. Recently, I have grown aware of the numerous live webcam social media websites that exist out there, which encourage our young people to commune with the world, often very provocatively.

With all these temptations around, how will our young people not all be lost? Psalm 119:9 provides us with the answer when it says, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.” How do we withstand the growing temptations that are all around us in these dark days? We read God’s word, discuss that word with one another, and pray to him who always provides for the needs of his people.

Sing or pray Psalter #61.

I am often amazed by the almost complete loss of even religious behavior in our world today. You go to a restaurant, and everyone just plows into their food the moment it’s placed in front of them. You meet someone, and within seconds of greeting you they’re already spewing profanities out of their mouth. You sit in the classroom and listen to the theory of evolutionism being taught as fact, without even a mention of the truth of creation.

These things are constant reminders to us that we are merely pilgrims on this earth. David was one of the most influential and powerful men on earth, yet he also felt this way. In verse 19 he says, “I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me.” When we experience the mockery and ridicule of the world, we are comforted by the truth that the same Jesus who died for us has ascended into heaven, is preparing a place for us there, and will return to bring us home for all of eternity (John 14:3).

Sing or pray Psalter #336.

I happened to run into a pretty interesting TED talk recently about lie spotting. The speaker provided some very shocking data about the prevalence of lying in our society. She said that according to studies, we are lied to 10–200 times per day, married couples lie to one another in one out of every ten interactions, and teenagers lie to their parents in one out of every five interactions. Do you question that data? I did, which only supports the fact that lying is all around us.

Psalm 119:29 says, “Remove from me the way of lying: and grant me thy law graciously.” David says that he has chosen the way of truth and asks God to keep him from lying. The world loves its lies, even outright claiming that some lies are good. As the speaker put it, we lie to match up our fantasies with the way we really are. That is only true of those who are building up their treasures on this earth. Those who are given the kingdom of heaven have no need for fantasies, for all things are given us through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sing or pray Psalter #321
Read Psalm 119:33–40
On the way home from school a while back, the talk show host was talking about how Republican presidential candidate frontrunner Donald Trump had misquoted scripture, stating that “money is the root of all evil.” He was attempting to quote 1 Timothy 6:10, which reads, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” It’s not his money itself that Mr. Trump needs to worry about; it’s his love for and coveting of money that’s the problem.

We all have a sinful nature that is prone to covetousness. This can be seen from a very early age, as toddlers grab toys from each other and cry when they don’t get what they want. In Psalm 119:36 David asks of God, “Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness.” David sees the vanity in coveting the things of this life, and he looks to God to deliver him from that temptation.
Sing or pray Psalter #325.

Read Psalm 119:41–48
What does it mean to be free? The world is in bondage, and because of that it is on a constant search for freedom. The world has fooled itself into thinking that the trick to gaining freedom is to reject all rules. This trend is well-documented by the media, as the population shows its hatred for law enforcement and all those who have been placed in positions of authority. In addition, the LGBT push is a rejection of the very laws of nature. Everyone can plainly see that God created men and women different, and that marriage is naturally between one man and one woman. In their effort to find freedom, the world only succeeds in falling deeper and deeper into bondage.

True freedom is the ability to walk according to God’s commandments. Psalm 119:45 says, “And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.” Freedom is not doing whatever our sinful nature wants, but what God wants. This is because in our new man, what God wants is our desire as well.
Sing or pray Psalter #334.

Read Psalm 119:49–56
Psalter #327, which is based on this section of Psalm 119, has been my favorite for as long as I can remember. At first, it was the bouncy tune that drew my attention. However, as time goes on, I grow more and more to appreciate the words as well. The title is “Comfort in Affliction,” and that subject is already addressed in the first verse, where we sing that God’s word gives us comfort in all the trials of life. In verse two, David speaks of the mockery a child of God will receive when he lives according to God’s commandments. This, however, does not cause us to lose heart, because we know that God has saved us before the beginning of time and is preparing a place for us in heaven. The fact that this life is merely a pilgrimage is addressed in verse three, as the psalmist is angered and sorrowed by the wickedness on this earth. The song ends beautifully with God’s people singing of the perfect peace they experience when they meditate on God’s law.
Sing or pray Psalter #327.

Read Psalm 119:57–64
Last Sunday, we heard a sermon entitled “The Worship God Requires.” In this sermon, the minister said he believed that if the Holy Spirit visited our churches he would commend us, but also say that he had somewhat against us. We would be rebuked for becoming too familiar with God and not having the proper awe when we come to worship him. This really hit home for me, as I thought sadly about all the times my mind had wandered while God himself was speaking to me.

David had this awe for his God. Verse 62 says, “At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments.” We all enjoy a good night’s sleep and see our need for that sleep. Sleep refreshes us and prepares us for the work ahead. David got that same kind of refreshment from praising God. When we pray, let us ask God to make us contemplate the wonder of our personal salvation and praise him for it every day.
Sing or pray Psalter #320.

