Variations of this cover were used from 1996 until 2012.
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PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE FEDERATION OF PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUNG PEOPLE’S SOCIETIES
The Coming of the Antichrist

The antichrist is coming.

You as young people know this. It is a biblical fact, which you believe by the power of faith. His coming is foreshadowed already in the Old Testament, especially in the history of the tower of Babel. In the New Testament his coming is prophesied by Jesus himself, as well as by the apostles.

The subject of the antichrist is large—too large to cover in this editorial, and I will not attempt to do this. Instead, I want to concentrate on one aspect of this truth: the manner of his coming. How or in what way does he come?

Antichrist does not arise in a vacuum. He will not arise suddenly on the stage of history, arising unexpectedly out of nowhere. He will not present himself abstractly as the leader and savior of mankind. He will indeed present himself as such, but only in the context of historical events that bring about his coming. He will arise organically, that is, in and through the development of man.

One of the most necessary factors that bring about the rise and rule of antichrist is the development of sin. A few words of explanation concerning this idea are appropriate.

There has always been sin in the world since the original sin of our first parents. Man is always totally depraved both as to his nature and as to his activities. But sin is never static. We must not stop by saying that man apart from Christ is a wicked sinner. Rather, man develops in sin. He uses his situation in life and the means given to him to increase his ability to sin. The more intelligent he is, and the more able he is, the more quickly and the more extensively he advances in his sin. Man today, with the means he has been given, has all kinds of ways to sin that he never had previously. You can easily think of your own examples of this.

I want to put this matter of the development of sin into a twofold perspective. One has to do with the development of the means available to sin, and the other is the current wave of bombings and mass shootings throughout the world.

Anyone who is not a hermit knows that during the last decade, and today with increasing frequency and violence, followed by predictable increasing deaths, there have been multiple bombings and mass shootings.

Now, young people, when I was your age (admittedly quite a while ago), such acts of violence were extremely rare. Very infrequently there were multiple murders, but not mass murders, and certainly nothing like what we are seeing today. Ask your parents and grandparents to confirm this.

Today most of the Western world lives in fear of bombings and mass shootings. Men wring their hands trying to figure out what causes these, and especially how to prevent them in the future, with very little success. Ever since the rise of the Muslims against the West, there has been a correlative incidence of terrorist violence, most of it directed against innocent civilians, who are the logical targets because they do not have the means to defend themselves.

Here a word must be said about the means to sin that are available to those who want to misuse weapons. Most of the shooters are armed with AK-47s or AR-15s, plus semiautomatic pistols. Large magazines that hold many shells are easily available for purchase. Having shot a number of such weapons, I can assure you that their destructive and swift power are awesome.

For most of man’s history such weapons did not exist, but today they do. Gone are the days of muskets and muzzleloaders. Many of the weapons used as recently as the Viet Nam war are long obsolete. Today man can and does kill his fellow man swiftly and easily.

This speaks to the coming of the antichrist. The current situation cannot continue indefinitely, since man always moves forward in sin, and the present lawlessness will only become worse. Eventually, if left unchecked, this will result in the disintegration of society, which even the natural man understands will end in complete chaos, a situation that cannot
be tolerated.
This paves the way for antichrist. He will appear on the scene of history as the savior of mankind. He will present himself as the one who is able to halt the lawlessness of bombings and mass shootings. He will have the solution to the hatred between those who oppose one another based on racial, ethnic, and religious differences. He will present himself as the only one who is able to save mankind. In so doing, he will assert that he is the Christ, although in reality he is the false Christ who will lead men not to the true salvation of heaven, but to eternal destruction.

Another factor that brings about the rise of antichrist is what can be called a leadership vacuum. The headline of a recent Washington Post article reads, “Campaign ’16: Is it God’s Judgment?” The question is asked in light of the fact that the two major candidates are the least-liked contenders in American history.

My answer to the question is unequivocally affirmative. In some form the candidates, particularly as to their characters, are God’s judgment on America, as many or most evangelicals believe. Hilary Clinton is a congenital and inveterate liar, as recent events have demonstrated. Donald Trump is a loose cannon. Most of the times that he opens his mouth, he has an uncanny ability to insert his foot.

All of this goes to the matter of trust. Should we be expected to trust a demonstrated liar? Can we trust a scattershot, impulsive person who puts his mouth in gear before his brain is engaged? Do we want either candidate to become the leader of the free world?

Besides the fact that God is imposing his righteous judgment on our society by giving us a choice between two incompetent candidates, there is another aspect that should not escape our attention. It seems evident that in his divine and all-wise providence, by giving us these candidates, he is working in the events of mankind to create a leadership vacuum. Neither one will be a strong and wise president who will provide definitive leadership.

This again paves the way for the rise of antichrist, who will take advantage of the leadership vacuum to present himself as the strong leader that the world needs. When this will happen and how it will happen we cannot know. But the signs are unmistakable. Unfortunately, we have a choice to make between the lesser of two evils. But whoever prevails, the cause of antichrist is advanced.

Young people (and all who read), be aware of what is happening. Discern the signs of the times, especially the manner in which antichrist is even now arising. The end of all things is upon us!

**Editor’s Notes**

Recently there have been a couple of changes in the Beacon Lights staff. Alex Thompson has resigned from the staff to pursue other interests. Beacon Lights thanks him for his contribution to the magazine. Replacing him as archivist is Joel Rau. Joel is a fifth year accounting student at Calvin College, who will bring his organizational and computer skills to this position. He is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church. The staff has also selected Macy Schimmel to be our new promotions manager. She will be responsible for various advertising efforts and promotions aimed at growing our subscription list. Macy is a sophomore at Calvin College, majoring in English and secondary education. She is a member of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church. Beacon Lights is pleased to welcome these two new staff members, who have demonstrated enthusiasm for the cause of the Reformed faith and the continued success and improvement of the magazine.

Also, the rubric From the Pastor’s Study has not appeared in Beacon Lights for some time. The staff has decided to resurrect this rubric four times per year. Two of the articles will be written by Rev. Jonathan Mahtani (from Cornerstone PRC) and the other two by Rev. Brian Huizenga (from Hope Redlands PRC). Beacon Lights welcomes these two new contributors to the magazine. Look for their articles in the near future.

The magazine this month is the yearly convention issue containing the three convention speeches and pictures of the activities throughout the week. Thanks to Kara Kregel for putting together the picture pages once again this year.

Finally, Beacon Lights is 75 years old, but we are not the only one. This month the Reformed Witness Hour also celebrates its 75th year of continuous
broadcasting. Because this endeavor was initially a project of the young people of the church, it was promoted in Beacon Lights. We are pleased to present in this issue an article about the RWH by Rev. C. Hanko, editor of the magazine at that time. Enjoy!

The Protestant Reformed Hour

This article first appeared in Volume 2 Number 3 December 1941.

Sunday afternoon A.D. 1941, November, the ninth. The clock in the radio studio WLAV stood at precisely 4:15. At the wave of the baton the choir of six male and six women voices struck up the opening theme song, “Established in the highest heavens, the Lord has set his throne, and over all his kingdom rules, for he is God alone.” Fifteen minutes of the forty-five minute broadcast are devoted to hymns from the Psalter: words and tunes which carry a familiar ring in the hearts of many.

It’s New

For those who participate in the broadcast it was the fifth program of its kind. For me it was a novel experience to both witness and hear our own Protestant Reformed people on the air.

On this particular Sunday the Rev. H. Hoeksema spoke on the subject, “The Living God.” In a thoroughly lucid, interesting, and thought-provoking way the listeners were impressed with the fact that our Tri-une God lives his own divine covenant life of perfect friendship and takes his people unto himself to share that covenantal life with him in perfect blessedness unto the praise of his glory. The living truth of the Word of God stirred an echo of faith in the believing heart. “This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent.”

It speaks well for our youth that their first efforts toward broadcasting have produced a program of this caliber.

Anyone who hears these broadcasts will immediately agree that they are decidedly different from any other broadcast, even of their kind.

It’s Distinct

Superficiality, which so commonly marks the religious broadcasts of our superficial age, is conspicuous in its absence. Mere emotionalism, so often mistaken for real inspiration, does not taint these programs in any way. Just because Scripture is never superficial, and because Scripture is allowed to speak freely, the rich and full revelation of God predominates.

That is its peculiar distinctiveness. These radio addresses are not interpretations of a few isolated portions of Scripture, but are expositions of certain fundamental truths as they are revealed to us throughout all of the scriptures. The Word of God speaks from beginning to end, and the living truth of that word as it lives in the hearts of the believers takes on a fuller and richer significance at each broadcast.

