Welcome to the age of distraction. We have screens and gadgets that will take us anywhere we want to go, whenever we want to go. Everything is “high-speed” and “on-demand” to satisfy our impatient and fast-paced society. There are so many ways we can be distracted!

A distraction is something that pulls or diverts us. Our attention is what is being pulled and diverted. Many times when we are distracted, it is from something more important to something less important, but not always. Our attention as Christians must be focused on Christ. We are called to do all things with Christ in mind. Satan often pulls our attention away from Christ and his kingdom. This is one of Satan’s favorite means of attack. He subtly pulls our attention away from Christ with distractions.

How we deal with distractions is closely tied to our use of time. The Holy Spirit through Paul calls us to be followers of God (Eph. 5:1). Ephesians 5 is an exhortation to holy living. Verse 8 calls us to “walk as children of light.” We are to be children of the light over against the works of darkness. How are we to be as lights shining to drive away darkness? By our own conduct. This is what Paul transitions to in verses 15 and 16. “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” John Calvin expounds on Paul’s call in verse 16 to redeem the time because the days are evil:

By a consideration of the time he enforces his exhortation. Everything around us tends to corrupt and mislead; so that it is difficult for godly
persons, who walk among so many thorns, to escape unhurt. Such corruption having infected the age, the devil appears to have obtained tyrannical sway; so that time cannot be dedicated to God without being in some way redeemed. And what shall be the price of its redemption? To withdraw from the endless variety of allurements which would easily lead us astray; to rid ourselves from the cares and pleasures of the world; and, in a word, to abandon every hindrance.¹

Many are the distractions that would pull our attention away from Christ. On a typical evening we might find ourselves spending an hour on Facebook, a couple of hours watching whatever it is we watch on TV. Then we are ready to go to bed. We spent the evening doing what we wanted to do and now we quickly read a short passage for devotions because we are too tired to spend much time with that. Our distractions have hindered us from doing things that should be our priority, like devotions. We need to be aware of how everything affects our spiritual lives. Is the activity we are engaged in pressing what God has given us into his service, or is the current activity pulling our attention away from God?

Our time here on earth is short. Whether we live to be 100 years old or only until we are 20, our time in this world is short in the scope of eternity. Things pertaining to the scope of eternity, such as the state of our spiritual life, are of utmost importance. Everything else must take a back seat. God has given us time that we might glorify him in all that we do. So we confess with the Psalmist, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

We must not be of the mindset where we say, “I’m only young once; I’ll live for myself now and maybe focus on my spiritual life later.” This is foolishness. How we live now as young people lays the foundation for how we will live as adults and how we will teach our children if the Lord grants them. “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Eccles. 12:1).

We ought to take an inventory of our usage of time on a typical day. How much time do we spend on Facebook and randomly surfing the web? How much time do we spend reading and studying God’s word in our personal devotions? How much time do we spend reading, and what are we reading? How much time do we watch TV, and what are we watching?

The more time we spend in God’s word and contemplating who we are and what we need, the more we will realize and become appreciative of what God has accomplished for us in his Son, and the more we are encouraged to lay aside all distractions that Satan is using to pull our attention away from Christ.

We must be diligent in our use of time. In this age of images and screens the importance of reading cannot be emphasized enough. We must be readers of things that give us insight into God’s word. More importantly, we must read God’s word itself. We must do this daily and not count it as a burden. How will we ever know how to live as Christians if we don’t study the words of Christ?

By God’s grace we can do this. As we read and study his word, we are sanctified and encouraged to more godly living. We must pray for this work of God in our lives. Our hope on this earth is for the resurrection of our bodies and life eternal in heaven. Our lives must reflect that hope.

say meant for Prof. Engelsma’s reading. He explains: “I judged that her writing about her circumstances would be beneficial to the readers of the Beacon Lights. I suggested that it be published, and Jane agreed to have this happen, should the editor of the Beacon Lights agree.” The editor of Beacon Lights agrees. Prof. Engelsma continues: “Knowing more about her struggle than the piece contains, I added my comments concerning her struggles, because there are other women and men too in her peculiar straits, who undoubtedly share her struggles and who will be helped by my frank acknowledgment of the temptations she faced and overcame.” Beacon Lights thanks both Jane and Prof. for writing on this difficult subject.

Second, this is our annual post-convention issue. Beacon Lights thanks the three speakers for the summaries of their speeches; rumor has it that they were well received by our young people. Enjoy the pictures also!

Third, we have on hand no book reviews and very few poems, and we would like some of each. All you poets and book reviewers out there, please take up the pen.

—Mark H. Hoeksema

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 (**Called to the Ministry**

Rev. Heath Bleyenberg)

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**Called to the Ministry**

I was born August 18, 1975 in Pipestone, MN, to Jim and Gloria Bleyenberg, and am the second oldest of five children. My earliest years were spent on a farm outside of Edgerton, during which time I attended the Protestant Reformed Free Christian School for two years and was instructed through the preaching in Edgerton PRC.

In 1982 our family moved to Chino, California. We lived there eight years, and I attended Hope PR Church in Redlands. Eight years later, in the fall of 1990 (my freshman year in high school), we moved back to Edgerton, and I finished my high school instruction at the local Christian Reformed high school.

I decided to attend Dordt College, majoring in mechanical engineering. In 1998, having graduated from Dordt, I packed my bags, loaded my car, crossed the Mississippi, and entered uncharted territory (at least for me), and at long last arrived in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Though it was a long day of driving, it turned out to be a good day. I arrived just in time to attend Bible study that night at Hope PRC.

From 1998 to 2004 I worked as a mechanical engineer making construction documents and designing many of the mechanical features present in grocery/retail stores. People have often asked me, “You must not have liked your job, seeing that you entered seminary?” On the contrary, I thoroughly enjoyed my job. But the call of God is irresistible, and he would give me more enjoyment and comfort in the way of submitting to his will. In 2008 I graduated from seminary and was called to be the first minister of Providence PR Church.

My days in seminary were memorable. The classroom instruction was top-notch—Reformed, godly, and edifying. So lively were the classroom lectures that once, during church polity, the ceiling fell down during the middle of class! During my seminary years I had the privilege of providing housing for two other seminarians. (Rev.) Cory Griess lived with me for one year. After that, the Irishman (Rev.) Martyn McGeown took up residence in my basement for two years. I provided the housing. He provided the dry Irish wit. We had many a good discussion late into the night. I count both men dear friends of mine.

In November of 2008 I was ordained into the ministry. For some seven months I was a bachelor living in the parsonage. I met my wife, Deborah Key, the summer before I was ordained, and we were engaged shortly after ordination. She has been a faithful help to me in the ministry. My wife and I enjoy all...
things nature—bike riding, hiking, gardening, and especially bird watching. Every four years you can find me cheering for the USA and the Netherlands in the World Cup.

The Lord calls a man to the ministry in different ways and at different times in his life. Some men know when they are younger and begin preparing already in high school. I did not feel the force of the call until my mid-twenties. That’s not to say that the Lord hadn’t planted the seed earlier in my life. Once while I was in college, I traveled home to Edgerton for family visitation. During the meeting the elder asked me if I had ever considered the ministry. I was rather startled by the question. Startled, because my answer was, “Yes, I have considered it,” but all too often would dismiss the notion very quickly. The Lord also worked in my heart by giving me more and more an interest in spiritual things. That interest led me in my junior year of college to purchase *Reformed Dogmatics* and *In the Sanctuary*, books by Herman Hoeksema. What a thrill when the books arrived in the mail! Any of you young men (and young women), read the *Standard Bearer* too! I recall reading with an excited interest the “News from Seminary Hill,” and especially Prof. Decker’s convocation address from 1 Thess. 5:25: “Brethren, Pray for Us” (Vol. 73, p.55).

After I graduated from college and moved to Michigan, I struggled with the call to the ministry more and more. Eventually the issue boiled down to this—how will God have me serve him? How would the risen and exalted Christ use me in his kingdom and covenant? The churches needed ministers. I had an interest in spiritual things. By God’s grace, I loved Jesus Christ and his church. I did not have the other commitments that go along with having a wife and children. The Lord led me very slowly, and at times painfully, to seek admission into seminary and thus into the ministry.

I’ve been asked to give any advice to young men who may be considering the ministry.

