I Kissed the Church Goodbye 3
An Exciting Week at the Convention 5
Safety in the Ark 6
Living in Hope of a New Creation 8
Living Godly in a Wicked World 10
Convention Photos 13
Devotional 17
The Elusive Virtue of Contentment 24
Vigilance 26
The Psalter (4): The Scottish Metrical Psalter 27
Church News 28
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I KISSED THE CHURCH GOODBYE

Whether you realize it or not, there is a brutal war being waged against you. The battleground is your mind. Your foe? Not a physical army seeking your death, but the philosophies of this world. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). The philosophies of the world seek to turn you away from the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:5). These philosophies call upon you to put your trust in things other than God. Some of them tempt you to place your trust in yourself: your own mind, thoughts, or strengths.

What is your position in this war? There is no neutral stance you can hold. You cannot be a pacifist because you are already in the heat of battle. The life of the Christian is never a flat line. There is either positive development in the way of sanctification or there is backsliding.

Joshua Harris was a pastor and well-known author. You may recognize him by the title of his controversial book, I Kissed Dating Goodbye. He also wrote an excellent little book called Humble Orthodoxy. On July 26, Harris, just after announcing to the world his impending divorce, declared through his Instagram account that he is no longer a Christian. I quote his post in full because it is worth reading in order to get a grip on the magnitude of the shift in his beliefs.

My heart is full of gratitude. I wish you could see all the messages people sent me after the announcement of my divorce. They are expressions of love though they are saddened or even strongly disapprove of the decision.

I am learning that no group has the market cornered on grace. This week I’ve received grace from Christians, atheists, evangelicals, straight people, LGBTQ people, and everyone in-between. Of course there have also been strong words of rebuke from religious people. While not always pleasant, I know they are seeking to love me. (There have also been spiteful, hateful comments that angered and hurt me.)

The information that was left out of our announcement is that I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is “deconstruction,” the biblical phrase is “falling away.” By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian. Many people tell me that there is a different way to practice faith and I want to remain open to this, but I’m not there now.

Martin Luther said that the entire life of believers should be repentance. There’s beauty in that sentiment regardless of your view of God. I have lived in repentance for the past several years—repenting of my self-righteousness, my fear-based approach to life, the teaching of my books, my views of women in the church, and my approach to parenting to name a few. But I specifically want to add to this list now: to the LGBTQ+ community, I want to say that I am sorry for the views that I taught in my books and as a pastor regarding sexuality. I regret standing against marriage equality, for not affirming you and your place in the church,
and for any ways that my writing and speaking contributed to a culture of exclusion and bigotry. I hope you can forgive me.

To my Christians friends, I am grateful for your prayers. Don’t take it personally if I don’t immediately return calls. I can’t join in your mourning. I don’t view this moment negatively. I feel very much alive, and awake, and surprisingly hopeful. I believe with my sister Julian that, “All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”

There are many things we could talk about in this Instagram post, but we will try to examine it broadly. From all outward appearances, not long ago you would have seen Harris as a faithful pastor, talented writer, and genuine disciple of Jesus Christ. His book, Humble Orthodoxy, is still a good, helpful read, regardless of his current, changing views of the book’s contents. Harris has not only turned his back on the beautiful things he has written but more importantly he has turned his back on his Master. Harris has kissed the church goodbye.

Nine days after Harris’ declaration of unbelief, he marched in Vancouver’s annual gay pride parade. Harris’ description of himself having gone through a massive shift in regard to his faith in Jesus is an understatement. Not only has he kissed the church goodbye, but also he has attempted to deface the walls of Zion with perverted graffiti. How does one do a complete one-eighty as Harris has in regard to his faith?

Maybe your response to reading this sad story is that you really have nothing to worry about because you are safe within the walls of a solid, Reformed church. Consider for a moment the period of the judges. Over and over it took only one generation for the church to fall back into the ways of wickedness. The same sad history repeated itself during the period of the kings. History has shown us that the mighty fall. But surely we solid, Reformed Christians would never come close to such a deed as the judges, or the kings, or especially Harris? On the contrary, every child of God must in honesty admit that he is capable of such sin. Every one of us can point to times in our lives where we could be described as a “back-sliding Christian.”

Looking at a timeline of Harris’ ministry, divorce, declaration of unbelief, and participation in the gay pride parade, you might be tempted to think that all of this happened relatively quickly. Let’s not pretend that in June he believed that the Bible prohibited homosexual behavior and then in July he decided he needed to apologize to the LGBTQ community for not affirming their place in the church. These things do not happen overnight. They begin by questioning God and what he has written in his word. Foolish questioning leads to doubts about God and his Son, Jesus Christ. Soon, passages of scripture and entire books are being torn out the Bible. What is left is an untrustworthy book about a God who is not in control of all things. The one who has started with foolish questioning now has the gall to say that unbelief is freedom. In the words of Harris, “I don’t view this moment negatively. I feel very much alive, and awake, and surprisingly hopeful.” Those are words that make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up.

How do we respond when we hear of once seemingly godly men turning their backs on the truth? We could talk all day about the horrible things Harris has done. We can question the legitimacy of his credentials as a pastor because he never went through formal seminary training. We could read all of his writings with suspicion because we didn’t like his book on dating. But in the end, none of that matters. What matters is how we examine our own lives in response. Do we with the Pharisee say, “God, I thank you that I am not like Joshua Harris”? Or do we with Paul in humility say, “God have mercy on me because I am the chief of sinners.” In the words of Harris’ own book, we do hold the truth high, but we do so with a tear in our eye, knowing that the same God of grace who rescued us is also powerful enough to rescue them.¹ I hope that this article has not come across as the author taking the opportunity to smear a heretic, but as a warning for each one of us to examine our own lives and take heed lest we also fall.

There is also encouragement to be had here. Those who are truly God’s elect will not fall away. Jesus declared that “of all which he [God] hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:39–40). God be praised for his mercy toward us, who are undeserving sinners.

We as Christians live in a world that is increasingly wicked. As young people, the pressure of the world’s temptations is always pressing upon us. From the temptations on our Snapchat accounts to the constant comparisons of Instagram, and everything in between, it is easy to see how this world is not so different from the days of Noah, neither is it hard to comprehend a desire to start fresh in a world where these complications do not exist.

While we cannot escape the world and we cannot just delete the evil that we see in this world as God did during Noah’s time, we have something similar, to a smaller degree. This is the beauty of the Protestant Reformed Young Peoples’ Conventions. For one week out of the year, we have a time apart from the world, filled with a sense of peace, an opportunity for spiritual growth, and sanctified fun with fellow believers. There we can meet new friends and enjoy time with the old ones, all the while growing together as a body of believers in our spiritual lives.

At the convention, we are encouraged to continue the good fight of faith. We all have our own unique concerns, but at the convention we especially see that we are not fighting our battle alone! There are hundreds of other young people who are experiencing the struggles and temptations that this world loves to throw at us. We can encourage those whose sword is faltering or whose endurance is weakening. We have a strength in numbers that we could not possess alone.

There to help and encourage us are chaperones and speakers, who bring the word of God through speeches and devotions. While we receive edifying words every Sunday, these speeches are directed intentionally toward us as young people, and therefore have insights from those who have already faced the enemies that we as teenagers are facing during this time of our lives.

The PR conventions have a central purpose in educating and encouraging young people in their spiritual lives. But there are so many social benefits that accompany this main goal. First of all, we have the opportunity to meet other young people who have the same beliefs as us. Oftentimes we have heard of the churches in other states, but we struggle to connect with them because we don’t know any of the people there. Because of the convention we can connect the faces of these brothers and sisters in Christ with the distant churches.

We also cannot forget the fun that we have with one another. The convention this past year did an outstanding job of making the games new and exciting. There was always excited talk of what entertaining game we would get to play that day. Between the race car derby and the inflatable slides at the carnival after banquet (that may have flipped by accident), excitement was never lacking!

Another great benefit is a different setting in which to get to know our ministers and other adult members of our churches. It is easy to look at these individuals in their positions of authority and lose sight of the fact that they, too, were young people and continue the struggle of faith as adults. At convention, it is easier to see adults who are in authority over us as friends and people to get to know and learn from as fellow soldiers of the cross. How often do we have the chance to get whipped down the toboggan hill by one of our ministers, or get to see another teaching young people how properly to launch a soaking sponge?

