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Published monthly by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People’s Societies
This issue includes four articles written as part of the annual scholarship contest; two written by aspiring ministers and two by young people studying to be teachers. The writing prompt that all four authors chose was as follows:

In the New Testament Paul often refers to himself as God’s servant, or slave. What does it mean to you, as a teacher or pastor, to live your life as God’s slave? How would you instruct your students or young people to live as God’s slaves?

This would be a good opportunity to encourage these young people as they pursue the gospel ministry and a career in teaching. But why stop there? Do you know a young man that by his life and walk shows himself as someone that should consider the gospel ministry? Or perhaps you go to church with someone who shows gifts that would make them a good teacher? Encourage them! How powerful it would be if you were to pull that young person aside and tell them that you see gifts in them and ask them what their plans are. Charles Hodge said “preaching the gospel is a privilege superior to any other intrusted to man.” Don’t miss an opportunity because you feel it might be awkward to bring a word of encouragement. It might be the means God uses to raise up a preacher of the word to proclaim the good news of the gospel or to raise up a teacher that will have an incalculable impact on the children and young people in their classroom.

Dying Well

How will you die? Will you die well?
“What silly questions to ask,” you say.
And then you lose a loved one.
Tragically.
Or you receive the doctor’s report that you will not live as long as you expected, and your life comes to a screeching halt.
Suddenly.
Now you are forced to think about death. It’s all you can think about because of death’s cold gaze staring you in the face. Death’s cold grip is so real and you can’t seem to slip away.
The opening questions are probably ones you neither have asked anyone nor been asked yourself.

Thoughts about death don’t usually arise until death actually grips you or someone close to you. We spend our days living uninterrupted as we always have, so thoughts about life receive all of our attention.

But how often do we think about death? How often do we think about our death? It’s something we should think about. Will we die well? How can we die well? If by dying “well” we mean “properly,” is there a proper way to die? Death is, well, death. By God’s grace there is. By faith we know and are assured that there is a proper way to die.

First, you die well by living perfectly in this life. Perfectly? Is that even possible? We will carry our sinful nature until the day we die, so how do we live...
perfectly?

Consider what the word “perfect” actually refers to in scripture. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord and was “perfect in his generations” (Gen. 6:8, 9). David vowed to behave himself “wisely and in a perfect way” and to walk within his house “with a perfect heart” (Ps. 101:2). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commanded his disciples to be perfect “even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). The apostle Paul exhorted the church at Corinth to “be perfect” (2 Cor. 13:11). Keep in mind that all of these references to perfection were tied to sinful men. Noah was guilty of the sin of drunkenness; David was an adulterer who committed murder to cover up his sin; Jesus’ disciples abandoned him in his hour of need; Paul persecuted the church. How could these men be considered perfect and even insist on the perfection of others?

Perfection has in our modern language come to mean “flawless.” But biblical perfection refers to completion or spiritual maturity. Saints (including the ones listed above), while sinners, mature spiritually. We can see that in our own lives. We, through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, make spiritual progress. Do we stumble and fall? Yes, even grievously at times, but there is development nonetheless. So how is spiritual maturity reflected in our lives? We live not for ourselves, but for Jesus Christ. We confess with Paul, “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). How tragic is the thought of facing death knowing it is the culmination of a life lived not for Christ, but for self? How tragic is the thought of facing death after a life of pursuing the sinful pleasures of the world? There is no peace with God in the death of one who has lived like this; there is only cold, empty nothingness.

Second, you die well when you confess with Paul, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). When you live “wisely and in a perfect way” (Ps. 101:2), exalting Christ as the reason you live, then you die well, as Paul did, viewing your inevitable death as a gain rather than a loss.

When you make the confession that to live is Christ, included in this are the sufferings of Christ. Our spiritual connection to Christ often brings earthly suffering. Paul often associated the suffering of saints with the suffering of Christ. We bear “about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Cor. 4:10). “As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Rom. 8:36). “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus” (Gal. 6:17). “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord...That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Phil. 3:8, 10). Our suffering is part of “living Christ.”

What about viewing death as gain? Does this imply that true saints are those who go around hoping to die soon? No, rather they are enabled by the death of Christ to view their own death as a part of God’s bringing them to be with him (John 17:24).

In conclusion, dying well is really about living well, that is, living godly. But don’t focus on the person, focus on the one working faith in the person, enabling him to live perfectly and view death as a gain. And true gain is this, that God, the one who works faith in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, is the one that we will behold “in righteousness.” Then and only then we “shall be satisfied” when we awake with his likeness (Ps. 17:15).

SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY  
Aaron Van Dyke

A PASTOR’S LIFE AS A SLAVE OF CHRIST

“Paul, a [slave] of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.” Though our King James Version uses the word “servant” rather than “slave,” that is how we can read the apostle Paul’s introduction of himself in the opening verse of his letter to the Romans.1 Paul, the great preacher

and evangelist to the Gentiles calls himself a slave. What’s more, we find that the title “slave” precedes “called to be an apostle” and “separated unto the gospel of God.” Why is this? Paul leads with this title because he knows that both his calling as an apostle and his separation unto the gospel ministry mean nothing apart from his slavery to Christ. As we examine what it means to be a slave of God, especially for a pastor and the flock he serves, we will see that Paul’s inspired word-choice carries a revelation of how God would have his people view themselves and their callings in this world. We will see that properly living one’s life as a slave of God means consciously operating within the twofold reality of God’s ownership of and authority over us his slaves.

When we hear the word “slave” our minds generally go to kidnapping and whip-cracking, cotton fields and galley benches, use and abuse. As free citizens in the twenty-first century, the images that the word evokes cause us to bristle. We might wonder then how Paul could justify using the word “slave” to describe his relationship with his savior. Was Paul unaware of the truth that he was God’s son for Jesus’ sake (1 John 3:1)? Did Paul forget that as a child of God, he was numbered among Christ’s brethren (Heb. 2:17)? It is important for us to remember that when Paul calls himself a slave of God and Jesus Christ, he isn’t talking about scourges, chains, and abuse. Rather, Paul is emphasizing aspects of our relationship to Christ that are uniquely pictured in slavery.

The first of those aspects is the truth that Christ owns his people. When a pastor considers his calling to live his life as God’s slave and to exhort his sheep to do the same, this truth must be first in his mind. Before setting to work in his Master’s fields of harvest, he must consider that he belongs “body and soul, both in life and death…unto [his] faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” Unless he properly understands this truth, he will have no foundation to build upon in his preaching and pastoring. We will look at three major considerations that go with the reflection on Christ’s ownership. For a man who desires to minister to God’s people, all three considerations are essential for him to understand rightly.

The first consideration is that we are Christ’s property because we have been purchased from great destruction at great cost. To continue to quote the Heidelberg Catechism: Christ, “with his precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all [our] sins, and delivered [us] from all the power of the devil.” Once serving a cruel taskmaster with no hope of escape, we have been taken from what was indeed scourges, chains, and abuse, and have been “bought with a price” (1 Cor. 7:23). This is the good news that a pastor is called to bring to his congregation. A pastor must be personally convicted of this good news before he can do this. “I was fettered in the bonds of sin and damnation by nature, but now I belong to a new Master, the Lord Jesus!” This is the gospel message.

The second and third considerations that the truth of Christ’s ownership brings are closely tied together. They are the realization of our own passivity in the purchasing process and the resulting confidence that we have in our preservation as slaves of Christ. When Christ strides into the slave-market, looks at a man or woman, and says “mine,” there is no question about who has bought whom. We didn’t seek him out; we didn’t give him any reason to seek us out. Without our having any say in the matter (thanks be to God) we find ourselves being exchanged into the hands of our Lord and led to his estate. Because we belong to an unchanging God who purchased us apart from anything we did, we are assured that our “election made by Him can neither be interrupted nor changed, recalled or annulled.” A pastor must rightly understand these truths to rightly view the work that he does as being non-meritorious, but rather born out of thankfulness. Additionally, he must rightly understand these truths to effectively defend and promote them among his congregation and in this world.

