What is the church?

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What is the church?

This issue of Beacon Lights attempts to answer that question by explaining several aspects of the church. There are many things that characterize the church. The church is characterized by the pure preaching of the gospel. The church is described as the bride of Christ. The church is described by adherence to doctrinal purity. The church is militant. The church is triumphant. The church is universal. The church is described as the company of the elect. So many beautiful truths!

Maybe we are fluent in all of this language about the church already. Maybe we make a confession that we love the church. But does our daily walk match our confession? Just as there are many ways to describe what the church is, there are also many ways to describe what the church is not. What follows is an explanation of a few of these “is nots.” These are ways the devil uses to drive a wedge between the reality of how we live and our confession (how we say we should live). These are shortcomings that we can easily fall prey to. When we identify these things in our lives, it is indicative of hypocrisy.

The church is not only Protestant Reformed or even, more broadly, reformed. The church is universal. It is composed of members from all over the world and all periods of time throughout the history of mankind.

The church is not a den of apathetic hypocrites. If we have a problem with something someone said, we are not to go around to all of our friends and say, “You’ll never guess what Reverend So-and-so said” or “Do you know what Jim believes?”. Maybe a pastor said something that I can’t reconcile in my mind. Does that make me automatically suspicious of every sermon he preaches or every article or book he writes? How do I now talk about that pastor? Is it charitable? What should I do? Matthew 5:23-24 speaks of a situation where we might know that someone has an unresolved problem with us. We may not even know why they have a problem with us. In this passage, Jesus tells us be reconciled to the brother before we engage in worship. If that is what is required in this situation, how much more so must it be required when I am the one who has a problem with something a pastor said? All of this applies to what we say about the meetings of classis and synod. We must submit ourselves to the decisions that these bodies take. If we disagree with a decision that was taken, our response must be to go through the proper channels in order to make our concerns heard. Our response must not be to speak ill of the men involved in the decision. There is a difference in saying “You’ll never guess what Reverend So-and-so said” and “Hey, in the sermon yesterday Rev. So-and-so said ... I was going over it in my head and I can’t wrap my head around what he said about ... What do you think about it?”

The church is characterized and described by concern for the glory of God, who revealed the truth to me and to the person I may be engaged in a debate with. We must concern ourselves with seeking truth out of love for the brother. This must reveal itself practically in our conversation when we engage in such debates. Does our tone in a debate reveal that we are seeking to smash down our opponent with our abrasive and berating language and superior intellect, or does it reveal a true, loving concern regarding the implications of what our brother may erroneously believe? Sometimes we will need to say something to a brother that we know will hurt them. But always the question must be asked: “What is my motive?”. There is no such thing as concern for the truth apart from love. If we understand sound doctrine and can explain it clearly but we don’t do it out of love, our knowledge and ability is nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-2).

The church is not characterized by suspicion. If we have a problem with something someone said, we are not to go around to all of our friends and say, “You’ll never guess what Reverend So-and-so said” or “Do you know what Jim believes?”. Maybe a pastor said something that I can’t reconcile in my mind. Does that make me automatically suspicious of every sermon he preaches or every article or book he writes? How do I now talk about that pastor? Is it charitable? What should I do? Matthew 5:23-24 speaks of a situation where we might know that someone has an unresolved problem with us. We may not even know why they have a problem with us. In this passage, Jesus tells us be reconciled to the brother before we engage in worship. If that is what is required in this situation, how much more so must it be required when I am the one who has a problem with something a pastor said? All of this applies to what we say about the meetings of classis and synod. We must submit ourselves to the decisions that these bodies take. If we disagree with a decision that was taken, our response must be to go through the proper channels in order to make our concerns heard. Our response must not be to speak ill of the men involved in the decision. There is a difference in saying “You’ll never guess what Reverend So-and-so said” and “Hey, in the sermon yesterday Rev. So-and-so said ... I was going over it in my head and I can’t wrap my head around what he said about ... What do you think about it?”

The church is characterized and described by
many truths. In sinfulness, the church can also fail to live out these truths. Read about these truths in the rest of this issue of Beacon Lights. But don’t stop there. Live these truths. And may your confession be that of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 21: “I am, and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof.”

A MOST DANGEROUS BUSINESS

Editorial Dewey Engelsma

Each Sunday, we assemble at church for the purpose of worshipping God. Every element of our worship service brings praise and honor to our God. Central to the work of the church is the preaching of the gospel. In a special issue on the church, therefore, it is fitting that we focus our attention on the activity of preaching.

The world mocks the preaching of the word. The world calls it foolishness and “non-essential.” They tell us that our work as church is less important than the work of the local pawn shop, hardware store, and abortion clinic. As well they should. With the preaching God destroys their earthly wisdom and brings to nothing their understanding (1 Cor. 1:18–19). For us who believe, however, the preaching is the power of God unto salvation, and we are not ashamed of it (Rom. 1:16).

The purpose of preaching is the glory of God in Jesus Christ. God is glorified when the faith of the congregation is strengthened and the members are drawn closer to God. This is done when the word is purely preached and when the object of their faith, Christ Jesus, is set before them (1 Cor. 2:2). We are saved through the preaching (Rom. 10:17).1 Preaching opens and shuts heaven (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 31). Preaching reveals to us the will of God (Acts 20:27). Preaching binds up the hurting, liberates the prisoner, and declares freedom to the slave (Isa. 61:1–3). It feeds God’s people so that without it, the people starve and die (Acts 20:28).

Non-essential? We must never believe it. There is nothing that goes on in the world around us that is more important than the preaching of the word.

The nature of preaching is the setting forth, not of a man’s voice, but of God’s voice. God chose to speak to his people through preachers. That means when you hear the preacher setting forth the word of God in its purity and power, you are hearing the voice of God. This is difficult for us to understand, because our old nature wants only to believe what it can see and hear. Although we hear our pastor’s familiar voice, we believe by faith that the voice we hear is the voice of God himself:

John 3:34—“For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God.”

1 Thessalonians 2:13—“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”
Augustine—“Don’t listen to me, but together with me. There’s someone, you see, who says to us, ‘Come, children, listen to me,’ (Psalm 34:11). And let’s all come running, and stand there, and prick our ears.”

Luther—“Would to God that we could gradually train our hearts to believe that the preacher’s words are God’s Word...As a matter of fact, it is not an angel or a hundred thousand angels but the Divine Majesty Himself that is preaching there” (Luther’s Works, Sermons on the Gospel of Saint John).

Calvin—“God has willed it that we always receive his Word from the lips of men, as though he himself had appeared from heaven” (commentary on 1 John 4:1).

It is for this reason that not only preaching, but also the hearing, has been described as “a most dangerous business” (Luther the Preacher, Meuser, 13). What makes the preaching dangerous is not the fact that some in the congregation might criticize it. What makes the hearing of preaching dangerous is not that a sermon might be difficult to listen to and follow through to the end. Those things are child’s play compared to the real danger. In the preaching and the hearing, we are dealing with Jehovah God himself, and what will you do with God in the preaching? (Heb. 4:13).²

The very real danger we face in this matter is that when we oppose the chastisements that come from the pulpit, it is not just the minister that we oppose, no matter how “base” he may appear to us (2 Cor. 10:1). We resist Jesus Christ, who is the word being taught, and we resist God who sent him (Luke 10:16).

² The two-fold response can be seen in the reply to the messengers Hezekiah sent out, bidding Israel to come and worship God in Jerusalem. Some “laughed them to scorn, and mocked them,” while others “humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem” (2 Chron. 30:10–11).
Be an attentive hearer of the word. Listen carefully, with eagerness to the word you are being fed, and receive it with joy. Just another activity? Hardly! Here we have “all heavenly treasures so applied to us that they be no less ours than Christ’s himself” (Calvin, *Summary of Doctrine Concerning the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments*).

Another temptation is that we do not listen with discernment. Prof. George Ophoff spoke of the believer in the pew having “Reformed antennae.” Just as some animals have antennae that are acutely sensitive to smell, touch, and even sound so they can pick up the slightest disruption around them, so the spiritually alert, well-trained believer is often the best suited to pick up theological distortions from the pulpit. This should not be a surprise to us, neither should this intimidate us. We have an anointing from the Holy Spirit and know all things (1 John 2:20).

For our example in fighting against both of these temptations, we ought to look to our Berean brothers and sisters: “These (the Bereans) 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” (Acts 17:11).

The third temptation we hearers of the word face is perhaps the most serious. We enter the sanctuary with pride. We sit down in our usual spots and feel comfortable. We are satisfied with our lives, our businesses, our family, our friends, our vacations, our church, our school, and our spiritual state. We would never say it out loud, but it is written all over us: “We aren’t so bad after all. Life is good.”

And then the rebuke comes.

A rebuke that hits a little too close to home.

We are okay with the minister pointing out the errors of the Roman Catholic Church, but how do we feel when the rebuke seems aimed directly at... me? Oh, how our pride rebels against this word of chastisement and will do anything to escape it!

