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A large part of your day is spent online. The majority of that time is spent on your phone. And that is where the focus is for this special issue of *Beacon Lights*.

Although there are proper and good uses for our phones, the best answer to the question, “What did you do on your phone today?” would most often be “Nothing.” Which is dangerous territory for a child of God to find himself on. We should examine our use of our phones.

But we should also examine our relationships to our phones. Which scenario would you choose?

- No access to a Bible for a week
- No access to your phone for a week

As we face the painful implications of the choice we might make, let us consider the implications in light of Matthew 6:21: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Rejecting idols of wood and stone, have we instead made our treasure the liquid crystal display of our mobile device?

In this issue, you are asked to evaluate your use of your phone. As part of a life of self-examination, it is especially proper to examine our use of something that so dominates our lives. For those of you on social media, examine that use and its godliness... or worldliness. What are the things that show up on your screen when the lights are out and nobody is around?

A word about the book review you will find in this issue. It is longer than it should be, for two reasons. One, the author of the book review (namely, me) lacks the gift that some writers have for concise writing. I often channel my inner Puritan and use ten words when five would do. The other reason for its length is that I realize the majority of those who read the review will not purchase the book. So I tried to convey many of the key points in the book, and the arguments that I found so compelling in reading the book, in the review itself.

Run your phone use through these three questions (posed by the writer of the book reviewed later in the issue):

- **Ends:** Do my smartphone behaviors move me toward God or away from him?
- **Influence:** Do my smartphone behaviors edify me and others, or do they build nothing of lasting value?
- **Servitude:** Do my smartphone behaviors expose my freedom in Christ or my bondage to technique?

There are readers who are practicing self-discipline and using their phones properly. Be encouraged in that walk; continue to use your phone as a tool in the service of your King. For many, however, their use of their phone has spiraled out of control. It promises much yet delivers very little. For those who look to their phone for the joy that is found in Jesus Christ alone, the message is, “Awake to righteousness!”, and when next you pick up your phone, consider the words of the prophet Isaiah: “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (Isa. 44:20).

Also of note in this issue is the first article of two by Prof. Barry Gritters on preparing for and entering the seminary. The first set of questions has to do with what is required to enter into the seminary and the second installment, to be published in October, the Lord willing, will address the ministry itself. The introductory note explains the origin of these articles, and we thank Prof. Gritters for submitting them to Beacon Lights. May God be pleased to use these articles to raise up more ministers of his word from among our fellowship.

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1 When I was attending Calvin College (now Calvin University), I got a paper back from a professor with the word “verbose” written at the top. I don’t remember the grade I received, only that word. At that time, I thought the word meant something else, so I never looked up the definition. It was only a couple years later that I found out what the word meant, and it has stuck in my mind ever since. Were I to resubmit my work to that professor today, I fear I would get the same result.
TWO FACES

Last summer my wife was at a local park. She observed another young mother sitting on a bench, clearly engrossed in her phone while her children played. After some time of not paying attention to her kids, she got up and took a selfie with them near the playset. This picture, if shared on social media, would show a mother having the time of her life with her kids at the park when in reality she was not even paying attention to them. The picture would be deceiving to all who observed it. This was a woman with two faces.

When you log into your social media account to post something about yourself, you are like an artist painting a self-portrait. You are in total control of what everybody will see. Is what they are seeing false or true? Or is what they are seeing only half true? Do you have two faces; one that you are trying to hide and one with which you are trying to deceive others?

A life like this can only be faked for so long. Soon your house of cards will come tumbling down. Then what? What will all of your friends and followers do? Will they abandon you? How many YouTube celebrities have fallen after their misdeeds, lies, or hypocrisies were exposed?

In a survey of state and independent schools in England in 2017, it was found that 60% of students thought that their friends show a fake version of themselves.¹ Over half of the students in England are living with two faces. That was three years ago. What would the statistic look like today? What would it look like in the United States?

Why is living two lives a bad thing? Maybe some might see it as just a hobby of sorts. It can’t be that big of a deal, right?

First, living a double life is wrong because it is a sin against the ninth commandment. The Heidelberg Catechism describes the positive command of the ninth commandment in this way: “That I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God.” That’s hard-hitting. Maybe your social media accounts are not promoting outright lies about your life, but are they telling the whole truth? Telling only part of the truth of your life (the part you want people to see) is what the Catechism describes as “deceit: and is the work of the devil, which incites the wrath of God.

A second reason that living a double life is wrong is because it shows an underlying discontent with the circumstances of one’s life. Living a double life is like saying, “I don’t want people to see this part of my life because I don’t like it.” Could this discontent with the part of your life that you are not showing to others exist because you are coveting the life that others have? If this is the case, then it is a sin against the tenth commandment.

Back to the young mother at the park. Before we throw her under the bus—and the 60% of our friends who use social media to paint a picture that does not reflect reality—we should examine our own lives. Maybe we don’t misuse social media. Maybe we don’t use social media at all. We can still be guilty of two-facedness. Maybe we do that old-fashioned thing and talk face to face with people instead of over the internet. When we talk, what do we say? Do we tell a good story about ourselves because it will make others think a certain way—the way we want them to think—about us? It is easy for us to reveal in our speech only the cool and nice things we want others to see while leaving out those things that might make us not look so good. I’m not saying here that you need to tell your friends what sins you committed since the last time you saw them. Rather, our speech must tell the whole truth, not just part of the truth, as described above.

¹ “Teens ‘rebelling against social media’, say headteachers.” https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-41509402 One school surveyed began a three-day phone fast. Students reported that “fears of being offline were replaced by feelings of relief.” Students did not realize how much they did not need their phones until they were without them for a few days.
After examining your life have you found that you actually are living two lives? If so, what will you do? Only one of those lives matters, and you know which one it is. It is the life that God gave you. Is your concern with living before the face of men or before the face of God? Men might see your fake life for a short time and “like” it and “follow” it, but sooner or later that will end. God, the omniscient one instantly sees right through a fake Instagram or Facebook life, and he is the one we must be concerned about.

Proverbs 12:22 says, “Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.” Social media falls under the realm of the tongue. When we post on social media, we are speaking. God hates lying speech, but he delights in truthful speech. When you live joyfully and thankfully in the life and circumstances that he has given you, this delights him. When your social media feeds truthfully reveal the life God has given you, that is a proper use of social media, and God delights in this. Live then, with one face, a true face that lives before the face of God.

Aliesa Moelker

TECHNOLOGY’S EFFECT ON INFANTS

Between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four months is when a child has the most critical brain development. The experiences that an infant has during these six months are pivotal for future functioning. If these six months are full of time glued to a television or mobile device, the child will lack experiences that will affect their future development and hamper them from learning and growing in knowledge. Technology is increasingly being used with infants, and some say there are benefits to infant technology use, but only adverse effects have been observed.

The use of television has proven to create lasting effects on an infant’s development. Karin Archer mentions many excuses that parents give for allowing their children to watch TV excessively and at shockingly young ages. Some of these excuses are attempting to cure the child’s boredom, enabling the parents to have parent time and the hope of educational benefits. There are no proven educational benefits or any benefits in general to television use. Archer proves that exposure to television and mobile devices impairs an infant’s fine-motor development and causes them to score lower on a fine-motor development test. Fine-motor skills are pivotal to an infant’s development and function as a growing human being and part of society. If a child’s basic functions are restricted in the early stages of their life this will carry into every other aspect of the child’s life.

The use of television has different effects than the use of mobile and interactive technology with infants. Daphne Bavelier compares technology with food, “As with food, the effects of technology will depend critically on what type of technology is consumed, how much of it is consumed, and for how long it is consumed” (Bavelier, 1). This touches on the fact that all technology has effects on a human, just like all food consumed will have an effect on a human. There are many variables that need to be considered when using technology, such as what type of technology is being used, how much of that technology is being used, and the period of time that it is being used in. These variables are considered in Bavelier’s writing. This means that a blanket statement may not be made about all technology because many variables have to be analyzed and considered.