For that reason, it appeals to the Reformed believer who treasures the instruction he has received both in the catechism rooms and from the pulpit, who delights in the study of the Word of God and finds it his chief mediation. It serves to enrich the knowledge he has already acquired and fills him with a desire to ever grow in that knowledge.

Without fear of contradiction it can be said that this is the only program of its kind, and therefore fills a crying need. No doubt, it will find an attentive and ever growing audience, not only in our own circles, but also among all those who love and cherish the faith of our fathers.

A First Fruit

We have here a concrete example of what can be done. Do you know that these broadcasts are made possible largely through the small contributions of from ten to twenty-five cents per week? How many young people, and older ones as well, spend far more than this small amount every week for trifling luxuries which give but passing pleasure. A more extensive effort in and around Grand Rapids can
make these broadcasts still more effective by reaching a larger audience. In other localities as well, a small weekly contribution from those who are eager to take advantage of these broadcasts will do much toward making this possible.

Our young people have begun this project. Let’s see it through. Let’s not let anyone avail himself of the opportunity of taking it from you through your laxity.

Each local society should put forth an effort at once to bring these programs into their community. In time this could even become a project for the PRYPF. Possibly the 1942 convention can already take preliminary steps toward making this a broadcast that can be heard through all of our churches.

Which is only another reason why all of our churches should be represented in that ever growing, ever more active and influential Federation of Protestant Reformed youth.

A weekly broadcast throughout all of our churches may seem but a dream yet, but let’s strive to make it a reality. And that as soon as possible.

May God’s blessings rest upon the efforts that are being put forth, and may the blessing be evidenced in the fruits of these and future broadcasts.

Listen to…

The Protestant Reformed Hour
Each Sunday Afternoon – 4:35 p.m.
Station WLAV – 1340 on your dial

Ask Schuyler

Union Membership

“What do I say to someone who asks me why I don’t agree with union membership? I understand that unions are like a rebellion against the employer, and that union members are being greedy, but how do I say this nicely? Also, is there another reason why we don’t agree with unions?”

This question, like many ethical and moral questions, is not directly addressed in the Bible. There were no labor unions in Old Testament or early New Testament days. Therefore, we need to apply biblical principles to the question. That is the very essence of wisdom, the application of the truth of God’s word to specific questions, even to those not directly addressed in the pages of scripture. This has become a regular feature of the Schuyler column, which gives me opportunity to teach and gives the reader opportunity to learn.

A labor union is an association of workers. These workers give part of their salary, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to the union so that the union can represent them before the employer. This money is called “union dues.” With the dues the union not only represents the members of the union (the workers), to gain for the workers better pay and conditions, but the union also contributes to various political candidates and social causes (this is especially the case with public sector unions, which make political donations with the hope that elected politicians will pass laws favorable to their cause).

While unions might appear harmless, in that supposedly they prevent exploitation by the employer, they are actually a form of extortion by the employees against the employer. Imagine that John Smith works for Peter Jones as a factory employee, but Smith is not satisfied with the conditions under which he works. Smith could petition Jones for better conditions (indeed, he could seek a job elsewhere). Instead, Smith organizes a union, so that all of the employees together force Jones to provide better conditions. They force him by organizing a strike, so that they all refuse to work unless the employer gives in to their demands.

When union members strike (and if you are member of a union, and the majority votes to strike, you must strike with them), they rebel against the employer, which is a sin against the fifth commandment, and they steal from the employer, which is a sin against the eighth commandment. They steal by refusing to work, by extorting more money from the employer than they have earned, and by potentially damaging the employer’s business (while the
employees are striking, the company suffers financial loss). In the past, unions have, by their wicked rebellion, brought whole cities, states or countries to a standstill. Such strikes have forced company bosses and (in the case of public sector unions) even governments to the negotiating table. Unions have also been guilty of violence, which is a sin against the sixth commandment. Read the history of unions: it is a history of violence, rioting, social unrest, and even murder.

Even if a union does not strike, the threat of strike action or some other kind of disruption remains and is used as a tool against the employer. We call that extortion, albeit legal extortion.

If a Christian joins a labor union, he sins. He sins because he brings himself into alliance with the ungodly in their rebellion against the employer and therefore against God. If a Christian pays dues to a union, so that the union can threaten or intimidate the employer, he is responsible before God for what the labor union does. We call that the principle of “corporate responsibility.” We are responsible not only for what we do, but for what the organizations or bodies do (family, church, nation, union, etc.) to which we belong. A Christian does not want to make himself responsible for the sins against the fifth, sixth, and eighth commandments committed by the union to which he voluntarily joins himself!

How, then, does the employee gain better pay and conditions for himself? First, he works diligently. A wise employer will notice and reward diligence, especially where many employees are lazy, disinterested, and unmotivated in their work (In our modern world, a diligent, faithful, conscientious Christian worker should be noticed!). Second, he asks the employer for better pay and conditions. He asks submissively, and he asks without threats or intimidation. Third, if the employer cannot or will not give better pay and conditions, he submits and continues to work cheerfully and without grumbling, or he seeks lawful employment elsewhere. Fourth, the working Christian trusts in his heavenly Father to provide his daily bread in the way of faithful and diligent labor. He works without fretting that God will not provide for his needs. Fifth, he leaves the judgment of his cruel, greedy, exploitative employer to God (1 Peter 2:18–21; James 5:7–10).

The Christian is called to deny himself, to take up his cross, and to follow Jesus. One sphere in which he does this is in the workplace. He denies himself by refusing to work on Sunday, even if he is offered good overtime pay, so that he can keep the fourth commandment. He denies himself by refusing to join a labor union, even if that means that the other people in his job oppose and ridicule him, so that he can keep the fifth and eighth commandments. He denies himself by refusing to accept the mark of the beast, in whatever form that might take, even though it means that he cannot buy or sell (or gain employment or eat), so that he can keep the first commandment. The Christian glorifies God in his work, his family, his recreation, and in all things, not only in religious or spiritual matters. “Jesus is Lord” applies to the whole of life.

In Thyatira there were “trade guilds” to which a person had to belong in order to gain promotion in the world. The problem was that each guild had its own god, and to be a member you had to participate in worship to the guild’s god. Not to belong to a guild meant financial hardship and even social exclusion. To belong to a guild meant participation in idolatry. The wise reader can apply that to labor union membership (Rev. 2:18–29).

—Schuyler

Poem

James Jonker

Autumn Anthem

The glowing trees are tinged with flame:
The fiery forests with colors blaze.
And written there I see his name
And hear the silent call to praise.
The Daily Press
“press toward the mark…” (Philippians 3:14)

October 9

The Immovable Man
Read Romans 7

In Romans 7 the inspired apostle Paul describes the great battle that rages within every believer: the war between the law of God and the law of sin. As a result of this struggle, even the godly man sometimes wavers like a wave of the sea (James 1:6). But Psalm 125:1 describes the righteous man not as a wave, but as a mountain: “They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever.”

As far as mountains go, Zion isn’t that impressive. In height and size it’s more like the foothills near which I live than the mighty Rockies that lie beyond. What made Zion indomitable was Jehovah’s presence. The same is true of you and me: when we trust in the Lord, then are we steadfast, immovable. But when we halt between serving Jehovah and serving self or another idol, we are in danger of being tossed to and fro (Eph. 4:14). So “let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)” (Heb. 10:23). And “trust ye in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength” (Isa. 26:4).

Sing or pray Psalter #354.

October 11

The Man Who Lives Forever
Read Psalm 125

Psalm 125 says this about the one who trusts in Jehovah: not only is he immovable, but he will abide forever.

You and I are creatures subject to time. The fact that we find ourselves so startled by the passage of time is evidence that we were created to glorify and enjoy God forever. C. S. Lewis commented on this reality: “We are so little reconciled to time that we are even astonished at it. ‘How he’s grown!’ we exclaim, ‘How time flies!’ as though the universal form of our experience were again and again a novelty. It is as strange as if a fish were repeatedly surprised at the wetness of water. And that would be strange indeed; unless of course the fish were destined to become, one day, a land animal.”

And unless we were destined to become, one day, those who abide forever.

Sing or pray Psalter #281.

October 12

No Mere Mortals
Read Matthew 7

The man who trusts in the Lord will abide forever, as Psalm 125 affirms, but those who do not trust in him will also exist for eternity.

“You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously—no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption” (C. S. Lewis).

What a weight that knowledge must bring to our interactions with others. What urgency it must bring to our sharing the gospel!

Sing or pray Psalter #25.

