Common Grace...Again?

The title of this column reflects my thoughts early last year upon receiving my copy of The Rock Whence We Are Hewn from the Reformed Free Publishing Association. Boy, was I wrong.

My original (wrong) thoughts on the book were, “Do we really need another book on common grace?” Then I read the book. We do. Never judge a book by its cover...or your premature perception of its content.

The book, edited by Prof. David Engelsma, consists primarily of several works surrounding the common grace controversy of 1924 and the events that led up to it in the Christian Reformed Church. Engelsma summed it up well in the afterword:

The Rock is the authoritative account of the doctrinal and church historical origin of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. It is this account, not in the form of a dispassionate, scholarly analysis some years after these churches came into existence. But the account consists of the doctrinal debate, the controversial writings, and the reflections on church political actions that were actually in the process of causing division in the Christian Reformed Church and forming the Protestant Reformed Churches. The book puts the reader into the Christian Reformed Church and, more particularly, into the circumstances of the controversy over common grace in that church, in the early twentieth century.

Most of us have heard and many of us have read about the history of the controversy over the three points of common grace, but here is a description of the battle from the trenches. Henry Danhof’s and Herman Hoeksema’s works in this book, some of

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them translated from Dutch for the first time, outline many issues and events surrounding the controversy of 1924: how common grace weakens the antithesis, the error of the well-meant offer of the gospel, Danhof’s and Hoeksema’s struggle to reform the CRC from within, their mistreatment from the CRC and the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and the formation of the Reformed Free Publishing Association and the magazine, The Standard Bearer.

In The Rock, Danhof and Hoeksema speak for themselves. They were wrongly cast out of the Christian Reformed Church for their refusal to adhere to the three points of common grace and their rejection of the well-meant offer of the gospel. You can feel Hoeksema’s pain while describing the wrong-doing of his former professor and friend, Louis Berkhof. Berkhof, who had earlier officiated at Hoeksema’s wedding, was instrumental in misrepresenting him (and Calvin) and casting him out of the CRC. I quote:

“For the same teachings contained in Calvin’s Calvinism you have persecuted Danhof and myself, and you did not rest until we were expelled from the communion of your church. At the time you became friends even of your enemies to unite with them in expelling those who were your friends and brethren in the faith. You are responsible before God, before whose judgment seat we will appear together...If you cannot do this [provide proof that Calvin viewed the preaching as a well-meant offer of salvation], your duty is to acknowledge that you depart from Calvin and that in 1924 you would have thrown him out of your church as you did us.”

In addition to the common grace controversy, the book includes several other works: “The Idea of the Covenant of Grace” by Danhof, and two more works by Hoeksema: “The Reunion of the Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed Churches” and “The Place of Reprobation in the Preaching of the Gospel.”

At over 500 pages long, this tome may seem quite formidable, but it is far from that. Apart from being very interesting reading, it is put together in such a way that allows it to be read little bits at a time. Each of the works within this book were originally published as pamphlets, as series of articles in The Standard Bearer, or as public lectures, and are therefore short enough to be read in a few sittings or even one. Additionally, there are many helpful footnotes that describe some of the history that Danhof and Hoeksema refer to in passing.

This is truly a must-read for all Protestant Reformed members, especially the young people. Go back to the roots of your Protestant Reformed Church laid out in this book. Your understanding of the common grace controversy will be benefited and your appreciation for the struggle for truth that resulted in the formation of the PRC will only increase.

2 Ibid., 345.

Our Goodly Heritage

Mark H. Hoeksema

Interview with Elsie Verhey (1)

It is March 2, 2009, and I am at the residence of Mrs. Elsie Verhey in Edgerton, Minnesota.

Mark H. Hoeksema: Mrs. Verhey, where and when were you born?

Elsie Verhey: I was born in Murray County, which is about 8 miles east of here. I was born at home.

MHH: And what was your date of birth?

EV: 1/4/38.

MHH: Can you tell me a little bit about your family, who your parents were, what your life was like when you were young and growing up, what your church affiliation was?

EV: OK. We lived on a farm, where my parents had fifteen children. I was the second to the youngest. We went to the Reformed church in Leota. That’s where I was baptized and raised.

When I was a sophomore in high school, my parents moved to Edgerton, and I finished high school there.
school there. We went to the Reformed Church here in Edgerton. And it wasn’t until I was going with Art [her husband, deceased at this time] for quite a while that I started going to the PR church. At first it was just occasionally. So when we were engaged and decided that we were getting married, then I went more to the PR church. But I didn’t have my papers transferred until after we were married.

MHH: And when did you get married?
EV: In 1956.

MHH: What are your recollections about growing up in the Reformed Church?
EV: The first year I lived in Edgerton, during my sophomore/junior year, I went to Bible camp at Medicine Lake, near the city. That was the first time I heard of the three forms of unity. Perhaps it was preached when I was a child—the morning services were still in Dutch in Leota. Some of the older people were angry when they finally decided to have one service in English. But, hey, this is America! So, actually, as a child, I really got nothing out of the morning service.

MHH: You didn’t understand the Dutch?
EV: Not a word, no. I mean, I can speak “Dutch” Dutch, but not the theological words.

In fact, my dad read the Bible in Dutch for years. So, well, we got our catechism and the Sunday School in English, and our personal reading, but otherwise, like by the table, it was Dutch.

MHH: But you had not heard of the three forms of unity?
EV: Until I went to that Bible Camp.

MHH: So the Heidelberg Catechism was never preached.
EV: Maybe it was in the Dutch in the morning. Maybe it was. But later on, when they had the English all the way… I don’t recall. When we moved to Edgerton here, then I know they didn’t have the Heidelberg Catechism.

MHH: So, this Bible camp was apparently somewhat of a revelation to you?
EV: It was! I remember—Heidelberg Catechism, you know, and then digging into it, but it was just never taught us as kids.

MHH: Did you go to catechism classes at all?
EV: We called it question school because that’s about what it amounted to. We had catechism, but it was nothing like anything Reformed Dogmatics or anything like that. It was just basically Bible stories.

MHH: So you probably had a fair amount to learn when you began to go to the Protestant Reformed Church? Because they obviously were having Heidelberg Catechism preaching. You recall who the minister was at that time?
EV: Oh, yes. Rev. [Herman] Veldman. He was a good one to get you really enthused in it. I really learned a lot from him.

I think [Rev. B.] Woudenberg was our next minister.

MHH: So those are early memories of the Protestant Reformed Church. Can you tell me a little bit about your family?
EV: My children?

MHH: Yes, your family and your recollections of your married life here.
EV: My oldest daughter is Joan. Then Melanie. They went to the Free Christian School [the Protestant Reformed school in Edgerton]. There were quite a few students at that time. I remember when Rev. Veldman baptized Melanie, I thought he was going to drown her. I thought, “What is this? Immersion?” I think I was just as startled as she was. He just kind of stood there and grinned.

Then Colleen and Jim. They all four moved to Colorado at once. Joan and Colleen were in Denver, and Melanie and Jim in Loveland, CO. So I had no children around here. I thought, at least they’re all in the same direction. They’re not some here and some there.

They, of course, learned the Heidelberg Catechism. I remember sometimes, when they went to Southwest [Christian School], once Joan said that she asked the teacher (it was study hall) if she could go to her locker and get her catechism book. Then she memorized the Lord’s Day. And, “You memorized that?” They were really shocked that they memorized the Lord’s Days for catechism.

MHH: If you got married in 1956, then you didn’t live through the schism of 1953. Was there still fallout going on? What is your knowledge of 1953?
EV: No, the ones who were going to leave, left. But there was bitterness. Families were divided. Art’s parents went to this church, his brother-in-laws’ parents left.

MHH: So did you or your husband lose friends with
Evangelist: Who were your friends or people you had grown up and gone to school with?

Evangelist: Oh, my husband did—a lot of them. You see, he was in the service at the time. He was discharged from the service—and he came home and there was not a single one left in the church of his friends. In fact, when we got married, there was a big gap between the ones that were our age, and for a long time we were just like kids there in our church. Everybody was way, way older. Later on, finally a couple of younger ones got married. But it was really hard on him, really hard, because as young people they did a lot of things together. Then all of a sudden you come home from the service and…. In fact, one of his buddies was in the Marines with him, and his family left, too, you know. And they always….

Minister: What has been important to you in your church experiences and your church life?

Evangelist: For one thing, the fellowship of the saints—mingling in with the fellow church members. Of course, the preaching is the top, and societies, and the school—all put together. But I think it’s being able to be friends with those of like faith. My family is all from the Reformed or Christian Reformed Church. So you associate with them, but it’s not the same as when you have everything in common, you know? They think if you have to go here or there on Sunday, what’s the big deal? You don’t like to do that on Sunday.

Minister: How would you characterize Edgerton as a congregation? Is it, in your opinion, a close congregation; not so close? Obviously Edgerton in its history has gone through a number of struggles together—not being a large congregation. I’m just curious what your thoughts are.

Evangelist: Well, it seems like there are divisions. I suppose you have that in every congregation. You have your friends, your close friends. But that’s my opinion—that it just could be more unified.

Minister: What part do you think that the Free Christian School has played in Edgerton’s history, or maybe even in your own personal history?

Evangelist: As far as Edgerton’s history, I don’t know. They kind of looked down on everybody else—that little school, how come they’re still open? There are so few students. How can they keep going? But I was certainly glad that I had the school here for the children. When our kids were in school, they had the ninth grade too, so they didn’t go to Southwest until they were sophomores, which was nice. By that time, you’d be surprised how established they are, even that one extra year.