Bavelier states that “technology” is a very broad term, so it is logical for individuals to not express great concern for the effects of said technology on infants. They argue that there are so many variables and effects of technology that could have a positive impact on infants, such as possible educational benefits and cultural exposure, that they hope that the positive benefits will outweigh the negative impact. These hopes of educational benefits and exposure to new ideas are not able to be proven and have no existing evidence. The negative impact is overwhelmingly obvious and observable. One of the many observable negative impacts is the link between higher levels of television watching and the likelihood of childhood obesity. Ciaran Haughton states, “Studies have shown an association between television viewing and body fat in toddlers and
young children” (Haughton, 506). This correlation can be expected since the more time that is spent watching television and being occupied by a device allows less time for physical activity.

Another observable negative impact is the association between screen time and an infant’s sleep. Ciaran Haughton provides results from multiple studies;

The first study to examine the longitudinal relationship between television exposure in early childhood and sleep duration found that higher levels of television screen time were predictive of shorter sleep durations across infancy and into middle childhood. An earlier cross-sectional study found a positive association between television viewing and the likelihood of the child having irregular sleeping schedules (Haughton, 506).

Similar sleeping problems found in young children and infants have been shown to be associated with watching television close to bedtime. Adequate sleep is critical to a child’s early life, and short sleep duration and irregular sleep schedules have been associated with future problems such as language issues and obesity.

The infant stage of life is packed with growth and is the foundation for an individual’s life. This stage of life has to be filled with exploration and discovery. This is when a child’s creativity is discovered and is able to flourish and develop, and when a child starts to show personality traits. The most critical brain development that will ever happen in an individual’s life occurs between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four months. Brain development is overwhelmingly important for obvious reasons; every function of the body hinges on the brain and its function. If this stage of life is filled with time focused on a device or television, a child’s creativity is restricted and snuffed out. Television affects so many aspects of development, behavior, and function in all people, especially infants who are in the most influential stage of life.

Works Cited


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Jenna De Boer

SOCIAL MEDIA MODESTY

Why do you post on Instagram? Why do you pose in that cute outfit for your Snap story? What is your end goal? If it’s for the likes, for the followers, to impress your significant other or the “popular” kid, or to look cool to your friends, I urge you to search your motives. 1 Corinthians 10:31 states, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

Scroll through your Instagram feed. What is portrayed? Is it picture after picture of unrealistically skinny girls hardly covered in small pieces of clothing? Or is it blog posts and meditations about a portion of God’s word? Does what you post reflect what you are seeking after?

Let’s not kid ourselves. You and I have both texted a friend a picture asking if it was good enough to post on Instagram. What did that picture look like? Was that cute outfit showing off a little too much? Was it in that swimsuit your mom told you not to buy?

Sister, your body is a temple (1 Corinthians 6:19: “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”). As a follower of Jesus Christ, you are commanded to show that you stand for him no matter the cost, even if it means
racking up fewer followers or receiving fewer likes. If you are flaunting your body in post after post, you are following after the world.

As a Christian, you are called to be in this world but not of this world. John 15:19 teaches, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." If the world loves you because of your posts on social media, you are not living your life for others, or for God. You are living for the praise of others, and therefore striving after your own gain. You cannot live a life for God and for yourself. The Christian life does not work that way.

Denying yourself and following Christ is certainly not an easy task, but it is more than necessary. We are commanded to live out our confession of him each and every day. God calls us to show his name by the way we live. Since social media is such a big part of our lives, we must show his name through this too, as difficult as it may be.

Why do you and I feel such a strong push to look a certain way or show off certain parts of our body on social media? Are we trying to shape our lives after the popular models and celebrities of today? My dear friend, striving to be like an ungodly influencer will not bring you joy, neither does it glorify God or bring you closer to him.

The only influencer we should be modeling our lives after is Jesus Christ. We should strive to live a life just as he did, serving God first and others second, deleting ourselves from the picture. We will never perfectly live up to him, but we need to long to be like him in every way, for he was the only perfect person to ever walk this earth.

Yes, you and I make mistakes. Mistakes are in our human nature, and we will never be able to get away from them until we are perfect in heaven. However, if we are going to be a light shining for our perfect Savior in this world of darkness, we must stand out on social media as modest children of the King.

So if we should not glorify ourselves or be immodest on social media, how can we be lights shining for our Savior and use our platforms to his glory?

I encourage you to boldly and directly reveal that you are a child of the King on your social media. Do this with integrity, and truly share your joy in your salvation. Share verses, meditations, or encouragements from God’s word regularly. Share a quote from your devotional on your Instagram story, or a verse that stuck out to you in your Bible reading. Post a link to a meditation or an article about Christian living or ask others to share something for which they are grateful.

You may have coworkers or others following you who are not believers. Friend, let them see that you are different! Do not be afraid to be a light in this wicked world! Give others the occasion to ask about your joy, why you are different, or why you post Bible verses. If you truly confess Jesus in your heart, you will not be ashamed to proclaim to even those who will reject it, that he is Lord.

Other Christians will be encouraged by your posts. There are many times in a Christian’s life that he or she may be walking through a fiery trial which is unknown to others. God could use you to encourage a brother or sister and you may never know. What a wonder! Let us strive to be an encouragement to our brothers and sisters. Instead of following the trend of an ego-centered profile page, let’s have a Jesus-centered profile page, dedicated to his glory.

You are right if you’re thinking: it’s not trendy to flaunt the name of Jesus on an Instagram page. The world of media surrounding us flaunts the name of self. As teenagers, it is difficult to not go with the flow, because you feel like you don’t fit in. Be different and look different from the world. Do not be afraid to be the change. Do not be afraid to do the less trendy thing because it is right.

How do you want to be remembered? For your body, your clothing (or the lack thereof), or the number of followers you had? Friend, in eternity, these things will be dust. Strive to be remembered for how you lived your life for Christ, as a light for his Kingdom, full of inward beauty in this world full of lust and outward beauty.

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CELL PHONES: HELPING THE WORLD OR HURTING IT?

With innovation at every turn, this world is becoming increasingly governed by technology. Since there are new and exciting tech advances each year, society has completely changed from what it was decades ago. Technology is all over the place, resting on our desks, clipped around our wrists, and buried in our pockets. Although there are a variety of examples of different technologies that have changed and are still changing today’s society, the most evident device that is promoting change is the cell phone. Cell phones have seen much advancement and are used by a large percentage of the world’s population, including those of a relatively young age. Although cell phones are helpful and innovative, their use by young adults and those younger have created problems in the areas of their education, safety, and health.

The first area in which young adults are showing a significant decline is in their achievements in education. This is because cell phones present a variety of new problems when one is supposed to be dedicated to learning. In the article by Andrew Lepp et al., they present the results of multiple studies concerning the relationship between students in either high school or college and their phone use. Through their extensive research, they established that there is a negative effect on someone’s grade point average if they are accessing any sort of media, text, or calling app during class and/or study time (Andrew Lepp et al., 344). All of these intelligence decreasing apps and activities can be accessed through the modern cell phone. This makes the cell phone a major distraction. An additional article supports this idea of students experiencing a decline in intelligence. Brittany Harman and Toru Sato wrote a report that says that “the more an individual sends or receives text messages, the lower his or her grade point average typically is” (Harman & Sato). This second article reiterates the point that cell phones are having a huge negative impact on the average intelligence of young adults who frequently use cell phones.

This deterioration of intelligence is having a great impact on education, but cell phones are also having a tremendous impact on the schools of education themselves. In an article by Kinjo Kiema, a program specialist at the Education Writers Association, she analyzes both sides of the argument taken from interviews with teachers spanning from elementary to high school on whether cell phones are beneficial enough to be allowed in a school setting or not. One side of the argument that she makes clear in her work is that cell phones can be used as a cost-effective tool that schools can utilize, which would remove the cost of schools buying certain technologies themselves. However, Kiema also includes that the allowance of phones in the classroom will serve as a distraction for both teachers and students. Not only as a distraction, but cell phones have the potential to be used for bad purposes such as cheating or cyberbullying (Kiema, 1–2). After analysis of both the positive and negative effects that cell phones can have in a school setting, it can be easily seen that there are more negative results than positive. This clearly shows that there is a serious problem that is now being dealt with because of the introduction of this new technology in our society.

