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In mid-September 2018, over 400 churches in the West Michigan area worked together to bring Luis & Andrew Palau and their message to Grand Rapids. Driving around West Michigan in the weeks leading up to the event, you would think that a good portion of the $1,700,000 budget was spent on signage alone. The last editorial detailed the extraneous activity of CityFest 2018: the BMX competitions, face painting, climbing walls, and music. All of this was leading up to the main event—Luis and Andrew Palau and their gospel message. In this editorial, I intend to focus on their theology and examine it in the light of scripture and the Canons of Dordt. This is what Reformed believers do.

Luis Palau is no Jim Bakker. Jim Bakker was a televangelist who spent the better part of the 1900s fashioning his life according to Romans 2. He was a “guide of the blind,” an “instructor of the foolish,” and a phony who preached against theft while he stole millions. Convicted of theft, an adulterer and accused rapist, he was a man who could read Romans 2:24 as being directly addressed to him: “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.”

From all outward appearances, Luis Palau lives a moral life. Perform an internet search for “Luis Palau scandal” and you will come up empty. Many popular evangelists are exposed by their own wicked lives as false prophets and bring on themselves “swift destruction” (2 Pet. 2:1). Luis Palau does not belong to that camp.

It is difficult to know what exactly Luis Palau believes because he shies away from doctrinal pronouncements. In his book Say Yes! How to Renew Your Spiritual Passion, Palau writes that he used to “preach certain minor points of doctrine with conviction.” This memory left him embarrassed because he subsequently changed his mind about those truths. His focus now is on areas of unity. If you find the thought welling up in you that perhaps differences matter, he has a word for you: “Crucify it” (165).

For Luis Palau, all gospels are the same. The wide variety of churches that brought CityFest 2018 to Grand Rapids supports this view: Wesleyan, Assembly of God, Orthodox Presbyterian, Christian Reformed, Nitrogen Movement (wait, what?), Roman Catholic, and most everything in between. Rare is the church or denomination not found on the list. I asked the Festival Director of the Luis Palau Association, Andrew Park how they can have all of these different churches working together when Amos teaches that two cannot walk together “except they be agreed” (Amos 3:3). He responded that they do not focus on the doctrine, but focus on “Christ and Christ crucified.” They leave the follow-up details to the local congregation.

Luis Palau may believe there is only one gospel message, but that was not the teaching of the apostle Paul. For the apostle, there were two gospels. One gospel was the gospel he preached; “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8–9). A gospel message that taught anything other than this is “another,” and if anyone, man or angel, were to preach another gospel he is to be “accursed” (Gal. 1:6–9).

In this year in which we commemorate the Synod
of Dordt, let’s hear the Canon’s gospel message.

All men are “under the curse, and...deserving of eternal death” (Head 1, Art. 1) and “equally involved in ruin” (Art. 6). Salvation needs to come from outside ourselves, because “we are unable to make that satisfaction in our own persons” (Head 2, Art 2). In fact, natural man “is neither able nor willing to return to God.” Why? They are “dead in sin” (Head 3/4, Art. 3). From the mass of fallen humanity, God chose an “elect number...to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit” (Head 1, Art. 7). Although the death of Christ was “abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world” (Art. 3), it was God’s will that the “saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect” (Head 2, Art. 8) and that Christ “should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given Him by the Father.” “Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure...but because He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also” (Head 3/4, Art. 14).

How does Palau’s gospel line up?

In his brief exposition of the life of Peter, titled, Walk on Water, Pete! Palau writes, “And all He (Christ) wants from us is that we be available to Him. All He asks is to take over. Just let Him take over and see what He can do through you” (86). In the book Where is God When Bad Things Happen, he writes, “We can depend upon His Spirit for the strength to do what is best. But it all starts with our choice to align ourselves with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ” (136). Palau believes the power to choose “is one of the greatest gifts God ever bestowed upon the human race” (135).

This explains why Palau and others like him frenetically crisscross the globe spreading their message of choice. “What drives me is the conviction that if only people would see the point and get the message, they would be changed. Maybe that’s why I—along with many other evangelists—spend so much time literally pleading the case for salvation through Jesus Christ” (The Luis Palau Story, pg 23).

As part of his revival address to Londoners in 1984, Palau exhorted the audience that Jesus “loves you so much that He died for you. He gave His blood for you and your family. He wants to reign in your life. He wants to be your King.” “You can receive Christ the same way—by opening your heart to Him and saying, “Thank You, God” (Spirit Aflame, Holton and Jones, 225). “If you give your life to Jesus Christ, old things will pass away and all things will become new. But you must make the decision. You must intelligently come to Christ” (220). This was the message Andrew Palau brought to CityFest 2018: “It’s a beautiful offer, and I extend it to you now.”

For Luis & Andrew Palau, and Jacob Arminius before them, Jesus gave his life for all men, including those who will one day perish eternally in hell. Some atonement.

It is only in the way of exercising your will and making that choice for God that you will enjoy salvation. It depends on man, and man’s choice.

Palaus’s gospel message runs shipwreck on the scripture and the Reformed confessions.

Palaus’s gospel message is not that of Romans 9:16, “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” or Philippians 2:13, “For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” A choice is certainly made, but not the one that the Palau glory in: “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you” (John 15:16).

According to the Canons, Palau’s teaching “is nothing less than the denial of all the efficiency of God’s grace in our conversion, and the subjecting of the working of Almighty God to the will of man, which is contrary to the apostles” (Head 3/4, Rejection of Error 8). As you read through Palau’s writings or listen to his teaching, you get the distinct impression Jesus is this helpless creature who is standing out in the street (probably in the rain, bedraggled and cold) running from door to door, hoping someone will finally let him in. This impression is only confirmed when Andrew Palau, at the end of his speech on Saturday night at CityFest 2018, as he is about to offer salvation to all, (mis)quotes Revelation 3:20, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

Palaus’s teachings bear an uncanny resemblance to those of the Remonstrants (Arminians): conditional election, universal atonement, partial depravity, resistible grace, and conditional perseverance.

This makes it all the more bewildering that Reformed churches that stand in the line of Dordt should have this man come and preach to their people. To work side by side with the Roman Catholic
Church and any number of Arminian churches and bring in an exemplar of Arminian theology and yet retain the name Reformed is, to use a euphemism, puzzling.¹

There is every reason to celebrate the Synod of Dordt this year. We should take part in that celebration. Rather than simply pay lip service to it, we should confess the truths found in the Canons of Dordt. Not merely because we are Reformed and if we did not believe the doctrine of the Canons to be biblical, our consciences would require us to strip the name Reformed off our churches. We love the truth found in the Canons because they accurately summarize the truth found in the Bible about who God is and what salvation in Jesus Christ means. Conversely, we reject the teaching of a free will of man to choose for Christ, or against him, because “these adjudge too contemptuously of the death of Christ, do in no wise acknowledge the most important fruit or benefit thereby gained, and bring again out of hell the Pelagian error” (Canons, Head 2, Error 3).

After Jesus had borne the wrath of God against sin for all of his children, he said, simply, “It is finished.”

For Jacob Arminius, Luis & Andrew Palau, and everyone else who teaches that the will of God in salvation is subject to that of man, Jesus hangs on that cross today. It isn’t finished.

It will be finished when man says it is finished.

—Vi De Boer

Poetry

CHRISTMAS PRAYER

Lord give not the joy that centers on passing things
But grant to me the joy thy Holy Spirit brings.
Withhold from me the peace that is shattered in a minute.
But give me, Lord, the peace that has thy blessing in it.
Do not give me love that is a weak façade,
But bless me with the love of thee, Almighty God.
True joy, true peace, and true love:
Precious Christmas gifts from God above.
Roughly 100 of them stared back at us in that old, hot chapel at the Indiana State Prison. Their faces each told a story, a sobering story that was a mystery to the beholders. The thought crossed my mind as I looked out over the crowd, “How many of these faces were the last thing that someone saw before they took their last breath? How many of these men have brought about the end of someone’s life, innocence, or livelihood?” I can say without a doubt that I am glad I don’t know all of the things that the men who came to hear the Hope Heralds sing had done. There we all were, awaiting an hour of praise to God’s name. The people in that chapel could not have been from more opposite walks of life. Yet there in the back of the chapel was the phrase that brought the two groups together: “But for the grace of God.”

