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Editor’s Note  Mark H. Hoeksema

As is our custom, in this issue we are publishing four essays from the annual scholarship contest. This contest is open to those who are pursuing an education directed toward either the ministry or toward teaching. These papers are the ones the committee determined were the best from this year’s submissions. Two are written by those intending to seek the ministry, and two by those pursuing an education degree. The question prompts were as follows:

1. 1 Corinthians 13:13: of the trinity of Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love, the greatest of these is love. How do you intend to live by this and use the principles taught in that chapter in your future calling?

2. The Constitutions of our schools contain the statement that the Bible, the doctrines of which are contained in the three forms of unity, forms the basis for instruction in the school. Give an example of how a Lord’s Day, a single question and answer from a Lord’s Day, or an article from the Belgic Confession or Canons of Dordt could be used in classroom instruction.

*Beacon Lights* hopes that these essays will encourage those who are considering the ministry or teaching in the future.

Enjoy!

Scholarship Essay  Grace Medema

KNOWING GOD IN THE CLASSROOM

Why do we send our children to distinctly Protestant Reformed schools? Why don’t we send them to the public schools just like everyone else and have extra money in our pockets? What is so important about a Reformed education? The answer to all these questions is simple: to know God. As the adopted children of God, we are called to learn about God and to know him and who he is, with the purpose of glorifying him in everything we do.

The knowledge of God is essential—it is “the most practical, most vital, and most important thing in your life and in mine” (Haak, par. 5). When we know God and all his amazing attributes, we are able to praise him and set him as the center of our lives. Lord’s Day 47 of the Heidelberg Catechism explains this in regards to praying the petition “Hallowed be thy name.” We ask God to “grant us, first, rightly to know Thee, and to sanctify, glorify, and praise Thee in all Thy works, in which Thy power, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy, and truth are clearly displayed; and further also, that we may so order and direct our whole lives, our thoughts, words, and actions, that Thy name may never be blasphemed, but rather honored and praised on our account.” Studying God’s works causes us to know who he is more and more, so that we live the whole of our lives elevating the Creator, our Father, above all else.

As a future teacher in our Protestant Reformed Schools, I turn to Article 2 of the Belgic Confession for a guide to remind me how I need to teach God’s precious children all about him. This article sets forth the means by which God is made known unto us, of which there are two: “First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book...Secondly, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word.” God reveals himself to us both in his creation and in his Word. Therefore, by studying that creation and committing the scriptures to heart, we learn about God’s attributes and earnestly desire to praise our God for eternity. This is what I need to teach my students. This is the most important thing for them to learn about. This is what I need the focus of every single lesson to be—to know God.

Using this Belgic Confession article as my guide, one major focus of my classroom will be knowing God through his creation, that most elegant book. God’s creation is known as general revelation: all people can see who God is by observing the wonders of his creation. Romans 1:20 speaks of this
truth plainly: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” Even the reprobate see God’s creatures, know deep down in their hearts that God is the only powerful one, and are left without an excuse not to praise him. Since the creation of the world clearly shows the invisible things of God, my students must be able to see these things and learn to know God through them.

We are able to notice and discuss the Creator in many different subjects in the classroom. The first course that jumps to mind is science, where we study the creation directly. From insects to the human body to volcanoes in the sea, I will have so many opportunities to direct my students’ attention to God’s power, wisdom, and greatness. With this in mind, Psalm 19:1 is a powerful text: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.” It reminds me that when I look at the glimmering stars in the night sky, that very sky is shouting, “Look how great your God is! He has set in place these countless stars, more than you could ever count! Praise your creator!” It is this testament that I must show my students every time we open up the science textbooks, every time we have recess outside. I must ask my students (and myself) continually how each and every part of God’s handiwork shows his majesty and power.

God’s creatures not only include animals and plants, but also time and order. In math class, my students need to understand that God is the one who created time; he is the one who made everything so orderly. In his infinite wisdom, God put everything in order: every time we multiply 5 and 5, it makes 25. All those rules in the math book are not there just because someone figured out how to do this or that—instead, we have been given them by our Father himself to showcase how powerful he truly is. We know some people to be extremely intelligent, but they all look like specks of dust in comparison to the God who planned and designed this whole world that runs according to his will. If my students understand this—that God uses this math class to show them how infinitely great and mighty he is—then they are absolutely finding that precious knowledge of God.

The other main focus of my classroom will be knowing God through his word. Looking back to my high school years of catechism, I remember the very first lesson of the Essentials catechism book we went through.

Lesson 1: The Knowledge of God
1. What is above all things precious?
   
   The knowledge of the true God through Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

2. Why is this knowledge so important?
   
   To know God through Jesus Christ is to have eternal life.

These two questions and answers highlight once again the importance of knowing God. To know God as the God of salvation gives me so much peace, joy, and hope! Because I know God sent his Son to save me from my sins, I know he loves me as his child and I have eternal life in him. This knowledge is essential for every Christian, and so I must strive to teach it to my students as they grow in that knowledge of their God.

God reveals himself specially to his elect through the scriptures—his divine word to us. Those truths of salvation through Jesus Christ thus need to be present in my classroom as well. It is easy for teachers to focus on the academic learning of their students so much that they push the spiritual to the side. But why are we sending our children to our own Protestant Reformed schools? So they can know their God more and more. Therefore, I have to keep myself prepared always to present the word of God as being first and foremost in everything I teach.

I have been taught by my professors to start with making an objective for every lesson that I plan. They say to go to the state standards, pick out which one you want your students to learn, and then build your lesson around that one statement. For me as a future Protestant Reformed teacher, I have to change that around. I must start with God’s word as the center of my every lesson, so that no matter if I am teaching science, or spelling, or art, I must always be teaching my students about God and the wonders he has done. I will not pick out a statement that the state says the students should learn. Instead, I will go to my Bible and use the scriptures as the center of my classroom. It is only through the word that we come to know God as our savior.

Once we see who God is as he reveals himself in his creation and word, we break forth in a most hearty desire to glorify God in all his works. We see his mercy in that he takes pity on us in Christ, forgiving every single one of our sins—even the ones we aren’t aware of! We see his justice as it was satisfied in the death of his Son on the cross. God is so good! What our Father has done for us in his Son
The knowledge of God makes even the heavens of Psalm 19 to pale!

The most important job for a Protestant Reformed teacher is to nurture each student’s desire to know God and to praise him. Public schools will not teach children to see God’s works in creation as revealing the glory of God—they will lean as far away from it as they can. Therefore, I am called as a future teacher to connect God’s work in creation to the attributes of God, one by one. I must urge my students on in the work of knowing their heavenly Father. I need to walk a life of glorifying God in everything I do—because that is what is required of me, but also because I am so grateful to him that all I can do is burst forth in praise! As the teacher, I have to set an example so my students understand what a joy it is to live a life of service to our God.

How often don’t we find students complaining with the work that is set before them? In Psalm 73, Asaph learns contentment with his station in life by knowing God. He was envious of the wicked at the beginning of the psalm: “They have more than heart could wish” (v. 7). However, Asaph finally went to the sanctuary of God, and when he did so, he came to a better knowledge of his God. Then he understood where God was bringing those wicked: “Thou castedst them down into destruction” (v. 18). He learned that God is constantly with him, and this is his conclusion: “There is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (v. 25).

