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PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE FEDERATION OF PROTESTANT REFORMED YOUNG PEOPLE’S SOCIETIES
Looking Back with Luther

“We are beggars, this is true.”

The story passed down through history is that these words were scribbled down by Martin Luther on a piece of paper and stuffed into his pocket while he was lying on his deathbed.

You can imagine what he was thinking. He was a weary pilgrim at the end of his allotted time on earth, about to enter eternity and join the church triumphant. Facing the blessedness of eternity before the throne of God, he had opportunity to look back on his life, a life that we would describe as “saintly.” After all, he played a crucial role in starting the Reformation in Europe. But how would Luther have described his lifetime of laboring on behalf of the church?

Beggarly.

Standing before the pearly gates, what did he have that he could offer in exchange for his salvation? His devotion to his work on behalf of the church? What about his prayer life? Would that suffice? He understood that in the face of eternity all of his work in this life—even his best works—were still completely lacking. He was a poor, weak, weary pilgrim completely dependent on the mercy of God. In his biography on Luther, Carl Trueman described Luther’s last moments as follows: “Against the vast canvas of eternity, in the face of God, and in the context of God’s gracious revelation of himself in Christ, Luther was but a small child, barely touching the surface of the ocean of God’s mercy. Which is, one might say, exactly what he would have hoped to be.”

Luther humbly accepted the fact that he was completely dependent on his Savior for saving mercy, and in that reliance he confidently faced death. Remember as well that this was at the very heart of the Reformation. Luther saw the error of Rome’s doctrine of works righteousness when he struggled to “do enough” to be justified before the righteous God. He realized that it wasn’t up to him to do anything. God justified him through the sacrifice of Christ.

In this context then Luther saw himself as a beggar. We ought to view ourselves the same way—and not just when facing death. The end of another year gives us the opportunity not only to celebrate the birth of our Savior, but also to reflect on the year gone by. We take stock of all that has happened. We reflect on thoughts we had. We remember words we spoke. We think of actions we carried out. When we reflect on all of this, we realize that even our very best works were polluted with sin. Our best works are but filthy, tattered robes of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

What is our best work? I think many of us would answer that worship is our best work. But how good is that work in reality? Do we take the time to prepare ourselves before worship so that we are in the proper state of mind when we enter God’s house? When we hear the law read every Sunday morning, do we drift off because we’ve heard it Sunday after Sunday? When we recite the Apostle’s Creed every Sunday evening, is our heart truly speaking or just our lips? Do we worship God through congregational prayer or do we doze off because it’s “long prayer?” Do we consider the giving our gifts during collection as a part of worship, or is it our “break time” to finish reading the bulletin? Then there is the sermon. God is speaking to us through the preaching of the gospel, yet we find ourselves so easily distracted.

Is there anyone who can truly say he does not struggle with anything listed above?

But there it is. Even what we would call our best effort, our best work, our worship, is polluted with our own thoughts and desires.

We truly have nothing of ourselves that we can offer to God.

The only thing we can offer is what we have been given.

Salvation in Jesus Christ.

So as we reflect on our life at the close of another year we confess with Luther—in thankfulness for God’s abundant “ocean of mercy”—“We are beggars, this is true.”

Ryan is the managing editor of Beacon Lights.

Interview with Agatha Lubbers (1)

It is June 27, 2009, and I am interviewing Miss Agatha Lubbers in Grand Rapids, MI.

Mark H. Hoeksema: Miss Lubbers, where and when were you born?

Agatha Lubbers: I was born on a Thursday, December 24, 1931 on 12th Avenue in Jenison, Michigan. The house in which I was born is still standing—a little brick building.

MHH: Who were your parents?

AL: My parents were Rev. George C. Lubbers, a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches and Rena Lubbers, a lady who came off the farm in Hudsonville, a member of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church. They married in 1930 when my father was a student in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

MHH: Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood, your youth, your family life?

AL: I said to somebody recently that I probably had gone to more Protestant Reformed churches or been a member of more Protestant Reformed churches than many other people in the Protestant Reformed Churches. My first membership, where I was baptized by Rev. Gerrit Vos sometime in January of 1932, was in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church. I was there until 1934 when my father took a call to the Doon, Iowa Protestant Reformed Church. In September of 1934 I became a member of the Doon Protestant Reformed Church.

After about three years, my father took a call to the Protestant Reformed Church in Pella, Iowa, and I was a member of that church for another six years. I remember Pearl Harbor in 1941 in Pella when we were going to listen to the Reformed Witness Hour, which was one of the excuses for having a radio in those days, and then we heard the voice of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who came on the radio instead of Herman Hoeksema.

Then we were in Randolph until 1950. I went to the Randolph Christian School, which was in East Friesland prior to that, graduated in the eighth grade, and went to the Randolph Public High School—no Christian high school in the community—although my father thought of sending me to Grand Rapids so that I could either go to Grand Rapids Christian or to Holland Christian. But I think better sense prevailed and I went to a very conservative public high school in Randolph, Wisconsin. They taught Latin in those days in that school, and we had a Carnegie Public Library in the town. The Andrew Carnegie of great fame had given money so there could be a Carnegie Library there.

Then we moved to Grand Rapids, and in 1950 I became a member, with our family, of the Creston Protestant Reformed Church. The building is still standing. It is now used by the Seventh Reformed Church as a fellowship building. It is across from St. Alphonsus Catholic Church on Leonard Street. My father was minister there until about 1954, give or take. He lived through the 1953 collision and when the church became small, it didn’t fall into nonexistence. But he felt he was called to be a home missionary to those who had left the Protestant Reformed Churches, and he felt that maybe he could be influential in getting them back.

Then in 1950 I went to Calvin College. I was there one year and a summer when I was asked if I would please teach at Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School. That began a 56-year career, which was interrupted by certain times that I went to college or took about a two-year break when I went back to college and got my degree and graduated in 1959 from Calvin College in the days of president Bill Spoelhof.

My career, beginning in 1959, was that I was principal and teacher in place of Alice Reitsma at Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School until 1968. Then Covenant Christian High School came into physical existence. There had been several years of planning. I applied, and I taught many courses at Covenant Christian High School.

After 29 years of having been at Covenant, I went to Eastside Christian School during a time of some controversy with respect to the move of Adams Street Christian School. I worked for eleven years at Eastside Christian School.

Now I come to the time in my life, after one year
of retirement, that I’m going to try to do something a little bit different, if I possibly can.

That’s a short resume of my life.

MHH: Very interesting. I’d like to take you back to some of the elements you mentioned, perhaps in a little bit more detail.

What are your recollections of the time prior to and including what you called the great collision of 1953?

AL: My recollections of that period of time were that my father and other ministers in the Protestant Reformed Churches were laboring with the issues that were brought into the Protestant Reformed Churches because of the connection that had developed between Herman Hoeksema and Klaas Schilder. Fact of the matter is, Klaas Schilder stayed in our home in Pella, Iowa with several other ministers, I think in his first visit. I do not know exactly when that was, but I know it was in the very early forties, or it could have been in the late 30s. I remember seeing a photo of my dad’s Model A car, and they were going to help him get to where he had to be at his next place.

I recall Schilder’s being in Randolph. It had to be in the 1940s, when he came here once again. He was going to speak in the Congregational Church where we had our services, and various Reformed people were invited to come.

My dad, after that time, had a nervous breakdown, and he spent time at Pine Rest. In fact, he had 24 shock treatments, and he had great questions in his life. I can recollect that his first task was to translate Believers and Their Seed from Dutch into English. He did that work in lieu of being able to go into preaching immediately. We would have preachers coming in, although very soon he did go back into the labor of preaching.

At that time there were ministers particularly associated with the group called the Concordia, and they were friends of my dad who were becoming more and more interested in the Liberated movement in the Netherlands and their theology. I think they believed that there was a kind of sterility or probably an incorrect emphasis in the covenant theology of Herman Hoeksema and other people. I don’t think my dad really went along with that completely. I know he didn’t because he would not have espoused the idea of seeing to it that Believers and Their Seed would get into the seminary. He was hoping that it would be used there and that it would be distributed further. I know Homer Hoeksema did some other translating to make it just a little bit more free in its English, because Dad was very close to the Dutch in his translation—he wanted to be accurate and didn’t feel he had the freedom to do that, although he was a very good Dutch scholar and could preach in Dutch. In fact, he preached in Dutch in the two congregations that I remember: Pella and Randolph. Until I was about sixteen years old, they had a Dutch service once a Sunday for those people who believed that that was an important way for them to worship God.

My dad did not really have very many connections, although in the early days his connection was with Andrew Petter. Andrew Petter became strongly concerned that the theology that had been taught before was not what he could espouse. But he did not have a lot of influence on my dad. That’s the early days prior to 1953.

When we came to Creston in 1950, that’s where he was more closely in contact with the people in Grand Rapids. I would say that’s where things became much more a concern for him because he had friends who were in churches in Grand Rapids. There was Hubert DeWolf, there was Richard Veldman, and people like that with whom he communicated. They were personal friend of his. I don’t know that he always agreed with everything that they stated. But my dad was a very trusting man. I just believe that he couldn’t believe that people could be unorthodox. That was basically, I think, his position, although he strongly emphasized that we always have to preach admonitions of the gospel. I can remember that term coming through many times—admonitions of the gospel.

I remember that Herman Hoeksema listened to my dad and said, “George, I always like to hear you preach because Christ is central in your preaching.” And that is true. I don’t think my dad ever preached on the break of 1953 in his sermons. I never heard him say anything about that. I know there were others who did, but he did not.

MHH: What effect, if any, did these events have on your own personal or family life, and on your contacts in the church?