These truths of Christ’s ownership must be defended because they are under attack from all sides today. In the United States, the election of a president whose vice-president is openly pro-life goaded herds of women to lumber through the streets of many of our nation’s major cities, bawling, “My body, my choice!” On May 26, in Dublin, swarms of Irish

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2 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 1, Question and Answer 1, in The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 83.

3 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 1, Question and Answer 1, in ibid., 83.

4 Canons of Dordrecht, First Head of Doctrine, Article 9, in ibid., 157.

5 Canons of Dordrecht, First Head of Doctrine, Article 10, in ibid, 157.

6 Hartocollis, Anemona, and Yamiche Alcindor.
voters cried and embraced in celebration over the recent repeal of an abortion ban.\(^7\) To such people, the idea of Christ's ownership (by virtue of creation for unbelievers and by the added virtue of redemption for his elect) is abhorrent. Such would have Jesus' maidservants rise up in rebellion against the One who owns them, body and soul. Such people would have Christ's slaves believe that their Master has no claim on their bodies.

Within the sphere of the church-world comes the semi-pelagian lie that Christ's ownership of his people is only partial; there remains yet a part of us that we own and direct in cooperation with Christ. According to this lie, rather than being slaves, passively purchased and eternally retained, we are hired hands, free to come and go as our own will dictates.\(^8\) Others, from so-called Reformed colleges, propagate the idea that the slaves of God and the slaves of mammon are to join hands in a cooperative effort to be "agents of renewal" in this world. What is this renewal? It is the service "of all humanity:" the address of issues such as air pollution and the attempt to rectify social injustice in the name of the Master. All of this is done while largely ignoring the tasks that the Master has given his Church, to preach the pure word and to spread the Christ-centered gospel message.

Perhaps more threatening to a pastor's proper walk as a slave of Christ is his old man of sin's natural resistance to being subjugated to Jesus. It is in connection with this natural rebellion that we consider the second reality that a pastor seeking to live as a slave of Christ lives out. Having considered the reality that Christ owns us, we have seen the basis for the second aspect of our relationship to Christ that is pictured in slavery, namely, that Christ has complete authority over us, his slaves. We will note three ways that this authority especially manifests itself in a pastor's life and three ways that he exhorts the members of his flock, particularly the young people, to live out of this truth.

One way that the truth of Christ's authority manifests itself in a pastor's life is in his faithful stewardship of the gifts and opportunities that Christ has given him in his office. The theme of a slave's obligation of faithful stewardship is prominent in the Bible. In Matthew 24:45–46, Christ commends faithful stewards, saying, "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." The unique position that a pastor has in the church may tempt him to use his Lord's estate to increase his own position in this life. By grace, a pastor fights against this inclination. Can the pastor speak eloquently? His golden tongue is filled with his master's truths. Does the pastor have a first-rate intellect? He sets his mind on delving into the words of his Lord. Is the pastor looked up to? He leads Christ's people in a way that magnifies God. Why? Because Christ's authority, Christ's worth to be served, reigns in such a pastor's life.

A second way that a pastor lives out the truth of Christ's authority is in his complete devotion to serving the flock that Christ has entrusted to his care. In his seminary commencement address in June 2017, Prof. Barrett Gritters emphasized the all-encompassing nature of this devotion. He said: "That the ministry is an existence means that a man gives his life to the ministry unlike anyone else gives himself to any other occupation. Unlike the occupations of your cousins and friends, which must not consume them, this occupation must consume you. In a very real way, it will become your existence. It will define you."\(^9\) A pastor who thinks very little of Christ's authority in his life will quickly tire of this demanding, often exhausting task of tending to his Lord's wandering, bleating sheep. The pastor who remembers his obligation to spend everything that he is for the sake of his Lord will do so more readily, spurred on by the knowledge of his awesome responsibility before his awesome Master.

The pastor who knows that he is operating on Christ's orders will not only have a greater sense of his calling to devote himself to his sheep, but he will also be encouraged in the knowledge that the work that he does is the work of Christ, and therefore cannot fail. This is a third way that a pastor lives as a slave of Christ, conscious of his authority. The

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\(^7\) Gregory L., Renita Brio, and Leo Enright. “Irish voters overwhelmingly repeal abortion ban in historic vote.” The Chicago Tribune, 26 May 2018 [Dublin].

\(^8\) Canons of Dordrecht, First Head of Doctrine, Error 6, in ibid, 161.

pastor is assured that he operates by the authority of his Master, the One who holds the king’s heart in his hand and “turneth it withersoever he will” (Prov. 21:1). Christ does not promise the pastor mass conversions or ease in his labor, but the pastor can be assured that the double-edged sword that he wields is the sword of Christ, who loses no battles, and loses no sheep (John 17:12).

In his work of wielding the double-edged sword, a pastor, who has himself learned what it means to live as Christ's property and under Christ's authority, will exhort his congregation to do the same. This exhortation will come in a special way to the young people of the congregation, who are in times of growth and spiritual development.

Just as he strives to be a faithful steward-slave, so also will a pastor instruct his young people to follow the example of Joseph in the house of Potiphar (Gen. 39:1–12), and the example of the faithful servant in Christ's parable of the talents (Matt. 25:20–21). A pastor will urge his young people to “redeem the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16), knowing that time, opportunity, and talent are tools-on-loan, given by the Master to be used for the Master and his church. When one's Friday night is not his own, he is not devastated when he is required to call off plans with friends in order to serve at a young people's function. When one's abilities are simply God's borrowed tools, one does not use them to fuel pride, but rather employs them in the service of their owner.

Additionally, just as the pastor himself subjects his body to the service of his Master, so also will he instruct his young people in the truth that their bodies have been purchased by Christ for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19–20). He will call them to the remembrance that Christ's bodies must be kept pure and holy for his sake. A believing young person who knowingly puts himself in harm's way or damages his body on purpose shows disregard for Christ's blood-bought property. A young couple who live unchastely defile the very temples of Christ's Holy Spirit.

A third way that a pastor leads his congregation's young people in complete servitude of Christ is through the example he sets of complete submission to scripture as divine authority. Such a pastor asks the question, “What would thou have us to do, Lord?” and rather than looking to sociologists, philosophers, or biologists for the answers, he opens up the word of God. The pastor urges his young people to do regular devotions, that they might become better acquainted with the one who purchased them, grow in their love and adoration of him, and strive all the more to live lives of thankful sacrifice as his slaves.

A pastor who strives to live as Christ's slave may be thankful that he does not do so in his own strength, but rather in the strength of the one whose love for him is so great that he sent his only begotten Son to die for him. His will having been “healed, corrected, and sweetly and powerfully bent,” a “ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign”11 in such a man. With Paul, he counts the title “slave of Jesus” his highest honor and will seek all the more to live out of and to preach the beautiful reality of God's ownership of and authority over us his slaves. What a privilege to be counted as a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ!

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SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY Matthew Koerner

ENSLAVED TO JEHOVAH

It is likely that there are few people who would be content upon being sold into slavery. For many, the very term “slave” immediately produces images of prejudice and horrific violence. Even more offensive to our selfish hearts is the implication of total subordination to another. To be a slave is to forget about one’s own wants; the bidding of the master takes precedence over all else. Even the very person of the slave becomes the property of the owner. Being enslaved is entirely about working for the gain
of another. No sane person then, we say, would wish for this or would take pride in such a state.

Yet slavery is an office the apostle Paul speaks highly of in the New Testament. The Greek word he often uses to refer to himself means “servant” or “slave.” Paul writes that he is enslaved to his Lord, and he does so without any trace of bitterness or unhappiness. In some of his epistles, he even begins with such acknowledgment of his position of total service to God and his Son Jesus. While it may seem surprising to us counterintuitive to readily identify one’s self with slavery, Paul’s attitude is a good one for the child of God to adopt. For a minister of the word, it is obvious that this is an applicable concept. But those who are not called to the ministry can also gain valuable instruction here. What does it mean to live as God’s slave in the ministry and other offices? To answer this question, we must begin by examining the fact and the benefits of Jesus becoming a slave for us. Only after having done this can we think about what it means for us to be slaves to our God.