Convention is always an amazing week, and in my opinion this year did not disappoint. It is a week of encouragement in our spiritual lives. It is a week of godly friendships, Christian fellowship, and God-glorifying fun that we would be hard-pressed to forget.

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SAFETY IN THE ARK

The Flood is history. The same kind of carnal unbelief that said in Noah’s day, “there will be no Flood,” says today, “there was no Flood.” Both are rooted in the love of the world and hatred of the God of Jesus Christ, truth, and judgment. The church must proclaim the history of the Flood.

In the 600th year of Noah’s life in the 2nd month on the 17th day of the month, God came in the Flood. For 40 days and 40 nights rain fell. The sluice gates of heaven let down a wall of water from above and the fountains of the deep unleashed a wall of water from beneath. This was accompanied by a great tearing, rending, and shaking of the earth. Those waters went up until they covered the mountains of that world to a depth of 15 cubits. The waters prevailed for 150 days. The Flood lasted one year and ten days.

The Flood was the manifestation of the power of God. The Bible says the waters “prevailed,” and the waters “prevailed exceedingly” (Gen. 7:18, 19, and 24).

The Flood was the power of God to judge and destroy a world smug in its sins. They were deaf to Noah’s preaching and warnings and mocked at his word about righteousness and safety in the ark. Such is God’s word always to the unbelieving and the impenitent. They will be destroyed.

The Flood was the power of God’s grace to save believing Noah and his family and the animals that were with him. “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8). In grace, God gave an unconditional promise to save Noah. In grace, he made a covenant with Noah. The grace of God lifted Noah up and separated him from the destruction of the world happening beneath the waves.

Noah was saved by faith alone. By faith alone, Noah was righteous before God. Righteousness is God’s judgment that a man is perfect and worthy of eternal life. God saved Noah because God forgave his sins and declared him righteous. This is the stated ground for Jehovah’s call of Noah into the Ark, “for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation” (Gen. 7:1).

The Flood is a type of the salvation of God’s elect church in Christ. As God saved righteous Noah, so God saves the righteous man today. The righteous man is the man whose conscience is cleansed from guilt by faith in the resurrection of Christ.

Christ’s resurrection is the promise from God that the Flood is past for the believer because Christ underwent the judgment of the Flood at the cross. Scripture describes the reality of the cross for Jesus Christ: “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me” (Ps. 42:7). Jesus went down into the flood of God’s wrath at the cross and with him went the whole cosmos, God’s elect church at the heart of the cosmos, and all the sin and guilt of all God’s people. He emerged from that flood the third day when he came out of the grave. He arose because he made satisfaction for sin.

Since he emerged, the believer cannot be submerged anymore in the judgments of God. The resurrection is the confirmation that we are perfectly righteous in Christ and worthy of eternal life. When the believer experiences a flood of troubles in this life, the resurrection of Christ is the promise that those sufferings are for salvation and not for destruction. When God comes in judgment at death, then the believer will not perish, but really begin to live through the dying off of sin. When God shakes the world once more at the appearance of Christ, he will deliver the believer at last into the new heavens and earth.

In the death and resurrection of Christ, believers have been buried with him, raised to new life. As really as those Flood waters came in and lifted up Noah and his family and separated them from the destruction of the world, so does the blood of Christ separate the church from the world. The blood of Christ separates in the very depths of the being of the child of God. It destroys all flesh. It destroys flesh, too, in the sense of the old man of sin. The old sinful man is killed and the sanctified and renewed man emerges. By the blood of Christ, believers are washed from sin’s guilt and accounted righteous before God in Christ. By the blood of Christ, they are washed from the pollution and dominion of sin and consecrated to God. God will preserve them until he sets them down on their Ararat in the newborn
world of the new creation.

God saved Noah and his family in the ark. The word *ark* means a box or chest. We can conceive of a very large wooden pole barn or better, of a huge coffin into which Noah entered by faith, and by the wonder of God's grace emerged from the flood. The ark was an instrument that God used to save Noah. The ark did not save and preserve Noah because it floated or because it was so well constructed. The Flood would have destroyed the largest ships man has ever built. The Scriptures say that “the LORD shut him in” (Gen. 7:16). That phrase means that God took the ark into his bosom, enfolded it with his arms, stood under it, held it up, and preserved it by his great power in the Flood.

The ark was part of the wonder of grace in the Flood. The power of God's grace in the waters lifted up the ark, preserved that ark in the Flood, and caused that ark to rest on Ararat. The fact that Noah built the ark at all was a work of God's grace. Noah built by faith, so God built the ark.

The pressing question about the ark is, what is its application today? The ark is a word of God in scripture to his covenant friends in the last days about their calling in the midst of a wicked and perverse world. The ark stands as the everlasting reminder of the part that God's people have in his covenant to cleave unto him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love and to forsake and condemn the world. The ark is the calling to come out of the world and into the true church of Christ. The ark is the calling of God's people to build in God's covenant, kingdom, and church in antithetical separation from and in condemnation of the world.

Things were humming along in that world. Man was making tremendous strides in the world in every area of science and technology. There was a flourishing religious side to the world. They called themselves the sons of God, so those men claimed the name church for themselves. But God says in Genesis 6:13: “the end of all flesh is come before me and the earth is filled with violence through them.” The words “the end of all flesh,” mean the extremity of man's wickedness. Sinful man had come to the bitter end of the development of sin and unbelief so that flesh was as wicked as flesh could get in that age.

The ark was a word of God that he hated their religion, their sin, their unbelief, and their impenitence, and that he would destroy them. The ark stood like a pointing and accusing finger and like a coffin warning of impending doom.

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The ark calls the church to be separate from and condemn the world. The ark is especially the condemnation of the amalgamation of the apostate church and the ungodly world. The believer is not called to build a good and godly culture, hold hands with the wicked, and make a pleasant society, but to build in God's covenant, kingdom, and church, separate from the world. By building in God's covenant, the believer condemns as Noah did when he built the ark. When believers build and maintain a separate school, that is an act of condemnation. It says that they can be part of no other. When believers build and maintain a separate church, that is an act of condemnation because they cannot belong to another.

There is safety in separation from the ungodly world and apostate church world. In the union of church and world, there is destruction. Denial of the antithesis is the death of the church. Not only the antithesis over against the ungodly world, but also the antithesis between those that adhere faithfully to God's word and those that have departed from the truth of the word of God and have become like the world. To deny that antithesis and to attempt to overcome it is ecclesiastical suicide as much as if Noah would have stopped building the ark or opened the door of the ark in the Flood.

Second, the ark was the commendation of Noah's faith. He believed God's word that there would be a Flood and God's promise to save him in the ark and to give him a new creation. So he built the ark by faith. This is the great test of a man's faith: will he believe God though the whole world condemns him and all men forsake him, hate him, and ridicule his work? By his obedience to God, he showed that his faith was true faith in God's promise.

Third, the ark shows what works are pleasing to God. The ark is not the calling of the church simply to be busy, but the calling of the church is to obey the word of God in everything. The ark is the condemnation of all man's invented religious works by which he supposes that he is very spiritual and pleasing to God and upon which he expends a great deal of time and energy. Good works which demonstrate our faith are obedience to what God commands in his word.

Fourth, the ark was an expression of Noah's hope. In all his life Noah labored for the end of the world and the coming of a new one. Every ounce of his energy was pressed into that calling all the while he was harassed by the wicked.

In seeking the world to come, the ark is the condemnation of all world-flight. Noah lived and built
in the middle of the world. Noah used the world. If Noah lived today, the world would sue him for damaging the environment because he cut down so many trees. But he used the world for the only legitimate purpose for which it can be used, and that is labor in God's kingdom, covenant, and church and for the world to come.

The friend of God must seek the world to come and not the world that now is. God calls us to perseverance against terrible opposition. He calls us to live holy and separately from the ungodly world. He calls us to confess his name and love his truth. He calls us to be sorry daily for our sins. He calls us to labor for the things of God's covenant, God's kingdom, and God's church, and God's truth. These are the things that belong to the world to come.