Thirty-five of the Hope Heralders arrived at the prison after a two-hour bus ride. I dare say that many of them shared my thoughts of thankfulness that we would be returning to that bus to go home after a few hours. For most who arrive there, they can know that they have arrived at their inevitable and inescapable coffin. Indiana State Prison is a very large compound with impregnable walls, housing about 2,300 inmates. The average sentence to be served is 55 years. Since it is a maximum security facility with many of the state’s most dangerous criminals, we had to go through a grueling process to get in. To enter the prison, we had to present identification, go through a metal detector, be frisked, and then proceed through a series of about six rooms. One cast iron door would open, let a group in, slam shut, and then another door would let them into the next room after a short wait. It was peculiar that after all the hassle to make it to the chapel, we never saw a single guard, even while we were with the inmates! We found that it was a significantly more intimidating environment than the home concerts that we are accustomed to.

“Is there a Jake Dykstra here?” This was one of the first things that I heard as I walked through the door of the prison chapel. I knew who was asking, and as soon as I looked, there he was. The man who I had talked to a full two years ago at the last Hope Heralds concert at the prison. His name is not important, but his story is. This man had committed a sin that any Christian would look upon as detestable and ugly, and for that he is serving out two life sentences without chance of parole. We talked for a while, and one thing struck me: all this guy wanted to talk about was God, Jesus Christ, and salvation! He visually thirsted for good Christian fellowship and was so happy to have us back to hear us sing and to talk to us.

It was a truly blessed experience to be able to sing to and have fellowship with the men there. More than likely, some of them were there on good behavior, simply looking to break up their daily routine and get out of their cells. But we could not miss the fact that this was not the case with all of them. Many of the inmates sang along, faces alive with the joy of singing praise to God. In fact, one old man requested to join us on one of our numbers that he knows and loves. The song itself speaks about the Christian’s hope of eternal life in the mansions that Christ has prepared for us in heaven. This man loves that message, for that is all he has. He knows that he is going to die in that prison, yet has the hope of eternal life. The men particularly liked the song “Little is Much When God is in It,” performed by the Voices of Victory. How relatable this song is to them, in their tiny cells in ten acres they will never leave. They have many opportunities to serve the Lord there, as many of them made clear to us. Many of them are Bible study leaders, choir members, and even graduates of a Presbyterian seminary within the prison. While what they can do there may seem small in comparison to all of the opportunities that we have to serve, they are thankful for what they have.

It must not be ignored that these men certainly deserve the position that they have in life. These men were terrible criminals at one time or another and deserved the penalties they received in worldly courts. Nonetheless, this ought to give us cause for reflection. How easy isn’t it for me to look in pride upon other people and think that I am really something? This was my first thought, and I am sure I was not alone. This is true for all of God’s people,
young and old. Pride is a sin that we love because by nature we love ourselves. We love to have others look at us and applaud our good works. Our sinful natures say that the men we traveled to minister to are the lowest of the low, certainly not worthy of anything but a miserable life in a jail cell.

Throughout the day, each of us singing saw more and more of ourselves in our brothers in Christ there. Don’t you and I belong in that prison? Worse yet, don’t you and I belong in eternal hell for even one sin against God? This thought ought to humble any of us to the dust. Let us be careful, as young people and adults that we do not vaunt ourselves over others. While there certainly are degrees of sin, some of them meriting serious punishment from society, the sins of God’s people make each one equally worthy of damnation in God’s courtroom. You and I must never look at the sins of others and think that our sins are not so bad. The next time your neighbor wrongs you or the next time you hear of a gross public sin, remember that he is no more deserving of eternal punishment than you are. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

How wonderful it is that God’s people may know his great grace. He does not choose us for who we are by nature, but for who we are in Christ. Recall the words of Ephesians 2:8, 9: “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” May our lives be a testimony of this truth, that but for the grace of God, we have no hope! But for the grace of God, we would hate him and his word. But for the grace of God, you and I could be sitting in that chapel staring back at the Hope Heralds. Thank God that he has chosen us for his elect children, and pray for the strength to put away the pride that so easily besets us day by day. By the work of the Spirit in our hearts, we may believe without a doubt the words of our Savior that his grace is sufficient for us.

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Book Review Rick Mingerink

NOT A DAY CARE BY DR. EVERETT PIPER

Higher education is a mess right now. We are watching colleges and universities strangle themselves as they discover what education looks like when the oxygen of objective truth is pulled out of the room. Because the basis for such action is found in the philosophies and theories of some of their own radical professors, they are only eating their own poison. Postmodernism’s chickens have come home to roost. The insular environment of higher education, usually regarded as conducive to deep study, has proven to be a prime environment for the asinine practices that are being put into place in the name of tolerance and democracy. And it’s killing them.

What are some of these practices?

- The need for “trigger warnings” whenever something seemingly offensive is going to be said.
- The establishment of “safe places” for students where they can pet puppies, play with Play-Doh and color from their favorite coloring book to soothe their offended minds.
- Choosing on admissions paperwork which pronoun best fits your chosen identity. If you don’t identify with he or she, you may certainly choose ze, too. And if you don’t want to constantly remind others of the pronoun of your choice, you may wear a school-issued button which displays your pronoun.
- The establishment of “Bias Response Teams” which go around campus responding to any cases of offensive speech.

And the list can go on and on.

The leaders of these colleges and universities are weak. Some know better, but they’ve let the fear of
man control their boardrooms. For many others, they are only the college flower child from the 60s and 70s who finally cut his hair, put on a suit coat, and now resides on campus as dean or president. They are no defenders of objective truth.

Instead of rooting out the seeds of progressive radicalism early on, the leadership left them in place. In the shadows, these seeds germinated. Now, the roots run deep. Their grip on the soil of the university is firm. Removing them would surely get someone dirty. So, instead, they let their institutions bleed out. This is the sure mark of a spineless leader.

That is why they would do well to follow the lead of Dr. Everett Piper, president of Oklahoma Wesleyan University (Bartlesville, OK). Last year, Dr. Piper wrote the book Not a Day Care. This book is his response to the degenerating state of higher education in America.

The seed for this book was planted after an incident in Dr. Piper’s university. In 2015, Dr. Piper was confronted by a student who claimed he was victimized1 in a recent weekly chapel speech. The speech was on the topic of love found in 1 Corinthians 13. The offense? The student felt offended because a homily on love made him feel bad for not showing love in his personal life! Utterly dumbfounded that such thinking could exist at OWU, Dr. Piper wrote an open letter on the university’s website. What follows are some excerpts of what he wrote:

Our culture has actually taught students to be this self-absorbed and narcissistic. Any time their feelings are hurt, they are the victims. Anyone who dares to challenge them and, thus, makes them feel bad about themselves, is a “hater,” a “bigot,” and “oppressor,” and a “victimizer.” I have a message for this young man and all others who care to listen. That feeling of discomfort you have after listening to a sermon is called a conscience…The goal of many a good sermon is to get you to confess your sins—not coddle you in your selfishness. The primary objective of the church and the Christian faith is your confession, not your self-actualization.

He ended his open letter with this:

This is a place where you will quickly learn that you need to grow up. This is not a daycare. This is a university.

In the months following, his open letter went viral on the internet and finally culminated in the book, Not a Day Care. If you are not aware of what is going on in colleges and universities today, I highly recommend reading this book. In as much as the work of our own Christian schools correlate with that of higher education, all of us should read this book. We aren’t immune to anything in this world.

Regarding the book, Dr. Piper writes in a very accessible manner. I think the term is “conversational.” He doesn’t base his arguments on peer-reviewed research like most writers in academia. In fact, this book isn’t academic at all. Although he points to the reasons why higher education is where it is today, he doesn’t examine it very deeply. With that said, unlike other books recently written on this subject, Dr. Piper does come with a Christian perspective and assessment. I think the strength of this book is in its ability to make aware of what is going on in our local institutions.