The truths Asaph lays out in Psalm 73 are what makes even the heavens of Psalm 19 to pale!

the knowledge of God means for me and my students. When we truly understand how wise, glorious, powerful, merciful, and just God is, we have peace, contentment, joy, and a desire to praise him for ever and ever. May we press on to know God in the classroom and in every area of life.

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*All Scripture references use the King James Version of the Bible

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Scholarship Essay Ryan Kregel

**REVELATION AND SCIENCE EDUCATION**

Article 2 of the Belgic Confession states that God reveals himself to us by two means. “First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe” and second, “by his holy and divine Word.”1 The truths laid out in Article 2 must permeate the entirety of Christian education. A truly Christian education does not concern itself with trying to prove that God exists; rather, it is more concerned with knowledge of who God is and the application of that knowledge. This knowledge of God comes only from his self-revelation, apart from which we can know nothing about God.2 When we understand what God reveals to us and how he accomplishes that, we are better enabled to understand “what man is. And what children are. And what college students are. And what education should be.”3 Thus, God’s revelation as explained by Article

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1 Belgic Confession, Article 2, in The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 24.


3 Gordon H. Clark, A Christian Philosophy of
2 has everything to do with the aim of Christian education, namely, the development of the covenant child as “the perfect man of God.”

Christian education starts with the premise that God is, and that all true knowledge flows from his revelation in scripture and in creation. This is what the child of God studies. This is what Article 2 teaches. But how is the Christian teacher to integrate the truth of Article 2 into instruction day after day? Bringing God into the curriculum certainly consists of more than mere “tacked on references to God’s greatness, the insertion of one or two Bible passages...[or] the discussion of a religious or moral application at the unit’s conclusion.” Rather, God’s revelation of himself in Scripture and the creation must be as a golden thread that is woven through the entire fabric of the instruction. This must be true for every subject area taught in the Christian school, including the sciences, an area where man has increasingly tried to push God out. The cry today in academia is to keep religion out of science at all costs. But since God is the source of all knowledge, science and religion cannot be separated. “The man who devotes himself to science [and teaching it] cannot split himself into halves and separate his faith from his knowledge.” The Christian teacher then must use his knowledge of science (the investigation of God’s revelation in creation) only in conjunction with the lens of scripture (special revelation).

The first section of Article 2 describes general revelation, God’s revelation of himself in the creation, preservation, and government of the universe. Interestingly, Article 2 describes this revelation of God as “a most elegant book.” What do we do with a book? We read it, we understand it, we learn from it, we remember it, and sometimes, if it is good and profitable, we read it again. In the case of the elegant book of God’s revelation in the creation, we read it over and over in the Christian science classroom. We stand in awe of the works of God in creation. With David we confess, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou has ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him” (Ps. 8:3–4).

...since God is the source of all knowledge, science and religion cannot be separated.

Like any other, this book has chapters. By studying biology we read the chapter on the great design of the Creator in creating and providing for the many different kinds of organisms that inhabit the earth. Studying ecology reveals the many relationships between organisms that the Creator has established, which contribute to the great order seen in the creation. When we study astronomy we are reading the chapter on the vastness of the universe; so immense and seemingly infinite, yet God transcends the finite universe. Geology gives the teacher opportunity to explain the mighty power of God behind the flood when he destroyed the world that then was and provided deliverance for his church. The Christian school teacher explains these chapters to the students continually, pointing to the glory and sovereignty of God. In doing so, the aim of Christian education—the formation of the perfect man of God—is furthered.

This elegant book also has characters; characters that lead us “to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, His eternal power and divinity.” These characters are described as creatures, both great and small. When we see the word “creature,” we often think of things with life: fish, birds, mammals, insects, reptiles, bacteria, and plants. But if we consider the etymology of the word “creature,” it includes much more than just living things. The word “creature” comes from the Latin *creatura*, which means “a created thing.” Living things were not the only things created by God. We confess that all things were created by God; “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible...” (Col. 1:16). Therefore, in addition to plants and animals, the things we

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4 Herman Hoeksema, “Christian Education,” The Standard Bearer 3 (September 1, 1927), 536.
8 Article 2.
normally consider as creatures, we add water, rocks, mountains, planets, and stars. In light of this, if science education in the Christian school is anything, it is a character study—characters that lead students to contemplate the invisible things of God. It is the great responsibility of the Christian science teacher to show these characters to the students, furthering their understanding of God’s eternal power and divinity and also their formation as a perfect man of God.

Article 2’s treatment of general revelation ends with its application to the unbeliever. God reveals himself to unbelieving man in the creation to leave him without excuse in the day of judgment (Rom. 1:20). The teacher points out the judgment that awaits the unbelievers to whom God has shown himself in the creation. Romans 1:18–19 leaves no doubt about this: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.” How much greater judgment lies in store for the one who has heard the faithful preaching of the gospel and has received a Christian education, who then turns his back on the truths he has been shown? Here the opportunity arises for the teacher to encourage the students toward a life of child-like faith and trust in God as the creator. This is part of the aim of covenant education, the formation of the perfect man of God.

Article 2 next states that God “makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word.”9 Why is this included? Peter De Jong clarifies this statement in his commentary on the confession:

Man cannot know God as Creator and Sovereign of the world by means of a strictly scientific investigation of nature, history and human experience... Therefore, special revelation, embodied in Holy Scripture, not merely supplements general revelation... It republishes, corrects and interprets the truths of God revealed in nature. Only by the illumination which Christ’s Spirit bestows can man again know God, the world and himself as he should... Only the Christian, because he has the key of Holy Scripture, can unlock and understand the revelation of God in nature and history.10

Calvin speaks to the importance of scripture alone as the way to an understanding of general revelation.

For as the aged, or those whose sight is defective, when any book, however fair, is set before them, though they perceive that there is something written, are scarcely able to make out two consecutive words, but, when aided by glasses, begin to read distinctly, so Scripture, gathering together the impressions of Deity, which, till then, lay confused in our minds, dissipates the darkness, and shows us the true God clearly.11

The Christian school teacher equips the student with the spectacles of scripture to teach the students how and why God reveals himself in the creation. The Christian school teacher leads the students through the general revelation of God and uses the spectacles of scripture to say, “This God is the one who has revealed himself in creation and this God is the one you must serve.” In this way the Christian school teacher leads the students to Christ day after day, aiming at the goal of covenant education, the formation of the perfect man of God.

Science education in the Christian school draws from both aspects of God’s revelation. This education must not be limited simply to the passing on of a body of knowledge about the natural world to the students. The students can know the creation only in light of the scriptures, and then they will “arrive at the sciences, not ‘Christian sciences,’ but science in its own right.”12 The students must be diligent in their study of the body of scientific knowledge the way that God intended, with the Creator at the forefront. “To be so occupied in the investigation of the secrets of nature, as never to turn the eyes to its Author, is a most perverted study; and to enjoy everything in nature without acknowledging the Author of the benefit, is the basest ingratitude.”13 Christian education concerns itself with the formation of the perfect man of God, which is furthered when the golden thread of God’s revelation in scrip-

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9 Ibid.
10 De Jong, The Church’s Witness to the World, 81.
The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 says that the tongues of men and of angels, gifts of prophecy, understanding into the mysteries of God, all knowledge, faith enough to move mountains, constant care for the poor, selling of possessions, and martyrdom count for nothing if the virtue of charity is not present in him. A Christian man, a minister of the gospel, may have all of these good works abounding, but without love, it is a grand exercise in futility. Along with the apostle, this short treatise will argue that the virtue of love and of charity supersedes all qualities and works that may be exercised by the professing Christian. Moreover, in relation to myself as an aspiring minister of the gospel, this paper will demonstrate how I intend to live by this rule of love as a servant in the church.