But I was just really, really happy for the school. Back then, the teacher was always right. Rev. Veldman always said, “The teacher may be so wrong, but to a child, the teacher is always right. You never, ever say that the teacher is wrong.” That was one of Rev. Veldman’s tidbits (laughter).

Minister: And he had a few of those.

Evangelist: Oh, yes, he did.

Minister: He was a strong character.

Evangelist: He was. I never knew his brother Richard, did you?

Minister: Yes. Rev. Veldman is, I should probably say, was relation to me, through the Hoeksema side. Not real close, but he was a cousin of some variety. To be continued…

Federation Board Update

Greetings again from the Fed Board.

Our last update informed you about what the Fed Board is, what we do, who the current members are, and what we plan to do this coming year. The purpose of this article is to give an update of our work so far and what will be happening in the coming months.

First and foremost, the Fed Board is excited to announce the 2017 Young People’s Convention, hosted by First PRC of Holland. The theme will be Holding Forth the Word of Life, based on Philippians 2:15–16. The convention will be held at Michindoh Conference Center in Hillsdale, Michigan. You can find more info by visiting the Convention’s website.
(www.prcconvention.com), or reference the convention advertisement on the back of this or other Beacon Lights issues. The Fed Board would like to express our thanks to the Steering Committee and subcommittees of Holland PRC for their many hours of hard work and continued dedication. We are confident it will be a week of good fellowship and spiritual edification for the young people, so we encourage all to attend!

Related to the convention, the Fed Board has recently formed a Convention Coordinating Committee, headed by the Convention Coordinator. The committee will be working with the Steering Committees planning conventions and will primarily be working on drafting a Convention Planning Blueprint, a booklet that will help guide Steering Committees and future members of the Fed Board with information on how to get started planning a convention, a timeline detailing deadlines, and specific duties for subcommittees.

The Convention Coordinator is a new position, created last year. The position has been held by Karl Dykstra who helped the Fed Board see the great need for the position as conventions continue to grow in size and complexity of planning, and he happily volunteered to be the Fed Board’s first Convention Coordinator. Karl’s experience as the chairman of Southeast PRC’s convention in 2015 made him an excellent fit for this position. Karl has done excellent work creating an outline for the Convention Planning Blueprint and providing valuable input for convention related matters. However, because of his current workload, Karl has decided it is best for him and his family to resign from the Fed Board. In the coming months, the Fed Board will nominate a replacement for Karl who has experience with planning a convention. The Fed Board thanks Karl for his valuable work and insight he provided during his term.

The Young Calvinists continue to be hard at work for the spiritual edification of the young people. They are planning many exciting events for the young people, including more Talking Points and activity nights. Stay up to date with the Young Calvinists by visiting their blog at www.youngcalvinists.org. The blog also contains many edifying articles and book reviews.

The Scholarship Committee now has writing prompts available for the Protestant Reformed teachers and ministers scholarship paper. This scholarship opportunity is available to those who will be attending college next year or are currently attending college for teaching or the ministry. We greatly encourage aspiring ministers and teachers to enter a paper for this scholarship to be evaluated by the PR Scholarship Committee.

The Fed Board recognizes that we cannot faithfully perform our work without the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We covet your prayers as we continue our duties throughout the rest of this year. We also ask that you pray for the committees the Fed Board oversees, namely, Beacon Lights, Scholarship Committee, Young Calvinists, and Steering Committees, that the work they do may be for the spiritual edification of the youth of our churches and most importantly for the glory of God’s name.

In Christ,

Taylor Dykstra, President (member of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan)

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**Christian Living**

**Rev. Ronald Van Overloop**

**Attitude Toward Other Members**

Gracious salvation puts the ones being saved into a relationship—a covenant relationship. This relationship is both with the Savior and with all the others saved by the Savior. Scripture often uses the figure of the human body to describe both the relationship that every saved one has with Jesus and the relationship the saved have with the other saved ones. Jesus is the head of the body (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22–23; 4:12,15; Col. 1:18,24; 2:19).

A correct understanding of the relationships in the body is very important for the well-being of the body. Each member must first focus on his relationship to the head. Then each member will have a
right understanding of their relationship with the other members. A correct understanding of the relationship with one another is not natural, but a learned understanding. We never stop learning what that proper relationship is and how we are to practice and experience that relationship.

It is my observation that we usually have no problem accepting and being nice to the more severely handicapped members of the body. For example, we think that those with Downs Syndrome are so cute, and we even take pride in talking with them and being helpful to them. However, there are other members that we find it easy to mock, ridicule, bully, and look down on. You cannot easily see these handicaps when you look at them. But they are different and it is hard to be nice to them. They have little or no social skills (their handicap is social). They just don’t know how to fit in and get along. We whisper about them with our friends. We rarely make an effort to talk with them or invite them to come along with our group of friends. It is really easy to ignore or mock them. They’re different! They’re strange!

1 Corinthians 12:12–25 informs us that God made the church to be like the human body. It is one body with many different members. The differences that exist between the various members of the body do not put any member out of the body. In the body there are free men, and there are slaves who are property of others. There are the rich and the poor. There are the smart ones and the slow ones. There are the athletic ones and those who stumble over a hair on the floor. There are fat ones and skinny ones. There are black ones and white ones. God made all these differences. As soon as we say that God made the differences, we immediately realize that the differences do not detract from the body, but enhance it. The differences enhance both the body’s abilities and its beauty. It would not be a body if every member was a hand or a heart or a kidney. When God designed the human body he was thinking of the church! In God’s mind his thought of the church as the body of Christ was before (“supra”) his thought of the human body. Paul first gives a simple, practical, and common sense answer: “If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?” Then Paul gives a spiritual answer—one that takes God into consideration. “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body.” The all-wise God wants the body to have a multitude of members, each different from the other, and when put together they make up the marvelous creation of a human body. No believer may say that because he is not like another believer or not as good as another believer, that therefore he is not a member of the body. Stop feeling sorry for yourself! Stop looking horizontally. Every believer has his very important and necessary place in the body.

The second sinful attitude is the declaration of a member of the body that he does not need another member. “The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.” Stop being arrogant! No believer may look down on or think less of another believer. Realize that our sinful human natures often think less of those believers who are not like us. The apostle declares that God has a contrary judgment. The body parts that seem to be feeble are both nec-
necessary and more honorable (1 Cor. 12:22). What a tremendous caution to any arrogant thoughts we might have concerning other members of the body of Christ: those who limp, those who aren’t “normal,” those who have a different skin color, those who have a different language, those who live in a different part of the world, etc.

All the members of the body of Jesus Christ are to see themselves and each other as God does, namely, eternally chosen by God, saved by the blood of the Lord Jesus, indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

This right perspective of the other members of the body begins with each member’s having the right perspective of himself. Each member must know whose he is and whom he serves. This is the beautiful language and powerful confession of the apostle Paul in Acts 27:23, “There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.” A frequent lie of Satan is that I am what people (including myself) say about me, when God’s truth is that I am what God says about me. Satan’s lie is that my identity is determined by what I have done (or not done), but God’s truth is that my identity is determined by what God has done for me. It is not about who is cute or athletic. Instead we are to realize that the wise and gracious God sees you as indwelt by Christ’s Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) and thus as a very necessary and important part of Christ’s body (1 Cor. 12:18, 24b). It is all about whose I am! God chose me; I did not choose him. God gave me to Jesus Christ. I belong to him! I am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior and Lord Jesus Christ by sovereign, gracious election and redemption. And it was completely undeserved and unearned! That is why every member must put on humbleness of mind and meekness (Col 3:12).

Only when we correctly understand ourselves will we correctly look at the other members of the body. Then we will see them as saints, as beloved of the Lord, as redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus, as God’s children. This is true of them even though they may be slow, homely, irritable, and bothersome. That is why every member must put on longsuffering, forbearing one another, forgiving one another (Col. 3:12–13).

Then we will not speak evil of any of the other members just because they look different or because they serve a different purpose in the body. Such speech (and the attitude behind it) causes division in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:25). Then we will be able to suffer with those who suffer and rejoice with those who rejoice (1 Cor. 12:26). Then we will see ourselves in humility as the chief of sinners saved only by God’s undeserved love (grace). Then we will not conduct ourselves with haughtiness as if we made ourselves to differ. Then we will see the necessity and wisdom of developing the fruit of the Spirit called meekness. Then we will judge and speak of other members in the most favorable manner; and then we will forgive as we’ve been forgiven (Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32).

Remember: every one saved is in a most gracious and most wonderful relationship with Jesus, the head. And every one saved is in a most gracious and most wonderful relationship with all the others who have Jesus as their head.

Rev. Van Overloop is pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

Prayers for the Church Universal

A Short History of the Protestant Reformed Churches of Myanmar (Burma)

Once, the godly philosopher and theologian Augustine said, “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.” That is how the story begins—without our
covenant God’s drawing us with his covenant love, there will be no PRCM in this unfortunate country. It is a wonder of grace that we became Reformed believers when no missionary was allowed in the country. So, I need to tell about myself, because that is the beginning of how the PRCM started.

My name is Rev. Titus San Ceu Luai. I was born in 1967, from a nominal Christian home, in Baptist Church. My father was a military officer with excellent ability for the army, trained in the best and highest military school of the land. He did not care very much about religion, but my grandpa was a pastor in Independent Church of Burma. My mother also was a Christian by name but a little more concerned with religion than my father. My parents had four children, I am number two. In that way I was brought up in a highly military officer’s home, guns were every day in my life, but no Jesus.

In his providence, the Lord sent three evangelists from one of the evangelicalism groups to our home when I was about 18 years old, and I was converted through his mercy and grace. In that, I became a Christian of evangelical persuasion from Baptist. That was about 1984.