The servitude of Jesus begins with an incredible occurrence—his incarnation. Jesus, the fully divine Son of God, took on a human nature and came into this world of sin. In so doing, he limited himself. Proof of this lies in Philippians 2:6–8. The King James Version (KJV) of the Bible does not capture this as well as some other translations, such as the English Standard Version (ESV). In the ESV, Philippians 2:6–7 read: “who, though he [Jesus] was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” By becoming fully human, Jesus sacrificed some of his power. Think of that! God himself, in the second person of the Trinity, emptied himself, being born by a human mother. The passage states that one way in which Jesus demonstrated servitude was by coming into this world in the flesh.

This was not, however, Jesus’ ultimate purpose in coming to earth. The ultimate reason for Christ’s incarnation was to go to Calvary, dying to redeem his people. Philippians 2:8 goes on to say, “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (ESV). After emptying himself, Jesus bore the full wrath of the Father against sin. Jesus was made a slave that he might redeem us. We were bought with his blood. This purchase was a freeing one: “He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder” (Ps. 107:14, 16). We, who were by nature imprisoned by our sinfulness, have had our chains cut loose! What a knowledge! In the words of the psalmist in verse 8, “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”

However, we are not freed to a life of living as we please, void of any responsibility. No, we are as it were purchased from sin, our former master, at the auction block, and become instead slaves to Jehovah God. The implication is that we have a newfound responsibility—we must lead holy lives. This is reflected in Romans 6. In verses 18 and 20–22, we read,

Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

We are not to live our lives flippantly; the salvation we have in Jesus Christ does not give us the right to do as we please. Rather, it gives us the incentive to live lives of thankfulness, continuing to serve our Lord daily.

Anticipating that we might stumble at this concept, wondering why good works would still be required of us since we are saved by grace alone, the Heidelberg Catechism states that in doing good works, “we may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us.” A similar thought is found in the Belgic Confession. In Article 24, we confess that Jesus purchasing us by His death causes us “to live a new life, and [frees us] from the bondage of sin.” The idea is the same one expressed in verse 15 of 2 Corinthians 5—that we should no longer live for self, but for the One who died for us. Having been bought by his precious blood (1 Pet. 1:18–19), we are enslaved to him, and thus must live godly

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1 See Romans 1:1, Philippians 1:1, and Titus 1:1.
2 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 32, Question and Answer 86, in The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 120.
3 Belgic Confession, Article 24, in The Confessions and the Church Order, 52.
As was noted before, being enslaved to another involves a slave entirely setting aside his or her wants, focusing instead on what his or her master requires. For the apostle Paul, this was a daily calling. Rev. Cory Griess gave a convention speech on this a few years ago, noting three ways in which Paul served his Lord: he taught and believed what Jesus told him to, he witnessed of him, and he endured persecution for Jesus’ sake.\(^4\) As someone studying to be a pastor, I think this pattern is a good one to emulate. It is important for a minister always to remember that he is God’s slave and that therefore, all he does must be for the furthering of the Master’s kingdom. Paul himself gives instruction to the minister in his second letter to Timothy, writing, “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient” (2 Tim. 2:24), an exhortation which shows that a pastor is a slave to God, but still in a capacity of service to his flock. A central part of furthering the kingdom for a minister is serving other people, both those in his congregation and those outside it. This takes on many different forms, and one could spend a long time simply listing different means of serving—through the preaching, visiting the sick, and evangelism to name a few. Certainly, though, all of these are also ways in which the minister shows his true master is King Jesus, and that service to the kingdom is above all else in his life.

That this is necessary for the pastor ought never to be in question. We often refer to ministers as the mouthpiece of God, and this is an appropriate way of describing what their main work—bringing the gospel through the preaching—truly is. However, the picture has a bit more significance in the context of being a slave. A mouthpiece is simply a small part of an instrument. By itself, a mouthpiece is really nothing but a piece of metal. But when one puts one’s lips to a mouthpiece and blows into it in a certain way, sound is produced. One might say that when the mouthpiece bends to the will of the one using it, it finds its purpose—making music. Similarly, when a minister bends to the will of the Master, he produces the beautiful strains of the gospel. Of his own accord, the pastor really serves no purpose. But when he is enslaved to his God, abandoning his own will and submitting wholly to that of his Lord, the kingdom is furthered.

Of course, ministers are not the only ones who must view themselves as slaves to Jehovah; this is a responsibility which lies on all of God’s people. It was shown above that our state of slavery necessitates that we lead sanctified lives, seeking to glorify him out of thankfulness for his purchase of us. In 1 Thessalonians 2:12, Paul writes that we ought to “walk worthy of God.” Scripture makes clear that we are to lead lives in accordance with the law of our Master. But being a servant also carries practical applications for our daily lives. There is not space enough here to deal with all of them, so we focus briefly on those that apply to young people, and how a pastor might encourage them to live rightly as slaves.

Young people in the modern church have ample opportunity to live out their responsibilities as slaves. Reverend Arie den Hartog writes that “In all of our service to the Lord we can never give him anything that he has not first given to us. All that we have, including our very life, all our talents, all of our possessions, we have only because the sovereign God has given them to us.”\(^5\) This idea brings to mind Jesus’ parable of the talents, found in Matthew 25. As servants of our God, we are called to use the gifts he gives us in his service, even if doing so is not meritorious for us. In instructing the young people, I think this would be a good idea to focus on. So often we are like the servant who buried his talent in his lord’s absence, making no use of it. In my own experience, young people in particular often are reluctant to use their gifts in service to the church. One who is proficient in writing might be encouraged to submit articles to \textit{Beacon Lights.} One who is talented athletically may be challenged to witness more broadly that she plays not for personal glory, but for the glory of God. One who has a particular gift in empathy and lending a listening ear to provide advice may be urged to visit the sick in his congregation. All of these are simple examples, but each one is a good way of acting in service to our Master.

More broadly, it is the responsibility of every believer (not only pastors or only Paul himself) to submit as Paul did, and as Rev. Griess alluded to in his speech. Certainly, enduring persecution is in some ways not quite as applicable to us today, but following the teachings of Jesus and being


witnesses of him are very attainable goals for our young people. Making confession of faith, which so many of us do when in the high school age range, is a personal commitment to following the teachings of scripture. Witnessing can take on a variety of forms. One which is especially pertinent for our young people is how we conduct ourselves with friends. On Friday night, will you, young person, go to that party with its sinful allures, or will you stay home, showing yourself to value obedience to the Master over earthly relationships? Paul says, “[If I yet pleased men [rather than God], I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10). If we, whether young people, parents, or aged saints, are unwilling to set aside others’ opinions of us, Paul writes that we are not worthy of the title servant that God has given us. A powerful reminder indeed!

If ever we are tempted to say that we need not submit to God as servants, we need only turn back to the Son of God; even Jesus saw himself as a slave to the Father. In John 4, Jesus told the disciples that, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (v. 34). Because he had emptied himself, it was part of Christ’s responsibility to submit to the will of the Master. No place is this better exemplified than in his prayer in Gethsemane: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). That is true submission to the Lord, and it is our example. May we treat it as such. Having been bought with a price, we ought not to serve men (1 Cor. 7:23), but live the thankful lives of those enslaved to the Lord of lords, the Master above all others. As we sing in Psalter number 426, verse 9: “I am, O Lord, Thy servant, bound yet free, Thy handmaid’s son, whose shackles Thou hast broken; Redeemed by grace, I’ll render as a token, Of gratitude my constant praise to Thee.”

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**SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY** Pamela Regnerus

**LIVING AS GOD’S SLAVE**

“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ…” (Rom. 1:1a)

Paul begins many of his writings in the holy scripture referring to himself as a servant. Throughout all of Scripture, and especially in the New Testament in Paul’s letters, God’s elect people are called servants or slaves. Although the idea of slavery has a negative connotation in the world today, it must be seen that slavery and service to God actually bring true freedom for the child of God. For Reformed, Christian educators, living a life of service is especially important for several different reasons. In the first place, God holds teachers to a high standard because his little lambs are placed under their care and guidance. Reformed teachers also are under the calling to spread the gospel, even to covenant children found in the Protestant Reformed classroom. Lastly, Christian educators must recognize the leadership which has been given unto them and use that leadership to serve others as God has commanded.