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Convention Speech Rev. Andy Lanning

LIVING IN HOPE OF A NEW CREATION

The flood is a powerful promise that Jesus Christ is coming to earth again. This might surprise us at first. What does the flood have to do with the return of Christ? After all, the flood is recorded way at the beginning of the Bible, while our Lord's return will be the very last thing that happens in the history of this earth. The flood resulted in the utter destruction of all flesh, except Noah and his family, while our Lord will make a new heaven and earth when he returns. What does the flood have to do with the return of Christ?

And yet our Lord and his apostles repeatedly connected the flood with Jesus’ return. Our Lord, in Matthew 24:37–39 says: “But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” And Peter, writing about “the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished,” writes that “the heavens and earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men,” which will occur on “the day of the Lord” (2 Pet. 3:6, 7, 10).

The connection between the flood and the return of our Lord is that the flood was a precursor of the second coming. The flood foreshadowed and foretold the return of our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven. The flood stands as a powerful promise of God to his church that Jesus Christ is coming indeed! For as it was in the days of Noah, so also shall the coming of the Son of man be. This promise of God encourages the hearts of God’s people as we wait for our Lord to appear. Especially when it seems to us that we have been waiting long for him, knowledge of the flood assures us that God’s word is true and that Christ’s return is sure. The child of God, believing God’s word concerning the flood, lives in the hope of the new creation.

There are especially three things to note about living in the hope of the new heavens and earth. First, the Lord Jesus Christ shall return to the earth personally. He will come visibly and bodily in such a way that every eye will see him. The flood foreshadows this personal return of Christ to the earth, because when God sent the flood, he himself came to the earth. God did not sit at a distance from the earth and send the flood waters, but he himself visited the earth and brought the flood waters with him. Notice the language that God uses in Genesis 6:17: “And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth...” If God were far away, he would only send a flood of waters. But God himself came to earth and brought a flood of waters upon the earth.

This was also the prophecy of Enoch about the flood, recorded in Jude 14–15: “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all...” Even though the ultimate fulfillment of Enoch’s prophecy awaits the second coming of Christ, Enoch was definitely speaking...
about the flood as a type of the final judgment. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, was prophesying to the last generations before Noah, the tenth from Adam. Those were days when the church was apostatizing through the sons of God marrying the daughters of men (Gen. 6:2). To those ungodly generations, Enoch prophesied that God would soon come in judgment “with ten thousands of his saints.” What a striking prophecy! It means that when the flood waters were exploding up from below, God himself was there with his own hands breaking up the fountains of the great deep. And when the flood waters were crashing down from above, God himself with his own hands was opening the windows of heaven. And the angels of God, as the servants and ministers of God, were there, for they are the “saints” spoken of by Jude. Though unseen by the wicked who choked and drowned in the waters of the flood, God came personally to earth in the flood, with a multitude of angels in his attendance. Yes, it is true that God is always present on the earth and never leaves or departs from it. Part of his glory as God is that he is omnipresent, or everywhere present. But there are also times when God comes in a special visit to the earth. The flood was such a visit, as the Lord came in judgment with ten thousands of his saints.

So it will be when our Lord Jesus Christ returns on the clouds of glory. He himself personally shall return, and his coming will be triumphant, majestic, and glorious. The very last sign before his coming shall be the sun turning to darkness, the moon not giving her light, and the stars falling from heaven (Matt. 24:29). Into that pitch blackness there shall sound the shout of Jesus Christ himself, accompanied by the trumpet-blast voice of God, and the voice of the archangel (1 Thess. 4:16). As he shouts, the Lord himself shall descend from heaven on the towering clouds of heaven as his chariot (Acts 1:11), shining with all of the full, bright glory of God himself (Matt. 25:31), and every eye shall see him (Rev. 1:7). He shall be attended by all his holy angels (Jude 14). His shout, and the trump of God, shall have raised the dead (1 Cor. 15:51–54), whose bodies will be reunited with their souls. That same trump of God shall change those of us who are alive and remain so that we too undergo a kind of translation or a resurrection without dying that makes us fit for life in the new heavens and earth, and we shall be caught up with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17). What a blessed hope the children of God have as we await our Lord. He is coming, personally and visibly, just as he promised!

The second thing to note about living in hope is that, when our Lord returns, he shall make a new heavens and earth. He will do this by burning up the present heaven and earth with fire so that the elements shall melt with a fervent heat, and the world that now is shall perish. Here too, the flood was a type and precursor of the coming of the Lord. Through the waters that blasted up from the earth and that smashed down upon the earth, the world that existed before the flood, being overflowed with water, perished (2 Pet. 3:5–6). The earth that Noah stepped onto after the flood was a new earth. Even though it was recognizable as a place where he could plant a vineyard, for example, it was nevertheless new. So it will be in the coming of our Lord. Out of the ashes of the present heaven and earth, as it were, our Lord will make a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13).

There are many things that we could say about the new heavens and the new earth, for the Bible reveals much about them. It reveals the light of them—not the sun, but the Lamb. It reveals the work we will be engaged in—worshiping God and ruling over the heavens and the earth with Christ. Even though there is much to say, we say it all as the blind trying to describe color, for we yet see through a glass darkly as we sojourn on this present earth. So, for this article anyway, let us focus on only one aspect of life in the new heavens and new earth: covenant fellowship with God.

Here too, the flood has something to teach us, for covenant fellowship with God was a prominent feature of the flood. God told Noah to come into the ark (Gen. 7:1), not go into the ark, indicating that God was in the ark and that God lived with Noah and his family in the ark for the entirety of the time that they were sealed in. After the flood, God said to Noah, “And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you” (Gen. 9:9). Then God gave to Noah one of the most visible, recognizable, and beloved symbols of his covenant: the rainbow. “I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth” (Gen. 9:13).

When God gave the rainbow as the symbol of his covenant, he was revealing that his covenant is essentially friendship and fellowship between himself and his people in Christ. God’s covenant is that he dwells with his people and brings them to dwell with him. In order to understand this, we must understand the rainbow. Some say that the rainbow is a covenant symbol because it has seven colors, and seven is the number of the covenant. Others say that the rainbow is a covenant symbol because it unites
earth and heaven by appearing to span them both. There may be some truth to these ideas, but they do not capture the main biblical significance of the rainbow. The key to understanding the rainbow is Revelation 4:3. There, God is described this way: “And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.” Here we are told that God’s glory, which always shines forth from him, is the brilliant color of the rainbow. When God gave the rainbow as a symbol of his covenant, it was as if he took a little wisp of his glory and painted it across the sky. By this, God tells his people that we may dwell with him and behold his glory. Rather than destroying us in hell as we deserve, he will take us to live with himself and show us his beautiful glory in heaven. God gives us this precious gift through Jesus Christ, who bore the flood of God’s curse against our sins and delivered us from them. Life in the new heavens and earth will be the life of covenant fellowship with God in Christ, dwelling before his throne and beholding his beauty and glory world without end.

The third thing to note about living in hope is that we may be absolutely sure that God’s promise of Christ’s coming is true, even though there are many who deny it and laugh at us for believing it. The Bible says that there shall be scoffers in the last days who say, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Pet. 3:3–4). By this question, the scoffers mean to say that Christ shall never return and that his promise has failed, because we have been waiting two thousand years and he still has not returned. Over against these scoffers, we hold to the promise of the scriptures that “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness,” and we, “according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:9, 13).

The flood teaches us this patient hope as well. Remember that Noah lived in the midst of a wicked generation who lived in open ungodliness. Noah looked forward to God’s coming to the earth in judgment, but it was a judgment that must have sounded so strange to people in his day. God said that he would send a flood, and Noah was commanded to build an ark-box for his family and the animals. But it had never rained before! How could water possibly cover all the land and destroy all flesh? And yet Noah believed God. By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, built the ark (Heb. 11:7). So it is with us. All we have to go on is the word of God, which promises the return of our Lord. But that word is sure, surer than all of the scoffing and scorning of the wicked. And so we look forward in hope to the coming of our Savior and to our eternal fellowship with him before the throne of God. For the flood is a powerful promise that Jesus Christ is coming again!