First, by all means pray to God. Pour your heart out unto him. Ask for the grace of the Holy Spirit that you may be led to know God’s will. In so doing, you may have the confidence that God will lead you.

For many men the answer God gives is the same answer Jesus gave to the Gadarene demoniac whom he healed. The man, understandably, wanted to be near Jesus and be with Jesus in a special way. But the word of Jesus to him was, “Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee” (Mark 5:19). Jesus was saying “You’ve tasted of the healing mercies of God. You want to be with me. You want to be my special disciple. That’s a good desire in and of itself. But that’s not my will for you. My will for you is that you go home, and tell your family, tell your neighbors, all the great things I’ve done for you.” I say, for many men, the answer of Jesus in response to their prayers is “You wonder about being a minister? That’s good that you think about that. But that’s not my will for you. My will for you is that you serve as elder, as deacon, or as a God-fearing man in the office of all believer: prophet, priest, and king.” What a high and noble calling that is! May God grant our churches more of these men to serve in this capacity!

But for other men, the Lord calls in a special way. In response to their prayers, God will impress that call upon the man’s heart so that that man has no peace as long as he puts off preparation for the ministry. The desire for the ministry simply does not go away. It consumes the man’s thoughts day in and day out, and so long as he remains idle, makes him a miserable, miserable man.

Young men, pray to God. And do not dismiss so easily your leanings toward the pastoral ministry. Your serious consideration of it might very well be an indication that God has called you to it.

Second, for you men considering the ministry, speak to somebody. Speak to parents. Speak to that teacher who knows your strengths and weaknesses. Go to your minister. Seek the advice of the elders. There is wisdom in a multitude of counselors. Speak to these people and tell them you are considering the ministry and ask whether or not they see in you the natural gifts for the labor. They will be able to give you good advice and encouragement. And when necessary, they will spur you on in your preparation. The longer a man resists the call, the more difficult it becomes later in life to begin—though it is not impossible.

Above all, demonstrate in your life humility, godliness, and a fervent love for the Lord Jesus Christ and for his blood-bought people.

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Not Ashamed of the Gospel

INTRODUCTION

Romans 1:16 begins with the word “for.” Whenever that word begins a verse, what follows gives a reason for some previous statement. Paul had said, “I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are in Rome also.” He desired to go to Rome, but was “let,” or hindered hitherto, and he prays for a prosperous journey according to the will of God. What accounts for his eagerness and his zeal? “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

That must be your and my confession too. Personally the confession that we are unashamed of the gospel is important because the gospel is the power of God to salvation in our souls. I do not say it must be the power in your soul. The text is not a call that the gospel be the power that moves your soul. The gospel is that. It is that because it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes, in you and me too. To be ashamed of the gospel would be to be ashamed of the only power that works salvation in your hearts, in my heart, and in the hearts of everyone who believes.

THE GOSPEL

In the text the Scriptures teach us that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The word “gospel” means “glad tidings.” In the context the gospel is called “the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:2). The gospel is the gospel of God because he is the author of it and works salvation by it. In our text the gospel is called the gospel of Christ. That phrase means exactly what the apostle said earlier: it is “the gospel of God… concerning his Son Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:2–3). The gospel is and can be only about Jesus Christ. The gospel, then, is the glad tidings from God to his people in the world concerning God’s Son, Jesus Christ, as the fulfillment of God’s promise and the salvation of all who believe in him.

According to the apostle the gospel contains two basic elements: “which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures, Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:2–4). That is the gospel.

Between those two events stands the cross. Christ was born to die, and he was raised because in his death he effectually accomplished salvation. The gospel at its heart is the cross. The gospel is the glad tidings that the Son of God—God—came in the flesh, died according to the flesh in payment for the sins of God’s people, to pay their debt to God and to earn for them by that death eternal salvation.

The gospel is the heart of Christianity. What we mean is that every truth of the Christian faith is the gospel. If the gospel concerns Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” then the gospel is very simply the whole truth of Jesus Christ.

The gospel of Jesus Christ includes all of Scripture. This is the teaching of the apostle when he says, “which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures.” When the apostle says “the holy scriptures,” he is referring to the Old Testament. That Scripture contains the promise of the gospel. That promise God fulfilled in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. It was the gospel of Christ as he also spoke it through his apostles and set it down in the New Testament.

Where do you find the gospel? In Holy Scripture! The content of Scripture is nothing less than the gospel, and the whole of Scripture is the promise of the gospel, the revelation of the gospel, and the doctrine of the gospel.

That gospel is also preached. The apostle says, “I am ready to preach the gospel at Rome.” Wherever the Scriptures are faithfully preached, there is the gospel. That is the means by which the gospel comes to us to today, as it came to the Romans in their day.
The Gospel’s Power

When the apostle says, “for it is the power of God…” he begins to give his reason why he is not ashamed of the gospel. He is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God.

A power is the ability to accomplish some purpose. The word “power” is the word in the Greek from which we get our English words dynamic, dynamite, and dynamo. A dynamic speaker is a powerful, effective speaker who moves his audience to sympathy, action, or whatever his purpose might be. Dynamite has the power to explode rocks. A dynamo—an electric generator—has the power to generate electricity. Wind is the power to move a gigantic sailboat or to destroy a house. Likewise, the gospel is a power.

The gospel is the power to accomplish salvation.

The salvation that the gospel works is salvation from this world: its folly, guilt, pollution, death, misery, corruption, and from the wrath of God to come.

The gospel is the power of God to salvation that consists in righteousness. A man cannot be saved apart from righteousness. God loves the righteous, blesses them, and saves them. God hates the unrighteous, curses the wicked, and damns the ungodly.

That saving righteousness is righteousness in the legal sense of acquittal in the judgment of God. That righteousness is also righteousness in the ethical sense that being justified, we are also transformed according to the image of God in Jesus Christ. The gospel is the power of God to salvation that consists in this righteousness.

The gospel is the power to salvation because “therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.” The phrase “righteousness of God” refers to the perfect and complete righteousness and so many holy works that God worked out for his people in Jesus Christ at the cross as the only ground of their salvation, and as the pattern of their spiritual transformation.

The apostle is giving the reason that the gospel is the power of God to salvation. In the gospel God reveals the righteousness of God by forgiving the sins of his people for Christ’s sake and imputing his righteousness to them. By the gospel God reveals the righteousness of God by transforming the justified sinner and giving new life to him.

The gospel is the power to salvation because it is “the power of God.” That it is the power of God means that God himself accomplishes salvation by the gospel in the hearts and lives of his people in the world.

The gospel is the power of God to salvation. Not an offer of salvation; not might be; not could be; not should be; but it is. When God purposes to save a man by the gospel, then the gospel cannot be refused, rejected, or resisted, but God delivers the gospel into that man’s heart, acquits him of his sins, imputes Christ’s righteousness to him, and on that basis frees him from sin’s bondage, pollution, and corruption.

The gospel— all of it—is the power of God to salvation, because God will not have his Son denied in the least.

The gospel is the power of God to salvation “to everyone that believeth.” When the gospel comes and is delivered by God into the soul of a man or a woman, that man or woman believes. They infallibly believe. They cannot help but believe. As the wind comes irresistibly, so the grace of God in the gospel irresistibly gives faith. He works every aspect of faith, including the will to believe, the power to believe and the act of believing, and saving righteousness by faith.

Faith, then, cannot be a condition. Faith is a benefit of the gospel given graciously, and not a condition of the gospel that man must fulfill, not even a condition that he fulfills by grace. Teach that faith is a condition, and one denies the gospel.

The importance of this point is that by faith we are justified and saved, so that if faith is man’s work, then salvation is man’s work; but if faith is the gift of the gospel, then salvation is too. The text speaks of this when it says, “as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” That means that a man who is righteous by faith only, not by his works, shall live.

Being Unashamed of the Gospel

Of that powerful gospel the apostle is unashamed.

We can more easily understand this if we examine what the opposite means. To be ashamed is be embarrassed. If a man is ashamed of the gospel, he is embarrassed by it. Being embarrassed by it, he is silent about it, eventually denies it, and soon forsakes it. Being ashamed of the gospel is bad because it is the power of God to salvation, so that in forsaking
the gospel one forsakes the only power to salvation.