Around 1986, one of my uncles from my mother’s side came and visited our house. He was the founding pastor of Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Myanmar, and he was surprised that our family now really believed in the Lord. He said when he was young he visited our house but my father did not like to talk about Christianity at our house, but now everything changed. So, he said he would teach us the Five Points of Calvinism and we all agreed to listen. He taught us night after night for almost a week and especially I was really changed into Presbyterianism after that. My uncle told me that he was going to open a theological school soon and if I was interested I could attend.

So, I attended that Presbyterian school in 1987. My uncle’s church was a Chin speaking church and my father’s house, after some time, had a fellowship group meet regularly and needed a pastor. My uncle’s church could not get a Burmese speaking pastor, so when I was at school the first year, the Assembly of Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Myanmar called me as probation-pastor for that little Burmese speaking congregation. I speak both the Burmese and Chin language because my father and mother are from a Chin tribe and the place I was born and grew up is a Burmese speaking place.

In fact, in our country too many languages are spoken yet today and the majority can understand the Burmese language. It is like a common language for the whole country. I finished in 1992. After that, the Presbyterian church ordained me since my probation period was over and I got married. As was the Presbyterian system’s way, one was first a pro-pastor for four or more years, married, then ordained—quite different from our Reformed church.

In 1992 as soon as I finished school, the Assembly called me to become a lecturer at the school since there was a shortage of able teachers. I studied a lot for teaching as well as for pastoral work and realized that Reformed mean not only Five Points of Calvinism but much more. There was no one here to teach me, the school was liberal, and had very few books. At that time the country was ruled by Socialist government so Christian books were banned and very rare to get. In that way the thirst in my heart to know more of Reformed truth grew.

In 1994 the school asked me to go to Singapore for further study at the Far Eastern Bible College MDiv program. I sent and found out that that college taught 50–50 to be saved—that means man 50% God 50% working for salvation. I was dismayed and confused, away from country, away from my wife and daughter, and felt very sorry. But the Lord had another purpose for me to be there.

That was that I found a magazine from the college library called The Standard Bearer, and articles that I read I agreed with 100%. So I wrote to the address but received no reply for quite some time. During that time one of my fellow students, who was a member of the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore, invited me to attend a Reformation lecture at his church. I went with him and after the lecture finished, I went to the tea time in the basement of the church. I found one white man with a nametag “seminarian.” I asked that young man where he came from and he replied that he came from America. I asked him whether he knew of The Standard Bearer. He said he came from that school.

I was so happy. His name was Allen Brummel, now Rev. Brummel. He brought me to Rev. Kortering, pastor-on-loan from the PRCA, who would be my mentor and friend til today.

Rev. Kortering asked me what I wanted to know about Reformed truth. I replied that I wanted to know everything of Reformed. I wanted to see the world as a Reformed man—every corner of life and
doctrine. He said, “Oh, if that is the case we need to spend some time together.” I said that would be fine. From that day on, every week I was in Rev. Kortering’s house, listening to whatever he said, and read books that he gave me to read, and attended all classes that he taught to the ERCS. And the thirst in my heart was quenched. I became a thoroughly Reformed man in the PR tradition.

But my church back home and my college in Singapore did not like me to become like that, so finally they kicked me out of the college as well as from the denomination because of what they called “too Reformed.” That was in 1997. My wife suffered the most, because we had no home, only the Presbyterian School’s apartment where we stayed. I was in Singapore and she with two little children were kicked out of the apartment with no place to stay. But deacons from the ERCS helped and she managed to rent a small place to stay and waited for me to return. I returned home, and my former congregation also broke away from the Presbyterian denomination and followed me. In that way we started the Protestant Reformed Churches of Myanmar.

So, I was a Baptist, then evangelical, then Presbyterian, lastly Protestant Reformed. That was my pilgrim journey, still going forward. All these for his mercy and for his glory. My special thanks are to PRCA brothers who helped me all the time, especially Hope PRCA.

From 1997, our covenant Lord sustained his covenant people so, though our numbers are very few, we stand for the truth as our PR churches in the world do. We maintain the covenant view of family, no remarriage after divorce, marriage is life-long, we strongly believe double-predestination, we strongly oppose common grace, grace is always particular, no grace whatsoever for reprobate. We also maintain Heidelberg Catechism preaching. We are the only church to do that in our country. We sing only Psalms. For that we have to translate English Psalms songs into Burmese which is quite difficult, so we have only about 23 songs, but we are happy to sing them and no other songs in our worship.

Since 1997, we have had quite a number of contacts from various parts of our country who are interested in our PR views and we continue to work with them. Hope PRCA always helps us to do that, and they faithfully oversee our activities and also come to visit and conduct seminars so that those who want to know the PR views of Reformed truth can learn them in more depth.

And since no Reformed creed is available in the Burmese language, I had to translate them and have finished all our three forms of unity: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt. I have also translated the Church Order of Dordt and various forms of Reformed liturgy which were so difficult—many nights very few hours to sleep.

And PR books produced by the RFPA are so faithful to the truth. I like them to be read by my people but they cannot understand English so I have to translate them into Burmese. I have finished a few books: Doctrine According to Godliness, Portraits of Faithful Saints, and Contending for the Faith. And now I am translating For Thy Truth’s Sake. I have also translated various articles of The Standard Bearer which I put in my weekly paper called “Sunday Digest.” And I have finished translating PR Catechism materials for various ages of children and youth.

Our Burmese Bible was written by a Baptist-Arminian missionary so a lot of areas needed improvement. I translated the KJV into Burmese and now finished all NT books and some OT books—all 150 Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, and am now starting the book of Deuteronomy.

Please pray for us to spread our PR truths throughout the country. Our country is a Baptist dominant country in Christendom, and the majority are not Christian. So, we have a lot to do for his kingdom. And pray that these translation works may be finished for his glory. And please pray for publishing those books that finish translation. And one more thing to request for prayer is to establish a Reformed day-school for our covenant children. Before 2010, our government did not allow private schools—all schools were run by the government. Since 2010, the government has allowed private schools, but not yet Christian school or private schools that teach their own prescribed subjects. Private schools are only allowed to teach government prescribed subjects, all humanistic and nationalistic views. But in 2015, things changed a bit with a newly elected government led by Nobel-prize winner, Lady Aung San Su Kyi. So in his providence through your prayers we might have our own covenant school.

In his service,

Rev. Titus
Two Lessons
Read Exodus 5
The moment of truth has arrived. Moses and Aaron appear before Pharaoh with Jehovah’s command, “Let my people go.” They add a ramification to their request: “lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword” (v. 3c). Calvin suggests that “the threatening, which they added, admonishes Pharaoh that his rebellion would not be unpunished…for if [God] would take vengeance on the people who were retained against their will, how could he escape with impunity, who professedly entered into contention with God?” Defiant Pharaoh only increases the Israelites’ burden. They blame Moses and Aaron for their trouble, and Moses cries to the Lord in dismay. Moses has a lesson to learn: the way of obedience is not an easy path to earthly happiness or success. Has Jehovah taught you that lesson?

There is a second lesson in this passage. Israel’s bondage in Egypt typifies our bondage to sin. Sometimes, when God’s word confronts us in our sinfulness, our misery seems only more unbearable and inescapable than it did before. In that way Jehovah teaches us that “only a divine Savior” will be able to rescue us (Reformation Heritage Study Bible). Is that the sort of mediator and deliverer you seek?

Sing or pray Psalter #290:1–7.

“I Will Redeem You”
Read Exodus 6
Jehovah reiterates his covenant promises in Exodus 6:1–8. Moses brings that word of God to the children of Israel, but they are “not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Rom. 9:6). And so “they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.” Some like them remain in the church today. Like stony soil receiving seed, they hear God’s word with gladness, but “when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended” (Mark 4:17).

Jehovah also reaffirms Moses’ appointment as his representative in this chapter. As at the burning bush, Moses attempts to evade his calling (vv. 12 and 30). Moses recognized that he was unfit for his commission, and he was right. Verses 14–27 trace the genealogy of the three sons whom Jacob rebuked on his deathbed (Gen 49:3–7) and end with “that Moses and Aaron” (v. 26). The “base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen…that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor. 1:28–29). Jehovah used weakest means to fulfill his will, for he alone would redeem (“redeem” is used for the first time in Exodus 6:6) his people with a strong hand and outstretched arm.

Sing or pray Psalter #211.

A Two-Fold Purpose and the First Plague
Read Exodus 7
In Exodus 7:3a Jehovah echoes his words from Exodus 4:21: “And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart.” Yet throughout the following chapters we will also read that Pharaoh hardens his own heart. Thus the inexplicable reality of God’s sovereignty and man’s accountability. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Prov. 21:1),” but “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (James 1:13b). God is not the author of evil, but why does he permit it? He has a two-fold purpose. First, he desires the salvation of his people. Secondly, he wills that even “the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord” (v. 5a).

Then Jehovah through Moses sends the first of the ten plagues, which come in three cycles of three, followed by the final plague. In the morning Moses awaits Pharaoh at the river’s brink, and before Pharaoh’s eyes Moses turns his idol god, the life-giving water of the Nile River, into blood. Now the riverbed that was the grave of so many Israelite baby boys literally ran with blood.

Sing or pray Psalter #308.

An Amphibian Army
Read Exodus 8
In the third plague, unannounced flocks of lice, Jehovah again chooses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty. Previously Pharaoh’s wise men had been able to imitate the wonders worked through Moses and Aaron, although they had not been able to save from God’s judgements. Then God sends swarms of flies. From this fourth plague on he clearly divides between his enemies and his redeemed: there are no flies in the land of Goshen. But first Exodus 8 recounts the second plague.