Read Psalm 119:65–72
Have you ever forgotten to pray before you started eating? It’s just a small thing, right? You just forgot; you didn’t do it on purpose. But how could we ever forget? How could we forget to thank the God from whom all blessings flow? Sadly, it’s often because we begin to take these blessings for granted when things are going well in life. We begin to stray from God and then he afflicts us (v. 67), reminding us that we rely completely on him and that our happiness must not be connected to our earthly situation. Job is the ultimate example. He was a very successful man with a large family, but God took it all away in a moment. He had nothing left, nothing, that is, except his God. And because he had God, he had everything. When it pleases God to afflict us in this life, may we sing with the psalmist, “Affliction has been for my profit, that I to Thy statutes might hold.”
Sing or pray Psalter #329.

Read Psalm 119:73–80
In Psalm 119:79, David says, “Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies.” Matthew Henry explains that David is not trying to gain more followers here, but showing...
a desire to be loved by and associate with the people of God. The writer goes on to say that some people connect this plea with David’s murder of Uriah. After that event, the people of God in Israel were ashamed of their king. The judgment of the people wore on David, and he prayed to experience once again the communion of the saints. As a picture of our need for spiritual communion with him, God created man with an innate need for earthly communion. Even worldly psychologists will talk about the importance of a stable family life for an individual’s health. This is much truer in the church, where we are all part of one body, called to work together. One member is nothing without the body. The hand cannot do nothing without the muscles to flex it and the brain to command it. As Psalm 133:1 says, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

Sing or pray Psalter #371.

Read Psalm 119:81–88
Psalm 119:83 reads, “For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.” Matthew Henry explains that a leather bottle will get all dried out and cracked when it is left by the fire, rendering it useless. David uses this as a metaphor for himself. The trials of life had worn on him, and he saw that he was useless and had no power of himself. He was the leader of God’s people, yet his own children were rejecting the truth and even seeking to murder him. However, David did not forget God’s statutes, and he trusted that God would deliver him and use him for his purpose. A cracked bottle might seem useless to man, but God, the creator of heaven and earth, is able to use even the stones around us to glorify his holy name (Luke 19:40).

Sing or pray Psalter #269.

Read Psalm 119:89–96
I know almost nothing about professional football, but I know that Johnny Manziel plays it. I know this because nearly every time I look at the news I see another reporter gorging himself on the train wreck that is this young man’s life. With headings like, “Manziel’s Friends Worried He Will Die from Substance Abuse,” it’s obvious that the media loves every bit of drama it can squeeze out of this guy. They are likely going to report him right into the grave.

I thought of this when I read verse 95, which reads, “The wicked have waited for me to destroy me: but I will consider thy testimonies.” The wicked love destruction. They are going to hell and want nothing more than to bring as many people down with them as possible. It is only by trusting in God and considering his testimonies that we are not ensnared.

Sing or pray Psalter #331.

Read Psalm 119:97–104
I used to run a lot. Often, before I set out for a long run, I’d pour some honey into my mouth. The sugar in it gave me a nice, quick jolt of energy. It’s hard to imagine something sweeter than honey. Psalm 119:103 says, “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” The word of God is sweeter even than honey. Notice the exclamation points with which David punctuates this statement. Spiritual food must be more precious to us than any of the earthly food that pictures it. Also, just as honey provides energy for the race, so the scriptures give God’s people the strength they need to run the race and fight the battle of faith. We all need the sweetness of God’s word. May we never take it for granted!

Sing or pray Psalter #333.

Read Psalm 119:105–112
Children, have you ever heard someone say “I swear” that this or that happened? Have you ever heard your parents say that you shouldn’t talk like that? Why not? Why is it such a big deal to use that word flippantly?

The answer has to do with what it means to swear. When we swear, we are calling on God to bear witness of what we are saying and to judge us if we speak falsely. An oath, then, must only be used in the most serious of situations, such as truth seeking in a church discipline case or in a court of law. When we swear an oath without really thinking about it, we are bringing the judgment of God upon ourselves.

David understands all this and makes a proper oath in Psalm 119:106, where he says, “I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.” David knows he is weak and sinful, but he leans on the cross and knows that the one who paid for his sins will give him the strength to perform this work.

Sing or pray Psalter #335.

Read Psalm 119:113–120
Psalm 119:118 says of those who reject God’s law that “their deceit is falsehood.” Matthew Henry says that this phrase can be looked at from two different points of view. First, these people try to deceive themselves by rejecting God’s law and following those of their own creation. Second, they deceive others by making great outward shows of holiness. The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were blatantly guilty of these things. They had no problem rejecting the scriptures, even killing the Son of God, but they made sure they didn’t walk more than a certain number of steps on the Sabbath. The Pharisees loved to make a big show out of their prayers, thanking God that they were better than everyone else. The religion of Islam in our day is also all about an outward show
of strict obedience, as are many of the false religions. These religions create an easy way for man to feel holy and have others look at him as such, and we must realize that this appeals to our sinful nature and always be on guard against it.