Before one can live out charity, he must first understand what charity is. First, with 1 Corinthians 13 in view, it will be necessary to consider the preceding chapters and the historical context of the church of Corinth. Throughout the epistle, the apostle addresses several matters in this consistent pattern: “Now concerning...” (1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1). Indeed, each chapter of 1 Corinthians addresses a different problem that was present in this particular congregation. Early in the epistle, Paul writes, “For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you” (1 Cor. 1:11). Contentions and division are the issue. In light of 1 Corinthians 12, where the apostle addresses spiritual gifts and their various operations within the body of Christ, we understand that Paul is giving a correction and exposing plainly that there are many members in the body with different functions to serve God’s purpose. The gifts that God poured out abundantly upon the Corinthian congregation were being taken advantage of in a negative fashion by the members. Instead of communal edification and charity, factions and individualism were promoted.

What is the answer to such a conflict? The apostle shows us the “more excellent way” in chapter 13, namely, that of love. The noun ἀγάπη (agape) is quite ambiguous and may apply in a variety of situations. Interestingly, the apostle was inspired by the Holy Ghost to employ ἀγάπη rather than φιλαδελφία, which refers directly to brotherly love, that kind of affectionate love that is toward a fellow believer (1 Pet. 1:22). Thus, to understand this Christian virtue more fully, we must have an example. The charity Paul commands is the kind of charity that is directed first towards God because God himself is the example of charity. Without God’s love, 1 Corinthians 13 would not exist. In what chief way did God display his love? God loved a wretched, vile, and sinful world, sending and giving his Son to that world so that those same sinners in the world who believe on him are granted everlasting life as a result of God’s love toward them (Lenski 547). The world to which God gave his Son was filthy and drenched in sinfulness. Did this prevent him from sending his Son who died for the sins of those who believe? No, for if this were the case, the words written by the apostle Paul in Romans 5:8 would not be true, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” And thus, our example of charity is Christ himself, for indeed he possessed the qualities of 1 Corinthians 13 in righteousness, all of which were done and accomplished in love for his people.

Truly, charity is the “first and last word in Christian theology and ethics” (White 1357). This essential virtue is the capstone of the Christian faith. John Calvin, with respect to charity in 1 Corinthians 13 says, “The main truth in the passage is this—that as love is the only rule of our actions, and the only means of regulating the right use of the gifts of God, nothing, in the absence of it, is approved of by God, however magnificent it may be in the estimation of men” (Calvin 421). All things that God gives for the...
edification of the body are to be applied with fervent charity, for without such charity Christ is not honored.

We have seen in the previous section what charity is and what it looks like, but yet another question remains, what does charity do? The apostle gives us this answer in verses four through six of chapter thirteen. He writes,

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things (vv. 4–7).

As a pastor, many things are required, many duties are to be accomplished. Being in the position of an aspiring minister in the PRC, temptations to slack in forbearance, to be unkind, to envy other ministers, to boast in one’s spiritual gifts, to self-seek, to be easily provoked to anger at disobedience and to think evil are besetting sins that could certainly corrupt the office that God might be pleased to place me in. Also, it may be possible to be commended for eloquent speech, great wisdom and knowledge, suffering for Christ’s sake and the like, but what does the apostle say to such a one that has all these things, but has not charity? His works and gifts are useless, a vain show and an abomination in the sight of God (cf. Luke 16:15). This quality, as John Calvin said earlier, is the only virtue that God commends as it is joined with all good works. The Belgic Confession corroborates well with this in regards to sanctification, “…we do not speak of vain faith, but of such a faith which is called in Scripture a faith that worketh by love, which excites a man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in his Word” (Belgic Confession Art. 24). To this standard, according to the word written in 1 Timothy 1:5, “Now the end of the commandment
is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” I will seek to apply in the ministry—the keeping of God’s commandments by love.

To be a true minister of the gospel, I must resolve to apply what is taught here in 1 Corinthians 13, to live according to the virtue of charity. The qualities of charity may not be easily applied, but are set forth in clear and unmistakable terms. Charity makes no room for laziness, cold-heartedness, envy, boasting, arrogance, selfishness, and resentment. On the contrary, love rejoices in truth, is longsuffering, hopes until the end and believes the precious promises of God. John Owen, preaching on the duty of a pastor once said, “There is required love of the truth. We shall never contend earnestly for the truth, we shall never ‘buy it and not sell it,’ whatever we know of it, unless our love and value of it arise from a sense and experience of it in our own souls” (Owen 459). I intend to live by this rule of love in all things, for charity is not reserved for a special office in the church but is to be lived out by all true believers in Christ. The only way I may truly apply what is taught concerning love in 1 Corinthians 13 is by the power of God’s Holy Spirit, “for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor” (Heidelberg Cat. LD 2), and therefore because I cannot conjure up this divine charity of myself, I must first acknowledge the truth that, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us...” (1 John 4:10). From believing that God loves me for his Son’s sake, and learning from Christ as my Lord and example, then may I be enabled to live out of charity in my future calling, may God so graciously grant. Amen.

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**Scholarship Essay  Matthew Koerner**

**LOVE IN THE MINISTRY**

The ministry of the word is a calling which requires much attentiveness to and emphasis on the words of 1 Corinthians 13:13, where we read that love is the greatest of the three Christian virtues. In fact, ministering to fellow saints and ministry in general are referred to as a “labor of love” in Hebrews 6:10. The calling to love permeates all of the call to be a pastor. Lord willing, I will one day enter into that calling. If I am to be an effective church leader, keeping in mind that my work is a “labor of love” will be vital. If it ever becomes simply “a job,” there will undoubtedly be problems. This is not to say that the other two virtues of 1 Corinthians 13 (faith and hope) can be diminished. On the contrary, all three must coincide and remain inseparable from one another, for the ministry of the gospel to be an effective endeavor. However, love is what ties it all together for a pastor, and he ought to incorporate it into all that he does.

In order rightly to understand how a minister is called to love, he first must understand what exactly it is to love biblically. Not now the world’s definition; the world would simply say that true love is buying someone an expensive piece of jewelry or giving of one’s time for another. Certainly, there can be love in these actions, but they are merely specific ways to show love outwardly, and they fail truly to capture the idea of love. No, at its heart, love is much deeper than this. God gives something of a definition of love in 1 John 4:10. There we read, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us...” True love is epitomized in the sacrifice on the part of God
of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as well as in Christ’s willingness to endure what he did to redeem sinful humans. How much stronger an image is this than to give of one’s time or energy to serve another! Christ gave of himself completely—nothing of him was withheld, even to the point of death. At the core of this action is the true meaning of love. Christ gave of himself freely. There was no ulterior motive. He died purely because it was his good pleasure to save us from our fate of hellfire.