October 13

A Double Security
Read Psalm 46

Psalm 125:1–2 teaches that not only is the man who trusts in the Lord himself like a mountain: he is surrounded by moun-
tains. Matthew Henry commented beautifully on this text: “The mountains around the holy city, though they do not make a circular wall, are, nevertheless, set like sentinels to guard her gates. God doth not enclose his people within ramparts and bulwarks, making their city to be a prison; but yet he so orders the arrangements of his providence that his saints are as safe as if they dwelt behind the strongest fortifications. What a double security! First, we are established, and then entrenched: settled, and then sentinelled: made like a mount, and then protected as if by mountains.”

Is that double security yours?

Sing or pray Psalter #355.

The Rod on the Righteous
Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–15

The psalms that we’re considering this month are psalms of degrees or ascent, songs that the Old Testament saints sang as they traveled to God’s house in Jerusalem. Perhaps they sang these words from Psalm 125 with light hearts as they ascended Mount Zion or climbed the steps of the temple: “The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands to iniquity.”

How could they sing those words with a light heart? After all, the text does not promise that the rod of the wicked will never light upon the just. Here is the comfort: though they may mourn under the rule of wicked men, God’s people can rest assured that the tyrannical rule of their enemies, whether spiritual or physical, will not prevail. Our God sets a bound to our tribulations. Father knows our frame; he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. Knowing that, “we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope” (Rom. 5:3–4).

Sing or pray Psalter #356.

Let Us Do Good
Read Galatians 6:1–10

Psalm 125 concludes with this prayer: “Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts. As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.” The psalmist understands that God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap (Gal. 6:7). For that reason the apostle Paul instructs the saints in Galatia to bear one another’s burdens and not to be weary in well doing. Note, however, that the good of the saints is not merely external. Psalm 125 emphasizes that the good are upright in their hearts.

Among your tasks and mine today and every day is the diligent keeping of our hearts. From our hearts flow the issues of life, our sowing to the flesh or our sowing to the Spirit.

Sing or pray Psalter #325.

Like Them That Dream
Read Psalm 126 and Jeremiah 31:1–13

The tone of Psalm 126 is one of joyful awe. The Lord has brought his people back to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon, and when they reflect on their great deliverance, they are so overcome with wonder that it seems to them as if they must be dreaming. Those who were unable to sing Jehovah’s song in a strange land (Ps. 137) have experienced the fulfillment of this prophecy: “Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away” (Isa. 51:11). Indeed, their deliverance was such a wonder that it was even acknowledged as such by those who lived in the surrounding nations.

Dear Christian, are you overcome with joyful awe when you muse on God’s great deliverance of you? We were slaves to sin, but the Lord has brought us out of the house of bondage and made us the servants of righteousness instead (Rom. 6:17–18). What a wonder! May he be praised!

Sing or pray Psalter #357.

Turn Those Still Captive
Read Colossians 3:1–17

Those who have returned to Jerusalem from captivity celebrate their great deliverance in Ps. 126:1-3, and then they pray, “Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south.” What are they requesting? The remnant that has returned to Zion knows that they are exactly that: a remnant. Many of their fellow Israelites have remained in Babylon, content to live their lives in bondage. The returned remnant pray for the homecoming of those still in exile. They pray confidently. After all, Jehovah is able to make streams flow in the desert regions in the southern part of Canaan; he is able also to turn the captivity.

Does the knowledge of your great salvation compel you to pray for those still in sin’s bondage? The scriptures declare, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God,” and then it points the finger at us: “And such were some of you.” God turned our captivity: he is able to turn the captivity of any sinner.

Sing or pray Psalter #403.

A Joyful, Fruitful Harvest
Read: Read Psalm 126 and John 16:1–22

The Christian life is a sojourn through a vale of tears, but the Bible likens our
patient enduring of trials to sowing and promises that our planting, though it be accompanied by much toil and trouble, will yield an abundant harvest. The pain of labor and delivery is overcome with wonder when a weary mother is handed her newborn child. Similarly, the sorrow of laying a loved one’s body in the grave will be conquered with triumph at the resurrection of the dead, and the difficulty of waiting patiently for our Lord’s return will yield to exultation when we see him face to face.

No matter what trials and troubles this day holds for you, dear brother or sister, be comforted with this truth: you have joy that no man can take away from you.

Sing or pray Psalter #358.

**Except the Lord (1)**
**Read Psalm 127**

The Holy Spirit inspired wise Solomon to pen the words of Psalm 127. The psalm begins with a solemn warning: unless Jehovah prospers our work, that work is done in vain. This is true not only in the private sphere: it’s true of the public sphere as well. The building of a man’s house or the security of a city do not ultimately depend on the diligence of the builder or the vigilance of the watchman, but on God. Yet Solomon does not denounce work or watchfulness; indeed, the very next psalm pronounces the man who eats of the labor of his hands happy. But note this about that man: he does not place his trust in his own diligence or industry, but in the Lord (Ps. 128:1–2). Psalm 127:1 cautions us, then, against self-reliance, presumption, and the attribution of our wealth or success to anyone or anything besides God himself.

We can derive additional lessons from that truth. First, since God alone gives every good and perfect gift, he alone deserves the glory for the fruit of our labor. Second, we must take up that labor with earnest prayer for Jehovah’s blessing, lest we work in vain.

Sing or pray Psalter #359.

**Except the Lord (2)**
**Read Romans 9:16–33**

Psalm 127:1 teaches us that the fruit of our earthly labors depends upon Jehovah’s gracious blessing. If it’s true with regard to our earthly labors that we work in vain when we work apart from God’s blessing—and it is true—how much more must that be true of our spiritual labors and our entrance into heaven? We do well to condemn the heresy of Arminianism, but if we’re honest with ourselves, we really do not always believe that sin mars even the very best of our works. Our pride can lead us to think that God is pleased with us on the basis of the works that we do, even though scripture clearly states that he is the one who works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). God doesn’t grade on a curve: the ground is level at the foot of the cross. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). You and I are totally depraved and would be utterly lost, except the Lord...

Sing or pray Psalter #244.

**October 21**

**Jehovah Gives Rest**
**Read Psalm 127:1–2**

The word “vain” sounds like a gong in the first two verses of Psalm 127. Apart from Jehovah’s blessing, a man labors in vain and a watchman stays alert in vain. And in vain you and I rise up early and stay up late, for Jehovah “giveth his beloved sleep.” He who never slumbers nor sleeps knows our frame, remembers that we are dust, and gives us the rest we need to refresh our bodies as well as our souls. In our age of busyness and distraction comes this command: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10a).

Not only does our God command us to take time to be still throughout the week: he commands us to rest for a full day out of every seven. On the Sabbath we’re to refrain from work and from our own pleasure. That day is to be set aside for corporate worship and dedicated to the remembrance of Jehovah’s great deliverance of us from our bondage to sin. Do you strive to keep the Sabbath day holy? To you Jehovah promises: “Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord...” (Isa. 58:14).

Sing or pray Psalter #320.

**October 22**

**While You Are Sleeping**
**Read 1 Kings 3:5–15**

My study Bible notes that the phrase translated “he giveth his beloved sleep” in Psalm 127:2 can also be translated this way: “he giveth to his beloved even in his sleep.” Calvin notes this possible translation as well, emphasizing the reality that God provides for his people “without any great care on their part.” Remember Jesus’s words in Matt. 6:25? “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.” Our heavenly Father feeds the fowls of the air and clothes the flowers of the field; are we not much better than they? God answered Solomon’s request for wisdom while he slept, and while Jacob slept at Bethel God assured him of his presence. He provides for us, too, even while we sleep.

We are commanded in Philippians 4:6 not to be anxious about anything. Therefore, even when we are not asleep, but diligently working, our “minds repose in stillness of faith,” faith in the one who never sleeps and will never leave nor forsake us (Ibid., Ps. 37:25; Josh. 1:9)

Sing or pray Psalter #100.

**October 23**

**The Bread of Sorrows**
**Read Ecclesiastes 6**

To what does Solomon refer when he writes in Psalm 127:2 that it is vain for us to “eat the bread of sorrows”? Calvin
thought that the expression could be explained two ways. First, it may denote “what is acquired by hard and anxious toil.” When Adam fell, God declared that he would now eat his bread in the sweat of his face (Gen. 3:19). In Ecclesiastes 6:7 Solomon bemoans, “All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.” Calvin’s second suggestion was that the expression referred to bread “eaten with disquietude of mind” (Calvin).

To us who do not know what it is to lack our daily bread comes this word of God: “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate…” (1 Tim. 6:17–18). When that spiritual perspective is true of a man, the bread of which he partakes will not be the bread of sorrows but the bread of joy.

