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Editorial Doug Dykstra

A THISTLE IN YOUR HEART

Is there a thistle in the corner of the garden of your heart? Perhaps a patch of growing and expanding thistles? I refer to the metaphor of the parable of the sower, and through it I challenge you to consider the theme of idolatry as it applies to a specific area in our lives today.

In Matthew 13 Christ teaches by means of the parable of the sower. Because the parable’s emphasis is on how the preaching is heard using the idea of different types of soil, it would be better to call it the parable of different soils.1 In the parable Christ makes it clear that he is speaking to us, the church, as those who hear the gospel. In this particular application we think we are good soil hearers, but we have a serious problem, namely, weeds. The sin of idolatry certainly is such a weed. One very thorny weed is a particular device. It is highly favored, sought after, and loved. It is particularly loved by the youth. It is small as idols go. It is shiny. It only requires a small amount of cheap electrical energy in exchange for 16–18 hours of awesome, powerful access to ALL that the world has to offer. I suspect you know to which idol I refer. Yes, it is your smart phone. We can include its bigger cousins, the Android tablets and iPads.

Where would we be without our precious digital devices? As I type this article, my smart phone is inches from the keyboard, second only to my coffee cup. Where is yours right now? That we are too often overly attached to them hardly requires proving. While doing internet research, I was shocked to learn how many hours per day the average American spends on his or her cell phone. I checked other reputable web sites and the data checked out.

If you’re between ages 18 and 24, you look at your phone the most often, with an average of 74 checks per day.2 This comes out to 4.7 hours per day!3 This is close to 30% of your waking hours. Is it true for you and me? Do we spend nearly a third of each day on our phones?! Do I smell an idol hiding right in plain sight? In a certain sense we are in a love/hate relationship with our smart phones. This is, I trust, understood by all. We need them, or we think we do, to survive each day. Some of us—usually adults in business—often wish we were rid of them, since they cause an uninterrupted flow of annoying interruptions. Text messages, emails and calls stream in incessantly. Modern daily business makes this necessary. Vacation for many of us older ones isn’t truly vacation unless we can be freed from this annoying technical tether. But for many a Christian young person (far too many, I fear) to be disconnected from this glowing god of glass, plastic, and metal is to be disconnected from society; separation from it would be as if you were made to disappear.

If being separated from your smart phone makes you feel as if you disappear, it would be better that you make your smart phone disappear permanently. It would be for your good. On the other hand, there is a proper, even a good place for smart phones, tablets, and similar portable devices. Under control such a tool is an amazingly valuable gift. As such it can be used profitably for the service of kingdom causes and the glory of God. Keeping in touch with friends isn’t sinful unless we lack discretion and go

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1 Hanko, Herman C. The Mysteries Of The Kingdom, p 14.
in the direction of worldliness. There is, for example, a world of difference in the following two examples:
First, young people who strengthen and build one another up via Facebook, Chat, Skype, or other forms of messaging across the many miles after they have become friends through young people’s conventions, youth retreats, or a trip to the BRF. Example two is the young lady and young man who use so-called “private chat.” (Perhaps they use Snapchat or a similar app. These are highly questionable apps, since their selling point is that the video and pictures sent disappear after 10 seconds. Most likely, if you need to cover your tracks, you shouldn’t be using the app!) At some point in their interaction, this couple becomes inappropriate in speech and behavior. Shameful this is because they have given in to willful temptation. By bad behavior they break each other down. Example one serves God’s glory. Example two serves self and sin. How we choose to use our smart phones is the big difference. What we do with it determines if our smart phones serve us or we serve them. Do we let them become the thistle of our idolatry? Do we use them to produce good fruits from the seed of the word? Or, do we bow ourselves to an idol of self indulgence and bring forth foul fruits of faithless filth?

The use of our smart phones as a tool of temptation is the major way they can become a favored idol, but the device itself can also be an idol. First, we should ask ourselves if we can justify the cost of owning a smart phone. When you take away the slick marketing of monthly contract payments, a new device costs between $400 and $650. They can be bought for less, but that almost free phone isn’t free at all when you do the math for monthly payments to the provider. In 2015 Pew Research showed 43% of Americans paid between $50 and $100 per month, while 34% paid something less than $50 a month. 4 A conservative average would be $60 a month. That’s $720 a year! No matter how you pay, it is a costly little idol and often coveted by young people each time a new style is released.

When Motorola’s legendary RAZR came out, it was coveted. It clearly made idol status. I remember one day at recess break a handful of girls noticed the new flip phone on my desk. They quickly gathered around. Teachers certainly aren’t popular, so I knew it was my phone that drew them. They all began asking to handle, hold, and caress it. They wanted to try the latest features on this new super cool flip phone. I asked them, “What’s more important, an expensive pair of the latest style shoes or a phone?” Without hesitation they assured me a cool phone is FAR more desired. I had the opportunity to ask the same question of college age girls. The answer was the same. Guys also highly valued a good cell phone; they also saw it as very important. While guys looked mostly for function, girls saw the phone as an accessory that needed both to look good and function well. Except for a great increase in cost and capabilities, nothing has changed in the world of phones since then. Smart phones have too easily become coveted gadgets. Too often, with thoughtless ease, we have allowed room for the seeds of this small thorny idol to sprout!

Coveted? Today’s smart phones certainly are! According to Consumers Reports, already in 2012 1.6 million smart phones were stolen in the USA. In 2013 the number rose to 3.1 million. 5 Over the following three years the number dropped off again due to protective features on newer phones. The data reveals a shocking over-attachment to these treasured idols. Even the unbelieving world is worried about the strong attachment young people have and the real physical danger this deadly digital device presents.

It is true, smart phones endanger lives; they have literally killed people. In auto accidents, yes, but also in “walking while distracted” accidents. In 2013 there were 3,154 deaths in auto accidents due to distracted driving. Of these distracted driver fatal accidents, 49% were because drivers age 15–29 were using cell phones. This according to data gathered by the US Department of Transportation. 6 Such startling statistics don’t exclude us and people we know. If the general population is so over-attached to their smart phones certainly we are too. More strange than auto related deaths is the number of people killed due to walking while distracted. Erin Dooly of ABC News wrote about a government report from August, 2015 revealing an alarming increase in pedestrian fatalities. “Pedextrians”—people who text while walking—may be partly to blame. Research done by Ohio State University found the number of pedestrians injured while on their phones more than doubled between 2005 and 2010. “The problem is particularly prevalent among

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5 http://www.consumerreports.org.
tens, who tend to believe it’s okay to cross the street while texting or tweeting. Nearly 40 percent of U.S. teens have been hit or nearly hit by a passing car, motorcycle, or bike” (Erin Dooley, *Distracted Walking*). In 2011 an 18-year-old Hope College student was hit and killed by a 20 mile per hour freight train. He was thought to have been distracted by the ear buds and smart phone he was using at the time of the accident.

Young people, have you become so infatuated with your smart phones that they may cause injury, or worse, result in the death of another or yourself? It is a sobering thought. Yet, a more serious question is whether we become so involved with our digital devices that we are led to the point of risking spiritual death. Sin, self centeredness, and smart phones. Sadly, taken together, these three can quickly become symptoms of deep spiritual sickness.

Thankfully we may look to the Great Physician for our spiritual healing. For this we return to Christ’s parable in Matthew 13. Our Savior instructs us that we are called by the Father and made capable by the Holy Spirit of being good soil hearers. However, there are thorny thistle temptations that can use up the good soil and choke out the seed of the living word. As described in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus calls these thorns anxieties of living, deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of life. These three things are fitting descriptions of misused smart phones. Facebook pics/posts, Tweets, Instagram posts, complimentary video clips, and caustic-unkind-cutting comments can quickly lead to high anxiety for others in the broader social network of friends and contacts. How quickly we can hurt (intentionally or not); how hard it is to heal those wounds!

Deceitfulness of riches? We deceive ourselves when we don’t control our use of the gifts God gives. Time, a gift from God, has intrinsic value. Time has a dollar value built right into it. To waste time is to waste money. For example, if your boss pays you for the time you work, but you fail to work, you have stolen money from him. Therefore, time wasted on our smart phones is really the same as wasting the wealth or riches God has given. The high cost of our favorite tech gadgets was discussed earlier. We know that we spend a great deal of money on our smart phones. Do we match the dollar amount spent on our phones with the amount we put in the collection plate? Is this money ours? Is it not God’s, given to us so that we may serve him through our use of it? If we waste vast amounts of time and money on our devices, we make these devices the mother of all idols. By doing so we displace God and we place ourselves above our maker.