Sing or pray Psalter #338.

Read Psalm 119:121–128

Moses is on the mount in communion with God when God tells him that the people of Israel have made themselves a golden calf in his absence. God is ready to destroy them all, but Moses pleads their cause. In righteous anger, Moses calls for all those who are on the Lord’s side to kill the people who had blasphemed the name of God. This the Levites did, slaying three thousand of their own loved ones.

Psalm 119:126 says, “It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void thy law.” I thought of the story of the golden calf in Exodus 32 when I read this verse. Sin never goes unpunished. We see that throughout history when the cup of iniquity was full. The wicked see this when they enter hell after they die. We will all see this at the end of the world, when Christ will return as judge. Then, those that “have made void thy law” will call for the mountains to fall on them (Rev. 6:16), but there will be no escape.

Sing or pray Psalter #300.

Read Psalm 119:129–136

In Psalm 119:130 we read, “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” Genesis 1:3 says, “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” Do you see the connection here? The moment God spoke the word at the beginning of creation, there was light. This was a picture to us of the fact that we who are so simple are given light and understanding through God’s word. The truths of God are not complicated. Worldly philosophers can spend their entire lives debating who we are and why we are here, but our small children can easily answer these questions. That is because God has written his word in our hearts and given us light. Without that light, there is no understanding and all is darkness. To those who are in darkness, no amount of explaining can bring understanding.

Sing or pray Psalter #337.

Read Psalm 119:137–144

Psalm 119:143 says, “Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delights.” Two contrasting emotions are set forth in this verse: sorrow and joy. Both are very present in the life of the Christian, and it can be difficult to find the proper balance between them. On the one hand, we are to look at this life as a vale of tears, while on the other we are to be joyful in the work that God has given us. We must not be like the child who mopes around the house because he didn’t get to go to the sleepover. We long for heaven, but we enjoy our work on this earth because God is using us to glorify his name. God has saved us, and we must use this life to show him our gratitude for that salvation. Even in our suffering, we rejoice that “we are counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5:41). We know that we belong to him (Lord’s Day 1), and will go to be with him soon.

Sing or pray Psalter #341.

Read Psalm 119:145–152

I think we all have a tendency to think that our lives are just a little bit busier than those of most others. We talk about how little time we have and are skeptical when others do the same. Maybe this isn’t a sin that you struggle with, but I know I do. There are plenty of things to do in life and goals to accomplish, but the question is, what are we choosing to fill our time with? The businessmen and women of the world are extremely busy, but it is all vanity. Earthly work is not profitable in and of itself. Only work that is done to the glory of God is worthwhile. David understood this. As the warring king of Israel, he was one of the busiest men on earth, yet he found time to pray. Instead of only focusing on physical rest, David was interested in enjoying the heavenly rest. He prayed to his God each night, trusting that he would supply him with the strength he needed. Paul said it best when he commanded us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to, “Pray without ceasing.”

Sing or pray Psalter #339.

Read Psalm 119:153–160

You are driving home. It’s been a long day and you’re tired. You look in your rearview mirror and notice that the driver behind you is following extremely closely. It’s obvious that he wants to pass you, but traffic is coming from the other direction and he can’t. He starts honking his horn, but you are already going the speed limit, so you just try to ignore it. The second oncoming traffic clears the lunatic behind you puts the pedal to the floor and roars on by, screaming curses as he passes.

Would this make you angry? Why? Would it be because the opposing driver had no right to get angry at you? David would have been angry in such a situation, but for a different reason. Psalm 119:158 says, “I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.” David’s persecutors bothered him, not because of the hurt they had caused him, but because they had blasphemed the name of God. If we are offended when someone mocks us poor sinners, how much more should we be offended when someone mocks and blasphemes
God himself?
Sing or pray Psalter #267.

Read Psalm 119:161–168
I’m standing up in front of my fifth and sixth graders teaching them about Hannibal crossing over the Alps in the dead of winter. It’s exciting stuff. I sure think so, but Frank apparently disagrees. I say this because he’s fiddling with something under his desk instead of listening. I’m not sure what it is, and I don’t want to interrupt myself unnecessarily, so I opt for a flyby maneuver. Frank keeps throwing me furtive glances, but I keep talking and don’t look directly at him, so he begins feeling assured that I’m too into my lesson to notice. Still talking, I make my way around behind him until I can see that he’s writing on his knee with a highlighter again. I walk up, hold out my hand, and ask the class how many elephants they think Hannibal had.

Sometimes I’m amazed at how blind my students think I am, but then I realize that we are really all that way. Psalm 119:166 says, “I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies: for all my ways are before thee.” God knows even the thoughts of our heart, yet sometimes we live as if we can keep things from him.
Sing or pray Psalter #343.