Yes, chastisement is painful. It is meant to be (Heb. 12:11). It stings, cuts, and exposes us in our sin and misery: the misery of the sins which plague us now, but also the misery of the condemnation we bear in Adam. A mountain of sin and guilt, from which there is only one escape. The preaching of the gospel takes that sin and guilt and washes it all away in the blood of our Savior, so we stand before God now, and for eternity, as perfect and pure as Jesus Christ himself.

Chastisement is done out of love for you. I don’t mean by this that your minister loves you and therefore he rebukes you, true as that may be. No, it is God who chastens through the preaching, and be assured the minister felt the sting of that rebuke in his study while he prepared, and he feels it during the sermon as well. God rebukes his children. If you receive no rebuke and no chastisement, then you are no son of God (Heb 12:6–8).

The instinct does well up in us to flee these rebukes. Before we try to run, however, consider the alternative. Let’s look to Calvin again for instruction:

Those who cannot bear to be reproved had better look for another schoolmaster than God. There are many who will not stand it: “What! Is this the way to teach? Ho! We want to be won by sweetness”—These are our sensitive folk who cannot bear a single reproof to be offered to them. And why? “Ho! We want to be taught in another style.” Well then, go to the devil’s school! He will flatter you enough—and destroy you.

What should our response be to chastisement? “Believers humble themselves and are willing to be treated severely so that they may profit in God’s school” (*Calvin’s Preaching*, 14). Rebukes come when God determines we need them, not when we think the time is right (2 Tim. 4:2).

The very real danger we face in this matter is that when we oppose the chastisements that come from the pulpit, it is not just the minister that we oppose, no matter how “base” he may appear to us (2 Cor. 10:1). We resist Jesus Christ, who is the word being taught, and we resist God who sent him (Luke 10:16).

How then should we approach the sanctuary of God to hear the preaching? We must come with awe and humility—reverence for who God is and humility, knowing who we are in ourselves. Receive the word brought as from God himself. Give thanks to God for the faithful preaching that makes God everything and man nothing.

What is the end of the whole matter? What makes for a God-glorifying, flock-edifying sermon? What should be the burden on the heart of the preacher and the demand on the lips of the congregation? Simply this—“Sir, we would see Jesus” (John 12:21).
Of all the pictures in God’s word that describe the church of Jesus Christ, there are two that are surpassing in beauty and joy. The church is often described as the sheep of God, or the flock of Jesus Christ. The beauty of this description of the church is that it pictures the gracious and tender care of the Good Shepherd for his sheep. Its happiness is that it gives to our hearts the solid comfort of belonging to this sheepfold of our Lord, that our Good Shepherd will always take care of us, providing us everything that we need and keeping us forever safe in his hand.

Very similar is the inspired description of the church as the bride of Christ. There are many similarities between the two. Both beautifully describe the care of Christ for the church. Both emphasize the blessedness of simply belonging to our Lord. Both speak clearly of the gracious relationship of the covenant. Just as the shepherd calls the sheep to be his own, so the husband calls the wife to himself. He takes the initiative. The blessedness is in following him, being with him, and rejoicing always to know his leading and guiding.

Yet, there is also a great difference between these two descriptions of the church. While the description of the church as sheep speaks of the great need of the sheep (prone to wander and stray), the description of the church as the bride of Christ speaks of the intimate love and holy union of love and fellowship between Christ and the church. In fact, we are hard-pressed to find any description of the church that comes anywhere near the beauty and glory portrayed by the church as the bride of Christ.

As we consider this beauty and joy of Christ and his bride, we have great cause for rejoicing to be members of the bride of Christ and to share together in our love for our husband, Jesus Christ. We also have every reason to keep and guard ourselves in this love, out of our gratitude that our God has graciously chosen us to be part of the church as the faithful and committed bride of Christ.

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It is helpful to consider the passage that speaks most clearly of the church as the bride of Christ, Ephesians 5:22–33. The heart of this passage, in speaking of how husbands ought to love their wives and how wives ought to submit themselves to their husbands, is the gospel of the work of Jesus Christ on behalf of his bride. That work we find described in the words of Ephesians 5:25–26: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” Christ gave himself in his very life to wash the church in his blood, with that blood to sanctify and cleanse her.

This same work of Christ toward the church is also pictured in the Old Testament, in Ezekiel 16:9. The prior verse speaks of God entering into a covenant with Israel, to make that people his wife. The following verses speak of God’s lavishly clothing Israel as his wife, and that all her beauty and comeliness he put upon her, to make her outstanding among the heathen in beauty and glory. The great difference in the passages is that in the Old Testament passage God’s care for his bride leaves her without excuse for her unfaithfulness to her husband, and under severe judgment for her unfaithfulness (vv. 27, 35–43). Yet he will abide faithful graciously to restore a remnant forever to be his faithful bride (vv. 62–63).

Many other places in the Bible use this figure. Psalm 45 celebrates the wedding between Christ and his church, written in praise of the bridegroom. The whole book of the Song of Solomon celebrates the intimate love of Christ for his church and of...
the church for her husband. They seek, find, and then rest in one another’s love. Several parables of Christ use different facets of weddings and marriage to explain the kingdom of heaven. The call of the gospel is described as a call to attend a wedding feast (Matt. 22:1–14). There is also the parable of the virgins in Matthew 25:1–13. One of the major themes that unites the book of Revelation is the coming of Christ as the bridegroom to save his bride from the evil grasp of the world and to bring her to heaven, to enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb and to live forever in the bliss of heaven, the Lamb and his bride together forever. Glorious are the words of Revelation 21:2: “And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

Several passages of scripture are worth noting more closely. According to Romans 7:2–4, the church has become dead to the law by the body of Christ, in his death. As a result of his death, the church is no longer married to the law, having had the law as her husband. By Jesus’ death the church is freed to be married “to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” The apostle Paul expressed his zeal for the Corinthians’ fidelity to Christ against all departure from him with these words in 2 Corinthians 11:2: “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” The last is from the mouth of John the Baptist, answering the complaints of his disciples that Jesus was gaining more disciples than he. “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:29–30).

Putting these passages together tells us of the wonder of the church as the bride of Christ.

First, the Bible with this figure describes the history of the church of Jesus Christ, the beloved bride. She has her very beginning from the love of Christ. He redeemed her to wash her in his precious blood. By that washing he cleanses her heart that she loves her husband in return, and gives herself to him in committed devotion. As long as she lives on the earth she is the espoused bride of Christ, according to 2 Corinthians 11:2. According to Revelation 19:9, when Jesus comes again there will be “the marriage supper of the Lamb.” While on earth she is cruelly mistreated and abused by the world, which arouses the deep anger of her husband toward her abusers. She is the target of unlawful suitors, the devil, the world, and her own flesh, that would seduce her from faithfulness to Christ. She must also resist the temptation to commit fornication by idolatry, centering all her affection on her husband, keeping before her the day of her wedding feast. Keeping her eyes always on the coming of her husband from heaven in glory, her happiest day will be when he comes to deliver her from all her foes and tribulation and to take her to himself. She looks forward with heavenly delight to her endless life with her husband, to enjoy his companionship forever.

This same description allows us to understand also the history of our Lord Jesus Christ with his heart for his bride in the forefront. In the very same love he showed in giving his life for her, he continues to love her so deeply and so intimately. When you hear him say, “Behold, I come quickly,” you must hear him say that with all his love and affection for his bride. He desires fervently and ardently to come and take his bride, be married, and go on living forever in wedded bliss. But first the bride must be finished and completed. Her suffering must be fulfilled for the completeness of her joy in her wonderful deliverance. In that intimate love he longs for her. He prays ardently as the mediator to his Father on behalf of his bride. In that love he prepares a home for her and makes all things ready for his marriage supper with her. He works in his execution of all the will of God at God’s right hand in order that the day may soon come when he will be with his beloved bride forever.

Second, this precious description signifies the intimate communion and fellowship between Christ and his church. Christ delights to know his church thoroughly and completely, as a husband delights to know his precious wife. The church is also so enriched with the love of her husband that she loves him in return. She loves him out of the love that he has bestowed on her. She loves him also for all the love that he has bestowed. She delights to explore his love, because the more she knows about it, the more fervently she loves him in return. She turns to him with passionate affection, giving herself whole-heartedly to her Lord. She simply cannot wait until she can be with her husband forever, to live with him and to be perfected in order to love him forever with all her heart and soul.

Third, this blessed description also speaks of the unity of the church from a very special viewpoint. This intimate, fervent, and ardent love of the bride must have its place in the heart of every member of the bride. The love of every child of God is the love
of the bride for the bridegroom. The loving submission in the heart of every member of Christ is the loving submission of the bride to the bridegroom. The longing of the individual believer for his precious Savior and his coming again is the longing of the bride for the bridegroom. How blessed we are in that love! What a blessed and marvelous gift to cultivate and protect!

There are especially two points of application for young people from this description of the church as the bride of Christ.

The first point of application has to do with your affections. What do you do with them? Where do you steer them?

It is too easy to divide them, to think that some affection we can have for the world, for the things of this world and friends of this world, and then other for spiritual things, for the word of God, and for the church. How helpful it is to have this description of the church as the bride of Christ! The bride turns away from all other suitors with disgust and revulsion. How could she possibly give her love and affection to another than her espoused husband? May we be filled with the thoughts expressed in the words of the apostle Paul and John the Baptist we considered above, that we be jealous for the husband, to see that he alone is loved and followed. Out of that holy jealousy may we direct our hearts toward our husband. May we also help our fellow young people out of that same jealousy. Out of that same jealousy for Christ alone, we must also be vigilant against such other seducers as heresies (2 Cor. 11:2 in context), and even against the law as a rival to Christ (Rom. 7:2–4).