It is by the pursuit of the sinful pleasures of life that our smart phones can become the greatest temptation we face. Young people, especially girls, are likely to spend too much time pursuing the pleasures of social networking. There are good, appropriate ways to use social networking; there are inappropriate ways to network. You only need to ask this of yourself, “Is what I’m doing God glorifying, or am I serving myself and hurting God’s glory?” Boys are more often guilty of wasting excessive time in pursuit of online video games. The same guidelines for seeking God’s honor apply. Young men, do these games have clean themes? (Not too many, right?) Would you be ashamed if, while you were gaming, Jesus were to look over your shoulder at the screen? Don’t forget: God does watch; he sees all! Then there is the temptation of whiling away hours just entertaining ourselves with short video clips of everything from curious animal behavior to the world’s worst airplane crashes or the greatest moments ever in one sport or another. This behavior is time wasting and can readily become addictive. Too many of the videos that draw our eye are, at their core, pleasure centered.

Topping this list of addictive pleasures is pornography. For the godless hordes, this is what the internet is for. Much of today’s world readily admits this. For them there is no God, no strict rules, no biblical absolutes, no Ten Commandments. And those in the world have little if any guilt for their pursuit of twisted pornographic pleasure. We read in Romans 1 that they are given over to this by God: “Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves. Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the creator.... And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Rom. 1:24–25, 28). We are not immune to the temptation of abusing mobile technology to access the filth of pornography. We must be warned! Satan goes about as a roaring lion. He has no interest in tempting those in the world. He has them. They are lost. Satan seeks to devour you! 1 Peter 5 speaks of this: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking

whom he may devour. Whom resist steadfast in the faith” (1 Pet. 5:8–9).

The parable of the different soils also speaks an encouraging word. Through scripture, our Father builds us up through the gospel. This seed, once sown, does not return to the Father fruitless. The seed actually is Christ, the word. The sower is also Christ. This word, being Spirit-worked, bears fruit in each of us, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (Matthew 13). Although we have to battle the thorns of our weak natures, the promise of God cannot fail. We are encouraged by the gospel in Romans 6: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members [as] instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members [as] instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.... But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Rom. 6:12–14, 22).

Sin need not dominate our flesh. We are empowered by grace. We are in Christ and Christ is in us. Colossians 3 puts it this way: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.... Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:1–2, 5). Young people, be encouraged as members of the body of Christ. In singleness of your thorn-free heart, according to the grace worked within you, put to death the sinful; put on the living things which are from above.

Mr. Dykstra is a former teacher and a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

“Then shall I know even as also I am known!”

Editor’s Notes Mark H. Hoeksema

“This month’s editorial is written by Doug Dykstra and begins a series of articles in the coming months by several authors on the subject of idolatry. It has been placed prominently in the editorial position not only because it is well written, but also its connection to the editorials in the previous two months.

Beacon Lights also announces three personnel changes.

First, Monica Koole is leaving the staff to pursue other interests after serving commendably for four years. During this time many of the articles and series of articles that have appeared in the magazine bear her fingerprints. Sincere thanks to you, Monica, for a job well done. Taking her place as Contributing Writer Correspondent is Josh Moelker, a member of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church. Welcome!

Second, our secretary, Lenora Bodbyl, is retiring. With nine years of service, she is by far the longest serving staff member. Over the years she has not only kept the minutes meticulously, but based on her experience and knowledge, she has also made wise and valuable contributions to the decision-making process. Thanks for your faithful work, Lenora!

Third, Abbie Eriks is moving from Contributing Writer Correspondent to take Lenora’s position as secretary. Replacing Abbie is Jake Dykstra, a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church. We welcome him to the staff.

—MHH

Mr. Dykstra is a former teacher and a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Poetry Monica Koole

THEN SHALL I KNOW

What revelations there shall be,
When the Light of Day I shall see.
With sin, sorrow, and pain removed
My station most fully improved:
  ...Then shall I know even as also I am known!

With no longer a glass between
Where all things are so clearly seen,
When earthly transformed to heav’nly
Sees no more things shadowed darkly:
  ...Then shall I know even as also I am known!

While still I only know in part
What great desire fills my heart.
With patience I run my set race
Until I meet him face to face:
  ...Then shall I know even as also I am known!

I Cor 13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.
DEATH PENALTY

Question:
Could you clarify the biblical position on capital punishment? Specifically, when is the state permitted to carry out the death penalty? Should it only be used for murder, or may it be used for other serious crimes as well, such as rape? Also, how should we respond to Christians who oppose the death penalty on the grounds that God calls us to forgive those who have wronged us?

Answer:

The Bible is full of death, for death is God’s judgment upon sin. Therefore, God is the one who originally inflicted the “death penalty.” Our reader’s question concerns man’s right or responsibility to administer the death penalty. The sixth commandment forbids the unlawful killing of another human being, but there are obvious exceptions: killing in self-defense, killing in war, and capital punishment are the three clearest exceptions.

God commands capital punishment in Genesis 9:6: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.” This command predates the nation of Israel and applies universally to all nations, peoples, and cultures. God requires the death penalty for murderers, for “whomever sheds man’s blood.” To shed man’s blood is to murder him. Throughout the Old Testament law, the death penalty is inflicted for a number of offenses, such as murder, rape, adultery, idolatry, etc. Since the Old Testament civil law does not carry over into the New Testament, we must wisely apply the principles set forth in the Mosaic dispensation to the modern context.

In the New Testament, the state bears the sword, which is an instrument of justice: “But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom. 13:4). The New Testament does not stipulate which crimes require the death penalty, so that the state can determine its own laws, but the death penalty is required for violent crimes. The Bible does not advocate imprisonment as a penalty (there are very few references to prisons in Scripture), and I believe that society would be better served if violent offenders (such as murderers, rapists, and others) were put to death, rather than kept in a cage, protected by armed guards, for decades at the expense of the taxpayer. Paul writes that “rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil” (Rom. 13:3). A system in which lawbreakers laugh at the law is not a system that the Bible envisages. Criminals should fear the law: what greater fear than the fear of death! The criminal justice system is not for rehabilitation, but for punishment, so that the state acts as a “revenger to execute [God’s] wrath,” as Paul expresses it in Romans 13:4.

In Paul’s day, the sword was routinely used in the Roman Empire. The Romans put to death all kinds of criminals. In our liberal age, the sword is increasingly neglected. Nevertheless, God still requires the death penalty, especially for murderers, and when a murderer kills an innocent victim, God will require the blood of that person at the hand of the judge who did not, through the death penalty, prevent him killing again.

I read recently the horrifying story of Fred Harris, a pastor in Detroit, MI, who lobbied for the release of convicted murderer, Gregory Green, who had murdered his wife and unborn child in 1991. Green had been a member of Harris’s church, so that Harris thought it appropriate to lobby the parole board on Green’s behalf. On his release in 2008, Green married Harris’s daughter, whereupon on September 21, 2016, he murdered his new wife and their four children. He was resentenced to 102 years in prison! Had Green been executed in 1991 (and the death penalty should be inflicted early, if not immediately, after conviction, not dragged out for years through endless appeals), five people would be alive today. Pastor Harris’s misplaced compassion cost him the lives of his daughter and his four grandchildren!

The reader is right: God calls us to forgive. When the murderer asks our forgiveness, we must forgive him. If a church member, God forbid, were guilty of murder, and he repented, the church would owe him a duty of care. However, God does not call the state or the judge to forgive. The judge has no right to forgive: he must administer justice, which for murderers requires the death penalty. A judge who forgives criminals is guilty of dereliction of duty and is a danger to the society that he is called to serve, for he allows dangerous criminals to go unpunished.

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BEACON LIGHTS JULY 2017

Our Goodly Heritage Mark H. Hoeksema

INTERVIEW WITH HENRY HOEKSTRA (2)

Mark H. Hoeksema: Now, as far as the congregation itself was concerned, obviously there was considerable division. And I think that included the church property itself? What is your recollection of the events subsequent to the schism?

Henry Hoekstra: Well, I don’t think ours ever got to court. You know, they [the schismatics] went back to the Christian Reformed Church. But they would not take the Hull congregation until the property dispute was settled. I think my dad was elder then. They had to meet with the committee from their classis and I think the whole consistory of both churches. B. J. Haan was the chairman. You know B. J. Haan, maybe?

MHH: Yes.