AL: I was in my early 20s in those days. Young and impressionable in a certain sense, but very interested in what was going on. I was always interested in what my dad was doing. Because of the fact that he was involved very much in this controversy, I was involved with it too. My dad wrote the, basically wrote the
majority opinion. Although there were other ministers who labored with him, he was the spokesman for the committee, but he wrote it too, as I remember it. I was the person who typed it for him on a little Royal typewriter. I'll go back too, to the days of the translation of Believers and Their Seed. I typed every page of that from his notes from Dutch into English. That was one of my big typing practices when I was about sixteen or seventeen years old.

The effect of '53 was this kind of effect: there were two positions in the Creston Protestant Reformed Church. Some who were very oppositional, not necessarily so much to the theology or somewhat to the theology, but more toward the personalities of people involved in the controversy—anti-DeWolf or pro-DeWolf. Maybe not many anti-DeWolf. But there were those who were anti-Herman Hoeksema, and they had had a minister by the name of John DeJong, and they had very much love for him. I think he had preached, prior to 1953, the doctrine that he had learned and espoused when he went with Bernard Kok to the Netherlands prior to 1953, and said that these people and this theology is what the Protestant Reformed Churches ought to have.

That had an effect, I think, on the people. My dad came in as a person who did not espouse that, although he was not an adamant opponent of it because they were still reading and studying the Declaration of Principles. There was a lot of discussion about that and if that was going to be a new confession rather than its intention of being simply an explanation of what the confessions taught. My dad understood that it was an explanation. He never said anything about its being a third confession. He was not concerned about that. But there was plenty of argument and there was plenty of discussion.

MHH: I’d like you to take you back a little bit again, this time not from the viewpoint of the ecclesiastical situation necessarily, but from the viewpoint of education. As you mentioned, you’ve been involved with education for many years. I believe that you also mentioned that at a young age you began to teach, even without a college degree. Would you please elaborate a little bit about the Christian school movement and your involvement with the schools? I’d like to know about that.

AL: 1951 is when I became a teacher in Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School. I thought I was going to go just for a very short period of time and then return to Calvin College and get my degree. But as it turned out, because of the lack of teachers, or at least as far as Hope’s Board was concerned, the lack of teachers, there was a continued request for me to continue. So I would go to summer classes at Calvin College.

Going back to 1951 and 1952 and 1953, this is when the fracas in the Protestant Reformed Churches was developing. There were no signs at Hope School. There were a few people from Southwest Protestant Reformed Church and, I would say, none from Hudsonville, none from Hope who took the side of Hubert DeWolf. Even though Hubert DeWolf had been a minister at Hope Church prior to this time, I wouldn’t say that there were any sympathizers in the school that I could notice. Everybody was basically sympathetic to Herman Hoeksema.

The teachers in the school were all people who agreed with the Herman Hoeksema position because it was myself (this is in Hope Protestant Reformed), and it was Alice Reitsma and Jessie Dykstra. Those were the three teachers. I was there just briefly and then Catherine Stuursma became a teacher there, and she was not what we would call a Hoeksema follower. She was on the DeWolf side of the issue. But it didn’t really enter into Hope School so much, although I had one complaint. That was from John Blankespoor, that I had said something in a class about the position that was being discussed and debated. He even called me about it and asked why I had brought it up. I said, “I thought it was important.” And I said, “You know that I am not in favor of the position that’s being taken by yourself and certain other people.” I don’t know how long the children stayed there, but I think after ‘53, the Blankespoor family went to other Christian schools.

At that time, 1950, the Hope School preceded Adams Street School. Those were the two schools in town. Adams Street came into existence in 1950 and they had a much greater impact than we did. In fact, about one-half of the school did not come back after the collision of 1953. Many of the teachers were, let’s say, in agreement with the position that was taken by the Classis. They even had to have a secret meeting one night to determine who was going to be faithful in their instruction and who was going to go along with the position of 1953. The secret meeting was in the home of Tom Newhof, Sr. on Hall Street. Winnie Koole in that particular situation went with a monkey mask on (laughter).

I wasn’t at the meeting. I was told about the
meeting, particularly by Winnie, because I lived with her for 40 years and we shared stories. And she said she went there. Mrs. Newhof was just about scared out of her wits. Winnie said, “Well, I thought I had to come here incognito, so I did.” So she came in a monkey mask (laughter). As a result of that meeting, because the principal was no longer with them, the result of the meeting was that Winnie and Fred Hanko became joint principals at Adams Street. For many years after that, they had nothing but women principals in the school. I think there was a lady by the name of Mrs. Veltman and Mrs. Gertrude Hoeksema and various people.

One of the greatest impacts on us—and that wasn’t with the school so much—was with the Protestant Reformed Young People’s Convention in 1953. There were two conventions. One was the convention of the so-called Orthodox Protestant (no, I can’t remember what they actually did call themselves). They didn’t stay Protestant Reformed very long. But they were the DeWolf group (I’ll use that for terminology), and they had their own Young People’s Convention. We had a Young People’s Convention that was sponsored by Southeast Protestant Reformed Church. I remember going to the one that was at Southeast Church.

But to come back to school. No, I don’t think that the school was involved in that theological issue so much because I think the school is a school that believed that children who are born in the covenant family must be taught as covenant children. They were taught as covenant children, with the understanding that they would not make any ultimate decision, but they would make decisions in their life that might, because of their own moral, rational freedom, had to affect them in this life.

After 1953, there was a greater activity in a group called the Federation that organized in about 1955 or 1956. Its purpose of that was to see to it that teachers in the schools were thoroughly committed to the Reformed faith and had not espoused any of the ideas that might have had an influence on education and certainly not the influence of common grace. That was certainly one of the goals of the meeting—to help the teachers grow in an understanding of what Reformed education really is all about.

MHH: With respect to your teaching career, what subjects did you teach? What stands out in your mind, if anything?

AL: I would have a hard time remembering all of the courses that I taught. But I would say, in the field of religion, I taught some courses in the history of the Bible. One of the main courses that I taught was Church History. I constructed a syllabus on ancient church history, because I felt that that was a very important thing to emphasize with young people, and it was not something that in typical church history books was emphasized greatly. The high points were emphasized and taught in the B.K. Kuiper church history book, which we used as a standard book at certain times. And I did quite a bit of writing on medieval church history as Prof. Herman Hanko had done in the seminary. The syllabus on ancient church history was used quite broadly by people who followed me in the church history department. They even used it in Redlands, California, for their young people’s discussion and study, and other places used it. It was not copyrighted in any sense of the word. It was just in a mimeographed form. I really enjoyed teaching church history. My remembrances are good, and some of the comments by some of my former students indicate that they said that they learned a great deal as a result of that course.

As far as other things that happened during that time was that the Federation became quite active in asking teachers to work in the summer. We worked on various projects. Teachers would head certain study projects, and these study projects would meet for about three weeks. I remember the first one was on a Reformed treatment of pagan literature, or at least literature from Christian countries. I shouldn’t say “pagan literature,” but literature from Christian countries. That was a labor of experiment in a certain way because many of us had not done this kind of thing before, so it took us awhile. Then there were some on writing, and there were some on social studies.

The PRTI (the Protestant Reformed Teachers’ Institute) developed quite soon after the split of 1953. Now there are over a hundred teachers who get together for the PRTI meetings. At that first meeting, I became the secretary, and Winnie was the treasurer, and Fred Hanko was the president. There were twelve teachers, and they were just from Adams and Hope. So that’s how it started. One of the main reasons, at least in the Grand Rapids area, was to attempt to provide more unanimity and happiness between the two schools, because there was sometimes kind of a competitive attitude that we felt was not necessarily to the benefit of the two schools.
Well, we introduced some competition anyway. But it was supposed to be friendly competition—running and various things like that: field games and kids getting together. Maybe that was sort of a grassroots beginning of Covenant Christian High School.

MHH: That provides a lead-in to my next subject. After your career at Hope School, you became associated with Covenant High School. Could you tell us a little bit about the beginnings of Covenant and the development of the high school and your involvement in that process?

AL: The high school began to develop about 1965. There were meetings. There were even meetings of women who were involved. They were like associations that thought that they maybe would be able to raise some money for this. Covenant Christian High School was built for about $200,000. It was a six-room school in those days.

When I was seeing the school develop in the Walker area, I was teaching on the sands of Hope School with more burdocks and more sand burrs than probably there were even blades of grass in those days. The kids would count the number of sand burrs they took into school. It was unbelievable. There were tons of flies. They were always killing flies or catching them with their hands. They’d make a little mark on their rulers whether or not they caught a fly or not. Whoever had the most marked-up ruler was the most special person in the classroom at that particular time. No screens, just lots of flies.

I taught almost everything in the humanities. It taught history, and I taught church history. I taught almost all the literature courses that the school could offer in those days. I can’t remember that I ventured really outside of those areas. I did teach German for several years because that was my major in college.

I remained a teacher for the first 14 years, and I remained a teacher for the next fifteen years—not as much, because I became principal in 1982. I was principal from 1982 to 1999. During that time some of our students were coming back to the school.

Before I became the principal there was quite a controversy as to whether or not I could be a principal. Some were opposed to my being the principal in the school.

MHH: Could you elaborate a little bit? I do remember that there was such a controversy.

AL: In 1982 there was a collection of fifteen people who signed a request for a society meeting because the board had made a decision. There were nine members on the board. They had decided that there were only two applicants—both of them from the faculty of Covenant Christian High School. I don’t know if they advertised farther than that. They had to have a society meeting because that was what the constitution said: If you had fifteen people who signed a document that said they wanted a society meeting, they had to have it. And they did.

MHH: You were one of the applicants?