Read Psalm 119:169–176
This past school year, we read a book entitled “And now, Miguel” together in class. Miguel lives in a family of shepherds. During lambing season, all the sheep are branded with paint. It is very important that the same number be placed on the ewe and her lamb, so that they can be kept together. This is necessary, because the ewes will often let their lambs wander off and then be unable to find them again. The ewe knows her lamb only by smell, but if there are a lot of other sheep around, that particular smell can be difficult to locate. There was one point in the book where a ewe and her lamb were both looking right at each other and bawling, but there still wasn’t any recognition.

Sheep are used all throughout scripture as a picture of what we are like spiritually. In Psalm 119:176 David says, “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.” When we wander off into sin, we rely on our good shepherd to find us and bring us home once again. Without him we would be lost.
Sing or pray Psalter #55.

Read Psalm 120
Psalm 120 is the first of the fifteen psalms called the “Songs of Degrees”. These psalms are also known as the “Songs of Ascents”, “Songs of Steps”, “Pilgrim Songs”, etc. There are many thoughts as to why these psalms are grouped together and titled this way. Martin Luther believed that the Levites sang these psalms while standing on stairs or some other high place. Others believe that the Levites sang them while climbing the 15 steps leading into the temple. These psalms may have been sung by the Israelites when climbing up Mt. Moriah to the temple to celebrate the different feasts God required of them. Furthermore, they might have been sung by the faithful Israelites when returning to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity.

Regardless of whether these psalms were sung at these times or not, it is true that every one of these psalms is full of hope and joy. Psalm 120 speaks of deliverance from the lying tongue. Psalm 122 speaks of the joy of worshipping in God’s house with fellow saints. Psalm 126 speaks of God’s delivering us from captivity. What beautiful words for God’s people to sing on their way to God’s house.
Sing or pray Psalter #294.

Read Isaiah 38
When researching the fifteen psalms that are called the “Songs of Degrees”, I ran across an interesting idea for the author of ten of them. While it is widely accepted that David wrote four of them and Solomon wrote the one in the middle (Psalm 127), the authors of the other ten are unknown. The theory I ran across gives several reasons why King Hezekiah might have written them.

First of all, when Hezekiah prayed for healing, God granted him fifteen more years of life. This explains the fifteen Songs of Degrees. Furthermore, as a sign that this would happen, God moved the sun backwards ten degrees. Hence the ten psalms that Hezekiah might have written. The article went on to explain how the Hebrew word for degrees, ma’alah, is quite uncommon in the Old Testament, but is repeated surprisingly often in the accounts of 2 Kings and Isaiah concerning the healing of Hezekiah. Also, Isaiah 38:20 reads, “...we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord.” Could it be that “my songs” refers to these ten Songs of Degrees?
Sing or pray Psalter #280.

Read Psalm 120
“Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue,” pleads the psalmist in Psalm 120:2. His enemies are lying to him and about him. To his face, they speak words of friendship and praise, but their promises are empty. Behind his back, they plot against him. They lie about him to others and spread evil rumors to his detriment. He is being assaulted by the most dangerous and hurtful of enemies, the ones that spread their lies under the pretense of friendship.

The psalmist turns to the Lord as the only one who can bridle men’s tongues. We have already seen in Psalm 119 how the psalmist desires his own tongue to be kept from
lying. Psalm 119:29 says, “Remove from me the way of lying...” Now he asks God for judgement upon those lying about him. God answers the psalmist with promises of judgment. They will be punished with the “sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper” (Ps. 120:4). They shall burn in the lake of fire. Revelation 22:15 says, “For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.”

Sing or pray Psalter #253.

**Read Psalm 121**

Psalm 121 begins, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” Some read this verse with a question in the beginning. “Shall I lift up mine eyes to the hills for help?” Shall I place my trust in earthly things? The answer is clearly stated in verse two and in Jeremiah 3:23, which says, “Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.” Others read this verse that we must lift our eyes up above the hills, beyond earthly things, to God for help. Still others read this verse with the question in the final half of the verse. “I will lift up mine eyes... From whence cometh my help?” In this case the Israelites are traveling to Jerusalem and see the hills as a source of threat or harm. That the Israelites would be traveling to Jerusalem would fit with what we have learned about the Songs of Degrees, but there is another possible explanation. The Israelites were traveling toward Mount Moriah, where the house of God rested.

Sing or pray Psalter #347.

**Read Psalm 121**

In Psalm 121 the psalmist comforts himself in God when he faces difficulties and dangers. The God who made the heaven and the earth has promised “neither to slumber nor sleep.” Furthermore, “he will not suffer thy foot to be moved...” says verse three. God will not let us be tempted above what we are able. He will keep us from falling. Psalm 73:2, 23 says, “But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped... Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.”

In addition, God has promised to be the “shade upon [our] right hand” (Ps. 121:5). He refreshes us like shade is refreshing on a hot summer day. He keeps closer to us than our shadow and under his shadow we may sit with assurance. Song of Solomon 2:3 says, “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.”