The second point of application has to do with how we view marriage, and friendships and dating with a view to marriage.

Marriage is so very important to the church of Jesus Christ. The marriages of godly men to godly women are so vital for the proper raising up of the future generations of the church in God’s covenant mercies. Such marriages also provide the framework of stability for godly parents and children to commit themselves to the church with the same lifetime commitment practiced in marriage. In godly marriages, husbands and wives help each other to become better Christians, as fellow pilgrims journeying to Zion.

But it is also true that godly marriages, where believing husbands and wives live together by the grace of Jesus Christ, bring their happiness and satisfaction in their marriages to the loveliness and beauty of the one great marriage between Christ and his bride, the church. This is a powerful reason why young people must desire and demand one thing above all in their dating and marriage: true faith and its fruit of godliness in prospective spouses.

So much encouragement for walking in the truth of the church as the bride of Christ is found in consideration of this blessed truth. Contemplate that marriage. Consider the glory, the wonder, the grace, and the majesty of your bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. Meditate upon the glory, the wonder, the beauty, and the loveliness of the bride. Ponder the wonderful joy of the wedding feast in the celebration of the bride’s complete deliverance. Think about the everlasting bliss of the joy of their everlasting life together, forever delighting in one another’s love. So be strengthened in the pursuit of that end, as the blessed bride of Christ!

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Rev. Nathan Langerak

THE CHURCH MILITANT, LATENT, AND TRIUMPHANT

The terms church militant, triumphant, and latent are used to describe a threefold distinction in the church of Christ. The one church of Christ can be described as she exists throughout history in three different states. A threefold distinction in the church was often used by the medieval church theologians. However, they spoke of the church militant, triumphant, and dormant. According to Rome, the church dormant was that aspect of the church that supposedly suffered in purgatory between their death and final glorification. With the Reformation’s rejection of works righteousness and its attendant doctrine of purgatory, the reformers spoke of the church militant and triumphant. A proper understanding of
the definition of the church also requires that we speak of the church latent.

The description of the church as militant, triumphant, and latent follows from the understanding of the church as the complete number of the elect that make up Christ’s universal body. Christ is the head. The church is his body. That church is composed of the total number of the elect that God appointed to salvation in eternity. Rome made the church the pope and his hierarchy. The church is wherever the pope is. The church, then, is basically synonymous with the Roman Catholic institution. Arminianism, with its doctrine of man’s free will, defines the church as those who accept the offered salvation and persevere to the end. Man’s will defines the church.

The Reformed faith, following men like John Hus and John Wycliffe, brought the definition of the church back to scripture. The church is the company of the predestinated. Election is the heart of the church. The church cannot be understood apart from the doctrine of election, and election cannot be understood apart from the doctrine of the church. Election appoints individuals out of the human race to salvation as the church. By means of election God determined the body of Christ, the church, and gave to each individual his place in that universal body. The gathering of the church is the gathering of the elect. Election controls the gathering of the church. Election determines when and where those elect are gathered and brings to pass all that is necessary for their gathering into communion with Christ by faith. No church or denomination or religious organization at any point or time in history exhausts the innumerable multitude gathered throughout history from all nations.

The understanding of the church as the company of the predestinated is found in the Reformed creeds. The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 21 says about the church, “That the Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself...a church chosen to everlasting life.” The Belgic Confession in Article 27 refers to the church in the perilous times of Ahab, that “the Lord reserved unto Him seven thousand men, who had not bowed their knees to Baal,” a remnant that the apostle Paul in Romans 11:5 calls “a remnant according to the election of grace.”

The Reformed creeds, in their understanding of the church as a “chosen church” and an elect remnant, simply base themselves on scripture. Referring to the church of God in the Old Testament, Moses teaches Israel in Deuteronomy 7:6 that “the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself.” In the great New Testament book of the Bible on the church, the apostle Paul teaches the church in Ephesians 1:4–5 that she has been “chosen...before the foundation of the world” and “predestinated...according to the good pleasure of his will.” The church is one great, innumerable multitude chosen to salvation and gathered into fellowship with Christ throughout history.

When we speak of the church militant, we are speaking of that aspect of the church that is alive on the earth at any one time in history, is joined to Christ by faith, and is fighting the good fight of faith in the world against sin, Satan, and the whole world. The church is a warring church. She has been called out of the world to which she belongs by nature. She has been called into communion with Christ by faith. Enmity with the world is the result. To be the friend of God is to be the enemy of the world, sin, and Satan. The love of God demands that she hate the world. So the character of her life in the world of sin and darkness is one of constant warfare. The Heidelberg Catechism describes the life of the church militant in its explanation of the church’s petition, “deliver us from evil,” in Lord’s Day 52: “since our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh cease not to assault us, do Thou therefore preserve and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes...”

The church triumphant means that aspect of the church that throughout history has finished their course of warfare on the earth and is glorified in heaven—some in soul, a few in body and soul, such as Elijah and Moses. The church triumphant is living and reigning with Jesus Christ in conscious glory in heaven.

The truth of the church triumphant is closely connected with the doctrine of the intermediate state. The intermediate state is the state of the saints after physical death and before the final resurrection. The false doctrine of soul sleep denied that there was such a thing as the church triumphant. According to that false doctrine, when the saints die, their souls enter a state of unconscious existence until the final resurrection. Rome denied that the church triumphant included most believers. Most believers entered purgatory at their death to suffer punishment and to pay for their sins. The Reformed faith teaches that the saints at their death are immediately taken up to be with Christ in glory. The body of the
saint goes into the grave, and the soul of the saint is resurrected to heavenly glory. Christ assured the thief on the cross that he would be with Christ in Paradise that day. That word of Christ also refutes the Roman Catholic fiction of purgatory. If there was a man that needed purgatory, surely it was the thief on the cross, but he went immediately to be with Christ.

The book of Revelation pictures the intermediate state of believers in many places in the book, but especially in Revelation 20:4–5: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God...and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” John sees the souls of those who had been beheaded for Christ’s sake. The church of Christ in her warfare in the earth always suffers some form of martyrdom for Christ’s sake. We are killed all the day long in many different ways. At the end of earthly life the believer is taken up to live and reign with Christ. The church triumphs over sin, death, the world, and the devil and his hosts in this life. She enjoys conscious glory and perfection in soul with Christ in heaven. This state lasts until the coming of Christ, when the whole elect church, gathered and glorified body and soul by the wonder of the resurrection, becomes the church triumphant.

Controversial is whether or not there is such a thing as a church latent. The church latent is that aspect of the elect body of Christ that is not yet born, or that is not yet gathered into communion with Christ by faith. Not denying the truth of election, some argue that the church can only refer to those that are joined in communion with Christ by faith, whether on the earth or in glory. Others deny that there is a church latent because they deny the truth of election.

Although the words church latent are not used in scripture, the concept of the church latent is found in scripture. For instance, God spoke to the apostle Paul during his mission labors in Corinth in Acts 18:9–10: “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.” The people in that city were the Lord’s people. They were the Lord’s people by virtue of divine election. That divine election constituted them as members of God’s church from eternity. They had eternal and real communion with Christ by election, though they were not yet members of Christ in time by faith. The Lord’s election of them demanded that they be gathered into communion with Christ by faith, that is, that the eternal reality of their communion with Christ be made temporal reality in their union with Christ by faith. This is the church latent in every age.

There is one elect church in every age. The church latent becomes the church militant. The church militant becomes the church triumphant until finally all God’s church has been gathered and glorified, and together that church, as an innumerable throng, gives glory to God and to the Lamb in the new heaven and new earth, world without end.

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Prof. David J. Engelsma

What Makes a Church Reformed?

Introduction
The question is not, “Who makes a church Reformed?” The answer to this question would be, “the Spirit of Jesus Christ.” By his Spirit, Jesus Christ himself, who is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23), creates a group of believers and their children as his body in a certain place at a certain time in connection with qualified men as elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3). As the creation of Jesus himself, this congregation preaches the pure gospel of holy scripture, administers the sacraments rightly, and exercises Christian discipline upon the unfaithful, the disobedient, and the impenitently unholy (Belgic Confession, Article 29).

But the question is, “What makes a church Reformed?” The sense of the question is, “What are the characteristics of a church that is truly Reformed, especially in view of the sad fact that there are
many churches that call themselves ‘Reformed’ (or Presbyterian) that are not, in fact, Reformed at all, or that are departing from those truths, or losing those characteristics that make a church truly Reformed?”

The question has enormous practical importance in light of the fact that the young readers of this magazine, like many others, have the calling from God to be members of a Reformed church.

The question that is the title of this article, and therefore this article, are of urgent practical significance because there are such churches—many of them—and there are such developments—many of them—in our day. One result is that members of these churches, especially the young people, are being deceived. They suppose that they are members of a Reformed church when, in fact, they are not. Members of churches where these developments are taking place ignore the falling away of these churches from that which makes them Reformed simply because these churches continue to carry the name “Reformed.”