AL: I was one of the applicants for the position. I believed that I should be considered. I didn’t believe that the word of God [forbade me] from being principal, as these men told me—men from my consistory at Faith Protestant Reformed Church. They told me that I was sinning against the word of God. And I said, “No, I don’t believe I am. And obviously the board doesn’t believe I am.” A committee from Faith Protestant Reformed Church visited me many times and told me that I should take my name off the list of those who were applying for principal.

MHH: On what grounds?

AL: The grounds were that women are subject to men in all kinds of situations. Women are always subject to men, even if you were working at Steelcase [a local corporation]. I said, “Well, that’s not a Christian organization. I believe that the Bible does not teach that. It does teach that a woman should be subject to her husband and her husband should be kind to her and loving to her. And that would make it possible for her to be subject to her husband, and she would not object to that. The relationship in the church should be such that the teachings of the apostle Paul are adhered to—that women should be silent in the church. That is to be understood as the authoritative word of God.”

In 1982 the society met, and it was not a unanimous vote. But there was a large enough vote that I felt comfortable. I said to the board at that time, “If you feel that this is not expedient (that’s the term I remember using), then I will be very happy to step down and remain in the classroom. I don’t want to leave Covenant at this point. But I think it would be a matter of expediency for me to be off.” They said, “Absolutely not. This is what we believe is right.”

I remember saying to the consistory members, “Gentlemen, I have enjoyed this discussion with you. I think I’m still right, and I believe you’re still wrong. The Bible does not teach that.” I said, “If
you believe that you are right, would you please tell me what commandment of the ten I am sinning against? That’s why you should be here. Is it the fifth commandment? The society has said it, the board has said it. It has to be the fifth commandment that I was not obeying.” I said, “I’m going to work for [the board]. I have to obey them. I have to do what they tell me to do.” And I said, “If there is a commandment, put me under censure. And if there is no commandment, please don’t come here with that as your agenda. You may come here, but don’t come with that as your agenda.” They never came again.

After that, they took off after my dad because he had preached a sermon during the summer that talked about the relationship between men and women. He didn’t talk about me, but he used that moment. I was in Europe when that happened. There was a big uproar. Nothing really happened, but they took after him, and they went even as far as Classis West because Pella was his church from which he had retired. Well, they never proved that he was doctrinally wrong. They just didn’t like the sermon. So you could like sermons or not like sermons. But you’ve got to prove that the man spoke something that is against the word of God, and they couldn’t do that. They had all kinds of theories, but nobody agreed with them.

My dad said to me, “Ag, don’t worry about it. This is not a doctrinal issue. This is an issue of life, so don’t worry about it.” So I didn’t. To be continued…

Amazing Grace: Lessons I Learned from My Grandma

Grace Schimmel was born August 27, 1926 to George and Nellie Kamps. Over the course of her long and full life, she had seven children, 31 grandchildren, and over 50 great-grandchildren. Her past times included lively card games with friends and family, heated debates around the dinner table, Dutch bingo, and painting (which she was very gifted in). Her laugh was contagious, and she always had a spring in her step. She was my role model, my fountain of knowledge, and my grandma.

While she was still on this earth, she taught me many things about life. She was as wise as an owl, and quick like a fox, even as she got older. A lot of the times her advice didn’t come directly from things she told me; rather, some came from her daily walk.

Trust in the Lord (Prov. 3:5–6): Day to day, week to week, my grandma always had a positive attitude. Back then, I didn’t know how she did it, with the news about her cancer always being negative and her growing pile of pill bottles making its home on the counter. From the world’s perspective, she should have just given up.

Now, as a more mature Christian, I can see what she saw: God’s hand upholding her. She trusted in God to carry her through each day, just as a little girl trusts her father. She knew that he would never leave her or forsake her. Her positive attitude came from the knowledge she had that God would take care of her. The frequent reminders of life’s frailty were God nudging her closer towards his outstretched hand, which she clung to with all of her heart.

Spend as much time with your family as you can (Job 1, Job 14:2): As a young child, I didn’t like going over to my grandparents’ house. They were too big, too loud, and too scary. As I got older, I learned to love their company as one loves the company of friends. I always looked forward to flying around the curves of Leonard Street because I knew that it meant going to Grandma’s house. I was older, so I was able to stick my two cents in during discussions and was sometimes even asked my own opinion, which made me feel pretty important. The loud giants were gone, and fun-loving teddy bears had taken their place.

I didn’t see this back then, but the time I had with my elderly grandparents was limited. My grandma especially taught me that this time I had with family
was special and shouldn’t be squandered. She made every minute that we were together count. God had blessed her with this family, so she had better influence us as much as she could before she was gone. I also think that we were just a joy to be around, so she could never get enough of us.

Sadly, I learned this lesson the hard way. Long story short, I had an opportunity to spend time with my grandparents the weekend before my grandmother peacefully, yet suddenly, passed away. I didn’t take it; I spent time with friends instead. To this day, I regret that decision.

So, take it from me, make the most of your time with your family. You don’t know how long you have with them. And believe me, every moment is entirely worth it.

Be wise in whom you date (1 John 2:15, 2 Cor. 6:14a, Eph. 3:17, Col. 3:18–19): The weekend before she died, my grandma gave me one of the most important pieces of advice I have ever received. As I was about to run off with some friends (some of them boys), she told me with a knowing look and a smile, “I want to approve of the boy you date.” I just smiled back at her, gave her a hug, and quickly ran back to where my friends were waiting for me.

At the time, I just brushed off what she had said because dating was too far away for me to even think about. But now, this simple phrase weighs heavily on me. How can I find someone who measures up to my grandma’s standards? I can’t just be going and dating anyone that I kind of like. He has to have the marks of a true man of God, which my grandma saw in Grandpa. Even though she is no longer here, my decision must be based upon the Christian doctrines she passed down to me. She taught me that a spouse has to lead me and run with me closer to Christ, rather than carry me away from him.

Pray without ceasing (Luke 21:36; 1 Thess. 5:17): Something that I personally tend to forget to do is to pray. I make excuses like, “I didn’t have time,” or, “I was just too hungry, so I couldn’t wait.” This has become a horribly bad habit that I just can’t seem to break.

My grandmother had a very healthy prayer life; she always prayed when prayer was needed, and even if it wasn’t, she prayed. She even kept a prayer journal with pages full of prayer requests and things to remember to pray about so that she knew exactly what she was going to say.

As I write this, I see my huge need for prayer.

My relationship with God is built off of prayer. So, if I’m not taking the time to pray, then my spiritual life will die. Her example is what I should follow after so that I make time for prayer. Rather, I should pray first, before I make time for anything else.

Love God with all your heart and show it (James 1:22, Matt. 22:37): God was the center of my grandma’s life. Her zeal for God was insurmountable. She loved God with all her heart and knew his word like she knew the rules to all her favorite card games. Even a lot of the discussions that we had at the dinner table usually revolved around news stories which she would dissect using her Christian worldview. She talked the talk, and also walked the walk, which seems to be a disconnect in most people’s lives today.

Not only did she love God in her heart, she loved him in her actions. Grandma made sure that her walk reflected her love for God. She did this by serving others. I remember seeing her knitting needles and yarn basket by her armchair next to the fire full of started projects that she was going to give to others. She also liked to crochet the edges of blankets for new babies, which all of her grandkids have.

Actions such as these weren’t the only way she showed God’s love. She herself loved others with this love. She cared deeply for her friends and family, using her homemade dinners, words of kindness, or her time to show her love. My heart thobs with godly pride when people tell me how much they loved her and how much she meant to them.

Her life was an example of what she believed. With this walk, she showed true thankfulness to God, as well as being a witness to those around her, Christian or not. There isn’t a day that I don’t miss her, even though her influence surrounds me, but I am assured that someday I will see her again.

For all of you reading this, go visit your grandparents. The elderly generation has so many important things to say and are more than happy to share them with you. I know that as young adults, we need good role-models and solid advice. Who better to fit the bill than those that have lived almost a century? Elderly people, as we all know, aren’t here forever, so we should feel a stronger urgency to spend time with them. I assure you, not only will you learn lessons, but also a variety of card games. It’s worth it.

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Go to God in Prayer  
Read Psalm 142

1 Samuel 22 records the time that David hid from Saul and the Philistine king Achish in the cave of Adullam. 1 Samuel 24 recounts the time that he fled from Saul to a cave in the wilderness of Engedi, the same cave his pursuer shortly entered. It’s likely that on one of those occasions, David prayed the words that are recorded as Psalm 142. The psalm bears the title “Maschil,” meaning that it is a psalm that teaches. What lesson would David have us learn?

Here is the first lesson: when you are troubled, overwhelmed, or abandoned like David was, go to Jehovah in prayer. Reserve a quiet time, find a quiet place, and quiet your heart with this knowledge: Jehovah knows your path. He encompasses your way and directs you to an expected end. When your flesh and your heart fail, find in him the strength of your heart; your portion forever (Ps. 73:26). When his way for you eludes your understanding, confess this by faith: “But he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

Jehovah Knows Your Way
Read Psalm 142

Imagine yourself on a busy street corner in a big city. People stream past you, and horns blare as drivers attempt to maneuver through traffic. If you would shout right now, would anyone hear you? Everyone around you seems absorbed by his own schedule and intent on his own destination. Now consider that this city is one of thousands in the world, and you are only one of billions of people. The Creator of this universe is so great that the enormous universe in which our tiny planet spins is the work of his fingers. And yet, when you cry to him, he hears you. Not only does he hear you, he knows you, and he knows your path. His knowledge is not a formal, academic knowledge. It’s intimate and informed care for you and for all who belong to him in Jesus Christ.

Jehovah clung to that truth when he called out the words of Psalm 142 to Jehovah. Lonely and weary, he poured the last of his energy into prayer, knowing that the one to whom he cried would answer him, for he is able to do it, being Almighty God, and willing, being a faithful Father (HC, LD 9).