A group of sheep is a flock; wolves live in packs. Do you know which collective noun refers to a group of frogs?
group of frogs is called an army. God deploys an army of frogs in the second plague. The Egyptian goddess of fertility was symbolized by a frog. Suddenly frogs overrun homes, beds, and ovens. When Moses intercedes, God removes his amphibian army. (None could argue that the frogs appeared and “croaked” due to environmental causes, for the frogs living in their natural habitat along the river didn’t die.) Then Egypt reeked of rotting flesh.

What idols are you prone to worship? Can you think of a time when Jehovah made you loathe what you formerly thought ensured your happiness?

Sing or pray Psalter #213:1–4.

April 11

Jehovah’s Power Displayed

Read Exodus 9

In plagues five and six God exposes two more of the Egyptian’s gods as helpless idols. Their god represented by a bull or cow couldn’t spare their herds from his “grievous mur-rain.” Their goddess of war and healing was unable to save her worshippers from the boils that covered them from head to foot, inflaming their legs and knees so that they were unable to stand (Deut. 28:27, 35). But the most grievous plague noted in Exodus 9 was invisible to the human eye. That plague was Jehovah’s hardening of the hearts of Pharaoh, his servants, and many of his people. But even among the Egyptians some feared the word of the Lord. Those who by grace resorted to the shelter of the Most High were spared his fury just as their livestock were spared the deadly hail of the seventh plague.

That inward plague accomplished a two-fold purpose. It not only hardened those so appointed to their destruction: it also demonstrated God’s power. To those who take counsel against the Lord and his anointed comes the declaration originally made to Pharaoh: “For this cause have I raised thee up…that my name may be declared throughout all the earth” (v. 16).

Sing or pray Psalter #253.

April 12

Tell Your Son

Read Exodus 10

Among the people to whom Jehovah’s glory must be declared were the little children of Israel, those already born and those yet to be born. In Exodus 10:1–2 Jehovah declares, “I have hardened [Pharaoh’s] heart, and the heart of his servants…that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son’s son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them.” Again he commands his people to instruct their children regarding their great deliverance in Exodus 12:26–27 and Exodus 13:8, 14–16.

Do you diligently teach your children of the great salvation that God has wrought when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up? Do you make time to answer their questions?

(In Exodus 12:26–27 and Exodus 13:14–16 the instruction of the children takes place in response to their questions.) Do not hide from them the glorious deeds of the Lord, his might, and the wonders that he has done. “So that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments” (Psalm 78:7).

Sing or pray Psalter #212.

April 13

From Rags to Riches

Read Exodus 11

In the final verse of Exodus 10, Pharaoh commands Moses to leave and see his face no more. Moses agrees, but before he departs in great anger, he announces the tenth and final plague. He also foretells the haste in which the children of Israel would suddenly depart: they would be thrust out, and as they went the Egyptians would lade them with silver, gold, and costly apparel. The people who had been slaves would shortly be decked with jewels. What a beautiful picture of Christ’s church, the bride brought out of bondage and adorned with all the riches of salvation.

At the burning bush, Jehovah foretold that his people would spoil the Egyptians. He gave this command concerning the jewels and clothing that would so suddenly be theirs: “Ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters” (Ex. 3:22). What a beautiful picture that salvation belongs not only to believers but to their children also.

Sing or pray Psalter #124:1, 2, and 9.

April 14

The Home-born and the Stranger

Read Exodus 12

In Exodus 12 Jehovah smites all the firstborn of Egypt, and the Israelites triumphantly depart. The chapter also contains further instruction regarding the celebration of Passover. All the congregation of Israel were to keep the feast, including the slaves. No uncircumcised foreigner could partake, but if a foreigner desired to join the celebration of Israel’s deliverance, he was permitted to do so once he and all the males in his household were circumcised.

The feast was to be eaten within one’s home: no food could be carried out the door.

Those rules are not unnecessarily strict. Rather, each pictures a glorious aspect of our salvation. In Jesus Christ, the Passover Lamb, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free” (Gal. 3:28). In him we “are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands” (Col. 2:11). He is the door. All who enter through him “shall be saved” (John 10:9), never again to hunger or thirst, for his “house shall be called an house of prayer for all people” (Is. 56:7).

Sing or prayer Psalter #199.
The Firstborn Redeemer
Read Exodus 13
In Numbers 3:13 Jehovah declares, “On the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast.” Those firstborn were representative of the entire nation of Israel, whom Jehovah calls his firstborn in Exodus 4:22. He set them apart as his peculiar and holy treasure (Ex. 19:5–6).
In Exodus 13 he gives Moses instruction regarding the redemption of the firstborn. Firstborn animals were to be sacrificed to him, and firstborn children were to be redeemed by a sacrificed animal.

Again, all these Old Testament laws were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Our Savior is the firstborn of every creature (Col. 1:15), the firstborn of Mary (Luke 2:7), the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18), and the firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29). Those many brethren are the true “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16), who comprise “the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven” (Heb. 12:23). “These were redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb” (Rev. 14:4).

Sing or pray Psalter #243:1–5.

A God-Directed Path
Read Exodus 14
The Lord himself led the Israelites out of Egypt and toward the promised land. The pillar of cloud and fire did not guide them along the most direct route to Canaan, however. Instead of journeying north and east, the Israelites traveled south. Soon Pharaoh and his army pursued them, and the terrified Hebrews were hemmed in by the Red Sea and the wilderness mountains. But Jehovah’s thoughts toward them were thoughts of peace, and not of evil (Jer. 29:11). The very circumstance they thought would result in their destruction was the means by which he saved them and destroyed their enemies. Even the Egyptians acknowledged that Jehovah fought for his people (v. 25). All Israel had to do was hold their peace (v. 14).

Jehovah stills his people in ways that don’t seem good. You might wonder, “Why this vocation, Lord?” or “Why this trial?” No doubt many Israelites wondered why they had to march between walls of water in the dead of night. But they did so by faith (Heb. 11:29). Likewise, we walk by faith and not by sight, trusting that just as the angel of God went before and behind the Israelites, so he surrounds us today, lighting our path with his word.

Sing or pray Psalter #292.

A Song of Celebration
Read Exodus 15
Moses and Miriam led the children of Israel in celebrating the Lord’s victory over his enemies in Exodus 15. They celebrate in song.

Throughout the scriptures, but especially in the Psalms, God’s people are commanded to sing to him. Our songs to God are prayers, and yet, as prayers that are sung they express and evoke emotion more powerfully than prayers that are spoken. The song of the children of Israel was a song of triumphant praise. It was sung by all of the congregation, each member of the body lifting up the same words of praise at the same time. It was sung with understanding. The verse just before the song begins notes, “And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses” (14:31).

Do you sing praises to our God with understanding (Ps. 47:7)? Do you sing his praises with your family members? Do you sing with your whole heart in the congregation of which you are a member (Ps. 111:1)?

Sing or pray Psalter #418.

An Omer of Manna
Read Exodus 16
In Exodus 16 Jehovah provides his people with bread from heaven. “Man did eat angels’ food: he sent them meat in the full” (Ps. 78:25). Each person was allotted a portion of one omer, which was to be gathered daily, except on the sixth day, when enough manna was to be gathered for the Sabbath day as well. God also commanded that an omer of manna be kept “for your generations; that they may see the bread wherewith I have fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt” (v. 32).

Has God been faithful to provide you with the necessary physical and spiritual bread that you need each day? Do you take time to reflect on his provision for you in the past? Do you encourage your fellow saints, family members, and children with examples of his faithfulness from your life? May our experiences be like so many omers of manna that nourish the faith of others.

Sing or pray Psalter #292.

Time and Again
Read Exodus 17
Though the Israelites prove themselves time and again to be an unbelieving, undeserving people, Jehovah proves himself time and again to be a faithful, forgiving God. He gives them water from the rock, which Moses smites with the rod previously used to execute judgement. “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted” declares 1 Corinthians 10:6, and 1 Corinthians 10:4 teaches that the Rock from which the Israelites drank was Christ. Have you tasted that living water?

Exodus 12:51 declares that Jehovah brought “the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies.” The
people freed from bondage immediately faced the threat of war. In Exodus 17 that threat becomes a reality, and the Israelites win the victory thanks to Moses’ outstretched arms. Moses was a weak mediator, but he pointed to the One who all alone stretched out his arms on the cross. Still today he intercedes on behalf of his people with lifted up hands before our Father’s throne. We’ve been freed from sin’s bondage to fight the fight of faith. But never fear: nothing can separate us from our Mediator’s love (Rom. 8:35).

Sing or pray Psalter #92:1-3.

**Delegate**

**Read Exodus 18**

In Exodus 18 Moses heeds the wise advice of his father-in-law and delegates some of the burden of leadership to other “able men.” There is practical (and spiritual) application here for all. Pastors, businessmen, builders, teachers, mothers in the home, students assigned to a group project: in light of Exodus 18, consider the following insights on delegating:

“...God has not given us all the time we need to accomplish what we have to do...This...reveals a faulty paradigm, one that views productivity as primarily an individual matter. God hasn’t given us all the time we need because he wants us to rely on other people as well as our own resources and gifts...God designed the world so that there will always be more things for us to do than we are able to do. That isn’t just so we learn to prioritize; it’s so that we learn to depend on one another. And that’s what delegation enables us to do...delegation is the single most important way to free up time. Enlisting others is essential because, when done well, delegation builds others up and deepens existing relationships” (Perman, What’s Best Next).

Sing or pray Psalter #350.