The idea of a servant or slave is widely criticized by the modern world. When the word “slave” is said, many people’s thoughts jump immediately to the slavery of blacks in the United States, which was outlawed by the Thirteenth Amendment. Britannica Encyclopedia says about slavery, that it is a “condition in which one human being was owned by another. A slave was considered by law as property, or chattel, and was deprived of most of the rights ordinarily held by free persons” (Hellie, 2018). Multiple websites on the horror of slavery can be
found, with titles ranging from “End Slavery Now” to “How to End Slavery.” Yet the Bible clearly states that God’s chosen people are to be as slaves, or servants, to him. Are these websites contrary to the word of God?

In response to this question, and to determine the calling of Christians in regards to living as God’s slaves, it is important to distinguish between the slavery of which the world speaks, and the slavery which God demands of his people. As stated above, in general, the word “slavery” refers to the bondage of a person, who is being held and forced to do things against their will. (The issue of human slavery is another topic and will not be specifically addressed in this paper.) Serving God as a slave does indeed mean that one is held in bondage by God. However, this bondage is not typical bondage at all, but rather it brings liberty! Freedom! Joy!

It seems contrary to common belief that bondage brings liberty. How can this be? The answer to this truth lies in the doctrine of the five points of Calvinism. Hanko (2004) writes that total depravity, the first point, shows that “all men, except Jesus, are depraved and wicked…in every part…in every part completely” (p. 114). Thus, every human being is conceived in bondage to Satan, the devil, and their own sinful flesh (Heidelberg Catechism, 1652). However, as the remaining points of Calvinism prove, God has graciously saved his people from this horrific captivity by the work of Jesus Christ on the cross! All of the elect have been justified through Christ and “brought before God…as though they never had any sin or committed any actual sins” (Hanko, 2004, p. 197). No longer are God’s people held in bondage to sin, but they are free to live a life of joyful service to the one, true, and living God! We are like unto Paul, “a man who was once an enemy of God and a persecutor of the church [who] was saved by the power of the Word of Christ and made His lowly and obedient slave” (denHartog, 2007, p. 230).

The Reformed teacher can have confidence that they are a true child of God through the faith he gives unto them (Ophoff, 1952). As the desire to become a teacher grows in the heart of a Protestant Reformed believer, the importance of having a servant’s heart must also become increasingly clear.

Living as God’s slave means that every aspect of an educator’s life must come under the inspection of the word of God. Every aspect of their life includes, but is certainly not limited to social media, behavior on the weekends, and interaction with friends and family. These are areas where it can be easy to slip and not live as a servant to God. The Reformed teacher may have to, in service to God, give up social media if they find that they spend too much time on it. The Reformed teacher may have to find new friends with whom they spend time if they see that their current friends often overindulge in alcohol. The Reformed teacher, as a slave of God their Father, may have to work harder on maintaining good relations with their family, so that they might set a godly example for their students. All of these examples show the high standard to which God holds educators of his covenant children. Why such a high standard? Because “teachers are the Christian school” (Dykstra, 2014, p. 391).

Service/slavery to God can also be seen through a broad lens, with the calling that God has placed upon each and every believer. Rev. denHartog (2007) succinctly summarizes an important calling of the church by saying that the whole church must be busy proclaiming the word of the Lord (p. 230). As educators of God’s covenant children, teachers have a unique opportunity to work to fulfill this calling. Prof. Russell Dykstra (2014) aptly encapsulates this calling, saying, “They (teachers) impart necessary knowledge of God, his creation, and how to serve God as his covenant people in the world” (p. 389). The Christian, Reformed teacher is placed into a classroom, with the faces of God’s little lambs staring back at him. He must be ready to use every opportunity to live as God’s slave, in service to him and to others. Although God may have already justified the heart of every child in the classroom, this does not make the spreading of the gospel any less important to the teacher. The students must learn to live and breathe the word of God, so that they might live godly lives of service and go on to spread the gospel themselves. This means that they must be taught the truths found in the word of God. This can be done in hundreds of different ways. One specific example is the importance of having daily devotions in the classroom. Devotions at the beginning of the school day, before lunch, and at the end of the day show that serving God must consume the life of elect believers.

Another way in which teachers serve God and the students in the classroom is through distinct, Protestant Reformed teaching. Reformed educators must be thoroughly informed and knowledgeable in regards to the Reformed creeds and all of the truths which God has graciously revealed to the Protestant Reformed churches. One simple way which this can be done is through a subscription to the Standard Bearer. This Reformed bi-monthly magazine will not
only help keep the educator informed of everything going on in the churches, but also help them grow in their understanding of many doctrinal topics and issues. As God’s slave, the elect child of God absolutely must know the truths which he has revealed in his word. Teachers especially must heed this calling, because they are helping to raise the future church. This includes pastors, elders, deacons, and mothers. Rev. denHartog (2007) writes, “The whole church of Jesus Christ must be interested in this work [of spreading the gospel]. She must be concerned about raising up preachers from her sons” (p. 230). Children must be taught the truth by Reformed teachers, so that they can firmly take a place in the elect church.

In the last place, teachers are placed in a position of leadership. As has been pointed out by several different wise leaders, true leadership requires serving. Leaders put others above themselves, as taught in Philippians 2:3, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” The students need to respect the teacher, but they also need to know and see that the teacher will do anything within their power to provide each individual child with their physical, mental, and spiritual needs. Teachers truly need to be compassionate and caring (Dykstra, 2014, p. 389). The leadership God has given unto Reformed educators must not be flaunted about as a weapon, but rather be used as a tool to further enhance the instruction of young, Reformed believers.

There is much that can be said about living a life as a slave of God, especially as a Christian, Reformed educator. It first must be seen that slavery to God brings true liberty, in distinction from earthly slavery. Because the Reformed teacher can, through faith, be confident of his own salvation, he must labor diligently to serve as a slave of God, especially through examination of his own life. He must actively proclaim the word of God to the classroom so that future generations have a deep understanding of the creeds and doctrines. May the Reformed educator always live a humble life of service to God and his neighbor!

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**SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY** Martha Mahtani

**ROYAL SERVANTS OF THE KING**

The image of a slave contrived in the minds of many today is that of a filthy and dehumanized creature, forced to do the bidding of his or her master. Why is a picture like this ingrained upon the recesses of our brains in such a derogatory way? The simple truth is that it originates from our own nation’s history of slavery which began in the seventeenth century. In just a few short years, this act of taking upon other humans as property with harsh treatment had become prominent. Contrary to what is seen in this period, the title of a slave has a much deeper and positive meaning concerning the spiritual master that God’s people have. Slaves, or servants, indeed have the calling to carry out the will of their masters. Nonetheless, we as God’s people have a different sort of master—and therefore a different sort of role as slaves to our Lord. As purchased property of an eternal master, the servanthood of both teachers and students must be performed in the way of our Saviour, who surrendered to the Father, lowered himself to earth as a man, and was exalted over all creatures.
The key aspect of a life of true service to God is that of having the mind of Christ; fully surrendering to the Lord who rules over all. In Philippians 2, the apostle Paul lays out before the church of Philippi these words: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” He goes on to give an account of Christ’s incarnation, death on the cross, and glorified resurrection. Immediately, the apostle points out that Christ “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phil. 2:6). In an article titled The Mind of Christ, Rev. Dennis Lee explains this to mean that Jesus, all the while being fully God, did not see the need to obtain that reputation, but instead emptied himself and took on no reputation, as Paul describes in the following verses (Lee). Christ in all his glory clung not to the Godhead that he most definitely possessed, but rather cared only for his subservience to the Father. Through this submission, Christ showed the necessary acknowledgment of God as his Father and a willingness to adhere to the command given by his Lord.