Sing or pray Psalter #426:1–5.

The Promise Keeper
Read Psalm 142

Though he was forlorn and forsaken when he prayed the words of Psalm 142, still David hoped in God’s promises. He looked forward to the day when he would be surrounded by God’s people and crowned their king. (The word translated “compass” in verse seven in the KJV can also be rendered “encircled,” denoting, perhaps, the future encircling of David’s head with a crown. Psalter #388:5 extends this idea to the joy with which all of God’s people are crowned.)

Ultimately, David trusted in God’s promise that from his family would come the Messiah, the King who descended to hell and the grave on our behalf, but tore away the bars of that prison and ascended to Jehovah’s right hand. From there he gives gifts to his saints, and in him all of the promises of the Father are “yea” and “amen.” Do you pray to Jehovah in that assurance?

Sing or pray Psalter #388.

A Threefold Distress
Read Psalm 143:1–4

A troubled David again appeals to Jehovah in Psalm 143. But before he presents his case against his enemy in verse three, he admits his own guilt in verse two: “Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” So you and I should always first confess our own sins, both in prayer and when confronting a brother or sister. But if David himself is guilty, on what grounds does he plead? On the basis of Jehovah’s faithfulness and righteousness (see verse 1).

David’s case against his enemy consists of three incremental crimes. First, the enemy has persecuted his soul. He pursues David, intent on his life. Second, the enemy has smitten him “down to the ground.” His threats and slander have crushed David’s spirit. Third, he has made David to “dwell in darkness.” David is so overwhelmed that he cannot find any comfort or light. “My heart within me is desolate,” he says. All this he presents to the Judge.

What temptations pursue you today? Would your own sinful self crush the new man within? Plead your cause before the Judge on the basis of his Son’s righteousness.

Sing or pray Psalter #390.
**A Threefold Discipline**  
**Read Psalm 143:1–6**

David presented his enemy’s threefold persecution in Psalm 143:3. Initially overwhelmed by his enemy, David regains a right perspective when he exercises three spiritual disciplines (v. 5). First, he remembers the days of old. His current troubles have consumed him, but how do they compare with trials he has faced in the past? Second, he meditates on all Jehovah’s works. He cannot reflect on former days without acknowledging God’s gracious interpositions on his behalf. Third, he muses on those works. The word muse originated in Greek mythology. Now the word muse refers to a person who inspires an artist, writer, or musician. Pondering Jehovah’s works moves the poet in David: he stretches out his hands to Jehovah and praises his works in song. He longs to be restored to a proper spiritual perspective at one point or another. Are you discontent? Discouraged? Depleted? Reflect on your life. Consider the ways Jehovah has provided for you in the past. And may your meditations inspire you to praise our God in word and song.

Not a day goes by when you and I don’t need to be restored to a proper spiritual perspective at one point or another. Are you discontent? Discouraged? Depleted? Reflect on your life. Consider the ways Jehovah has provided for you in the past. And may your meditations inspire you to praise our God in word and song. Sing or pray Psalter #389:1–3.

**A Morning Prayer**  
**Read Psalm 143**

The tone of Psalm 143 changes after the “Selah” in verse six. It’s as if David is finished posturing on the witness stand. He approaches the Judge’s bench, as it were, and pleads with him face to face. You see, David knows this Judge well: the Judge is his Father. And even more than David desires the just punishment of his enemies, he desires a healthy relationship with his Father. He comes to Jehovah with a prayer: a perfect prayer (it is, after all, a Spirit-inspired prayer), a morning prayer. It is a prayer that I memorized some years ago and often pray silently even before I arise at the beginning of the day. Here is part of that prayer: “Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee” (v. 8).

To that prayer David desires a speedy answer, and he—and you and I—can be confident of just that. For when “the righteous cry,” “the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles” (Ps. 34:17).

Sing or pray Psalter #391.

**Deliverance Necessitates Destruction**  
**Read Psalm 143**

In Psalm 143:11–12, David presents two petitions. First he pleads, “Quicken me, O Lord, for thy name’s sake: for thy righteousness’ sake bring my soul out of trouble,” and then he prays, “And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant.”

David knew that to pray for his own deliverance was to pray for the destruction of his enemies. He understood the reality of the antithesis, a truth at which many twenty-first century Christians balk. It’s a truth that the ungodly seem to comprehend readily, however. For some time American Christians could claim that we have a voice in our culture. No longer can we pretend that that is true. “What we face is not a struggle within a culture but...a clash of alternative cultures” (Carl Trueman). The forces of the moral revolution are advancing on every front, and out of all the confusion they’ve generated, they’ve made one thing clear: they will take no prisoners.

Sing or pray Psalter #389.
be crowned king as he was in Psalms 142 and 143. He is the king of Israel, but he recognizes that he could not rule without Jehovah, either. God is (9) the one “who subdueth my people under me” (v. 2d). What a wonder that this great God is (10) mindful of man! And yet that is the last glory for which David praises him.

What a wonder that such a God takes thought of man, whose days are like the grass. What a wonder that such a God takes thought of sinners like you and me!

Sons Like Plants, Daughters Like Pillars

What makes David’s petition that Jehovah rid him of strange children so very urgent? He knows that the maintenance of the antithesis is essential to the prosperity of God’s people. Therefore, he links that petition to his subsequent requests with the conjunction “that.” David prays that Jehovah will rid Israel of the unbelievers who dwell among them so that their covenant children may thrive. He desires sons like “plants grown up in their youth.” He compares the godly young men in Israel to fruitful plants, resilient to wind and storm and also to drought, for their roots are planted deep in the river of life. He likens Israel’s daughters to pillars (“corner stones” is perhaps better rendered “corner pillars”) that not only support a structure, but beautify it as well. (That’s a striking figure, sisters! Don’t permit yourself to think that our role in Christ’s church is unimportant because God has reserved the special offices for our fathers, husbands, and brothers!)

Do you love the children of the church? Do you desire to see them grow and prosper spiritually? Then, for the welfare of those children, you must be willing to pray, “Rid me…from the hand of strange children.”

Sing or pray Psalter #393.

The Happy People

Psalms 144:13–14 describes a prosperous people. Their granaries and barns are full, and they live in peace and safety. If you were to walk through the streets of their city, you would hear no cry of lament. These are also happy people. Are they happy because they enjoy such abundance? No, their happiness has a much deeper source: they are happy because they belong to Jehovah. Many Christians today have fallen prey to the lie that above all God desires that they be happy. Consider those who disregard God’s hatred of divorce, reasoning that he will sympathize with their unfaithfulness and subsequent adultery because he wants them to be happy. Others excuse their own more respectable sins—bitterness, discontent, impatience, etc.—assuming that God will dismiss their damnable self-idolatry because he is sorry they are unhappy.

Dear Christian, do you find the source of your happiness in your situation, or in the knowledge that you belong to your sovereign heavenly Father, the holy God who desires your holiness far more than your earthly happiness? Happy is the people whose God is Jehovah!

Sing or pray Psalter #399.

An Unsearchable Greatness

Like Psalms 25 and 34, in the original text Psalm 145 is an alphabetical acrostic. The first word of verse one begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and the first words of the following verses begin with the remaining letters of the Hebrew alphabet in sequence. This style of poetry likely aided God’s people in memorization, but it also suggested a totality of the treatment of its subject, similar to our expression “from A to Z.” Jesus employs that idiom using the first and last words of the Greek alphabet, “Alpha” and “Omega,” meaning that he is not only the first and the last, but everything in between as well! Interestingly, one letter of the Hebrew alphabet—the letter “nun”—is absent from Psalm 145. Perhaps that verse was lost in translation. More likely David intentionally excluded it to suggest the infinite, incomprehensible glory of God. “His greatness is unsearchable” (v. 3b).

Though we will never be able to wrap our minds around Jehovah’s glory, we do not shrink back from studying him as he’s revealed himself in the scriptures. Christian faith requires “a certain knowledge;” repudiates willing ignorance; engages the renewed mind.

Sing or pray Psalter #394.
A Limited All
Read Psalm 145
Psalm 145:9 reads, “The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.” Does that verse teach that God dispenses grace on both the elect and reprobate? No, not when it is considered in its context. Jehovah is the one who feeds every living thing. He is indeed “a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness” (Jonah 4:2). But he is also “righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works” (v. 17), near only “to all that call upon him in truth” (v. 18), and the one who preserves only “all them that love him; but all the wicked will he destroy” (v. 20).

Does your mouth speak the praise of that incomparably great God? Do you look forward to the day when, willingly or unwillingly, all flesh will bless his holy name? The apostle John relates a vision of that great day in Rev. 5:13: “And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”

A Grand Finale
Read Psalm 146
Each of the books of Psalms ends with a doxology. Consider the final verse of Book One: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen” (Ps. 41:13). Psalm 72:18-19 concludes Book Two: “Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name forever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen.” Psalms 146 to 150 are the doxology, the grand finale that concludes not only Book 5, but the entire book of Psalms. There are no laments here. No cries for help. Just a sustained “Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah!”

Christmas is coming. Is your calendar jam-packed? Are you wrestling with the “holiday blues”? May our meditations on the grand finale to the Book of Psalms move you to praise the covenant God who kept his word and sent his only begotten Son.

The praise to which the psalmist calls us is both corporate—“ye” in the KJV denotes a plural “you”—and personal: “Praise the Lord, O my soul” (Ps. 146:1b). It is praise that demands one’s entire being, in every situation, for a lifetime.

A Jerusalem Celebration
Read Psalm 147
Psalm 147 is addressed to a specific group of people: the saints in Israel, who are referred to twice as “Jerusalem.” They are Jehovah’s chosen nation, the beneficiaries of his great power, infinite understanding, abundant provision, and transforming word. It is their city that he builds up, and their nation that he encircles with peace. He gathers their outcasts together and blesses their children. Among all the peoples of the earth, we who are God’s people are the only group referred to as “Jerusalem.”