The book is saturated with examples from colleges and universities across the nation where these institutions are strangling themselves in ridiculously applied postmodern philosophies. The culmination of these examples points powerfully to the fact that higher education has gone woefully astray. They are becoming an embarrassment with their marshmallow policies and practices enacted by their inept, agenda-controlled leaders.2

Young people, I encourage you to read this book

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1 For those of us who were taught that dictionaries are useful in understanding word meaning, I urge you to quickly reject such archaic nonsense. Dictionaries are clearly hegemonic in their monopoly of defining words. It is oppressive that Noah Webster gets to tell us what words mean. With that in mind, the word “victimized” should be understood as any feeling of mental discomfort or uneasiness. But don’t let me put you back in bondage by suggesting what a word should mean. Feel free to explore the space of “victimization” on your own and construct your own meaning.

2 Example: In 2016, the president of the University of Iowa, Dr. Bruce Harreld, is shown on a university produced video explaining Iowa’s new gender pronoun policy; a policy they are proud to launch as first in the nation. Besides using male and female pronouns, students can identify with gender transcending pronouns like ze, zer, hir, zeros or hirs! In the video, the president sits prestigiously in his office and reminds students that they should choose the pronoun that fits them best. With all the righteousness that the office of university presidency brings, Dr. Bruce Harreld confidently tells the viewers that his pronouns are he, him, and his.
and be aware of the world we are living in. Better yet, take a cue from Dr. Piper. Boldly live in the truth regardless of what others around you are doing. When college and university presidents all over the country are folding from pressure, Dr. Piper stood up and said “Enough!” That’s courage.

**Devotional Abby Van Solkema**

**THE DAILY PRESS**

“press toward the mark...”
(Philippians 3:14)

**December 8 Read 2 Kings 19**

Even though Rabshakeh was no longer in Jerusalem, he continued to attack the nation of Judah by sending a threatening letter to King Hezekiah (vv. 8–13). Hezekiah’s proper response to this intimidation was to bring the matter before the Lord. Take another look at Hezekiah’s prayer in verses 15–19. If you read it closely, you will notice that it follows the pattern of the Lord’s Prayer by beginning and ending with the glory and honor of God’s name. By praising the name of the Lord, Hezekiah was acknowledging that he is almighty and sovereign over all things—even seemingly hopeless situations such as facing an invasion from a powerful army.

Take a moment to examine your own prayer life. Are your prayers dedicated only to yourself and what you think that you need? Or are they focused on the glory and honor of God? The glory of God is the very purpose of creation (Rev. 4:11). And what brings glory to God will most certainly benefit his people. “…all these we ask of Thee, because Thou, being our King and almighty, art willing and able to give us all good; and all this we pray for that thereby not we, but thy holy name, may be glorified for ever” (Lord’s Day 52, Q&A 128). *Sing or pray Psalter #308.*

**December 9 Read Psalm 46**

This entire psalm serves as a reminder to God’s people of the confidence that we can have in our Lord despite how difficult our circumstances seem. But I would like to focus specifically on the phrase that is repeated in verses 7 and 11, “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” What an amazing statement! The almighty Lord of hosts, who is in control of everything that exists, is with us. The One who is the conqueror of all the nations is also the “God of Jacob,” a refuge for his people. He has power over all things, and in his providence, he works every event that happens on this earth for the good of the elect. And his presence with his people assures us that he cares not only about big, world events but also about our little moments. When we remember the words of this psalm, it is an antidote for our anxiety about what is happening in the world around us, and in our personal lives as well.

Psalm 46 was a favorite of Martin Luther. It served as the inspiration for a hymn that he wrote called, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” I would encourage you to read through the lyrics of this familiar hymn today or sing it with your family. *Sing or pray Psalter #128.*

**December 10 Read Psalm 80**

Psalm 80 is a community lament, most likely written while the nation of Israel was in captivity. God had given them over to their enemies as a form of chastisement. The psalmist was conscious of the fact that their sin had separated the nation from God and caused him to turn his face away. So he offers up a prayer for restoring grace and asks God for a savior.

Even the elect may sometimes go through seasons where God feels distant. He has not actually left us, but we may not be experiencing the blessings of God’s favor for a time because of a recurring sin. In these situations, we must seek the Lord just as the psalmist did, and wait patiently on him for restoration. We may not always appreciate the chastisement

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of God, but Hebrews 12:11 reminds us, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” The goal of chastisement is reunification with God, which can only be accomplished through Jesus Christ. Just as Israel was desperate for an earthly deliverer, we desperately need a Messiah to reconcile us with God. *Sing or pray Psalter #221.*

**December 11**  
**Read Psalm 135**

Psalm 135 is a call to praise God. The psalmist recounts some of the marvelous things that God had done for his people Israel. He brought them out of bondage in Egypt and destroyed the Canaanite nations so that they could possess the land. When Israel remembered what God had graciously done for them in the past, they felt assured of future blessings as well.

Similarly, when we call to mind how God sent his only begotten Son to die on the cross for our sins, it serves as a guarantee of his continuing and future grace towards his people. As we read in Romans 8:32, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

How do we remember what God has done for us? By reading and meditating on his word. Recounting how God has cared for his people throughout history and will continue to do so leads us to proclaim with the psalmist, “Praise ye the Lord.” *Sing or pray Psalter #373.*

**December 12**  
**Read Isaiah 49**

The beginning of this chapter is a beautiful prophecy of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. God promised to send a Servant-Savior who would restore the people of Israel and also be a light to the Gentiles. But Israel’s sinful response to this promise in verse 14 was to doubt their deliverance and complain, “The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.” The people’s captivity in Babylon had led them to question if God still cared about them.

When we face difficult circumstances in this life, we may also wonder, “Does God really care about me?” The answer to our question is found in the rest of this chapter, where God graciously reminds his people of his constant faithfulness. He is even more attentive and compassionate to us than a mother is to her infant child (v. 15). We are graven on the palms of his hand and are continually before his eyes (v. 16). “But God is faithful, who, having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end” (Canons of Dordt, 5th Head, Art. 3). *Sing or pray Psalter #379.*

**December 13**  
**Read Isaiah 50**

In the midst of the thick darkness of sin and suffering on this earth, we cannot find our own way and are susceptible to many dangers. The words of Isaiah 50:10 give us hope in this valley of tears, just as they gave hope to the people of God who were in captivity in Babylon, “let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.”

Our instinct when faced with the fears and anxieties of living in this world is to try to find security in something around us. Verse 11 refers to this as kindling your own fire and surrounding yourself with sparks. But these things only give a temporary appearance of safety, and the judgment of God against those who trust in their own efforts is frightening. “This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.” Take a moment for self-examination and try to identify something that you might turn to for security instead of trusting in God. Pray that the Holy Spirit will work faith in your heart to trust in the true light of the world and not be distracted by the sparks of earthly security. *Sing or pray Psalter #100.*

**December 14**  
**Read Isaiah 51**

In this chapter, we find a message of comfort for God’s people who were in captivity. God reminds them through Isaiah that their salvation is permanent, while the opposition and mockery that they face on this earth are only temporary. In verses 7 and 8, he points out that their persecutors are weak and earthly creatures—nothing in comparison to God. And verses 12 and 13 go on to ask, “Why are you afraid of men that will die? Did you forget that your Lord made everything?”

We may not be facing physical harm from those around us like the Israelites were, but persecution in the form of rejection and ridicule is a very real threat. Proclaiming the gospel and living according to God’s word is not going to make you a popular person. Not getting invited somewhere or having someone not like you can be devastating! But we must be careful not to let the fear of man govern our actions instead of the fear of God. “And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror,
neither be troubled” (1 Pet. 3:13–14). Sing or pray Psalter #346.