As figures who are put in authority in our schools, teachers must recognize their place as servants in God’s kingdom and surrender to his instruction. The calling of teachers lies not in the idea that they are placed in tyrannical rule over the students, as some may tend to believe, but instead used as instruments to lead as godly examples. Paul writes about this matter also to the congregation at Colossae. “Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven” (Col. 4:1). As masters in the classroom, teachers ought to rule with an awareness that they too are servants under the most high God—sinful, yet striving to continue learning under their spiritual master. David Mathis, an author and editor for an online publication, expresses that instructors in a school are not called to teach just to show their own knowledge of the subject matter, but to heed the voice of God and learn from it so as to direct their students. In this same way, the Bible makes clear that the teachers and students ought to see themselves as “unprofitable servants” (Luke 17:10). The completion of tasks within a servant’s vocation is not to make the person deserving of a reward but because it is the calling and duty of man to serve his Lord (Belgic Confession, Article 24). By God’s grace, the students will see their teacher as having a mind of service and will be desirous to have that same mentality.

Likewise, although teachers are put in place to lead their students, the main goal is to have the students submit to God as their true master. A concrete example of this can be seen in a teacher assigning Bible passages for the students to look at and study for themselves. As a student memorizes these verses and as they are incorporated into the daily lessons and classroom life, the young person moves forward in the process of “mapping [their] life and mind onto the very life and mind of God” (Mathis). Through this, the students see their teacher as a master in the classroom, but only as a means to know more fully their spiritual Lord. Out of this should spring forth a constant reminder to the students of their servanthood to God. This is laid out in the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 48 where the second petition, “Thy kingdom come,” is explained; that is, we as God’s people must make it our prayer to have the Spirit work in us and thus make us more fully submissive to our master. The next Lord’s Day goes on to emphasize a recognition of man’s work to “renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey Thy will, which is only good; that so every one may attend to and perform the duties of his station and calling” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 49). What better way for teachers and students alike to truly understand the depths of their obedience to their master?

Another part of having a Christ-like mind is related to the concept of Christ becoming incarnate, lowering himself to this sinful world and becoming like man. Although deserving of no condemnation, he “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant,” subjecting himself to the shameful death of the cross (Phil. 2:7–8). Christ offered himself up as the ultimate sacrifice, being made humble before God and all else out of love for his people. He did not want to build a reputation that would allow him to climb higher in society. He was instead content to gain no reward and please only his Father in heaven. A well-known passage in Colossians speaks explicitly to this and depicts the obedience of Christ, as the apostle Paul exhorts the people to obey their master in all things “as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col. 3:22–23). In becoming a man and desiring no mighty reputation among men, he perfectly displayed the mind and action of a servant.

Just as Christ performed the will of God in humbling himself before man, so must God’s people do the same, especially in the vocation of a teacher. While teachers may be set in authority, they are also called to serve the students and parents. No man should see himself as better than another; rather, he must always be looking to place his neighbor above himself and before him, seeking to “esteem...
In the same way, so should teachers be of this mind—serving the students out of love and looking out for their best interest. It is vital that the rulers in the classroom recognize their own weaknesses and are willing to admit wrong and gain knowledge from their students. While this does not perfectly reflect the person of Christ who had no sin, it is nonetheless a reminder for those in authority over others to lower themselves and acknowledge the human depravity of each member within the church.

In direct connection with the mindset of teachers towards their students, the matter of the students’ relationships among one another must be stressed. Often, it can be a tendency for students (and all of God’s servants alike) to look upon the neighbor and form prideful thoughts because of various flaws or weaknesses. Scripture speaks directly to servants about walking in humility, submitting one to another in fear before God (1 Pet. 5:5–6; Eph. 5:21). Students must be taught that a life lived in service to the will of God rather than an attempt to satisfy man is an honor and pleasing unto the Lord. It is of the most urgent nature that teachers emphasize to their students the importance of humility. Satan strikes hard at any who begin to feel the pride and longing to be higher on earth than others, just as he did in the garden with our first parents (Gen. 3:6). As students strive for a spirit of humility, they will join with the same mind of Christ working diligently together as servants in God’s kingdom.

At the completion of Jesus’ life here on earth, God raised him up on high to be seated at the right hand of his Father’s throne, exalted above all others. The work that Christ did on account of his crucified body and shed blood bought life for his people—unmerited and eternal. With this great work, Christ is known and glorified in all corners of the earth. Paul writes, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). What Christ did was earn for God’s people all the riches of salvation. As we look back at our nation’s history, it is obvious that many slaves did not have even the simplest of blessings or access to any rights. Many were restricted from reading and writing, unable to become literate and further their education. On the contrary, we as God’s people have rights that only his chosen elect have obtained because of his amazing work on the cross. By the grace of God, he now looks upon us as precious and redeemed.

The obvious result and forthcoming action of any teacher is an awareness of God’s gift and thus a proper approach to the students. Since God has promised eternal life to his chosen people, no teacher has any right to belittle a student. Each person has a name, a personality, and a specific level of intelligence that God has gifted unto them. While we do not know God’s plan for every person, we can by faith desire that the children we raise in our churches will follow in the footsteps of Christ, crowning them as royalty in the palace of our king. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). God’s servants have been called out—chosen, royal, holy, peculiar—and what a comfort to know that nothing can change that! With this knowledge, teachers must continue in having the mind of Christ and seeing the students as objects of God’s love and perfect work.

In the same manner, students are called and must be encouraged to not only esteem others above themselves, but to love them as fellow princes and princesses in God’s kingdom. This is not to say that the royal status causes God’s people to sin less, as “even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 44). Nonetheless, the positive side presents itself in that love and trust can be shown and displayed to those of God’s holy choosing unto himself (Deut. 14:2). Because we have been granted the mind of Christ to know more and more the very mind of the Lord, we can accept this task with excitement and vigor (1 Cor. 2:16). The contrast to the slavery which defined much of our country’s history is that while Christ has purchased his people to be his property and to do his bidding, we are not treated harshly or as those who have no place or belonging. In the courts of God and in our Lord’s presence, we are royal servants of the king!

Through deep study and an understanding of the mind of Christ, God’s people must strive to kneel in submission to him, walk humbly before all men, and live as his holy bride. As the need for godly, Christian teachers continues to grow, it is of utmost importance that our teachers be properly equipped for the work which they are called to do. The training of students to have the mind of Christ and the desire to be Christ-like in their walk is a difficult task, especially with the strong currents of our society influencing young people, young adults, and even the older generation today. The comfort that God’s people must keep in mind is that our slavery and servanthood to God is unlike that of the history of
our nation. It is a gift that we are enslaved to Christ, having been freed from the bondage of sin and given everlasting life as servants to God (Rom. 6:22). It is then with great rejoicing that we join together with the apostle Paul in saying, “To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved” (Eph. 1:6).

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Devotional Abby Van Solkema

THE DAILY PRESS
“press toward the mark…” (Philippians 3:14)

October 8 Read Micah 4

After prophesying in chapter three about the terrible judgment that was going to come upon the wicked, corrupt leaders of the nation, here Micah shifts his focus to the glorious kingdom that will be established for God’s people when Jesus comes again. In this glorious kingdom, everyone will know the ways of the Lord and walk in them. God will destroy all of their enemies so that they can dwell in peace and prosperity. “But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid” (v. 4).

In contrast to the kingdom of heaven, the world that we live in is plagued with fear, poverty, conflict, and ignorance. It is difficult to find a news story that doesn’t contain some or all of these features. Earthly kings and politicians may promise freedom from all these things, but they are not able to deliver on their promises. But God always fulfills his promises. In his eternal kingdom fear, poverty, conflict, and ignorance will not exist. What a wonderful hope that someday “we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever” (v. 5). Sing or pray Psalter #136.

October 9 Read Micah 5

The message of Micah 5 comes to a nation who is under siege and without hope. But where does their hope come from? It comes from the humble village of Bethlehem. “Though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel” (v. 2). In this humble village, a baby would be born that would be our Shepherd-King and bring peace to God’s people (v. 5) and vengeance upon God’s enemies (v. 15).

Do you ever feel like you are weak and insignificant or “little among the thousands”? Like you couldn’t ever do anything to help the kingdom of God? The Lord is most glorified by using people who feel inadequate in themselves to serve his purposes. He chooses the lowly so that we cannot take pride in our own abilities, but rather give all the glory to him. “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Cor. 1:27). Sing or pray Psalter #107.