Such shame for the gospel manifests itself by open renunciation of and opposition to the gospel, as well as one’s shamelessly teaching false doctrine.

There are, however, ways other than this bold renunciation of the gospel that shame of the gospel manifests itself.

Many are ashamed of the preaching of Scripture. Many pulpits that should proclaim the gospel proclaim everything except the gospel, so that the pulpit becomes a platform for the proclamation of the latest in social or political activism, the gospel being deemed a sorry method for the advancement of earthly agendas and earthly kingdoms.

Many are ashamed of the doctrines and teachings of Scripture. In their college lectures they are ashamed that the gospel teaches that God made the earth in six days. Being ashamed, they teach some form of evolutionism.

In their preaching they are ashamed that the gospel says that God elects and reprobates. Being ashamed they rarely, if ever, preach it.

In their seminaries they are ashamed that the gospel teaches that salvation is not by works, because they say that doctrine will make men careless and profane. Being ashamed of the gospel, they teach justification by works.

In their counseling rooms they are ashamed that the gospel demands suffering for the child of God, brings a sword into his relationships in the world, home, and workplace, and calls him to be at enmity with the world and separate from impenitent sinners. Being ashamed of the gospel, they teach otherwise.

Being ashamed of the gospel, they will not defend that gospel when it is attacked at their church assemblies, in their church papers, in the books of their colleagues, or in their presence. The explanation of the silence of many in defense of the gospel is that they are ashamed of it, deeming it unworthy of even a tepid defense.

Being ashamed of the gospel, a man is silent. He does not speak it when called, confess it when demanded, or preach it when sent.

Such an attitude is not the attitude of the apostle. He is unashamed of the gospel. Upon the Christ of the gospel he relies entirely for his own salvation, and upon the power of that gospel he depends absolutely in all his work in the churches. Because he is unashamed of the gospel, he is ready to preach it at Rome.

The apostle might have had a reason to be ashamed of the gospel if the gospel was only words, so that it did not accomplish what it said. But like the wind moves a sailboat, dynamite explodes rocks, and generators produce electricity, so does the gospel effect salvation.

He might have had a reason to be ashamed of the gospel if the gospel did not deliver more than Rome gave. But the gospel is the power of God to the greatest good, a good so great that if a man should lose all, life included, and have the gospel, he has gained the world: salvation from sin, righteousness, and life everlasting.

The text then also speaks to the Christian young person and to us as members of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

First, you and I may not be ashamed of the gospel. If the gospel is the power of God unto your salvation, then you will not be ashamed of it either. That too is the power of the gospel. By nature we are ashamed of the gospel. The gospel gives faith and by faith boldness. As the Psalter number says “Thy truth before the kings of earth with boldness I will speak.”

Second, confessing the gospel, we will not be put to shame. We may suffer in this life, but we are living heirs of the world to come, to an inheritance reserved in heaven for us. Such was the experience of the apostle for his boldness in the gospel. He would come to Rome, but as a prisoner for the gospel’s sake. He would preach in Rome too, and for it lose his head. But he gained that crown of righteousness laid up in heaven for him.

Third, the gospel speaks to the Christian young person because it calls you to be a member of a church that is not ashamed of the gospel, but that preaches it in her own pulpits and wherever God in his good pleasure sends the gospel, and while she is faithful to that gospel, never to leave that church.

Fourth, the resolve of the apostle to proclaim the gospel must be ours as churches. There is no time like the present in which there is a great need for the vigorous proclamation of the gospel. I make mention of only one example relevant to your life and to the work of the Protestant Reformed Churches in which you are members. Presently, the heresy of the conditional covenant as taught by the movement called the Federal Vision sweeps through the Reformed world. Shame at the gospel would manifest itself in silence on this point in an hour of great opportunity
No one, other than the Son of God made flesh, has been used by the hand of God to do more for the Christian church than the apostle Paul. The apostle was human, sinful, and had strengths and weaknesses like any one of us sinful creatures, but God raised him up in Paul a mighty man. Paul was valiant for the truth, valiant for the gathering of the church, valiant for the glory of Christ. One Reformed man rightly stated that “the apostle Paul was the most influential Christian that ever lived…. In his epistles (by inspiration) he gave the Christian church the theology which has dominated all of its thought forms to this day, in both its Christology and its soteriology, in both its ecclesiology and eschatology. He was a man of God in the truest sense—perhaps the most gifted, the most loyal, the most heroic, certainly the hardest working man that Christ ever sent forth to labor for him in the whitened harvest.”

All by sovereign grace.

If you pay attention when you read the epistles and the book of Acts, you will discover that Paul was a unique man—brilliant, pious, sincere, devoted, driven, passionate, and empathetic. He was a man by virtue of his upbringing able to live in two worlds, the Jewish and the Gentile, for the good of the church. But if one day in glory you ask the apostle to describe himself, more than likely he will only say one thing, the same thing he already said about himself in Romans 1:1, “You want to know who I am? I am Paul, a servant of Christ.”

When we introduce ourselves to people, the first things we talk about reveal how we identify ourselves. We can therefore learn much about how the apostle Paul identifies himself when he introduces himself to the Roman Christians for the first time in Romans 1:1: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.” Paul tells us, this is centrally how I understand myself, and this is centrally what I want you to know about me: I am a servant of Jesus Christ.

The word for servant is actually stronger than servant; it is the word for slave in the New Testament. Paul says the most fundamental reality about me is that I am a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. To be slave of another means two things. First, it means that you do not have rights over yourself any longer. Second, it means that ultimately you are not in control of your own life any longer. You have a mind and you have a will, but your mind is conformed to the mind of the master, and your will actively coincides with the will of the master. A slave is not just one who serves and then goes home, but one who is completely owned by the master, body, mind and soul, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The master for the apostle is Jesus Christ. At the heart of Paul’s identity

What kind of involvement, you may ask? For the Christian young person: hear it, study it, learn it, read it, believe it, confess it, live it, and love it. Support it by prayer, word, and deed. Be thankful for it, too, because like Paul and like the Romans to whom he wrote, we have received the gospel as a gift from God, and salvation by it.

Rev. Langerak is pastor of Protestant Reformed Church of Crete in Crete, Illinois.

Rev. Cory Griess
is the fact that he is a man who no longer lives for himself, but lives for the master, Jesus Christ the Lord.

By saying, “I am Paul, slave of Christ,” the apostle could have just as easily said, “I am Paul, Christian.” For a slave of Jesus Christ is the very definition of any true Christian. According to Scripture it is not Paul alone who is a slave of Christ, or apostles, or office bearers alone, but all believers are to be identified this way. In Revelation 1:1, where John is speaking to the whole church—office bearers, laymen, young people, children, old members—the text says, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ…to shew unto his servants (the same word, his slaves) things which must shortly come to pass.” The church is made up of slaves of Christ.

This must lie at the center of the existence of the child of God—you young people—already now. I am his property. He is my master. Not later when I get married and have my first child, but now, right now. At the center of who I am is not what school I go to, or where I am from, or where I have been, or how good I am at sports, or what kind of instrument I play, or how many people I know or don’t know, or how I look or don’t look, or how much I weigh or don’t weigh, or who my parents are or are not, or where I work or don’t work, how much money my family has, or how much money my family does not have. The child of God must be able to say, if you strip all those things away from me, I still am who I am; you have not destroyed me, you have not shaken me to my core, for at the heart, the center of who I am is a slave of Jesus Christ, a being owned by the master, and willingly so.

As you can well imagine, if that is your identity, it will affect your life, and the more you grow in this central identity, the more that identity will show in your life. It showed itself in the apostle’s life. I point out three ways.

First, that Paul was a slave to Christ showed itself in his mind, in that the substance of what he believed and preached was what Christ taught him to believe and preach. Paul was taught by Jesus Christ himself in Arabia and submitted himself to that teaching all his days. Our minds and hearts too are surrendered to the mind of the Lord Jesus. When they are, we see the beauty of what he teaches and would not want to compromise that truth for anything in all the world.