HH: He would always call our church the “Hoeksema Group.” And my dad corrected him on that. “We’re not the Hoeksema Group. We are the Protestant Reformed Church” (laughter). So that was the end of him calling us the “Hoeksema Group.” Tim Kooima was telling me that not so long ago. So, maybe you heard it from Tim too, I don’t know.

MHH: I think he mentioned something about it. But the Protestant Reformed did end up getting the building back, correct?

HH: Yes, they had to buy it back—part of it anyway. They built a new one.

During the split, or after the split, your dad taught catechism in Hull in the old town hall. Henry Hoksbergen, deacon Hoksbergen, would light the fire in the coal stove. You know how kids are, we were horsing around before your dad came. And he opens the door: “Sounds like a bunch of heathens in here” (laughter)! We were rowdy.

MHH: That sounds like something he would have said.

HH: Yes, they really appreciated that he was there. I remember going to hear him preach.

One time we went to Doon and it rained and rained. We hardly made it home. I think we had 8 inches of rain that Sunday. We finally made it home, and after we went over the road, it washed out a couple hours later.

MHH: Wow. But the membership of your family basically stayed in Hull?

HH: My immediate family, my brothers and sisters? One of them moved to Michigan, but the couple that moved to Michigan are no longer in our church. That would be Pete and Dorothy. But the rest of them all stayed.

MHH: Those were definitely difficult years, though.

HH: Oh, they were, they really were.

MHH: Lots of divisions in families and a lot of hard feelings. I’ve heard a few stories.

HH: I know there was the Vis family. They were members there—John Vis, Bill Vis, and Rev. Pete Vis. You maybe don’t remember him at all?

MHH: No I don’t.

HH: He always, he was really quite Reformed even through the split time. My dad always said he was still a good preacher. But Rev. DeJong—he was conditional theology man. He was a Schilder man, through and through. And I can remember Schilder preaching in Hull, too, once.

MHH: Oh, really?

HH: Yes. I couldn’t understand a word of it, but….

MHH: Oh, because it was…

HH: Yes, the Dutch language. I could speak a little common Dutch language, but not when it comes to scripture. I’m all lost with that. I remember it was hot. He had a pitcher of water up there, and he drank water all the time (laughter).
MHH: What has been important to you in your church experiences and in your church life?

HH: I do think about it, all right. We’re blessed that we stayed in the Protestant Reformed Church, or that the Lord’s kept us in the Protestant Reformed Church would be the proper way to say it.

As a family, we are really blessed that we are still members in the PR church. We love the PR church. We really do. And we pray for the church daily. We do.

And, of course, for our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren, too.

MHH: How would you compare the church of today with the church of your youth?

HH: Well, in some ways I think the church of today compared to then is, as far as discipline is concerned, I think they’re slower with it. And maybe, rightly so. Maybe discipline was a little too hasty in those days sometimes. It’s always hard to decide—something goes on too long.

What else shall I say? I think catechism for the young people—is a little more thorough today than what it was when I was young, till we had your dad (laughter).

MHH: Then it became more thorough?

HH: I think so. Of course, they still have the same catechism book. But I think it is a little more systematic today than what it was then. It all depended on who the minister was that we had in those days too.

MHH: No, you never do. We just found that out.

HH: That’s right. You go to Trinity [Trinity’s pastor had just accepted a call].

MHH: Yes, I do.

HH: I was surprised.

What else? Young people make confession of faith earlier than what we did. And that’s good, too. I think it wasn’t really pushed very hard that you should make confession of faith when you’re younger. And I know, in those days, we went to catechism until we made confession of faith, no matter how old we were. Sometimes kept on going even after making confession of faith.

MHH: You say that they do it at a younger age. In your youth, what would you say was a more likely age?


MHH: That old?

HH: It varied, too, of course. I think I was 20, 21. I’d just joined the army. I’d been drafted.

MHH: And, definitely today it’s at a much younger age.

HH: It is.

MHH: You feel that that’s a good thing?

HH: Well, I think it’s fine. I think so.

MHH: Was there a reason that they waited in former years until they were older?

HH: Good question.

MHH: Curious as to whether you have any thoughts on that.

HH: Maybe it was a custom, I really don’t know. But I remember that even after we made confession of faith, we still kept going to Young People’s Society because there was no other society to go to.

MHH: So, when did the young people or young married couples start to have societies?

HH: There was Ladies Society and Men’s Society—really all there was. I don’t know when the other societies started. After the split, then I think they started a young adults or young married, whatever they called it.

MHH: We still have those today.

HH: Yah, we do. I went to Men’s Society all my life, and I still do. And my wife goes to Ladies’ Society. We never did join the young married. We were stubborn, maybe (laughter)? Well, it really worked better for us. Somebody had to stay home with the children. That’s why we kept it the way we did. We didn’t have to get a babysitter.

Anyway, I always think you could learn from the older gentlemen. You learn from the old, at least I did when I was back in those days anyway.

MHH: That makes sense.

HH: Preaching, for the most part, I think has stayed the same. I think it hasn’t changed. It better not.

MHH: Not as far as its essence is concerned.

HH: Right, that’s what I mean.

MHH: My last question is: are there any issues that you would like to address or any opinions you would like to express?

HH: Well, we have the home-school issue today, don’t we? There was a family that came to our churches after they got married. I think Prof. Dykstra was in Doon when they joined the church. They met at Dordt. He was Netherlands Reformed.
She was Christian Reformed. They home-school their children. I really never had an issue with it till it became an issue today. I think where we have our own schools, that’s where they belong. If there isn’t a school, then that’s the way to go, I’d say. If there is no other school, no other place, that’s where they should be. Then they can home-school. But not everybody’s capable of doing it. And I hope it stays that way. I have no problem with those that home-school, if they don’t have our own school.

You know, we believe the same faith. We don’t go off someplace all by ourselves. We apply it that way. So we should educate our children together too, as the organic view of the covenant.

MHH: Well, thank you very much for your thoughts, for your history, for your stories. It’s very much appreciated. And this concludes our interview.

**Devotional** Ben Laning

**THE DAILY PRESS**

“press toward the mark...”

(Philippians 3:14)

**July 8 Read Numbers 29**

According to Matthew Henry, the Israelites had more ceremonies and special events in the seventh month than in any other. There appear to be a few different reasons for this. First, this month was the first month of the year until it changed when the Israelites came out of Egypt. Second, it was during this month that slaves were set free in the Year of Jubilee, so other things were planned to coincide with that event. Third, the people had more leisure time during the seventh month than they did at most other times in the year, because it was between planting and harvesting.

Matthew Henry goes on to point out that the Israelites focused on growing closer to God in their leisure time. When we think of vacation, what comes first to our mind probably isn’t sitting in the pew at church or discussing a passage in Bible study. Of course, this isn’t to say that it’s wrong of us to do other things on vacation, but we need constant reminders of the danger in setting our eyes on those things. *Sing or pray Psalter #164.*

**July 9 Read Numbers 30**

As we have been going through this history in Bible class this year, I always try to stress to my students the importance of understanding the spiritual truth being taught by these Old Testament laws. All the things that they did back then are pictures of spiritual things for us today. In this chapter, we read about how a woman’s vow could be cancelled out by her father or husband. So what is this supposed to teach us? Yes, we know that the man is head of the home, but is there something deeper here?

When we pray we do so to God the Father and through Christ. As is explained in Hebrews 4:14, 15, Christ is our high priest who sits at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. Our prayers are made perfect through him. We can see this truth pictured in Numbers 30. The woman, who pictures us, must present her vow before her father or husband, who pictures Christ. The man must approve that vow, just as our sinful prayers need to be made acceptable to God. This picture, however, is always an imperfect one, as we see in verse 15. *Sing or pray Psalter #230.*

**July 10 Read Numbers 31**

Moses commands the Israelites in verse 17 and 18 of this chapter to kill all the male Midianites, as well as all the women that had lain with a man, and keep only the young Midianite virgins alive to work as their slaves. The reason for killing all the older women is explained in verse 16, where it says, “these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor.” This judgment goes back to what happened in Numbers 25, where Balak has just failed to get Balaam to curse Israel. Instead of giving up, however, he comes up with this plan of sending the beautiful women of Moab and Midian into the camp of Israel to lead the men astray. This plan works amazingly well, and it begins tearing the nation of Israel apart until a plague kills 24,000 of them and Phinehas spears a man and woman who are flaunting their adultery in front of the whole congregation. It’s because of this that the grown women of Midian are all sentenced to death. *Sing or pray Psalter #362.*
July 11  Read Numbers 32

Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh chose land for themselves on the east side of the Jordan River. The Bible doesn’t tell us that this was wrong, but their reason for doing so doesn’t appear to be very good. The beginning of this chapter tells us that these tribes wanted the land because they saw it was good pasture, and they had a lot of animals. God had already told them what land they were going to inherit, but they saw what they wanted and weren’t content to trust in God’s will. We are often like this. We all have things we want to accomplish in life, and sometimes we set our focus on these things without even thinking about what God’s will is for our lives. In addition, one minister pointed out on a blog I ran into that we never read about important figures in Israel coming from these tribes. From this, he believes that we can conclude that Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh slowly faded out of Israelite history. Whether this is true or not, it reminds us of the importance of being active members in the church.