Is it Christmas Day! The stores have been dressed in holiday style for months already, and much of the world will do their best to make merry today. But among all the people of the earth, we who are God’s people are the only ones who have reason to sing praises unto Jehovah with thanksgiving.
ones who have reason to celebrate today. The Word of God was made flesh and dwelt among us. Do you believe in him? Christmas is a Jerusalem celebration. Praise ye the Lord (Ps. 147:20c).

Sing or pray Psalter #403.

A Transforming Word
Read Psalm 147

Psalm 147 contains three calls to praise Jehovah. These appeals, which are found in verses 1, 7, and 12, divide the psalm into three sections. After each call to praise, the psalmist focuses on one or more of God’s attributes as they come to expression in creation and in his people. First the psalmist observes Jehovah’s great power and infinite understanding. He calls the stars by their names. How can we doubt that he is powerful enough to gather together the outcasts of the church, heal the broken-hearted, lift up the meek, and cast down the wicked? After the second call to praise, the psalmist describes God’s gracious and sustaining provision for his creation. Do not doubt that he will provide you with all things necessary for body and soul, also, but remember that it is not your physical strength that delights him. He takes pleasure in those who fear him. In the third section the psalmist focuses on the efficacious word of God. God’s word sends the snow and hail, and it is also the transforming power that melts them. That powerful word he entrusted to Israel, his church. What kind of transformation has (and does) his word work in you?

Sing or pray Psalter #402.

The All and the Alone
Read Psalm 148

Psalm 148 is a systematic, all-encompassing call to all things created to praise Jehovah. The psalmist systematically enjoins different groups in the creation to praise, beginning in the heights with the angels and then working his way down to the sun and moon, all the stars, the earth’s atmosphere, and the clouds. Then the psalmist descends to the lowest parts of the earth and works his way up. He addresses the mythical dragons and the creatures that dwell in the depths of the sea, then the so-called “elements of nature”—fire, hail, snow, mist, and stormy winds—followed by the mountains and hills and then the living things that populate them—plants, animals, and birds—before turning to address the king of God’s creation: man. No people group escapes his attention, regardless of their age, sex, or social status. All are called to praise Jehovah. Why? Because “his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven.”

Do you reserve all your praise for the one who alone is God?

Sing or pray Psalter #404.

His
Read Psalm 148

In Psalm 50:10–12, the Almighty God declares, “For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof.” Although all created things belong to Jehovah, the psalmist reserves the possessive pronoun “his” for only two of the created groups addressed in Psalm 148. He refers to “his angels” and “his hosts” in verse two, and he writes of “his saints” in verse 14. These two groups belong to Jehovah in a special way. They are moral, rational beings. The angels are those who “do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word” (Ps. 103:20), and his saints, the people who are near him, are those in whom he works “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

What a wonder that the righteous and holy God of heaven and earth calls us his.

Sing or pray Psalter #405.

A Bed…
Read Psalm 149

Rest is an important, recurring theme throughout scripture. God set aside a day of rest at the end of the very first week. The Israelites longed to enter Canaan, the land of rest. The physical rest that our bodies need and the land of Canaan typified the spiritual rest that is to be found only in our Savior. To all who labor and are heavy laden, Jesus cries, “Come unto me…and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt. 11:28–29). In his full and free salvation we repose, ceasing from our own works and resting in his steadfast love.

Psalm 149 begins again with “Hallelujah!” The Psalmist enjoins Israel to rejoice in their Maker and King, praising him with music and dance. Why? “For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation” (v. 4). The knowledge of their salvation gives Jehovah’s saints cause to celebrate, even when they are lying on their beds (v. 5). It’s noteworthy that these saints are resting, but they’re not asleep: they’re singing at the top of their lungs. Similarly, the glorious salvation rest that we’ve been given doesn’t mean inactivity: it drives us to praise.

Sing or pray Psalter #408.

...and a Sword
Read Psalm 149

Psalm 149:5 contains the striking image that we considered yesterday, that of saints singing aloud on their beds. That their salvation rest is not one of ease is further demonstrated in the following verse: not only are they singing as they
rest, they have a sword in their hand! This deadly sword is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17), “the word of God” (Heb. 4:12). And it is to be used to execute vengeance, to bind kings, and to execute the judgment written.

Who has the honor of wielding this sword? “All his saints.” So the gospel is brandished by the church, leaving Jehovah’s enemies without excuse and conquering his saints from every tribe and tongue, taking them captive to Christ, and making them citizens of Israel. So you and I have the privilege of turning that blade on our own hearts day-by-day. “With this two-edged sword believers fight against their own corruptions, and, through the grace of God, subdue and mortify them; the sin that had dominion over them is crucified; self, that once sat king, is bound with chains and brought into subjection to the yoke of Christ” (Matthew Henry).

Sing or pray Psalter #407.

December 31

A Hallelujah Chorus
Read Psalm 150

If you have ever attended a live performance of Handel’s Messiah, perhaps you were startled when, three-fourths of the way through the concert, the entire audience suddenly stood for the “Hallelujah” chorus. Legend has it that at the oratorio’s London premiere, King George II became so excited during the “Hallelujah” chorus that he leapt to his feet. Out of respect for the king, the entire audience followed suit, and from that time on, it became tradition for all to stand during that climatic piece.

The grand finale of Psalms climaxes in Psalm 150. Seventeen times in six verses the psalmist sounds this note: “Hallelujah!” He calls on “all his works in all places of his dominion” to praise Jehovah (Ps. 103:22). Nor is it enough that a solo instrument be employed in this endeavor: the psalmist conducts an entire orchestra in a symphony of praise to God, and he calls on all that breathe to join the chorus. Indeed, it’s hard to read (or sing) this psalm without leaping to one’s feet. Yet at its conclusion lingers the recognition that everything that breathe does not praise Jehovah and the yearning for the day when the Messiah returns and that prayer becomes reality. (See Rev. 5:11–14.)

Sing or pray Psalter #409.

Dear Daily Press readers,

The end of 2016 marks the end of our devotional study of Psalms. As the year 2017 begins, we commence a chronological devotional study of the entire Bible. Not all of the Bible is arranged in historical order. As one would expect with such an ancient, lengthy, and detailed book, there are differences among approaches to organizing its text in historical sequence. In The Reese Chronological Bible Dr. Edward Reese painstakingly arranges the Bible not just chapter by chapter, but sometimes even verse by verse. Certain portions of scripture he places according to the estimated date of their composition. In order to simplify our reading and writing schedule and to maintain momentum in our study, we plan to assign one chapter of scripture per day, following a chronological list from www.blueletterbible.org with a few changes made after referring Dr. Reese’s chronological Bible. We recognize that some chapters of the Bible are much longer than others and may require more time to read aloud than is suitable for family devotions where there are young children present, for example. In those cases, please feel free to read only a portion of the chapter or to divide the reading material between multiple devotional sessions. Nor will we writers be able to cover all the material in a chapter in a brief mediation. Each devotional will either act as a summary of the assigned chapter or focus on one event, theme, or person found therein.

Why a chronological study? In “Skip’s Farewell,” printed in the December 2014 issue of Beacon Lights, Mr. Chester Hunter, who wrote the devotional column for this magazine for more than 20 years, suggested that a future writer consider a chronological approach to the Bible. Since it can be helpful to study the scriptures in their historical context, Mr. Laning and I have decided to follow his advice. We pray that our study of the Bible in chronological sequence will prove edifying and interesting to us and to our readers.

Sarah Mowery

January 1

A Very Good Place to Start
Read Genesis 1

The Christian faith begins before the beginning. In the beginning, God. The triune Almighty God was there in the beginning. He commanded, and the world was created (Ps. 148:5). He spoke, and it was done (Ps. 33:9). First he called into existence a watery chaos, and then he ordered that chaos into a beautiful world in which plants, animals, and man could thrive. What was his evaluation of his creation? “Very good!”

The Reese Chronological Bible inserts Isaiah 14:12–17 and Ezekiel 28:13–18, which poetically recount Satan’s fall, after Genesis 1:1. We know that God created the angels very early, because scripture tells us that when the heavenly hosts observed God creating, they shouted for joy (Job 38:7). In his book The City of God, Augustine suggests that God’s creation of light on the first day might refer metaphorically to his creation of the angels. He reasons this because while Genesis 1:3 records God’s creation of light and Genesis 1:4 notes that God called the light good, never does the passage say that God created the darkness, nor does he call it good. He only separates the darkness from the light. Whatever the case, already at the very beginning, a shadow stretches over God’s good creation.

Sing or pray Psalter #288.
A God-Ordained Institution

January 2

Read Genesis 2

Genesis 2 returns to the creation of man, describing it in more detail, and teaches that marriage is a creation ordinance. I recently read of a man who proposed to his girlfriend by asking her if she would live with him in an institution. That’s certainly an unconventional proposal, but it’s not unbiblical! Marriage is a God-ordained institution, a law that is as basic to human morality as the law of gravity is to our physical existence. God himself determined the clear boundaries of this institution. A man and woman enter it when they make their marriage vows, and there they remain until one of them dies. Within marriage, the sexual relationship is “safe and fruitful.” Without that institution, sexual activity is “dangerous and destructive” (Ash, Married for God).

Why did God institute marriage? It’s commonly presumed that he did so because Adam was lonely. The Bible doesn’t say that Adam was lonely, however. It says that he was alone and that he needed a helper. God created man to be fruitful and to rule over his creation. Adam wasn’t capable of fulfilling that high calling by himself: he needed a woman to help him. In short, God didn’t create marriage to meet our needs. God instituted marriage so that man—male and female—could better serve him.