**A Consuming Fire**

**Read Exodus 19**

Last summer our family attended a USAF Thunderbirds air show. We arrived early, and then waited, and waited, and waited for the airshow to begin. Suddenly, four F-16s roared overhead in formation. The ground shook beneath the deafening rumble of the engines, and our two-year-old clung to me, sobbing with fright. When Jehovah God descended on Mount Sinai, thunder rumbled, lightening flashed, and the entire mountain shook. The people exceedingly feared and also quaked, in part at the terrible sight and in part at the deafening noise, but also because they understood the source of this tremendous display of power: the holy God of heaven and earth was coming down.

The same thrice-holy God condescends to commune with us. Do you serve him acceptably with reverence and godly fear? “For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29).

Sing or pray Psalter #259.

**April 22**

**The Perfect Law of God**

**Read Exodus 20**

Before he reads God’s law during the Sunday morning worship service, our pastor often reminds us that that law comes to God’s people in the context of its introduction: “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” We are God’s redeemed people, purchased by the blood of the Lamb. We are not married to the law: we are married to Christ. The law cannot condemn us; instead, it serves us as the rule for our life of gratitude. It’s a law that’s written in the hearts of God’s people by the Spirit of Christ: “I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ez. 36:27; see also Jer. 31:33).

Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you keep his commandments? Do you rejoice in the way of his testimonies as much as in all riches? (Ps. 119:14). Is your earnest prayer “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law”? (Ps. 119:18). Thereby you know that you love him (1 John 2:3).

Sing or pray Psalter #322.

**April 23**

**The Civil Law Begins**

**Read Exodus 21**

Exodus 20 contains the Ten Commandments, God’s moral law, which shall not pass away. Exodus 21 contains the first of many civil (or judicial) and ceremonial laws that are no longer binding on us New Testament saints but still set forth abiding moral principles. Jehovah safeguarded slaves, women, and the unborn. He distinguished between the willful and accidental taking of human life, highlighted the seriousness of the obligation to honor one’s parents, maintained that the punishment must fit the crime, and held people accountable for damage caused by their livestock and property.

A brief survey of American society will reveal how many of our neighbors despise God’s moral standards. What would a survey of your life reveal?

Sing or pray Psalter #42.

**April 24**

**A Judge of Widows**

**Read Exodus 22**

God sets forth additional moral principles in Exodus 22. The first 15 verses contain commands regarding the Israelites’ possessions, specific applications of the eighth commandment, “Thou shalt not steal.” Still today “God forbids not only those thefts and robberies which are punishable by the magistrate” but “all wicked tricks and...
devices whereby we design to appropriate to ourselves the goods which belong to our neighbor;” and also all covetousness and abuse or waste of his gifts (HC, Q & A 110).

The chapter also contains a number of laws that prohibit social injustice. Verse 24 reminds us that even if we commit injustices not punishable by the magistrate, vengeance belongs to Jehovah, who “execute* righteous* and judgment for all that are oppressed” (Ps. 103:6). “The L*or* preserves the strangers; he relieves the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down” (Ps. 146:9).

Sing or pray Psalter #179.

April

Don’t Follow the Crowd
Read Exodus 23

The civil laws in Exodus 23 set forth principles regarding truth, justice, bribery, and rest. The second verse declares, “You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice” (NKJV).

In the fourth century AD there lived a bishop who understood the principle of Exodus 23:2. His name was Athanasius, and he served as a bishop in Alexandria, Egypt, for over four decades. During his ministry, a multitude of Christians and Christian church leaders followed a heretic named Arius. Arius denied the deity of our Savior Jesus Christ and consequently the Trinity. His false teaching became so popular that Athanasius faced vigorous persecution and was even exiled from Alexandria five different times. Once a close friend of Athanasius observed, “Athanasius, the whole world is against you!” Athanasius answered, “Then it is Athanasius against the world.”

Athanasius didn’t stand alone, though, did he? He was strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might (Eph. 6:10). “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day” (Eph. 6:13).

Sing or pray Psalter #326.

April

Sprinkled with the Blood
Read Exodus 24

Twice in Exodus 24 the children of Israel assert, “All that the L*or* hath said will we do, and be obedient!” (v. 7). But Jehovah did not make his covenant with them on the basis of their obedience, but on the basis of the blood shed for them. So “Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the L*or* hath made with you concerning all these words.”

Then Moses, Aaron, Aaron’s sons, and seventy of the elders of Israel ascend the mountain and see God. “And there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness” (v. 10). Matthew Henry notes, “The believer sees in the face of Jesus Christ, far clearer discoveries of the glorious justice and holiness of God, than ever he saw under terrifying convictions; and through the Savior, holds communion with a holy God” (Matthew Henry). Has he shined the light of the knowledge of his glory in your heart? (2 Cor. 4:6)

Sing or pray Psalter #231.

April

According to the Pattern
Read Exodus 25

God now gives the pattern of the tabernacle to Moses, and that in great detail. In verses 9 and 40 he emphasizes the importance of building the tabernacle according to that pattern. None of its details were arbitrarily appointed, for, as Heb. 8:5 teaches, they served “unto the example and shadow of heavenly things.” The tabernacle, its furniture, and its rituals all pointed to Christ. Yet Calvin warns, “There is, however, no reason that we should be here overcurious, so as to seek in every nail and minute things some sublime mystery...we ought therefore to exercise moderation in this respect, which we shall do if we seek only to know what has been revealed to us respecting Christ.”

Even in the New Testament, we worship God only as he has commanded in his word. That is the regulative principle of our worship and the essence of the second commandment, as Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 96 states: “What doth God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.”

Sing or pray Psalter #256.

April

God With Us
Read Exodus 26

Before the fall, God communed with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. There man was nourished by the tree of life, and the rivers that flowed out of the garden encompassed lands where there was gold. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God banished them from Eden, “and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24). Now God gives the template for the tabernacle, in which he will dwell among his people, and this new dwelling place is reminiscent of his former dwelling place. The candlestick, with its branches and flowers, is like a tree. The tabernacle gleams with gold. And cherubim guard the Holy of Holies.

The tabernacle doesn’t point back to Eden, however. It points forward to Jesus Christ, Immanuel, “the mediator of a better covenant” who dwells in the hearts of his people (Heb. 8:6). It finds its ultimate fulfillment in the paradise of God, which, in the symbolic language of Revelation, includes streets paved with gold and in its center the tree of life.
Sing or pray Psalter #134.

**Past the Altar**

**Read Exodus 27**

When God’s people entered the court of the tabernacle, they first encountered the altar of burnt offering. Only through the sacrifices offered on the altar could they enter the presence of the holy God. The blood shed on the altar could not take away sins, but, like everything else in the tabernacle, it pointed to our Lord Jesus Christ, who “now once in the end of the world hath…appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb. 9:26). Only through his shed blood do we “have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Rom. 5:2).

Within the Holy Place stood the lamp, which evoked a tree or a vine with branches. The priests tended the lamp morning and evening so that its light never went out. In John 15:5 Jesus declares, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.” Does your light so shine before men? (Matt. 5:16). And do you look forward to the new heaven and earth, in which God’s people will “need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light”? (Rev. 22:5).

Sing or pray Psalter #318.

**Our Better High Priest**

**Read Exodus 28**

Jehovah chose Aaron and his sons from among the people of Israel to serve him as priests. Artisans filled with the Holy Spirit made the garments that set apart Aaron and his sons for service and covered their nakedness, garments “for glory and for beauty.” But Aaron and his sons were sinful, mortal men. Their priesthood would be replaced by the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom God swore an oath of which he will not repent, “Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4). “This man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood” (Heb 7:24).

Our sinless high priest hung naked on the cross, bearing our iniquity. Upon him, our representative, came the wrath of God, and for our life he died. His glory and beauty inspires awe and reverence (Rev. 1:17). The names of his people are not engraved on a breastplate that he must wear, but in his very flesh (Is. 49:16). And before God’s throne of judgement he ever lives to make continual intercessions for his people (Rom. 8:34). “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb. 7:25).

Sing or pray Psalter #47.

**A Holy Priesthood**

**Read Exodus 29**

Exodus 29 records God’s instructions for the week-long inauguration of Aaron and his sons into the priesthood. Aaron and his sons were washed, clothed with the holy garments, and anointed with oil. Then Moses offered an offering for their sins. The second offering, a ram wholly burnt, pointed to the priests’ total consecration to God. The blood of the third sacrifice, a peace offering, was put on the right ears, hands, and toes of Aaron and his sons, symbolizing that they were sanctified from head to toe for God’s service. Some of the flesh of this sacrifice was given to Moses and Aaron and his sons to eat. All of this was necessary because God brought his people out of bondage in order that he might dwell among them (v. 46).

We’ve also been brought out of bondage to sin and into fellowship with God. Our high priest gave his body to the cross and shed his blood for us. He nourishes our souls with his crucified body and shed blood to everlasting life. As members of his body, we share in his anointing, and we’re called to daily present ourselves as living sacrifices of thankfulness to him (Rom. 12:1).

Sing or pray Psalter #368.

**Prayer like Incense**

**Read Exodus 30**

Exodus 30 begins with a description of the altar of incense and ends with the recipe for the incense itself. This sweet-smelling perfume was to be burned twice each day, in the morning and in the evening. The burning incense pictured the prayers of God’s people ascending up to heaven. Luke 1:10 suggests that it was customary for those in the outer court to pray even as the priest entered the holy place with the incense. It was a great and rare privilege for a priest to execute “the priest’s office before God in the order of his course” (Luke 1:8). We have the privilege – even the command – to offer our prayers to God without ceasing. “Be careful [anxious] for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6).

In Exodus 30:12-16 God instructs Moses concerning atonement money that was to be collected: one half shekel for each person 20 years old and older. The rich were not to give more, nor the poor, less. Our God is no respecter of persons: “the souls of all are of equal value, equally in danger, and all equally need a ransom” (Matthew Henry).

Sing or pray Psalter #311.