Sing or pray Psalter #370.

July 12  Read Numbers 33

Do you write things down so you won’t forget? My wife and I sometimes joke about how I have the long-term memory in the relationship and she has the short-term. My mind tends to jump between thoughts very quickly, so it’s not uncommon at all for me to completely forget what I was saying in the middle of a sentence. Because of this, it helps me a lot to write things down.

Numbers 33:2 says, “And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the Lord.” Moses recorded Israel’s history so that it wouldn’t be lost and we could all learn from it. Matthew Henry suggests that we get into the habit of putting into writing all the ways in which God cares for us throughout life. We forget so quickly and have a tendency to focus on the negative things, that having these remembrances of God’s caring mercies can help strengthen us in times of trial. These aren’t the things we typically think of writing down first, but they could be the most important. Sing or pray Psalter #213.

July 13  Read Numbers 34

There’s a lot of talk about borders in our country right now. President Trump wants to build a wall on the US-Mexico border to help keep illegal immigrants out of our country, and he’s receiving plenty of backlash from the media about it. The slogan, “Build bridges, not walls” is a very popular one. This slogan doesn’t just apply to Trump’s wall, but to society’s major push for acceptance in all areas of life. We need to love and accept everyone, no matter how different from us they may be. Showing someone the error of their ways is now a hate crime that deserves punishment.

This chapter talks about the borders God set for the nation of Israel. These were very specific borders in which the Israelites were to live. Not only did the nation have very specific borders, it was also very small, being about 160 miles long and 50 miles wide. This is how the church is today spiritually. We are part of a tiny remnant, and we must not go over our borders and commune with the world. As we often say, “We are in this world, but not of it.” Sing or pray Psalter #246.

July 14  Read Numbers 35

We know that God is not the author of sin, yet he uses our sin and that of wicked men for his purpose. An example of this is seen in the story of Levi. In Genesis 49:7, Levi is told that his descendants will be scattered throughout Israel as judgment for his part in the deceit and murder of the Shechemites. Yet, we can see how this curse was turned into a blessing in Numbers 35. Levi had the privilege of being cared for by the other tribes, and, in that way, they experienced the communion of the saints in a more special way than most Israelites did. The tribe of Levi did not have their own land, but they were given specific cities from the other tribes in which they could live. They didn’t grow their own crops, but were given from the tithe. We have similarities to this today with caring for our pastors and teachers. Of course, this wasn’t only good for the Levites, but it was good for the rest of Israel as well. They had the privilege of caring for their fellow saints and being able to be taught by the Levites. Sing or pray Psalter #369.

July 15  Read Numbers 36

I like history, and the story of the daughters of Zelophehad is an interesting one. The story starts back in Numbers 27, when these daughters come to Moses with a problem. Their father has died and he has no sons to pass his land down to, so they are worried that their family’s inheritance will be lost. God tells Moses that the daughters of Zelophehad were right in being concerned about this, and that their father’s inheritance will be passed down to them. In addition,
a system is laid down to ensure that someone in the family will always receive the inheritance.

This was a good solution to the problem, but we see that a new issue came up in Numbers 36. The daughters of Zelophehad were going to get married and were worried that their inheritance would become their husband’s. In this way, it would still be lost from the family. In answer to this, God told the heiresses that they must marry within their own family in order to keep their inheritance. This story illustrates for us the fact that these inheritances were a picture of our inheritance in heaven, something which we must never give up. Sing or pray Psalter #30.

July 16 Read Deuteronomy 1

It struck me when I was reading this chapter that the pillar of fire and cloud that led Israel through the wilderness is a picture of Christ preparing a place for us in heaven. It was the beginning of verse 33 that made me think of this, which says, “Who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in.” This is what Christ does for us. In John 14:3 he says, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” Not only that, but God also shows us where to pitch our tent in this life. We are like lost sheep, but God takes us by the hand and leads us through the trials of this life into our heavenly home, as David confesses in Psalm 139:10. David goes on to say “even the night shall be light about me,” which is exactly what happened when the Israelites were led by the pillar of fire. Sing or pray Psalter #111.

July 17 Read Deuteronomy 2

The story of Sihon the Amorite is a good example of how God uses wicked men for his purpose. God told Israel to ask if they could pass through Sihon’s land. They would do so quickly and quietly, and pay for whatever food and water they needed. However, Sihon refused and came out to fight Israel. In verse 30, God says that he “made his [Sihon’s] heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand.” This worked according to God’s plan. First, it destroyed the wicked Amorites, who were ripe for judgment. Second, it added to the wealth of the Israelites, since they kept the spoil of the cities. Solomon brings out the idea that the wicked are actually the servants of the church in Ecclesiastes 2:26, where he states that the lot of the sinner is to “give to him that is good before God.” Third, it showed God’s power to the Israelites themselves and to the wicked nations around them. Just as God is glorified by the salvation of his church, so he is glorified by the destruction of his enemies. Sing or pray Psalter #156.

July 18 Read Deuteronomy 3

Moses knew that God said he couldn’t enter the promised land because of his sin of striking the rock, but he still tries asking toward the end of this chapter. In recounting God’s answer to Israel, Moses says in verse 26, “But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes.” I couldn’t figure out what “for your sakes” meant here when I read the verse, but Matthew Henry has come up with a few good possible explanations. First, maybe the phrase is meant to convey the idea that Moses was provoked into striking the rock by the people of Israel, which was definitely true. Second, it could be pointing to the fact that losing their leader right at the moment they were preparing to enter Canaan was just as much a judgment on the nation of Israel as it was to Moses himself. Third, “for your sakes” could mean that God’s anger towards Moses was a warning to the people against disobeying and questioning God. Although a type of Christ, Moses was still a man, and the Israelites needed to be reminded of that. Sing or pray Psalter #290.

July 19 Read Deuteronomy 4

Deuteronomy 4:20 says, “But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day.” Upon reading this verse, I connected the fiery furnace of Babylon, Egypt, and hell in a little different way than I had before. Both the fiery furnace and Egypt were pictures of hell. Just as the devil strives to bring us down into hell, the wicked sought to destroy God’s people in the fiery furnace and in Egypt. However, in both cases God delivered his people from destruction. They were delivered from death. As it says in I Corinthians 15:55, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” We can’t be brought down into hell, because Christ did that for us and atoned for our sin. The deliverances out of the fiery furnace and Egypt were pictures of that. Moses pictured Christ as Israel was delivered from the bondage of Egypt, and the angel of Jehovah himself saved Daniel’s three friends in the fiery furnace. Sing or pray Psalter #87.

July 20 Read Deuteronomy 5

Israel actually heard God himself speaking to them
out of the fire and lived! That’s pretty amazing, as brought out by Moses in verse 33 of the previous chapter. The people of Israel realized this, as they make clear in Deuteronomy 5:26. They can’t believe they’re still alive after that interaction, and so they plead with Moses to talk with God for them. This shows that they saw a difference between themselves and Moses. They looked to him as their mediator, pointing to Christ. Although a type of Christ, Moses was a very imperfect one. John 1:18 exalts Christ above Moses when it says, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” Moses had a very special relationship with God, but even he could not see God’s face. This is manifested in Exodus 33:22, where God covers Moses’ face as he passes by. Sing or pray Psalter #397.

The first verse of this chapter talks about seven nations that Israel was commanded to exterminate. These nations, which were said to be “greater and mightier” than Israel, included the Canaanites, which I found confusing. We usually refer to all the people that Israel was to wipe out collectively as Canaanites, but this verse just lists them as one of the seven nations. It appears that the answer to this is that the term “Canaanite” can be used in a broader or narrower sense. All the seven nations listed did live in the land of Canaan and were, therefore, Canaanites. However, there was also a specific group of people living within Canaan that were known as Canaanites (Numbers 13:29). This group must have been stronger or larger than the others, which resulted in these other nations sometimes being referred to together by their name. This is similar to the way we use the term Kleenex. Kleenex is actually a brand name, but we often use it to refer to any kind of facial tissue. Similarly, the Canaanites were a specific tribe, but the name could refer to anyone living in the land of Canaan. Sing or pray Psalter #3.