Second, Paul honors his master by speaking the truth of his master to others. It is astounding if you watch him carefully. You see him in prison in Phillippi, and yet speaking about the things of God and singing praises to God, which was the means God used to convert the Philippian jailor. You see Him before Agrippa where he is on trial, using the opportunity to speak to call Agrippa to believe in Christ. It didn’t matter to him what people thought. It didn’t matter how people looked at him. The apostle was a slave of Christ; that stood at the center of his identity, and he would speak of Christ at every opportunity.

We must be willing to speak of him too, brothers and sisters.

Even if by doing so it means suffering for our master. That is the final manifestation of the apostle’s slavery to Christ that I highlight. Paul was so identified by his master’s rule over him that he was willing to suffer for his Lord. The apostle tells us of his suffering for Christ in 2 Corinthians 11:24–33, which you may read for yourself. To be a slave of Christ will mean suffering for us today too. The apostle in 2 Timothy 3:12, after recounting some of his sufferings, looks ahead to the future church and turns his eye upon you young people and says, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” You too.

That is always true in every age, but it increases in expression in various ages and the closer we get to the end. You young people must know that greater suffering is coming for us in these United States. One would have to be blind not to see the storm clouds of persecution rolling in. I don’t mean to scare you, but you must ask yourself, and I myself, Am I willing to suffer for my master? Give up if necessary the nice home or the boat and the weekends by the lake, and the closets full of clothes and the shopping and the good food? Am I willing to have church without the nice buildings or the church picnic at the nice park? It will take time yet, but it’s coming, it’s coming. And it will expose who is a slave of Christ and who is not. For a slave of Christ is not identified ultimately by those things, and will not compromise his devotion to the master when those things are stripped away.

The master has suffered and given his life for our ransom. We must be willing to suffer for his name’s sake. One has to ask himself, What would cause Paul so willingly to give himself up to all of this as slave of Christ? The answer is that his master is the Christ who redeemed his life from destruction by sovereign, irresistible grace. Paul was headed for the pit of hell. In natural arrogance he had viewed himself as righteous, clothed with his own good
works. When God opened the eyes of Paul’s heart, he saw not righteousness in himself, but sin. There was covetousness of other rabbis in him, self-love, pride, envy, and every manner of putrid motivation before God. Only after this did Jesus and his death on the cross start to make sense to him. Jesus did not die because God was rejecting Jesus personally, but he died because God was rejecting him for the sins of his people upon him. Then by the Spirit Paul made the next step: “died for my sins.” And then the next step: “Why, out of all the people in the world, did he choose me?”

Paul began to realize he was a slave already before God gave him faith in Christ, a slave to sin. As owned as Paul was by him now, so owned was he by sin before. In Romans 6:6 the apostle uses the same word, “slave,” to describe himself and us when he says that before Christ’s work in us we served sin—we served sin as slaves is the meaning of the original Greek.

The apostle understands, young people, that the options are not “slave” or “not slave”. The options are slave to sin and Satan and destruction and hell, or slave to Christ and life and truth and joy. The apostle understands that the only freedom from master sin is to be liberated as slave to master Christ. Such a thing is only possible by sovereign grace. A slave has no means to free himself, but must be freed by another. It is only this gospel of pure, undeserved, and sovereign grace—you understand, don’t you, young people?—that could possibly produce a Paul who loved the Lord unto the death.

You, young people, do you love the Lord Jesus? You know him, I know you do; you’ve been taught him. Do you love him? He is a real person, and his gospel is a real gospel. Paul met him on the road to Damascus. You realize that he walked this earth two thousand years ago, and that he was crucified on a cross outside the northwest corner of Jerusalem (you can go there if you’d like), that he rose out of a tomb in heavenly life, life from the next age beyond the chasm of death and the curse. You realize that in the same sky you are living under, the one you know, he will return with all the holy angels with him, filling it with the brightness of his glory. And you realize that when this person comes back, he’s coming back for you.

You realize that everything you are learning in catechism is not just nice, logical arguments that make sense, though it all is logical and makes sense, for God is a God of logic. You realize all of your instruction acts as spokes on a wheel to lead you to the center where stands a real person, the second person of the Trinity robed with your flesh, come to your world to redeem you, to take you to himself, and to bring you out one day and all creation with you. All your instruction is that you might see him by faith as Paul saw him by sight.

As important as money is, money did not become incarnate for your soul. As important as sports are, sports did not die upon a cross for you. As important as sexual relations are as a gift of God used properly, it was not sexual relations that rose again from the grave victorious. It was Christ. All other would-be masters are not worthy of your willing service. He alone is worthy of complete surrender.

I was talking to a young woman in the seat next to me on the plane last time we had to fly for Classis West. She had just gotten out of rehab for the third time for heroin addiction and was on her way back home. As it ended up, the Lord gave the opportunity to open my Bible and explain to her for forty minutes the gospel of Christ. She was very interested and asked a lot of questions…until I got to the part where I said when one comes to faith in Christ, Christ becomes not only savior but master, and part of salvation is that he rules over our lives for our good. At that point, she interrupted me and asked, “Wait a minute. Does that mean I have to stop sleeping around?” A little bit taken aback, I responded, “Yes, yes it does.” With that she was done. Willingly bound to sin, the prospect of being slave of Christ sounded horrific.

Your maturity, young people, is that you more and more look sin in the eye and say by sovereign grace the exact opposite of what that young woman said. You say, “There is only hell and destruction with my sin. And there is freedom in slavery to my Christ. By grace alone I don’t want sin. I am free, slave to him. And since I do nothing to earn the master’s work of redemption, then all that is left for me is to enjoy living free with him and unto him, unashamed of the one who has done everything for me.”

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Living Unashamed of the Gospel Today

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day [believed: or, trusted]. Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:7–13).

You, young people, are ashamed of the gospel. I am ashamed of the gospel. Paul says in Romans 1:16, the theme text of this year’s convention, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.” But I say to you, you are ashamed. I am ashamed. There are many experiences I went through as a young person like you that confirm that in my mind, and here is one: About five years ago, I heard of a debate that would be between an atheist, Christopher Hitchens, and his believing brother, Peter Hitchens. Perhaps I should not have gone, but I did. From the mouth of this respected atheist orator, before about a thousand people, there spewed forth mockery of Christ and the Christian religion. And then came this: “Anyone here want to stand up and call themselves sheep?” Shame poured into my heart; shame delayed me so that I did not stand up when I should have. And even if I had stood up, the shame would have still been there! Young men, young women, you and I are ashamed of the gospel.

To understand that fully, you have to understand what the gospel is. When we think of the gospel, we often think, “It’s what Jesus has done in dying on the cross for our sins.” And yes, that is the heart of it. But really, every truth in the Bible is intimately connected to the gospel. When Paul says that he is unashamed of the gospel, he means that he is unashamed of all the Scriptures which are about the gospel. Every single word, every single page in your Bible in some way or another points to Jesus and what he has done for you. Don’t forget that! Mess with creation in Genesis 1, mess with the truth of the unconditional covenant, mess with the virgin birth, and you mess with the gospel itself. The Scriptures, all of them, are gospel writings. And you and I are ashamed of them!

Ashamed? Yes, ashamed. Shame is that complicated mix of fear, anxiety, and embarrassment in your heart that you feel when someone whom you respect disapproves of you. Rev. Herman Hoeksema described the Greek word as an “inferiority complex.” When another looks down upon us, that painful shame overcomes us, making us red in the face, hot, sweaty, with a racing heartbeat, and a desire to cover our face and to disappear from the situation. You have shame; I have shame toward the gospel.

What happens, young people, when you find out that your friends are doing something contrary to God’s word, this gospel? The weekend comes and the beer is flowing. You may say, “That’s dumb.” Or you may speak the gospel—“Our Savior has saved us from the sin of drunkenness.” Your friends gather to watch the latest popular drama of pretty little liars in high school committing the grossest of sins. You
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may say, “Let’s change the channel,” or, “I’m going home.” Or you may speak the powerful gospel: “The Word, Christ himself, says that out of thankfulness we are to flee these sins!” And there are other sins you can address with the gospel. But the shame is already creeping within us, simply thinking about saying something in these situations.

After church, you gather with other young people and have a society meeting. Why are there those awkward silences? Ashamed of the gospel? Then it’s time to pray, and it’s your turn to pray. Why the trembling? Why is it so hard to speak to God about your love for Christ in prayer before others? Ashamed of the gospel? After church, you stand in a circle of young people or by your cars outside. You know there is a sermon to talk about, but who is going to bring it up? Ashamed of the gospel? Your friends hop in the car. You could turn on the popular secular radio station, some country, or hip-hop. Or you could stick in the Hope Heralds CD. Ashamed of the gospel?