After examining the cell phone’s effect on a person’s intelligence and education, the next major decline evident in the lives of young people is in the area of safety, and more specifically, road safety. Jack Nasar, a professor at the Ohio State University, and transportation engineer, Derek Troyer, wrote an article researching the cell phone’s impact on the safety of drivers and pedestrians. They recognize in their writing that there are some positive aspects to being able to access cell phones while on the road, such as being able to call for help and to give directions to their destination. However, Nasar and Troyer state that “studies show slowed reaction times, increased distraction, and motor vehicle collisions associated with mobile phone use.” Not only are cell phones a bad influence on the driver, but pedestrians using them are also experiencing less situational awareness and a greater amount of distraction (Nasar & Troyer, 91). This leads to a greater risk for other drivers on the roads as well as pedestrians who may or may not be active on their phones. Overall, road safety has declined dramatically since the introduction of the cell phone.
The final area in which a dramatic downward trend can be detected is in the area of one’s health. Since the introduction of cell phones, both the physical and mental health of students have been affected. In the journal entry of Jacob Barkley et al., they have identified anxiety as a side effect of cell phone use. They continued on to explain that the average cell phone user feels as if he must remain constantly connected to his cell phone so that others might be able to reach him at any given moment. This attachment to a cell phone creates anxiety over a false obligation that one might feel towards his phone. Students are also experiencing anxiety when they are not able to access their phones as frequently as they would want (Barkley et al., 344). These mental problems are serious, and because of the popularity of cell phones, they are spread all over the world.

However, issues with health do not stop there. Physical health problems are becoming a common result of phone use. Another article written by Andrew Lepp et al. establishes many reactions that one’s body can have to this abundance of cell phone use. As seen in this article, in most cases, cell phone use is sedentary behavior, which means that most of the time, its use happens in a resting position. The increased amount of resting because of the large quantity of time that people are on their phones causes a decrease in physical activity and lowers one’s cardiorespiratory abilities. This can lead to increased blood pressure, increased body fat percentage, and overall increased risk for diseases, including heart disease (Andrew Lepp et al.). With this health decline on the rise in students and adults, cell phones can be seen as promoting unhealthy habits to all users.

With the abundance of problems in education, safety, and health that are caused by cell phones, this advancement in technology can be seen as a downturn in the lives of many students. However, many around the world, no matter their age or station in life, are also undergoing some or all of these declines. With this in mind, one might pose the question: are cell phones helping the world or hurting it?

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**Book Review** Dewey Engelsma

*12 WAYS YOUR PHONE IS CHANGING YOU*


The data is in, and it isn’t pretty. The average teen spends around 7½ hours per day on his or her smartphone. That means over seventeen years of your life could be spent looking at your phone. Ouch.

That data may shock some of us, but I think for the most part we know we are spending an excessive amount of time looking, scrolling, liking, posting, browsing, and otherwise wasting a vast swath of our lives on our phones. The question then becomes, do we care? Should we?

Tony Reinke thinks you should, and he lays out his case in his book, *12 Ways Your Phone is*
Changing You. We should listen to him.  

As Christians, one of two things is true: Either God is pleased with our phone usage and will bless it, or he sees it as the colossal waste of time that it is and will not bless it. (You probably know where I stand on the issue.) Other books, including The Shallows by Nicholas Carr and Irresistible by Adam Alter, have proved the dangers from a secular point of view. These devices are rewiring our brains, and we are becoming increasingly addicted to their use. What about from the Christian perspective? Is it okay that our phone use mirrors that of the world? Tony Reinke lays out the case that thoughtlessly adopting the technology of the world is worldliness (37). Eternity, not psychology, is his concern (43). That doesn’t make him a Luddite (someone who rejects new technology). He is an early adopter of new technology, and throughout the book makes the case that this technology is a gift from God and that it can be pressed into the service of our King.

Although Reinke does not answer the weighty question that has plagued millions of smartphone users (is gif said with a hard “g” or a soft “g”?), he compellingly lays out twelve ways our phones are changing us. The problem we face is that when we change slowly over time, we don’t recognize the change. Typically, we would have someone who loves us speak a word of warning (“Hey, you’re different now than you used to be”), but now we face the situation where almost all of us are changing! We are all proverbial frogs in boiling water, not recognizing that the temperature in the water around us is slowly increasing.

So, how does Reinke think we are changing, and should we care?

Here is a sobering thought: what is on your screen reveals what is in your heart, even (or especially) that which takes place under the guise of anonymity (27). So often, what is on our hearts is the craving for immediate approval. We post…and wait for the likes to come in. We crave the small burst of satisfaction we receive when our post is liked, admired, and congratulated. Our addiction to our phones often reveals an addiction to looking at ourselves (110). So many of us have become digital Narcissuses—staring into our own shimmering pool (our phone) and in love with what we see. But at what cost? Such a desire, Reinke contends, will “kill us spiritually.” Only those who “aim their entire lives toward the glory and approval of God will find, in Christ, eternal approval” (77). Examine your phone use in this regard—whose approval are you craving throughout the day as you post your selfies and other carefully staged images? Be careful lest, like the Pharisees, the burst of gratification you receive from those posts proves to be your only reward (Matt. 6:2).

Your phone allows you to get comfortable with secret vices. Reinke surveyed 8,000 Christians and found that almost 50% of professing Christian men freely confessed ongoing pornography use (135). Smartphones allow some to “destroy themselves in secret” (136). Here is where getting rid of your smartphone may be the calling for some of God’s children. If you struggle with the temptation to pornography, or any other “secret” sin (secret is in quotes because, as Reinke points out, we fool ourselves with anonymity), removing your eye and hand are called for, which in this case means removing your access to the internet. Get rid of it. As Sinclair Ferguson said, “It is better to enter heaven having decided to never use the Internet again, rather than going to hell clicking on everything you desire” (137). Although the world (and your friends and family) will think you are a freak, Reinke comforts with the statement that you will be a “freak” who “believes in 2 Corinthians 4:18, ‘who look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal’” (89).

Reinke makes the case that our phones are making us “broadly connected but emotionally shallow” (179). Thinking about this made me see a close parallel. We spend many of our waking hours on our phones browsing through “odd curiosities” (180) and endlessly swiping through Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter. And although you might now be an expert on the upcoming college football season, and you now know which Hollywood star is appearing in which godless film, are you really entitled to spend your time in this way? What is the cost of this endless stream of meaningless information filling your brain? I contend that not only will it make us “emotionally shallow,” but it will make us theologically shallow. If we are used to getting our information in 280 characters or less, we are not quickly going to sit down and read through the Acts of Synod to study deeply and make a judgment about an issue. This will leave us spiritually ignorant, unable to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). And if in our ignorance we still form opinions, this makes us foolish, and not wise (Prov. 1:7; 10:14; 15:7; 18:2).

Do you think it is glorifying to God or an evidence of your love for him when you spend five, seven, or nine hours of each day of your life browsing, posting, liking, uploading, watching, and clicking on...
things with no value, either temporal or eternal? Reinke makes the penetrating statement: we do not have “time to kill,” we have time to redeem (180). And if we decide that we just don’t care and will persist in wasting our time in this way, perhaps the faith we are not living is no faith at all (James 2:17).

What about our devotions? When our phone is the first thing we look at in the morning and the last thing we look at before bed, odds are good that our devotional life is poor. Reinke quotes Charles Spurgeon: “Permit not your minds to be easily distracted, or you will often have your devotion destroyed” (128). We must spend time reading, studying, and meditating on God’s word. That short devotional that pops up on your phone every morning is good, but it must not replace careful meditation on the word of God. The death of God’s people on account of a lack of knowledge is not only relegated to generations past (Hos. 4:6).

Reinke’s reference to C. S. Lewis and the devil’s “Nothing” strategy is worth quoting at length:

[This] strategy…eventually leaves a man at the end of his life looking back in lament: “I now see that I spent most of my life in doing neither what I ought nor what I liked.” This “Nothing” strategy is “very strong: strong enough to steal away a man’s best years, not in sweet sins, but in a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what and knows not why, in the gratification of curiosities so feeble that the man is only half aware of them…or in the long, dim labyrinth of reveries that have not even lust or ambition to give them a relish, but which, once chance association has started them, the creature is too weak and fuddled to shake off.”