I could be reading a bit too much into the verse here, but the word flint stuck out to me in verse 15 of this chapter. Flint is used to make fire, so it’s interesting that the Bible states that it was out of this kind of a rock that the water came. Hebrews 12:29 says, “For our God is a consuming fire.” We have a just God who demands obedience. In John 4:14 we read, “But whoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” The fire of God’s wrath had to be satisfied, so Christ, the water of life, put it out by dying on the cross and washing away our sins. We see this connection from another perspective in Luke 3:16, where John the Baptist tells the people that he baptizes them with water, but Christ baptizes us with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Also, the world was destroyed with water at the Flood, and it will be destroyed again with fire at the end of time. Sing or pray Psalter #372.

The giants mentioned in this chapter have a very important place in Old Testament history. It was because of Israel’s fear of the giants that they ended up wandering in the wilderness for forty years. God told Israel to trust that he would give them the victory, but Israel faltered when the ten spies came back saying that they felt like “grasshoppers” in comparison to the sons of Anak (Numbers 13:33). These giants are mentioned again in Deuteronomy 9. As Israel came to the Jordan River the second time, they again faced the challenge of defeating the children of the Anakim. Biblehub.com has some interesting information about these people, including the fact that their name likely meant “long-necked” and that the Israelite spies compared them to the giants that lived before the Flood, as mentioned in Genesis 6:4. Their main city was Hebron, which was given to Caleb after they were destroyed. The children of Anak were destroyed under Joshua’s leadership, but
the giant Goliath and his family were likely descendants of these people who had joined the Philistine nation. *Sing or pray Psalter #420.*

**July 25**  
*Read Deuteronomy 10*

It’s been a good day. We’ve gotten through all the material I wanted and the kids have been well behaved, so I tell them to grab a piece of candy on the way out for recess. This gets them hooting and hollering and they run outside with their prizes. Only a couple think to thank me on the way out. This irks me. Haven’t they been taught to say thank you when someone gives them something?

If I stop and think about it for a minute, I can see that I’m acting a lot like David when he said that the rich man should be put to death for stealing from the poor man (2 Samuel 12). How hard is it to say thank you? Seems easy enough, yet I forget to do it every day. I need to be exhorted by Moses just as much as the Israelites did in this chapter, because God has done more for me than I can even fully comprehend, and yet I forget to thank him. We are all small children spiritually, but may we be small children who desire growth. *Sing or pray Psalter #403.*

**July 26**  
*Read Deuteronomy 11*

Deuteronomy 11:29 says, “And it shall come to pass, when the LORD thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal.” This verse refers to an actual event that Joshua carried out when they entered Canaan, as recorded in Deuteronomy 27 and Joshua 8. Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin stood on mount Gerizim, while Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali stood on mount Ebal. The distance between the tops of these two mountains was about two miles, and Levites stood with the ark of the covenant in the valley between. When Joshua read the blessings of the law, the people on Mount Gerizim said “Amen”, and the people on Mount Ebal said “Amen” when Joshua read the curses. I found it interesting to look at which tribes were commanded to be on each mount. Although I don’t know if there is any special significance to this, it seems to me that the ones who stood on the mount of blessing were largely names I would have expected. Do you think there’s any significance? *Sing or pray Psalter #399.*

**July 27**  
*Read Deuteronomy 12*

I was confused with what it was saying about which flesh they could eat and where they could eat it in the second part of this chapter, but an examination of Matthew Henry’s commentary helped explain it all to me. God commanded the Israelites not to eat meat from their offerings in their houses, as they would eat a normal meal. In addition, God makes here an allowance for those who did not live close to the tabernacle in Canaan. When they were in the wilderness, the Israelites had to kill every domesticated animal at the door of the tabernacle. However, many of them lived a great distance from the tabernacle in Canaan, so this was no longer required of them. Those animals which were unclean are also mentioned here. Although they were not to eat of the meat used for sacrifices, they could eat of that same animal when it had been killed for a common meal. Finally, the blood of the animal had to be poured out on the ground and not eaten, showing that the animal belonged to God, the giver of life. Much of this section is even repeated twice in the chapter, emphasizing its importance. *Sing or pray Psalter #393.*

**July 28**  
*Read Deuteronomy 13*

We are such weak creatures, who often don’t fully comprehend the weight of our sins. We know how wrong this or that sin is, but we don’t feel how wrong it is. Idolatry is a great example, because we all struggle with that sin daily. Yes, we know that we shouldn’t be so attached to that sport, hobby, or vehicle, but it’s understandable, right? We just really enjoy it. What’s so wrong about that? Yes, I know I shouldn’t exalt myself above others, but I’m much more involved in the life of the church than he is. Yes, I know I shouldn’t be so consumed with plans for the business, but at least I’m being a good steward, right? It’s appalling how often we try to justify our sins by twisting them into something pious.

The ease with which we fall into this sin can dull our response to it. Deuteronomy 13 wakes us up to the seriousness of idolatry. Those who are guilty deserve instant death, which is exactly what they received in the Old Testament. That is the just punishment for sin. Do you feel that? Do I? *Sing or pray Psalter #123.*

**July 29**  
*Read Deuteronomy 14*

In the first verse, God’s people are commanded not to cut themselves, “nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead.” The first part is fairly straightforward. Israel was commanded not to cut themselves in mourning and worship, like the heathen did. This
could also be looked at as a more general command
to care for our bodies, because they belong to God,
not us. These things we are familiar with, but what is
meant by the baldness between the eyes? According
to Matthew Henry, this might have been a command
against excessive sorrow for the death of loved ones.
We know that the Bible commands us to love God
above all earthly things and people, but this is very
hard to do. It seems almost wrong to say that I love
God more than my wife, my children, or my parents.
Yet God warns us against the danger of becoming
too attached to the relationships we have in this life
(Matthew 10:37). Beauty is found in the fact that
when we love God above all else, we are brought closer
to the people we love in this life as well. *Sing or pray
Psalter #418.*

**July 30** Read Deuteronomy 15

One thing I really try to stress in my classroom is
students thinking for themselves. Of course, this
can be done in a rebellious and improper way, but
critical thinking is vital for the spiritual growth of the
Christian. We need to be able to answer the “whys”
of what we believe. Because of this, I would love to
have a discussion with my students about this chapter.
Deuteronomy 15 talks about the way in which the
people were to treat their fellow Israelites. As this is
laid out, a clear distinction is made between the way
they were to act towards their brothers and people
from other nations. Israel was commanded to help
their brethren, but steer clear of those around them. In
fact, they weren’t even allowed to borrow money from
other nations. Israel was commanded to help
their brethren, but steer clear of those around them. In
fact, they weren’t even allowed to borrow money from
other nations. In contrast to this, we have the Parable
of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. Here, a man goes
to great lengths to help someone he doesn’t know any-
thing about. So which is it? Do we help everyone or
just those whom we know to be in the church? What
do you think? *Sing or pray Psalter #398.*

**July 31** Read Deuteronomy 16

As mentioned in verse 16, the feast of unleavened
bread, the feast of weeks, and the feast of tabernacles
stood out from the rest of the feasts. Here’s a brief
overview of each.
The feast of unleavened bread began the night after
the Passover and lasted for a week. It celebrated Israel
being delivered from the bondage of Egypt. During
this week, the Israelites had to remove all leaven,
which pictured sin, from their homes.
The feast of weeks got its name from the fact
that it began fifty days, or seven weeks and a day,
after the feast of firstfruits, which was during the
feast of unleavened bread. This feast is also known
as Pentecost, which means “fifty.” In this feast, the
Israelites showed thankfulness to God for the wheat
harvest and allowed the poor to glean in their fields.
Whereas the other two feasts were celebrated in the
spring and summer, the feast of tabernacles was cele-
brated in the fall. During this week-long feast, the
Israelites lived in booths they built to commemorate
the years of wandering in the wilderness. It was a
joyous feast, where they remembered God’s care for
them. *Sing or pray Psalter #409.*

**August 1** Read Deuteronomy 17

The last section of Deuteronomy 17 talks about how
the Israelite kings of the future were to conduct them-
selves. The beginning of verse 17 commands him not
to “multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not
away.” Of course, I immediately thought of David
and Solomon. These two righteous men were types of
Christ, yet they transgressed this law greatly, Solomon
going so far as to have 1000 wives and concubines.
We see the effect this had on him as well in 1 Kings
11:4, which says, “For it came to pass, when Solomon
was old, that his wives turned away his heart after
other gods.”