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Convention Speech Rev. Heath Bleyenberg

LIVING GODLY IN A WICKED WORLD

A few thousand years ago Noah lived in a wicked world. The same is true for us in the year of our Lord 2019. We live in a terribly depraved and wicked world. We know that’s the case because Jesus makes that comparison in Luke 17:26: “And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.” The “days of the Son of man” refer not only to that point in time immediately preceding the second coming of Jesus Christ, but all the New Testament era can be considered the “days of the Son of man.” Right now we live in the days of the Son of man. And these days are becoming increasingly wicked and corrupt.

What was it like in the days of Noah?

First, the wickedness began many years prior, when members of the church began to marry the people of the world. That’s the teaching of Genesis 6:2: “[T]he sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.” This is a description of the intermarriages that took place between those of the line of Seth (sons of God) and those of the line of
wicked Cain (daughters of men). The women of the
world made themselves available to the descendants
of Seth. The descendants of Seth were smitten with
their beauty. These women were willing to give
these men their time and attention, and the men
were more than happy to reciprocate.
Second, as the years went on, these mixed mar-
rriages resulted in extreme wickedness. “And God
saw that the wickedness of man was great in the
earth”! (Gen. 6:5). Men and women and children
over the face of the whole earth were expressing
their wickedness and depravity. This tells us what
happened in these ungodly marriages. Did the
wicked women become more and more godly? No.
But those of the line of Seth became more and more
wicked. The principle is this, namely, that the church
does not sanctify the world. But rather these unholy
unions only served to corrupt the church.
As more of these unholy marriages took place,
and as the earth became more populated, what
became true of people? Genesis 6:5 says that God
looked down and saw the human race, that “every
imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only
evil continually.” Every imagination, every thought
that ever entered into the mind of man, was evil.
It was only evil. There was no good mingled with
it whatsoever. It was entirely void of any good and
anything glorifying to God. This was the state of
man’s mind continually. This tells us the duration
of their wicked thinking and doing. It kept going on
and on and on. Think of that wicked man Lamech.
He lived early on, but he's a man indicative of the
spirit of the age. He boasted to his two wives about
killing a man and essentially said, “And what’s God
going to do about it? And if God would punish me
I’d be punished more than Cain!”
What did all this mean for Noah? Remember that
Noah was a righteous man. Noah loved the Lord.
How did others treat him? You can be sure they
treated him with scorn and contempt. They hated
Noah. They hated Noah’s God. They counted Noah
a fool for his love and devotion to God.
They counted Noah a fool especially in connec-
tion with Noah’s obedience to the Lord to build an
ark: to build an ark in the middle of dry ground, to
build an ark so large as to hold so many animals, to
build an ark in anticipation of a worldwide flood!
And they let Noah know that he was a fool for
wasting his time. They hated Noah. He became the
laughingstock of the world.
That’s what it was like during the days of Noah.
Ungodly marriages produced ungodly children.
The imaginations of men’s hearts were only evil
continually. Genesis 6:11–12 give us the summary:
“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the
earth was filled with violence. And God looked
upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all
flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.”
Sometimes I wonder how Noah would have
responded if he could have seen into the future, to
behold our culture and to see all the filth and cor-
rup tion in our society. And I wonder if Noah would
not have said, “If there was ever a time during the
world I would not want to live, it would be in 2019.
Too much evil! So much corruption! Every man
doing that which is right in his own eyes.”
We don’t know what Noah would have thought.
My point is that sometimes we consider the days
before the flood, and we say, “That was the most
wicked time on the face of the earth.” And yes, it
was wicked, so wicked that God said, “This present
world must be destroyed!” But the wickedness of the
present day is for sure not less than it was in the days
of Noah. If anything, it’s more. This is the wicked
world in which we live.
“As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be
also in the days of the Son of man.”
First, we live in a culture where every man does
that which is right in his own eyes. The mentality is,
“Nobody tells me what to do. Nobody may tell me
how to live my life. And if somebody does tell me
what I should do and how to live my life, I’ll simply
take it as a suggestion.” The result of that kind of
mentality is rebelliousness. Children rebel against
their parents. Young people then do not heed the
words of Mom and Dad, but instead challenge their
authority. The danger is that that ungodly behavior
rubbs off on us. That’s the culture in which we live,
so let’s be aware of it.
Second, in our day and age the devil is working
hard to distort the truth of God’s word. The advances
in science and technology lead scientists to declare,
“The earth is billions of years old, and this is an
indisputable fact, along with the evolution of species
along the way.” For young people especially who go
off to college and university, you will be confronted
with these claims. And when you raise your voice in
biology class and say, “The word of God does not
allow this universe to be that old, nor the evolution
of species,” then you will be ostracized.
Third, the devil is also working hard so that you
young people would begin to have eyes for someone
of the world. That’s what happened during the days
of Noah. The descendants of Seth looked at the
beauty of the daughters of the world, and they were
smitten! Young men, the daughters of the world will
present themselves unto you as fair and beautiful. Young women, some dashing young man of the world might pursue after you and flatter you with all kinds of words and all manner of money. Beware, young people! We live in a wicked world.

Further, there’s all the ungodly entertainment the world sets before us. To be sure, there is legitimate entertainment for the Christian to enjoy. But for every legitimate form of entertainment there are thousands of other forms that are forbidden to the Christian: the TV shows, the movies, the songs that are recorded, all the taking of God’s name in vain, all the setting forth of promiscuity and fornication as something that’s normal and something that’s good. The danger is that we assimilate that kind of thinking and ungodly behavior. To assimilate means that once you become exposed to this filth and corruption, and the more you’re exposed to it, the more you begin to absorb it into your own thinking and living. We live in a wicked world!

Do you sense the danger? Are you aware of the wickedness of the day: the drinking, the promiscuity, the pornography, the foul language, the hedonism of the day?

Young people, do not be deceived. Do not be lulled into a false sense of security. We can become very comfortable with our lives, comfortable with the internet, comfortable with the culture around us. We can become very comfortable with our sins and the old man within us lusting for more and more pleasure. Don’t become complacent in your lives. Sin is nothing to be trifled with. God takes sin seriously. Look what happened to the world before the flood. It was so filled with sin and wickedness and violence that God sent the flood to destroy it all.

In the midst of this wicked world God gives us the calling to live godly.

That was the command that came to Noah long ago. The Bible doesn’t tell us much of Noah’s day-to-day life leading up to the flood. But the Bible does tell us in 2 Peter 2:5 that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. Amidst all the violence and wickedness and all the pleasure seeking of the world, Noah was a preacher of righteousness. He testified against the ungodliness. He didn’t accept it as something normal for him and his family. He didn’t sit idly by. He didn’t keep his mouth shut. He preached to his own family the good and holy ways of God. You can see Noah gathering his family round about him and telling his sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, together with their wives, “You may not go out into the world and become friends with the ungodly. You may not go out and engage in all that pleasure seeking. Serve God! Worship him alone! Love him! Seek your pleasure in him!”

Not only did Noah preach to his family, but as God gave him opportunity he preached to those around him. He preached the righteousness of God. Noah preached, “The judgment of God is coming for all your sins and all your wickedness.” And in all this Noah lived godly. He didn’t partake in those sins. He lived godly in a wicked world.

The calling also comes to you young people: live godly in the midst of this wicked world. That’s simply another way of saying, “Live antithetically.” Testify against the ungodliness the devil presents to you. Say, “No, I will not partake in that wickedness. No, I will not listen to that music. No, I will not watch that garbage. No, I will not engage in the lusts of the flesh!” Live godly. Live in gratitude, knowing the great salvation God has given you in Jesus Christ.

Then demonstrate that godliness in the friends you seek. Demonstrate that godliness in the marriages you desire. That means you say, “I will seek that one to be my spouse who has the same faith and who believes the same Christ.”

Exercise yourselves unto godliness. Refrain from the evil. Do the good. And know that the Lord is the one who delivers us from this wicked age.

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Devotional Ben Laning

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

November 8  Read Galatians 4
Because we hear it so often, we don’t always appreciate the reality when we are called a “child of God.” The same is true with calling God “Father,” as we see here in Galatians 4:6. Rev. Van Overloop explained that this special relationship we have with God implies four things. First, we have the right to his attention, affection, and riches. We know that no matter what is going on, our Father will be there for us when we need him. Second, we have his likeness. We’ve been predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, Jesus Christ. Third, we are confident he will supply for us all our needs, for he urges us to ask them of him. Fourth, he has made us heirs and partakers of his heavenly kingdom. These things help earthly fathers know how to reflect God for their children. We shouldn’t focus on the fact that our children are reflections of us, but we must point them to their heavenly Father. Sing or pray Psalter #278.