Sing or pray Psalter #305.

**Exception the Lord (3)**

Read Genesis 30:1–2 and Genesis 33:1–7

Some time ago I viewed a video clip from a popular reality TV show. In the video a judge on the show was praising a contestant. She began her comments this way: “First of all, I want to thank your parents for creating you.” The absurdity of that statement should give any rational person pause, but this woman was interrupted with thunderous applause. Such is the folly of unbelievers: they attribute to man the glory due our Creator. We’ve already learned from Psalm 127 that the building of a house and the security of a city depend on Jehovah. So, too, the gift of children. Except the Lord chooses to give children to a man and woman, they will remain childless. Yet not only do the wicked delude themselves into thinking they are responsible for the creation of their own offspring; they reserve to themselves the right to murder their unborn children as well.

Dear Christian, do you consider the children that Jehovah gives to be a burden or blessing? The scriptures teach, “Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward (Ps. 127:3)”

Sing or pray Psalter #425:4–6.

**The Inheritance of the King**

Read Psalm 127 and 1 Samuel 1:1–2:10

Imagine for a moment that you are a child of the richest king in all of history. Not only is your father rich, he is indescribably generous and has determined to give his children the very best inheritance that he can give them. What do you think he would give? Do you think you would be glad to receive that inheritance? Dear Christian, we are the sons and daughters of the King to whom belongs all of earth and heaven, and it’s his good pleasure to entrust to us an inheritance of inestimable value. What does he choose to give us? Covenant children. They are his heritage.

In this life it’s not uncommon for siblings to quarrel over their parents’ estate, so dearly do they desire the money or materials left behind. But now more than ever before, unbelieving men and women choose not to bear children. So lightly do they esteem the inheritance of the King. How greatly do you value the children who are the heritage of the Lord?

Sing or pray Psalter #359.

**24**

**October**

**A Warrior’s Arrows**

**Read Proverbs 22**

We are warriors, members of the church militant, and, according to Psalm 127:4, our children are like arrows, arrows that may fly into lands and years that we will never see. The psalmist pronounces the man who is given many of those arrows blessed. Spurgeon comments, “Of course a large number of children means a large number of trials; but when these are met by faith in the Lord it also means a mass of love, and a multitude of joys.” Matthew Henry adds: “Observe here, children of the youth are arrows in the hand, which, with prudence, may be directed aight to the mark, God’s glory and the service of their generation; but afterwards, when they have gone abroad into the world, they are arrows out of the hand; it is too late to bend them then. But these arrows in the hand too often prove arrows in the heart, a constant grief to their godly parents, whose gray hairs they bring with sorrow to the grave.”

What urgency that reminder brings to our duty to train up the church’s children in the way that they should go. Let’s be diligent in that high calling.

Sing or pray Psalter #89.

**25**

**October**

**The Inheritance of the King**

Read Psalm 127 and 1 Samuel 1:1–2:10

Imagine for a moment that you are a child of the richest king in all of history. Not only is your father rich, he is indescribably generous and has determined to give his children the very best inheritance that he can give them. What do you think he would give? Do you think you would be glad to receive that inheritance? Dear Christian, we are the sons and daughters of the King to whom belongs all of earth and heaven, and it’s his good pleasure to entrust to us an inheritance of inestimable value. What does he choose to give us? Covenant children. They are his heritage.

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Sing or pray Psalter #360.
The God Who Sees in Secret
Read Proverbs 31:10–31
There is something appealing about a vine that grows by the sides of one’s house. Its beauty and fruit may be noticed and praised by many passersby. On the other hand, very few admire a vine that grows in the heart of one’s home. And it’s likely that the inhabitants of that home grow so accustomed to its presence that they also sometimes fail to notice it, much less appreciate the fruit that it bears, fruit that is essential to their daily life. This doesn’t deter the woman who fears the Lord from working willingly with her hands and looking well to the ways of her household. She knows that the repetitive, sometimes menial tasks that comprise her loving service are not meaningless. She will rejoice in time to come when the God who sees in secret rewards her openly.

Sing or pray Psalter #360.

Behold, the Happy Man
Read Psalm 128
Well-known and much-loved Psalm 128 speaks of the happiness of the man who fears the Lord. There’s something to note about this man from verse 1: his fear of Jehovah compels him to obey his commands, to “walk in his ways.” How is this man blessed? It’s not with wealth or fame; in fact, what the psalmist refers to as his blessed state may seem incredibly ordinary to us. Yet the psalmist calls our attention to the fact that he is blessed with this word, “Behold.” Behold, the happy man. This man works to sustain himself. He has a faithful wife and many children. These are blessings: they come from the Lord.

Note this, too, about the happy man: Jehovah blesses him “out of Zion,” that is, as he lives as a member of God’s people. Today, too, the happy man doesn’t desire his personal happiness only. All the days of his life he prays for and promotes the good of the church, and he is rewarded with the blessed, eternal life that is anything but ordinary.

Sing or pray Psalter #361.

The Prayer of the Afflicted
Read Psalm 129
From the dawn of history, affliction has been the lot of God’s saints. But God is always righteous, even when the wicked persecute the just. He has determined the extent to which the ungodly may go, and accordingly he cuts the cords with which they drive their plows into his field. But the cords or the yoke with which he has bound them can never be cast off (Ps. 2:3). They will be confounded and cast off in the day when the Lord of the harvest gathers in the grain. So the righteous jointly confess, “They have not prevailed against me.”

All this is true, of course, for the sake of our Savior. The Roman soldiers made furrows in his back with their cords, but, more terrible still, he endured the dreadful wrath of God against your sins and mine, for God is righteous. His justice for the sins that you and I have committed and continue to commit had to be satisfied. And it was satisfied fully by our Savior’s death on the cross. Praise God, that full satisfaction was freely applied to your account and mine. When we are afflicted, we can pray in that confidence.

Sing or pray Psalter #362.

Out of the Depths
Read Psalm 130
In Psalm 130 the psalmist cries to Jehovah “out of the depths.” From what depths does his prayer ascend? From the depths of a pit that he has dug himself. The name of that pit is Guilt and Despair. The psalmist’s sins have risen up against him day by day, and when he considers them and the wretched depravity of his nature he is tempted to lose hope. He knows that even his secret sins are exposed in the light of God’s countenance (Ps. 90:8), and he realizes that God is righteous: he will not at all acquit the wicked. But the Lord is also slow to anger, and great in power (Nah. 1:3). There is forgiveness with him, the one who is mighty to save. In that good news the psalmist places all his hope, and he calls his fellow saints to do the same.

Dear brother and sister, when you are burdened with your sins and the misery of your condition, hope in Jehovah! With him is steadfast love and plentiful redemption. The price that Jesus paid was high enough, deep enough, and wide enough to pay for every one of the sins of every one of his people.

Sing or pray Psalter #363.

Forgiveness and Fear
Read Psalm 130
In psalm 130:4 the psalmist declares, “But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” The psalmist is not terrified of Jehovah: he recognizes Jehovah as his only hope. No, the fear of which he speaks is the reverence a little child has for his strong and loving father. He does not run from Father when he is troubled: he runs to him. He knows that Father alone is able to rescue him, and he trusts that Father will rescue him because he has experienced Father’s love. This kind of fear will never be found in those who are not forgiven of their sins, not even at the end of time. Oh, they will tremble with us when our Lord is revealed in all of his power and glory, but as we tremble in awe, they will quake in terror, knowing that there is no escape for them from the wrath that is to come.

Dear Christian, there is forgiveness with God. Trust and obey him with the humble love of a little child.

Sing or pray Psalter #364.
Put on Humility
Read Psalm 131
Psalm 131 is a humble psalm that extols that very virtue: humility. The psalmist writes that his heart, his eyes, and his mind are not lifted up in pride. He compares his humble state to that of a toddler, who, now weaned, rests contentedly in his mother’s arms without frantically rooting for milk. This humility frees the psalmist from anxiety, restlessness, and despair: he is content to lean on Jehovah. This humble state enables him to trust “that all things work together for good to them that love God, to whom are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). It enables him also to exhort his fellow saints, “O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore” (ESV). “With the humble is wisdom” (Prov. 11:2b).

Brothers and sisters, every sin that we commit springs from the root of pride that remains in us. We are prone to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, but from the root of pride that remains in us. We are prone to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, but also looks beyond them to God…and renders all the glory to God…Humility is powerful, for it is based on the sense of being absolutely dependent on the grace of God. That is why a good Christian has such a serene and confident spirit, combined with the utmost humility…”

Sing or pray Psalter #366.