We don’t marry multiple wives today, but we often
commit a similar sin when we engage in the entertain-
ment of the world. The television and music of today
systematically seek to destroy God’s commands about
marriage and the life of the family. Music is a power-
ful thing, and the world’s music often gets stuck in our
minds without us thinking about what we are really
saying. This is one of the major ways in which the
world strives to lull us to sleep spiritually, and we must
be on guard against it. *Sing or pray Psalter #385.*

**August 2** Read Deuteronomy 18

The “Prophet” mentioned in verse 15 and proceeding
verses is Christ. We can gather this from the context,
as well as the fact that it’s capitalized. According to
Matthew Henry, “this is the clearest promise of him in
all the law of Moses.” Henry also says that those who
helped pick up the leftovers after the feeding of the
divide thousand were referring to this promise when they
said in John 6:14b, “This is of a truth that prophet that
should come into the world.” It was given to Moses
not only to prophesy of the coming Christ, but also
to strengthen him on the Mount of Transfiguration in
Mathew 17:3. Moses and Elijah could do this because
Christ has a human nature in which he experiences
all the trials we experience. Deuteronomy 18:15 says Christ came “from the midst of thee, of thy brethren.” The chapter ends by telling us how to distinguish this Prophet from false prophets. False prophets prophesy things that don’t actually come to pass, but everything that Christ prophesies happens exactly as he said. Can you think of all the ways that we see this truth manifested in the world around us? Sing or pray Psalter #287.

In the last verse here, God explains how sin must be punished. It reads, “And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” This clearly states that a murderer should be put to death, a command that is completely rejected today. Only a little over half the states still have the death penalty, and our prisons have long lines of people on death row who still haven’t been killed for a murder they committed decades ago. According to deathpenaltyinfo.org, ten people have been executed in the US so far this year, and half of them committed their crimes twenty or more years ago. The shortest length of time on the list was eight years. Proper discipline and punishment must take place very soon after the sinful act is committed in order to be effective. It’s so bad that many of those on death row will never actually be put to death. Wikipedia states that there are a whopping 3,125 people on death row in the US today. The death penalty is not about getting revenge, but about paying the price for sin that God demands. Sing or pray Psalter #300.

Facebook has a big problem on their hands. People keep using their livestream feature to record violent acts and even suicide. It seems as if a new one of these shocking and horrific cases pops up every week. People decide to livestream their own suicide for the world to watch. And do you know what? The world does, by the thousands.

God commanded the Israelites in Deuteronomy 20 to be ready to die when they went into battle. We do not know when God is going to take us home, but we must be ready for it. We are ready to die, because we know that our true home is in heaven and that God’s will is perfect. We know that all things are for our good. Those who commit suicide on Facebook Live are ready to die as well, but for the opposite reason. Whereas we are ready to die because of the hope that is within us, they are ready to die because they have no hope. There is no hope without God. Sing or pray Psalter #203.

There are a number of very interesting laws in this chapter, but the one I want to focus on today is about the judgment that came upon the rebellious son. If a son was unrepentant in his sin of stubbornness, rebellion, gluttony, and drunkenness, then his parents took him to the elders and stoned him to death. Can you imagine doing that? I don’t know how an Israelite parent ever had the strength to carry this out, but it reminded them of sin’s seriousness, and the fact that church unity must always come before family unity. When we examine the sins listed, we see that our young people still struggle with these things today, including the sin of drunkenness. Sometimes parents can trick themselves into thinking they are showing love towards their children by looking the other way. However, as parents (and teachers), we must show love by being vigilant in watching for these things. Just like it is for a parent, it’s easy for a teacher to look the other way because it’s the easy route and keeps us popular, but we must not fall into that trap the devil has laid. Sing or pray Psalter #140.

Verse 5 seems kind of random. In the middle of this section about caring for others, we have this verse about separation between the sexes. It does, however, connect with verses 9-12, which prohibits the mixing of dissimilar things. The meaning of the verse is clear. A woman should not try to look like a man, and a man should not try to look like a woman. It wasn’t very long ago that we probably could have read this obvious truth and moved on, but not so today. This is one of the areas where the devil is really focusing his attack on the church. According to Wikipedia, gender identity is “one’s personal experience of one’s own gender. Gender identity can correlate with assigned sex at birth, or can differ from it completely.” This is exactly like the story of the emperor’s new clothes. Everyone knows that Bruce Jenner is really a man, and yet they call him Caitlyn. Sometimes we make jokes about how ridiculous this is, but it’s also a sign of the times. Man is openly rejecting the basic truths of creation. They are debating the undebatable, and there’s no reasoning with this kind of thinking. Sing or pray Psalter #110.
I remember when I first started getting collection envelopes from the deacons. I paid the single member amount for the General Fund and put a few bucks in for the other collections, without thinking about it nearly as much as I should have. When we got engaged our pastor talked to us about giving in marriage counseling, and so we sat down and looked at our finances. It was a wake-up call, because we quickly realized that we were not giving nearly enough. The Christian life is one of living out the truth that all things belong to God and of caring for one another. The last few verses of Deuteronomy 23 talk about caring for others and being cared for. Neighbors could eat crops as they passed by a farmer’s field. This is similar to the gleaning which is talked about in the Book of Ruth. The Israelites were commanded to take care of those in need. The flipside of that was they were also commanded to allow themselves to be cared for. Our pride so easily gets in the way, but it’s important that we give to our fellow saints and humbly receive gifts from them in return. *Sing or pray Psalter #315.*

**Christian Living  Tim Rus**

**DID YOU SAY YOUR PRAYERS TONIGHT? (2)**

Now from the experience of being in the court room in front of an earthly judge, there are significant points to be considered, which I will do the best I can to describe. However, I am sure my words will fall far short of what they should be relating to God and his mercy and justice.

Entering the courtroom is an overwhelming experience. There is a great separation between the parties. Not so much in physical distance, but rather emotionally. The aisle separating the two sides is a great chasm, filled with fear and pain.

Knowing the person responsible for Charity’s death was just a few feet away created an overwhelming feeling. Not one of anger, but rather confusion. My mind was simply unable to really grasp the totality of the whole experience. There was so much going on: Reporters, attorneys, cameras, crying, and sorrow.

Everyone wonders what’s going to happen. What will be the plea? What kind of sentencing? Is she really sorry? How will I respond?

Some similarities between the earthly courtroom and the final judgment:

First, there is the judge. His sentence on earth is for the most part final, except if someone decides to appeal. With God there is no appeal. His decision is absolute and final; no one can challenge his wisdom or question his fairness. Then there is the guilty party. Before God I am the guilty one. Now I await the sentencing with great fear and trembling. But just as the judge of heaven and earth proclaims the sentence (eternal damnation) another one steps in and proclaims that he will take the punishment in my stead.

With that I begin to feel some relief. Who could this be that would take my punishment and be qualified to do so other than one who is both God and man? My Savior Christ Jesus! Christ Jesus, I say, Son of God and Son of man, the only one qualified to stand in my stead and make the payment for my debt. What a savior we have!

Now touching the earthly judgment. A plea has been entered or a jury has issued their verdict: “Guilty!” No gray areas, no more discussion, the decision has been made: Guilty! Now where do we go from here? There is none to take the punishment for the guilty party. The earthly judge will proclaim his sentence and the punishment will be implemented. Here I want to be extremely careful, for I do not in any way want to compare myself to Christ Jesus. But standing between the earthly judge and the guilty party, we received permission of the judge to speak.

We looked in the direction of the one whom the Lord used to take our daughter to heaven as she wept and cried out in pain and sorrow. In such a setting, we spoke the words, “We forgive you,” which have such a significance it’s hard to describe.

I ask myself the question. How would I respond if I did not see repentance, but a person who actually was blaming me for the situation? I know from a human perspective I would not have been able to say those three precious words, “We forgive you.” Now this is the amazing part of God; he forgave us
while we were yet sinners living in enmity against him. Imagine that! Someone who has wronged you so deeply and yet that very person totally and unconditionally forgives. Moreover, the person pays the debt and sets us free!

Certainly a significant element of forgiveness is repentance. God calls us to live peaceably with all men as best we can. But what if there is no evidence of repentance? In this case I believe that this is one reason why God doesn’t expect us to forget, but to forgive.