October 10 Read Micah 6

When confronted with their sin against God, the people of Israel offer up everything that they can think of: animals, large sacrifices, and even their firstborn sons. But none of these things can satisfy God’s divine justice. His answer through the prophet Micah in verse 8 is clear. “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” What he requires of us is not some type of payment or sacrifice, but rather
thankful obedience because Christ has already paid for our sins.

Jesus refers to Micah 6:8 when he is addressing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:23. And it is an admonition that we need to hear too. No matter how seemingly impressive it may be, God is not pleased by empty religious rituals and worship that attempts to cover up a life of disobedience to God’s commands and a heart that is only focused on service of self. Pray with David the words of Psalm 139:23–24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” *Sing or pray Psalter #384.*

**October 11**  
**Read Micah 7**

If we pause to contemplate our sinfulness and the ease with which we get swept away by sin, it can fill us with feelings of hopelessness. We certainly do not deserve God’s mercy and forgiveness. The only way that we can receive this mercy and forgiveness is through Christ. But we can be comforted by the fact that God does not forgive us because of anything that we do, but because of a reason within himself.

Who is like Jehovah? He is merciful by nature. This is difficult for us to imagine because we by nature are not merciful. We hold grudges and seek revenge on people who hurt us. But God glorifies himself by showing infinite mercy to his people. Micah 7:18 says, “he retaieth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy.” And Ephesians 2:4 reminds us that God is “rich in mercy.” He not only delights in showing mercy to his people, but he also has the power to deliver them from their sin and misery. *Sing or pray Psalter #280.*

**October 12**  
**Read 2 Chronicles 28**

Ahaz’s father, Jotham, was one of the godly kings of Judah. We read in 2 Chronicles 27 about how “he did that which was right in the sight of the L ord” (v. 2). But Ahaz is very different from his righteous father. He worshiped Baal, sacrificed to other gods in the high places, trusted in Assyria for help instead of God, and destroyed the vessels of the temple. He even sacrificed his own sons to Molech. How could such an unfaithful son come from a faithful, godly father?

The answer to this question lies in the fact that parents cannot save their children any more than they can save themselves. Only God is able to work salvation. Parents should most definitely teach their children about God to the best of their ability, but there is no promise in the Bible that if you make sure your children know this and that, they are guaranteed to become a Christian. This should not lead parents to discouragement, but rather relief. The responsibility of your child’s salvation does not rest on your shoulders, but in the hands of your heavenly Father. *Sing or pray Psalter #89.*

**October 13**  
**Read 2 Kings 16**

In this chapter we read about Ahaz going to Damascus to meet with the king of Assyria, whom he has recently pledged his allegiance to. While he was in Damascus, he sees an altar that catches his eye. So he sends the dimensions of the altar to Urijah the priest and tells him to build it in the temple. This was in direct violation of God’s specific instructions about how he was to be worshiped.

Like Ahaz, we may be tempted to integrate worldly practices into the way that we worship or live. One example that comes to mind is the way we celebrate holidays. Do we go to church to commemorate the birth of Christ and then go home and open gifts from “Santa?” Do we celebrate after church on Easter Sunday with an egg hunt? What kind of message does this send to our children and to the unbelieving world around us? “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). *Sing or pray Psalter #366.*

**October 14**  
**Read 2 Kings 17**

In 2 Kings 17 we read about the nation of Israel being carried away into captivity by the Assyrians. They had rejected God, so he gave them over to their sin. Israel had become like the gods they worshiped. They “followed vanity, and became vain” (v. 15). The idea of vanity is nothingness. The people were serving gods that weren’t real, so they became nothing.

What do you worship? We all worship something. Who or what we trust in is the object of our worship. What we worship determines how we spend our money. What we worship shapes our actions and impacts our emotions. And just like Israel, we will resemble what we worship. Are you being conformed to the image of Christ or “into an image made like to corruptible man” (Rom. 1:23)? *Sing or pray Psalter #266.*
October 15  Read Isaiah 13

Isaiah prophesied during a time of great material prosperity in the land of Judah. As a result of this prosperity, the nation had become less conscious of their dependence on God and declined spiritually. Idol worship was rampant, and the people of the Lord were living just like the world around them. Does this sound familiar? We are also living in what seems like the day of man. There is unprecedented progress in science, medicine, and technology, accompanied by great wealth, but also great spiritual apostasy.

Babylon represents the day of man, the “glory of kingdoms” (v. 19). But to Babylon and also to God’s people comes the message of judgment in Isaiah 13, “Behold, the day of the Lord cometh” (v. 9). Isaiah predicts the actual fall of Babylon to the Medes and also foreshadows the judgment of God on all nations when Christ comes again. To the church, the day of the Lord is not a threat but a promise. “For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel” (Isa. 14:1). Sing or pray Psalter #59.

October 16  Read Isaiah 14

Isaiah 14 speaks about the fall of the literal king of Babylon, and also prophesies of the fall of the king of spiritual Babylon, Satan. We may sometimes think that Satan is the counterpart of God. But this is giving him too much power. If he had an opposite, it would probably be one of the higher ranking angels like Michael. God is sovereign over Satan. He is in control of Satan’s every move, and everything that Satan does serves his eternal purpose.

Satan will not be the ruler of hell, and seemingly important people who go there will not have any higher status. They will all face the same punishment. Picture all the great and terrible leaders that have died throughout history and how weak they are now, despite how much power they had while they were on this earth. When Satan is ultimately defeated and joins them in hell, they will say “Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us?” (v. 10). What an amazing comfort this is to those who are oppressed by earthly rulers and who face the daily attacks of Satan! Ultimately even he will confess that Jesus is Lord. Sing or pray Psalter #3.

October 17  Read Isaiah 15 & 16

These two chapters of Isaiah prophesy judgment upon the nation of Moab specifically. But in the midst of this judgment and call for repentance, the Lord also gives Moab an important calling. “Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler” (16:4). And this calling is extended to all the other nations throughout history as well. Wherever God’s people are facing persecution, those around them are obligated to provide refuge and assistance.

God’s people are precious to him, and he hates those who oppress them. In Zechariah 2:8 we read, “For thus saith the Lord of hosts…he that toucheth the apple of his eye.” Those who do not provide refuge for the people of God reveal themselves to be enemies of God. But those who by grace choose to suffer with God’s people will be rewarded with eternal life. As we get nearer to the end of the world and face increasing persecution, pray for the courage to suffer with God’s people and not let the fear of man keep you from doing what is right. Sing or pray Psalter #323.

October 18  Read Isaiah 17

Israel had made an alliance with Syria against Assyria instead of trusting in God to save them. Therefore the message of judgment to Damascus in Isaiah 17 comes to them as well. “Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength…In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow…but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow” (vv. 10, 11). Since they were trusting in their own strength, God was going to destroy all of their efforts.

Forgetting God can be very easy. We get caught up in our daily tasks—work, school, relationships—and God gets put on the back burner. Prayer doesn’t seem as important as doing laundry. Spending time in the word doesn’t seem as important as getting to bed on time. We start to rely on ourselves and think that God is not involved in our day-to-day life. Sometimes it is not until we experience a season of suffering that our focus is brought back to the Lord and his constant care of us. How can you keep God in the forefront of your mind today? Sing or pray Psalter #214.

October 19  Read Isaiah 18 & 19

The nation of Egypt took great pride in its wise men. Therefore, as part of his judgment on the nation prophesied in Isaiah 19, all the wise men of Egypt were made fools. God was reminding the people that he is the source of all wisdom. “For the Lord
giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding” (Prov. 2:6). He gives it, and he can take it away again.

Like Egypt, we too can be tempted to find security in our own wisdom. This wisdom may not be in the form of wise counselors, but rather the internet. Having unlimited access to tons of information on every topic imaginable right in our pocket can make us think that we are experts on everything and able to figure out any problem on our own. We should be careful to keep earthly wisdom in its proper place and put our trust only in the one who is the source of all wisdom. *Sing or pray Psalter #71.*

**October 20**  
Read Isaiah 20

Many other nations had counted on Egypt and Ethiopia to help them fight against the Assyrians. But now Isaiah prophesies that “they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory” (v. 5). God was going to judge both of these mighty nations by giving them over to the Assyrians. After Egypt and Ethiopia are taken captive by Assyria, the other nations are afraid. They wonder “how shall we escape?” (v. 6).