**Doctrinal According to the Confessions**

What makes a church Reformed, first and foremost, is that it faithfully preaches and teaches (including the content of its writings) the truths of the Bible as these truths are expressed and summarized in the three confessions: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt (or, for Presbyterians, the Westminster Standards). So vitally important is faithfulness to the confessions in a church’s teaching for making and keeping a church Reformed that the Reformed churches bind all their officebearers by a solemn oath to embrace the creeds, and never to teach contrary to them. The young people who read this article ought to take this opportunity carefully to read the document that binds ministers, elders, and deacons to the creeds: the Formula of Subscription in the back of the Psalter.

But it is also possible, and, in fact, is a reality today, that a church has its officebearers sign the Formula of Subscription without enforcing its requirements. In this case, the minister is allowed to preach (and write) contrary to the confessions. The elders and the entire congregation (which also is responsible for the preaching and writing) do not discipline the minister for his heretical preaching and writing. In view of the heavy emphasis of the confessions on the doctrine of salvation by God’s grace alone, without the will and works of the sinner, an important example of this departure (apostasy) of a church that has the name “Reformed,” indeed the most important example that I could adduce, is that ministers teach that salvation is conditional, that is, dependent upon the sinner; or that God is gracious in Jesus Christ to everyone and offers salvation to everyone in the sincere desire to save all humans (which necessarily implies that the salvation of a sinner is the act of the sinner himself); or that justification is by faith and by the sinner’s own works.

A church that teaches that salvation is partly the work of the sinner himself, or that salvation depends in part on the sinner, and a church in which the elders and congregation permit such teaching, is no Reformed church at all, regardless of the name on the bulletin. It is Arminian (see the Canons of Dordt 2, error and rejection 3).

When a young person is deciding his or her church membership, he or she must decide on the basis of the church’s proclaiming and confessing the doctrines of the gospel of grace. Only then is the church a Reformed church, and only then will the person be Reformed in membership.

**Doctrinal, Period!**

There is still another criterion in regard to sound doctrine. This is that a church preaches and teaches sound doctrine at all, and condemns false doctrine as she does so. It is possible that, although a church does not teach false doctrine, it nevertheless fails to teach sound doctrine. The minister declines to teach doctrine in his sermons. All his sermons are “practical”: how to live, especially how to live in love for the neighbor. The minister has made up his mind that he will not be a doctrinal, but a “practical,” preacher.

**When a young person is deciding his or her church membership, he or she must decide on the basis of the church’s proclaiming and confessing the doctrines of the gospel of grace. Only then is the church a Reformed church, and only then will the person be Reformed in membership.**

A church is Reformed only if the preaching is doctrinal. If the preaching is only “practical,” Sunday after Sunday, sermon after sermon, that church is not Reformed. The gospel of Jesus Christ, as rightly proclaimed by a Reformed church, is doctrinal. Because it is doctrinal, it also necessarily is polemical, that is, it exposes, condemns, and warns against
false doctrines, especially those that threaten the church at the present time. Refusal to be polemical is not the manifestation of love on the part of a peace-loving minister. It is the symptom of the despising of the doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

My seminary professor, Herman Hoeksema, once exclaimed, “What the church needs, in the first place, is doctrine; what it needs, in the second place, is more doctrine; what it needs, in the third place, is still more doctrine.” Although he was referring explicitly to the church that deposed him for defending the gospel of grace, what he said applies to all churches always: the church needs, the church is founded upon, the church lives by doctrine. And without doctrine, the genuine practice of the members of the church withers away and dies. At best, it becomes mere morality, a kind of Pharsical outward show.

The church needs sound doctrine in the catechism classes. You young people must be thoroughly taught doctrine especially in the class of “Essentials of Reformed Doctrine.” Such teaching makes a church Reformed in the future. By her minister, the church must apply herself to the teaching of doctrine in this class, both by his thorough preparation and by his lively teaching. The young people must attend this class as though their life and the life of the church depended on it. They do.

**Machen on the Doctrinal Church**

In his classic book, Christianity & Liberalism, J. Gresham Machen demonstrated that the fundamental difference between Christianity—not simply Reformed, or Presbyterian, Christianity, but Christianity—and unbelieving liberalism is that Christianity is doctrinal, whereas liberalism is practical—all about “Christian living.” “Christianity is…life, not a doctrine,” says the liberal. Responds the Christian: “Christian doctrine lies at the very roots of faith.”

In a new biography of another orthodox theologian who, with Machen, opposed the unchristian liberalism in the Presbyterian church in the early 1900s, the author describes the main thinking of the liberals this way: “Christianity [is] a life and not a doctrine” (Geerhardus Vos, by Danny Olinger, 2018, 238). Liberals in the church despise and oppose sound doctrine because they are enemies of Christianity.

The liberal theologian preaches “the modern exaltation of ‘life’” at the expense of “doctrine.” He is fond of attacking emphasis on doctrine as “dead orthodoxy.”

“[This non-doctrinal] liberalism is not Christianity.” This is a warning that all “conservative” Reformed churches need to hear as much today as they did in the early 20th century.

In defending Christianity as doctrinal, Machen argued that Christianity is also necessarily “polemical”—something that liberalism despises, denies, and opposes with a passion. “Truth cannot be stated clearly at all without being set over against error...A large part of the New Testament is polemic.”

**Discipline**

As I have already suggested, what makes a church Reformed is also church discipline. This is the excommunication in various stages of those who teach false doctrine and who fail to live the holy life that sound doctrine produces.

If a church tolerates heretics or young people who openly, impenitently fornicate (by “shacking up”), this church is not Reformed, even though it excuses itself by appealing to its love for the minister or for the young people who are living together outside of marriage. The obvious truth about such a church is that it does not love God. Does it need to be said? A church that does not love God is not Reformed.

With reference once again to the life and history of Machen, the “liberal” church does not refuse to exercise discipline altogether. It does discipline. It disciplines J. Gresham Machen and those who like him uncompromisingly confess the truth of the gospel, condemning false doctrine, and who expose the liberal church’s other evils.

**Observance of the Sacraments**

A Reformed church has the highest regard for Christ’s two sacraments: baptism, by which those (elect) who are baptized are united to Christ, and the Lord’s supper, by which believers feed on Jesus Christ.

One aspect of a Reformed church’s high regard for baptism is its urgent calling of the parents to rear their baptized children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord Jesus (Eph. 6:4). This includes the church’s preaching and the elders’ exhorting the Christian school according to Article 21 of the Reformed Church Order of Dordt: “The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant.” A Reformed church is covenantal in that it confesses and holds dear the establishment of the covenant with the children of believers. The extension of the covenant with the children carries with it the calling
The relationship between the church and the state is big news these days. God has made it big news by sending a coronavirus pestilence upon the whole earth. In response to this pestilence, government officials in most states have forbidden their citizens from assembling in public gatherings. The purpose of these orders is to prevent the spread of the pestilence and thus to protect the lives of the citizens. In many cases, the government has included the church in its ban on public gatherings. Some churches disobeyed the government and assembled anyway. In one case, the police came and issued tickets to everyone who came to church. In another case, the pastor of the church was arrested and put in jail. The mayor of New York City threatened to close down the churches permanently if they did not obey. News organizations are reporting these things and our nation is facing the question of the relationship between the church and the state when it comes to worship. May the state ban the assembly of the church for worship? And if it does, must the church obey the state’s ban on the church’s assembly for worship?

As covenant young people, we are interested in these questions too. In fact, these questions are vital for us! They have to do with our relationship to the state in the matter of worship. These questions are not merely an interesting discussion topic for us, but we must have definite answers. Let us take each question in turn and make our stand on the word of God.

Question: May the state ban the assembly of the church for worship?
Answer: No, absolutely not. The state has no say whatsoever over the worship of the church. This applies to government officials at every level. The president of the United States may not forbid the church from worshipping. The governor of a state may not forbid the church from worshipping. Nor may an international health department like the World Health Organization. Nor may the county health department. Nor may the city mayor. Nor may the local police force. Nor may a legislature. Nor may a judge. No state official of any standing whatever has any authority to ban the assembly of the church for worship.

This applies to any reason that someone might think of for banning the assembly of the church. It
certainly would be wrong for the state to persecute the church in hatred for the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this case, the state would do what the rulers of the Jews did to Peter and John. “And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). The state may not ban the church’s assembly out of hatred for the gospel. But it also would be wrong for the state to ban the assembly of the church for any other reason. The state may not ban the assembly of the church for public safety reasons. It may not ban the assembly of the church to slow the spread of a pandemic. It may not ban the assembly of the church to preserve the health of the citizens. It may not even ban the assembly of the church to save the lives of the citizens. There is no reason whatever that would give the state the authority to prohibit the assembly of the church for worship.

There are two principles that make this clear. The first principle has to do with the nature of the church. The church is the body and bride of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22–23; 5:22–33). Therefore, the church is not an earthly institution, but a spiritual and heavenly institution. Although the church is gathered on the earth, meets in earthly buildings, and is made up of God’s elect who live their earthly lives as citizens of earthly kingdoms, the church is not earthly. It is not of this world, but has its source, its existence, and its nature from its heavenly head, Jesus Christ.