**December 15 Read Isaiah 52:1–12**

What is the gospel? It is the good news (or “good tidings” as it says in verse 7) that God is King and he has sent his Son to save us from our sins. As we near Christmas, I couldn’t help but think that Luke 2:10 in regards to this as well, “Fear not: for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.” The good tidings of salvation and peace gave hope to Israel in their captivity and to the shepherds in the field when Jesus was born, and they give hope to us as well.

Isaiah 52:7 speaks of the delight that God’s people have in those who bring the message of the gospel. As the mouthpieces of Christ, our pastors are included in this. Faithful gospel preachers are gifts from God, but they are also men, and therefore need our support and encouragement. How can you support your pastor? You can offer financial support by paying your church budget. You could write your pastor an encouraging note or pray for him. And you can be respectful in the way that you speak about your pastor to others. Thank God today for those who engage in the important work of proclaiming the gospel. Sing or pray Psalter #131.

**December 16 Read Isaiah 52:13–53:3**

From an earthly perspective, Jesus was far from desirable. Isaiah 53:2 says, “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.” Jesus did not look like a god. And he did not have a position of great power and influence in the church or government during his ministry on this earth. Our Lord came to be a Servant-Savior, not an earthly king like the people wanted. This was evident from the very beginning in the humble circumstances of his birth. “He is despised and rejected of men” (v. 3). By nature, we are just like the people that lived during Jesus’ earthly ministry. We have no reason to desire him. It is only when the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts that we can recognize his beauty and glory—“the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14). In light of this truth, think about the significance that you place on earthly beauty in yourself or others. It is also important for us to remember that since Jesus was not attractive in an earthly sense, in our evangelism efforts, we should not try to alter the gospel to make it more attractive to those that we interact with. Sing or pray Psalter #124.

**December 17 Read Isaiah 53:4–12**

The words of Isaiah 53:5 are probably very familiar to you. “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” But have you ever really stopped to think about how amazing they are? Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, took upon himself a human nature to atone for our sins. He willingly submitted to abuse at the hands of wicked men and suffered the wrath of God in both body and soul. By means of his lowly birth, suffering, death, burial, and descent into hell, Jesus experienced increasing degrees of suffering to satisfy God’s justice so that we can experience the favor of God. Jesus obediently died an accursed death on the cross to make us righteous before God. Death is no longer something that we need to fear, but rather a passage to eternal life. When we contemplate the suffering of Christ for our sins, what should our response be? “By the mercies of God... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). Sing or pray Psalter #28.

**December 18 Read Isaiah 54**

“For the Lord thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name” (v. 5). What a comforting promise for those who are struggling with singleness or an unhappy marriage! Even if we have unmet expectations in regards to marriage in our life on this earth, our joy can still be full because we are the bride of Christ. The Lord is a greater husband than any man can ever be. If we expect a spouse to fulfill needs that only God can truly meet, we will always be disappointed. Even though we know this truth, we may still have feelings of loneliness or disappointment just as Israel did when they were in captivity. But instead of allowing these feelings to make us bitter, we can lean on Jesus. It is only because of his sacrifice on the cross for our sins that we are privileged to be the bride of Christ. Sing or pray Psalter #125.

**December 19 Read Isaiah 55**

An invitation is issued in verses 1–2 to all those who are thirsty, “Come to the waters.” And there...
is not just water to sustain life, but also milk to give strength, and wine to make the heart glad. All this is available free of charge not only to those who cannot pay but also to those who are trying to find nourishment by means of their own labor. What a fitting picture of the blessings of salvation that we receive through Christ! They are given to God’s people freely not because of merit, but only because Christ has already paid the price by his death on the cross. And only the Holy Spirit can work in our hearts the spiritual thirst that is required to come to the waters.

In this Christmas season, let us focus less on all the delicious treats and drinks that fill our stomach temporarily and more on what is truly satisfying—the Bread of Life. “And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). Sing or pray Psalter #395.

December 20
Read Isaiah 56

In Isaiah 56 the Lord through Isaiah commends those who keep the Sabbath day holy. Keeping the Sabbath is not about following a list of rules, but abstaining from our normal work to consciously delight in God’s work. It is a day of rest from labor to devote our time to holy things. The true keeping of the Sabbath helps us to walk in sanctification all the other days of the week. And proper Sabbath observance serves as a little foretaste of the eternal rest that we will have in heaven.

But because of the Fall, sin has tainted everything on this earth—even our rest. In the world that we live in today, the idea of the Sabbath has either been distorted into a day of personal enjoyment or otherwise ignored completely in the quest for money and accomplishment. The situation was undoubtedly similar for the saints who were in captivity in Babylon. The temptation from those around us (and from our sinful nature) is to either fill our Sabbath with idle pleasures or continue working as though it is not the Lord’s Day. Pray that God will help you to delight in the Sabbath and observe it as he commands. Sing or pray Psalter #320.

December 21
Read Isaiah 57

In contrast to the sad condition of apostate Judah that is described in the first part of this chapter, verse 15 sets forth the wonderful promise of God that he will dwell with the remnant. The idea of dwelling with God is not just about his presence, because God is everywhere. It also involves fellowship with him and receiving the blessings and benefits of his love and favor. In the Old Testament, God dwelled with his people by means of the tabernacle. In the New Testament, Jesus took on a human form and had fellowship in the flesh with the saints at that time. And when he ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit was poured out to all believers. One day, Jesus will return in glory, and all God’s people will dwell with him forever in heaven.

Verse 15 also reminds us that God only dwells with those who are “of a contrite and humble spirit.” We are only privileged to dwell with God because of the mediation of Christ. He does not need to have fellowship with us because as the triune God he has perfect fellowship within himself. When we recognize his majesty and our sin and weakness, we will approach God with the proper holy reverence that he requires. Sing or pray Psalter #306.

December 22
Read Isaiah 58

In Isaiah 58, God uses Isaiah to call out the nation of Judah for their shallow, hypocritical worship. The people were making a show of serving the Lord externally, while internally they were only serving themselves. Isaiah used the example of fasting to illustrate this point. Apart from the spiritual reality of denying yourself and focusing on God, fasting has no worth. Empty rituals mean nothing to God and outward acts of piety are not some kind of bargaining tool that we can use to get what we want. On the other hand, when we perform outward rituals such as fasting or Sabbath observance as an expression of a regenerated heart and not for our own glory, we will experience the favor of God and fellowship with him.

Take a moment for self-examination. Have you ever done an outwardly good deed for the wrong reasons? Were you more concerned about your status and reputation in the church than the glory of God? In your prayers today, ask the Holy Spirit to work true worship in your heart so that your actions flow from a desire to glorify God and not yourself. Sing or pray Psalter #69.

December 23
Read Isaiah 59

The beginning of Isaiah 59 paints a very bleak picture of the total depravity of man. Their sin has separated them from God. All of mankind is utterly lost and incapable of doing any good. They are eager to sin, and every aspect of their lives has been tainted with sin. As Paul says in Romans 3:10, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” This does not
only describe the situation in Judah at this time but the situation of the whole human race in our natural state. No one can save themselves or anyone else from their sin.

It is only when we comprehend the depth of our sin that we truly appreciate the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Over against the hopelessness of sinful man, we see the greatness of God’s grace toward his people. The Lord single-handedly establishes a covenant with those who are dead in sin and upholds it faithfully with his own arm. “And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord” (v. 20).

Sing or pray Psalter #83.

December 24 Read Isaiah 60

God’s people who were exiled in Babylon undoubtedly hoped and dreamed that someday they would be able to return home and rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem to its former glory. But God promises them something even better. Isaiah 60 describes a New Jerusalem that none of the people could have imagined. And more importantly, it foreshadows the new heaven and new earth that we read of in Revelation 21.

When we read passages like Revelation 21 and Isaiah 60, we may create in our minds a picture of what we think heaven is going to be like. But in reality, it will be far greater than we can even comprehend with our earthly minds. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor. 2:9). Why does God have such greatness in store for us wretched sinners? The answer lies in verse 21 where God says that it is all the work of his hand, “that I may be glorified.”

Sing or pray Psalter #249.