This, then, is how a minister must serve his congregation. There is no room for any pretense in his labors; all must be performed purely out of a desire to serve his congregants and the church at large. Professor Russell Dykstra writes,

“...the minister recognizes that he is simply not important. What happens to him is not significant. What people think about him is not his concern. If he is despised, yea even the offscouring of the world, so be it! So long as God’s Word and work go forward. A faithful minister does not want to stand out, to draw attention to himself. He deliberately stands off to the side as much as he can. He is ready, eager, to serve!” (Dykstra).

In fact, this is so serious a matter that in 1 John 4:8, we read, “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” In order for one to truly be a child of God, one must love. In order for one to truly be a minister of the word of God, then, one must truly act out of love and service to others.

But how might this be put into practice? There are a number of ways in which this can be done. For instance, there is a certain sense in which the preaching of the word is a manner of displaying love. God as our shepherd leads us, his flock. We all learn Psalm 23 from an early age, so the image of a shepherd is not a new one. But we also do well to remember that a pastor reflects God as shepherd. Just as God is the Good Shepherd of his sheep, so a minister shepherds his flock—his congregation. Of course, the picture is limited because no human can rightly exemplify the characteristics of God in his perfection, but the idea remains a good one. As the “mouthpiece of God,” a pastor is tasked in part with expounding God’s words to his people. This means leading them to green pastures beside still waters (Ps. 23:2). God will send us another Comforter (John 14:16), and proclaiming the comforts of scripture and the doctrines contained in it is certainly a way for a minister to show love to his congregation through the preaching.

Those comforts are also prevalent in our Psalter’s Consolation of the Sick. I remember once hearing my own minister say to two seminarians, “Make this form your friend,” and that seems to be good advice for anyone going into the ministry. This is a form designed to be read to a saint nearing the end of his or her earthly journey. 1 Corinthians 15:26 accurately characterizes death as “the last enemy;” for the child of God, it is one of the greatest trials one faces to meet the end of one’s life. To come to the death bed of one of his congregants with no understanding of or empathy for the situation would be a great mistake for a minister to make. Love must be central to his approach, and the love needed is exemplified in the language of the Consolation of the Sick. Over and over again the form refers to scripture. Scarcely a sentence goes by without quoting or paraphrasing a verse from the Bible. The comfort of this form is immediately evident to anyone who reads it, and quoting it for an ailing saint is clearly an effective means of showing love in that trying situation. Christ sent his Comforter out of his deep love for us, and it behooves a pastor well to reflect that act of God by bringing his own words of comfort to a fellow saint who is nearing death out of his love for him or her.

However, scripture is not merely the surface level doctrine of much of mainstream Christianity, with its “comfort” that there is nothing more to the gospel than “Jesus loves you, and your sins are all forgiven.” Rather, God’s word also contains throughout its pages a call to repentance. In fact, we learn from the language of Hebrews 12:5–11 that God uses chastising as a means of displaying his great love toward us. Just as an earthly father disciplines his child out of love, desirous that the child remain on the straight and narrow, so too God, out of his infinite mercy and love, chastises us to keep us on the path of righteousness. A true pastor of God’s word is one who fears not to bring this gospel of repentance to the assembled flock. He loves his fellow saints enough that he calls them to turn from their wicked ways and back to the way of obedience to God’s righteous laws. He is willing to use his shepherd’s crook to pull the sheep back among the flock, even if it causes some initial pain. He understands that our sufferings in this present life, even pain resulting from having one’s sins pointed out, are unworthy of comparison with our future glory (Rom. 8:18).

In fact, even in our Form for Excommunication, the prayer we recite bears this same attitude. It acknowledges that God does not desire for the sinner to perish in his sin and that the church is always open to a repentant sinner, then reads, “... we therefore humbly beseech Thee, to kindle in our
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“press toward the mark…”  (Philippians 3:14)

November 8  Read Psalm 141

Psalm 141: 5–6 reads, “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities. When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words; for they are sweet.”

I read Spurgeon and Matthew Henry’s commentary to help me understand these verses. Henry brings out the idea that we must be thankful when we receive reproof from fellow saints. This is an example of something that we would all be quick to say, but often very slow to carry out. One way that we show our appreciation for that proper reproof comes in praying for the ones who reproved us when they are going through trials. Spurgeon believes that verse 6 is still talking about those fellow saints who reproved David. When Saul fell and David became king, he didn’t seek revenge on those who reproved him; instead, he was thankful for the words they spoke. We must be the same. Sing or pray Psalter #386.

November 9  Read Psalm 142

I recently heard about the horrible Blue Whale Game on the news. According to Wikipedia, “The game allegedly consists of a series of tasks assigned to players by administrators during a 50-day period, with the final challenge requiring the player to commit suicide. The term ‘Blue Whale’ comes from the phenomenon of beached whales, which is linked to suicide.” The game seems to have resulted in hundreds of children and young people mutilating and killing themselves across the globe over the last couple years. This was in the news because it was thought to be linked to the death of a boy in Texas, who used his cellphone to videotape his own hanging.

The fact that something as disgusting and horrifying as this would spread rapidly over the entire world shows the despair and hopelessness of wicked man. In contrast, the elect find comfort in God during all their trials. David wrote this psalm while he was hiding in a cave from the king who was hunting him down, and yet he was able to end it with the words, “the righteous shall compass me
Abigail says some pretty harsh things about her husband Nabal to David in this chapter. In verse 25 she says, “Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him.” Then in the next verse, “now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal.”

Was it right of Abigail to talk about her husband this way? I think we can all agree that she was telling the truth, but isn’t she still commanded to honor her ungodly husband? Can you argue that she was still honoring him while publicly referring to him as a “man of Belial?” In my mind, that seems difficult to defend. If a woman started attending our church services and seeking membership, but spent time talking to people after church about how wicked her husband who had stayed at home was, would you feel that was improper? Do you think Abigail’s speech is justifiable? Sing or pray Psalter #31.

I recently got the Reformation Heritage Study Bible, and I like how it contrasts the confession of Saul in this chapter with that of the New Testament Saul (Paul). As Saul nears the end of his life, he says in verse 21, “I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.” In contrast, Paul boldly confesses in 2 Timothy 4:7, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” It is only by God’s grace that we are able to make the second confession at the end of our lives and not the first. Of ourselves we have done nothing but play the fool. We have erred exceedingly our entire lives and deserve everlasting fire. However, we are brought out of that by Christ’s shed blood, just as Paul miraculously was. We have been given a new heart, in which we love God and his commandments. We have a small beginning of the new obedience and seek a closer relationship with our heavenly Father. It is only because of the strength God has given us that we are able to fight and endure to the end. Sing or pray Psalter #408.

In the Reformation Heritage Study Bible’s commentary on this chapter, Beeke instructs us to keep in mind that we are most susceptible to falling right after a spiritual victory. I think this is a great point, and one I often touch on in Bible class with my students. No sooner does David hit a spiritual high point when he refuses to kill the Lord’s anointed, than his faith fails and he looks for refuge from the Philistines. Haven’t you had a situation like this in your own life? You are being very diligent with your personal devotions and feeling very close to God, but the moment you begin feeling proud about it you fall right back into your greatest besetting sin. Pride is really what it always comes down to. David stopped trusting in God and decided to find his own way of protection. The second we forget that every good work comes from God, we fall right back into sin, often even more deeply than before. Sing or pray Psalter #159.