The second principle has to do with the nature of the church’s assembling for worship. The church’s assembling for worship is a holy and heavenly meeting with God himself. The church’s assembling for worship is unique and distinct from every other assembly of men on earth. It is not like the book club at the library. It is not even like the Bible study on Wednesday night. In the assembly of the church as church for worship, God himself brings his congregation before his own face. Leviticus 23 calls the assembly of the congregation for the feasts “holy convocations.” Exodus 39:32 calls the tabernacle the “tent of meeting” (translated in the KJV as “tent of the congregation”). Hebrews 10 teaches that we as the church in worship “enter into the holiest” (v. 19), that is, into heaven itself, through the flesh and blood of Jesus. This flesh and blood of our Lord is the “new and living way” for the New Testament church in her worship to come right into God’s presence (v. 20). This is one reason it is so important for us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (v. 25).

These two principles show that the church is a spiritual and heavenly institution and that her worship is a spiritual and heavenly activity of meeting with God. Therefore, it is not only unlawful, but impossible, for the civil state to try to rule over the worship of the church. The civil government may rule over our earthly church buildings by imposing fire codes, and over our earthly church property by imposing or exempting us from taxes; but the civil government may not and cannot touch the spiritual activity of worship by the heavenly body of Christ. This position is implied in Article 28 of our Church Order, which recognizes the civil government’s authority when it comes to the church’s earthly
possessions and order, but also firmly maintains the absolute authority of Jesus Christ over his spiritual body. “The consistory shall take care that the churches, for the possession of their property and the peace and order of their meetings, can claim the protection of the authorities; it should be well understood, however, that for the sake of peace and material possession they may never suffer the royal government of Christ over His church to be in the least infringed upon.”

Question: If the state does ban the assembly of the church for worship, must the church obey?
Answer: No, absolutely not. The church is not obligated to obey any rule of the state that limits or prohibits her worship. If the state says only 50 people may assemble, the church may assemble with 30 or 80 or 500 people. If the state says there may be no public assemblies, the church may call the entire congregation to worship in the public assembly of the church. The church in her worship is under no obligation whatever to obey the state’s ban on public assembling. For worship, she may disobey the state’s ban with a clear conscience before God.

The principle here is the Christian’s obedience to the civil state in all lawful things. Civil government is an earthly institution with very real authority from God himself. The government officials are ordained of God (Rom. 13:1). Our calling as citizens of the United States, as citizens of our respective states, and as citizens of our local communities is to be subject to these authorities (Rom. 13:1). We are forbidden from resisting these authorities, which would be to resist the ordinance of God and to receive to ourselves damnation (Rom. 13:2). We are required to honor civil government in all things without exception, and to obey civil government in all things that do not conflict with the word of God. As Reformed Christians, our heartfelt confession is that “it is the bounden duty of every one, of what state, quality, or condition soever he may be, to subject himself to the magistrates; to pay tribute, to show due honor and respect to them, and to obey them in all things which are not repugnant to the Word of God; to supplicate for them in their prayers, that God may rule and guide them in all their ways, and that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (Belgic Confession, Article 36).

However, the authority that God has granted to the state does not extend to the worship of the church. When the civil government by executive order forbids the congregation of Jesus Christ from assembling for worship, it infringes on the royal government of Christ over his church. God says, Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together (Heb. 10:25). The civil government says, Forsake the assembling of yourselves together. We recognize that the government is not forbidding us from preaching the gospel. We recognize that the government is not explicitly persecuting the church. We also recognize that the government’s motivation is the honorable desire to contain COVID-19. Nevertheless, in banning the church from worship, the government has usurped authority that belongs to Christ alone. The state has required something, even unwittingly, that is “repugnant to the Word of God” (Belgic Confession, Article 36).

The church’s response to this must be, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye” (Acts 4:19). Our response must be, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Regardless of the government’s reason for denying the church her call to worship, the church must not cede that authority. She “may never suffer the royal government of Christ over His church to be in the least infringed upon” (Church Order, Article 28).

Our disobedience of the state’s ban is not rebellion. Even when we must disobey, we may never rebel. We still submit to the government’s authority, even though we may not obey the executive order. Submitting to the state means that we would not prevent a police officer from investigating our actions. If there were a penalty for noncompliance, we would suffer that penalty. We will also obey the executive order in non-worship events, such as refraining from group assemblies in our own personal lives, closing of our schools, postponing events, and the like. But in matters of worship, we must obey God rather than men.

Only the church itself, under the authority of Jesus Christ, may decide matters of worship. It may do this for reasons of persecution or the safety of the members (Matt. 10:23). The individual child of God is also free to stay away from church for his own protection and physical safety, as David left Jerusalem in his flight from Absalom (2 Sam. 15). Under the authority of our head and by his wisdom, the church itself may decide to cancel services. The church is called to love our neighbor. Although the state overstepped its authority in forbidding the church’s worship, the purpose behind the ban was to minimize the transmission of coronavirus. As the church, we are also interested in limiting the transmission of this disease. We may not willfully expose ourselves to danger (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 40,
WHAT IS THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH?


There is confusion among young people today about the mission of the church. This confusion is being spread by “Reformed” colleges and universities who are presenting cultural redemption, premillennialism, and leftist political philosophy in the garb of Reformed Christianity. Buzzwords like “shalom,” “vocational mission,” and “agents of renewal” fly from lecterns thick and fast. These words and their accompanying worldview are presented with many twisted scriptural proofs. Falsely, they are presented as the worldview of Christ, as the essence of Reformed theology, and as the mission of the church.

In an effort to protect Reformed young people from this confusion, authors Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert wrote What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission. Understandable, organized, and thorough, the book does an excellent job of critiquing popular errors about the mission of the church and setting forward biblical principles in their place.

From beginning to end, the reader will enjoy the authors’ emphasis on correct scriptural interpretation. In my opinion, this is the book’s greatest strength. After a brief introductory chapter, the authors dive right in to examining the most-quoted Bible passages that are twisted to support erroneous views of the church’s mission in this world. Exegeting each passage in simple language, the authors look at the biblical context and the grammar of each passage to find its true meaning. By doing this, the authors demonstrate that in both the Old and New Testaments, God’s mission on earth is not social transformation for all nations, but rather the forgiveness of sins for a particular people. Since Christ’s mission on earth was gospel-centered, argue the authors, the church’s mission should be gospel-centered as well. The following quotation gives a good sense of the prevailing content and tone of the book:

“We know this sounds heartless, but it’s true:...

Yes, the relationship between the church and the state in the matter of worship is big news these days. As covenant young people, let us take our stand in this big news upon the word of God and our confessions.

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it simply was not Jesus’s driving ambition to heal the sick and meet the needs of the poor… The mission of Jesus is not service broadly conceived, but the proclamation of the gospel through teaching, the corroboration of the gospel through signs and wonders, and the accomplishment of the gospel in death and resurrection (pp. 55, 57).

In the chapters that follow this, the authors give a general overview of the Bible, demonstrating that in all their parts, the scriptures have the person and work of Christ, not the formation of an earthly utopia, as their focus. In opposition to the popular teachings of many Christian colleges and universities, the authors also go to great lengths to deny that it is the church’s mission to “partner” with God in extending a “cultural kingdom”:

…that’s the really glorious thing about the gospel of Jesus. Everything we have—and everything we will ever have—is given to us. We will not have earned it; we will not have built it. We will simply have received it all. When eternity finally comes, we will live in a land that was made and created for us, under a kingdom that was won and established for us, by a Savior who died and was resurrected for us. Put simply, the gospel is the good news of salvation, in all its parts, that is for us, and not in the least by us [emphasis theirs] (p. 208).

Besides giving a good overview of the gospel message and the mission of the church, the authors do an excellent job of giving biblical guidance about common questions that young adults think about in college, such as: Does the Bible say anything about capitalism and socialism? Does the Old Testament advocate the formation of a welfare state? What is the concept of shalom, and is it biblical? What does the Bible say about the continuity between this present earth and the new heavens and new earth? As a Christian, what are my responsibilities toward the panhandlers downtown? The reader will notice with appreciation that in answering these questions, the authors affirm the Pentateuch as literal history, they explicitly present an amillennial view of the end times, they define the “kingdom” of God as “the redemptive reign of God over His people,” and they take the truths of sin and hell seriously.

For all its strengths and usefulness, I did notice three weaknesses in the book. First, the authors fail to recognize that the errors they are warning against have direct roots in the false teaching of common grace. As a consequence of this, the discerning reader will detect sentiments of common grace here and there in the book (with the actual words “common grace” appearing once as a partial explanation of why capitalism has worked out so well for so many countries). Second, in three places in the book, the authors apply the image of God to all people, rather than to only God’s people. My third criticism of the book is more mild than the first two, and that is that in my opinion, the authors do not write with all the urgency and warning that I think their important topic deserves today. I do grant that this may be an effort on their part to apply the exhortation of Colossians 4:5–6.