Perhaps you spend time with people from other denominations. There is talk about evolution and how it’s not a salvation issue. Are you willing to insist, even though you may not be able to explain it perfectly, “YES, the gospel is at stake!”? There is talk among young people of other denominations that the doctrines the Protestant Reformed people hold to—those distinct teachings of the unconditional covenant, particular grace, the unbreakable bond of marriage—are not that important. URC, CRC, PCA, OPC, PRC, we’re all the same, we’re all going to the same place anyway. Which young person is going to humbly but passionately defend the gospel? Ashamed?

Yes. As I began, you are ashamed and I am ashamed. Because of that old man still within our hearts, we have that shame and feel that shame. That ought to be something to grieve over and to be troubled over. But the gospel for those who are ashamed of the gospel is that Christ has blotted out our sins, covered them over when he “…who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2).” However, there is more to the gospel for us. Not only is it forgiveness for our shame, but it is also Christ’s power, by his Spirit, to live unashamed of this gospel.

By his power we seek to do so.

We first have to address the problem. Why are we ashamed? It is because we are way too concerned about what other people think of us. Why was the apostle Paul tempted to be ashamed of the gospel when he wrote Romans 1:16? Why was Timothy tempted to be ashamed of the gospel? They both were among many who despised the gospel. And we are ashamed because others, even those in the church among us, will despise us…or so we think. Why not say it’s sin? Because what will my friends think of me? Why not use God’s name in daily conversation? Because that’s not what others see as cool. Why not bring up a spiritual conversation after church? It’ll be awkward. They’ll all look at me weirdly. Why not insist that those doctrines are essential? People will be offended and think I’m saying I am better than they. The problem is that we are too concerned about what others think. We have made an idol out of people. And really, we have made an idol out of self, out of our reputation among others.

We fight against this problem and live unashamed of the gospel by growing in love for God. The reason that we are ashamed is that we love ourselves and our reputation more than God. Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” How do we grow in love for God? There are many ways. But go back to the basics, young people. Do your devotions. Daily read that Bible, that gospel, and pray earnestly, “More love to Thee, O Lord, More love to Thee!”

Second, we must grow in faith, that is, a knowledge both intellectual and spiritual. Romans 10:11 says, “For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.” You grow in faith by using the means of faith, and the chief means is found in God’s house under the preaching of the word, where you don’t just sit there, slouching, distracted, and sleeping, but doing whatever it takes to focus on every word of the worship service. Without faith strengthened in this way, you will be ashamed. You won’t know what to say when the opportunity comes to speak the gospel.

Third, we must grow in hope. Romans 5:5 reads, “And hope maketh not ashamed.” Meditate, young people, on heaven. You’re young, but the recent death of a young man in our churches should make you realize that life may end at any time. Meditate on, discuss, think on, sing about heaven. Yes, fill your life not with secular music, but with music that helps...
you meditate on your hope. See the greatness of glory and yearn for it more! If you have your desires molded by the hope of heaven, then that earthly desire to gain the approval of others diminishes, and you are able to live less ashamed of the gospel. Grow in faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love.

Fourth and very practically, force yourself to talk about the gospel. Being unashamed about the gospel is especially using your mouths, breaking the silence, and witnessing to the gospel. That is what Paul is referring to in our theme text. He is talking about preaching, using his mouth to speak the gospel. That feeling of shame and awkwardness will arise in our hearts because of that old man, but that new man in us must fight that shame and force out those words of the gospel. No, it’s not just ministers who talk about these things, while the rest of the people listen, but all of us, as Christians are not only to live like Christians, but to speak the gospel as Christians.

It is very important that we do this, young people! It’s important simply because God’s word shows us that is how we ought to live in response to that precious gospel. It is important because it is how we glorify God.

It’s important that we work on it because the last days require it. We live in the last days. If you do not fight the shame in these last days, and boldly speak of that gospel in your own circle of friends, how will you speak of that gospel to the world when God requires it? If you can’t be unashamed before your friends right now, how can you confess your faith before the mockery of the world, its persecution, the burning stake, and the cross? By God’s grace, we must work against shame, preparing our hearts, so that we never deny him before men.

Pray, young people, for yourselves. Pray for each other as your parents pray for you. Pray for faith, hope, love, for the power of Christ’s Spirit to live unashamed of the gospel.

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Praise God

Praise God for His grace.
Praise God for He is good.
Praise God for He is sure,
And His grace has always stood.
And His grace will always stand,
For we are always in His hand.
So pray to God for His grace,
Pray during trials,
But also,
Pray when it’s going well.
And remember,
Praise God for His grace,
Praise God for He is good.
Praise God for He is sure,
And His grace has always stood.

Dan Ophoff

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Poem

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October 9 Read Jeremiah 7

There are two thoughts that we can focus on in today’s reading. First, we see the prophet taking an unpopular stand in bringing to Israel the reasons for its distress. Second, we see the depths of sin into which Israel had fallen. Are you able to point out to your friends, family, or even church, those faults that are leading them astray? This is not an easy task, but the child of God is called to admonish his brothers and sisters so that they do not fall further into their sins. We cannot do this by thinking that we are better than they, but we must humbly go to them and show them the error of not glorifying God in their work. This takes grace, but God gives to us sufficient grace even for this task. Sing Psalter 182.

October 10 Read Jeremiah 8

After pointing out Israel’s sins, Jeremiah looks ahead to the terrible judgement that will come upon them because of those sins. In the previous chapter the basic sin to which Jeremiah points is that of wrong worship of Jehovah. Israel believed that a half-hearted manner of worship would satisfy God. For that sin the terrible things related in this chapter would occur. Israel could find no peace in the way they were living. Jeremiah asks the rhetorical question of the last verse. Yes, there was and is balm in Gilead. It is only found by grace. That balm is Christ. Sing Psalter 179.

October 11 Read Jeremiah 9

Well is Jeremiah called the weeping prophet. We see that immediately in verse 1. Why does Jeremiah weep and lament? First, he weeps for the sins of God’s people. He sees the sin in all that they do, and that sin causes him to mourn. Second, he weeps when he sees God’s judgements upon Israel and Judah. Do we weep when we see sin in God’s church? Do we mourn over the judgments that God has announced for such sins in his word? Sin is sin and will be punished. If it were not for the grace of God in sending to us a redeemer, we would be destroyed as Judah was. Sing Psalter 164.

October 12 Read Jeremiah 10

One of the sins that afflicted Israel and Judah was that of idol and image worship. In his first two words from Mt. Sinai, God had warned his people against that sin. They had fallen into it head over heels. Now as they were preparing to go into captivity, into a land rite with this evil, Judah was warned to not fall farther into this sin. For most of us, image worship is not a problem. But we live in a world full of idolatry. Where do we stand? How do we stand? Let us stand upon the true word of God as found in the Bible. Sing Psalter 138.

October 13 Read Jeremiah 11

God has made a covenant with his people of all ages. Judah had broken that covenant and now was faced with ruin as the armies of Babylon circled outside the borders of the country, awaiting the day that God would send it in judgment. God has made a covenant with us in Christ. How do we live within that covenant? Do we obey our gracious God in that covenant, or are we like the men of Anathoth, Jeremiah’s hometown, who brazenly spoke evil of God’s prophet? Let us keep God’s covenant every day of our lives. Sing Psalter 289.

October 14 Read Jeremiah 12

Jeremiah, like Asaph of the psalm, pours out his complaint to God against his wicked neighbors who seem to prosper in their wickedness. God rebukes the prophet in verses 5 and 6 and reminds him of his grace that is stronger than any evil that man can devise. In the final part of the chapter, the prophet implores God’s true people to turn to God and turn from their wicked ways. Only in this way will they find salvation that is by grace alone. Sing Psalter 202.

October 15 Read Jeremiah 13

By means of two concrete signs, Jeremiah was to show the people of Judah the way that they were going. Like the linen girdle that was made useless by being hid in the ground by the Euphrates River, and like the wine bottles that were broken to bits, Judah
would see what would happen to them because of their stubbornness in not turning from their evil way. There are signs of another coming destruction. These are the signs of Matthew 24. Are we giving heed to such signs? Sing Psalter 353.