“Arise, O Lord, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword: From men which are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes” (Psalm 17: 13–14).

The last part of this section, where it says that the wicked man will be full of children, confused me. Doesn’t that sound like something that would be said about the righteous man? Well, I had some help translating the original Hebrew, and it seems that the verse either says “their sons are satisfied” or “they are satisfied with sons.” As you can see, these two phrases have different meanings. However, it can be said that no matter which is the correct interpretation, the verse is saying that the wicked have many earthly riches that continue in the line of generations. They appear to have everything the heart could wish, but they have nothing. There can be no fulfillment in a life without God. Sing or pray Psalter #31.

When I read verse four, it immediately made me think of Gideon defeating the Midianites. This verse reads, “Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt.” Gideon set out to defeat the host of Midian with 32,000 men. God, however, wanted to make it clear that the victory came from him, so he kept whittling down Gideon’s force till it only consisted of 300 men. This tiny army, less than the number of members in our Loveland congregation, was commanded to circle the Midianites. Then, at the stroke of midnight, they smashed the fire-carrying pitchers they held in one hand and blasted the trumpets they held in their other hand and complete chaos broke out in the Midianite camp. In fact, the enemy was so terrified and confused that they started killing each other as the 300 men watched in amazement. This amazing story is a physical example of what always takes place spiritually. Our God will always...
As I write this, Hurricane Harvey has just ravaged the Texas coast. I read that many people have been left without drinking water after treatment plants began failing. The sad irony of having nothing to drink while getting hit by one of the biggest floods in history reminds me of the world today. We live in the digital age, a time when anything can be obtained with the click of a button or a spoken word, yet there is a complete lack of knowledge. The world is in darkness, and the more it advances, the deeper that darkness becomes. This psalm points us in the right direction. May David's confession be ours, when he says in verse one, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.” Just as the victims of Hurricane Harvey will quickly perish if drinking water isn't provided, we perish without God. He is our light in this dark world. Sing or pray Psalter #164.

Are you a Ziphite? Am I? I'm sure that there are many ways in which we can compare ourselves to these wicked men, but here's one that comes to mind immediately. We are Ziphites when we, in the name of helping, tell someone the bad things another has said about them. What good does it do for your friend to be aware of all the mean things that are ever said about him? No, the other person should never have said that, but spreading it only promotes division. It's the sinful desire of our flesh to exalt ourselves above others that leads us to do this. Can you think of any other way that we might act like the wicked Ziphites sometimes? Sing or pray Psalter #147.

November 15 Read Psalm 54

We just finished the story during which this Psalm was written, found in 1 Samuel 23 and 26, in Bible class. The Ziphites showed their hatred for God by informing Saul whenever they found out where David was hiding from him. Saul blasphemed God by portraying the murderous actions of these men as pious, when he states in 1 Samuel 23:21, “Blessed be ye of the LORD; for ye have compassion on me.”

David's sin had gotten him into such a difficult situation that there seemed no way out. David went to the wicked Philistines for refuge, instead of trusting in God. Achish had welcomed him into his country, assuming that David wanted to fight Saul, a belief that David cultivated. He fell deeper into his sin by lying to Achish about the battles he was fighting. In order to keep the king in the dark about his killing of the heathen tribes around them, David killed all potential witnesses and told the king he was getting the spoil from Judah. Achish is so convinced by David's lies that he's excited to bring David into battle with him against the Israelites. David continues to make double-meaning comments to fool Achish as they march into battle against his own people, and there seems to be no way for David to get out of the situation he's gotten himself into. But that's just the point, isn't it? All we can do of ourselves is make our situation worse, but God always provides a way out for his people. As Psalm 46:1 states, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Sing or pray Psalter #128.

November 16 Read Psalm 63

As I write this, Hurricane Harvey has just ravaged the Texas coast. I read that many people have been left without drinking water after treatment plants began failing. The sad irony of having nothing to drink while getting hit by one of the biggest floods in history reminds me of the world today. We live in the digital age, a time when anything can be obtained with the click of a button or a spoken word, yet there is a complete lack of knowledge. The world is in darkness, and the more it advances, the deeper that darkness becomes. This psalm points us in the right direction. May David's confession be ours, when he says in verse one, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.” Just as the victims of Hurricane Harvey will quickly perish if drinking water isn't provided, we perish without God. He is our light in this dark world. Sing or pray Psalter #164.

David needed to learn to trust in God again. He had been seeking refuge in a wicked nation while living a lie, and now he was paying the consequences. God had just saved him from a horrible battle against his own people, and now he returns home to find all his city burned and everything taken. His men are so fed up that they are ready to stone him for the loss of their families and possessions. This judgment of God causes David to repent. He directs his trust back to God and asks if he should pursue the Amalekites. God shows David he has been forgiven by responding and telling David he will be able to retrieve everything. David is once again on the mountaintops of faith, but all his men are not. Those who complain about sharing the spoil with the 200 men who stayed back show...
that they haven’t learned a thing. They’re still giving themselves the credit for their victories and accomplishments, and have forgotten that they are nothing without God. We are much the same, and must always be on guard against triggering the sin of pride. Sing or pray Psalter #154.

November 20  Read 1 Samuel 31

In Lord’s Day 40 of the Heidelberg Catechism, we are told God requires in the sixth commandment “...that I hurt not myself, nor willfully expose myself to any danger...” The reason is brought out in the second question and answer of the following Lord’s Day. Here we read, “Since both our body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, he commands us to preserve them pure and holy....”

Suicide, even endangering ourselves unnecessarily, is an extremely serious sin. It’s a form of murder, as clearly stated in the Lord’s Day. Our bodies belong to God, and therefore we must care for them. In addition, killing oneself is a complete rejection of God’s plan. God has a plan for when we die, and it’s blasphemous for us to think we have the right to decide when our life ends. We can see from this chapter that Saul’s final act was one of wicked defiance against God.

Some go so far as to say that if someone commits suicide it’s a sure indication that they weren’t a child of God. What do you think? Can you think of scripture passages to prove that, or is that concluding too much? Sing or pray Psalter #106.

November 21  Read Psalm 18

Psalm 18:2 compares Jehovah to a rock, fortress, buckler, horn, and high tower. As Calvin says, “God equips the faithful here from head to foot.” The Reformation Heritage Study Bible takes a moment to look more closely at each of these metaphors, as does Charles Spurgeon. God as our rock is one in whom we find shelter, and the one who is our sure foundation. Just as a large boulder cannot be moved, so our God will never leave us. God as our fortress keeps us safe from all our enemies, just as he kept David safe from Saul among the rocks of the mountains. God as our buckler, or shield, is the one with whom we ward off the blows of our spiritual enemies. God as the horn of our salvation is the one to whom we can cry out in time of trouble, and who will cause us to rejoice when we have the victory over our enemies. Finally, God as our high tower is the one who lifts us out of reach of our foes and causes us to look out over the wonder of his constant provision for us. Sing or pray Psalter #34.