But God’s people have no reason to despair because they have a greater power than Egypt and Ethiopia on their side. In contrast to the fears that plague those who trust in man, we read in Jeremiah 17:7–8, “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.” *Sing or pray Psalter #162.*

**October 21**  
Read Isaiah 21

During the time of Isaiah, it was common to have watchmen posted on the wall of the city to function as lookouts. They would warn the city if enemies were approaching during the night. Isaiah is the watchman in this chapter, and night symbolizes God’s wrath and judgment. The morning symbolizes deliverance from this judgment through Jesus Christ. The people ask, “When will the night be over?” and Isaiah answers “The morning cometh, and also the night” (v. 12). What he means is that only in Jerusalem (the church) will morning come. The rest of the world will continue to exist in darkness. For the reprobate, morning will never come.

If we seek the morning, we will only find it in repentance and separating ourselves from the world. We cannot be in the darkness and in the light at the same time. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). *Sing or pray Psalter #207.*

**October 22**  
Read Isaiah 22

Judah had an outward reformation under Hezekiah, but for most of the people, there was no humility or true repentance. Shebna represents this underlying pride and wickedness of Judah. Shebna was an officer in the court of Hezekiah who was consumed with his own image and station on this earth instead of the service of God. He was deceitful and ambitious and even had a sepulcher made for himself that would be a monument to his self-proclaimed greatness. The Lord saw Shebna’s wickedness and sent Isaiah to proclaim judgment on him. Shebna would lose his position in the household and be replaced by a faithful servant of the Lord, Eliakim.

One only has to scroll through Instagram to find numerous examples of people who are consumed with their own image. Are you one of these people? If we aren’t mindful of our pride, our social media accounts can very easily become like Shebna’s sepulcher—monuments to our own greatness. Take a moment for self-examination. Are you living for the kingdom of God, or for your own glory? *Sing or pray Psalter #403.*

**October 23**  
Read Isaiah 23

The geographical location and harbor of the nation of Tyre made it a well-known center of commerce. It was a city of merchants, and as a result, the pride of the people was in their money. But God laid it all to waste. The judgment of Tyre serves as an important reminder that our material possessions are gifts from God, and he can easily take them away at any time.

Are money and possessions too high on your priority list? Do they take your attention away from the service of God’s kingdom? Do you make decisions based solely on finances instead of seeking God’s will for your life? Remember the words of Jesus in Mark 8:36, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” *Sing or pray Psalter #31.*

**October 24**  
Read Isaiah 24

In the past ten chapters of Isaiah, we have read
prophesies of judgment against almost all of the neighbors of Israel. But now Isaiah broadens it out to declare judgment on the whole world as well. Did the thought ever come to your mind while reading these chapters that all this judgment seems a bit harsh? What are the grounds for all this destruction? “The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant” (v. 5). God made a covenant with the whole human race in Adam, and transgressing the law of God is a breach of that covenant. Not only does the entire human race deserve eternal punishment, but the actual earth is defiled from sin as well. In the day of judgment, the earth will be destroyed, and God will make a new heaven and earth for his chosen people to dwell in. *Sing or pray Psalter #139.*

**October 25**  
**Read Isaiah 25**

It is easy to get discouraged in our life on this earth. There are mass shootings and other great tragedies. We may face illnesses or the death of those we love. And everyone has their own personal struggles of mind and body. There are so many reasons to cry! But even in the midst of all this, we can look up and find hope in the promise of heaven. In heaven we will never have to suffer death or pain or sadness again. “He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces” (v. 8). Belgic Confession, Article 37 says that in heaven God’s elect people will “possess such a glory as never entered into the heart of man to conceive.” What a comfort it is to God’s people that this earth is not our eternal home! *Sing or pray Psalter #305.*

**October 26**  
**Read Isaiah 26**

This world is filled with people who have no peace. They run as fast as they can from one distraction to another. They chase the promises of the next adrenaline high, the next emotional high, the most fun party ever, the best job, the newest drug, or any number of other things. But they never find the satisfaction that they are looking for because they are searching in the wrong place. Philippians 3:19 describes this kind of people as those “whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”

In contrast to these restless wanderers, Isaiah 26:3 promises, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” It is only when we trust in the Lord and keep our mind on heavenly things that we will have true peace. This perfect peace is far better than the short-lived peace provided by temporary earthly distractions. *Sing or pray Psalter #76.*

**October 27**  
**Read Isaiah 27**

Isaiah 27 paints the picture of God’s people as a “vineyard of red wine.” The Lord keeps this vineyard with great care. He waters, protects, and guards them constantly. In such an environment, the vines are sure to bear fruit. The fruit is the evidence of God’s gracious work in the vineyard of his church. The fruit of the vines bears witness to him and brings him glory. Lord’s Day 24 of the Heidelberg Catechism states it like this, “It is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.”

If we believe that salvation is all of grace and not works, we may be tempted to ask the question, do we really have to do good works? But the question should actually be—how can we not? “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). *Sing or pray Psalter #218.*

**October 28**  
**Read 2 Kings 18**

At this time the king of Assyria sends a representative (Rabshakeh) to the city of Jerusalem in order to get the people to turn against Hezekiah and surrender to the Assyrian army. It is interesting to note that the tactics of Rabshakeh are very similar to the same schemes that Satan has been using throughout history, beginning with his temptation of Eve by means of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. He speaks in a language that we can understand. He makes us aware of our weaknesses and glorifies the power of God’s enemies. He makes us doubt God and his promises. And he makes sin look extremely appealing.

Take a few moments to think about these timeless strategies of Satan and try to identify ways that he may be using them against you in your own life. “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor. 2:11). Pray that God will give you the strength to resist the lies and deception of the devil. *Sing or pray Psalter #103.*

**October 29**  
**Read 2 Chronicles 29**

From the very beginning of Hezekiah’s reign, we see evidence of the great zeal he has for the Lord. He wastes no time in opening the doors of the temple and beginning repairs. His main focus as a new
king was the spiritual (not political) state of the kingdom. He gives an inspiring speech to the priests and Levites, commanding them not to be negligent in their duties. The cleansing of the temple was completed in only 16 days. Hezekiah's excitement was shown by the fact that he rose early on the day when he could finally go to the house of the Lord again. And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had enabled them to get this all done so quickly. Is zeal for the Lord evident in your life as well? Sing or pray Psalter # 350.

The Lord had instituted the Passover feast as a way for the people of Israel to remember their redemption from the land of Egypt (Ex. 12:14) and to pass this memory on to their children (Ex. 12:25–27). It is for these same reasons that we celebrate the Lord's Supper in the New Testament, except that we remember Christ's death on the cross to save his people from their sins.

Why was it so important for Hezekiah to reinstate the Passover feast? It was a sign that the people were remembering God and what he had done for them. Israel's main sin was forgetting God and not trusting in his promises. Just like Israel, we are also prone to forgetting God and what he has done for us. What a blessing that God has instituted sacraments such as baptism and the Lord's Supper to strengthen our faith and serve as visible reminders of our salvation! Sing or pray Psalter #277.

When Hezekiah reorganized the priests and reinstated worship in the temple, “he commanded the people that dwelt in Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and Levites, that they might be encouraged in the law of the Lord” (v. 4). He wanted to make sure that the priests were provided for financially so that they were able to focus on studying the law of God and teaching it to the people.

We also should be concerned about providing for the physical and financial needs of our pastors. It is the calling of the church to take care of the pastor and his family so that he can focus on preaching the word and caring for the congregation's spiritual needs. Articles 11 and 12 of the Church Order speak to this when they say that ministers of the word are not allowed to have a “secular vocation” and that the consistory “shall also be bound to provide for the proper support of its ministers.” Sing or pray Psalter #133.

Psalm 48 is a song about the glory of Zion, the city of God. It is described as “beautiful for situation” (v. 2). What made Zion so beautiful wasn't the physical architecture or actual elevation, but the fact that God was there. When the people were dwelling in Zion and living in close fellowship with God, they were protected and guided by his hand. They had no reason to fear their enemies.