I can honestly say that in my personal experience, love for my neighbor did not come automatically regarding the loss of my daughter.

Distractions or plunging into my work are coping methods that I have seemed to have fallen into. It’s kind of a mixed feeling. I know that work is not and will never be a true comfort, but it does help distract my mind from the pain of my loss. Nevertheless, there are times when I simply cannot control the tears. When this comes upon me, it is an absolute horrific experience that words cannot explain.

The fact is that I miss Charity so much that no matter how much I try, the pain simply overwhelms me at times. I know that these words are not too encouraging to someone who is going through grief, but it’s reality. There will be times where the road is so dark and the pain so intense that you will literally feel physically sick and totally exhausted. Even in this state we know that the Lord will not leave his people alone, and that as we read in Isaiah, a bruised reed he will not break. I wish that I knew of or could offer a plan to avoid this pain, such as start here at point “a” and proceed to point “b” and everything will be ok. Don’t expect that to happen. As I am writing this, I am not only specifically giving this advice to my readers, but more so for me.

There is no clear path, but I know my redeemer lives and that I shall see God in my flesh at the last day. Glory be that he alone has conquered death and the grave! It’s ok to miss our loved one!

Trusting only in God! One example that comes to mind is Joseph and his life. Just think of the fact that if there is anyone on this earth that you should be able to trust, you would think that it would be your own brothers, but what did they do? They sold him as a slave. Now I am sure Joseph never forgot what his brothers did to him, but I am also very sure he did not live with bitterness in his heart. As we know from the Bible, he loved his brothers and had pity on them in their need during the years of famine.

One can also think of the events in Joseph’s life when he was put into prison with the baker and the butler. Think about the fact that Joseph saw them in distress and acknowledged their pain. Furthermore, he stated that the interpretation of dreams belonged to God. He even told them what their dreams meant. Granted, the interpretation of the one was not very good. But the interpretation of the other relieved him of his pain, and he was soon restored to the place as Pharaoh’s butler. Joseph simply asked him to remember him. But the scripture tells us that he forgot him. If Joseph would have put his trust in the butler, believe me, he would have been extremely let down. Nevertheless, in God’s timing the butler told Pharaoh of Joseph, and we all know the story from there.

Eventually the brothers who did him wrong looked to Joseph for mercy and their daily bread. Did Joseph refuse them food or hate them? No, he showed mercy. If my brothers did to me what Joseph’s brothers did to him, by nature I would not be very loving towards them. But God is able to work in our hearts to love and not hate, as God is love. My main point in telling this story of Joseph is to stress that we do not put our trust in man. Every person, or for that matter, everything except God will fail us. Furthermore, think of Joseph as he went through these many trials. He had no idea what the outcome would be either from an earthly or heavenly point of view, but God worked it for the good on his chosen ones. Even more is the fact that God in his mercy gave us his word and told us of his workings in Joseph’s life so that we could be comforted in our affliction.

Now even more incredible is the fact that God controls all things for the salvation of his church—everything, even the death of our beloved Charity. The refrain in the old hymn, “Trust and Obey,” written by John H. Sammis, puts it so simply: “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

For me a significant point was one day going to the grave site and weeping bitterly, but then “talking” to Charity and telling her that dad loves her so much and I will never ever forget her. But I have to move on or this pain is going to kill me. I think that at a certain level I was saying goodbye and asking her if that was ok with her. This was not a planned event; I only intended to visit the grave site. So, with that I considered the words of David found in 2 Samuel 12:23: “But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me,” and applied them to myself, realizing that in these words David spoke of the resurrection. Please don’t misunderstand me, I
am not at all saying that at this point my pain was
gone. Not at all. But I am simply acknowledging this
point in my journey as a stepping stone on the path
of healing.
In closing I will simply leave you with a quotation
from Charity’s journal that we found under her bed
as we were cleaning out her room:
But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased,
and said unto them, Suffer the little children
to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of
such is the kingdom of God (Mark 10:14).
Whenever a door is closed, God opens a
window. Whenever I need him, no matter
where I am, He always finds me. And I pray
if I have a problem and He answers my prayer.
Do you know why? Do you? Because I am His
child, and He loves me, and I love Him. You
should do the same. Because no matter what
bad things you’ve done, you can be forgiven.
And that’s the truth.

Tim is a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed
Church in Grandville, Michigan.

COVENANT EVANGELICAL REFORMED CHURCH
(SINGAPORE)

The staff members of Beacon Lights have asked me
to write a short introduction and prayer requests for
CERC for a series on praying for the church uni-
versal. We are very thankful and eager for oppor-
tunities to interact with our beloved international
brethren. Many of the youth from our congregation
in Singapore have made the trip to the US to visit
the PR churches. If any PR youth are looking for
a sunny, tropical, exotic getaway, why not consider
paying Singapore a visit too? The airfare is steep,
but you will be assured a warm welcome to a lively,
friendly, and more importantly, fellow Reformed
community that is one with you in the faith.

At the present time of writing, CERC consists of
151 communicant and non-communicant members
(about 35 families). There are also between 25–40
regular visitors. We currently have no place of wor-
ship that would resemble a proper church building
by US accounts, but occupy the 4th floor of a factory
building in an industrial area, as some US visitors
may have seen before. Finding a suitable place of
worship is an issue for our congregation as scarce
land is prohibitively expensive in Singapore, the cost
running into many tens of millions. We have been
using this factory space for several years now, but
new government land usage rules state that indus-
trial spaces can no longer be used exclusively as
places of religious worship. At this time, we have
obtained a 3 year waiver from the land authority
to continue worship here for now, but beyond that
is highly uncertain. We trust Jehovah to provide us
what we need in this regard. This is certainly an
area that our brethren may pray for us.

Despite the humble and unlikely outward appear-
ance of CERC’s place of worship, God does make it
possible for visitors to find us often. Singapore
being a major international commerce and transit
hub, we often have visitors transiting through from
other countries join us for worship. A large propor-
tion of the church’s members are newly Reformed,
many being actively brought in by friends, especially
the young people. In Rev. Andy Lanning’s current
round of pre-confession/membership classes, there
are as many as 15 visitors of all ages attending. We
recognize that the Lord alone gives us this period of
growth and peace in the church, and are thankful
for it.

However, we do see that the fruits of the gospel
are indeed twofold. For every visitor that stays and
eventually becomes a member, many others hear the
Reformed preaching and go their way. Also, like the
church in Corinth in Paul’s day, we are surrounded
by a very materially rich, very godless culture, while
man’s idols (pagan and otherwise) abound. The
megachurch and charismatic movements also have
especially strong traction in the land (there is one
megachurch just across the street). The ungodly
influences of the land we live in are never far from
the doors of our church and from our own hearts,
just as they are with you in America. Pray for us
too, that we may have grace and boldness to live
antithetically.
CERC has also by the Lord’s leading been deeply involved in the work of missions at home and abroad. At the present time, God has given us an opportunity to work in the mission field of Kolkata, India, where we have been in close contact with a pastor named Emmanuel Singh for several years. Emmanuel became Reformed upon reading A. W. Pink’s *Sovereignty of God*, and for some time thought he was the only Reformed man left, until he came into contact with the PRCA after listening to the PRCA’s Reformed Witness Hour broadcast. After some contact and work with various PR ministers including Revs. Haak, Kortering, Woudenberg, and VanOverloop, the PRCA transferred ownership of the work over to CERC. Over the past few years much more has been done, including the training of Emmanuel and many delegation visits between the two countries, and today, Kolkata has a vibrant infant congregation that is looking to organize, while Emmanuel also does frequent work in the surrounding villages. The next step as of the writing of this article, Lord willing, will be to examine Brother Emmanuel in a classical examination in Singapore on 29 October 2016 with the view of calling Emmanuel to be CERC’s missionary to Kolkata. Please pray for CERC in this area as well, as the Lord leads us to fulfill the calling to preach the gospel in all the world for a witness unto all nations (Matt. 24:14).