Nakedness and Shame

January 3

Read Genesis 3

The Bible never beats around the bush. Already its second chapter ends with a sentence that can trigger smirks around the supper table: “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” Nakedness indicates vulnerability. Adam and Eve were created without sin: they had nothing to hide from one another or from God. But as soon as they fell into sin, their nakedness became a cause for shame: there was much that they desired to hide from one another and from God. That doesn’t seem to be the case with many in our world today, does it? In fact, the word “naked” is rarely used; the euphemism “nude” is preferred. Nudity is nakedness portrayed in an “artful” way with the intent to deceive and manipulate. It is sin stripped of its shame.

Adam and Eve learned that they were unable to cover their nakedness themselves, nor could they hide from God. Nor can we, for “neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). The covering of their shame—and ours—required a blood sacrifice, the bruising of the heel of the promised Seed.

Sing or pray Psalter #142.

Knowing and Taking

January 4

Read Genesis 4

I began yesterday’s meditation by stating that “the Bible never beats around the bush.” Nor does the Bible employ euphemisms, though it might seem as if Genesis 4:1 does exactly that: “And Adam knew Eve his wife…” Perhaps the word “knew” in that context seems prudish or archaic to us. In fact, it’s a beautiful expression for the exclusive, intimate physical relationship that belongs to husband and wife. The Hebrew word translated “knew” in Genesis 4:1 is the same word David uses in Psalm 139 in his attempt to describe the intimate and inexhaustible knowledge that Jehovah has of him. That’s the secure, self-sacrificial context in which God intended sexual relations to take place.

But how quickly fallen man deviated from what God calls good! In Genesis 4:19 we meet the first recorded bigamist, Cain’s vengeful, boastful great-great grandson, Lamech. Lamech didn’t “know” his wives: he “took” them. His relationship with his wives resembled the majority of contemporary sexual relationships; relationships that consist of the self-serving exploitation of another to satisfy one’s own lusts. Such is the sad case when man makes himself god and reserves the right to determine what is good and what is evil.

Sing or pray Psalter #384.

After His Image

January 5

Read Genesis 5

In Genesis 1:26, the triune God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” And so he created man a moral, rational creature, a ruler who resembled the sovereign King, his Father. Strikingly, the backward genealogy in Luke 3 begins with Jesus Christ and ends this way: “Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God” (v. 38). But Adam forfeited his Father’s image when he fell. He wasn’t content to be just an image of the one true God: he desired to be God himself. Sadly, he remained only an image, but now the image he bore was that of the devil (John 8:44). Instead of calling order out of chaos as God had done, his rule would create more chaos. Man was called to be fruitful and multiply: he proliferated wickedness and filled the earth with violence.

God restores his image in all those who are elect in Jesus Christ, “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person” (Heb. 1:3). They are his children, in whom his Spirit dwells, bringing forth fruits meet for repentance.

Sing or pray Psalter #243:1,2,5,6 and 15.
Godlessness and Grace

Read Genesis 6

The history of the human race from Genesis 3 through Genesis 6 is an increasingly downward spiral. The blurring of the antithesis between the seed of woman, “the sons of God,” and the seed of the serpent, “the daughters of men,” leads to God’s assessment of mankind in Genesis 6:5, “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Though he is longsuffering (1 Pet. 3:20), he determined to destroy mankind “with the earth.” (Gen. 6:7 and 13). But—and thank God, there is a “but”—“Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (v. 8).

This grace that Noah found when he looked into the eyes of Jehovah came not on account of any works of righteousness that he had done; it was the fruit of Jehovah’s saving mercy. God saved Noah by the flood, a picture of the washing of regeneration, “which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” We, with Noah, are “justified by his grace,” and “made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:6–7). Praise him!

Sing or pray Psalter #211.

The Fire Next Time

Read Genesis 7

Of all the stories in the Bible, perhaps none is subject to as much ridicule and unbelief as the story of Noah’s ark and the great flood. That’s ironic, because there’s more at stake than the factualness of the biblical account of Noah. The story of the flood encapsulates the entire gospel. The ark was Noah’s only hope for salvation. God commanded him, “Come thou and all thy house into the ark.” Similarly, the gospel calls men to their only hope for salvation: Jesus Christ. There was nothing in Noah himself that made him worthy of this gracious salvation. Soon we’ll see him, this second Adam, in a garden and then naked and ashamed. But God made a covenant with him that he would not break. Noah stepped into the ark, and God closed the door.

Jesus said that the days before his second coming in judgment would be like the days in which Noah lived. Unbelieving men and women will eat and drink and marry and mock at their only hope of salvation. To them comes this warning: “God gave Noah the rainbow sign: no more water, the fire next time” (James Baldwin).

Sing or pray Psalter #76.

This article was originally published in the December 1961 issue.

At no other time of the year does the behavior of the American people as closely approach insanity as at Christmas. One glance at a red-colored date, five sixths of the way through the December calendar, and an entire nation lurches into incredible activity. Like the fabled hordes of the Ghengis Khan, its people descend upon welcoming stores. Every available mail pouch bulges with every kind of greeting card. Forests of evergreens disappear overnight. There is a spontaneous generation of several million red-coated, white-bearded imbeciles who roam street and store for weeks, with no other function than a periodic bellow of inane and un-nerving laughter. The people eat and people drink—furiously. They laugh and they talk—with a vengeance. They are incomparably, indescribably, unimaginably, and absolutely violently happy.

When the child of God disentangles himself from this rampaging madness, he ponders a sober “Why?” Who or what can be responsible for this universal fervor? Approaching a typical specimen on the Eve of Christmas, he may ask, “Sir, what does all this hubbub mean?” To which question comes the quick and hearty reply, “Why man, it’s Christmas. You know, Dicken’s A Christmas Carol and that sort of thing. ‘Tis the season to be jolly.” And just before the festive soul goes fah-la-lahing unsteadily down the boulevard, comes the consummation, “Jesus was born.” Ah yes, Jesus was born. But it’s hardly the answer one expected. Is that the foundation upon which this monstrous tower of December-babble is built? Upon the birth of Jesus?

The child of God needs no special brilliance to realize what the ungodly merry-makers understand by the “birth of Jesus.” A little baby lies in a manger. Several well rubbed, golden Guernseys moo contently over him. A beaming mother nestles
When I moved into Sunset Village, I had to part with so many “goodies” that I no longer would have room for in my small room. That included many memories like the things you are asking for, but I’ll give you a few things that I recall.

My earliest position with Beacon Lights was Assistant Business Manager. Winnie De Vries (later Zandstra) was Business Manager. Every month we would go to Doorn Printing Co. on Eastern Avenue where Beacon Lights was printed. We had to make new addressograph plates for subscribers whose addresses had changed. This often included some for the boys (young men) in service. I took care of the people living in Grand Rapids and Winnie did those from the churches outside of the Grand Rapids area.

Later (I assume it was after Winnie married) I became Business Manager, taking care of subscriptions. Next I wrote a news column and an occasional fill-in elsewhere. The news included births, obituaries, entering the military service and their homecoming, and weddings. Much later I did proof-readings. Later still (recently) I gave one of my poetry books to the Beacon Lights editor to be used as fill-ins at his discretion.

That covers as much as I recall.

Best wishes with your project!

Thelma Westra is a mother in Israel and a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.
The Quest of the Magi
(Matt. 2:1–11)

This poem was originally published in the December 1970 issue.

Upon this scene did come one day
A caravan from far away,
Their trappings rich were wrought with gold
A splendor glorious to behold.

They came from eastern land afar
Compelled by God, led by a star.
These learned men and lustrous sages
Had studied long from history’s pages.

The heavens and all its starry frame
Proclaimed aloud God’s glorious name
But of God’s gracious saving love
They did not read in the heavens above.

Nay! History’s pages did declare
Of all his tender love and care
His mighty power and glorious worth
Was lauded far throughout the earth.

A compassionate God his people saves
While they are laboring as slaves
With mighty power he overthrows
A wicked Pharaoh and all their foes.

With cloudy pillar he led by day
His people safely on the way
And with a fiery pillar of light
He led them through the darkest night.

Sihon, the Amorite king they slew
And Og, the king of Bashan, too
Jordan’s waters stood as a wall
And Jericho’s walls did crumble and fall.

Thus they were led to the promised land
In infinite love, by God’s own hand.
For God is not a man; he repenteth not.
And it was said of Israel; what hath God wrought?
Yeal! When the enemy endeavored to curse
God caused the enchanter to utter this verse
In Jacob I behold not iniquity
Nor perverseness in Israel I see.

In exultation they shall sing
For among them is the shout of a King
Yeal! A star in Jacob shall appear
And a scepter rule both far and near.

And now, the Magi have come to bring
Homage to Israel’s newborn King.
For God mysteriously did impart
Salvation’s message to their heart.

They quest from busy passers-by
Where is he born? Thy King most high?
In eastern sky we have seen his star
And have come to worship and adore.

But! All Jerusalem is troubled at their quest
And Herod is shaken, and sore distressed.
He urgently demands from chief priest and scribe
Where must Christ be born! Of royal tribe?

And they answered and said unto him
In the land of Judea, in Bethlehem.
For thus it was written of David’s town
Thou art Bethlehem Judah of great renown.

Thou art not least, for from thee shall come forth
A might governor by glorious worth.
He shall rule o’er my people Israel
As long ago the prophets did foretell.

Then Herod bade the wisemen come
To commune in private, in his home.
Diligently he enquired about the star
What time it appeared in land afar.

Then craftily saying, “Go search for him
In the land of Judea in Bethlehem
And when ye have found him, let me know
That I may come and worship also.”

The wise men are puzzled and sad at heart
When they from the palace did depart.
Jerusalem’s indifference seems strange indeed
Why has hope faded for the promised seed?