November 9  Read Galatians 5
Prof. Decker preached that there’s really only one fruit of the Spirit: love. The love of God is the fruit that comes from having the Spirit. If we don’t have love, then we don’t have the Holy Spirit. Love is the only virtue that we read God is. There’s no love outside of God or apart from him. What the world calls love is no more than hatred against God. The love of the world is the manifestation of the reprobate mind. Anything goes under the guise of love in the name of tolerance. In contrast, love is shown when the church disciplines those who are walking in sin because it cares about the soul of the individual. This is love for the neighbor, and we can’t love God if we do not love the brother. We must give of ourselves for one another. We must bear one another’s weaknesses for the sake of unity in the church and not hold grudges. We must be quick to forgive and put the focus on our own sin, crying out in humility, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” Sing or pray Psalter #369.

November 10  Read Galatians 6
Children, have you ever heard someone say something mean about someone else? What’s the first thing you want to do when you hear that? Some of us might be quick to stand up and rebuke the speaker as we should, but many times that’s not what happens. Instead, we might run to that person and tell them what was said about them. We might even claim to be doing this out of care for them, but is that really love?

Prof. Hanko preached about how we are inclined by nature to rush and tell others when we see someone fall. Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Telling someone evil things that were said about them only hurts them and tempts them to respond in like manner. Instead, we must address the person about their evil speech in meekness, considering our own sin and the fact that we all fall sometimes. There are temptations on every side, and we must always strive to help one another stay on the straight and narrow. Sing or pray Psalter #370.

November 11  Read Acts 17
When we are confronted with new things in our life, how do we evaluate them? This question was posed by Rev. Slopsema in a sermon on this chapter. It’s tempting for us to determine if something’s right or wrong based on tradition, what the majority thinks, what sounds reasonable, or what feels good. Instead, we must remember that the scriptures are our sole rule for faith and life. This is something the Bereans lived out. They were busy in the word of God, as we must be. The title of Slopsema’s sermon was “The Nobility of the Bereans.” This comes from Acts 17:11, where we read that the Berean saints “were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” The Bereans were born again by the grace
of God and the Holy Spirit. They were nobility from a spiritual point of view. Does this describe us as well? Are we like the synagogue of Thessalonica or Berea? We must not just believe what we are told blindly, but daily search the scriptures for ourselves. Sing or pray Psalter #40.

**November 12**  
Read 1 Thessalonians 1

By way of introduction, Rev. DeVries brought out that Paul had been concerned about the Thessalonians. They were a very new congregation, and he was wondering if they’d be able to withstand temptation. Paul was very happy to hear Timothy’s positive report of the Thessalonian church. This book is a letter of encouragement and exhortation. It defines the calling of the church as she waits for the return of Christ. In fact, each chapter ends with a reference to Christ’s coming.

In verse 3, Paul told the Thessalonians he remembered their “work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope.” Rev. De Vries explained that the believers themselves aren’t receiving the credit here, but God-given faith results in labor and hope produces patience. Faith implies that we trust the Christ in whom we are united. It means we cast aside our works and put all our trust in him. Faith will reveal itself in our lives, for faith without works is counterfeit. This was true of the Thessalonians, and Paul rejoiced in the effect the word of God and the Spirit had on them. Is the same true of us? Sing or pray Psalter #66.

**November 13**  
Read 1 Thessalonians 2

In verses 10–12, Paul is answering many accusations that have come against his preaching. Rev. den Hartog summarizes three ways Paul defended his ministry. First, he spoke of the fact that he was bold and ready to suffer persecution. Second, he emphasized that God-given faith results in labor and hope produces patience. Faith implies that we trust the Christ in whom we are united. It means we cast aside our works and put all our trust in him. Faith will reveal itself in our lives, for faith without works is counterfeit. This was true of the Thessalonians, and Paul rejoiced in the effect the word of God and the Spirit had on them. Is the same true of us? Sing or pray Psalter #391.

**November 14**  
Read 1 Thessalonians 3

Paul was worried about the Thessalonians. They were being persecuted, and he wanted to know how their faith was holding up in the face of this affliction. Rev. DeBoer explained that faith is the bond that unites us to Jesus Christ and causes us to believe in him. Faith is a gift of God, which he grants to some and not others by his good pleasure. Sometimes our faith can be weak during grievous trials, but faith is what our good works flow out of. Paul prayed that the Thessalonians’ faith might remain strong, and they might not be “moved” during their afflictions. Tempters are like dogs wagging their tails, who flatter and lead us astray. We are especially susceptible to this when we’re going through difficult trials. Great temptations come when we think about being persecuted. For example, we can convince ourselves to hide that we are a Christian because otherwise we will lose our business. Instead, we must stand fast in the Lord and, in love, help others to do the same. Sing or pray Psalter #343.

**November 15**  
Read 1 Thessalonians 4

Rev. DeBoer preached that the Thessalonians here had a problem. They understood the truth that Christ was returning soon to mean that it was happening right away. Some went so far as to quit their jobs and wait. This caused them to start wasting time and getting into each other’s business. In response, Paul commands them in verse 11 to “study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands.”

We need to hear this command today as well. We have jobs, but it’s still harder today than ever before not to be busybodies. It used to be that people had to work nearly every waking moment to survive, but now we have large amounts of free time on our hands. Besides, technology makes it that much easier to fill that free time with frivolous and even spiteful talk. Social media gives us access to everyone else’s business with the click of a button. We must recognize and fight this temptation, instead using our energy to be a witness to those around us and to help those in need. Sing or pray Psalter #343.

**November 16**  
Read 1 Thessalonians 5

Rev. Mahtani preached that one of the struggles of a pastor is that he wants his congregation to be
comforted when they consider the end times, but he doesn’t want them to fall asleep spiritually. Paul assures us that when sudden destruction comes, we need not be afraid, because we are children of light. Instead of a day of destruction, for us it will be a day of salvation. To others it will bring pain like that of a woman giving birth. However, unlike a mother delivering a newborn, the wicked world will have no way to get rid of their pain. This is the judgment that will come on those who are spiritually asleep and drunk. Inactivity, blindness, and being unprepared are all characteristics of sleep that are bad spiritually. Similarly, overindulgence, impairment, and loss of self-control are all characteristic of drunkenness. We must flee this wickedness and behave as Christ has saved us to behave. We must watch and be sober, the opposites of the world’s sleep and drunkenness.  

Sing or pray Psalter #345.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1
November 17

Rev. Barnhill gave the background to Thessalonica and the church there in a sermon on this chapter. Thessalonica was a major seaport that traded a lot with Corinth and Ephesus, thus making it a good place for the gospel to spread from. Paul and Silas labored there for about four weeks during the second missionary journey, and Paul would later send Timothy there to check on them. Timothy returned with a very encouraging report of the work, which occasioned Paul’s first letter to them. The second letter was written a few months later, when the Thessalonian’s lifestyle was being negatively affected by their belief that Jesus was returning at any time. In addition, there was a lot of fake communication coming to the church, so Paul wanted to set that straight in his letter as well. The theme of the book is the second coming of Christ, and the sub-theme is the antithesis. The Thessalonian church lived in a big city, and with big cities comes big sin, especially fornication and idolatry. How true that is today in a world of over seven billion people. Sing or pray Psalter #136.