In the New Testament, we experience the glories of Zion even more fully through Jesus Christ. “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell” (Col. 1:19). And we also look forward to someday dwelling in the New Jerusalem that is described in Revelation 21. I would encourage you to take the time today to read verses 22–27 especially and compare them to Psalm 48. Sing or pray Psalter #134.

The book of Hosea tells a shocking story. God commanded Hosea to marry a known prostitute? And Hosea remained faithful to her and loved her throughout their entire marriage, even though she was repeatedly unfaithful? But the events of Hosea's life were divinely inspired to emphasize just how shocking Israel's unfaithfulness to God was. When Israel began to seek out the gods of the nations around them, this was a betrayal of God. And we also are unfaithful to God when we trust in something or someone other than him.

Author Ed Welch puts the sin of unfaithfulness in perspective with this example from his book, What Do You Think of Me? Why Do I Care?: “It’s like being married and then adding a second wife or husband just in case the first one doesn’t satisfy all your needs. You can say that you love your first spouse, and you might even believe that, but your first spouse won’t. Your first spouse knows your actions are an outright rejection and betrayal. You renounce your first spouse by taking another” (p. 45). Sing or pray Psalter #124.

In the society that we live in today, divorce is very common. Statistics say that about half of all marriages in the United States will end in divorce. In stark contrast to that, we read the promise of God in Hosea 2:19–20 to his bride, the church. “And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and
in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord.” His bride has been repeatedly unfaithful and committed adultery countless times. I think everyone would agree that divorce would be a legitimate choice on his part. But God does not divorce. Instead, he says, “Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant” (Ezek. 16:60). We should not take God’s incredible faithfulness for granted, but rather in thankfulness strive to walk a new and godly life. 

Sing or pray Psalter #377.

When two people begin a relationship together, it is usually because they find something attractive about each other. It could be physical characteristics, or a pleasant personality, or shared interests. But this does not seem to be the case for Hosea. We read that when Hosea sought out Gomer she was already an adulteress. And just like Gomer, there was no beauty or value in us that attracted God’s love. God chose us to be his people, from eternity, even though he knew all of the sins that we would commit in our lifetime.

“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved” (Eph. 1:5–6). The good pleasure of God is the only cause of our election. And this good pleasure of God is not just random feelings, but perfect decisions, because God is infinitely wise and omniscient. In his wisdom, he chose you for his glorification. 

Sing or pray Psalter #7.

The dire spiritual situation of the nation of Israel is described at the beginning of Hosea 4, “there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out” (vv. 1–2). The people of Israel were no longer showing any restraint against sin. Everyone did what they thought was right in their own mind. And because of their actions judgment is promised, “I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings” (v. 9).

Our culture today preaches this same message. “Do whatever makes you happy.” “You are the only one that matters.” “Make your own rules.” Everyone is encouraged to choose their own gender or sexual orientation, and they can even decide to kill an unborn baby if they did not get pregnant at a time that is convenient for their happiness. No matter how “normal” the world around us may make this seem, be assured that these sins are abominations to God. If we reject God’s rules for our life, he will reject us (v. 6). 

Sing or pray Psalter #12.

Hosea 5:10 pronounces judgment on the leaders of Judah for being “like them that remove the bound.” On first reading, this can be a difficult verse to understand. After doing some further investigation I found out that the word “bound” refers to something like an ancient landmark. The idea is that God had set boundaries upon his people in the Old Testament by giving them the Ten Commandments, civil, and ceremonial laws, but the leaders of Judah were changing or setting aside these laws to serve their own selfish purposes.

God has also given us boundaries so that we know how best to live as created human beings on this earth. These boundaries are the Ten Commandments. And sin is when we choose to live outside of those boundaries. When we think that we need to go outside the boundaries of God’s law to find happiness and satisfaction, we have been deceived just like our first parents Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden. Following God’s commands is the only way to be truly happy. 

Sing or pray Psalter #41.

Hosea 6 is a call for the nation to repent. “Come, and let us return unto the Lord” (v. 1). An essential part of this repentance is described in verse 3, “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.” This phrase is a bit confusing, but the idea is that of pursuing the knowledge of God. If you remember from the previous chapters of Hosea, one of the main sins of the nation was that they did not know the Lord.

The only way that we know the way of salvation is through the knowledge of God. This knowledge is found in the Holy Scriptures. Have you made time to read the Bible today? Hebrews 11:6 assures us that when we pursue the Lord, he will reveal himself to us. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

Sing or pray Psalter #62.
**THE TREE**

Gnarled, twisted, writhing snake,  
Snow-shod ‘neath a winter sky,  
Putting on the feathery flake,  
Only then to lay it bye.

Standing bleak and bare, alone –  
Leaves have drifted to the ground;  
Cheerful, chirping birds have flown;  
The howling wind’s the only sound.

Stalwart, staunch, and strong it stands  
‘Neath the vaulted roof of sky.  
Fearless of cruel winter’s hands;  
It will live again, although it die.

May we too stand straight and sure,  
Even ‘neath death’s troubled sky,  
Knowing that by faith secure  
We shall live, although we die.

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**Poem** James Jonker

**Church News** Melinda Bleyenberg

**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:

- Jace Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Jenn Richards—Georgetown, MI
- Holland Jaclyn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tyler & Bethany Kamps—Grace, MI
- Josephine Anne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Caleb & Sandra Meulenberg—Grace, MI
- Isaiah John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Maria Miersma—Grace, MI
- Charley Russell, son of Mr. & Mrs. Stefan & Kaley Boddy—Hudsonville, MI
- Theodore Ryan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan & Amy VanPutten—Hudsonville, MI
- Sierra Marie Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Philip & Marie Hopkins—Redlands, CA
- Theodore Camron, son of Mr. & Mrs. Marc & Rebecca Kuiper—Southwest, MI
- Mason Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Todd & Denise Griffioen—Trinity, MI
- Declan John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jared & Cassie DeVries—Trinity, MI

**CONFESSIONS OF FAITH**

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

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

- Julia Holleman—Crete, IL
- Callie DeVries—Randolph, WI
- Tanya Buite—Randolph, WI
- Neal Hanko—Spokane, WA
- Scott Sullivan—Spokane, WA
- Matthew Kleyn—Spokane, WA
- Arend Haveman—Trinity, MI
- Erin VanBaren—Trinity, MI

**MARRIAGES**

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

Mr. Daniel Huizing and Miss Bridgette Rypstra—Edmonton, AB, Canada

Mr. Sean Ferguson and Miss Mary Mahtani—Edmonton, AB, Canada
Planning for a national synod had begun early in 1618, even before Prince Maurice called for a synod. Because the church and state were tied together in the Netherlands, the churches in the Netherlands couldn’t call a synod themselves. Only the government, Prince Maurice, could call one.

Representatives from all the provinces of the Netherlands were called, along with major theologians from the Dutch universities and fourteen Remonstrants to present their case to the synod. A synod discussed in the Reformed churches all over Europe and from there, the rest of the world through the colonies the European countries held at the time. The Synod of Dordt became, in many ways, an international synod and its decision would hold great weight.

A weighty matter lay before the many delegates. Was grace resistible as the Remonstrants claimed or irresistible as the Gomarists argued? Were men totally depraved? Was God’s grace for all or for his particular chosen people? When the synod began, these were the doctrinal questions the delegates would have to answer.

While this synod started out as a Dutch synod, it was attended by over twenty-five delegates from other countries, including Great Britain, Switzerland, and various German states. Because of all the foreign delegates, this synod would not be a quiet synod in the backwaters of the Netherlands. It would be

Tricia Mingerink

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
Grace and Assurance
The Message of the Canons of Dordt

In 1618-19 the great Synod of Dordt met to counter the Arminian error that was threatening the peace and welfare of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. The fruit of their deliberations was the Canons of Dordt, a creed which has defined the Calvinist, Reformed faith for centuries.

This accessible commentary on the Canons leads readers through the comforting message of the creed: being wholly saved by God’s grace—not one’s own merit—comes with the steadfast assurance of eternal and unchangeable election.

by Martyn McGeown

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