Blessed are the Meek
Read Matt. 5:1–16
Humility is a necessary Christian virtue. You and I must examine our lives for areas in which we lack meekness and then pray for forgiveness and growth in this fruit of the Spirit. In his book The Disciplines of the Christian Life, Olympic gold-medalist and missionary to China Eric Liddell writes the following:

“Humility has no self-conscious pride about it...is not afraid to learn new lessons...has no mock-humility about it saying, ‘I can’t do this...’ when all the time it wants to be pressed more to do so. Nor does it say, ‘I can’t do...’ because it is afraid of loss of face if it fails, or because people will laugh. Humility is not out to justify its actions...Humility looks at its sins (self-examination) but also looks beyond them to the Savior from sin and casts itself upon his mercy...Humility looks at its merits, gifts, and talents but also looks beyond them to God...and renders all the glory to God...Humility is powerful, for it is based on the sense of being absolutely dependent on the grace of God. That is why a good Christian has such a serene and confident spirit, combined with the utmost humility…”

Sing or pray Psalter #87.

Remember David
Read Psalm 132
As God’s people make their way to his house, they remember how earnestly David desired to build the temple. As they assemble to worship, they pray that they might experience his presence and rejoice in all the blessings of their salvation. Knowing that God promised to bless his people through David’s anointed Son, they pray that he would remember David and show himself faithful to his covenant. Their assurance of an affirmative response rests on the Lord: he has chosen Zion as his habitation forever.

Now that Jesus Christ, the Anointed One, has merited our salvation, our God no longer dwells within a physical temple. He dwells within each of his people by his Holy Spirit. He is present wherever his saints, the living stones with which Christ builds his church, gather to worship him. He dwells with us still as we gather for corporate worship. We are the lively stones of the church that Christ builds, a church gathered from all nations (see Eph. 2:18-22, 1 Pet. 2:5). How privileged we are to be members of that spiritual house! Is the assembling of that house as important to us as the building of the physical temple was to David?

Sing or pray Psalter #367.

Two Kinds of Clothing
Read Matt. 22:1–14
Psalm 132 speaks of two kinds of clothing. First there is the clothing of the righteous. In verse nine God’s saints pray, “Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy.” Jehovah responds positively to that petition in verse 16: “I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.” The clothing with which Jehovah covers his people is the only apparel fitting for those who would attend the marriage supper of the Lamb, the crown-prince from David’s line. Dear Christian, the very best of your works are as filthy rags. There is nothing that you and I can do apart from Christ that will earn us a place at Father’s table. Rely on him only for your salvation.

Psalm 132:18 speaks of the clothing of the enemies of the anointed King. In this world, the ungodly are brazen in their wickedness. More and more it seems as if nothing can make them blush. But in the day that Jesus Christ ascends his throne, they will be clothed in shame.

Sing or pray Psalter #368.

Unity Like Oil
Read Psalm 133
Psalm 133 is a short, sweet celebration of the communion of saints. The psalmist exclaims, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” and then supports that assertion with two very different metaphors. First, he compares unity among God’s people to the fragrant anointing oil poured upon Aaron’s head, oil that ran down his beard to the edge of his robe and consecrated him as high priest. The Bible teaches that our head, Jesus Christ, is anointed with the Holy Spirit. His anointing flows down to us, the members of his body, setting us apart for Jehovah’s service and equipping us
to bring forth the fruits that nourish the communion of saints: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control.

There are few experiences more joyful than true communion of saints. There are few things more painful than discord among brethren. If it sometimes seems that you have little in common with your fellow church members, remember this: you have in common the one who is more important than anything and everything else, Jesus Christ himself.

Sing or pray Psalter #369.

Unity Like Dew

Read Ephesians 4

Around 9,000 feet in elevation, beautiful Mount Hermon, which is located in the north of Palestine, stands nearly 7,000 feet taller than Mount Zion. Because it’s so tall, Mount Hermon captures a lot of moisture in an otherwise very arid region of the world. Psalm 133 compares the communion of saints to Hermon’s heavy dew. Like the oil that ran down Aaron’s robes from the top of his head, so the mountain dew descends from its peak. Similarly, the unity that we have in the Spirit of Jesus Christ is bestowed from above. So extraordinary is this unity, so other-worldly, that Jesus pinpointed it as the characteristic that would distinguish his people from the world: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

Though that unity descends from above, it is a unity that, to use the words of Ephesians 4:3, we, still sinners, must endeavor to keep. Ephesians 4 is full of instruction regarding how to keep that unity. What is one way in which you will strive to promote unity with your fellow saints this week?

Sing or pray Psalter #370.

Convention Speech

I t’s a great privilege for me to speak at the Young People’s convention, and an even greater privilege to spend this week with you all. The theme for this convention is “Contentment” based on Philippians 4:11, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” The topic assigned to me for this speech is “Content with God’s Plan.”

A Secular View of Contentment

I begin by reading a definition of contentment that I found on the web, which I think is representative of today’s secular view of contentment.

The secret of contentment is to live the life you want to live. It must be your authentic life, not a copy of mine or anyone else’s. The secret is to find what you’re passionate about and to carefully weave that into your life. The secret is to think carefully about what makes you truly happy, and then live a life that reflects that.

“Be authentic!” That’s what the world says. Be independent. Don’t let anyone else dictate to you what you must be, and don’t let anyone control your happiness. It’s about you. Today, this has led to the “liberty” of the LGBT movement, to the woman’s right to abort, to sexual gratification without responsibility, and to the demand that anyone and everyone be accepted in society as they are.

But this is not something new in our modern world. When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi, there were two secular schools of thought, both of which agreed that our goal should be to find contentment, but they had different ways of getting there. The Stoics believed that because human beings have no real control over their external circumstances, the thing to do is to control your own attitudes and feelings. And so they trained themselves not to be bothered by or to react to life events. You find contentment, they said, in yourself and in how you feel, and you mustn’t let others affect your feelings.

On the other hand, the Epicureans tried to find a balance between pain and pleasure. They aimed to outweigh pain with pleasure, to minimize pain and maximize pleasure. Yes, there are troubles in life, they said, but there’s also a lot of joy, so focus on the joy and live the life that brings joy and happiness to you. It’s about you.

When contentment is sought in one’s self or is defined by what will bring you happiness, it will
always elude you. Man’s heart is never satisfied. “Give, give!” cries the blood-sucking leech, and it is never satisfied (Prov. 30:15). And because it knows this, for more than 50 years now, the world has been singing these famous Rolling Stone lyrics:

I can’t get no satisfaction
I can’t get no satisfaction
‘Cause I try and I try and I try and I try
I can’t get no satisfaction

Looking at these secular definitions of contentment helps us to understand not only the mind of our society (a mind of covetousness, pleasure madness, discontent, complaining, self-centeredness, entitlement, etc.) but it also helps us to understand our own struggle with contentment. We struggle because we naturally (and sinfully) have the same approach to life—“I have a right to be happy, and no one should stand in the way.” Wasn’t this the way our sin problem began in the hearts of Adam and Eve? It wasn’t only pride and a desire to be like God that gave Eve the desire to take and eat the forbidden fruit, but it was also that the fruit was forbidden and that in forbidding the fruit God, (or so it seemed to Adam and Eve), was depriving man of a certain pleasure. It was covetousness and discontent that moved Eve to disobedience.

So what is contentment? As I describe it, I’ll give you three headings, and with each of these we have to keep God in mind. God is essential to a proper definition of contentment.

**Contentment is demanded by the sovereign Creator**

Hebrews 13:5 places this demand before us, “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have.” God’s demand in the law, “Thou shalt not covet,” includes the positive calling to be content. “For he hath said…” This is how the verse continues. God has said—this is the reason for this demand. God has the right to demand contentment from us. He is the sovereign who has made all things; he has made us; we are dependent creatures; he knows what we need and what is good for us, and so he demands contentment from us.

Here, I want to bring in the other part of my topic: God’s plan. God’s plan is his will for your and my life. That will includes how we must live (our obedience) and all that happens to us in life (God’s providence). One part of this will (God’s providence) is hidden from us—we do not know how our life will change tomorrow. The other part of God’s will, however, is known to us (his demands). What God requires of us never changes. When God demands contentment, then, he is demanding obedience in your present situation, and any and all disobedience is discontentment. When we disobey, like Adam and Eve, we show that we are not content with God’s will. So, for example, if you are sexually active as a single young person, that disobedience is an expression of discontent with God’s plan. One of the greatest ways we can show contentment is submission to the will of God for our lives. What does God require of me, here and now, in my life?