Sing or pray Psalter #224.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2
November 18

2 Thessalonians 2:15 reads, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.” As I read Rev. McGeown’s article in the August Standard Bearer, I thought about how applicable it was to this verse. McGeown explains that the Democrats are pushing to amend the Civil Rights Act adopted in 1964 to include protection from discrimination for LGBTQ Americans. There are a number of troubling provisions in this bill. For one, it claims that race/color and sexual orientation/gender identity are on par with one another. This means that anyone who speaks out against LGBTQs can be categorized as racist. Secondly, the Equality Act is purposefully broad and vague in describing where discrimination is outlawed, including any “public gathering” or “service provider.” Along with that, there are little to no provisions for religious exemptions. After all, people shouldn’t be able to hide behind religion as an excuse to be racist, should they? We must see the push for this bill as another one of Satan’s direct attacks on the church. As we live in an ever-darkening world, may we continue to stand fast and hold to the truths we have been taught. Sing or pray Psalter #224.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3
November 19

Rev. Barnhill explained that Paul would dictate his letters, but then write the last part, showing authenticity. The first two chapters of the book end in benedictions as well, but this one looks backward at what God taught throughout the letter. In the last verse, Paul talks about the grace that comes from Christ like a fountain. This grace is favor. There’s nothing more important than knowing what kind of an attitude God has towards us. This favor is undeserved and unmerited. What’s more, it’s also a power by which he showers blessings upon us and makes us beautiful in his sight. It gives us peace knowing that God has reconciled us to himself. This peace is a state of quietness and security, and it’s a part of the benediction at the end of our worship service. We come to church weary with the knowledge of our sins, but there we are comforted by the promise of grace and peace. There has been unrest in our denomination, but we still have peace when we submit to the decisions that have been made. We seek the peace of Zion and don’t try to take sides. Sing or pray Psalter #350.

Read Acts 18
November 20

In verses 9 and 10, God assures Paul that he’s been called to preach. The results of Paul’s preaching had been that very few believed, and this caused him to lie awake at night. Rev. Smit reminded us that it’s natural for us to get discouraged when things don’t work out our way. Elijah began to despair after he saw there was no change in Israel following Mt. Carmel, and he concluded it would be better for him to just go to heaven. How about us? What
response do we receive to our witnessing? Do we get discouraged?

We must remember it’s the Lord who determines the harvest and where his word will be preached. He will care for us in even the darkest of times. God doesn’t promise us that we won’t be put to death for speaking the truth, but we are promised that the gates of hell will not prevail. Our problems don’t just disappear, but looking at Christ we can deal with them in the right perspective. Our natures always want to believe the grass is greener on the other side, but we are simply commanded to labor where the Lord has placed us. Sing or pray Psalter #355.

Have you ever read the book Fahrenheit 451? It’s a novel set in the future when books are outlawed, and “firemen” burn any that are found. This story came to mind as I listened to Rev. Bleyenberg’s sermon on Acts 19:18–20 entitled “Burning the Books.” In this case, however, the book burning was a good thing. The people had grown up believing in witchcraft, and that is what these papyrus scrolls taught. The people were stirred up to burn them after they saw the sons of Sceva failed to do what Paul did. Keep in mind that there was no printing press back then, so these books were very valuable and not easily replaced. The value today would be somewhere around a million dollars, but they didn’t even want to sell them and let them fall in someone else’s hands.

Are we burning the world’s books like we should? These “books” can be anything that hinders us in our Christian life. They include the world’s music, its movies, and the addictions that are such a huge problem today. Burning these things doesn’t necessarily mean that we physically burn them, but that we rid them from our lives. Sing or pray Psalter #384.

Most of the following devotionals will be based on sermons by Rev. Rodney Kleyn, who has a wonderful series on this book available on Sermon Audio, spanning the last few years and including scores of sermons.

Corinth was a busy port city that was extremely wicked. Rev. Kleyn said it could be compared to Amsterdam and Las Vegas today. Therefore, the church there had almost every problem you can imagine, including rebelling against authority, scandal of open sin, taking each other to court, receiving and eating of meat offered to idols, fighting over spiritual gifts, impurity, marriage issues, women being disorderly in worship, problems with the sacraments, and denial by some of the resurrection. The Corinthian church had many weaknesses in her marks, but she still had them. Even though the churches Paul ministered to had problems, he always looked at them as the body of Christ, God’s church, the called ones, and those who are sanctified. As John Calvin said, we must not expect the church to be free of problems, because that only leads to us looking to self. Just as we don’t define our children by their sins, so we mustn’t define other churches by their spiritual weaknesses. Sing or pray Psalter #138.

It’s a tragedy when an adult acts like a baby. The church in Corinth was immature, and Paul needed to rebuke them. Many of the members had become fleshly minded, and this was causing a lot of strife. Because of this, Paul fed them with milk and not meat. He spoke to them about doctrine in very simple language and didn’t delve too deeply into it, because the Corinthians weren’t ready for it. Children can explain why Jesus had to die even before they can read, but we expect them to be able to say more about it as they get older. This should have been
happening with the Corinthians by this point, but it was not.

We all need to grow up and be ready for spiritual meat. We should never be satisfied with our spiritual maturity. Especially when we grow up in the church, being a spiritual baby can become a great danger for us. We easily become like the Pharisees and convince ourselves that we’re just fine because we are the children of Abraham. In contrast, we must be like the Bereans, who searched the scriptures daily and hungered after spiritual meat. **Sing or pray Psalter #25.**

### November 25 Read 1 Corinthians 4

Paul instructs the Corinthians not to judge their ministers in this chapter. Rev. Kleyn explains what this means, seeing as how passing judgment is not wrong of itself. The point here is that we shouldn’t think too highly or critically of the minister himself, because the focus shouldn’t be on the man. This is especially important for parents to remember because whole families can easily be turned away from the church because of father’s and mother’s view of those in the special offices. Our pastors are ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. A minister is a galley slave, in that he answers to Jesus Christ and isn’t that important as a person. He’s been given charge of something that’s valuable to God, and he must take good care of it. He must remember his calling to declare the whole counsel of God and nothing but that.

So what is the criteria for evaluating a minister? He must be evaluated based on how faithful he is to his calling, the word of God, and the people of God. Faithfulness is what God has called us all to, as ministers and as other members in the church. **Sing or pray Psalter #52.**

### November 26 Read 1 Corinthians 5

Someone in the church at Corinth had married his stepmother. Paul says this was worse than anything going on in the city itself. Interestingly, though, Paul’s focus is not on the incest or sexual immorality, but on the fact that unrepentant sin was being tolerated. Why tolerated? Maybe everyone was just too afraid to meddle in his business, or maybe he had a lot of family in the church, or he was wealthy, or he had important talents that were used in the church. Whatever the case may be, it’s likely that the attitude of the congregation was that they needed to love him, and his actions weren’t really affecting their lives, so it wasn’t their business.

Paul calls this tolerance pride. It’s saying we know better than God about what’s right and wrong, so we don’t need to discipline someone for disobeying his law. Although done in the name of love, this is hatred. Wouldn’t it show love to warn someone about going out on a frozen lake where the ice is very thin? In the same way, we must warn and admonish one another, showing care for their soul. **Sing or pray Psalter #51.**

### November 27 Read 1 Corinthians 6

The Corinthians used Christian liberty to pursue their earthly lusts. They said God had given them sexual desires, so they should be able to satisfy them. This is the same false idea of liberty that’s touted around today. It’s defined as a person’s right to throw off all authority and be a law to themselves. On the contrary, true liberty is the freedom to serve God. Paul is actually a great advocate of Christian freedom, seeing as how he came out of Phariseeism, but he made it clear that it didn’t give license to sin.

Christian liberty might say that something is lawful even when it isn’t helpful. We need to ask ourselves if what we are doing is expedient, as taught in verse 12. Is it expedient for me spiritually? Is it profitable for others spiritually? Is it expedient in regards to the glory of God? Rev. Kleyn gave the example of physical exercise. It’s good to take care of our bodies, but it can be a problem if done for the wrong reasons or if it keeps us from other aspects of our work. When evaluating an activity, we should ask if it’s expedient, not if it’s wrong. **Sing or pray Psalter #89.**

### November 28 Read 1 Corinthians 7

Would you ever advise someone to live the single life? If so, what could be the reason for doing that? This is what Paul is doing in this chapter. He’s saying it wouldn’t be a sin to marry, but he’s giving pastoral advice not to because of the “present distress” (v. 26), which was probably persecution. One reason for this advice is that marriage brings extra trials into our life. Also, the time is short; we don’t have long to serve God in this life. In addition, some are simply happier if they aren’t married. Marriage isn’t forever, because nothing in this world is. Marriage is a very important and beautiful thing, but we mustn’t live for it, because life is bigger than that. Marriage is but a picture of a greater marriage that we will all enjoy forever in heaven. Whether it be marriage or
something else, we must not become engrossed in the things of this life. We mustn’t be governed by the hurts that happen to us in life, as modern psychology would teach us. Instead, we must always have our eyes set on Christ, serving him in spirit and in truth. *Sing or pray Psalter #251.*

**November 29**  
Read 1 Corinthians 8

Members in the church disagreed about what to do with meat offered to idols. Some wanted nothing to do with it, others said it could be taken home to eat with your family, and others believed they were free to eat it in the pagan temples with the ungodly people. The problem here was that some in the congregation had knowledge without love. They weren’t concerned about leading their brothers into sin. Love must be the motive of Christian liberty. Christian living is a matter of wisdom, taking in all the facts and considering what to do for the glory of God.