Sing or pray Psalter #344.

**Read Psalm 122**

There are many professing Christians who do not go to church. They believe that they can worship God just as well by themselves and do not need the preaching or communion of the saints.

In this psalm David speaks of the joy of worshipping in church on Sunday with fellow believers. “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord” (Ps. 122:1). They went together, at the same time, to worship God, and it filled them with joy. When we worship together, we can and must encourage each other and sharpen each other in the truth, “as iron sharpeneth iron” (Prov.27:17). God also makes a place for us in his house when we go there with other saints. Psalm 84:10 says, “For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” Though our place might be that of just a doorkeeper, we are filled with joy to be one with God’s saints.

Sing or pray Psalter #350.

**Read Psalm 122**

“My students and I learned about our amazing eyes in class. We learned that our eyes are the most active muscles in our bodies. We learned that they flip everything we see upside down and then our brain has to flip it back the right way. If our brain has to flip everything we see, it’s no wonder half of our brain is occupied with seeing. Our eyes are so busy, and yet we must never forget that their most important job is to look to heaven where God reigns.”

“Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in
the heavens,” the psalmist cries as he turns his eyes to the heavens. Although we know that God is everywhere and is not confined to the heavens, it is in the heavens that he manifests his glory, as king in his court. From heaven, God beholds the events of the world and comes to the aid of his people. In this psalm, the writer is looking for mercy from the scoffers and those who scorn him. We also need God’s mercy from the scoffers in the world today.

Sing or pray Psalter #351.

Read Psalm 124

Even if we praised God with every breath in our bodies during every second of our lives, we could not praise him enough. We owe him praise for many reasons. One reason is that we were about to be destroyed. Like a lamb snatched out of the very teeth of the lion, we have barely escaped ruin. Like a little sparrow out of the snare of the fowler, we have barely escaped the traps of our enemies. At times, to us and others it may seem like we are trapped and beyond hope. Isaac may have thought there was no escape for him as he lay tied to the altar and his father raised the knife. However, just as God spoke out of the heavens and provided a lamb for the sacrifice, so God will break the snare of our enemies so that we can escape. We must praise him, for “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 124:8). Only he can and has saved us.

Sing or pray Psalter #353.

Chastity, College, and Covenant Daughters

Have you noticed how frequently the word strategy is used today? Corporate, public, and ecclesiastical life are strategy-driven. Politicians tell us we must have strategies to alleviate poverty, to fix failing schools, and to advance minority rights. The list is seemingly endless and, of course, they all involve spending more of your and my money. Churches have strategies for “outreach” (one of those nebulous words which can mean just about whatever you want it to mean); for attracting and retaining “the youth” (who seem to be a special group who require special attention); and for cultural engagement, to name but a few. At all costs we must have a strategy, or so we are told. Without exception, the strategies not only ignore the word of God, but flatly contradict it. They are all a series of humanistic answers to humanistic problems.

An example of this approach came to my attention recently as I listened to a news broadcast on the problem of sexual misconduct on American college campuses. Recent government-sponsored surveys have found that over 20% of female undergraduate students have reported being the subject of sexual assault. Numerous American colleges have legal judgments pending in cases brought by students aggrieved by what they consider to be the colleges’ failure to protect them. The news segment ended with a proposal from public colleges to counter the problem of sexual misconduct. Yes, you’ve guessed it, they need a strategy: specifically a strategy to protect students from sexual assault.

Some colleges have already sought to address the problem of sexual misconduct. The University of Michigan, for example, has instituted what it terms “healthy sexual relationship training” for all students. The official in charge of the university’s program, Holly Rider-Milkovich, commenting on research data said the answer to sexual abuse is “changing our cultural expectations, so that sex is something people engage in when it is equally desired, not a goal ‘that someone strives toward, regardless of objection’”. In her view sexual intercourse among students is legitimate and good when it is consensual; it is only when one of the partners feels obligated that it is bad.

Holly Rider-Milkovich’s answer is no answer at all, but is part of the problem in that it is a deliberate and wicked rejection of the word of God. The Bible is very clear in its condemnation of all sexual activity
outside the bond of marriage: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). Her position is representative of colleges, student bodies, and students who simply assume the goodness and legitimacy of sex outside of marriage. They call it good, but the Bible calls it fornication and warns those who continue in this sin that they will not inherit the kingdom of God, (1 Cor. 6:9–10).

The state is also leading the charge in developing such wicked strategies today. One state-sponsored higher education website begins its section on campus life this way: “College provides an environment for many students to explore intimate relationships with casual partners or serious relationships” (bestcolleges.com). Forget the euphemistic language: they are promoting college as an environment for students to fornicate and bring upon themselves the judgment of God. That is their strategy and it is one which Protestant Reformed youth must reject outright.