December 25 Read Isaiah 61

After reading about the New Jerusalem in Isaiah 60, we may wonder, who can accomplish this work? Only one upon whom the Spirit rests—the Servant of the Lord. The first few verses of Isaiah 61 foreshadow the coming of a Messiah that would be a prophet of salvation to the people. This prophecy was fulfilled in Luke 4:18–19 when Jesus stood up in the synagogue at Nazareth and proclaimed the words of Isaiah 61:1–3. In doing so, he was stating the purpose of his earthly ministry. He was sent to preach the gospel to heal the brokenhearted and recover the sight of the blind. But Jesus could not only give them deliverance from their earthly trials; he could even save them from the captivity of sin and death. The result of the Messiah’s work is “that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified” (v. 3). If we are planted in Christ, our roots will be secure for all of eternity so that we may glorify God and enjoy him forever. Sing or pray Psalter #291.

December 26 Read Isaiah 62

In the last verse of this chapter we read that as a result of their salvation, the people of God shall be called “The holy people.” Something that is holy is set apart for God. We also read in Titus 2:14 that Jesus Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” God calls his people out of the world to become more and more like the image of Christ. This growth in holiness is called sanctification. Is there evidence of sanctification in your life?

Although we must continually strive towards holiness, we must also recognize that we will never achieve it in this life. It is only by the work of the Spirit in our hearts that we have a small beginning of obedience. Therefore we long for the day when we will finally be perfectly holy in heaven. Sing or pray Psalter #6.

December 27 Read Isaiah 63

In Isaiah 63:9 we read a remarkable statement about our Savior and his people, “In all their affliction he was afflicted.” When God’s people suffer, he is not simply observing from the sidelines. He deeply feels our suffering because we are united with him through Christ. Jesus also understands what we are going through because throughout his life on this earth he experienced all the suffering and temptation of a normal human existence. “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

Not only is Christ able to have sympathy with our afflictions, but he is also able to help us in our time of need. We never experience suffering alone because he is always with us. What a great comfort to know that even at our lowest point God is there with us, and is worthy of our praise! Sing or pray Psalter #56.
**December 28** Read Isaiah 64

Verse 4 refers to the great blessing that is in store for those who wait on the Lord. But waiting on the Lord is difficult. In our modern society, we are not used to waiting for anything. Technology has taught us to be very impatient people. And our sinful pride makes it difficult to completely place our trust in God instead of trying to figure things out ourselves.

But God has a purpose in our waiting—the strengthening of our faith. And while we wait he is working. He does not need us to accomplish his sovereign plan. Pray that the Holy Spirit will work humility in your heart and give you the faith to trust not only in God's promises but also his timing. “Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD” (Ps. 27:14). Sing or pray Psalter #73.

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**December 29** Read Isaiah 65

If you look up Isaiah 65:20 in various commentaries, you will come across conflicting opinions on the meaning of the text. Pre-millennialists try to interpret it literally and claim that it speaks of life during the thousand year reign, as evidence that the righteous will live to be very old during this time. But from my study, I believe that this interesting verse is describing the everlasting youth that we will have in heaven.

There are two figures in the first part of this text, that of an infant and an old man. In the new heaven and new earth, neither of these figures will be present, “there shall be no more thence.” In the new creation all of God's people will be young forever. This is what is meant by “for the child shall die an hundred years old.” Even after one hundred years he is still young. What a comfort to God's people that whether a believer dies in infancy or of old age or somewhere in between, through Christ he will still have the strength of youth for eternity. In heaven, all weakness and infirmity will be taken away. Sing or pray Psalter #284.

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**December 30** Read Isaiah 66

A strange scene is described in this last chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. Verses 6–8 describe a voice coming out of the temple, and a woman that has unexpectedly brought forth a child before she even went into labor. The people are amazed as all of a sudden she is surrounded by multitudes of children as well. She had brought forth a whole nation at one time. “Who hath heard such a thing?” (v. 8).

This woman represents the church of the old dispensation. And the child that she brings forth unexpectedly is Christ. Although the faithful people of God were waiting for the promised Savior to be born, it still took them by surprise when it happened. And immediately following the birth of Christ, we see the birth of the entire New Testament church, represented by the nation that the woman brings forth all at once. It is so wonderful to be able to look back on these prophecies of Jesus Christ and see how God's promises have been fulfilled! Sing or pray Psalter #300.

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**December 31** Read 2 Kings 20

Have you ever wondered if prayer is really necessary, since God in his providence has already determined what is going to happen? Well, here in 2 Kings 20 we have evidence of the truth found in James 5:16, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Hezekiah, at only 39 years old, is on his deathbed. God showed him a great mercy by sending the prophet Isaiah to tell him specifically that he was going to die. And Hezekiah reacts just as he had when faced with many other trials in his life—he prayed. God's response to Hezekiah is, “I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears” (v. 5). Isaiah brings a message from God that Hezekiah will be healed and live for another fifteen years.

Hezekiah's answered prayer serves as a reminder of how important our own prayers are. Our prayers may very well be used as an instrument to bring about God's sovereign will just as Hezekiah's prayer was. Our heavenly Father has not only ordained what will happen in the future, but the means that he will use to bring about that end—whether it be prayer, modern medicine, or the choices that we make. What a privilege that God condescends to use us in his work! Sing or pray Psalter #210.

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**January 1** Read 2 Kings 21

How could a nation that had served the Lord under the reign of Hezekiah so quickly turn back to the sin of idolatry when his son Manasseh took the throne? It probably didn't happen overnight. When Manasseh took the throne at twelve years old, he most likely was not openly in favor of idolatry, but perhaps tolerated it more than his father did. But the progression of sin is such that what is tolerated will become what is supported and even promoted. We read that Manasseh eventually served idols openly and even undermined the true worship of Jehovah by putting a graven image in the temple.
We can see a similar progression of sin in our nation’s tolerance and now promotion of homosexuality and the LGBT community. But let this be a lesson for the people of God as well. Any sins or heresies that we allow to creep into the church now may be openly embraced by our children and grandchildren in the future. What a sobering thought! Sing or pray Psalter #170.

**January 2**  Read 2 Chronicles 32

In verse 25 we read that Hezekiah did not respond to God’s merciful saving of his life with humble gratitude as he should have, “for his heart was lifted up.” Because of the great prosperity that God had given him, he was filled with sinful pride. In his pride, Hezekiah boasted about his riches to the ambassadors from Babylon. We read in 2 Kings 20 that the punishment for this sin was that everything he had showed off to the Babylonians would eventually be taken away by them as spoils of war.

Just like Hezekiah, we can also be filled with pride as a result of our successes on this earth. It is important to remember that everything that we obtain or accomplish in this life is a gift from God, not a reason for arrogance. 1 Corinthians 4:7 reminds us, “For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” Sing or pray Psalter #311.

**January 3**  Read 2 Chronicles 33

Despite being the son of godly King Hezekiah, Manasseh turned out to be one of the most wicked kings of Judah. Verse 9 says that Manasseh led Judah into even worse sins than those of the wicked Canaanite nations that God had destroyed. Idolatry and depravity were rampant throughout the land. While he was in captivity in Babylon, we read of Manasseh’s remarkable repentance and salvation.

When we hear of an especially shocking sin that someone else has committed, it can be tempting to think, “I would NEVER do that!” or “That sin is MUCH worse than anything I have done.” But the truth is that despite what our pride tells us, we are all capable of grievous sins. In a sermon on this text, C.H. Spurgeon said, “I do not wonder at Manasseh’s sin one half so much as I wonder at God’s mercy.” And we should all do the same. The salvation of Manasseh reminds us that there is no sin that God cannot forgive. To think otherwise would be to limit his power. If we humble ourselves before God and confess our sin, he will always forgive us. Sing or pray Psalter #102.

**January 4**  Read Nahum 1

Nahum 1:7–8 give an excellent summary of the theme of this brief prophetic book. These verses set forth the contrast between God’s goodness towards his people, and his complete destruction of his enemies. God’s goodness and his justice can seem to be in opposition to each other, but actually they are complimentary. The goodness of God demands that he punish what is evil. He would not be good if he were not also just.