Rev. Kleyn provided an example from his own childhood. He grew up in a church where there wasn’t any reading of the law, reciting of the creeds, or accompaniment with the singing. The EPC of Australia believes these things destroy the purity of worship. It would be foolish for a member of that denomination to come to the PRC and immediately judge us because we do these things, and vice versa. In all situations like this, we need to consider there is more to understand than we know, and we must not be quick to judge. *Sing or pray Psalter #254.*

**November 30**  
Read 1 Corinthians 9

The main event of the Corinthian games was a footrace. Competitors qualified for the race by strict training, not just by being the fastest. The crown the winner received was made of parsley and pine needles, so we see why Paul called it corruptible. The glory attained was found in winning the race, not in the crown. In addition, there were many other rewards besides the crown to be gained from victory. The Corinthians believed they wouldn’t need walls around their city if the hero dwelt among them because the gods would be favorable to him. The individual was also given many perks, including tax exemption.

Rev. Kleyn explained that there are many similarities between these ancient races and the spiritual race of the Christian, but there are also a few points of contrast. In earthly races only one receives the prize at the end, but all of God’s people are rewarded at the end of their race. We all run to attain, and the emphasis is on the effort, not the speed. The Corinthian runners received a corruptible crown, but our crown is incorruptible. Finally, whereas they ran for personal glory, we do it for God’s glory. *Sing or pray Psalter #45.*

**December 1**  
Read 1 Corinthians 10

Paul tells the Corinthians here to flee idolatry, which is anything that takes God’s rightful place in our hearts. Back in chapter 6, he had commanded them to flee fornication. The two were connected in Corinth. This city was especially known to be promiscuous. The worship of the goddess Aphrodite involved committing adultery with the prostitutes at her temple. We must flee all forms of sexual impurity like Joseph fled Potiphar’s wife.

Another way in which idolatry entered the church was by eating the food offered to idols in the pagan temples. Some of the Corinthians had begun to presume on their liberty, thinking they could get away with anything because they were Christians. They thought they were above sin, and it wouldn’t affect them. We need to have a healthy respect for the power of sin. If we play with fire, we run the danger of being pulled into sin’s orbit. Satan is working hard every day to turn our affections from God to him in the worship of nothing. In response, may we fight the battle of faith and not provoke our God to jealousy. *Sing or pray Psalter #70.*

**December 2**  
Read 1 Corinthians 11

The Lord’s Supper had become an ironic event for the Corinthian church. It should have been a time of unity for them, but it actually demonstrated the division amongst them between the rich and poor. It should have been a celebration of their deliverance from the wrath of God, but instead it brought greater judgment upon them. It should have been profitable as a means of grace for them, but instead they came together for the worse. Paul instructed the Corinthians that they could have their feasts at home if they wanted, but when they came together, they needed to make sure the poor were being cared for.

The Corinthians were running into this problem because they weren’t engaging in self-examination as they should have been. In doing so, they mocked Jesus Christ when they came to partake of the Lord’s Supper. Like us, the Corinthians needed to learn to examine themselves daily. Living this way results in an increase in faith and holiness for the child of
God. We come to the sacrament more fully seeing our need for and dependence upon our savior Jesus Christ. Sing or pray Psalter #56.

December 3  Read 1 Corinthians 12

It is difficult to understand what Paul is saying in the first three verses of this chapter, but Rev. Kleyn explains it in simple terms. In verse one, Paul addresses the new issue of spiritual gifts. The Corinthian church had a carnal perspective on gifts. The things that were highly esteemed among men were what was highly esteemed in the church. True spirituality—faith, hope, and love—were lacking. In verse two, Paul talks about the Corinthians in their unregenerate state. They had been in bondage to the devil in false religion. They had used things like chants and adultery to reach ecstasy or closeness with their false deity. These dramatic expressions had carried over into the church, with those who claimed to be able to do things like speak in tongues and perform miracles. In the third verse, Paul reminds the Corinthians that their spiritual gifts come from the Holy Spirit. Their concern should be their own spirituality, not what specific gifts they have. Did they confess that Christ is the Lord in all they did? Do we? Sing or pray Psalter #61.

December 4  Read 1 Corinthians 13

We recently joined a small group, Sunday night Bible study that meets once a month. The topic last time was love, and, as you can imagine, this chapter was discussed quite a bit. This chapter tells us a lot about what charity is or isn’t. Could we replace our names with the word charity in these verses? Are you kind? Do you envy? Do you seek your own things? And so on. As you look through all these, can you point out ones you struggle with even more than others?

In verse 5, we read that love, “seeketh not her own.” This is completely at odds with the world’s idea of love. To them, love is about being served. We love someone because of what we can get out of them. We are told by the world’s psychologists that we deserve to have whatever makes us happy. This false love is anti-biblical. It’s nothing more than self-love, which only leads to self-pity, pride, and selfishness. In actuality, true love manifests itself in service, just as Jesus Christ our savior manifested his perfect love for us by serving. Sing or pray Psalter #277.

December 5  Read 1 Corinthians 14

The Corinthians had been making their worship into a big show. In reaction to this, Paul says, “Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues (1 Cor. 14:39).” They had been showing off their ability to speak in tongues and had lost the proper focus of the preaching.

Rev. Kleyn explains to us that there are four principles of worship. First, it must be edifying for all. Second, it must be intelligible and in a language that all can understand. Third, it must be governed by and correctly explain the word of God. Fourth, preaching and teaching should be at its center.

We can fall into this trap of focusing on the outward form of worship as well. There are many true churches around the world whose services look different from ours, so we mustn’t think our way of worship is the only way. The minister must put his focus on making scripture understandable, not on delivering a beautifully crafted, flowering presentation. We must remember that, although the minister is the one speaking, we are all included in the worship. It’s not a spectator sport. Sing or pray Psalter #269.

December 6  Read 1 Corinthians 15

“What doth the resurrection of Christ profit us?” This is the question posed in Lord’s Day 17 of the Heidelberg Catechism. In answer, the Catechism says, “First, by his resurrection he has overcome death, that he might make us partakers of that righteousness which he had purchased for us by his death; secondly, we are also by his power raised to a new life; and lastly, the resurrection of Christ is a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection.”

Rev. Haak preached a sermon on this Lord’s Day, 1 Corinthians 15, and Acts 17, where Paul preached to the Athenians on Mars’ Hill about the unknown God. The Greeks were willing to listen to Paul until he started preaching about the resurrection (Acts 17:32). The wicked world hates the truth of the resurrection, which Rev. Haak explained is the most important fact in the world today. If Jesus’ body had still been in the grave on the morning of that third day, then the devil would have won. The resurrection showed that Jesus truly had defeated death. Through that sacrifice he’s justified us, sanctified us, and will soon glorify us on the last day. Sing or pray Psalter #394.

December 7  Read 1 Corinthians 16

Rev. Kleyn explained four principles for giving that Paul sets before us at the beginning of this chapter. First, we need to give with regularity. Giving needs
to be part of our regular Christian worship, not just something that’s done because of emotional begging and time-consuming fundraisers. Second, everyone must participate in giving. Giving is not just for the rich in the church. Third, one’s giving must be proportionate to the number of earthly things God has given him. In verse 2, Paul commands each person to give, “as God hath prospered him.” Often people say that we tithe and give a 10th part of what we have, but tithing is never mentioned in the New Testament. It’s important to also remember that the 10% the Israelites gave didn’t include all the sacrifices they brought throughout the year. We must all give liberally, as we are able. Fourth, the primary place for giving is the local church. By this we don’t mean that giving needs to be done in the church building itself, but within the body of Christ. Sing or pray Psalter #396.