So, first, contentment is demanded by God. But, you say, I can’t do that. It’s not that simple. And you’re right. Contentment is not merely a personality trait that some have and others don’t. No, contentment is something that seems to elude every one of us. And so I define contentment, second, as a gift from the gracious Savior.

**Contentment is given by a gracious Savior**

Contentment is not first about doing, but about being. It is not something we produce by a decision of the will, or by having a well-ordered life-management plan by which we hope to guard against the unexpected. Contentment is not something we can discover by following five simple steps. It is not a program.

Rather, contentment is a grace, that is, it is a gift graciously given with Christ to the believer. Contentment is the product, not of something we do, but of a renewed and transformed character. It is created in us by the Holy Spirit. That’s why I said it’s about “being” not “doing.” It is something that arises from who we are as Christians. It is not about having what everyone else has, or about being what everyone else wants me to be, but it arises from who I am and what I possess in Christ. God gives himself to us, and out of this comes our contentment.

The Lord is my inheritance,
The Lord alone remains
The fullness of my cup of bliss,
The Lord my lot maintains (Psalter 27).

Christian contentment, then, means that my satisfaction is independent of my circumstances. It is not merely being happy with what I’ve got now, but it’s being happy regardless. When Paul speaks of his own contentment in Philippians 4:11, he uses a
term that means literally “self-sufficient.” Of course, he doesn’t mean by this that he finds contentment in himself (as the Stoics taught) but that his contentment is independent of changing circumstances. His contentment is in the sufficiency of Christ. He says, “I can do all things—both being abased and abounding—through Christ” (Phil. 4:13).

Often young people are asking the wrong question—and are perhaps taught to ask this wrong question. They ask, “What do I want from this life?” when they should be asking, “What do I have in Jesus Christ?” In prison Paul possessed the greatest of treasures, salvation in Jesus Christ, the joy of forgiveness, the confidence of God’s presence, and “Christ in me, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27), and so he, with Silas, could sing at midnight.

However, as Paul says, contentment was something he had to learn.

CONTENTMENT IS LEARNED IN THE SCHOOL OF TRIALS

God, who is a loving teacher, is always busy teaching us to be content. It’s a class from which we never graduate and which we never ace. This is what Paul means when he says “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” He had a life of ups and downs. Sometimes he abounded and was full, other times he suffered need and was hungry. The danger, in the times of need, is to think of the times of abundance, to compare what is with how we think things ought to be, or to compare our situation with that of others. When one learns to be content, the comparing, the covetousness, and the complaining stop.

What Paul says here does not apply simply to material abundance and need. A need may be a lack of friends, it may be a tough home and family life where there is little love, it may be a difficult work situation where your boss seems to be using you, it may be a broken relationship or a situation in which you’ve been abused. “Whatsoever” state, “therewith” to be content. That’s all-inclusive language. Because bigger than your unfair boss, or your mean friends, or your parents who don’t get it, is God who put them in your life, and who put you in this situation.

I have learned… What did Paul learn? What does God teach us in our difficult situations? This: keep your eyes on me! I am your all-sufficient God. The one who is sovereign is also my loving Father. Not so much as a hair can fall from my head without his will.

But what about ambition?

Someone asks, but doesn’t contentment rule out ambition? And doesn’t contentment produce apathy and laziness?

Two things in answer to this question. First, there is one thing with which we must never be content, and that is our own spiritual growth. A little religion, a little prayer, a little hope, a little grace, a little faith… we should never sit down satisfied with just a little of these. In these things we need fullness of ambition! Second, yes, the scriptures demand ambition as part of good Christian stewardship. However, at the center of all ambition must be God’s glory and not our own. Christian ambition is to live my life to its fullest potential for God’s glory.

These two points are beautifully summarized in one of the shortest chapters in the Bible, Psalm 131.

1. LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.

2. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.

3. Let Israel hope in the LORD from henceforth and forever.

In the first verse, David reins in human ambition. He will not let his mind be preoccupied with the things God has kept from him because such ambition destroys contentment. If I insist on knowing exactly what God is doing, what he plans to do with my future, and why he has done with me what he has in the past, I can never be content. Then I’m wanting to be an equal with God, which I can never be.

The second verse gives us a picture of contentment, the picture of a weaned child. Before weaning, the child is always crying for more milk, whereas the weaned child wants mother, not for what she gives, but for herself. He is satisfied in mother’s arms, with her very presence. How true are the words of Augustine, “Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”

And so, in the third verse we have a statement of Christian ambition, “Let Israel hope in the LORD from henceforth and forever.”

Contentment in an Age of Entitlement

Entitlement: a word thrown around often; yet, what is entitlement? Entitlement is an “I deserve, I have a right to” attitude.

You do not have to look very far to see how this attitude pervades our country. If you are reading this article, you might very well be a millennial, someone who was born in the 1980s or later. It is said of the children and young people in the millennial generation that they are characterized by an entitlement attitude. Millennials think the world owes them everything. Feeding this attitude are commercials on television that tell their viewers that they deserve to have the product being sold. Not uncommon are government programs that support those who are too lazy to work for a living; many men and women think they are entitled to money and benefits without working. Entitlement spreads its ugly tentacles everywhere you look.

While entitlement is definitely present in the world, we are more interested in seeing this attitude in ourselves. Here are some examples.

You receive your driver’s license and begin driving. The problem is, you are driving your dad’s car on the weekend, but your friends have vehicles of their own. You tell your parents, “Everyone else has a car of their own. So should I.” Entitlement.

The morning worship service is finished. You are thinking about the mashed potatoes you will devour at lunch. Your stomach has been growling all morning. You step into the kitchen when you get home, and you can smell the sweet aroma of those creamy, buttery potatoes. Dad prays before the meal, and then the potato bowl is passed around. By the time the bowl comes to you, the potatoes are gone. Gone. You can’t believe it. You become frustrated that everyone took your potatoes—did you not have the right to them? Entitlement.

It is Saturday morning. You have worked forty hours this week at your summer job. Saturday is your day to watch sports and hang out with friends. You hear a knock on your bedroom door at 7:30 in the morning; it is your dad, and he wants you to help him pull weeds in the yard. Angrily, you throw the sheets off your sleepy body: “He wants me to help him in the yard on Saturday? Saturday is my day.” Entitlement.

You are a sophomore in high school. Your biology teacher announces that a big exam is coming up, and that this exam is not to be taken lightly. Despite the teacher’s warning, you slack off on the night before the exam, whittling away your time on Facebook. Before long, it is 12:30 AM, and time to go to bed. You take your exam the next day, but after finishing the test you are not very confident. The next week your teacher returns the exam, and you discover to your horror that you got a 59%. Frustrated and disappointed, you crinkle your test in your hand and rush to your friends after class, complaining that the teacher has a harsh grading scale, and that he asked unfair questions. In other words, even though you did not study, you deserved a better grade. Entitlement.

The examples of this “I deserve, I have a right to” attitude are seemingly endless. The list above is far from exhaustive.

What is the root of entitlement? Even the world around us recognizes there is an entitlement problem, and seeks to find the causes of entitlement. Society locates the source of entitlement in bad parenting. Parents tell their children that they are special, entirely unique, and that they have boundless potential. Parents never let their sons and daughters lose at anything. Dads and moms spoil their children, giving them anything they want. These spoiled children grow up to be spoiled, entitled adults. In addition the world traces the entitlement problem back to laziness. Young people and young adults simply don’t want to work for money, but rather expect the money to be given as a reward for their sloth. If laziness is rewarded, why work? Finally, society finds the root of entitlement in materialism. We live in an age and country of tremendous wealth. We have
so much money, so many cars, such big houses, so many electronics; after a while, we begin to think we deserve these things.

There is, of course, truth to these reasons for entitlement that the world comes up with. But these are only surface reasons. To get at the heart of entitlement, we must go to the word of God. There are four main sins that lie behind the “I deserve, I have a right to” attitude: pride, ingratitude, selfishness, and covetousness.

First, pride lies behind entitlement. Pride says, “I am better than others.” Pride makes me think that I am good, special, outstanding, and unique. Why should I not have the right to the things that I want? Second, ingratitude drives entitlement. Ingratitude is thanklessness: showing no thanks or appreciation for what we receive from God and from others. This explains why we think the world owes us everything—we simply deserve it, anyway. Third, selfishness lurks below the surface of this “I deserve” mentality. Selfishness is self-absorption, thinking about self, and a satisfying of one’s own needs. It is about my time, what I can receive, and about what I want. To connect the dots between selfishness and entitlement is not difficult. Fourth, all these sins flow as three rivers of sewage into the polluted lake of covetousness. Covetousness says, “I never have enough. I need more. Give me more. Without more, I’ll never be satisfied.” A covetous heart is an entitled heart.