The shadows have fallen, night is at hand
Sending darkness and gloom o’er all the land
The day is now spent; their quest unfulfilled
Their thoughts are confused; their voices are stilled.

When lo! The star of the east so bright
Shedding its rays of wondrous light
Doth go before them, leading them on
To where the child was; The promised one.

Their joy is unbounded. Their faith is restored
Their hearts leap up in praise to the Lord
They hasten their step, till they come to the place
Where they had been led by the God of all grace.

They entered and saw the young little child
And Mary his mother, so meek and so mild.
They bowed down before him and worshipped him there
Presenting their gifts so rich and so rare.

Gold and frankincense and myrrh
Precious treasures from bounteous store
With humble hearts they have come to adore
The King of kings; Who reigns evermore.

O! Gentile Christian, do you understand?
These noble men from far off land
Were your substitutes of worth
Representing you at Jesus’ birth.

They are the first fruits of the Gentile world
God’s gospel banner stands unfurled
He elects from all nations, peoples and race
Choosing as his own, in boundless grace.

Come kneel down before him and worship him now
In holy adoration, in lowliness bow
To Jesus our Saviour, our Lord and our King
In grateful acclaim his praises sing.
The church of our Lord Jesus Christ rejoices that her Head and Redeemer was born as a babe in Bethlehem almost two thousand years ago. On December 25? In the year 1 A.D.? It seems that neither the month nor the year is correct. The few historical facts recorded in the gospels gave scholars little to go on. In the sixth century a learned monk designated the year 754 after the founding of Rome as the year of Christ’s birth and marked it as 1 A.D. on his new Christian calendar. Later investigations found that this placed the death of Herod the Great in the year 4 B.C. and the young child Jesus was residing in Egypt with his parents at that time. But the erroneous dating was too difficult to correct.

While most early Christians believed that it was on the 25th day of the month that Christ was born, the exact month was uncertain. The early church did not appear to have much interest in the date of Christ’s birth; the fact of His birth was the important thing and still is. The attention of the early church was particularly focused on Christ’s coming again to judge the quick and the dead—a natural reaction to the severe persecutions the church was undergoing. In fact, in 245 A.D., Origen, probably in protest of existing pagan festivities, declared it to be sinful to even think of keeping Christ’s birthday. It was not until controversies arose regarding the divine nature of the Saviour that greater interest in the circumstances of his birth emerged. A more dominant position was also given at this time to Mary, the mother of Jesus. In 350 A.D., Julius I, Bishop of Rome, set December 25 as the specific date for observing the birthday of Christ. Many and varied were the celebrations already being observed at this time of the year. Perhaps the Romish church desired to turn the attention of its newly “converted” members from such pagan festivals as the celebration of the winter solstice or the lavish Roman Saturnalia to a holiday that had sacred significance.

The church made many attempts to maintain this as a purely spiritual festival concentrated upon the mystery of the Incarnation. But it was not long before the pagan concomitants had become an integral part of Christmas festivities. Fires, lighted candles, the use of greenery for decoration, the burning of the Yule log and the exchanging of gifts were some of these secular elements.

Among primitive people sun worship was common. The Persians also showed reverence for the sun and at the time of the winter solstice would kindle great fires in homage to Mithras, the deity of light. One of several church fathers who warned against the use of the symbols of sun worship was St. Augustine. Later, the Romish church invested these symbols with religious significance hoping to direct their use to higher purposes. Certainly the church was correct in its interpretation of natural phenomena being symbolic of things spiritual, such as the material sun being a type of the Sun of Righteousness who was also that true Light that came to lighten the Gentiles. But when the heathen perceived, through the things that were made, the invisible things of Almighty God, “they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator...” (Rom. 1:25). Giving sacred significance to pagan symbols does not sanctify the symbols.

The use of greenery in the home was intended for more than decoration by pagan people. They revered natural phenomena and evergreens in particular were regarded as an emblem of immortality by northern tribes. By bringing greenery into their homes, these superstitious people hoped the magic power evidenced in the fact that the greens did not die during the freezing winters would prevent death from striking them also.

The most common of many legends concerning the origin of the fir tree as a symbol of Christmas...
centers on St. Boniface. This English missionary is reputed to have rescued a young prince from the hands of the Druids who were accustomed to offering human sacrifices to their god at the sacred oak. Boniface cut down the oak and in its place a small fir sprang up. After telling the people the story of Christ’s coming to earth, Boniface asked them to take the fir tree into their homes and to celebrate the birthday of the Christ. It is claimed that the German people were also the first to use lighted and decorated trees. A story, not authenticated, is told of Martin Luther’s decorating a fir tree one Christmas Eve with candles to illustrate the beauty of the starry sky. But years before, the Romans, in their riotous celebration of the Saturnalia—a festival which honored the ancient Roman god of agriculture—trimmed trees with trinkets and toys and sometimes candles. The Saturnalia was also an occasion for elaborate decoration of homes, temples and statues of gods and goddesses with green boughs, garlands and flowers. The practice of giving and exchanging presents was almost as common then as it is now at Christmas time.

Manger or crèche scenes have become both popular and competitive today. It originated with St. Francis of Assisi in 1223 A.D., who is also supposed to have been the first to popularize carols. Singing of Christmas carols was one of many things discouraged by the Calvinists who preferred instead the metrical psalms. Puritans in England and America did not allow Christmas caroling at all. In fact any special celebration of Christ’s birth or of his death was forbidden by them. According to a Roman Catholic author, Francis X. Weiser, when Christmas celebration was restored with the return of the monarchy in England, it was a new kind of “Christmas without Christ. The old traditions of religious observances disappeared, leaving only a worldly shallow feast of amusement and reveling”. And he could easily have added: “at which Santa Claus is the feted guest.”

To the church of God this imaginary character represents one of the most repugnant aspects of a worldly observance of a “holy” day. There was a real St. Nicholas, an early Christian bishop who lived in an ancient town in Asia Minor and who was noted for his generosity to the poor and to the children. Stories of him were carried by Dutch seamen to Holland and as a result, December 6 was designated as gift day for the children in his honor. No doubt, the early Dutch settlers of New York took with them this tradition. But the Santa Claus of today bears no resemblance to this ancient bishop. The poem of Dr. C. C. Moore probably had much to do with this transformation. Certainly the church does not fear the supplanting of Christ as the central figure of Christmas by Santa Claus. And the world never did and never can celebrate Christ’s Day anyway.

The church of Christ rejoices in the birth of the Saviour every day of the year, but it is good to have one special day set aside in which the church comes together to commemorate this wonderful fact. How easy it is to be swept along with the rushing world into a shallow observance—to allow oneself to become beguiled by a superficial joy which is intensified by all the outward trivia that seems to be part of the whole “Christmas season.” And then suddenly everything palls and we are glad that Christmas will soon be over. For a deep and lasting joy, for a proper celebration of Christmas, it is necessary to separate oneself from all that is not truly God-glorifying in this season. Take time to read and meditate, alone and within the family, on “The Mystery of Bethlehem.”

A Cloud of Witnesses

Rev. Erik Guichelaar

The Life of John Huss

Introduction

Ever since the time of the Protestant Reformation there has been a saying that goes something like this: “The doctrine of election stands at the very heart of the church.” Maybe you have heard your own minister say that from off the pulpit, or in the catechism room: “The doctrine of election stands at the very heart of what the church is.” What that say-
ing simply means is this: to know what the church is, one needs to know and embrace what the biblical doctrine of election is. If a person does not know the biblical truth of election, he really does not and cannot know what the church is.

The reason that the doctrine of election stands at the heart of the church is this: it is God’s decree of election that governs who the members of the church are. Those whom God chose (elected) in eternity to be his own people are the true members of the church of Jesus Christ. In fact, God elected them as his people exactly so that they might be members in the church. If you and I are the elect children of God, then by virtue of that very election, we are members of the church of Jesus Christ. This is an absolute, unconditional truth. Membership in the body of Jesus Christ is not based on any of your own works or decisions; it is not based on the approval and consent of other men; it is not based on the specific institution where you currently have your church membership. If you are an elect child of God, chosen in grace, then you are a member of the body of Jesus Christ, the church. If you are not an elect child of God, chosen in grace, you are a reprobate, and you are not a member of the body of Jesus Christ.

Now you might read that, and say, “Yes. That makes sense.” Maybe you say, “That is nothing new.” Maybe you even say, “I thought this article was about John Huss.”

But imagine for a moment, young people, that you never knew these things, that you were never taught these things. Imagine that instead of being taught these things, you were taught that you were saved based on your own actions and your own decisions. Imagine that they taught that you were saved based on your church allegiance, and that if and only if you were a member of a certain, specific church here on earth, could you also be a member of the church in heaven. And imagine that nearly everyone around you believed this kind of lie, so that nearly everyone around you made sure to belong to that one instituted church that was teaching all these things, and thought they were saved because of it. And imagine that you yourself happened to be a member of that church as well.

But now imagine that as you studied the scriptures for yourself, you became aware of how wrong all this was, and you came to a proper understanding of election. And imagine that you were a minister, and so you started to preach that it is God’s decree of election alone that governs membership in the true church of Jesus Christ (just as our ministers do today). And then imagine that as you started to preach these things, others in the church started to persecute you: they labeled you as a heretic, they excommunicated you, and you were forced to go into hiding. And then imagine that eventually you were taken, and you were tied to a stake, set on fire, and burned to death. Ultimately, because you were teaching from the scriptures that eternal salvation is rooted in divine election, and not based on works or on membership in a particular church institute.

Now you might read that and say, “That is a lot to imagine!” And maybe you are still saying, “I thought this article was about John Huss.” Well, what I have just asked you to imagine is exactly the story of John Huss, and what Huss experienced in his life as a member in the Roman Catholic Church.