Contentment is a virtue that is much easier to discuss than to practice. Whether in the back of church or on social media, the definitions roll easily off our tongues. “It is being satisfied with everything that God has given us.” “It is not being angry or bitter when God withholds certain things from us.” “It means being happy with everything that might happen to us since we recognize that it all comes from our loving Father in heaven.” Erik Raymond in his new book on contentment gives this definition (pointing out his reliance on Jeremiah Burroughs); “Contentment is the inward, gracious, quiet spirit that joyfully rests in God’s providence” (23).

As long as everything is going our way, it’s easy to claim contentment. And then your hours at work are cut back, making your difficult financial position seem impossible. Or a friend buys something you’ve always wanted, but can’t afford. Maybe the girl you want to date is more interested in your friend than in you. Or, more serious and devastating, the diagnosis comes back as cancer and you face the prospect of life without your father.

The words of 1 Thessalonians 5:18 that we give thanks “in every thing,” which so easily flowed off our tongues in Bible study now seem to get caught in our throats. Give thanks to God for this?

A lack of contentment is often a private sin, so it is one in which we feel that we can indulge. We ask, foolishly, what’s the harm, anyway? In addition to doubting the goodness of God to us, it is not long before a lack of contentment gives birth to its evil offspring, covetousness. John Calvin in his commentary on Ephesians 5:5 (which equates coveting with idolatry), shows the seriousness of this sin: “All
covetous men must deny God, and put wealth in his place; such is their blind greediness of wretched gain.” According to that same verse, no covetous person “hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” This should serve as a sharp warning to any of us who think the sin of coveting is a second-tier sin, and not as serious as murder, adultery, or theft.

Coveting destroys relationships. Many relationships have endured arguments and even strong disagreements, but envy is another creature altogether. “Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?” (Prov. 27:4).

Contentment is not something that you are born with, but rather, something that must be learned. As Erik Raymond shows in his new book on contentment, “the apostle Paul himself had to learn contentment. It was no more natural for him than it is for you” (see Philippians 4:11–12).

Raymond provides a good test to gauge how content we really are. He challenges us to ask those who are close to us if they think we often complain because this would reveal a lack of contentment. Since none of us will do that, we may follow his next bit of advice. “Inventory what you think about. Are you constantly embracing God’s goodness in the valleys as well as on the mountaintops? Contentment knows how to sing in the stocks as well as the banquet feast” (27).

Contentment, Raymond points out, is a work of grace. We must “feast on Christ” (68) by reading the Bible and through prayer. Even in this, however, our trust must not be misplaced. “The basis for answered prayer is neither our goodness nor our skill in prayer. Instead, it is God’s grace, kindness, and love. Any success in our praying comes from the successful work of Christ.” Later he writes, “Our boldness in prayer is based upon God welcoming us to the throne on the merit of Christ (Heb. 4:14–16).” He references a quotation by John Calvin who writes that “Christ is the only way, and the one access, by which it is granted us to come to God” (77). In other words, contentment flows out of faith in Jesus Christ. Do you lack contentment? Pray that God would forgive your lack of faith, and cause his Spirit to dwell in you richly so that you can learn contentment.

How often are we not discouraged by our attitudes toward the things of this world and our lack of contentment? So often it seems we are on this hamster wheel of frustration and futility, always running, always pursuing, always buying, but never satisfied and never truly content. We should be frustrated and discouraged with that life. That is not the Christian life. That is the life that needs to be rejected.

But there is hope. That hope is found in the finished work of Jesus Christ. You are united to this Christ (47), and in him, you are a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). Use the means God has provided to educate yourself on what contentment truly is, what the root cause of coveting is, and how to address and “mortify” it (Col. 3:5). This book can be an aid to doing just that, but this book, like any other good book on the topic, will drive you to the word of God, and to him who is the object of our faith and trust, Jesus Christ. Raymond provides what he calls a “simple formula,” to learn contentment. “If you want to be content, think less about yourself and more about Christ” (159).
VIGILANCE!

Be ye aware, God’s people
Whether ye be young or old
The devil is out lurking
Of this we have been told.

He creeps into our homes
And we must be aware
He can be oh so sneaky
And destroy us without care!

He is working on each one of us
Through technology and TV
So easy it is to become attached
Oh why can we not see?

Do we make the time to study
Do we make the time to read?
Or are we glued to our electronics,
Wasting the time we need?

We must seek to grow in knowledge
So we can then fight back-
Against his many wiles,
And all of his attacks.

Take time to be holy
Prepare for the fight.
To stand against the devil
And do what is right.

Be ye not afraid
Because the devil cannot win
God controls each of our lives
And died for all our sins.

We thank him for the comfort
He gives us in his word
He will never leave us nor forsake us
This through his servants we have heard.

Cheri is a mother and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.
The Psalter (4): The Scottish Metrical Psalter

John Knox was a minister who lived in Scotland during the time of the Reformation. He was exiled from Scotland and went to Geneva. In Geneva, he met John Calvin. When John Knox returned to Scotland, he brought both the Protestant Reformation and Genevan Psalter.

In 1556, John Knox produced an Anglo-Genevan Psalter for use in his congregation. It wasn’t yet a complete psalter since it had only 51 psalms. By 1564, this psalter was expanded into the Scottish Psalter with more tunes finally to include songs for all 150 psalms.

For nearly a hundred years, the Scottish Psalter was revised. The General Assembly of the Scottish Churches looked at the text of the psalter numbers carefully to make sure they remained faithful and accurate to the psalms.

In 1650, the Scottish Metrical Psalter (also known simply as the Scottish Psalter) was published. This version of the Scottish Psalter has been in use in various churches around the world since then with only minor updates to spelling. That is nearly 400 years! Few other psalters have been in use for so long with so few changes.

Our sister church in Northern Ireland, Covenant PRC of Ballymena uses the Scottish Metrical Psalter. The Scottish Metrical Psalter was one of the psalters used as the basis for the 1912 Psalter that forms the bulk of the Psalter we use in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. Many of our Psalter numbers are from the Scottish Psalter, including the much-beloved version of Psalm 23, Psalter #53.

The Scottish Psalter of 1650 is still well-loved today for its accuracy to the psalms.
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:

Brooks Edward, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tyler & Allison Ophoff—Byron Center, MI
Jason Timothy, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dan & Lori DeJong—Byron Center, MI
Harper Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dave & Anna Monkma—Georgetown, MI
Tessa Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jared & Sue Dekker—Georgetown, MI
Boaz Alexander, son of Mr. & Mrs. Bill & Joanna Leep—Grace, MI
Kenzi Faith, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Leah Nieuwenkamp—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Carson Dean, son of Mr. & Mrs. Stephan & Alexis Boonstra—Loveland, CO
Adrian Frank, son of Mr. & Mrs. Frank & Marisa Tolsma—Loveland, CO
Addison Olivia, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Dylan & Lisa Hoekstra—Loveland, CO
Tyler Bennett, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Lauren Feenstra—Redlands, CA
Rose Gwendolyn and Eden Grace twin daughters of Mr. & Mrs. David & Bri Ophoff—Southeast, MI
Dawson Elijah, son of Mr. & Mrs. Daniel & Kristen Schimmel—Southeast, MI
Nicklas Peter, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mike & Tammy Hanko—Southwest, 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:

Siege Boorsma—Byron Center, MI
Leanne Doezema—Byron Center, MI
Bryanna VanBaren—Byron Center, MI
Cassie VanPutten—Byron Center, MI
Melanie Hanko—Grace, MI
Taylor Griess—Loveland, CO
Mary Schwarz—Loveland, CO

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

Mr. Matthew Kuiper and Miss Ashlie Estabrook—Byron Center, MI
Mr. Timothy Wright and Miss Audra Miedema—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Travis Miedema and Miss Bethany Jelsma—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Noah Windemuller and Miss Jenni Elzinga—Grace, MI
Mr. Aaron Westhuis and Miss Kaitlyn Schritchfield—Loveland, CO
Mr. Andrew Sitter and Miss Katie Huizenga—Peace, IL