**Called and Equipped**

**Read Exodus 31**

God had given Moses detailed, extensive instructions regarding the building of the tabernacle, its furnishings, the priestly garments, and the preparation of the anointing oil and...
Beacon Lights 17

1:19–23). How quickly they forgot their vow to worship Jehovah “according to the pattern”! They traded the riches of their salvation to serve the world of men’s hands, determining that they would represent Jehovah with a golden calf, mimicking one of the Egyptians’ idols. Instead of worshipping the living God in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness as his image bearers, they became like the dumb, blind, deaf, and dead image that they made (Ps. 135:16–18).

As we considered several days ago, God requires “that we in no wise…worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his Word” (HC, Q&A 96). “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Is that the way in which you worship Jehovah “according to the pattern”! These gifts are given “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). You or I may be tempted to despise the gifts God has given us as insignificant, but we must be faithful to employ the gifts that God has given us (See Matt. 25:14–30). He calls us to serve our fellow saints, and he equips us to that end.

Do the members of Christ’s church benefit from the distribution and exercise of the gifts that God has given you? Sing or pray Psalter #383.

The Golden Calf
Read Exodus 32

Though God had manifest himself to Israel, so that they were without excuse, they “became vain in their imaginations and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to [a] four-footed [beast]” (Rom. 1:19–23). How quickly they forgot their vow to worship Jehovah “according to the pattern”! They traded the riches of their salvation to serve the world of men’s hands, determining that they would represent Jehovah with a golden calf, mimicking one of the Egyptians’ idols. Instead of worshipping the living God in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness as his image bearers, they became like the dumb, blind, deaf, and dead image that they made (Ps. 135:16–18).

As we considered several days ago, God requires “that we in no wise…worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his Word” (HC, Q&A 96). “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Is that the way in which you worship Jehovah, or are you content with an outward show?

Sing or pray Psalter #222.

The Meek Mediator
Read Exodus 33

Deuteronomy 34:10 declares, “And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.” Yet “the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3).

What is meekness? “Meekness is a recognition of one’s God-ordained place…It is a sense of proportion” (Elisabeth Elliot). A meek man doesn’t necessarily think less of himself, he thinks of himself less (C.S. Lewis). In the words of Romans 12:3, a meek man is one who doesn’t “think of himself more highly than he ought to think.” Like Moses, a meek man understands that he’s not saved alone, he’s saved as a member of Christ’s body, and he loves God’s people. In meekness and lowliness of heart, our Lord Jesus Christ far surpasses Moses. Let his mind be in you, and “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Phil. 2:1–3).

Sing or pray Psalter #109.

Visiting the Iniquity
Read Exodus 34

When the Lord declares in Exodus 34:6–7 that he “visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children” he does not contradict his word in Exodus 32:33, “Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book,” or Deut. 24:16, “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.” When he says that he visits the iniquity of the fathers upon their children he means that a man’s (or a woman’s) children and grandchildren will suffer the consequences of his (or her) sin. In many such situations, the sad consequences of the parent’s sin is that the children run in the wicked way in which their parent walked. Parents, does that reality compel you to repent and confess your sins to God and to your children?

Though Jehovah visits the sins of those who hate him to the third and fourth generation, he is merciful to a thousand generations of those who love him. As Jeremiah confessed, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not” (Lam. 3:22–23).

Sing or pray Psalter #281.

The Willing Offering
Read Exodus 35

In Exodus 35, Moses receives the commanded offering for the tabernacle. There are several things to notice about this offering. First, God’s people gave willingly. Every man gave according as he purposed in his heart, “not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). Second, it was an offering not only of possessions, but of time and talents as well. Third, it included the entire congregation, men and women. Finally, the riches that they gave came from their redemption. Not long before this, the children of Israel had been destitute slaves. When Jehovah redeemed them from bondage, they left laden with riches. Now they gave of those riches to God.

You and I have also been laden with riches, riches of salvation, earthly life, many abilities, and plentiful possessions. We can take no more credit for any of those things than we can the color of our skin. “For the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof” (1 Cor. 10:26). We are nothing more than stewards of the things he has entrusted to us. Do you willingly and thankfully render unto him the things that are his?

Sing or pray Psalter #27.
“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

He was on the brink of forsaking his faith. For the first twenty years of his life, he had been a member of a conservative Christian family, community, school, and church, and thereby formally educated in the Reformed faith. As early as he could remember, he had been attending church services, memorizing doctrinal and scriptural passages for catechism, and adhering to the expected behavior patterns of his particular religion. But he had not been one to think too long or hard about his instruction. Why did he follow certain rules? Why did he believe certain doctrines? It was all just “what he was supposed to do.” Oh, for a time, he had asked questions, but after receiving a few rote answers joined with disdainful and suspicious glances, he fearfully felt it was better to shut up and go with the flow.

Then he met a few acquaintances at work and online. They were nice and intelligent sounding people who had the knack for challenging every aspect of his belief system and upbringing. After some time, this son of a Reformed church began to doubt everything he had been taught. He had never really understood why he believed and behaved the way he did in the first place, and now he felt like giving it all up to experience the “freedoms” that the world had to offer.

This is a true story, not of a specific person but of one who represents what has happened to many young people in conservative, Christian, and even Reformed circles. It is the story of a soul without an essential skill called discernment. He did not learn it, he did not practice it, and he hardly knew what it meant. Do you?

You need discernment. Scripture says you need this skill to understand sermons (1 Cor. 2:13–14), to partake of the Lord’s Supper properly (1 Cor. 11:28–29), and to understand the signs of the times (Matt. 16:3). More, you need it every moment of every day, for God says “Prove all things” (1 Thess. 5:21a). This is God’s exhortation to discern everything in your life. Especially in these last days, when errors and evils abound, when the father of lies is loose to make the truth seem false and the lie seem alluring, when the post-modern world arouses passions blurring the difference between right and wrong, when our sinful nature is wooed unto this confusion, we need stalwart sons and daughters of holy discernment!

Parents, we must train our children in this holy skill. Teachers, pastors, and elders, we have the responsibility to Educate our young people in this mental and spiritual exercise. Young men and young women, begin practicing it now. And together let us pray with young Solomon, “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad” (1 Kings 3:9a).

What is discernment? It is God-given wisdom to test, to evaluate, to examine every belief or behavior, every doctrine or deed, and every idea promoted by word or example; then it is correctly to judge if such is good or bad, true or false, better or worse, wise or foolish. Discernment is the practical side of wisdom. While wisdom is a more general virtue that can include knowing what is true and having the intelligence to understand and memorize the same, discernment is a specific aspect of wisdom. A discerner does not soak in stuff like a speechless sponge. Rather, he has his mind engaged as he receives information. He thinks, he grapples with, he dissects, he filters, he wonders: “Is this really true? Is this consistent with the Bible? What are the ramifications for my life? What is the right application of this truth?” The discerner finds these answers and in doing so becomes convicted concerning what is good and evil. He tests all things and holds fast to that which is good (1 Thess. 5:21).

But a discerner does not only test information he receives. He tests all things. He does not stop thinking! Before he engages in any activity the practical
powers of his mind work to ascertain if what he is about to do is in accordance with his convictions. During a weekend activity or work, while sending texts or listening to music, while engaging in a Christian liberty or an American liberty, with those of like faith or alone, the discerner is constantly thinking, testing, and examining. He begins as a young person and never ceases in this holy endeavor.

The wise discerner tests all things with the infallible scriptures. That is the standard of his faith and the rule for his life. God’s infallible word is what the young Christian must grow up using as the authority to test the fallible ideas of men and women in home, school, and even church. Although a child should have a good degree of trust in the worth and credibility of his parents’ instruction, his minister’s catechesis, and his teacher’s lessons, a child’s faith may not ultimately be founded upon man’s word! As he matures, it is not satisfactory that something is true just because Dad said so, or even because Reverend so and so said so. He refuses to behave a certain way just because that is “the way we have always done it.” It is necessary to a young person’s spiritual development that he examine the instruction of his upbringing, holding fast only to what he has found consistent with God’s inspired word. As a young person practices such discernment according to scripture he will spiritually mature to continue this holy activity for a lifetime.

Scripture is abundant in its call to such discernment. The apostle John exhorts the church to discern the spirits which work in all kinds of teachers: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Wise Solomon contrasts the wise and foolish: “The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.” The noble Bereans of Acts 17:11 are commended for this discernment. “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

Strikingly, the main application of the above verses is that the people in the pew (the young people too) are to test what the minister is preaching. The catechism students are to examine what their catechism instructor is teaching. We are to evaluate what our high school teacher is teaching, and yes, what our parents are saying. Before we accept it as true, we are to make certain that it is true! Before we engage in an accepted behavior pattern, we should evaluate the biblical principles behind it. Adults should encourage such examination. We should not allow our fear of not being able to answer, make our young people fearful of asking searching questions. We should invite their respectful challenges, seeing them as opportunities for practice in such discernment. How else will our young people develop this ability?

This is not to condone an overly critical attitude toward a leader. It is not an excuse for rebellious and disrespectful challenges meant to embarrass a teacher. It is not to encourage doubt concerning everything you have been taught. Rather, it is a calling to begin cultivating this skill in the safe environments of church, school, and home in preparation for the more dangerous situations of the future.

Not only will such practice of discernment hone this skill for the future, but it will also be a means of impressing the truth upon young minds. After the Bereans of Acts 17 searched the Scriptures to ensure that what Paul preached was true, we read, “Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few” (Acts 17:12). What was the process that brought them to believe with all their heart the truth? They recognized that it was not merely Paul’s word, but that it was God’s word! In the way of exercising discernment now, the young person comes to a firmer conviction of the truths he is learning.