**October 16 Read Jeremiah 14**
As Judah drew nearer and nearer to captivity, there were other signs that Jehovah was displeased with his covenant people. A severe drought had overtaken the land. In the first part of the chapter we have many graphic pictures of that drought. Judah did not heed that sign. Jeremiah pleaded with God for them, praying for them even when God told him that it was useless. False prophets had told Judah that there would be no captivity. To whom do we listen? Do we listen to the false prophets of the false churches around us, or do we listen to the prophets who truly say, “Thus saith the Lord”? Sing Psalter 293.

**October 17 Read Jeremiah 15**
The people had fallen so far in their sins that not even the great mediators, Moses and Samuel, could save them. God tells Jeremiah that Judah will surely be carried away captive. Jeremiah then laments his own hard times as a prophet to whom no one will listen and whom no one likes. God reassures him in his office and tells him that even in the coming calamity God will protect him. We should trust in God to protect us even when those around mock us for believing in him. Sing Psalter 300.

**October 18 Read Jeremiah 16**
In verse 17 we read that Jehovah’s eyes were upon his people. What does that say to us? Are we cognizant of the fact that God watches us? Do we live out of that knowledge so that we do not do things displeasing to him? Judah knew this fact, but they ignored it. Jeremiah had to be a living example of the calamities that were coming upon them. He could not marry; he could not join in times of sadness or joy. We also find in this chapter evidence of God’s grace, as the prophet intimates that a remnant would return. We also see God’s grace upon us, as there is an indication that the Gentiles would be added to the church of God. Let us live in a way that is pleasing to God. Sing Psalter 87.

**October 19 Read Jeremiah 17**
There are two items of note in this chapter. Judah is reprieved for their idolatry and their disregard of the Sabbath day, and Jeremiah makes use of words from other places in Scripture to remind them about God and his commandments. Reading through the chapter we can see references to Psalm 1 and Job 19. These chapters have proved instructive for God’s church through the ages. We should turn to them often and see what God has to say to us through his word. If we disregard that word and walk in the sins of idolatry and Sabbath desecration, we should know that there will be no peace in that way. Sing Psalter 1.

**October 20 Read Jeremiah 18**
The truth of the sovereignty of God has been disregarded from the beginning of time. Satan did not like it and was cast out of heaven for not regarding it. Adam and Eve fell because they did not acknowledge that truth. We see in the figures in this chapter that Israel of old would not acknowledge it. The familiar figure of the potter and the clay is used throughout Scripture to show to us that our God is sovereign. In the world in which we live, even those who call themselves church do not bow to God’s sovereignty. God is sovereign or God is nothing. To which truth do you hold? Sing Psalter 236.

**October 21 Read Jeremiah 19**
Judah’s destruction was prefigured in the bottle that Jeremiah took to the garbage heap and smashed. Just as no potter had the skill to reconstruct that bottle from the shards, so no man could save Judah when God smashed them upon the rock of Babylon. Just as only the faithful in Judah bowed before the word of God as preached by Jeremiah, so only those found faithful in God’s church today will bow before God’s word concerning the final judgment that God will bring upon this world. Stand faithful and hear the word of the Lord, people of God. Sing Psalter 89.

**October 22 Read Jeremiah 20**
The Pashur was the ruler of the temple. He knew what the breaking of the bottle meant, but he did not react in a right way. He had Jeremiah arrested and despitefully used. After a night in the stocks, Jeremiah pronounces judgement upon this evil man. Then Jeremiah breaks into a lament for himself, as his life seems to be in danger. In that lament we have the beautiful words of verse 13. Even as Jeremiah despaired in the way God had led him, he knew that God would save his true people Israel. May God grant to us the faith to burst into singing in the most trying of times. Sing Psalter 193.

**October 23 Read Jeremiah 21**
A new king has come on Judah’s throne. He sends messengers to Jeremiah asking for prayers in Judah’s behalf against Babylon. Jeremiah’s answer, which comes from God, is that captivity will surely come.
The people should not fight against Babylon, and the king and his court should repent of their sins. We too need to listen to the word of Jehovah as found in the Bible, for in that word is the guidance that we need all the days of our lives. Sing Psalter 334.

**October 24 Read Jeremiah 22**

We now reach a series of sermons preached by Jeremiah to the various kings of Judah. Their primary message is the same: repent and turn unto the Lord. Judah had committed many abominable sins, among the worst being idolatry. They had turned from the Lord and walked after many gods. God would execute judgement upon the house of David. These words come to us as well. We must not follow other gods, but we must walk in the ways of the sovereign God of heaven and earth. Sing Psalter 91.

**October 25 Read Jeremiah 23**

Jeremiah continues to chastise those who have led God’s flock in a wrong way. But there are several gems of truth found in this chapter. First, there is the promise of the Messiah found in verses 5 and 6. This branch will be the righteous fulfillment of all the types and shadows that have gone before him. These unrighteous leaders have failed in their calling to prefigure Christ. Second, we find in this chapter the beautiful words about God’s word. This is found in verse 29. May we bow before that word which leads us in the right way. Sing Psalter 198.

**October 26 Read Jeremiah 24**

After the first group of captives was taken into Babylon, God gave Jeremiah a vision. The purpose of this vision was twofold. First, the bad figs pictured those who still rebelled against God and would be taken into captivity, and some would be tortured and killed. The second purpose was shown in the good figs. Those who obeyed God and willingly went into captivity would someday be released and would return to the land of promise. Just as God’s grace was given to them, so his grace has been given to us in the form of his son Christ Jesus. May we bow to the sovereign God and obey him in all things. Sing Psalter 92.

**October 27 Read Jeremiah 25**

In this chapter we see that Nebuchadnezzar was the servant of God. God used him not only to chastise his people, but also to punish other nations that lived around Judah. Nebuchadnezzar was fighting with Egypt when this prophecy was first delivered. Some of Judah’s rulers had tried to ally themselves with Egypt. God, using these prophecies, would show his people that there would be no help found from any corner.

Our help is not found in the strength of any man, but our help is found in Jehovah who made the heavens and the earth. Sing Psalter 352.

**October 28 Read Jeremiah 26**

Jeremiah goes to the temple and preaches a sermon that continues the foretelling of the destruction of Jerusalem. This he did in a very forceful manner. He is taken by the priests, and they advise the leaders to put Jeremiah to death. This does not dissuade Jeremiah from continuing to preach, even in the face of such opposition. Do we stand firm on the word of God even when faced with persecution? Are we ready to face death for speaking in the name of Jehovah? May God grant to us grace to stand for him as the end of this present world draws nigh. Sing Psalter 63.

**October 29 Read Jeremiah 27**

In picture language Jeremiah counsels not only Zedekiah, king of Judah, but also five other nations to bow before Babylon as it is being used by God for his purpose. The bands and yokes that Jeremiah put around his neck and sent to these kings signify what would happen to them. Just as if an ox does not fight the yoke, he will be spared pain, so the people, if they do not fight Babylon, will endure the captivity in an easier manner. Judah, like us, must bear God’s chastisement. Sing Psalter 386.

**October 30 Read Jeremiah 28**

God’s prophets throughout all ages have had to bear with false prophets. We find this quite often in the Old Testament. Christ faced those who said that he was not the Son of God, and the apostles faced those who told lies about them and their doctrine that was from God. Even today there are those who bring a false doctrine. We must not believe them no matter how convincing their prophecy may be. While we may not see the effects of the true prophecy as immediately as the people in Jeremiah’s day did, we may know that God’s truths as spoken by a true prophet of Jehovah will come to pass. Sing Psalter 21.

**October 31 Read Jeremiah 29**

People of God, do you pray for the government, however oppressive it may be, that God has placed over you? The captives who had already been placed in Babylon were instructed to do just that. In their normal daily lives, they were to stop and pray for the peace of that wicked government. That should be instructive for us. Our government is making laws that eventually may be used to put us into captivity. Our instructions: pray for the peace of that government, for in that peace we will find peace. Sing Psalter 223.
November 1 Read Jeremiah 30
In the middle of sermons dealing with the coming destruction and captivity, we find this beautiful gem of a sermon of peace. If we ask ourselves why God sends Jeremiah with this word, we find that the answer is easy. God had a remnant among the wicked in Judah. That remnant would also be taken into captivity, but by God’s grace they would be freed, would return home, and would continue to wait for the Messiah. Because Jeremiah wrote it, this sermon is for us. In the midst of this wicked world, we have the hope of the coming again of the Messiah. Our God is gracious; blessed be the name of the Lord. Sing Psalter 318.