Nahum’s name means “comfort” or “consolation.” We often think of being comforted by God’s goodness, but it is also reassuring to think about God’s justice. This aspect of God’s character is comforting to his people because we know that the same strength that is displayed in God’s wrath and justice is also present in his goodness and mercy. Our Lord is as longsuffering as he is powerful. And as confident as we are in his ability to destroy the reprobate, we can have the same confidence that he will preserve the elect. Sing or pray Psalter #2.

**January 5**  Read Nahum 2 & 3

Nahum 2:13 says, “Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts.” What a terrifying thing to hear from God! It is even more frightening than the lengthy description of the military invasion of Ninevah that makes up the first 12 verses of the chapter. The wrath of God is far more powerful than even the most formidable enemies on this earth. God will sometimes use worldly powers to execute his judgment, as he did with the Medes and Babylonians, but they are all under his divine control and serving his purpose. If God is against someone, they have no hope.

By nature, we are just like the inhabitants of Ninevah. It is only by God’s grace we do not face the same destruction as they did. When we are united to Christ by faith God is no longer against us, but for us. In Christ, we can confidently declare the truth of Romans 8:31, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” Sing or pray Psalter #252.

**January 6**  Read 2 Kings 22

During the temple renovations that Josiah had commissioned, we read in verse 8 of the high priest finding a copy of the scriptures as they had them at that
time. It is amazing that the reading of the word of God had been so neglected that the high priest finding the scroll and reading it to the king was worthy of mention. This should have been a common occurrence in the kingdom.

Unlike the Old Testament saints, you probably have multiple copies of the entire Bible in your home. You likely have the text of the Bible readily available 24/7 on your phone, and access to countless apps, websites, and podcasts at any time to assist you in studying the Bible. Do you appreciate these resources? And more importantly, do you use them? So by all means, study your Bible and take advantage of the biblical resources that are at your disposal, but don’t let it end there. Reading the Word of God should inspire action—as evidenced by the spiritual revival that followed during the time of Josiah. “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James 1:25). Sing or pray Psalter #333.

**January 7** Read 2 Kings 23

Godly King Josiah tried to use his authority to change the behavior of the people of Judah, but he could not change their hearts. After he died the nation as a whole went back to their evil ways under the leadership of his son, Jehoahaz. This is because our behavior flows out of what is in our heart. Only God is capable of giving sinners a new, regenerated heart and implanting the Holy Spirit in them so that they can keep his commandments.

This is also a key truth to remember when we think about instructing our children. Although making appropriate rules for children to follow and enforcing those rules is vital, parents must not neglect their children’s hearts. It is even more important for children to understand why they must not do certain things, and to comprehend why they are inclined to disobey and their need for a Savior. If you are a parent, pray that God will help you to keep the gospel (and not just behavior) as the central focus of your parenting. Sing or pray Psalter #141.

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**Christian Living** Samantha & Kayla Velthouse

**THE BRITISH REFORMED FELLOWSHIP: A MEMORABLE AND JOYOUS EVENT**

Every two years, the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) hosts a family conference somewhere in the British Isles. This year the conference was held at Hebron Hall in Cardiff, Wales. Our family had been talking about going for a while, and finally, our hopes became a reality. We, along with our grandparents, Ken and Mary Velthouse, and uncle and aunt, Stefan and Kris Engelsma, were ready to make the trip. When the day finally came on Friday, July 20, we began our long journey from Grand Rapids, with stops in Detroit and Amsterdam, and finally arrived in Cardiff early Saturday morning. We did not know what to expect when we arrived, but we were eager to begin the week.

This year there were over 120 attendees from 11 countries and six states. Many of these people were new to the faith and had come into contact with the BRF while they were searching for the truth online. Some had not yet even met anyone from the BRF and could barely speak English, but they came with hopes of learning more about the Word of God and to meet others who believe the same as they do. It was very eye opening to be able to see how God truly uses this means to draw people into the church from all different backgrounds and cultures.

The theme this year was “The Reformed Family—According to the Word of God.” The main speakers were Rev. Andrew Lanning and Prof. David Engelsma. On Sunday our group was able to worship twice, with sermons given by Rev. Lanning and Rev. Angus Stewart (from Covenant PRC in Ballymena, Northern Ireland). It was one of the greatest Lord’s Days we have experienced because of the fellowship and gathering of so many people from around the world to worship in one place, including people from Hungary, Brazil, Italy, Germany, and Singapore among others. Throughout the week, there were eight other speeches, all based on the family and marriage. These powerful speeches were very moving and helped us strengthen our hearts.
and minds as we learned more about how the word of God instructs us regarding the family, marriage, and relationships. No matter what the speech topic was, the main point in each one was that the truths of the family and marriage have their foundations in the word of God and that all these relationships are based on the marriage of Christ and his church.

But, the conference wasn’t all about the speeches. We also took two day trips with the group to explore Raglan Castle (built in 1435) and Gloucester, England (founded by the Romans in 1155), and to visit St. Fagan’s Wales National Museum of History (which included a zip line/obstacle course that we did!). We also had free time to take small trips with our family to beautiful Cardiff Bay and take a train ride to the city of Bath, England (a former Roman colony city in England, in which are the famous Roman baths, constructed in the year 76 AD). Beautiful cities! Also, during our free times, we were able to sit down and have fellowship with others and get to know one another. It was amazing to see how everyone had their own life stories.

This experience is one we will never forget. This conference brought us closer together not only because of the genuine love everyone had for us, but by everyone being there for us and trying to get to know us better. We know that we are all from the same family, Christ’s family and that there are Christians all over the world; not only in Grand Rapids, Michigan, or wherever you are.

We are hoping that we can go back in two years. This conference is for everyone of all ages, not just grandparents and parents. There were over 30 single young people and young adults there! It was a great experience, and we would like to encourage more people to come in two years. The next conference will be held in Northern Ireland.

Samantha & Kayla are sisters who attend Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church. Samantha is in the 12th grade and Kayla is in the 9th grade. Both attend Covenant Christian High School in Walker, Michigan.

The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and, in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin; from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also, in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind. All which were common also to believers under the law. But, under the New Testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected; and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.

They who, upon pretense of Christian Liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian Liberty, which is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

— Westminster Confession of Faith

Chapter 20, Art. 1 & 3

Romans 6:17–18 “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”

The words “Christian liberty” conjure up in the minds of young people a host of ideas—these often being misguided. Far too many imagine that the liberty of a Christian is essentially a license to sin. Young and old both think that true freedom consists of being allowed to do what feels right. In its most blatant form, the erroneous evangelical idea of Christian liberty is the antinomianism of the time of the judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his
own eyes” (Judges 21:25). This is pure lawlessness. In a different way, infiltrating the ranks of even the most conservative of churches, a subtle but foolish version of Christian liberty exists—that we are free to do anything we want, as long as we conform to the norm. Follow the outward standards of the “P.R. culture” on Sunday especially, while clergy are attentive, but then drop the charade and plunge into the secret frolics of sinful fun behind doors. Enjoy any fantasizing thought, pleasurable drink, or entertaining show, without examination of conscience or motive. And if anyone dares to confront, be ready to respond: “Don’t judge me. Don’t encroach upon my Christian liberty.”

Scripture explicitly speaks against such an idea of Christian liberty. “As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God” (1 Pet. 2:16). Sadly, many are doing just that—twisting the doctrine of Christian liberty to use it as a cover-up (or an excuse) for sin. The Deceiver uses false conceptions of Christian liberty to attack young men and women in the church of Jesus Christ. Required and painstakingly necessary is a clear working definition of true, biblical, liberty.

Based on Romans 6:17–18, a proper definition of Christian liberty is spiritual freedom from the cruel slavery of sin under Lord Satan unto the sweet slavery of righteousness under Lord Christ. There are only two spiritual masters that man serves. Every single man, woman, and child is a slave belonging either to Lord Lucifer or Lord Jesus. None are neutral. All who imagine themselves belonging to neither master still belong to the Devil and need salvation. Christian liberty is the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ to rescue you from that dark lord and grace you with the position of friend-servant to the Most High God “who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13).