November 22  Read Psalm 121

What came to mind when I read this psalm was the story of Elijah versus the 850 false prophets on Mt. Carmel, found in 1 Kings 18. Ahab refuses to acknowledge God, so Elijah suggests they have a little contest to see whose god is better. They will set up two altars, one for Elijah and one for the 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah. They will take turns calling upon their gods, and whoever sends fire to consume his sacrifice will be acknowledged as the one true God. The false prophets call out to their god all day, even frantically cutting themselves in an effort to please him, but there is no answer. Elijah mocks their foolish attempts, saying, “Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked” (v. 27). The prophets must finally give up, and then Elijah calls all the people together, constructs his altar, and pours water all over it as the suspense builds. Then he calls upon God and the fire pours forth from heaven, consuming even the water itself. Our God, our God, never sleeps. Sing or pray Psalter #345.

November 23  Read Psalm 123

God’s people are always despised and trampled on by the world. This is brought out in the last two verses of this chapter, where it speaks of the wicked mocking us with “contempt” and “scorn.” This theme can be seen all throughout scripture. Ishmael mocked his younger brother Isaac, because he hated that Isaac had been given the promise. The wicked mocked Noah as he spent 100 years building a gigantic boat on land, telling them that a flood was coming to cover the whole earth. Nehemiah and the returning Israelites were mocked as they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem with the meager resources they had. Jesus himself was mocked and scorned as the soldiers and Pharisees beat him and demanded he tell them who he was. The mocking continued as he hung on the cross and they contemptuously asked him to come down if he really was the Messiah.

Because of this intense hatred that the world has for God and his people, there is huge pressure on us to try to be like them. We must constantly look for strength from God to be in the world, but not of it, as Jesus commands in John 17:16. Sing or pray Psalter #351.

November 24  Read Psalm 124

In the NIV, Proverbs 31:25 reads, “She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.” In the KJV, the same verse reads, “Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.” I saw the NIV version quoted many years ago by a friend whose mother was going through a difficult trial, but to me that interpretation really loses the comfort that’s
there in the KJV. The phrase, “she can laugh at the days to come,” feels like typical worldly philosophy. “Pull yourself up by your bootstraps, believe in yourself, and you’ll be able to take on anything.” In contrast, “she shall rejoice in time to come,” carries with it the idea of waiting on God and being content in whatever he has in store for us.

True comfort is found in the fact that God is always with us, not in the belief that we have any strength of ourselves, as brought out in Psalm 124. This chapter assures us that God will always keep us safe and ends with the beautiful line, “Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” Sing or pray Psalter #352.

**November 25**  Read Psalm 125

Peace: the world is always searching for it, but can never find it. There will be a short time period at the end of the world where they will have a fragile peace founded on hatred of God, but it will quickly crumble away. As peace always eludes them, the wicked are eager for a scapegoat on which to place the blame. They find that in the church, convincing themselves that if they just got rid of the nut-case Christians that are indoctrinating everyone with laws of intolerance, then mankind could finally create heaven on earth. Richard Dawkins, an atheist science worshipper, is very open about this. He points to religion as completely irrational and the cause of nearly all the world’s problems throughout all of history, so happiness and peace depends on it being completely eradicated.

Always the world is searching for peace, but they will never find it, because they’re looking in the wrong place. Peace can only be found in God. As Psalm 125:5 says, “As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity; but peace shall be upon Israel.” Sing or pray Psalter #356.

**November 26**  Read Psalm 128

I recently listened to a sermon on this psalm, a few points of which I wanted to share with you. Psalm 127 and 128 are often referred to as the family psalms. Here, the wife is described as a fruitful vine. Contrary to the teaching of the world, it is a blessing for the wife to be fruitful. Her “career” is caring for the children and aiding the husband that God has given her. If we look at the structure of homes back in this time period, we find that the house was often situated around a central courtyard where the garden was. Just as the vines were located at the center of the house, so the wife is to be the center of the home. The wife prepares the food and then brings the family together in communion at the table after a long day of work. As the minister put it, “If there is no table in our lives, then we have traded the blessings of God for the trivialities of the world.” With so many things that command our time today—work, school, sports, technology—are we leaving time for the table? Sing or pray Psalter #360.

**November 27**  Read Psalm 129

In this psalm, we ask God to judge those that persecute us unjustly. This persecution is described in gruesome detail. We read in verse 3, “The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.” In this verse, the cuts made by the whips of the wicked are likened to furrows made in the ground by the farmer as he plows his field. Spurgeon brings out the fact that these furrows are made from behind us. The wicked are always deceitful and underhanded in their attacks, and we must be on constant guard against them.

Here, we have another example in scripture of the same thing being used to picture something positive and negative. When we think of farming in the Bible, we usually think of Christ as a sower who planted his church and preserves them until the harvest at the end of time. We don’t usually think about those rows picturing the stripes laid on God’s people throughout this life. However, there are ways to bring it together. The sweat and toil of the farmer is a result of sin entering the world, which reminds us to set our eyes on heaven, our eternal rest. Sing or pray Psalter #361.

**November 28**  Read Psalm 130

It’s pretty neat to see how children are little versions of their parents. I ask a question, and as they answer I think, *that sounds just like what their mom or dad would have said.* In fifth and sixth grades many students are still stuck thinking that their family’s way of doing things is the only way they can be done, but it’s something that we can learn from spiritually.

Just as children determinedly follow in the ways of their parents, so we should follow after God without wavering. That’s what we are commanded to do in this chapter. Psalm 130:6 says, “My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that wait for the morning.” Those who had to stand guard on the walls of the city all night were very eager for the morning to come, so that they would be released from their post to go get some rest themselves. We must follow after God even more eagerly than those guards, writing his word in our hearts, trusting in him, and setting our eyes on heaven. Sing or pray Psalter #363.

**November 29**  Read 2 Samuel 1

Why does David have such kind words for Saul? In verses 23 and 24 David speaks of Saul being swifter than an
eagle, stronger than a lion, and a king who clothed his people in scarlet and gold. When we studied this chapter in Bible class, Gertrude Hoeksema said that David was merely acknowledging the strong king that Saul had been early on in his reign. It’s true that Saul did have his moments. That’s why the men of Jabesh-Gilead went on a nearly suicidal mission to retrieve the bodies of Saul and his sons from the Philistines and bury them respectfully. Back in 1 Samuel 11, the Ammonites were about ready to mutilate and enslave the men of Jabesh-Gilead, when Saul rounded up a massive force of 330,000 and destroyed them. After the battle, the people come to Saul and suggest that they put to death everyone that hadn’t wanted him to be king, but Saul replies, “There shall not a man be put to death this day: for today the LORD hath wrought salvation in Israel.” Yes, God holds even wicked kings and rulers in the palm of his hand and uses them for his purpose. Sing or pray Psalter #222.

Did you know that Zeruiah was a woman? I had always assumed that she was the father of Joab, Abishai, and Asahel, so it was interesting to learn that she was actually their mother. She was also David’s sister, making Joab David’s nephew.