Despite this, What Is the Mission of the Church? stands as a readable, organized collection of proof texts for a (truly) Reformed worldview. Full of biblical principles and practical applications, it will help the reader (young and old alike) maintain a scriptural outlook on politics, charity work, and the true mission of the church here on earth. If you are a young adult thinking about higher education, or if you are a parent of such a young person, this excellent book is a must-read.

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**THE DAILY PRESS**

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

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**June 8**  
Read Psalm 95

God is worthy of our praise! Singing is one of the means that he has provided for us to praise him. In both Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3, Christians are instructed to use psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to give thanks to the Lord. Singing is also a beautiful way to remind ourselves and those around us of the truth of God’s word. Many other passages of holy scripture such as the Psalm you read today similarly encourage God’s people to sing praises to the Lord.

A hymn is a poem that has been written and set to music in order to express praise, thanksgiving, and joy in who God is and what he has done. A good hymn is God-centered, not man-centered. It should contain sound doctrine and beautiful, reverent language. This month we will be going through thirty classic Christian hymns and accompanying Bible passages. My prayer is that, whether you are able to sing these hymns out loud with your family, listen to them online or simply read through the lines as devotional poetry, they will inspire you to praise God more and more each day. **Sing or read “Come, Christians, Join to Sing”**

**June 9**  
Read Revelation 4

John’s vision of the heavenly throne room in Revelation 4 shows the Lord God Almighty on his throne, reigning and being worshipped by the members of his heavenly court. They praise both his nature and the works that he has done. God is holy, merciful, mighty, glorious, powerful, righteous, and loving. These and all the other aspects of his character make him worthy of our complete devotion. He is worthy of the praise of all men, angels, and all other creatures because he has created all these creatures in order to glorify himself. When we think about all that God is and all that he has done, how can we help but to fall down and worship him?

The words of worship that we read in Revelation 4:8 will be sung by all God’s people in heaven one day. They gave encouragement to John, who was in exile, and the churches who were suffering intense persecution at that time. Do you joyfully anticipate being able to praise God forever in heaven? How can you worship him right now? Is worship a significant part of your prayers? **Sing or read “Holy, Holy, Holy”**

**June 10**  
Read Colossians 1

Christ is the Lord of all things—visible and invisible. He is the Lord of creation. He existed before everything else was created. He created and continues to sustain the being of all things as he sits in his exalted state at the right hand of God. Christ is the Lord of redemption. He is responsible for the salvation of our souls. Christ is the Head of the church. He is all of these things because he is fully God, “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell” (v. 19).

God and God alone must be the focus of our life on this earth. The preeminence of Christ that is described in Colossians 1 demands nothing less. Our salvation and even our very existence are due to him. Any wisdom or strength that we have comes from his hand. He must be in the forefront of our thoughts and the motivation behind our actions. Is he the Lord of your life? Is he your treasure? Is he first in your heart? **Sing or read “Be Thou My Vision”**

**June 11**  
Read Matthew 14:22–36

When Peter first steps out of the boat onto the stormy waves of the Sea of Galilee, he shows great faith because his attention is focused only on Jesus. But then he begins to look around and notice how strong the wind and waves are, his faith turns to doubt, and he begins to sink. Immediately, Jesus reaches out his hand to catch Peter and lead him into the ship to safety.

Just like Peter, when we take our eyes off of the Lord and focus on the things that surround us instead, fear and anxiety will take over. Our troubles will...
seem impossible to overcome. But when the work of God’s Spirit in our hearts enables us to turn our eyes upon Jesus our perspective is dramatically shifted. However, we live in a world that is filled with distractions that are specifically designed to attract our attention. Think of some specific ways that you can dim the noise of all that this world has to offer and maintain a better focus on your Savior instead. **Sing or read “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”**

**June 12**  
Read Psalm 104

God reveals himself to man not only in his word, but also through his handiwork in creation. The beauty of a sunset that turns the sky into a marvelous painting displays the glory and majesty of God. The ferocity of a tornado that has the ability to destroy everything in its path displays the power of God. The intricacies of the human body display how God created and sustains every single molecule of our being. Nothing is out of his control.

It is easy to marvel at the many great wonders that you can observe in creation. Yet God’s own power and goodness overshadow even the most amazing created thing. When you observe the wonders of creation, does it lead you to praise the Creator? When you observe how every single creature is dependent on God for survival, are you reminded that he also cares for your every need? Think about the last thing that you learned about in science class or observed in nature. How does it display God’s character? How does this aspect of his character comfort you as a child of God? **Sing or read “O Worship the King”**

**June 13**  
Read 1 Chronicles 17

1 Chronicles 17:18–27 contains a beautiful praise prayer of David. In his prayer, David looks back on his life and marvels that God had brought him from being a simple shepherd to a great king. He considers how the Lord has preserved him on this journey through many trials and rejoices in God’s promises for his future. David knows his own sin and weakness and is amazed by God’s grace. The author of the hymn “Amazing Grace” was also very aware of how far God had brought him. John Newton went from being a slave trader to a pastor by the grace of God. His wonder at the transformation God had worked in him led him to pen the timeless words of this hymn. As sinners saved by grace, we can also marvel right along with David and John Newton. We were dead in sin and did not deserve salvation.

What a gift grace is! God’s grace sustains us through all the trials that we will face on this earth. God’s grace gives us assurance when our faith wavers. God’s grace protects us when we engage in spiritual battles with the devil and his host each and every day. It is only by God’s grace that our death is not something to fear, but a pathway to eternal life of communion with him. Have you thanked God today for his amazing grace in your life? **Sing or read “Amazing Grace”**

**June 14**  
Read Psalm 139

In this well-known psalm, David wonders at the extent of God’s care for him. How amazing is it that the great Creator and Lord of the universe cares for every single one of his children? He planned out exactly how we would be, our personality and what we would look like, before we were even born. He knows what we are going to do and say before it even happens, and he has ordained all these things for our good and salvation. He has planned every single event and circumstance that we will experience. We are never apart from God’s caring presence in our lives.

We need God’s presence during every moment of our life on this earth in order to fight against the attacks of Satan. We also need his presence to provide comfort and assurance when we face trials and especially our own death. Our comfort comes from his promise that in heaven we will abide with him even more fully than we are able to while on this earth. The author of the hymn “Abide with Me” wrote these words as he was very near to death. All of us, young or old, are also facing death. Let us pray along with him, “In life, in death, O Lord abide with me.” **Sing or read “Abide with Me”**

**June 15**  
Read 1 John 4

God is love. It is an essential aspect of his character. He shows this love in so many ways, but especially by sending his only begotten Son to die on the cross to save unworthy sinners from eternal punishment. As children of God, this love abides in us. True, selfless love is a product of the Holy Spirit’s work in our heart and a sign of salvation. An unredeemed sinner is not capable of showing true love.

1 John 4:19 puts the love that we show in perspective by reminding us, “We love him, because he first loved us.” This love for God expresses itself in a desire to serve him and do what he commands. What God has commanded us to do is to love him and show love to our neighbor.

Do you boldly confess that you love Jesus? Is your
love for Jesus apparent from the love that you show to those around you? Your neighbor is not just the person down the street, but your parents and siblings and classmates too. *Sing or read “My Jesus, I Love Thee”*

### June 16
**Read Psalm 105**

The psalmist here inspires the people to praise God by recalling all of the ways that God guided and cared for his people throughout Israel’s history. God made a covenant with Abraham and his seed, promising to make him a great nation. God cared for them while they were pilgrims and strangers seeking the Promised Land. He ordained the events of Joseph’s life in order to save his people from famine. He was with the nation of Israel in Egypt and eventually delivered them from their bondage there. He fed and sustained them in the wilderness and led them to Canaan.

Remembering these and other wondrous works that God has done for his people throughout history also serves to strengthen the faith of believers today. Because our Heavenly Father does not change, we can trust that he will be present with his people throughout all ages like he was during the time of the patriarchs. Just as he guided the nation of Israel through the wilderness with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, he will also guide you along the path of your life. Do you feel his guidance in your life? Are you regularly seeking out this guidance by spending time in communion with him through his word and prayer? *Sing or read “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah”*

### June 17
**Read 1 Corinthians 11**

The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was instituted by Christ so that believers would regularly join together to remember the sacrifice he made for his elect people at Calvary. As we chew the broken bread, we remember his body that was broken for our sins. As we drink the wine, we remember his innocent blood that was shed so that we might be made pure. Fittingly, Isaac Watts wrote the hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” in preparation for a communion service in 1707. The lyrics of this song encourage the believer to contemplate the great sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

The cross puts everything into perspective. It is appropriate that Christians are told to examine themselves in preparation for partaking of the Lord’s Supper because thinking about the cross should humble us. It should make us consider our thoughts, attitudes and actions. It should make us sorry for our sins and inspire us to devote our whole life to the service of the Lord. We must remember the cross daily, not only when partaking of the Lord’s Supper. *Sing or read “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”*

### June 18
**Read Psalm 145**

Psalm 145 is the final psalm of David that is recorded in Scripture. This psalm serves as a summary of all that David had learned about God in his lifetime. It was composed in order to extol the goodness and greatness of God. David’s response to the evaluation of his life was not pride in his accomplishments, but praise to the Lord. He praises God’s character, his works, and his care for David and the entire nation of Israel.