November 2 Read Jeremiah 31
How do we know that this prophecy was true? We can see that in verse 15. We have the prophecy of the deaths of the children around Bethlehem when Christ was born. Because we know the word is true, we can expect the return of Christ and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth. Our home is not here; when the days of our sojourn are over, we will be taken to our eternal home, and after the final judgement we will live with all the saints in the glorious new heavens and earth. Sing Psalter 55.

November 3 Read Jeremiah 32
While imprisoned for prophesying Jerusalem’s destruction at the hand of Babylon, which was even now besieging the city, Jeremiah does two things by faith. First, he obeys God’s instructions to buy a piece of land as a token of Judah’s return from captivity. He had to make known this transaction to the people so they would have evidence of what would happen in seventy years. Second, he prays the beautiful prayer found in verses 16–25. Make that prayer yours as you live on this earth. Sing Psalter 19.

November 4 Read Jeremiah 33
Once again while Jeremiah was in prison, God came to him with another beautiful prophecy. Very much like the preceding chapter, the prophecy is that of the return of Judah to Jerusalem and the land round about it. Judah would build up their society as before, having been chastened by their stay in Babylon. Also like the preceding chapter, the announcement of “the Branch” is once more made. That Branch is Christ, who will claim the throne of his father David. God is gracious to his people of all ages. Let us celebrate that grace with the singing of the psalms that he has given to us. Sing Psalter 378.

November 5 Read Jeremiah 34
In this chapter Jeremiah once again proclaims the sureness of the destruction of Jerusalem and the capture of the king and his court by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. Further, the reason for this captivity is told. The leaders of Judah had broken the solemn covenant that they made with Jehovah. Only one sin is enumerated in this chapter, that of taking back into slavery those who had been freed, but that sin is symbolic of all the ways that Judah had broken God’s commandments. We too must not be covenant breakers, but we must live in obedience to all the ordinances of God’s most holy law. Sing Psalter 379.

November 6 Read Jeremiah 35
There was a family brought into the sphere of the covenant by Jehovah, who kept the law of God very faithfully. These Rechabites were the in-laws of Moses. In this chapter they are praised for keeping the word of one of their earthly ancestors. God holds them up in contrast to wicked Judah, who would not keep the word of their spiritual father. Judah is condemned for their sins while the Rechabites are given a beautiful promise. That promise is a picture of the glorious promise that awaits God’s people who walk in obedience to Jehovah’s commandments. Sing Psalter 20.

November 7 Read Jeremiah 36
In this chapter we find the well-known account of the writing of Jehovah’s words upon a scroll, the reading of those words before the king, and the disdain the king showed to those words by burning them piece by piece in the fire. Most of those who witnessed this event were also disdainful of the word of God. How do we treat the word of God? Do we love it? Do we keep it? Or do we burn it in the fires of our disdain of that beautiful word? Sing Psalter 42.

November 8 Read Jeremiah 37
This chapter is a summary of most of the reign of the last king of Judah, Zedekiah. Jeremiah has one word for Zedekiah during that entire reign. That word is: repent. In the way of that repentance the people are to give themselves up to Babylon, as this is the way of the Lord for them. Jeremiah is put in prison for a supposed deserting of Jerusalem. God cares for his servant in this affliction by having him removed from the innermost prison and fed. We must hear the word of the Lord, and if that word causes affliction, we must trust that our God will care for us. Sing Psalter 18.
Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer.” (Isaiah 54:4–8).

I’m a divorced woman. The dark road of divorce was part of God’s plan for my life. I believe in the doctrine of predestination, and boldly apply that doctrine to my own life, trusting that my loving Savior’s plan for my life is good, including the uglier parts. What I have suffered isn’t greater or so different from the trials that other Christians suffer, but it does seem to be an issue that makes Christians uncomfortable—perhaps because divorce involves betrayal and sin, often including the sin of adultery. Nevertheless, I’m writing this because God’s word has something beautiful to say about my experience as a divorced person.

Jesus Christ wed himself to his bride, the church. Christians look on earthly marriage as a reflection of this much greater reality, and they gain a better understanding of the Savior’s love for the church. Married Christians pattern their marriages after Christ, and God’s love for the church informs married folks how to live well in marriage.

In Isaiah 54 the prophet foretold of a different relationship for his people. Isaiah told the forsaken Israelites to be hopeful in the face of hopelessness. Isaiah prophesied that Israel would be forsaken in Babylon, but she need not despair because God would deliver Israel from bondage and gather her again to himself.

I contend that Isaiah 54 addresses the experience of the divorced Christian, and the passage also instructs the divorced on how to live well despite the rejection of the spouse.

The state of divorce cannot be comfortable. Fear, shame, confusion, and grief are the experience of divorce, as described in Isaiah 54:4. The passage describes perfectly what every divorced person encounters. The message here is a promise for the future even though the present is difficult. The divorced child of God must accept the difficult realities of divorce and all the complications and grief that come along for the ride. Verse 6 says, “For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit.” The present grief is all too real, but even in this state of rejection, God has a promise for the future and his love is steadfast.

Those powerful emotions of shame, fear, and grief (Isaiah 54:4) can sometimes leave the divorced person feeling isolated from the Christian community at a time when fellowship is most important. God’s everlasting kindness (Isaiah 54:8) is reflected in his people as they open their homes to the divorced Christian. The lives of the divorced are enriched through friendships with God’s people, and divorced folks have much to contribute to the body of Christ as well. Through fellowship the divorced Christian begins to realize the promises of Isaiah 54 here and now. I’m blessed with a loving family and dear friends, and am thankful for all that God has done through their kindness, godly counsel, and simple acts of friendship.

Verse 7 says, “For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.” The passage uses the words “mercy” and “kindness” to describe God’s tender love for the divorced spouse. The divorced Christian lives in hope for the future and experiences the everlasting love of the Savior, even in her present state of divorce. God is speaking words of hope to the divorced child of God.

The object of that hope is found in verse 5. “For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his
name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel.” My hope is found in the great gift of God himself. God is the faithful, forgiving husband, and there is fellowship with him and solace in him in this moment in time as well as in eternity.

I’m grateful that the Lord is clear in Scripture. His command is that the divorced child of God live a chaste, celibate life. This command is not optional, nor is it up to each individual to interpret for himself. In 1 Corinthians 7:10–11 the apostle Paul wrote, “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.” Divorce puts the forsaken spouse in a precarious and vulnerable position, but obedience protects the divorced Christian from the entanglements that sin creates. This command is not intended to punish, but rather unburden the divorced Christian. God’s commands are always for our benefit. Obedience is liberty.

But the life of the divorced Christian is about much more than celibacy. Isaiah 54 compels me to go beyond that negative (though important) restriction, and to live gratefully and joyfully for Christ today. It further compels me to have bright hope in God’s promise in verse 8, which says, “In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.” This is the hope that I have set my heart on. The road is certainly narrower for a divorced Christian who endeavors to do God’s will, but a life of gratitude, peace, and purposefulness is a possibility by God’s grace.

I believe that Isaiah 54 has a broader message and a greater reality for God’s church today as well. This passage tells Christians that there may be a time when the church on earth resembles a forsaken spouse rather than a bride, but that should not shake our faith. Psalm 137:1–4 says,

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?

In Psalm 137 we read about fulfillment of Isaiah’s sad prophesy in chapter 54. This is sometimes the experience of the church today as well, as the church wrestles with worldly culture, or battles against apostasy, or is shaken by discord from within. The message for the church is the same as for the divorced Christian: “For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.” God will gather his forsaken spouse, his bride, the church, to Himself. Until the end of time we live in that hope.

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

Comments on Forsaken

With Jane’s approval, I add to her moving article on marriage, divorce, and remarriage what she herself could not comfortably write.