The biblical concept of liberty is emphatically not the long-standing American notion of having inalienable rights to the pursuit of your own happiness. If such is your concept of liberty, you are yet in bondage to Lord Lucifer. You vehemently deny this because he has exceedingly deceived you to believe that self-seeking is somehow freedom. But this delusion blinds many from the fact of their continuing bondage to Satan. True freedom consists not of doing my own thing and being who I want, but willingly surrendering my soul, body, and life unto him who has rescued me and conquered my heart by his amazing grace. True liberty is the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ “who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14).

To understand true Christian liberty, we must understand the biblical concept of bondage. Under Satan’s power, every human (except one) has been conceived with a sinful nature which, like shackles, binds the heart to sin and only sin. With that idolatrous heart, man might appear to be innocent, but the truth is that his heart is naturally bound by the sinful urge to please self, serve self, and trust self. In this captivity to self-service, men and women use (and often overuse) lawful things such as beer, cigarettes, and smartphones. Additionally, this yoke of self-gratification burdens mankind with unlawful things like pornography and gossip. This inordinate love of self is the very thing that drives mankind to labor in service of Lord Satan.

This captivity includes a pride that insists on self-righteousness. Such pride is like blindness which the cruel lord inflicts upon his servants. Men, women, and children—whether having grown up in a pagan community, been raised in a heathen religion, or been trained in a Christian institution—are plagued with this self-righteousness. Everyone enjoys accusing others of self-righteousness, but all these who are yet in Satan’s servitude are such blind Pharisees at heart. The worldling insists on being a good person, the Muslim claims he is doing enough to please God, and the confessing Christian truly thinks that his baptism, catechism, knowledge of Reformed slogans, and worship are his righteousness. Many of these continue in their sins privately while laboring with that self-righteous pride in an attempt to conform outwardly to their man-made standards of righteousness. Life involves constant blaming, excusing, and minimizing when conscience or comrade points out inconsistency with God’s law.

And yet the terrible irony is that there is in Satan’s captivity not only the shackles of sin and the blindness of pride but also terrible flagellation. That Slanderer whispers in one ear that you are righteous, and then in the other ear the opposite. “Sinner, sinner, sinner!” his serpent tongue speaks and slashes. “Hell is yours!” that tyrant threatens. “Labor, labor, labor, to make up for it,” that Pharaoh prods. And mankind blindly follows fearfully—guilt’s fear scourging, sin’s shackles remaining, self-righteous pride blinding.

All of this continues until there is true Christian liberty! Christ the Lord comes by his Spirit and rescues us from that bondage! He declares with authoritative words before us and Lord Satan that
he has purchased us by his precious blood and righteousness. Satan has no right to hold us in his bondage! Christ cries, “I claim him as mine! I claim her as mine!” And by his Spirit he regenerates us. “He bade the gloomy shadows flee, broke their bonds and set them free” (Psalter 293, stanza 2). He brings us to conscious faith. He takes our wills that naturally want to continue serving self and Satan, sweetly but powerfully bending those souls to choose him. And thus we experience relieving liberation from the wicked lord and, at the same time, the sweet slavery of the Lord Christ.

His Holy Spirit releases us from the shackles of sin and empowers us unto obedience to him. We can turn from addictive sin and serve him in selflessness. Our blindness is healed so that we see our servitude, not as a way to maintain self-righteousness, earn salvation, or escape hell; we understand that our new Master has merited all that fully! Freed from guilt, our motivation becomes enthusiastic gratitude and ardent love. Under Christ’s sweet servitude, we are free—free from guilt’s scourge, sin’s power, pride’s blindness, and any law used to uphold our righteousness. Submission to our Lord is no longer a fearful and dreaded activity, but rather a delight! Now, we look up to Christ and sing, “I am, O Lord, Thy servant bound yet free!” (Psalter 426, stanza 9).

The calling is summed up well with Galatians 5:1 “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Satan tempts our sinful natures every day, trying to lure us back into his bondage and behave as though we are still under his lordship. But Christ exhorts you to live as you are, in the true freedom he has won for you. Stand fast in your faith, looking to Jesus who has freed you from sin’s captivity. Stand fast in your faith, remembering that your liberty is freedom from self-idolatry unto the sweet sacrifice of self to your Savior.

Rev. Mahtani is the pastor of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church in Dyer, Indiana.

I recently read an interesting article by Dale Mansona in the April 2018 issue of Beacon Lights about the life of a young Christian in Ireland, so I thought that I would share my experiences as a young Christian in Wales.

Although I grew up in a “Church in Wales” primary school, the school was filled with unbelieving families. This meant that the students with whom I spent seven hours a day had no thoughts whatsoever for the things of God. This meant that my best friends through the whole of my schooling were unbelievers. There are no Christian schools around where I live so I have always attended a state school, which means that in every lesson I am surrounded by individuals who have no appetite for the word of God. I have heard it said that if you spend all day, every day around the same people, then you will become like those people. This is most definitely true in my experience. By the time I was 15 years old, I was no different from those unbelieving friends, and I was looking for ways to distance myself from the church and those in the church. I find that very embarrassing to admit now and I am ashamed of this. Nevertheless, the Lord helped me spiritually through that difficult time and has brought me to where I am today—a God-fearing young man who is now a member of the church. I know that there are many who will take their Christian schools for granted and my plea to you is, please don’t! It is so important to be surrounded by the right group of friends and that is a lesson I have learned over time. 2 Corinthians 6:14 highlights our need for Christian friends over ungodly friends, as it states “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?”

The turning point for me was a visit that I made to the USA with my parents in August 2015 when I attended the Young People’s Convention at Camp Michindoh, in Hillsdale, Michigan. I was a little skeptical of attending the convention as I did not know a single person there, but I cannot stress enough what a wonderful week I had there. I made so many Christian friends, many of whom I see every year and I would class as my best friends (you know who you are!), and I was blessed by the preaching
I heard, not just at the convention but also in the Protestant Reformed Churches that I attended with my parents. Since that summer, things changed for me and I realized that I needed the Lord Jesus Christ. In Wales from my experience, Christians are seen as a bit weird and a bit crazy as the country is largely atheist. However, visiting the PRC showed me that there is nothing “weird” or “crazy” in believing in God and I learned and grew up so much in the time that I was there. I have now been to Michigan for three summers in a row and each time I go, I grow spiritually and build upon the wonderful friendships I have, with which the Lord has blessed me. I hope to be in the USA in August and I know that once again the Lord will strengthen me through Christian company and fellowship. I am very thankful for the Protestant Reformed Churches indeed for these memorable summers that I have spent in the USA.

Another encouragement to me has been the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) conference. We had a wonderful time there again this summer, this time in Wales, and we were truly blessed by the ministry of Rev. Lanning and Prof. Engelsma. It was very encouraging and enjoyable to have 15 of our friends from the conference staying with us afterwards, and we greatly cherish the times we are able to spend with our brothers and sister in Christ. Although I had a very difficult time spiritually for many years and it is difficult for me to think about those years without shame and sadness, it is important to remember that all that happened was part of God’s plan for me and he has made me value him all the more having seen first-hand the dangers of the world. It has not been easy sailing since the summer of 2015. I have encountered many challenges along the way which have tested me and also showed me that I have a lot to learn. There are always new challenges facing me, but I trust in God and pray that he will help me overcome these challenges. These past two years in college (American equivalent of the last two years of high school) have been very difficult, as my friends in college have taken to going out drinking on a regular basis and developing very bad tastes in life. I recently received a comment from someone saying, “Why didn’t you come out (drinking) last night? You were the only person in the college not there.” Being told this kind of thing is difficult to take in, as you are being told that you are an outsider and you feel distant from your friends. Being young, it is easy to follow the crowd and be tempted to copy the wicked things done by those around you. I am the only Christian in my school, which has been very challenging especially when people around me don’t understand what it is to be a Christian. They seem to see going to church as a kind of club rather than a life commitment and they don’t realize that God and the church should be the priority in life. Some people have told me that being a boy makes it harder to be a Christian, as in a lot of cases it can be difficult to be different to other boys around you, and if you are different then there will no doubt be “banter” over the differences. This wasn’t a problem for me, but the number of Christian jokes increased over the years and hurt, even though they were intended not to.