In the place of such wicked strategies, our young people need to know and practice the Bible’s program for sexual relationships. Specifically, in view of the statistics cited above it is necessary for those of our daughters who attend college. In this article, I would like to address the obligation of our youth in this respect; I would also like to address the responsibility of our fathers.

The calling of covenant youth regarding sexual relationships can be summed up in one word: chastity. My dictionary defines chastity as follows: the state of being pure in body or conduct; modesty; purity of taste and style; simple, unadorned, unaffected. This definition embodies two distinct but related ideas. First, there is the idea of sexual purity. Chastity involves purity of conduct with respect to our outward behavior. It also involves purity of desire with respect to the inner desires of our hearts. The Bible commands purity of conduct in 1 Corinthians 6:18: “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.” Purity of desire is commanded in Matthew 15:19: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”

Closely related to sexual purity of heart and conduct is the second part of the dictionary definition, namely, to be simple, unadorned, and unaffected. While these virtues or qualities have to do with our attitude to life in general, they are closely related to sexual purity. This relationship is made clear in the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Standards (the historic confession of Presbyterianism). In its explanation of the seventh commandment it lists as some of the duties required “modesty in apparel” and “diligent labor in our callings.” In its description of the sins forbidden by the seventh commandment it lists among other things “wanton looks, impudent or light behavior, immodest apparel” and “idleness, gluttony, drunkenness, unchaste company.”

The relationship of these qualities to sexual purity is this: modesty and simplicity are inner attitudes or dispositions born out of contentment with who we are as a person and with the circumstances in which God has placed us. God has given to every one of his children special gifts and a wonderfully unique personality. And to you—godly teenage girl—God says you are beautiful. It may be that no one else tells you that and perhaps you would not say that of yourself; but beholding your meek and quiet spirit which is in his sight of great price God says you are stunningly beautiful. With such inner attitudes the Christian young person is able to live a life of devotion to God and consequently is better able to avoid the sinful pleasures of the world, one of which is fornication.

In addition to the obligation of chastity to which a covenant young person is called, there is also the need for support and accountability. It is essential for those of our youth who attend college to have the support and accountability of family, friends, and church. Covenant youth must not be in a position to “do their own thing” during their college years. Sometimes in our circles I hear it said that we cannot forever shelter our young people from exposure to the world. After all, so the argument goes, we shelter them for seventeen or eighteen years; there comes a time when they must stand on their own two feet. Really! Where do we read this in the Bible? Where do we read that at seventeen years of age we open the door some morning, give our child a pat on the back and say, “Well, we’ve done our bit, now it’s up to you; it’s time for you to stand on your own feet and make your own decisions.”

One of those life decisions our young people will have to make (and may even have made before attending college) will be when and whom to date. I believe this is a question that is especially relevant for our young women (advisedly I refrain from using the term “teenager” since I believe the whole concept of
the modern “teenager” is completely unbiblical). The prevailing idea today is that when a young woman gets to be around sixteen or seventeen she becomes autonomous in the matter of relationships with young men and may make her own decisions about whom and in what way she will date.

It is not my purpose in this article to address all the issues involved in biblical dating as opposed to the widespread practice of recreational dating (in which young people form a relationship, or indeed a series of relationships, without any scriptural accountability or protection). I am seeking to describe God’s program for sexual relationships over against the wicked strategy of sexual awareness training promoted by many American colleges today. I want to do this with specific reference to our young women; not that our young men do not need guidance in this matter, but our daughters are particularly vulnerable, as I hope to demonstrate.

That our young women are particularly vulnerable to sexual attention, unwanted or otherwise, in their college years is borne out by the statistics I quoted at the beginning of this article: some 20 percent of female undergraduates have reported sexual assault in a recent survey. This is not a statistic in which we may take any comfort. Perhaps some of us are tempted to respond, “You speak of sexual assault, which is a crime and therefore not something for which the young woman is responsible.” However, the designation “sexual assault” includes unwanted sexual attention and sexual attention and activity that was initially consensual but which the young female no longer wants. The statistic is therefore important more generally as an evidence of the sexual attention and pressure to which our college-age daughters are subject.

Our young godly women are vulnerable. They are especially vulnerable at college, not least because they very often live away from home. They are vulnerable to unwanted sexual attention, but they are also prone to the danger of forming romantic relationships with minimal or without parental supervision. What is the biblical method for their protection? In addition to the practice of personal chastity, it is parental supervision. And it is specifically fatherly supervision. To put it simply, it is dad’s job. It is a role that dad must not delegate to mom; indeed he delegates certain of his responsibilities to the Christian schoolteacher as he undoubtedly delegates some to his wife. But in the matter of protecting the sexual purity of his daughter and overseeing her romantic relationships, a Christian father takes the lead.