When she was cruelly and wickedly abandoned and then divorced by her husband, she was assailed by especially two powerful temptations. One was despair. Using her distress, and for a woman, especially a young woman who naturally, strongly desires a husband, children, and a family of her own, the distress was severe. Satan tempted her to despair not only of the possibility of purpose and joy in earthly life, but also of God and his goodness.

The other powerful temptation was bitterness. Yielded to, the bitterness would not have terminated on her painful circumstances or even on a faithless husband. But ultimately, it would have been resentment against God and his dealings with her. Bitterness would have consumed her spiritual life and shriveled up her earthly life.

By the almighty, amazing, never failing grace of God in Jesus Christ, Jane resisted both temptations.
that the divorced woman, particularly the “innocent party” in the divorce, remain “unmarried” (1 Cor. 7:10–11), Jane is a visible, ringing testimony to the unbreakable marriage covenant between God and his bride, the church.

She is also a witness to the power of the grace of God that enables us to do hard, even naturally impossible things, and to do them willingly and gladly. As she has written in her article, grace gives her not only obedience (to a very difficult command), but also the experience that “obedience is liberty.”

Prof. Engelsma is professor emeritus of Theology and Old Testament in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

A man had two sons. His younger son, the problem child of the family, asked his father for his inheritance money and ran away from home. He squandered his money on a frivolous lifestyle, and when he was penniless and hungry, he returned home. The father greeted him with open arms and even threw a party for him. The son had sinned greatly, but his father forgave him. This is the parable of the prodigal son. The story does not exactly portray the focus of my paper, but it illustrates the wrong example. Today’s youth believes that when they are young, they can do whatever they want. We, the younger generation of the Protestant Reformed Churches, must not become complacent in our youth, only to remind ourselves that later in life we will become “religious.”

Living in the 21st century as a Reformed young person is no easy task. Jesus clearly states this in Matthew 10: 22: “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.” Being a Christian means standing up for what is right, and that is especially hard when we are young. Many, including myself, hold this mentality: “I am young and in the prime of my life. I can get away with whatever I want. I’m in high school still! After all, I have the next 50 years of my life to grow up and become responsible. Right now I just want to live my life to the fullest.”

This brings me to a recent acronym which many of the youth use today: YOLO. I am sure that many of the youth reading this have heard this saying and maybe even used it before, but for those of you who have never heard it before, “Yolo” is an acronym for “You Only Live Once.” Millions of t-shirts and today’s pop culture songs use this term regularly, and the connotations behind the acronym itself usually do not demonstrate any good intentions. For example, a youth (under the legal drinking age) arrives at a gathering not expecting anything bad to happen, but a friend brings alcohol. This youth is then pressured into drinking because of this terrible saying “YOLO.” This idea has major consequences. Bad habits form quickly, and they are hard to break. This is not only with such things as alcohol or drugs. Another example could include skipping church or catechism. If the parents leave for vacation, and Sunday morning rolls around and the alarm goes off to go to church, one might think to himself, “I’ll skip church just this one time; it is not a big deal.” The mindset of this young believer again falls to the idea of “When I get older I will attend every church service, but just not right now. I am still young.” Soon, one ends up
only attending one service on the Sabbath, and it ends terribly in the young believer’s leaving church altogether.

As Protestant Reformed youth, we must be strong in our doctrines and beliefs. Thinking long term here, we are the future leaders of the church. If the youth grows up with this “YOLO” mentality, the church is definitely headed down the path to destruction. The devil seeks every day to nag and pester the younger generation because we are some of the easiest targets. It is incredibly simple to fall into the trap of “living life to the fullest while I’m young.” There are severe consequences to our actions. Not only will we be judged by God, but we will grow to be lukewarm Christians who have spent our whole youth partying instead of studying the Scriptures. The church blesses us with such things as Sunday School, catechism, and Young People’s Society for a reason, and we must appreciate these blessings.

Being a Christian is no easy task, as I said before. We are called by Christ to take up our cross and bear his name. It might be easy to skip catechism and go to McDonald’s with friends on a Monday night. The terrible thing is that we all have done certain things like this, and the only thing we are worried about is getting caught. We do not realize that God is always watching. He knows even our thoughts, and this might be dispiriting.

But do not be discouraged. God is on our side. As the Reformed youth, the devil would like nothing else than to see us stumble and fall. The devil will use endless resources and temptations in order to sweep us away from the true church. Do not be dismayed, though: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1)

We, the youth, are the future of the church. Someday we will grow up and have kids, and we must be firmly grounded in faith. If we spend our childhood in a sense living life to the fullest, our prodigy will then fall into the same trap. We will be faced with many battles and hardships in the future, and we must be prepared. This time of our youth is an important time to lay down the foundation for our Reformed belief.

Jordan is a member of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan. This paper was written for a senior English class at Covenant Christian High School.

BAPTISMS

“But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children.”
Psalm 103:17

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:
Abigail Leigh, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Todd & MariSue Overbeek—Byron Center, MI
Ashlynn Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Scott & Rose Ferguson—Edmonton, CAN
Gideon Isaac, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan & Elsie Miersma—Edmonton, CAN
Kyle Edward, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Stephanie Tolsma—Edmonton, CAN
Tabitha Jeanette, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nate & Rebecca Bol—Georgetown, MI
Hope Johanna, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bill & Joanna Leep—Grace, MI
Alice Ranae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Caleb & Sandra Meulenberg—Grace, MI
Tyce Ryan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brian & Tabi Feenstra—Hope, MI
Jackson Luke, son of Mr. & Mrs. Steven Tolsma—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Brayden Lucas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brian & Trisha Kotman—Loveland, CO
John Wittaker, son of Mr. & Mrs. Alex & Cyndi Kalsbeek—Peace, IL
Seth Jacob, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mike & Gina Cleveland—Redlands, CA
Audrey Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tony & Laura VanDonselaar—Southwest, MI
Chloe Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Lori VanOverloop—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.”
I Timothy 6:13

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:
Abigail Ophoff—Crete, IL
Katie Huizenga—Crete, IL
Grant Lenting—Crete, IL
Annica Bosveld—Hope, MI
Allyson Vink—Hope, MI
Karina Heynen—Hull, IA
Jessica Koirma—Hull, IA
Louise VanMaanen—Hull, IA

MARRIAGES

“Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it…. “
Psalm 127:1

United in the bond of holy matrimony were:
Mr. Al Steigenga and Miss Ashley Smeda—Faith, MI
Mr. Darren Solanyk and Miss Koryn Regnerus—Doon, IA
Mr. Taylor Dykstra and Miss Erin Rau—Hope, MI

October 2013
My Only Comfort

What is my only comfort?
That I am not my own.
My faithful Savior owns me,
Whose blood for me atoned.
The devil’s strength is broken.
My Savior’s on the throne.

What is my only comfort?
That I am not my own.
My Keeper so preserves me,
Each hair of mine is known.
No trials thwart salvation;
His plan they serve alone.

What is my only comfort?
That I am not my own.
His Spirit now assures me
Eternal life he’s sown
Inside me so I love him
For such great love he’s shown!

Connie is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

“LITTLE LIGHTS”
... let it shine!

Find all the words of Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1 in the puzzle below. Some two-letter words may have more than one possibility. Q&A 1:

What is thy only comfort in life and death?
That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.
What is thy only comfort in life and in death?

The answer to this question has strengthened the resolve of Christians throughout the world for 450 years. Yet today, the answer to this question reminds Reformed Christians of the comfort they have in Christ. The theme of comfort is woven throughout the entire Catechism.

This year marks the 450th anniversary of the first publication of the Heidelberg Catechism, the unique, beautiful, and precious confession that arose out of the Protestant Reformation in Germany during the 16th century. This is a significant anniversary for all Christians, but especially for those of Reformed Christian heritage.

Elector Frederick III commissioned Zacharias Ursinus, professor at Heidelberg University, and Caspar Olevianus, the court preacher, to prepare a manual for catechetical instruction. Out of this initiative came the Catechism, which was approved by the Elector himself and by the Synod of Heidelberg and first published in 1563. With its comfort motif and its warm, personal style, the Catechism soon won the love of the people of God.

To celebrate this rich heritage the Protestant Reformed Seminary is hosting a special conference to commemorate the Heidelberg Catechism.