There is much to begin discerning now. Why are you a member of a specific denomination? Because your family is there? Because you fear they will shun you if you go somewhere else? Or have you discerned that the doctrines taught are founded upon scripture, and are best for your own spiritual good, your children’s good, and for the glory of Christ? Why do you worship the way you do? Because it feels right? Because it is what you are used to? Or have you discerned the elements of worship in the scriptures and want to worship according to God’s will rather than according to man’s ever-changing preferences? Why do you keep the Sabbath day the way you do? Because man-made rules bind you? Or have you discerned from the scriptures the calling and profit to keep an entire day set apart for restful worship? Why do you (or don’t you) listen to certain kinds of music? Why do you (or don’t you) watch certain things on your big screen or phone?
screen? Why do you dress the way you do? Why do you date the way you do? Why did you vote for him or her this election? Because it feels right? Or have you discerned from scripture holy principles to follow even with regard to Christian liberties?

Often, discernment is difficult. Scripture does not give laws for every single situation, and so the temptation is to add laws to the scripture. This legalism is easier at first, but it is a sin that always backfires. A careful discerner avoids legalism, using the lens of scripture with much prayer to understand the will of God in each situation. He sees the extremes or ditches connected with almost every issue and finds the narrow way that avoids both. He can live in the world but not be of it. He knows how to hold to good habits and traditions not explicitly commanded in scripture, and at the same time refrains from condemning Christians not identical to him. He has tamed his tongue to be bold with the truth and yet also meekly gentle. He knows when to partake of a liberty and when to abstain for the sake of a brother’s conscience. He understands when enjoyment of a good thing is becoming an idol or addiction. He honestly examines not only his outward behavior but his inward motivations. He knows how to reject common grace, live the antithesis, and yet still be a compassionate witness to the unbelieving neighbor. He carefully investigates the best ways to answer the partially slanderous accusations against his church of legalism, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness. How discerning are you?

There are many impediments to our proper exercise of discernment. One is that we are too distracted. Our minds and hearts are so caught up with the noise and sights of media, devices, and work, that we do not have a moment to think, to read God’s word at all, much less to test everything with this standard. One of Satan’s strategies is overloading and over-stimulating our senses so that we are too distracted even to discern his craftiness. How many times did your phone divert your attention while reading this article? We need to implement concrete plans and actions to reduce the bombardment of our senses so that we can simply focus on this mental work!

A second hindrance is our feelings. This world is much like the time of the judges when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” Whatever feels right is right, even if it contradicts the equally strong right feelings of the neighbor. Mood determines right and wrong. This is not only today’s post-modern culture, but it is part of the temptation of our flesh. While feelings are not wrong of themselves, they are not dependable standards for discernment. Anger, fear, lustful passions, and sadness can often cloud clear thinking. Train yourselves to push aside feelings and objectively test all things.

A third great deterrent from discernment is laziness. It is mental, emotional, spiritual labor on the part of ministers, teachers, and parents to coach in this mental work. They will have many questions to answer. They will have to search the scriptures themselves to address questions not immediately answerable. For the young person, he has to read and study the Bible at devotions, engage his mind in church, think critically when he would prefer fun. Our lazy natures would rather live life having someone else think for us (even if it is the computerized Siri). It is easier on our brains and also on our consciences.

A final obstacle is fear. Fear not only inhibits clear discernment, it also prohibits it from even beginning. Frankly, there are some of you who are scared about what you are reading, and what might happen if you begin to think for yourselves about what the Bible says. And out of fear a young person might ask, “Am I even able to discern properly?” The fearful parent might wonder that too: “Is my son or daughter able?” “Fear not!” God says repeatedly in his word. God gives to believers and their children the Holy Spirit who works in us Christ’s treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). Our minds are sanctified to read God’s word and discern what is good and evil. Let us not fear but trust in God who says, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

May God grow our young people to become spiritually mature, able to chew on the meat of God’s word and thereby exercise discernment. “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14).

Rev. Mahtani is pastor of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church in Saint John, Indiana.
Spring

The scent of springtime fills the air
And fragrance greets us everywhere;
The grass is green, no longer brown;
The snow submerged into the ground.

Where just a few short weeks ago
Naught but bare limbs a tree would show,
New buds of green spring forth—and they
Enlarge—become a green array.

Where flow’rs were planted, soil erupts
To make room for the buttercups,
Hyacinths, violets, daffodils;
The ground with flow’rs our Father fills.

The skies have shed their wintry gray
And azure blue is here today,
Softened too with clouds of white;
The sunshine just a bit more bright.

The birds return from southern clime—
God sends them in the proper time.
To build their nests they’ll now begin,
And soon their eggs they’ll lay within.

A quickened world we’re giv’n to see—
A parable for you and me:
God takes our souls, which once were dead,
And gives us his new life instead.

His justice must be satisfied:
He sent his Son; accursed he died.
Our sins were nailed upon the tree;
Christ then arose triumphantly.

We live because he lives within,
He’s purged away our every sin.
May we reflect his love and grace
Until we meet him face to face. 🌞
What Is Man?

This article is an adaptation of a speech given on August 17, 2016, at the Young Adults Retreat held at Lake Okoboji, IA.

Psalm 8:3–4: “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?”

Imagine David as a young shepherd boy in the fields of Bethlehem, keeping watch over his flocks by night. He is lying on his back, surrounded by his sheep, gazing up at a clear night sky. Or picture David as king in his palace in Jerusalem. He is on his rooftop at night, not looking across at his neighbor’s wife, but up into the night sky to drink in the beauty of the moon and stars. It was a scene like this that led David under the inspiration of the Spirit to cry in astonishment, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him?”

Like Psalm 19 (the theme passage of the retreat), Psalm 8 is generally about the creation. But Psalm 8 has a different emphasis. While Psalm 19 speaks of the creation generally, Psalm 8 emphasizes God’s creation of and provision for the highest of his creatures: man.

Although there is this difference between the two psalms, both have the same major theme: “O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!”

Our Glorious Creation

In one of the versifications of Psalm 8 we sing, “When thy wondrous heavens I scan, then I know how weak is man.” That is one of the important truths that comes out of this psalm: the smallness and insignificance of man.

This is plain when we simply consider who we are. We are weak, easily laid low by the smallest bugs and diseases. We are limited: limited in ability, limited in knowledge, limited in strength. We are insignificant, one person amongst billions upon the face of the earth.

But this is also something that God impresses upon us by means of the heavens (vv. 3–4). Think about the size of the earth. Then think about how the earth occupies just a small place in our solar system. Then think about how our solar system makes up just a small part of our galaxy. Then think about how our galaxy occupies just a small part among the many galaxies in the universe. When you think about that, what impression are you left with about yourself? How small and weak man is. We are nothing in comparison to the heaven. We are a puny, insignificant speck of dust.

This is something that has always impressed me about Northwest Iowa. When you stand outside during a clear summer day, the sky feels so big and open and impressive. And the same is true at night; you go outside and gaze up into the vast, inky sky and see thousands of stars shining brightly. And there is a thought that rises unavoidably to the forefront of the mind: I am nothing.

How humbling! This is contrary to the attitude of the world (including the worldlings competing recently at the Olympics) as they strut with their chins in the air and their chests puffed out, boasting that man is mighty. This is contrary to my self-important, self-confident, self-seeking attitude. When we consider the heavens, and when we truly examine ourselves, we see that there is no room for pride in our lives. We are puny, insignificant, weak creatures of the dust. This ought to humble us deeply so we cry, “What is man? Who am I?”

How humbling, but also how amazing! The Creator is mindful of us puny creatures so that we are in his thoughts—how amazing! The Preserver visits us, sustains us, provides for us, bestows life and breath, food and drink, health and strength—how amazing! Stand in awe and amazement that God would condescend to us: “Who am I, that thou art mindful of me?”

The fact that God condescends to us is even more amazing when we consider how highly he has exalted us. He does more than feed and clothe
us like the birds and lilies; he has given us honor unmatched.

There are two parts to our exaltation. First, God has exalted us in our creation. “For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour” (v. 5). The word “angels” is actually the word “God.” Sometimes in the Bible the word is used to describe beings other than God (cf. Ps. 82:1, 6), but ordinarily it refers to God. However you take it, it still describes the exaltation of man. God made man lower than himself and a little lower than the angels. Man is the highest of all earthly creatures. What distinguishes us from the animals is that we have a soul, a spiritual dimension, that makes it possible for us to stand in a relationship to God and the angels. And the explanation is that God created man originally in his own image. This is the crown of glory and honor with which we were crowned. From a spiritual point of view, we were the children of God and looked like him.

Second, God has exalted us in our position. “Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet...” (vv. 6–8). In the beginning God gave to man dominion over the creation (Gen. 1:26, 28). As the highest of all earthly creatures and the one made in God’s image, God entrusted to man the rule of the creation. God made man to rule as king over the creation under God, in that way bringing the praise of the whole creation to the Creator.

How humbling! Not only does he think of and care for us puny creatures, but God has seen fit to create us a little lower than the angels, crown us with glory and honor, and give us dominion over all the works of his hands.

How amazing! What condescension of God in exalting insignificant creatures so highly!

**OUR GLORIOUS FUTURE**

But there is more to Psalm 8 than a description of God’s original, glorious creation of man. There is a description of a higher mountain peak of glory here, but to reach it we have to descend from the mountain peak of our original creation and pass through a deep, dark valley. To appreciate fully the amazing condescension of God described in this psalm, we have to be reminded of the sad and shameful story of the fall.