On another note, there is quite a contrast between David’s praise of the men of Jabesh-Gilead and Saul’s praise of the Ziphites. Both men praised the city for their actions in regard to the other, but that’s about where the similarities end. Saul’s praise was blasphemous, because he was praising them for helping him try to murder David. David’s praise was righteous, because he was condoning the men of Jabesh-Gilead for honoring the body of the Lord’s anointed, even when Saul had tried to kill him unjustly. The political world today that is so based on slander and mockery makes it even more difficult for us to respect those in authority with whom we don’t agree, but we must take David’s example. Sing or pray Psalter #223.

David asks God to make his enemies “ashamed” in the last verse of this chapter. There are many passages we could point to where God makes worldly men ashamed. First, we have the example of Saul with David himself. On the two occasions that David sneaks to Saul as he sleeps and takes something from him to prove his desire for peace, Saul admits his sin, says that David is better than he is, and acknowledges that David will be the next king. What we don’t see, however, is Saul demonstrating any repentance. Two other examples come from the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar was very proud of his accomplishments, so God humbled him and made him like a beast of the field, as we read in Daniel 4. Nebuchadnezzar was forced to praise the only truly powerful one. Then, in Daniel 6, we have the story of Daniel in the lion’s den. The king is “sore displeased with himself” (v. 14) when he realizes he must carry out his punishment on Daniel for worshipping his God, but even he believes that Daniel’s
God can save him from the lions, which is exactly what takes place. Sing or pray Psalter #121.

**December 4  Read Psalm 8**

December 4- Read Psalm 8

Concerning verse two of this chapter, Spurgeon provides an interesting list of children who instructed their elders in serving God. First, Jesus himself quoted this verse in Matthew 21:16, when the Pharisees complained to him about the children shouting in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” Second, we read in Foxe’s Book of Martyrs that when Mr. Lawrence was being taken away to burn at the stake, children followed praying, “Lord, strengthen thy servant, and keep thy promise.” Third, when Mr. Wishart, a Scottish martyr, was told he had a devil in him, a child spoke up and said, “A devil cannot speak such words as yonder man speaketh.” Finally, Whitfield spoke of the children who would sit around his pulpit, listening attentively as he spoke and helping him as much as they were able. Although we don’t agree with all of the things taught by these men, the point is still made. Hearing our children praise God is one of the greatest and most humbling blessings we can receive. As a teacher, I get to hear our little lambs praise God almost every day, and it truly is an amazing experience. Sing or pray Psalter #405.

**December 5  Read Psalm 9**

December 5- Read Psalm 9

We have just been studying the Persians in Ancient World History class. The Persians did some pretty amazing things, like building a bridge of boats for their army to march across and creating the stone city of Perseopolis with an underground sewage system hundreds of years before Christ. They were known for treating the people they conquered with respect, a policy which helped them create one of the largest empires in history. However, they uncharacteristically burnt Athens after finding it deserted, an act which the king would immediately regret. The Greeks got their revenge, because years later Alexander the Great led them into Perseopolis and burned it to the ground.

Psalm 9:6 says, “O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end: and thou hast destroyed cities; their memorial is perished with them.” Nations rise and fall, no matter how powerful they become. Throughout history God raises and destroys empires, “that the nations may know themselves to be but men,” as it says in the last verse. The world today has forgotten that they are “but men,” but we see Christ’s footsteps as he comes to give them the final reminder. Sing or pray Psalter #16.

**December 6  Read Psalm 10**

This psalm calls upon God to judge the wicked. Sometimes we can feel like the psalmist in verse one, when he says, “Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?” When we are spiritually low it can seem as if the wicked are getting away with their sin, and God isn’t doing anything about it. Don’t we see that in our children all the time? Instead of properly telling mom and dad or teacher when they are sinned against they decide to seek revenge themselves. Why? One reason is that they’re confident the adult won’t punish the offender sufficiently, so they had better make sure it happens themselves. We see something similar in the story of Jonah. God commanded Jonah to call Nineveh to repentance, but Jonah refused because he didn’t want to see the city forgiven. He thought God was wrong for not destroying the city immediately. When we think this way, we forget that we aren’t getting what we deserve either. The only thing we deserve is everlasting fire, but our Savior Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. Instead of pointing the finger, we need to live out of thankfulness for our amazing deliverance. Sing or pray Psalter #19.

**December 7  Read Psalm 14**

I read about Richard Dawkins in a recent Beacon Lights article entitled “The Cult of Dawkins: Science as Religion,” written by a high school student from our sister church in Singapore. I looked him up, and he’s pretty scary to listen to. Dawkins firmly believes that all of life’s questions can only be answered with science, and that religion must be abolished, because the only thing it succeeds in doing is making naturally rational people irrational. There is no arguing with someone whose answers are faith-based, and that kind of senseless disagreement is “a disgrace to the human race,” says Dawkins.

Psalm 14:6 says of the workers of iniquity, “Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the LORD is his refuge.” The wicked mock us because we trust in God. In their foolishness, they want to make the wise appear as they are. As Jesus said in Matthew 11:25, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.” We praise God for revealing these things unto us who are nothing of ourselves. Sing or pray Psalter #23.
Beacon Lights and Young Calvinists together present Read and Review, a free book program for young people and young adults. Each quarter five new books will be advertised in Beacon Lights and youngcalvinists.org. These books are free of charge to whoever requests them. All you have to do is write a review for publication in Beacon Lights or the Young Calvinists blog and the book is yours! Free! To kick things off we present the first list of five books.

- **Called to Watch for Christ’s Return**, by Rev. Martyn McGeown
- **The Hole in Our Holiness**, by Kevin DeYoung
- **Luther on the Christian Life**, by Carl R. Trueman
- **Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life**, by Donald S. Whitney

If you are interested in reading and reviewing one of these titles, please email us at editor@youngcalvinists.com. The book will be mailed to you free of charge. Once you have written your review, please send it to the same email address.

It’s that easy! We look forward to hearing from you!
We are all familiar with the first commandment in the table of the law...maybe even too familiar. Those of us who were raised in the Protestant Reformed Churches have heard the law read hundreds of times, Sunday after Sunday. In response to this commandment, we quickly say, “I only worship one God, the true God of heaven and earth. I do not have any idols.” However, when you consider what idolatry really is, you might have a different response. The Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 95 states that “Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God who has manifested himself in his Word, to contrive or have any other object in which men place their trust.” “Any other object” can literally be anything or anyone, including yourself.

Have you considered that, at times, you might be putting trust in yourself? How do you derive your energy for the day? Where does your food and clothing come from? What is the source of your happiness and contentment? Why are you posting on Facebook, Instagram, or Snapchat? Why are you looking at your social media feed? Do you want to know what everyone else is doing and buying so you don’t feel left out? Do you want to make sure that you are “liked” by all your friends? Not only is this a good time to examine whether or not you are using your time wisely, but more to the point of this article, what is your motive in making use of social media?

We are warned in scripture of the day and age in which we live. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:1–2, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy.” Social media is certainly a means by which men have shown themselves to be lovers of their own selves. This is just another display of sinful pride. Social media is relatively new, but the sin of self-worship (or pride) is not, as there are “no new things under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9). The sin of pride is the first record we have in scripture of sin: Adam and Eve’s willful disobedience to God. There is no question what God says about pride. Proverbs 6:16, 17 reads “These six things doth the Lord hate...A proud look, a lying tongue.” The words “pride” and “proud” are negatively referred to in Proverbs 13 times. In all of scripture, the words “pride” and “proud” are found 93 times. James 4:6 states “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

I am not condemning social media. There are positive uses for it. Some forms of social media are great tools to stay in contact and share life events with friends and family across the country or the world. The point is to use it intentionally and carefully, and to be aware of the amount of time you invest into it. What is the first thing you look at or think about when you wake up in the morning or before you go to sleep at night? We can waste hours and hours scrolling through our feed to “catch up.”