Young people, don’t you see that much of the time on your phone is nothing but a “dreary flickering”? That it is a mindless, time-wasting swiping of your finger, watching vanity after vanity appear and disappear? If you can’t see this in yourself, then put your phone down for just a few minutes and watch those around you. It is a depressing sight to see, as young and old, with the glow of the screen bathing their faces, waste their time with “nothing.”

What is the solution? Do we need a new app to help us manage our time? Do your parents need to put on stricter controls or show greater concern about your use of your phone (probably, yes)? Even that is not the real solution, because you know that you can work around anything they put into place and go where you want to go. Where is victory over this temptation to be found?

The same place all of our salvation is found, Jesus Christ.

To put it another way, our battle against the encumbering distractions of this world—especially the unnecessary distractions of our phones—is a heart war we can wage only if our affections are locked firmly on the glory of Christ. The answer to our hyperkinetic digital world of diversions is the soul-calming sedative of Christ’s splendor, beheld with the mind and enjoyed by the soul. The beauty of Christ calms us and roots our deepest longings in eternal hopes that are far beyond what our smartphones can ever hope to deliver (50).

Does a fear of missing out drive you to your phone over and over again? When you know your salvation, you are missing out on nothing. “Therefore, the motto over the allurement of the digital age is set in the slightly altered words of the apostle Paul: I count every real deprivation in my life—and every feared deprivation in my imagination—as no expense in light of never missing out on the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for all eternity” (161).

That carefully crafted image of you on Facebook and Instagram is not the real you. That is not your identity. You are in Christ; now believe that and live out of it.

All of this forgetting and fragmenting is why we must never stop returning to our identity in Christ. In him, the powers of sin have been broken. We are no longer bound to obey our eye lust, bound to seek the approval of man, bound to find our relevance in viral memes, or addicted to what’s trending on Reddit. My appetite for diversions and new daily curiosities has been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer the old me that lives online, but Christ living in me, and the life I now live online I live by faith in Christ, who loved me so much that he shed his blood for me (181).

I encourage you to purchase this book and commit yourself to read it. To disregard the problem, and to continue using your phone as usual, might reveal just how significant your problem is: “Our bondage to technology is measured by our inability to thoughtfully criticize ourselves” (194).
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“press toward the mark…”
(Philippians 3:14)

September 8  Read Matthew 22:1–14
Read Canons of Dordt, Head 3 & 4, Article 8
This article was written in response to the Arminian Opinions submitted to the synod, where they claimed God couldn’t really be serious in the call of the gospel if he had no intention of saving many of those who were called. The Reformers clearly stated it’s according to God’s good pleasure that he gives some the gift of faith and to others he does not. God is very serious about this, even casting those who refuse to repent and believe into eternal damnation. How could the same God who does nothing to save the reprobate desire their salvation in the preaching? That makes no sense. The word “called” here does not mean invited or offered. This is a command, and those who disobey will be punished. We see this idea in the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22, where the king destroyed those who did not heed the call to come to the feast. There is also serious promise that comes with the call: those who believe will be given eternal life and rest. What a wonder it is that the Holy Spirit works this in us that we may enjoy the heavenly rest into all eternity. Sing or pray Psalter #401.

September 9  Read Matthew 13:1–9
Read Heads 3 & 4, Article 9
We’re reminded here whose fault it is that the gospel isn’t believed. The Arminians said it was God’s fault, because he never gave the wicked a chance. Just as they did in Head 1, Article 5, and Head 2, Article 6, the Canon writers clearly state that unbelief is no fault of God’s. First, it’s not the gospel’s fault, meaning the gospel is not too difficult for them to understand. Second, it’s not the fault of Christ, for his atonement was sufficient. Third, it’s not the fault of God, for he seriously calls them and gives them a conscience and reason to understand the difference between right and wrong.

The fault lies solely on the unbeliever. Why? First, because he refuses to answer the call and come. Second, because he is like one of the soils in Matthew 13. He either rejects the word outright, loses interest in it after a short time, or fails to continue fighting against all the temptations around him and is choked. No matter the type, all these are guilty for their lack of fruit. May we all take heed to the words of Matthew 13:9, “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Sing or pray Psalter #144.

September 10  Read Matthew 12:33–37
Read Heads 3 & 4, Article 10 & 11
Article 10 now addresses those who obey the call. Notice that they don’t accept the call, as you might accept an offer, but they obey it, as you would a command. The credit for this obeying goes solely to God.

Article 11 then marks the switch from Head 3 to Head 4, from discussion on man’s depravity to his regeneration. Since man is totally depraved, he needs new life from God. Arminianism denies this, either by stating that man doesn’t need this or by claiming that man receives this new life by his own cooperation with God. God accomplishes his good pleasure in the elect by preaching the gospel to them and sending the Holy Spirit to work within them to heed the call. In so doing, the Holy Spirit “pervades the inmost recesses of the man,” completely different from the Arminian view, where God must wait outside hoping that man will let him into his heart. The bad tree is made into a good tree that bears fruit, as we read in Matt. 12:33. Do you believe? Then see that belief as proof that the Holy Spirit has given you new life and rejoice. Sing or pray Psalter #375.

September 11  Read Romans 5:1–11
Read Heads 3 & 4, Error and Rejection 6
As we’ve mentioned before, the Arminians taught that man’s will is morally neutral, so it did not lose any moral qualities at the fall. The Arminians then took this lie and ran with it. No new qualities, they said, can then be fused into the will during conversion. Faith can’t be a quality infused into man’s will, because there are no such qualities. Therefore, faith is only man’s activity, the thing he must do in order
to be saved. To the Arminian, faith is only a gift from God in the sense that God gives man the power to attain it, but man can resist God and refuse it. As Rev. McGeown summarizes it, “according to Arminianism, God in the preaching of the gospel merely removes certain hindrances from the will of man so that he’s able to believe of his own power.”

However, the Bible clearly states that God does infuse new qualities into man’s will. One verse we see this in is Romans 5:5, which reads, “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

**September 12**

**Read John 1:1–18**

Read Heads 3 & 4, Article 12

Everything in the previous articles of Heads 3 & 4 has really led up to the statement we find here. Let’s examine five truths the article tells us about regeneration. First, it is the work of God alone. Second, regeneration is a new birth, a new creation, and a resurrection from the dead. Third, regeneration is not performed merely by the preaching or in a way where the final decision is left to man. Instead, regeneration is a supernatural work that man has no ability to perform. Fourth, regeneration is described as “most powerful,” “delightful,” “astonishing,” “mysterious,” and “ineffable” (meaning it can’t be expressed in words). We know that we have been regenerated and we praise God for it, but it’s something we can’t truly understand. Fifth, God regenerates all those whom he has chosen; regeneration never fails. Regenerated man’s will isn’t simply influenced by this work of God, but it’s actually made active, as we read in John 1:13. Therefore, it’s proper to say that man himself believes and repents because of the gift of God’s grace that has been imputed to him. What a wonder! Sing or pray Psalter #179.

**September 13**

**Read Revelation 3:14–22**

Read Heads 3 & 4, Error and Rejection 9

Arminians said grace and free will together cause regeneration. This counterfeit grace is not effectual, but advising grace offered to everyone. Free will is the more important of the two, because God can’t give grace until man makes the first move. God can only help the sinner if he is asked. The Arminians used the gentleman analogy to illustrate this false doctrine. They said God is the perfect gentleman; he won’t enter our hearts until we invite him in.

This view has become popular today by perverting what’s taught in passages like Rev. 3:20, where Christ is actually knocking on the doors of the church of Laodicea to warn them about what they are, not to ask them permission to come in. God opens the heart, as we read he did to Lydia in Acts 16:14. Man has no part in this.

We see that again the Arminian teaching is consistent with Pelagianism. As Rev. McGeown puts it, “The Arminian view of election is Pelagianism; the Arminian view of the cross is Pelagianism; and the Arminian view of regeneration is Pelagianism.”

**September 14**

**Read Ezekiel 36:22–32**

Read Heads 3 & 4, Error and Rejection 7

The grace we read of in the Bible is effectual and irresistible. It always accomplishes its purpose. Arminian grace, on the other hand, is nothing more than “a gentle advising.” The Arminians protested that man’s abilities would be insulted if God’s grace were effectual. Notice how the Arminians were masters at making their repugnant ideas sound pious. As they put it, God used the “noblest manner of working in the conversion of man.” This allowed them to convince many that they were praising God, when they were really just robbing him of the power of his grace. In fact, it can’t even be said that God’s power is greater than Satan’s; it’s just that he has a better sales pitch.