Fathers, you need to take your responsibility in this area seriously; much is riding on it, not least the establishment of godly, stable marriages in the church. Dating ought to be with a view to marriage. That means that if you want to know whom your daughter should date you need to start with the doctrine of marriage and work back. Is the young man someone who would meet the biblical requirements for a godly husband? Is he one who is diligent in his callings; showing himself to be submissive to his parents, someone with a work ethic who will be able to support your daughter? Is he one who knows and loves the precious truths of particular grace, the unconditional covenant, and the antithetical life and who will therefore be able to lead your daughter in the doctrine to which she promised to adhere when she made public confession of faith? These are questions that you as father, and really you alone, must answer.

That fathers have both the calling to protect their daughters from unwanted sexual attention and the authority to oversee the relationships they may form with young men follows from the father’s position within the family. A father is the head of his home. That God gives a father this position in his home is clear from 1 Timothy 3. There we read that a father ought to be “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity”. What is true for those who desire a special office in the church is true for all fathers, namely, that they are called to rule their homes.

There is one passage of scripture to which I want to refer in this connection. It is a passage which specifically addresses a father’s rule of his daughter while she is still in his home and it is found in Numbers 30. The context of the passage is the necessity of keeping our vows unto the Lord. In this connection we read the following: “If a woman also vow a vow unto the LORD, and bind herself by a bond, being in her father’s house in her youth; And her father hear her vow, and her bond wherewith she hath bound her soul, and her father shall hold his peace at her: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand. But if her father disallow her in the day that he heareth; not any of her vows, or of her bonds wherewith she hath bound her soul, shall stand: and the LORD shall forgive her, because her father disallowed her.”
That this passage refers to a young woman is clear from the words, “being in her father’s house in her youth”. So even though this young woman may be attending college fifty miles, or for that matter one hundred and fifty miles distant from home makes no matter; the word of God says she is part of the home and thus under her father’s headship. These verses emphasize unmistakably the degree of authority a father possesses over his daughter. We are told that a father has the right to annul (or cancel) a vow that his daughter makes, even one that she makes to the Lord. Now it ought to be evident that if her father can annul a vow she has made unto the Lord, he can certainly cancel any promise or agreement she may have made with a young man.

A father’s right to cancel promises that he deems injurious to his daughter, including any agreement to enter into a romantic relationship with a young man, is an implication of his solemn calling to be her head. Numbers 30 is also important in that it speaks of the cancellation of vows by a father over his daughter and by a husband over his wife. Scripture knows of no period of autonomy for a young woman—that at the age of 16 or 17 she suddenly becomes her own head. Immediately after teaching that a father may cancel promises made by his young daughter, Numbers 30 teaches that if this young woman had a husband, then he may also cancel (or annul) any promises she has made. A young woman is under her father’s headship or that of her husband: the scriptures repudiate the notion of the young autonomous female.

The scriptures repudiate this notion for good reason. The reason is the wisdom of God for the welfare of our godly young daughters. They are precious to him; they are beautiful in his sight; he has made them beautiful in holiness, for in eternal love he elected them and by the blood of his Son he redeemed them. They belong to him and in his wisdom he protects them and leads them in love through the rule of godly fathers. This is an awesome responsibility for fathers; it also requires humble submission of godly daughters to their fathers. Such submission on the part of daughters is well pleasing to God.

In contrast to the strategies promoted by colleges for dealing with sexual abuse and unwanted sexual attention directed towards female students—which strategies arise out of unbelief and the rejection of God’s word—I have attempted to set out the biblical principles that should govern our behavior. These principles apply not only to the threats posed to our daughters at college, but also their vulnerability to unwanted sexual attention and improper romantic relationships generally.

The days are evil! The threats are real! Our covenant daughters are in danger! Not only so, but the threat of unwanted sexual attention and improper romantic relationships among our covenant daughters threatens the church. For a Reformed father the church is precious. He loves the church; he sacrifices time and money for the church; he works two jobs in order to pay Christian school tuition for the sake of the church; and he will fight for the church. Protestant Reformed fathers, you have both the solemn calling and exciting privilege to protect and lead your precious daughters. God gave them to you; they are the precious seed of the covenant who will produce and nurture the next generation. Keep them in our Protestant Reformed churches! You will do this as you exercise your calling to protect their sexual purity and to supervise their courtship: not just any young man will do; he must be one who knows and loves the Protestant Reformed faith.

It is that same Protestant Reformed faith that will enable our fathers to fulfill their calling. Of ourselves, by our own strength, we could never fulfill this calling. But our faith teaches us that God “hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations” (Ps. 105:8); and that our help is in the name of Jehovah who made heaven and earth. With much prayer, love, and not a few tears fathers do this. And the blessed result is that they “shall see their children’s children, and peace upon Israel” (Psalm 128:6).

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And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his leaf in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Psalm 1:3
The true church is under vicious assault in these last days. Satan, having great wrath because he knows his time is short, is determined to destroy the divine truth that the church loves, believes, confesses and lives. False teachers with their damnable heresies are on every side. Pressures to sell the truth for the sake of unholy alliances mount. Iniquity of the vilest sort is sanctioned and celebrated in society. What shall the church do as she awaits the triumphant return of her head Christ Jesus?