John Huss was a pre-reformer. He was one whom God used in a very powerful way to prepare the way for the Protestant Reformation. What we enjoy today in the preaching and in catechism instruction, what we enjoy as our Reformed heritage (what we sometimes take for granted), we enjoy, because God raised up men like John Huss and many others to rediscover the truths of the gospel, to preach those truths to God’s people in the face of fierce persecution, and even to suffer and die so that those truths might not be denied, but be spread throughout the world, even until today.

**Huss’ Life**

John Huss was born into a peasant’s family around 1369 in Husinec, Bohemia, (which is now part of present-day Czech Republic), and was burned at the stake by the Roman Catholic Church in 1415. During Huss’ entire lifetime, the Roman Catholic Church was overrun with corruption and gross immorality. Many priests did not know how to read. Even more priests had no care for studying the Bible. But even more priests had no care for sound preaching or faithful catechism instruction. What they all did seem to have a care for was money and the earthly, sensual pleasures that money could afford. This was the kind of corrupt church that John Huss grew up in, and in which Huss eventually became a priest in 1401.

Although Huss became a priest in the corrupt Roman Catholic Church, it quickly became clear that John Huss was no normal, corrupt priest. Instead of having a love for money, Huss had a love for the
Gospel. Instead of having a love for sinful pleasure, Huss had a love for holy living. And what began to characterize John Huss above all things was a love for the preaching. While the preaching in Huss’ day was either non-existent or thoroughly unbiblical, Huss stood out as an outstanding and passionate preacher. He was a preacher who studied the scriptures, who preached the scriptures, and who applied the scriptures to his congregation. He viewed the scriptures as the inspired, infallible word of God, and as the supreme authority for doctrine and for life. He preached the scriptures accordingly, and his congregation loved him for it.

But not surprisingly, this is exactly where John Huss came into trouble with the Roman Catholic Church, for almost as soon as Huss became a priest and began preaching to the people, he started to preach against the gross sins that characterized the other priests around him. As Huss also carried out his work as a lecturer at the university in Prague, he began to study the writings of the English pre-reformer John Wycliffe. Through studying Wycliffe, Huss began to see not only the wicked lifestyles of the clergy, but also the thoroughly false doctrine that characterized the Roman Catholic Church. And so Huss started to preach against false doctrine as well. He started to preach against indulgences, he started to preach that the pope was not infallible (only the scriptures were, he said), and he started to preach more and more about the glorious truth of predestination and election. The saints in Prague loved him for it, but the Roman Catholic Church hated him for it.

Soon Huss became a marked man. In 1407, John Huss was ordered to stop preaching against the sinful lifestyles of the other priests. In 1410 Huss’ church was forced to close down. Soon enough Huss was excommunicated and became a hunted man. From 1412–1414, Huss went into exile, hiding in castles, translating portions of the Bible into the vernacular Czech language, and writing his most important work, “On the Church.” In 1414, the Roman Catholic Church summoned the Council of Constance and invited Huss to come to the meeting, promising him a safe passage back to his hometown after the meeting was done. Huss decided to go to the Council, thinking he needed to show his fellow Christians and church members that he was not ashamed of the gospel and was ready to give a defense of the truth. But soon after his arrival, the promise of a safe return home was broken, and Huss was thrown into an utterly filthy prison. After five months, Huss was taken out of prison and asked if he would recant. He said he would only recant if he was shown that his teachings were not biblical. The Roman Catholic Church was furious with Huss, and after four more weeks in prison, Huss was burned at the stake.

**Huss’ Significance**

When we look at how the Roman Catholic Church treated Huss, we might ask why the Roman Catholic Church hated John Huss so much and went so far as to burn him at the stake. If all John Huss preached was the scriptures, the need to live holy lives before God, the glorious truth of predestination and election, and other such things, then why put the man to death?

This is where we must see John Huss as truly a pre-reformer. What John Huss emphasized was this: the scriptures alone are the supreme rule of faith and conduct. That kind of thinking attacked the very foundation of the Roman Catholic Church, for what the Roman Catholic Church was doing (and still does) was this: it was elevating the sayings of men (the church institute) above the scriptures. What the Roman Catholic Church was saying (and still says) was this: “In order to go to heaven, you need to go through the Roman Catholic Church institute. If you are not in good standing with the Roman Catholic Church, then you cannot be saved. But if you are a member of the Roman Catholic Church, in good standing with the church hierarchy, then you are guaranteed to go to heaven. The church saves you. What John Huss showed was this: it is not an instituted church here on earth that decides or determines your salvation and eternal life, but it is just the opposite: it is God’s decree of election unto salvation that governs the church and the members of the true church. As Huss emphasized, true and faithful instituted churches on earth need to recognize this and preach this as the plain teaching of the scriptures.

But you see, this means that it is God that saves, and not the Roman Catholic instituted church. This means that it is God who saves, and not the pope or priests or an instituted church. That kind of thinking threatened the complete control that the Roman Catholic Church had over its members, who for fear of their eternal salvation were obeying and believing everything that the Roman Catholic Church was telling them without comparing it with the scriptures.
The Roman Catholic Church could not tolerate giving up any control it had over the people. So Huss, even though all he was teaching was the scriptures, had to be put away and put to death.

Over a hundred years before the Protestant Reformation even began, John Huss was preaching loudly and clearly, “The doctrine of election stands at the very heart of the church. Election governs the church.” By God’s grace, that continues to be sounded forth across Reformed pulpits today. Thanks be to God if we hear that preaching in our churches. It needs to be that way, for this is how God saves: through faithful churches that faithfully preach the truth of what the church actually is—“the company of the predestinated.”

Rev. Guichelaar is pastor of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

**Church News**

**BAPTISMS**

“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Mark 10:14

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

- Honora Jayal, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Randy & Jenny Scott—Byron Center, MI
- Lincoln James, son of Mr. & Mrs. AJ Steigenga—Byron Center, MI
- Hayden Melanie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tyler & Laura Langerak—Byron Center, MI
- Coen Alan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brandon Huisenga—Crete, IL
- Evelyn Jordyn and Adalyn Jaryn, twin daughters of Mr. & Mrs. Jared & Sue Dekker—Georgetown, MI
- Marcus Jon, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jared & Dena Dykstra—Georgetown, MI
- Nelle Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Josh & Carrie Meulenberg—Grace, MI
- Jane Noelle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bennett & Sara Meyer—Grace, MI
- Caleb Benjamin, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dan & Kara Gritters—Hudsonville, MI
- Marie Lane, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dan & Annie Langerak—Hudsonville, MI
- Allison Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Rebecca Laning—Loveland, CO
- Victoria Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nate & Valerie DeKok—Lynden, WA
- Theodore Francis, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nick & Erika Vroom—Randolph, WI
- Bethany Alice, daughter of Rev. & Mrs. Erik & Cherith Guichelaar—Randolph, WI
- Jackson Douglas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nick & Sarah Hopkins—Redlands, CA
- Hope Alyse, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Josh & Rachel Feenstra—Redlands, CA
- Lois Faith, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nate & Nicole Price—Southwest, MI
- Joyce Andrew, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron & Erin Gunink—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:

- Jacob Dykstra—Byron Center, MI
- Brook Klammer—Byron Center, MI
- Lynnae Miedema—Byron Center, MI
- Lorraine Smit—Redlands, CA
- Shayna Allison—Redlands, CA

**MARRIAGES**

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

- Mr. Jared Zandstra and Miss Karli Mingerink—Byron Center, MI
- Mr. Benjamin Bartelds and Miss Caitlin Smeda—Byron Center, MI
- Mr. Jared Bosveld and Miss Lydia Koole—Hope, MI
- Mr. Jeff Bouwkamp and Miss Ashley Koole—Hope, MI
- Mr. Matthew Engelsma and Miss Carli Gritters—Hope, MI
- Mr. Ben Soodsma and Miss Heidi Oostra—Randolph, WI
- Mr. Jordan Pipe and Miss Anna Mae Kamps—Southeast, MI
- Mr. Daniel Ophoff and Miss Annie Kuiper—Southwest, MI
After riding his bike, Danny took off his helmet and scratched at his ears. They always itched after rubbing against his bike helmet.

“Did you have fun riding your bike?” his mom asked.

“Yes.” Danny plopped into a chair. “Did Roman helmets rub against their ears?”

“They might have.” His mom opened the library book to the picture of the Roman soldier’s helmet. “Roman helmets had these pieces of metal that protected the sides of the soldiers’ faces. The space over their ears was left open, but sometimes these pieces of metal would partially cover the soldiers’ ears. These pieces of metal would always restrict some of the soldiers’ vision, so he could only look forward and not get distracted by things to the side.”

“Sounds itchy and uncomfortable.” Danny itched at his ears again.

“Probably. But the helmet did its job. It protected the sides of the soldier’s face, but it left the ears open so that the soldier could still hear his captain’s orders. The helmet kept him focused on the battle ahead of him instead of the distractions around him.” His mom hugged him. “The salvation we’ve been given in Christ does the same thing for us. It protects our ears so that we can hear our captain’s orders, but we can’t listen to the world. Our salvation keeps us focused on the battle ahead of us instead of the distractions of the world.”

**Question to Think About:**

1. Read Ephesians 6:17, 2 Samuel 22:36, Isaiah 26:1–4, and Philippians 4:8 by yourself or with your parents. How does our salvation guard and protect our sight and hearing?
2. What are we supposed to focus on? How does salvation help us focus on it?
Save the date!
PRYP Convention 2017

Holding Forth the Word of Life
(Phil 2:15-16)

August 7-11, 2017
Michindoh Conference Center
Hillsdale, Michigan
Hosted by: First PRC of Holland
prccconvention.com