What folly this is! The Reformed fathers again rightly raised the charge of Pelagianism and pointed out that this teaching is directly contrary to what we read in a passage like Ezekiel 36:26. We must always be on guard against false doctrine that seeps into the church by being dressed up with false piety.

Sing or pray Psalter #173.

**September 15**

**Read Ephesians 1:15–23**

Read Heads 3 & 4, Error and Rejection 8 & Article 13

Arminians claim that God is omnipotent, but he decides not to use his omnipotence in man’s conversion. This doesn’t make sense, because if God’s grace is not omnipotent, then it’s not grace. Second, the Arminians claim that God respects man to make the decision for himself; he chooses not to intervene. Third, God might put forth a lot of effort to work in someone, only to have them reject him. In fact, since many go to hell, and God, according to the Arminian, wants to save everyone, his efforts are often lost. We must always be on guard against such teachings that take power that must only be ascribed to God (Eph. 1:19–23) and give it to man.
Article 13 addresses the fact that we know a lot about God’s work of regeneration, but we cannot fully comprehend it, and we must not attempt to do so. We cannot completely understand the how, when, or why of our regeneration. The emphasis here is on comfort and assurance. Instead of causing us to pry into the mind of God and disturbing us, this truth should humble us and cause us to give all praise, honor, and glory to God. *Sing or pray Psalter #219.*

**September 16**  
**Read Philippians 2:12–18**

Read Heads 3 & 4, Article 14

Faith is the gift of God, as expressed in verses like Ephesians 2:8 and Philippians 1:29. The Reformers and Arminians had different definitions of what this means. To the Arminian, this gift was something that God offered to man, and that man could choose to accept or reject. In contrast, our Reformed fathers pointed out that a gift in scripture is simply something that is given by God to man and that he then possesses. Man does not have the option to take or reject this gift. If God gives it, man receives it, plain and simple. God also does not give man the power of ability to believe and then leave the actual believing to man. If God gives the power to do something, then it happens. How foolish and blasphemous to believe that man can resist the will of God. As we read in Philippians 2:13, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” *Sing or pray Psalter #238.*

**September 17**  
**Read 1 Corinthians 13**

Read Heads 3 & 4, Article 15 and 1 Corinthians 13

God does not owe salvation to anyone; it is completely gracious. The only thing that man deserves is God’s wrath. The article talks about two kinds of people who don’t receive this grace. First, there are those who are openly sinful and don’t show any desire to be converted. Second, there are the hypocrites. These people claim to be Christians, and may even appear to be Christians to many, but they actually hate the truth. Not knowing the heart, we treat these hypocrites as brothers, but how do we act towards those who are openly living in unbelief? First, we look at them as those who are not yet called. Second, we pray for them and demonstrate a true desire that they be converted. Third, we act in humility towards them. May we never act haughty because of our salvation. We must ask ourselves, how do those that we come into contact with in the world view us? Do they look at us as someone who is humble or who is proud? We must remember the words of 1 Corinthians 13:4b, where Paul said, “Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.” Charity is showing humility, not pride. *Sing or pray Psalter #221.*

**September 18**  
**Read John 8:31–38**

Read Heads 3 & 4, Article 16

The Arminians claimed that the Reformers made man into a stock and block (puppet or robot), and this article is the Reformer’s answer to that accusation. God created man a rational, moral creature, and he has always and will always remain that. Although man is totally depraved after the fall, he still remains human. Man’s will is the same, even after he’s regenerated. Once regenerated, we simply become active, repent, and believe.

What does God do to the will then? The article lists three things. First, he spiritually quickens it, so that it becomes alive. Second, he heals it. Third, he bends it. The result is that man’s will is spiritually transformed, so that he desires to do the will of his heavenly father. Man then has true freedom, because freedom is freedom to do what’s right, not the ability to do whatever you want and please the lusts of the flesh (John 8:34–36). The conclusion is that regeneration is man’s only hope, and it’s all of God. So, to us who have been regenerated, may we show true thankfulness to him for that work in us. *Sing or pray Psalter 233.*

**September 19**  
**Read Isaiah 55**

Read Heads 3 & 4, Article 17

This article answers the accusation that preaching is pointless and unnecessary if salvation is all of God. The article shows that God uses means in his working of salvation. The Reformers first pointed out that God uses means in our physical life. If we are sick and don’t get medicine, we aren’t using the means God has given us to continue our life here. This is true spiritually as well, because salvation is all of God, but preaching is the means God uses to accomplish that salvation. The article describes preaching as the seed of regeneration and food of the soul, as we read in Isaiah 55:10–11. If we don’t take care of ourselves and use the means God has given us, then we tempt God. Tempting God is trying to force God to work in a way that he hasn’t decreed to.

The article goes on to explain that God gives grace through the use of admonitions. We’re commanded to do things. As Rev. McGeown summarizes, “God blesses in the way of diligence.” God does not bless
spiritual laziness. God does bless us while we are walking in obedience to him and giving him all the glory. Sing or pray Psalter #240.

**September 20** Read 1 John 1:5–10

Read Head 5, Article 1

Head 5 is all about the preservation or perseverance of the saints. This head begins by describing the saint as he struggles with sin all throughout his life. These saints are first those who are called. Second, they are those for whom Christ purchased the benefits of salvation on the cross. Third, they are those who have had the Holy Spirit work in their hearts. Although sin still remains within us, those sins are all washed away in the blood of Christ, as we read in 1 John 1:7.

This article speaks against two basic errors: antinomianism and perfectionism. The antinomian uses the truth that salvation is all of God to justify his wicked life and still say he is going to heaven. He denies sanctification. The second error refutes is perfectionism, which says man can attain perfection in this life. This is often done in a second blessing received from God. It is not the antinomian or the perfectionist who is saved, however; perseverance is given to the imperfect saint who continues to struggle with sin in this life. Sing or pray Psalter #257.

**September 21** Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–22

Read Head 5, Article 2 & 3

If we have been saved by the blood of Christ, then why do we continue to have sin within us? The answer is that the old man of sin continues to exist. We daily commit sins, or infirmities, as the article states. We do perform good works, but never perfect works. Even our best works are still polluted with sin. What does the believer do when he sees these sins within himself? He turns to the cross. This is not cause for despair, but for giving God all the glory. When we experience these struggles within us, we must be encouraged, because it is evidence of the Holy Spirit working in us.

Article 3 goes on to state clearly that salvation is impossible if left to man. In contrast, the Arminians taught that we can persevere of our own strength if we only put forth enough effort. In response to this proud thinking, 1 Corinthians 10:12 says, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” The true comfort, of course, is that God doesn’t leave us to our own strength, but he sends Christ who died on the cross to save us from our sins. Sing or pray Psalter #379.

**September 22** Read Malachi 3:6–15

Read Head 5, Error and Rejection 1 & 2

Error 1 directly addresses those who believe that the perseverance of the saints is dependent upon man’s decision. We believe that perseverance is the fruit of election, while the Arminians taught it is a condition of the new covenant. The elect for the Arminians were those whom God foresees will believe and persevere in faith. On the contrary, eternal life must include perseverance, because without perseverance it is not eternal life, but only temporary life. This shows the foolishness of the Arminian teaching that man must persevere in faith before salvation is guaranteed to him.

The Arminians taught that God gives man all the tools he needs to persevere and yet it is up to man to make the decision to do so, as we read in Error 2. They put forth much effort to sound very pious in their exaltation of man. Again, we see the Canons answer them with the charge of Pelagianism. The Arminian does everything he can to make man free, but he really only succeeds in making man a robber of God’s honor (Malachi 3:8–9). The truth is that we have no reason to boast, and all praise, honor, and glory goes to God alone. Sing or pray Psalter #379.