When you look back on your own life, can you see evidence of God’s greatness and goodness? When you consider the amazing things that God has created, does it lead you to praise him? When you read in scripture about how God sent his only Son to die for your sins, does it lead you to praise him? And when you look forward to Christ’s second coming and read in the Bible about the great glories that await you in heaven, does it lead you to praise him. David wrote, “My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever” (v. 21). Is this your song as well? *Sing or read “How Great Thou Art”*

### June 19
**Read Revelation 21**

John’s vision of a new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21 is a beautiful picture of the glorious future of the church in eternity. In heaven, our fellowship with other saints will not be tainted by sin. We will all join together in the presence of God to praise and serve him perfectly forever. We can only imagine what it will be like, and our wildest dreams will pale in comparison to the magnificence and splendor of Zion and the blessings that we will experience there. The source of all the glory of heaven is the glory of the Lord and his holiness.

Although we can begin to experience heavenly joys while we are still on this earth, it is only a drop in the bucket compared to what we will experience in heaven. In heaven all the saints will gather around the throne of God to sing joyful praises. There will be no more tears or sorrow, pain, or death. Although we experience many difficulties on the path of this life, we can find hope in our promised destination. We are marching to Zion! *Sing or read “Come We That Love the Lord (We’re Marching to Zion)”*
June 20  Read Psalm 46

These days, whenever you turn on your TV or computer or unlock your smartphone, you likely face a flood of news that reflects the chaos and uncertainty of the age in which we live. After being exposed to this for even a few minutes, panic may start to well up inside you. How will this end? What will happen to the economy? What does the future hold for me and my children? It is so easy to become overwhelmed with worry!

But, by the grace of God, we can put all of our fears and anxiety to rest when we run to our heavenly Father for safety. No matter what is going on in the world, he is in control of all things and works everything for the good of His people (Rom. 8:28). He is not only in control of global pandemics, but also every single detail of each one of our lives. Remember God’s mighty acts and pray that He will give you the strength to fight your fears and anxieties and place your trust in Him alone. Sing or read “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”

June 21  Read 1 Corinthians 15

We serve a risen Savior. What an amazing comfort this is to a child of God! Jesus did not stay in the grave. He arose and ascended into heaven and is present in the heart of every one of his people. He conquered death and made satisfaction for our sins so that we can go to heaven. His resurrection proved that he was the Son of God because he raised himself up by his own power.

Since we are united with Christ by faith, we were also raised with him to new life. Because he lives, we can be confident that our sins are forgiven. Because he lives, he is our hope in this life and the next. Because he lives, there is no reason for the believer to fear death. Because he lives, we know that he will someday resurrect the bodies of his people to be united with their souls in heaven. Because he lives, we can do our work faithfully, even when it is difficult, because he is with us, helping and guiding. Sing or read “He Lives”

June 22  Read Psalm 90

God is not constrained by time like we are. He created time. God has no beginning and no end, but as frail humans, we do. Ever since the fall of man into sin, we only have a limited amount of time on this earth. This thought inspires terror in the world because they have no hope for life after death. But for God’s children, the knowledge of our limited time on this earth should not lead to panic. Rather, it must give eternal perspective to what our priorities should be.

Psalm 90 is Moses’ prayer on behalf of the nation of Israel and it must be the prayer of every child of God as well, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (v. 12). Ask God for the wisdom to use whatever amount of time you have left on this earth to serve Him well. Pray that he will help you to put your hope in the eternal God instead of earthly health or success. Sing or read “O God Our Help in Ages Past”

June 23  Read Philippians 4

Contentment is not something that comes effortlessly in the life of a Christian. It is extremely tempting to think, “If only God would take this trial away or I could get this one thing, then I could be happy.” It is not wrong to ask God to help us with our struggles. But it is wrong to make our personal happiness contingent on our struggles being taken away. Paul reminds us in verse 6 to bring all our troubles to the Lord in prayer. We must also ask God to work contentment in our hearts no matter what his answer to our prayer is.

The apostle Paul suffered many trials during his life yet had learned to be content both in times of prosperity and times of poverty, in times of health and times of sickness. The author of the hymn “It Is Well with My Soul” was also well acquainted with grief. Horatio Spafford wrote these words in 1873 after he heard the news that all four of his daughters had drowned in a shipwreck while on their way to Europe. Are you experiencing a difficult trial in your

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own life? Because your sins are forgiven, no matter what your circumstances are, as child of God you can say, “it is well with my soul”. Sing or read “It Is Well with My Soul”

June 24  Read Luke 18:1–14

Prayer is a gracious gift of God that is vital to a healthy spiritual life. Prayer gives us a chance to bring our trials and temptations to the Lord, to take our burdens off our own shoulders, and place them on his instead. When we pray, we must come to God humbly as the publican did and confess our sins. We must also be persistent in bringing our petitions to God, following the example of the widow in Luke 18. Prayer is not just for times of distress but a daily way to commune with our Heavenly Father. It is a little taste of the fellowship that we anticipate in heaven, where we will not have to pray anymore because we will be in the presence of God forever!

Do you look forward to your own “sweet hour of prayer?” Do you have regular time set aside to have prayer and communion with God? If prayer is a struggle for you, think about ways you could improve in this area. Could you set your phone in a different room so you are not distracted by it? Would writing a prayer journal keep your mind from wandering? Sing or read “Sweet Hour of Prayer”

June 25  Read Philippians 2

“No matter who is president, Jesus is king.” You have probably seen this statement posted on social media a few times during presidential elections. It does serve as a good reminder of who is truly in control. But we should not say this flippantly. When you really think about it, it is a serious statement to say, “Jesus is my king.” If Jesus is your king, you owe him your respect and allegiance, your praise and service.

Our Savior is worthy of all praise and service because God has exalted him and given him “a name which is above every name” (v. 9). Every earthly inhabitant must “hail the power of Jesus’ name... and crown him Lord of all”. The angels must crown Jesus as King because of the power of his name. The martyrs who have given their lives for Jesus praise him as Lord. God’s elect people must crown him as the supreme ruler of their hearts and lives. Is Jesus the Lord of your life? Do you submit all of your worldly accomplishments to his rule? Sing or read “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name”

June 26  Read Ephesians 1

Paul wrote his epistle to the Ephesians from prison, yet it is filled with the hope of what God has prepared for those who love him. We have been predestinated, chosen in Christ before we were even born to be God’s adopted children and to receive a glorious spiritual inheritance. We have been redeemed according to the riches of his grace. And we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings, which is far better than any physical blessings that we may receive. Paul was able to find hope in the solid ground of these promises despite his circumstances.

The world that we live in is becoming increasingly uncertain. The current global pandemic serves to remind us that the idols men try to place their trust in such as money or modern medicine are limited. But God’s elect children have hope and certainty because of what Christ has accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection. We have victory in Christ and an eternal home with him in heaven to look forward to. We do not need to fear what will happen to us on this earth. Sing or read “In Christ Alone”

June 27  Read Isaiah 53

The first line and alternate title of this hymn, “Man of Sorrows, What a Name!” gives the impression of a very somber song. There is certainly a place for Christians to soberly contemplate the suffering that Christ endured for our sin. Isaiah 53 is a prophecy that foretells the great humiliation that would be experienced by our Savior throughout his life on this earth, beginning with his humble birth and culminating in his death on the cross. He was despised and rejected by men throughout his earthly ministry and suffered the physical and emotional reality of having an earthly body. He truly was a “Man of Sorrows.”

But the contemplation of Christ’s suffering and atoning death on the cross for our sins ultimately leads to joy, not sorrow, because he did not remain in the grave. He defeated death so that we do not have to fear it any longer. Christ arose and ascended into heaven. He is exalted and sits in heaven at the right hand of God, ruling all things for the good of the elect. And he will come back again to bring every single one of his children to reign with him in heaven forever. “Hallelujah, What A Savior!” Sing or read “Hallelujah, What A Savior”
June 28  Read Ephesians 4

Clergyman Samuel Stone wrote the hymn “The Church's One Foundation” during a time of great division in his own denomination. It was meant to express the doctrines of the holy, catholic church and the communion of saints that are found in the Apostles’ Creed. The church has faced persecution, false doctrine, and controversy throughout its existence and will continue to do so until Christ comes again. But with Jesus as our foundation, we can be confident that the church will survive, no matter what Satan tries to do to tear it apart.

It is so important for the church to be Christ-centered, not man-centered. Our local church is not simply a club. We do not join with other Christians just because we live near each other or have certain things in common. The church is a group of sinners, saved by grace, and united by the sacrifice of our Savior, gathering for worship, fellowship, and instruction. We are united by the fact that we have “One Lord, one faith, one birth.” Sadly, our fellowship within the church here on earth will always be tainted by sin, but we look forward to being perfectly united with every single child of God in heaven for eternity. Sing or read “The Church’s One Foundation”

June 29  Read Isaiah 26

In the early 1880’s, while enjoying a picnic near the ocean with her family, Louisa Stead tragically watched her husband die after he jumped in the water to try to save a boy who was drowning. In the aftermath of that traumatic experience, she penned this hymn about learning to trust in Jesus even in the face of great tragedy. Louisa went on to become a missionary in South Africa, and even after her death, this hymn continues to inspire Christians to lean on Jesus.