An introduction to CERC would not be complete without mentioning CERC’s storied history. The history of CERC has not been without controversy, grief, and a constant struggle for the truth. There is insufficient space in this brief article to do this weighty history justice. Rev. Arie den Hartog, who was one of the instrumental missionaries during the early years of the ministry, has written an excellent account of how the truths of God, particularly with regard to the truths of marriage and God’s sovereignty, were preserved in CERC today at much great personal cost for its members. This history has profoundly affected the lives of the youth of our church, many of whom were children at the time of these events and are now young adults. I strongly encourage Beacon Lights readers to read Rev. den Hartog’s sharp but warm and personal six-part narrative, which can be found online in the *Salt Shakers* (CERC’s youth magazine) archives from issues 22–26 titled “Lessons from the History of the Beloved Church of Jesus Christ Now Among Us.” This history is perhaps to us like what 1924 and 1953 are for the PRCA, and through it all the faithful labors of many officebearers, ministers, and ordinary members can be seen. But most of all, we see the loving, guiding hand of Jehovah, who through mighty waters broad and deep, safe his people did keep (Psalter 211). These battles fought have helped the church, by God’s grace, to be sharpened and zealous for the truth. Pray for us, that we may not lose this zeal, unity, or the precious lessons of our past for the generations to come.

As I hope Beacon Lights readers will see in this brief introduction, though we may be half a globe apart, spiritually and historically our churches are and have been very close. While we covet your prayers in various areas, our PR sisters are not far from our own hearts and minds. We confess the same Reformed truths, are brothers and sisters in the Lord, and are members of the same body. Once again, I thank the staff for the opportunity for contact and interface, and hope we may seek many more opportunities to preserve this unity.

Lee Yang is a member of CERC.

**Book Review** Ria Faber

JUST MERCY

Every once in a while, a book comes along that makes you think and even changes the way you have previously looked upon a subject. *Just Mercy* is such a book. This is the true story of a young lawyer’s fight for justice on behalf of many on death row. The author, Bryan Stevenson, battles racial injustice and represents many poor, non-white, mentally ill, and sometimes young offenders. Their stories are interspersed throughout the book as he recounts his defense of Walter McMillian, a black man on death row. The memoir reads like a legal thriller, juxtaposing his many triumphs and failures.

Bryan Stevenson grew up poor in Delaware. His great-grandparents were slaves in Virginia, and this
legacy of slavery influenced the way his grandparents raised their children and grandchildren. They particularly emphasized the importance of faith and education. Stevenson’s faith was cultivated in the African Methodist Episcopal Church where he played the piano and sang in the choir. Stevenson attended Eastern College, a Christian institution outside Philadelphia, and then Harvard Law School. His focus to defend the poor began during college when he took an intensive class on race and poverty litigation. He was required to spend a month with an organization doing social justice work. They sent him to Georgia to work with the Southern Prisoners Defense Committee where his first case required him to meet with a condemned man on death row.

In the late 1980’s, Stevenson’s legal firm first took up the cause of Walter McMillian, who was wrongfully convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of a white woman. The state’s case had many inconsistencies. They manufactured stories from witnesses who said they were with Walter when he committed the crime and disregarded accounts from many eyewitnesses who said they were with Walter at a church fundraiser. Alabama’s legal system was determined to find someone to convict for this murder and decided Walter would be prosecuted because of his affair with a prominent white woman (a crime during this time period). The exposition of this case opened my eyes to the unfortunate fact that since prosecutors and police have legal immunity, they can do considerable harm to innocent citizens when they are on the hunt for “justice”.

A large portion of this book deals with the cases of poor black children sentenced to adult prisons and serving life sentences. Stevenson tells these stories very convincingly and sympathetically. He challenges their sentences because he says they are juveniles and his firm recognized “the incongruity of not allowing children to smoke, drink, drive … because of their lack of maturity and judgment while simultaneously treating some of the most at-risk, neglected, and impaired children exactly the same as full-grown adults in the criminal justice system.” (270) Stevenson argues that circumstances that would bring a youth to be put in a situation where he felt his only option was to kill someone because he is not aware of his other options, should be recognized upon sentencing. One example is a young boy who shot his mother’s abuser. Yes, punishment needs to occur, but placing a young child in an adult prison is not always appropriate justice.

Stevenson also defends many poor white women who have been convicted of the murder of their spouse or stillborn child. He tells the stories of pregnant women who were too poor to see a doctor or go to the hospital, and then, unfortunately during labor, deliver a stillborn child. These women were then arrested and charged with capital murder which is punishable by the death penalty. Not all of the characters in Stevenson’s book are sympathetic, and his defense of them does not always seem to be justified. As a defense lawyer, his heart may sometimes get in the way of seeing their crimes objectively. In particular, he unsuccessfully defends a prisoner who commits the heinous act of killing a child with a bomb meant for a neighbor.

While justice has been denied for a large portion of those in the prison system, the author’s faith in both the power of redemption and justice underlines his continued hope in the possibility of change. “The true measure of our character,” Stevenson writes, “is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned…we all need mercy, we all need justice, and—perhaps—we all need some measure of unmerited grace.” (18)

Ria teaches at Covenant Christian High School in Walker, Michigan, and is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church.
CONVENTION

Oh what a privilege
God gave the “Word of Life”
To his beloved children
As comfort in the strife

To guide and to direct
To study and to learn,
Through trials and through tears
On your path to discern.

May it be the light before you
That you run the race not in vain
Confess the Father’s name in heaven
And do so without shame.

Let your light so shine before men
During the convention week.
Encourage one another
Being loving, kind, and meek.

This word you possess
Is a gift that God gave you
Be ye thankful and hold fast to it
In everything you do.

Take everything you have learned
That “Word of life” apply
And take the hope it gives you,
Trusting Christ, who for you did die.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.”  Matthew 10:32

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:
Victoria De Young—Georgetown, MI
Tonya Zwak—Georgetown, MI
Holly Tolsma—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Ruth Schwarz—Loveland, CO
Alexis Poortinga—Loveland, CO
Drew Buiter—Randolph, WI
Brandyn Brummel—Sioux Falls, SD
Laura Rau—Southwest, MI

BAPTISMS

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

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:
Jude Edward, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim & Amy VanTil—Byron Center, MI
Milo John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joe & Erika Dykshorn—Cornerstone, IN
Blake Alexander, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tyler & Jennifer de Jong—Cornerstone, IN
Tressa Joyce, daughter of Reverend & Mrs. Jon & Keri Mahtani—Cornerstone, IN
Dex Peter, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brett & Denise Zandstra—Cornerstone, IN
Ava Danielle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Lance & Chris De Vries—Georgetown, MI
Evan David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Caleb & Sandra Meulenberg—Grace, MI
Lee Richard, son of Mr. & Mrs. Everett & Michelle Langerak—Hudsonville, MI
Evelyn Nicole, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nick & Liz Schipper—Hudsonville, MI
Andrew James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Andrew & Anna Beelen—Hudsonville, MI
Jade Noelle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tim & Lacey Key—Hudsonville, MI
Emily Brynn—daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bryan & Erika Kiel—Kalamazoo, MI
Jayden Daniel—son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Kim Kiel—Kalamazoo, MI
Morgan Pam, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bob & Jenna Alsum—Randolph, WI
Jorie Kae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nick & Sonja Meelker—Redlands, CA

MARRIAGES

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

Mr. Joshua Mingerink and Miss Abigail Ophoff—Crete, IL
Mr. Nicholas Looyenga and Miss Emily Koole—Southwest, MI
**SOLA SCRIPTURA: THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE ALONE**

Once a man prized his Bible as his most precious possession. He read it every day.

But one day a worldly scientist told the man all the current scientific evidence. The man decided the evidence sounded good so he ripped out most of Genesis and anything that talked about God creating the world.

The next day, a professor told him some of the books of the Bible did not fit with current historical findings. The man decided the evidence sounded good, and he ripped out most of the Old Testament.

After that, the man met a scholar who told him that it was up to people to decide what parts of the Bible were God’s word and what parts they felt they wanted to follow. The man thought that sounded good. He ripped out the rest of the Old Testament and a chunk of the New Testament.

Since he’d already ripped out so much, he ripped out Revelation, since it was too hard to understand. He did the same for a few other bits that were also too difficult.

He looked down at the book in his hands. All that was left of his Bible was the empty leather cover and a few scraps of verses.

It looked worthless, so he tossed his Bible away.

Our source of truth is the scripture and only the scripture. Anything else we feel or hear should be held up to the light of the word of God. If we place anything else above the Bible, we tear the Bible apart until we have nothing left but tatters. Reformers like Martin Luther fought for this truth that scripture alone holds the authority of truth for our lives.

Unscramble each of the clue words. Copy the letters of the numbered cells to reveal the hidden phrase.

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HUTRT  2 5
IOTAHTYUR
LBBEI  3 10 6
RODWFDOG  7
AIROTSPNIN  1 4
```

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
Holding forth the **word of Life**

*Philippians 2:15-16*

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