We find all these sins identified by Jesus in his parable of the rich fool in Luke 12. There was a rich farmer who worked hard for what he had, and the fruit of his hard work was that he had an abundant harvest. He planned to build greater barns where he could store his plentiful crop. After having built the barns and stored up for his future, he could take it easy and party; he would have no worries in the world. This man was a fool. In him were found all the sins that lie at the root of entitlement. Read the parable, and notice how many times the farmer refers to himself—he was proud of his accomplishments. Observe his ingratitude: since it was he who worked hard for what he had, why would he ever be grateful to God or anyone else? Do not miss his selfishness, either: he planned to build those bigger barns, and to lay up his crop, all for himself and his own enjoyment and pleasure. Now, zoom out and see the big picture: this rich farmer was covetous, according to Jesus’ own words in verse 15; this wicked man always wanted more, trusted in his riches to bring him a secure future, and found his happiness in his wealth and goods. Indeed, he was a man who thought he was entitled to everything!

As terrible and far-reaching as the sin of entitlement is, we find in scripture God’s spiritual prescription. The spiritual prescription for the “I deserve, I have a right to” attitude is God-given humility, gratitude, selflessness, and contentment.

Humility! Humility is a lowliness of mind and heart. What makes us humble is that we know ourselves to be creatures of the dust. We know ourselves to be but specks of dust when we compare ourselves to the all-powerful, all-seeing, all-knowing God, the creator of the universe. The entitlement mentality smashes on the rocks of this knowledge. What is more, we will be humbled when we are brought to know our sin. Even as redeemed saints, we know our sins, and how we must struggle against the old man daily. Remember the beatitudes in Matthew 5? “Blessed are the poor in spirit”—those who know the poverty of their sin; this is immediately followed by, “Blessed are they that mourn”—those who mourn over their sin; this is followed by, “Blessed are the meek”—those who are lowly, for they know their sin and mourn over it. The knowledge of our sin makes us humble. Furthermore—and this cannot be emphasized enough—we will be humbled when we understand grace. God, out of his undeserved favor upon us, has by his power saved us from our sin by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we truly understand the riches of his grace, we will be humbled (Eph. 2:8–9): “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that, not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast.” What has become of the entitlement thought-process now?

Gratitude! When God works in us the knowledge that we are creatures of the dust, that we are sinners, and that we are saved by grace, this will not only work humility in us, but also thankfulness. Not only are we profoundly grateful for salvation, but we are deeply thankful for all of God’s gifts to us. We receive what we have graciously and warmly. Gratitude leaves no room for a thankless-entitlement mindset.

Selflessness! When we are keenly aware of our place as lowly creatures, as sinners, and as recipients of the grace of God in Christ, our focus will shift from the inward to the outward. No longer will we ask, “What can I have?, but now, we ask, “What can I give to others, and do for them?” The “I” in us slowly
dies, and the “others” in us grows.

Contentment! When God works humility, gratitude, and selflessness in us, then these three crystal rivers flow into the beautiful lake of contentment. When we understand who we are, and what God has done for us in Christ, this will make us content. Go back to the parable of the rich fool. God required the soul of this fool, and he went to hell. Luke 12:21 sets forth this dire warning: “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” The implication here is that we are to be rich toward God. Being rich toward God is not only about how we are to live, but also about who we are in Christ. Young people, we are exceedingly rich in Jesus Christ! We are united to him, showered with all the blessings of salvation from him, and preserved by him to everlasting life in the glories of heaven. Knowing this gleaming, beautiful treasure, the sinful entitlement attitude in us slowly dies, and God-worked contentment grows.

This humility, gratitude, selflessness, and contentment will spill over into all areas of your life. What about that car you think you are entitled to? You can wait, for you are grateful for the things you do have. What about those potatoes you supposedly do have the right to? You are patient and content, knowing that God has given you your daily bread, and so much more; you have no “right” to the potatoes. What about that Saturday when your dad asked you to work, the day you considered to be your day? Selflessly, you rise from bed without complaint, glad that God has given you the ability to work, and happy that you can faithfully use the time that God has given you to help others. What about that biology exam? You study hard for it, both out of thankfulness for the Christian school God has provided for you, and in humility that God has given you the gifts and talents necessary for studying and learning.

It is my prayer, young people, that, regardless of what you have of the things of this earth, you might know the riches of being in Christ. This is true contentment in an age of entitlement.

Rev. Barnhill is pastor of Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois.

Convention Speech

Rev. Ronald Van Overloop

Content with Who I Am

“One shall say, I am the Lord’s; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel” (Isaiah 44:5).

The first question is, “Who am I?” But this is really the wrong question (Every time you ask the wrong question, you will get the wrong answer!). The correct question is “Who am I in Christ?” Or you can phrase it: “Whose am I?” Asked either way, the answer will give you your true identity. In Christ I am a child of God himself.

The second question is, “Am I content with who I am in Christ?” “Am I content with whose I am?” Would you rather be something else? Have something else? The answer should be, “I am content! In fact, I am not only content, I am ecstatic about it.”

These questions and their correct answers are very biblical and very Reformed. The correct answers very much relate to the covenant and our understanding of it. How we think of ourselves is a good indicator of whether we are applying what we believe about the covenant to ourselves. Does your faith concerning God and the covenant he has established with you consist only of an intellectual grasp of the basic, biblical, Reformed truths? Or is your faith a very wonderful, living knowledge of what the Bible says so that these truths live within you as something most comforting, assuring, and exciting.

Another reason this topic is very important is because of the fact that we frequently (if not always) judge others by ourselves. So what we think of ourselves greatly affects what you think of and how you treat others.

Let us be aware at the very beginning that the
Liar has several lies to tell you about yourself. But he who is the Truth also has many contrary things to tell you. One of the Devil’s lies is: You get your identity from what you have done or not done. The truth is that you get your identity from what God has done for you. The Liar says that you get your identity from what people (including yourself) think about you. Jesus, the Truth, tells us that you get your identity from what God thinks about you. The devil says that you are a guilty sinner because you sin. The truth is that you are a saint (because God declares you to be so in Christ) who still sins.

* * * * *

Let us consider the subject of human identity from a general, scriptural viewpoint.

First, scripture teaches that God created man after his own image. So man is not the product of cosmic chance nor is created after an ape. God made man out of the dust of the ground and out of his breath: body and soul. Also God made mankind in two genders: male and female (Matt. 19:4; Gen. 1:27)—only two, not 31 options. God made females with a variety of gifts and talents—that’s wonderful. He made males with a variety of gifts and talents—that is equally wonderful.

Second, Scripture teaches that every human fell into sin and total depravity in Adam. This total depravity powerfully affects who we conclude we are. Fallen human nature and political correctness always want to determine what makes a real man and real success, beauty, and strength, and has constantly changed its answers throughout history. Hitler said the Jews were sub-human. Today a baby in the womb is a fetus. It is most normal (and sinful) that fallen man will think of himself by comparing himself to others, not realizing that horizontal thinking brings a snare (Prov. 29:25). As a result we either see ourselves as not as good as others: stupid, unimportant (1 Cor. 12:15,16) or better than others (1 Cor. 12:21). This is world conformity (Rom. 12:2–3) and always results in dividing the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12). It also destroys the concept of serving which is real greatness according to Jesus (Matt. 20:24–28).

Third, Scripture teaches that it is only in Christ that we can know and rejoice in our true identity as human beings. In Christ we have a new life through the new birth, by which we are re-created in the image of God (Eph. 4:24). We have a spiritual and heavenly identity in Jesus Christ which is from above. This is our earthly identity as human beings.

Through the new birth we are the children of God in the Son of God. We are not spiritual orphans; we have the perfect Father! We are new men and new women, new creatures. Old things (old sinful, pagan, and secular ideas of our identity gathered from our culture by the spirit of this age) are passed away (2 Cor. 5:17).

* * * * *

Let us consider more carefully what Scripture specifically says of our new identity in Christ—the new life in Christ.

Simply stated, we are saints (called by the Father into communion with Jesus, regenerated by the Spirit, and delivered from the dominion and slavery of sin) who still sin (Canons 5.1)! We must have an ever-present awareness of our depravity: sinfulness and sin (Rom. 7:24). But we are assured of the covenant, which enables us to thank God as his children whom he eternally loves (Rom. 7:25).

First, the covenant teaches godly humility: I am worse than what I think.