I am pleased to say that I have drifted from these friends since finishing college (I hope now to go to a university in Michigan, if the Lord wills it) and I feel that this is a burden lifted off me in many ways, as their bad influences have been removed from me. I have since realized the true importance of being surrounded by friends who share the same beliefs and love for God as I do, and I want to discourage anyone from hanging out with ungodly friends on a regular basis. You cannot have true fellowship with unbelievers and there is nothing that compares to being with my Christian friends with whom I can openly discuss godly things without fear of being ridiculed. Trust me, I know what will happen should you pick the wrong friends and none of it is good for your heart or soul.

The church we attend, Swansea Evangelical Reformed Church (try saying that quickly 5 times), is one of the only solid churches in the whole of Great Britain and we are very grateful for the ministry there by Rev. Neil Pfeiffer. We have about 30 regular attendees and there are only a handful of young people, which has been difficult especially since almost all of them live about 30 minutes away and, as few of us have cars due to their high cost to keep, we only see each other twice a week—on a Sunday in church and also at our young peoples’ meeting on a Friday evening. We had a split in our church five years ago which was a very tough time for all involved, but we have recently acquired our own church building and we can see that the Lord is blessing the work here in South Wales. This has been an encouragement for us and when you have less, you value the little things more, and this has certainly been the case in the church for us.

My family and I would consider ourselves a Protestant Reformed family in our beliefs, so it has been a challenge to find a church that is suitable for us to attend. Although there are several differences in belief between us and the church, we realize that we are very fortunate to have a church to go to that teaches the word of God faithfully. We do, however,
long for the day when a Protestant Reformed Church is established here in Wales.

It is easy to be discontent with what we have here with no Christian schools and the like, but one must look at God's blessings to us and realize that he has been gracious to us, and when we see these blessings, we learn contentment.

Josh lives in Neath, Wales and attends Swansea Evangelical Reformed Church.

**A LIGHT AFFLICTION**

Why me? What did I do to deserve this? I deserve better. These are all things that I find myself thinking too often. When God puts certain trials and hardships in my life, my first reaction tends to be anger and frustration. I am blinded by my own struggles, and I fail to see that it could be so much worse for me. The life of a Christian can be burdensome, but the reality is that our suffering is so small compared to eternity and the glory there.

It is so easy to get angry with God when he puts us into difficult situations. It is easy to feel that he is not doing things for our benefit, and that he is bringing things upon us that we do not deserve. However, what we sometimes fail to realize is that God owes us absolutely nothing. What we truly deserve is eternal hellfire for our sins against God. The only reason we are even in this world is because of his mercy and grace.

When I am struggling with something that feels like too much weight for me to bear, I find that Romans 8 can be very comforting and reassuring. It is hard for me to choose a verse out of this chapter that is my favorite. A huge comfort, however, is verse 31. The second part of it is, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” Considering this verse is a great solace for us as Christians. No matter what happens to us, nothing is going to bring us down, because God is for us, and as verse 28 says, he is working all things for our good. How can we fear when we remember this?

A beautiful example of this truth is the life of Joseph. Although his brothers hated him and sold him into slavery, causing him to lose his family and everything he knew, he remained steadfast in his faith, and God blessed him through his experiences. He prospered in Potiphar’s house. We see this in Genesis 39. Even when Potiphar’s wife had Joseph cast into prison, God was still with Joseph. In prison, the keeper put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners. No matter what happened to him, Joseph could not deny that God was working everything for his good, as is shown in Genesis 50:20. It is the same in our lives. Deuteronomy 31:8 says, “And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.” God is always with us, and he will never leave us.

At times it seems that our suffering is so great. But the reality is that our affliction on this earth is minuscule when compared to the glory we will experience in eternity (2 Cor. 4:17). It can also feel as if we are alone, with no one to take care of us, but Psalm 91:11, 12 destroys this thought when it says, “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” Thinking about this verse and its meaning is so comforting. God’s angels are watching over us, and they hold us in their hands so that we will not falter. What a great consolation!

Some trials that God places in our lives can be so consuming that we forget to trust in him. God promises to be with us always and to preserve us through the generations, but when we are blinded by our own struggles, we find it difficult to remember these truths. This is why Christian fellowship is so important. Our friends and family can remind us of these wonderful truths so that we always remember to trust God in all that we do.

God has promised to preserve us, and to be with us always. What a wonderful comfort that is in comparison to our seemingly huge afflictions. The Bible teaches us that the small trials we face in this life are nothing when compared to the glory we will experience in heaven.

Ruth is a member of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
**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:
- Quinton Jacob, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jake & Janelle Beintema—Byron Center, MI
- Emma Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Leah VandenToorn—Byron Center, MI
- Gatlin Ronald, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Katie Mingerink—Byron Center, MI
- Mila Rose, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Luke & Sara Mantel—Doon, IA
- Aspen Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Caleb & Shelby Groeneweg—Doon, IA
- Walker Duane, son of Mr. & Mrs. Cody & Erin Cammenga—Grace, MI
- Jace Elliott, son of Mr. & Mrs. John & Lorinda Tolsma—Loveland, CO
- Wesley Rolland, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Dana DeJong—Loveland, CO
- Camden John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Derek & Kelsey Heystek—Lynden, WA
- Amelia Rose, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nick & Erika Vroom—Randolph, WI
- Asher Garytt & Riley Lynn, twin son & daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Casey & Kristina Meelker—Redlands, CA
- Elinor Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jacob & Bethany Feenstra—Redlands, CA
- Luther Neal, son of Mr. & Mrs. Travis & Kayla Feenstra—Redlands, CA
- Josie Jane, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Adam & Catherine VanDyke—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:
- Georgia Lanting—Loveland, CO
- Emily Moore—Loveland, CO
- Alana Schipper—Southwest, MI
- Jack Westra—Southwest, MI

**MARRIAGES**

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

Mr. Mason VanBemmel and Miss Alyssa Lubbers—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Jordan Reitsma and Miss Kara Warner—Southwest, MI
Recently, I was reading an article that stated that trees were the most mentioned living creature in the Bible after humans. Doing some digging myself by looking up the words tree, forest, wood, branch, bough, oak, cedar, palm, and including items made from wood such as rod, staff, and cross, I found over 800 references to trees in the Bible.

Trees are often used as a symbol of all plant-life. It is easy to see why when we stand outside and look at the magnificent trees standing tall and strong around us. Trees are one of the few plants that can live for hundreds of years, unlike many plants like grass and flowers that die quickly.

Jesus is even compared to a tree. In Isaiah 11:1, Jesus is described as a Branch or a new trunk growing out of an old stump that had been chomped down. Have you ever seen that happen? A tree is cut down and it seems dead, but then the next spring, tiny shoots start growing out of that stump.

In the passage, this was the hope for the faithful in Israel and Judah, who had seen and would see their nations destroyed. Even though it looked like the line of David would be cut off, the Saviour would still grow from that stump to come and save his people from their sins.

During Christmas, we spend a lot of time with trees. There’s some debate on the origin of the Christmas tree. Some say it started with pagan festivals. Others say it was started by Martin Luther. Whatever the origin, let us look at our beautiful Christmas trees and remember the true Tree and Branch, our Savior Jesus Christ, who came when there was no hope for spiritually dead mankind and gave life to his chosen people.

*Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.*
SOUTHWEST PRC & PROVIDENCE PRC YOUNG PEOPLE’S CONVENTION 2019

WATCHING - AND - WAITING

AS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH

“AND AS IT WAS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH, SO SHALL IT BE ALSO IN THE DAYS OF THE SON OF MAN.”
-LUKE 17:26

AUGUST 12 - 16

CAMP MICHINDOH - HILLSDALE, MI