Much of what has been said so far was true of us at creation, but is no longer the case. God made us in his own image, but we have lost the image of God and have taken on its opposite: the image of the devil. God gave us dominion over the whole creation as kings under him, but now we press the creation into the service of self and sin and Satan. God crowned us with glory and honor, but we have abdicated that crown and lost that glory. This took place when we fell into sin. When Father Adam and Mother Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and rebelled against God, we sinned in them and thereby fell from that original state of honor and glory.

But that took place according to the sovereign good pleasure of God in order to raise us to a far higher glory in Christ. Psalm 8 is a Messianic psalm. There are a number of times that this psalm is quoted in the New Testament as applying to Christ (cf. Matt. 21:15–16; 1 Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 2:8–9). Jesus Christ is “the son of man” (Ps. 8:4). He was made a little lower than the angels when he took upon himself a human nature and was born of the virgin Mary. He entered into our shame and humiliation and went to Calvary in order to make atonement for our sins. And having made perfect satisfaction there, he arose victorious from the grave and ascended into heaven where he was crowned as King of kings and given rule over all things. And he will come again as King to create a new heavens and earth where his kingdom will be fully realized and he will have dominion over all things. Christ is crowned with the greatest glory and honor.

By his saving work he causes us to share in that glory and honor and dominion. Although we are undeserving, God is mindful of us and visits us with his salvation and love. Although we lost the image of God at the fall, he recreates us in his image and crowns us with a greater glory and honor. In Christ the King we reign over all things now. This creation is our rightful inheritance. All things work together for our good.

This is something we will enjoy fully at the return of Christ. When he returns, we will be crowned with the highest glory and honor. We will be like Christ, bearing perfectly his image in perfection. We will receive the new heavens and earth as our inheritance where we will live and labor in the service of Christ. We will be given rule over all things with Christ. We are sons and daughters of the King, destined to reign with him forever!

How humbling! Who am I that God would choose to crown me, an undeserving sinner, with the highest glory in heaven?
How amazing! Who am I that God would be mindful of me and visit me with his salvation in Christ?

**Our Glorious God**

But, in the end, Psalm 8 is not about man and his original glory, or even the church and the glory of her salvation. In the end, Psalm 8 is about God and his glory.

This is the theme of Psalm 8. This is how it begins (vv. 1–2), and this is how it ends (v. 9). Some commentators are confused and say that there are really two themes running through Psalm 8: the glory of God and the place of man in his creation. But this is not true. There is one theme that runs through this psalm, and it is the glory of God as he reveals it in the honor he bestows upon man. The second idea is intended merely to serve the first and most important idea of the excellency of God.

Therefore, it would be wrong for us to end our consideration of Psalm 8 by talking about man and his glory. Then we’ve missed the whole point of the psalm. We have to end by talking about the glory of our God. This is what we constantly need throughout our life: a glorious, expansive view of our God.

Everything that’s been said so far about us ought to lead us back to God. When we see the honor which God originally gave to man, we remember how puny man is in comparison to the heavens. Then we are led to consider how puny the heavens are before the God who has “set [his] glory above the heavens” (v. 1). The glory of man is a drop in a bucket compared to the exceeding greatness of the glory of the Creator.

What is true in creation is also true in salvation. The glory with which God crowns us is not our own but his own glory. And though he crowns us with great glory and honor and gives us dominion over the new creation, we are still lower than the one who is “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).

Our response to the vision of God’s glory we receive is to glorify him.

As you consider his glory in the works of his fingers in creation, praise him: O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

As you consider his glory in how he has made you, praise him: O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

And as you consider his glory in how he has remade you and glorified you in Christ, praise him: O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

Rev. Engelsma is pastor of Doon Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa.

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**Riotous Living**

We as young people in the Church in the year 2017 of our Lord have many temptations to flee and fight against. One major temptation is living a riotous lifestyle. As we look at the world today we see rampant riotousness, especially in the younger generations. The world loves pleasure and will do whatever it takes to be pleased, no matter the sin or the consequences of those sins. Three main activities of riotous living are drinking, doing drugs, and sexual immoralities. This lifestyle is one that has engulfed many young people, and is a constant temptation to the rest of the young people. We have been commanded by God to follow not after the way of the world, but to follow in the footsteps of Christ. When we walk after Christ we have joy and the Holy Spirit works in us a conviction, that we bear fruits.

Romans 13:12–14 gives direct command of how to live our lives concerning riotous living. Verse 13 of Romans 13 tells us that we walk “not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.” We are commanded by God not to live in riotousness, or in other words, not to live a life of partying and reckless ignorance. We are commanded to stay away from living a life of drunkenness, a life filled with alcohol and drugs, and the actions that proceed from using these.
We also have a command to flee the lust of the flesh—“chambering”—and flee willful ignorance of the wrong found in drugs, alcohol, and sex—“wantonness.”

This command is not one to be taken lightly; we see the command of the antithesis to walk separate from the world. The world loves to mill around the effects of drugs, drunkenness, and sex because it brings joy to them, ungodly, terrible, and abominable joy. They revel in the moment of these sins, they enjoy them and become slaves to these sins, and because God is not mocked, he fully gives the world over to their sins. 2 Peter 2:13 tells us that the world “shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they count it pleasure to riot in the day time.” The world loves to revel in immorality, often caused by the sins of drunkenness and drugs. These two cause those who use them to lose their sense and consciousness of what they are doing, thus causing them to cast caution to the wind, to do as they please in the moment.

There is the great danger that our young people will follow the world, falling into these sins. We out of love for God, with our hearts, souls, minds, and strength ought to flee these abominable sins, no matter how great the temptation. This joy that the world finds often appeals to us, especially as young people. We live lives dedicated to God and see the world enjoying their sins, and at times it makes it very difficult not to lust after and fall into these sins. This calling to flee from these sins applies not only to others but to me personally. This must be the confession of all young people, for no one is exempt from this calling of God.

There is but one option then to this temptation: flee unto the Lord, for he is our strength; we must follow Christ. This is our command in the most positive sense. We are commanded not to follow the world, in the negative, but are in the positive commanded to follow our perfect Savior Jesus Christ. Romans 13:13a tells us to “walk honestly, as in the day.” This verse tells us to walk properly according to the law and word of God. We are commanded to follow his commandments as they are our guide in this life on earth. Romans 13:14 tells us more, to “put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.” Here we see the two-fold calling: first we must flee the lusts of our flesh, and second we must put on the Lord, and this we do by following his law.

This also is a difficult command to follow because we are mere and sinful men, but we need to remember the words of Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Here we see that though we have a difficult command, we have the strength of Christ to assist us as he has given us his Spirit as our strength, for God never leaves nor forsakes us.

Though this command is difficult, it is one that brings great joy to us, the true joy that is unending joy, by God’s grace. In order to follow Christ we need faith, which our Lord has graciously given unto us. We read of this in Galatians 3:23–29 (which I recommend reading). By faith in God we are justified, and having this faith means we follow the law of God. Galatians 3:23–29 speaks of how faith works justification by obedience to God’s law, not by following man’s or the world’s laws. God has graciously given us faith even though we do not deserve it and can in no way earn it. Rather, it is out of love for us that God gives it to us. By faith, then, we can obey the law of God.

We see with great joy that God has blessed us with the gift of faith, that we might be justified, that we might follow his law and flee the devil and his demons who so often tempt us with alcohol, drugs, and sex, those sins of our lustful flesh. God of his good pleasure gives us this gift of faith that Christ might be glorified and us in him. 2 Thessalonians 1:11–12 says, “Therefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” We are comforted, that God who counts his children worthy and gives us faith will also work that faith with power so that we may glorify his name. This is our goal and purpose of life, to glorify the Most High God and Father, who by his grace has given us faith.

May we as young people see our calling to flee riotous living, and obey the word of God. Then may we thank him for his grace and his love in giving us the gift of faith, and may we pray for his strength to heed and obey this calling. May we go forth as young people who love the Lord our God in faithful and willing obedience to his name.

Caleb is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.
Resurrection Day

And behold there was an earthquake
God of all creation shook earth for our sake.
   The angel of the Lord descended
   The power of death was ended.
   He rolled back the stone
   See the pathway to God’s throne.
   Away from the door
   Passage open evermore!
   He is not here, but risen
   No more in death imprisoned.
   As he said
   Not amongst the dead.
Come see the place where the Lord lay
Our rising again is assured this day.

Poem
Vi De Boer
The Sword of the Spirit
Part 4: Its Use

Danny, his sister Becky, and their mom sat on the couch with the book of Roman armor and soldiers spread out before them. Their mom pointed at the picture of the Roman shield. “Do you remember when we were talking about the shield, how the Roman soldier shoved it into his enemy to get him off balance?”

Danny nodded. “Yes, you said we’d talk more about it later.”

His mom nodded. “Once a Roman soldier had his enemy off-balance, that’s when he would stab with his sword. The Roman soldier used his sword and shield as weapons together, not alone. It didn’t do him any good to flail about with his sword without his shield to protect him, nor would it do him any good to shove forward with his shield without following that up with his sword.”

“What does that mean for the armor of God that we’ve been talking about?” Becky asked.

“Faith and the word of God go together. Whenever we witness to others, the actions we do out of faith should match the word of God. We shouldn’t just flail about with quoting scripture if our life doesn’t show our faith. And doing good actions doesn’t have any real meaning if it isn’t backed up with scriptures.”

Danny wrinkled his nose. “I don’t get it. What does that mean for me? I’m too young to witness and all that.”

“You still have to live your faith, even when you’re young.” His mom hugged him. “Right now, you learn the Bible and grow in your faith so you’re ready when you’re older.”

Questions to think about

1. Read Ephesians 6:17 and 1 Peter 3:15 by yourself or with your parents. How do we use the sword we have been given?

2. What is the connection between the Shield of Faith and the Sword of the Spirit?

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
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