**September 23** Read 1 John 2:1–14

Read Head 5, Error and Rejection 9

The Arminians did not deny that Christ intercedes for his people, but they did deny that his intercession causes the saints to continue in faith. What Christ’s intercession actually did do then is unclear. As with everything else, the Arminians made Christ’s intercession dependent upon man. What a foolish doctrine to think that Christ doesn’t intercede for his people until they demonstrate a desire to be interceded for! Where would we be if Christ only interceded for us when we were faithful to him? If that were the case, then we would all be left to die. The truth is that Christ’s atonement and intercession secure our salvation. As we read in 1 John 2:1–2, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” There is no one who Christ intercedes for that is not saved. What a comfort! Sing or pray Psalter #368.
Read Head 5, Article 4

The Arminians claimed that the Reformed teachings amounted to making God the author of sin or making sin God’s fault. Articles 4 and 5 answer that accusation. How do we explain the fact that believers fall into sin? First, God’s people deviate from the truth. Second, they are seduced by fleshly lusts. Third, they willingly fall into sin and give in to those lusts. Fourth, they do not do what God commands them to do. Fifth, God permits these believers to walk in sin for a time.

There is a pattern here. The negligent Christian stops reading his Bible and worshipping God as he ought. He becomes self-confident, thinking he can handle things himself and does not need God. This makes him more vulnerable to the devil and to falling into sin, and when he does fall it makes him use the means of grace even less, and so he spirals downward. God does not make the believer sin, he merely withdraws some of the influence of his grace, so that the believer falls by his own natural depravity, as Rev. McGeown puts it. May this article be a warning to us to pray earnestly, “Lead us not into temptation.”

Sing or pray Psalter #364.

Read Head 5, Article 5

This article lays out the horrible effects of sin, specifically of the gross sins that God’s people can fall into, sins that often result in church discipline. First, these sins greatly displease God. Second, this sin puts a deadly guilt on the believer, as David describes in Psalm 32:3–4. Here, David writes, “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.” Third, these sins grieve the Holy Spirit, so that he withdraws himself from them for a time. Our assurance is shaken. Fourth, the sinning believer cannot look confidently to Christ, for he has rejected Christ in his sin. Fifth, when we walk in sin our consciences accuse us, so that we have no rest. Sixth, we can lose the sense of God’s favor for a time. God’s favor always remains, but when we walk in sin, it can be true that we do not sense it for a while. God does not allow us to be happy in sin, and we can be thankful to him for that.

Sing or pray Psalter #360.

Read Head 5, Article 6

Can God’s people fall out of faith? Can they fall so far that they cease to be God’s people and be saved? By 1618, the Arminians had answered yes, but the Reformed fathers at Dordt soundly rejected that claim. God always remains faithful to his promise. Regeneration is irreversible, and God does not withdraw his promise completely from his people. God does not cast us out of his family, but he chastises us in love, as an earthly father must do to his children. As we read in Hebrews 12:6, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” Our sins aren’t re-imputed to us, but we are children in need of correction. The article states that the fall of the saint into sin is very sad, but it doesn’t mean that he’s not saved. Rev. McGeown brings up the example of Samson. He fell into sin, committed adultery with Delilah, and he was greatly chastised for that sin, but he died in faith serving his God.

Sing or pray Psalter #356.

Read Head 5, Error and Rejection 3 & 4

In Error 3, the Arminians taught that those who are regenerated can and do fall out of faith and salvation. In fact, they say this happens often. There are many in hell, they say, who were once regenerated. This is a direct denial of verses like Romans 8:30, “Whom he justified, them he also glorified.” Furthermore, the Arminians taught that the regenerate sometimes do commit the unforgivable sin, or the sin against the Holy Spirit. It is important to understand that wondering if we have committed this sin is a clear evidence that we have not. This sin is described in Matthew 12:31–32. The sin against the Holy Spirit can only be done deliberately, persistently, and without shame. This sin was committed by the Pharisees when they claimed that Jesus’ miracles were done by the power of the devil. God keeps his people from committing this particular sin. The Arminians do everything they can to find a passage that says someone can lose their regeneration and get it back again many times in their life, but no such passage exists, because that is the lie.

Sing or pray Psalter #354.

Read Head 5, Article 7 and Psalm 32

This article gives reasons why the saint who has fallen into sin does not perish everlastingly. First,
the seed of regeneration within them cannot perish, as we read in verses like 1 John 3:9 and 5:18. Second, God causes us to repent and to have sorrow for sin. It is in the way of repentance that the believer is restored to once again experience fellowship with God. How amazing it is that we can be not only saved from sin and death by Christ's sacrifice, but also be forgiven again when we plunge deep into sin. David wrote of this wonder in Psalm 32:5 with the words, “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” Not only is the saint again forgiven, but he’s also brought to greater diligence by his experience, for it is by diligently walking according to God’s commandments that we show our thankfulness to him for his great mercy towards us. **Sing or pray Psalter #352.**

**September 29** Read 1 John 3:1–10

The Arminians taught that the only difference between saving faith and temporary faith is that saving faith perseveres and temporary faith does not. Scripture gives us three differences between the two. First, those with saving faith receive the truth in a good heart, while those with temporary faith have a heart of stone. Second, those with saving faith have a deep root, but those with temporary faith are without root. Third, those with saving faith bring forth fruit, but those with temporary faith do not.

Error 8 goes on to directly address the teaching of the Arminians that one can be regenerated and fall away many times in his life. According to the Arminian view, God would plant the seed of regeneration in his people, but that seed would die when the person falls into sin. This is contrary to what we read in 1 John 3:9, which says, “Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” In other words, although we sin, our sin takes place in our old man. In our new man we do not and cannot sin. **Sing or pray Psalter #243.**

**September 30** Read Ephesians 4:17–32

Read Head 5, Article 8

This article explains why it is impossible for the elect to perish. The article states that the reason for our perseverance is God’s free mercy. This guarantees two things. First, God’s people cannot completely fall from faith and grace. When we walk in sin, he removes himself from us, but faith does not completely leave us. Second, God will not let his people die during such backsliding, but he will call us to repentance.

The article lists five reasons why the elect cannot perish. First, God decreed that we would be elected before time, and that cannot be undone. Second, God promised to save his people, and God’s promises cannot fail. Third, we have already been called, and we cannot become uncalled. Fourth, Christ merited salvation for us by his lifelong obedience and his sacrifice on the cross, and that work cannot be made of no effect. Christ’s work would be a failure if even one person he died for was not saved. Fifth, God’s people have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, and that seal cannot be broken (Eph. 4:30). In summary, we see we are preserved because of the power of the triune God, and that’s the greatest assurance we can have. **Sing or pray Psalter #245.**

**August 1** Read 1 Corinthians 1:1–9

Read Head 5, Article 9

The Arminians taught an assurance of present salvation. In other words, we can be assured of our salvation at any particular time, but we can lose that assurance. None of us can know, say the Arminians, if we will be saved in the end.

What does scripture tell us of our assurance? First, the article says it is being persuaded that we will always be members of the church. Second, this assurance is being persuaded that our sins are forgiven because of Christ’s satisfaction on the cross. We are sorry for our sins, but we do not wallow in them, because they have already been atoned for by our savior Jesus Christ. Third, this assurance is being persuaded that eternal life is ours, as is confirmed in many passages in the Bible, including 1 Corinthians 1:8. Immediately when we die our souls go to be with God in heaven, where they will soon be reunited with our bodies on the last day. Lacking assurance is very serious, and we should expect that God’s people are assured. **Sing or pray Psalter #246.**

**August 2** Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–22

Read Head 5, Article 10

So where does our assurance of everlasting life come from? First, it does not come from any special revelation. This is the error of mysticism, which says only those who receive a special experience know they are saved. The vast majority of those in the church never get this experience and must live in constant doubt. Sadly, this means that most members are even reluctant to partake of the Lord’s
Supper, which is directly contrary to the form we read before partaking.

This question is also looked at positively in the article from three points of view. First, our assurance comes forth from faith. To doubt God is to call him a liar. Second, we embrace God’s promises by faith, because of the Holy Spirit working in us. Third, the fruit of this faith is that we have a genuine desire to perform good works. The article ends by talking about how we are miserable if we don’t have this assurance, as we read in 1 Corinthians 15:19. We must flee from those who preach doubt and rest firmly in the assurance God has given to us. Sing or pray Psalter #249.