Accurate knowledge of our sin and sinfulness comes only via vertical thinking (looking up at God instead of horizontally at people). When I compare myself to God, then I am not only incredibly tiny, but also horribly sinful. I see myself as the chief of sinners, less than the least of all saints, and THE sinner (1 Tim. 1:15; Eph. 3:8; Luke 18:13). To be a doer of the word and not a hearer only, I must continue in the knowledge of my natural face (James 1:22–23), that is, I must never forget my sinfulness.

This understanding of the continuing presence of the body of sin and of the infirmities of the flesh (Canons 5.1) results in a real, humble view of myself. Then (and only then) will I fly for refuge to Christ crucified and be constant in watching and prayer (Canons 5.2). Then I will see why it is so important that I first deny myself (Matt. 16:24) and that I mortify my desires and wants (Col. 3:5). Then I will properly abhor and loathe myself (Baptism and Lord’s Supper Forms) and crucify my old nature more and more (Gal. 5:24; Eph. 4:22). This is the way to know the greatness of forgiveness. And this is the way to love God more and more in gratitude (Luke 7:47). This is the way to be delivered from the snare (Prov. 29:25) of discontentment and frustration. And then I will sincerely long for perfection.

Second, the covenant teaches me to know myself rightly as someone to be loved correctly; I am better than what I think.
I do not stop loathing myself, but I know what divine grace has done for me. And I must always see myself the way God does: in Christ (Eph. 1 and 2). I am to know more and more who I am in Christ, not what other people (including myself) think. Keep God and the truth of his word big in your mind.

My identity in Jesus Christ is that I am justified by God himself, so I am righteous and without condemnation, and I am so because of what Jesus did for me, not because of anything I did (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 23). My identity is that I am sanctified and holy (Eph. 1:4), which Jesus works in me by his Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20), not because of anything I did. I am loved of God himself with an eternal love (Jer. 31:3) and I am accepted in the beloved (Eph. 1:6).

I find my life (my true identity) by losing my life (my old sinful identity). If I want to save my life, then I must lose it and find it in Christ (Matt. 16:25). The old man is me, but it is not dominant. However, while it is not dominant, it is still so very insistent and powerful that I have to put it off constantly. The new man is me, the real I. My new nature is dominant, for it is forever. My identity is that I am in a gracious covenant with God through Jesus Christ. My Maker and Redeemer talks and walks with me through his word. I am loved by God from eternity, and that is why Jesus bought me from sin and hell. So my only comfort is that I am not my own, but belong to Jesus Christ.

Everyone in Christ has purpose, namely, to glorify God and enjoy him forever (Westminster Shorter Catechism A.1). Unbelievers work with random chance (evolutionism) and they drift through life with no meaning or purpose. Human dignity for a Christian is that each one is a prophet, priest and king, ever striving to do the will of God. We are not seeking answers, for we have them in Jesus. We have our ethics clear (we do not wonder what is right or wrong) while unbelievers have a code that is constantly being redefined. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), and our members are to be used for the Lord (not for fornication), as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:12–22). We become truly human in Jesus, because we reflect Jesus and become what man was before the fall. We are better human beings. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13; 4:30).

An additional part of learning our identity is to determine of which group we are a part. Our real identity is not derived from the school we attend or our family; but we are part of the greatest society in the world—the church. We are of the greatest family and friend group there is, and we are a part of it forever. This family and friend group is a part of our identity (Isa. 44:5). We are part of the elected, the preserved, and the glorified church, and we are going to the new heavens and earth.

Finally, we have a great future in Christ. We live with hope, assured of our salvation, preservation, and glorification. We are not confined to this world of vanity of vanities. We are already blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3), and we will be glorified with him (Rom. 8:17, 30). We will enter the judgment with desire and comfort (Belgic, Art. 37), not fear, for it will publicly vindicate and justify Jesus, and the church (of which we are a part). The new heavens and earth are the eternal inheritance of all the sons and daughters of God (1 Peter 1:4). And there we will be given new names (Rev. 3:12)—the revelation of our real identification in Christ.

* * * * *

Now the question: Are you content with your identity in Christ? Or do you want something else? To be content is to have an attitude of being happy with what I have been given. Contentment is to have peace, joy, and comfort in every state and condition, arising from wanting what I have been given! The source and cause of contentment lies in my heart, in what I believe. It does not come from things. It comes from within me and not from outside of me. It is to be able to adopt God’s perspective of things.

Is what God has done, is doing, and promised to do for you not enough? Do you want something more? Or are you content with the fact that God himself loves you with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3)? Are you content with being accepted in the beloved (Eph. 1:6)?

Do you judge him not to know what he is doing with the circumstances of your life? Or do you keep striving to trust that his wisdom and love has made you and placed you in the very best set of circumstances and relationships?

Those Christians who feel themselves to be useless and worthless and unwanted are wrong! You are loved by God himself! You are part of the body of Christ! Stop feeling sorry for yourself and stop being so self-centered. Christ and his body would not be
BAPTISMS

“Their children were circumcised and were brought to the temple for purification, according to the custom of Moses.” Luke 2:22

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

- Theo Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kevin & Heather Deemter—Byron Center, MI
- Caleb Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Seth & Jessica Kamps—Crete, IL
- Felicity Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Todd & Joy Zandstra—Crete, IL
- Zack Ryan, son of Mr. & Mrs. John & Anna Heyboer—Grace, MI
- Titus Jon, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan & Rhonda den Hartog—Redlands, CA
- Nora Ashley, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Todd & Deanna Ferguson—Redlands, CA
- Victoria Leila, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth & Amber Van Den Top—Sioux Falls, SD
- Henry MacFarlane, son of Mr. & Mrs. Fred & Becky Johnston—Spokane, WA
- Zachary Jacob, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mark & Melinda Moore—Spokane, WA
- Libby Dawn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ed & Amanda Hekstra—Southeast, MI
- Calvin Jacob, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jacob & Rachel Maatman—Southwest, MI
- Jessa Lee, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Katie Hassevoort—Trinity, MI
- Jack Andrew, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan & Brittany Karsmeyer—Trinity, MI
- Sawyer Allen, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mitch & Kelli Van Overloop—Trinity, 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:

- Jennifer Kooiker—Crete, IL

MARRIAGES

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

Mr. Tad Landheer and Miss Lydia Rozeboom—Byron Center, MI
Mr. Zachary Zylstra and Miss Dallas Swan—Crete, IL
Mr. Brandon Kroese and Miss Brittany Kooiker—Crete, IL
Mr. Darren Haustek and Miss Kelsey Koosma—Hull, IA
Mr. Matt VandenBosch & Miss Lorissa Burgers—Sioux Falls, SD

Rev. Van Overloop is pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.
Beacon Lights

Sunday morning, Danny dragged his feet. He didn't want to go to church. He knew it was a bad attitude. He was supposed to like going to church. But this morning, he didn't. “Why do we have to go to church?” he whined.

His father was outside starting the car, but Danny’s mother heard him. “We go to church to worship God.”

“Couldn’t we do that here at home? Why do we have to go to church to do it?”

His mother thought about it for a few minutes. “There are a lot of reasons, but here’s one. You remember we’ve been talking about Roman armor, and especially the Roman shields?”

Danny nodded. Of course he remembered.

“The Roman soldiers didn’t fight alone. They always fought together as a group. Their shields were designed so that they would link together, forming what is called a shield wall. When the Roman soldiers marched forward, they pushed their enemy back with the strength of this shield wall.” Danny’s mother dug out the library book on Roman armor from the stack of books on the counter and flipped to a picture. “Sometimes, if the enemy was shooting arrows, the soldiers in the back of the army would raise their shields over their heads. This would form a solid roof. The Romans called this the tortoise formation, since their shields gave them an armored shell. Supposedly, the tortoise formation was so strong that a chariot with horses could drive onto the formation without it falling apart.”

“Wow.” Danny stared at the picture. “But what does that have to do with going to church?”

“Like the Roman shield, our faith is even stronger together. When we enjoy the communion of saints at church, our faith is strengthened together. We are no longer just one shield, but many shields protecting us from all sides. When we go into the battle of this world, we fight not as individuals, but as a group.”

QUESTION TO THINK ABOUT

1. Read Ephesians 2:16–22, 6:16, and Psalm 89:7 by yourself or with your parents. What is the importance of worshipping together with fellow saints?

Across

2. The shield of _____.

5. The Roman shield is called a _____.

Down

1. The Roman soldiers would link their shields together in a shield _____.

3. When the Roman soldiers formed a roof with their shields it was called the _____ formation.

4. At church, we enjoy the _____ of saints.

Tricia Mingerink

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
Save the Date!
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Holding Forth the Word of Life
(PHIL 2:15-16)

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