True peace cannot be found in the temporary distractions that this world has to offer. When we face trials, Satan tempts us to doubt God’s plan and seek out other sources of comfort apart from him. We may try to numb our feelings with drugs or alcohol. We may try to forget our problems by seeking out pleasure and entertainment. But perfect peace can only be found in the Lord. We can have peace regardless of our circumstances when we trust in God’s everlasting strength. Pray for the grace to trust him more and more. Sing or read “Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus”

June 30  Read James 2

A true and living faith results in submitting to God’s leading for your life. Simply saying that you trust God is hypocritical if you do not actually follow that up by obeying his commands. Abraham, a great hero of faith, exemplified this when he trusted God to lead him and his family away from their home to an unknown country. He also obeyed God even when he was commanded to sacrifice his only son, Isaac.

True happiness can only be found in trusting and obeying our heavenly Father. The path that God is leading us down will not always make sense to us because we do not know what he knows. We may not understand why God has taken something or someone we love away from us. We may not understand why our life is not going the way that we had planned it to be. But by faith, we can still trust and obey. Pray that the Spirit of God will work in your heart and enable you to trust him more completely and obey him more fully in all that you do. Sing or read “Trust and Obey”

July 1  Read John 1:1–34

In contrast to the world’s constantly changing standards for beauty, God’s perfect beauty transcends time and culture and never fades or changes. He is the source of all that is beautiful. God’s beauty is the sum of every desirable thing that you can imagine and then some. We cannot even comprehend it! The superior beauty of Jesus outshines all the other creations of God. Creation is only a dim reflection of his stunning glory. “All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth” (Isa. 40:6-7a).

You, as a child of God, are beautiful because you were created in God’s image, not because you meet certain cultural standards of beauty. It is not sinful to try to improve your appearance, but because sin has corrupted how we judge beauty, Christians must be careful not to let their physical appearance become an idol. Is your pursuit of beauty God-glorifying? What is shaping your perspective of what is beautiful—the world’s standards or God’s character? Sing or read “Fairest Lord Jesus”

July 2  Read Matthew 16

In order to be disciples of Jesus, we must deny ourselves and follow him. This is difficult because it goes directly against our human nature, which tells us to indulge ourselves and avoid discomfort.
As Christians, we must be willing to submit to the Father’s will even if it means we lose everything. We must submit to his will even if it means we lose our life. We must follow the example of Jesus who went to the cross willingly, obeying his Father’s will. Peter did not see why Jesus had to die and in Matthew 16 he even objects when Jesus mentions it because he was blinded by the things of man and the promise of an earthly kingdom. Jesus rebukes him for this in verse 23.

When we fix our eyes on the things of God, by grace we will realize that, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). What are you living for? What do you prioritize when making decisions about your future? Wealth? Fame or popularity? Appearances? Would you be willing to give these things up in the service of your Heavenly Father? Would you rather have Jesus?

To come to God “just as I am” does not mean that our sin is no big deal and does not matter to God. But rather it means that he saves us on account of what Christ did, not on account of what we have done. Therefore, we find our identity in Christ, not in what we have accomplished on this earth. We do not need to stress out about becoming somebody. God makes us the person that we need to be—a redeemed sinner who daily seeks to serve God and increase in sanctification by the power of his Spirit in our heart.

Sing or read “I’d Rather Have Jesus”

Read Matthew 7

The parable of the two builders in Matthew 7 likens our life on this earth to a house. The wise man’s house was built to last while the foolish man’s house easily crumbled in the face of strong wind and rain. The difference between the two houses was not that the foolish man’s house was exposed to a much stronger storm than the wise men. Jesus explains the reason that the wise man’s house stood firm was because of the quality of the foundation that the structure was built on. His house was built on a rock—the Rock—Jesus Christ.

What foundation are you building your life on? What priorities most influence your decisions and goals? Is your life based on financial security, good health, or the approval of others? Or is your life built on the foundation of Christ and his unchanging grace? Pray that God will make you increasingly aware that “all other ground is sinking sand.”

Sing or read “The Solid Rock”

Read Ephesians 2

There is so much pressure today, especially on young people, to become someone. It may feel like you are failing if you do not have an impressive social media image with a large following. You may feel pressure to try to start your own company or shoot straight to the top of your career right out of college. But it is important to remember that all these accomplishments are meaningless when it comes to our salvation. You do not have to be someone in order to be saved. It is all by the grace of God.

Sing or read “Just as I Am”

Read John 14

Our God, the “Great One in Three” is made up of three fully divine, co-equal persons who share one being. He is a triune God, made up of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwelling together in perfect unity. All three persons were involved in creation and in the formation of the covenant. Although the term “trinity” is not found in Scripture, the idea is woven throughout the whole Bible. Notice in the chapter you read today how Jesus proves that he and the Father are one and promises that the “Comforter” (the Holy Spirit) will come to abide with his people. The doctrine of the trinity is also beautifully stated in the hymn, “Come Thou Almighty King.”

The doctrine of the Trinity has often been disputed throughout the history of the church and is somewhat difficult to understand, but it is vitally important to believe. We cannot eliminate any persons of the Trinity without limiting God’s work and power. Paul’s blessing at the end of 2 Corinthians 13 displays how the work of all three persons is inseparable, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.”

Sing or read “Come Thou Almighty King”

Read John 10:1–18

Just like a defiant toddler who is determined to run into a busy street or a wayward sheep who does not want to follow the safe path that the shepherd is leading him on, God’s people so often try to rebel against his leading for their life and try to go their own way instead. How thankful we must be that our Great Shepherd and faithful Father is always watching over his people and guiding the course of their lives! He sometimes uses chastisement to put us back on the right path or gently uses his shepherd’s crook to lead us away from danger.

Do you feel like you have your life under control right now? Or does everything feel like it is out of
control? Either way, know that God is in control. All of your plans are subject to his will. And his will is what is best for us, even if we do not understand it right now. “Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established” (Prov. 16:3). Sing or read “Savior, Like A Shepherd Lead Us”

Sing or read “Savior, Like A Shepherd Lead Us”

To give glory to God should be the earnest endeavor of every Christian. Question and answer 1 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, “What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” And verse 2 of this psalm commands us to “give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name”. We owe God all the glory that we can give and much more. But, because of our sinful, human nature, man is naturally prone to self-centeredness. One way that we can keep our focus on glorifying God instead of ourselves is to remember all the great things that he has done. We can see his majesty in the universe he created and read of his great works in the Bible.

Is God’s glory really the chief desire of your life? Or are you tempted to seek your own glory instead? What motivates your actions, glorification of self or God? 1 Corinthians 10:31 reminds us, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” Sing or read “To God Be the Glory”

Poem Thelma Westra

MY FATHER

My father would lift me and hold me up high
To show me a scene or a parade passing by.

My father would lift me and hug me so tight
When I’d scrape up my knee or I’d just had a fright.

My father would lift me; I’d sit on his knee
And hear of his childhood, when he was like me.

My father would lift me— instructing my mind
In the fear of the Lord and the love of mankind.

My father would lift me from gloomy despair,
When things seemed all wrong—he always was there.

My father still lifts me—he lifts me in prayer
Commending my ways to our dear Father’s care.
FOUR GREAT THINGS UPON THE EARTH (1): THE LION

“There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going: A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any” (Proverbs 30:29–30).

The mighty lion prowled the savannah. As he moved, his muscles rippled beneath his gleaming, golden fur. His mane surrounded his face, blowing majestically in the slight breeze. As he passed by, the other animals ran in terror. They knew that the power of life and death was held in the mighty lion’s paws.

The mighty lion did not fear any other animal. He strolled forward wherever he wanted to, not stepping aside for anyone. He was a fierce, awe-inspiring sight as he walked by.

* * * * *

Have you ever seen a lion prowl at the zoo? It is a beautiful and scary sight to watch the way its muscles and bones play beneath its fur as it walks. It is that sight that the passage in Proverbs 30 is talking about.

In the Bible, the lion is used to picture many different things.

In the mighty lion, we have a picture of God’s might (Hos. 11:10). God does not fear anyone. He is all-powerful. He is stronger than the whole creation put together; not just stronger, but the whole creation is weak and frail and nothing compared to his might. He created everything with mere words. If we are struck with awe at the lion, a creature, how much more should we be in awe of the Creator!

Jesus is called the Lion of Judah (Rev. 5:5). He has the power to be a mighty savior. We do not have to fear that Jesus will be too weak or too frail to save us.

The lion is also used as a picture of the devil. Satan is pictured as a hungry lion on the hunt for those he can devour (1 Pet. 5:8). The wicked world is also pictured in the Bible as lions seeking to destroy the people of God (Ps. 10:9). Compared to the devil and the wicked of the world, we are weak sheep that can be easily hunted down. We must not try to stand against the devil, sin, and the wicked in our own strength, but seek the might of God to overcome.

And yet, as the children of God, we are also lions: “the righteous are bold as a lion” (Prov. 28:1). With the might of God, we don’t have to fear. We can face the difficulties of this life, temptations, and Satan himself boldly because we have the might of the Lion with us.

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