**August 3** Read Matthew 14:22–33

Read Head 5, Error and Rejection 5 & 6

Here again we talk about how the Arminians believed that we cannot have the assurance that we are saved, at least not saved eternally. We can feel we are saved at any moment, but none of us can know if we will be saved at the end of our life. This doctrine is in complete rejection of Q & A 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism. The rejection says that we deduce assurance from “the marks proper to the children of God” and “the constant promises of God.”

Not only did the Arminians teach that assurance is harmful to godliness, but they went so far as to say that it is praiseworthy to doubt. The Bible clearly teaches that doubt is sin. That is why Christ constantly rebuked unbelief and doubt, as he did in Matthew 14:31, where Jesus rebuked Peter for becoming afraid when he was walking on the water. Rev. McGeown shows the foolishness of such teaching by bringing out the contradictions it upholds. He says, “Shall the Holy Spirit produce unholy believers? Shall the Holy Spirit call us with a holy calling and then permit us to live without holiness? Of course not.”

Sing or pray Psalter #262.

**August 5** Read Psalm 130

Read Head 5, Article 13

Yesterday we talked about the fruit of assurance in God’s people, and today we examine that fruit in a saint who has fallen into sin and been restored. The Arminians claimed that the Reformed doctrine would make a Christian who had walked in sin return to his evil ways, because he knew God would deliver and save him anyway. In actuality, the formerly backsliding Christian is caused to be more diligent in a walk of godliness, because he does not want to fall back into darkness. To the godly man, to lose the gracious countenance of God is more bitter than death to him. Psalm 130:3–4 reads, “If thou Lord shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” If God did not see us through the blood of Christ we would have no hope. Thanks be to God for what his Son Jesus did on the cross to forgive us of our sins and make us worthy partakers of the heavenly riches. Sing or pray Psalter #268.

**August 6** Read Ephesians 5:1–21

Read Head 5, Article 14

The means that God uses to preserve his people unto the end is the preaching. Why does God use warnings in the Bible that are to be preached to God’s people if they are assured of their salvation already? One such warning can be found in Ephesians 5:6, where we read, “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” The reason for these warnings is that they are the way in which God preserves his people. These warnings have a two-fold effect upon those who hear them. First, they cause the ungodly to become hardened and continue in sin. Second, these warnings cause the godly to turn from sin and have a renewed diligence in obeying their heavenly father. God uses the wonderful life of assurance.

As we have stated before, the Arminians claimed the Reformed doctrine of assurance would make men careless. What incentive would man have to do what is right if he already knew he was saved? However, our assurance does nothing to make us proud. How foolish it is to be proud of something that we had no part in achieving. In contrast, the certainty of perseverance is the source of such humility and patience in tribulation, for we know that our God is in complete control and is working everything for our good. Sing or pray Psalter #267.
means of the preaching to bring people to the truth and to preserve them in that truth. *Sing or pray Psalter #169.*

**August 7** Read John 10:22–31

In this final article of the Canons, the truth of the perseverance of the saints is summed up and looked at negatively and positively. First, negatively, man by nature can never understand this truth, for to him there is no incentive to do good if he already knows he will receive the reward. In addition, Satan hates the truth, because it means he can never capture any of the elect and take them out of the covenant, as we read in John 10:28–30. Wicked man simply looks at this doctrine as an excuse to commit sin and they mock it at every turn.

Positively, this truth is taught all throughout the scriptures. There is no greater comfort than what we read in Q & A 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism, especially in the words, “who so preserves me.” God impresses the truth of this doctrine upon our hearts, and also gives us the wonderful assurance that we possess it. The Canons end with the beautiful doxology, “Now to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen.” Salvation is all of God and praise be to him alone. *Sing or pray Psalter #185.*

**From the Pastor’s Study** Prof. Barry Gritters

### HIGH SCHOOLERS’ QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SEMINARY AND MINISTRY

2 Timothy 2:2: *And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*

Note: In early November 2019, Mr. Jim Regnerus, principal of Trinity Christian High School in Hull, Iowa, asked me to give a chapel speech to their students while I was in the area for a Reformation Day lecture. Since the seminary professors always look for opportunities to promote the seminary and the call to the ministry, I quickly accepted the invitation. For this chapel, I asked Mr. Regnerus to solicit questions from the students about the seminary. The students came up with about 30 excellent questions that range from entertaining (“What do you do for fun at the seminary?”) to profound (“Do you feel like you are making an impact?” and “How are we to view the importance of the ministry?”). So I was disappointed when my flight to Iowa was delayed by an early winter storm and I was not able to speak to the students on the Friday morning as we had planned. But we took opportunity to begin answering the questions after the young people’s singspiration in Doon PRC Sunday evening. Since the time was short and I could not address all the questions, someone suggested that I write out answers to the questions and publish them. Here are those answers.

Thanks to Mr. Regnerus for the invitation, to the students for the questions, and to the *Beacon Lights* for publishing. (If anyone wants to know more about seminary that is not answered in these questions, please find our website at prcts.org.)

#### Questions about getting into seminary

1. Q: At what age can one enter the seminary? A: The soonest a man could enter seminary would be at about age 22, after four years of college. Probably you would classify him as a “traditional student.” But some of our students have been far from “traditional.” Some did not begin seminary until as old as 40. Two students came as trained scientists; one was a medical doctor for ten years before he started; another was a state attorney. Broad life experience before seminary can be a good thing for many men. Scripture says that a man should not be ordained who is a “novice” (1 Tim. 3:6) and that the church ought not to lay hands on anyone “suddenly” (1 Tim. 5:22). These terms are relative, not fixed; but scripture requires maturity of men who will be pastors. So you who are long out of high school should not conclude that it’s too late to think about the ministry.

2. Q: What are the academic requirements to enter the seminary? A: A four-year college or university degree is required for entrance. There are
also certain course requirements for entrance. The best way to meet both requirements is to pursue a liberal arts degree in which you would major in history, English, philosophy, or the classics, etc. Some men have entered seminary with a degree in the sciences, but that’s usually because they aspired to the ministry after they aspired to engineering or some other occupation. In such cases, they go back to college to finish the “pre-sem” requirements. The seminary catalog shows what courses need to be taken before entrance into seminary. You can find the catalog at the seminary website, prcts.org, under “Admissions/Catalog.” While you are there, look at the pictures and descriptions of the seminary facilities and student life.

3. Q: At what age did you feel called to the ministry? A: This is a good question, because it shows how every man’s experience is different. Some men sense God’s call when they are little children. My father-in-law, Rev. Kortering, told his mother at a very early age that he needed piano lessons. “Why?” she asked. “Because ministers,” said little Jason, “need to know how to play the piano” (or so he thought). Others did not know it until later. I first felt the call when I was a junior in high school, at about age 16. Terrified of the prospect, I told no one. Off and on for the next five years God planted the thought in my heart. Each time I had the thoughts, I tried to suppress them. I was running away from the Lord. But, as I often tell young people, God is called the “hound of heaven” for more than one reason. Usually the expression refers to God doggedly pursuing sinners until they repent and believe in Christ. But I like to use the expression also to describe how God pursues men for service in the ministry: “If God wants you to be a minister, he will pursue you until you humbly give up your interests and honor him.” At about age 22, I stopped running, re-entered college, and was ordained a few months before I turned 29. Running from God was a miserable experience. Once he made me willing “in the day of his power” (Ps. 110), I was never so happy.

Questions about getting through seminary

1. Q: How long are you in seminary? How many years of schooling does it take to become a minister? A: Most students in the PRC finish seminary in four years, or eight semesters. Three and a half years (seven semesters) are spent in classes at seminary with regular course work. One half year (one semester and a summer) is spent on an internship in one of our churches. Other summers the students usually work at some occupation to support themselves. At the end of four years is a final, public examination before the synod. At this examination, the churches judge whether a man has the gifts for the ministry.

2. Q: How long are classes? A: Normal classes are just under an hour. There are five morning class periods, beginning at about 7:00 a.m. and ending at noon. (The 7:00 a.m. hour is usually for Greek; the early hour enables these students to be off to their college classes.) Usually there are no classes after lunch. Afternoons and evenings are spent studying.