HOW MUST WE WIELD THE SWORD?

How does it apply to:
Defending the church from heresy & abounding lawlessness in society?
The instituted church and its relationships?
The believer and church membership?
The believer and life in this world?

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SOUTHWESTPRC.ORG
Church News  Melinda Bleyenberg

BAPTISMS
“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of heaven.”  Mark 10:14
The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:
Sophie Lyn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. David & Kristin Crossett—Ballymena, N Ireland
Samuel Scott, son of Mr. & Mrs. John & Rachael VanBaren—Byron Center, MI
Blake Joseph, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joe & Stacey Lubbers—Byron Center, MI
Avery Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tim & Jessica Ondersma—Byron Center, MI
Kayla Rose, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Eric & Stacey Solanyk—Loveland, CO
Weston Scott, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nate & Esther VanMeeteren—Lynden, WA
Addie Roe, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Caleb & Jenn VanBaren—Randolph, WI
Ella Jade, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brandon & Breanna Feenstra—Redlands, CA
Leo Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mike & Heather Puls—Southeast, MI
Holten Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Garth & Stephanie McKinney—Southeast, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH
“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.”  Matthew 10:32
Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:
John Smit—First, MI
Caitryn Hassevoort—Byron Center, MI
Amanda VanBaren—Byron Center, MI
Jenna VanBaren—Byron Center, MI
Anna VanderWall—Georgetown, MI
Sydney Hauck—Southeast, MI
Connor Flikkema—Southeast, MI

MARRIAGES
“For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.”  Psalm 48:14
Mr. Tyler Elzinga and Miss Saydee Bouma—Byron Center, MI
Mr. Ryan Buiter and Miss Joni Van Den Top—Doon, IA
Mr. Zachary Klamer and Miss Amanda Verbeek—Georgetown, MI
Mr. & Mrs. Cameron & Amy Van Overloop—Grace, MI
Mr. Kevin Huizing and Miss Abby DeVries—Edmonton, AB, Canada
Mr. Ethan Kalsbeek & Miss Kristi Tolsma—Immanuel, Lacombe, Canada
Mr. Dylan Hoekstra and Miss Lisa Brands—Loveland, CO
Mr. Jared Regnerus and Miss Rachel Smits—Randolph, WI
Mr. Adrian Gaastra and Miss Elisabeth Haan—Redlands, CA
Mr. Ben Noorman and Miss Brianna Hoekstra—Southeast, MI
Mr. Brandon Kuiper and Miss Macey Dykstra—Trinity, MI

Poem  James Jonker

God Gave Green

God gave green;
And life is green:
And grass and plants and trees are green. Life is green.

Grass turns gold and brown
And leaves turn gold and crimson: Dying is beautiful.

Withering grass and falling leaves;
And bare trunks silhouette the sky: Death is black,

Till whiteness fills the air and earth
And snow-clothes clothe the barren trunks
And blanket all the grass and leaves.
Death is white:
And death is beautiful.

Poem

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And life is green:
And grass and plants and trees are green.

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Shield of Faith Part 2:
Faith As a Weapon

Danny, his sister Becky, and their mother leaned over the library book on Roman armor. Their mother pointed at a picture of a line of Roman soldiers charging into battle. “One of the interesting things about the Roman shield is that the soldiers used it not only to protect themselves, but also as a weapon.”

“Really? I thought shields were only for protection.” Becky frowned at the picture.

Danny frowned too. How did a person use a shield as a weapon?

“Not the Roman scutum. It was designed to be used as a weapon along with their sword.” Their mother pointed at the picture of the shield. “See this big knob in the center of the shield? That is called the boss. It was often hardened wood or iron. When a Roman soldier marched into battle, he would slam the center of his shield, reinforced with this iron boss, into his enemy. While his enemy was hurt and stumbling, the Roman soldier would then stab him with his sword.”

“So they used their shields to punch people?” Danny straightened. That was a pretty cool shield.

“Yes. Sometimes, they would slam so hard he’d fall to the ground.”

“How is our faith a weapon?” Becky’s nose crinkled. “I’ve never heard it talked about like that.”

“If we’re only hiding behind our shield of faith, we aren’t taking action. There are passages in the book of James that say faith without works—without action—is dead. It’s just a wooden shield doing nothing. But when we follow God’s commands and walk with him as we are supposed to, then our faith has action. It is like the Roman shield punching forward into the world. Truly living our faith gets the world off balance. They can’t explain what is different about us, and they don’t like that. That’s how our faith is a weapon.”

Questions to think about
1. Read Ephesians 6:16, James 2:14-26, and Heidelberg Catechism LD 32 Q&A 86; LD 33 Q&A 91 by yourself or with your parents. How are faith and works related?
2. How does faith become like a weapon? What does it do?
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