What does scripture say we are to do with our time? 1 Corinthians 10:31 reads “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” The question is not, “Is social media wrong?” or, “Is taking selfies wrong?” Instead, ask yourself, “Am I glorifying God with what I am doing right now?” or, “Is this a proper and spiritually edifying use of my time?”

Another consideration is this: “Am I living as Christ with my use of social media?” Selfie. The term needs no explanation. Never in scripture are we taught to promote ourselves (pride!). We are always taught to do the opposite: deny ourselves, put others before ourselves, and always esteem others better than ourselves.

Does taking and posting selfies show that we are living a life of self-denial? We are called to live a life of service to one another, not a life of service to self. The life and ministry of Christ exemplified and taught us this. Mark 10:45 says, “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto (served), but to minister (serve), and to give his life a ransom for many.” The world of social media encourages a life of self-indulgence.

But aren’t we supposed to love ourselves? On one hand we are directed to “deny ourselves and follow Christ,” and on the other hand we are called to “love your neighbor as yourself.” How do we answer questions like this? How do we answer all of our questions regarding our walk in life? Go to scripture. The answers are all there. 1 John 4:7–11 says, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is...
of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” We love God, ourselves, and our neighbor, because God loved us first.

We love ourselves because God has created us as a temple of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 6:19). We show that we love ourselves by taking care of ourselves; we eat, drink, clothe ourselves, see that we get enough rest, and the like. There is no one who hates his own flesh (Eph. 5:29).

We love our neighbor because we are commanded to do so (Matt. 22:39). We must put others before ourselves. Look at Philippians 2:3: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” We are to live our lives this way because of Christ. He is the ultimate example of servitude, going so far as to lay down his life for the sins of his people.

Remember, we please God by being like Jesus Christ. Romans 8:29 states, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren.” We call ourselves Christians. This means that we believe in, and are followers of Christ. Think about that when you get ready to take the next Snap. The next time you log into Facebook, Instagram, etc. to check your feed, the next time you prepare to add content to your feed, think to yourself, “Am I pleasing God by posting this? Am I showing that I love, serve, and follow Christ with my content?” Live your life to please God, not to please your followers on Instagram.

So, where do you go to find strength for your soul and words of comfort each day? What makes you happy or gives you strength for the trials and temptations each day? Is it positive comments from your “followers,” or “likes” from your friends? While God may very well use encouragement from saints to help you get through difficult life situations, keep in mind that God is the sole source of strength and hope each and every day. Friends, family, or followers can and do fail you, or leave you. Your God will never leave you or forsake you (Heb. 13:5). Trust in him, and remember that trust in “any other object” is idolatry.

Mike is a member of Zion Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Poem Vi De Boer

PRAYER FOR BEAUTY

Lord, grant me not the beauty that is only external,
But in thy favor grant me beauty eternal.
Grant me inner beauty from thee—
Beauty that comes from thy Spirit in me.
Lord, uphold my soul more than my skin;
Make any beauty without come from beauty within.
Bless me with the beauty of a tongue under control—
A testimony of thy work in my heart and my soul.
Bless me with the beauty of humble submission
To thy word and my calling in all life’s conditions.

Make my cares deeper than skin, hair, and clothes,
And give me the contentment in thy grace to repose.
Give me not beauty that soon fades away,
But grant me the beauty of growth in grace day by day.

For this beauty, O Lord, I humbly plead
Trusting in thee to supply all my need.
For others see my outward parts,
But thou, O LORD, dost know my heart.

Vi is a member of Doon Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa.
**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:

Kayla Ruth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jason & Karen Elzinga—Byron Center, MI

Allie Grace, daughter or Mr. & Mrs. Derek & Liane Bruinsma—Crete, IL

Chase Matthew, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matthew & Chelsey Verbeek—Doon, IA

Clara Jane, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Gord & Rebecca Tolsma—Edmonton, Canada

Jase Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Johnny & Laurel Kuiper—Hudsonville, MI

Calvin Garrett, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Mary Nienhuis—Hudsonville, MI

Jed Hudson, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chuck & Catherine Cammenga—Loveland, CO

Maxwell Brent, son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Jenna Zandstra—Sioux Falls, SD

Francis Clementine, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Alex & Dana Vander Schaaf—Southeast, MI

Jacob Martin, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason & Kim Schipper—Trinity, MI

Ezra Richards, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan & Faith Richards—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:

Sis. Victorina Peñaverde, Sis. Rebecca Trinidad, Sis. Genelou Delera and Bro. John Dale Villegas—Berean, Philippines

Sam Ophoff and Lydia Smits—Crete, IL

Joshua Moelker—Georgetown, MI

Brianna Moelker—Georgetown, MI

Brad Bishop, Kim Pryor and Jean Watson—Kalamazoo, MI

Damon Kooiker—Randolph, WI

Emma Atwood, Abigail Kuiper, Madeline Riemersma and Colin Riemersma—Southeast, MI

**MARRIAGES**

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

Mr. Brad De Vries and Miss Tina Mulcahey—Byron Center, MI

Mr. Jordan Newhof and Miss Megan Veldman—Georgetown, MI

Mr. Kyle Van Dyke and Miss Jessie Mastbergen—Grace, MI

Mr. Joel Van Drunen and Miss Karissa Kuiper—Hudsonville, MI

Mr. Brent Hanko and Miss Kaitlyn Meyer—Lynden, WA

Mr. Will Kooiker and Miss Miki Dykshorn—Trinity, MI
SOLI DEO GLORIA: GLORY TO GOD ALONE

Once there was a man who decided to build a mansion. He cut the stone from the ground for the foundation, dragged it to the place where he wanted to build, and set the foundation firmly in place.

He raised the large timbers for the walls and the beams to hold up the roof. He covered the building’s exterior with beautiful stones and the roof with fine cedar shingles. He put in stained glass windows and beautiful oak doors.

On the inside, the house was furnished with beautiful carpet and expensive furniture.

It was a very beautiful mansion.

The man adopted a son to stay in this mansion. But this son didn’t take care of the mansion. He broke furniture and got the carpet dirty. He recklessly spent the money his adopted father had earned.

Yet, this adopted son walked around the mansion telling his friends that he had built the mansion. He didn’t give credit to his father who had built the mansion and who had given this adopted son all that he had.

Something to think about:

God built this creation. He created all things. He created us, and he is the creator of faith in our hearts. Yet it is too easy to go about as if we have somehow done something to make us worthy of praise and glory. As if we are the ones who have saved ourselves by our faith, by our good works, by our correct doctrine. But the glory for all of those things belongs to God.

This Thanksgiving, let’s remember to give thanks to God for ALL things. Even the things we can’t see with our eyes, such as faith and the continued renewing of our hearts. God deserves the glory—all the glory—for the works he has done.

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
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Lake Geneva Christian Center
Alexandria, Minnesota
2018

“Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.” Psalm 73:24

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