3. Q: Who is the toughest prof? And What is the most difficult class in seminary? What is the hardest thing going through seminary? A: The professors are all determined to make the students work their hardest. What is the most difficult depends on the student. Probably the hardest work is not the amount of reading or memorizing but doing exegesis (interpreting texts) and making sermons. These tasks take much prayer and usually some “blood, sweat, and tears.” To make sermons from good exegesis is the most important work that the student does. But it’s important to say, “When the Lord calls you to this work, the hard tasks are possible, and their difficulty is far outweighed by the joys of studying scripture and preparing to feed God’s people.”

4. Q: How many languages do you have to know going into the ministry? A: In order to preach well, a minister needs to know the two languages of the original scripture—the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. He is not required to speak the languages, but to read and understand them written. This takes many semesters of study. Sometimes God makes clear to a man that he is not called to the ministry when he is unable to learn Greek and Hebrew. An old seminary professor once said, “God calls mightily through the Greek!” In order to learn Greek, the seminary requires a man to take Latin in college before seminary. Learning Latin makes the study of Greek much easier. Formerly we required pre-seminarians to take Dutch or German. Especially Dutch would be helpful to read books from our history, but the requirement has been dropped. Don’t let the language requirements scare you away. If the Lord calls you, he will qualify you. A long time ago a minister told us young people that if we could get Bs in high school we probably could make it through seminary.

5. Q: How stressful is it studying for exams? A: Let me just say that when the students work hard every day, preparing for exams is stressful, but probably does not cause them to lose too much sleep in worry. The public examination at synod is another
matter. That two-day oral exam is very stressful for students, no matter how much we profs encourage the students not to worry. As far as I’ve heard, though, no one has ever died from their studies! To borrow from the apostle’s expression, no one has ever suffered “unto blood.”

6. Q: Do you like diagramming sentences? A: Well, well, there must be a teacher at Trinity who teaches students to diagram sentences! This gives me hope for you students. Diagramming sentences in the Bible is very important to understand what the sentence means. You cannot preach a text unless you know what it means. So we teach diagramming. I have a diagram of Lord’s Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism in my classroom—a gift from a friend of the seminary. Yes, I like to diagram sentences! I believe that you will, too, if you take Greek here at the seminary.

7. Q: What types of speaking skills do you learn in seminary? A: A good speech class is required before the men enter seminary. By the time they arrive here, they should have learned to speak in public. But the truth is, speaking in public is not easy, not all colleges have quality speech courses, and the men usually have a lot to learn once they arrive here. Seminary doesn’t have a separate course on speech, but we do help the men improve their speaking skills when they do “practice preaching.” One of the areas we analyze and give critique is in “delivery.” Students get plenty of practice—at seminary, in catechism classrooms, and eventually on the pulpits of area churches. By the time they graduate, they have become pretty effective speakers.

8. Q: How soon do you start practice preaching? How hard is it to prepare for your first sermon? When you preached for the very first time, was it hard to prepare and to deliver? A: The students make one sermon already in their first year of seminary. I work alongside of the students, step by step, in the process—usually about four or five steps. Toward the end of the year they present this sermon to their fellow students and their homiletics professor (me). From then on the students make two sermons each semester and receive no help in the process. This becomes more difficult. The students present these sermons to all the students and all the professors. We go down to Southwest PRC’s church building so that the students have a more realistic setting. Afterwards the professors all have opportunity to point out where the student did well and what should be done differently. This system is very helpful, and by the time four years are past, the sermons become better and the process is easier to follow. But sermon-making never becomes easy. I don’t remember making my first sermon, but I do remember the disaster it was when I first preached it to the students and profs. The first comment of one fellow student was, “That was boring!” Seminary teaches humility, too.

9. Q: How many hours outside of seminary class do you dedicate to your studies? A: For most students, the answer is, “Almost all of them.” Mondays are reserved for practice preaching, for traveling from out of state for preaching, and for studying. Tuesday through Friday classes last all morning. Each day after lunch the students go to their study carrels in the library and work, usually until about 5:00, when they go home. Evenings are devoted to studies also. We recommend that they reserve some time for their families, for exercise, and for participating in the life of their own congregation. But there is not much free time for hobbies or sports. Every man needs to learn his limits. When I was in seminary, I had to learn that some could get by with five hours of sleep each night; others needed six or seven.

10. Q: How much does seminary cost? A: For Protestant Reformed students and for students from churches we have some relations with, there is no tuition. The church budget that all your parents pay each week provides the salary of the professors and the maintenance of the building here. Our Church Order says in article 19, “The churches shall exert themselves, as far as necessary, that there may be students supported by them to be trained for the ministry of the Word.” We are thankful that all the congregations make great effort to support all the work at seminary. Our synod even has a Student Aid Committee that grants living expenses to students who need it. No one “can’t afford” seminary.

11. Q: What do you do for fun at seminary? What’s your favorite activity in free time? A: For a long time now there have been two ping pong tables (table tennis) in the lower level. Often the students go downstairs for a little while after lunch to get some exercise there. Because the tables are below the library and our offices, often we hear the hooting and hollering over the games. We trust they’re having fun. When they come upstairs perspiring heavily, I know that they got some good exercise too.

12. Q: What was seminary like when you first started? A: The most important part of my answer is: It was the same as it is now. We want to “hold the traditions,” as Paul exhorts in 2 Thessalonians 2:15. The same courses are taught now as then; the same
BAPTISMS
“Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Mark 10:14
The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:
Deborah Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jon & Elsie Miersma—Edmonton, CAN
Simeon Job, son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Maria Miersma—Grace, MI
Isaiah Cole, son of Mr. & Mrs. Cole DeVries—Grace, MI
Leo Wilson, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brandon & Maria Miersma—Hull, IA
Vivian Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. David & Amanda Rozeboom—Hull, IA
Macy Rae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kevin & Danielle Warner—Hull, IA
Allison Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron & Kristen De Jong—Hull, IA
Micah Jesse, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Jess VanOostenbrugge—Grace, MI
Mason Scott, son of Mr. & Mrs. Micah Bruinsma—Peace, IL
Micah Jay, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Connie DeVries—Southwest, MI
Madison Kate, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Laura Lubbers—Zion, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH
“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 10:32
Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:
Nicolas Hulst—Unity, MI
Brianna Gunnink—Unity, MI

MARRIAGES
“For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14
Mr. Brad Gritters and Miss Abby Kuiper—Byron Center, MI
Mr. Joshua Moelker and Miss Caitryn Hassevoort—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Darin Wierenga and Miss Hannah Bos—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Mr. Derrick Span and Miss Courtney Huisenga—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Rev. Stephan Regnerus and Miss Tori Mowery—Lynden, WA

To be concluded
Prof. Gritters is Professor of Practical Theology and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary in Grandville, Michigan.
**FOUR GREAT THINGS UPON THE EARTH (4): THE KING**

“There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going: a king, against whom there is no rising up” (Proverbs 30:29, 31).

The king sits on his golden throne in his mighty palace. The castle’s walls are thick and strong, yet the inside of the castle is decorated with gold and silver and paintings. Everyone who steps into this castle is filled with wonder.

The king’s armies are mighty and have never been defeated. With a word, he can send hundreds of thousands of men wherever he wishes.

And yet he is a good king, a kind king. His people love him and are thankful they live under his just and merciful rule.

* * * * *

Have you ever seen pictures of castles? They can be large and imposing, with strong stone walls. Or they can be beautiful and grand and sprawling, with lots of rooms. We are awestruck at the might of the historical kings who ruled vast empires and lived in those castles. We can’t imagine what it would be like to live with that much wealth and servants to do all our work for us.

And yet, historical kings can be cruel and mean to their people. People have risen up in rebellion against kings and defeated them. Kings often use their wealth selfishly instead of serving the people.

God, the true King above all kings, is a King unlike any other. He is mighty and powerful. This beautiful creation that we live in is nothing but his footstool to rest his feet on while he sits on his throne in heaven. He has the host of the angels as his army. Satan has tried to rebel against him, but Satan will be defeated. In Adam, the whole human race has rebelled, but God in his mercy has saved his people, and in his justice will defeat and judge the wicked world.

As God’s people, we are the citizens of his heavenly kingdom. We have a good and kind King whom we serve.

“For the Lord most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth” (Psalm 47:2, 6–7a).
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