Electing Leaders

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Winston Churchill famously said a politician should be judged by the animosities he excites among his opponents. According to that rule, President Donald Trump's first term has been a runaway success.

For many of our readers, this is the first election in which they get to vote.

And they have picked a doozy.


It’s easy to get caught up in the hysteria. The war of words, the slinging of insults, and the perpetual lies from habitual liars can get anyone worked up into a frenzy.

But not a watchful Christian.

A Christian is sober (1 Pet. 1:13). This means that when everyone else is calling names, insulting intellects, and mocking personalities, the Christian behaves differently. No name-calling. No mockery. But sober watching.

We view all events and individuals through the lens of the Bible. Both candidates in this year’s election would be the immediate object of Christian discipline in any faithful church of Jesus Christ. Except they repent and turn in faith to Jesus Christ, they will both pay for their sins eternally in hell. Neither candidate is the cause of excitement for the sober, watching child of God.

Don’t misunderstand. A watchful Christian who abhors the murder of the unborn, decries the anarchistic Black Lives Matter movement, and condemns lawless rioting will cast his vote accordingly. But this is a case where the vote is cast for the lesser of two evils. Support for a candidate does not mean turning a blind eye to his obvious moral, spiritual, and ethical failings.

Young people, you live in a country where you have the privilege to vote. Go out and exercise that right. Make a day of it. Vote, put the “I Voted” sticker on your chest, and get together with friends to watch the results come in. You may even consider staying up until the election is called, even if it means nodding off in your college class the next day.

But don’t forget who you are.

You are not first a citizen of the United States of America. You are first a citizen of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. In this kingdom, you do not have to hold your nose and vote for the best of the worst, but you worship and serve the King of kings and Lord of lords. Is there any so precious, so beautiful, so desirable as Jesus Christ?

Our identity as children of King Jesus will also temper our response if our candidate is not the one elected.

Will it be President Trump for four more years? Or is it God’s will that we show honor, love, and faithfulness to President Joe Biden?

Remember this, young believer. For all their bluster and loud proclamations, these men are not the final authority. God holds their hearts in his hands. They move when God tells them to move, speak when God tells them to speak, and they will answer to him at the time appointed.

There is hysteria out there. But not with the child of God. He can watch events unfold without fear or anxiety. Father rules. Your Father rules. And all authority belongs to him.

“But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Ps. 115:3).

CHRIST THE SAME!

Hebrews 13:8 “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

Everything had changed!

For the early Jewish New Testament Christians who had embraced Jesus Christ by faith, everything in life had changed. Young and old alike, Jewish Christians were shamed by their synagogues, were cast away from their communities, and were forsaken by their families. Christ-believing young people witnessed the horror of their believing grandparents
and parents being tossed out of the synagogues by the very members with whom they had worshipped since childhood. Their fathers, who previously had a place and calling in their Jewish community, were fired from their jobs and had no prospects of employment. Their mothers, once esteemed highly for their many virtues, were either passively dismissed or treated with obvious contempt. And all because of their confession of Jesus Christ! Even uncles, aunts, and other close relatives, who couldn’t understand why anyone would embrace Jesus Christ, wanted nothing to do with these early believers.

Family gatherings were over. Worship in the synagogue was forbidden. Involvement in the community, now a thing of the past. So much of life was now unsettled. Everything had changed.

But even that doesn’t really begin to describe the suffering of these early believers. For just as Jesus told them that their own family members would “put them out of the synagogues”—and it happened, he also told them that “whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God service” (John 16:2)—and that happened too. Jewish Christians, formerly regarded highly in their communities, became hated of all men for Christ’s sake. And thinking they were doing some service for God, unbelieving Jews wickedly slandered their Christ-believing family members, viciously berated them, spoke “all manner of evil against them falsely” (Matt. 5:11), and finally delivered many of them up to the Jewish councils to be shamefully beaten, violently persecuted, and finally killed. For the Jewish New Testament Christian, everything had dramatically changed.

And though inwardly they had peace with God, their lives had changed into ones filled with struggle and turmoil. Do you hear the young believer, faced with an onslaught of mockery and cruel torture, momentarily second-guessing his confession of Jesus Christ? “How long can I endure this?” the young believer may have cried out as loved one after loved one was hauled away to prison, perhaps never to be seen again. Do you hear the lonely lament of the wounded young Christian daughter, forsaken by her unbelieving parents? Perhaps even the young Christians wondered at times of intense mockery, “Maybe it’s better not to confess Christ. Can all this really be worth it? Since I believed, everthing in my life has changed!”

Those were days of hot persecution, awful rejection, and profound fear. Do you see the small seed of doubt beginning to sprout in the believing young person’s heart? Everything in their life had changed.

Everything is changing!

How about you? As you observe the fast-moving, ever-growing current of change, do similar anxious doubts creep into your heart? In your lifetime, perhaps now more than ever, things seem to be loose, unstable, and shifting. These are strange and fearful times we live in. And nothing more than a passing glance is needed to demonstrate this.

Taking a broad perspective, we notice the tremendous changes in the very fabric of our society. An unmasked rebellion against our God’s honorable ordinance for marriage and sexual purity is what we witness in a society increasingly given over to unnatural, “vile affections” (Rom. 1:26). What was once shameful to even discuss, is now celebrated by an LGBTQ+ community and culture that glories in its shame. Christians today wonder what pressures will come tomorrow from a society that is increasingly growing impatient with our insistence on God’s good way of sexual purity.

Then there is the unmasked dishonoring of law enforcement, ringing true Jesus’ warning that in the last days lawlessness will abound (Matt. 24:12). It doesn’t seem too long ago that society gave our police officers some place of honor. This certainly has changed. Leading cultural figures and the talking heads in the mainstream media vilify the police forces. Riots rage and pandemonium plagues the streets of major cities across our nation as the mobs call for an end to “police brutality,” campaign for the defunding of the police, and hurl obscenities at law enforcement, while also destroying property and lives. We shudder with horror as the news reports indicate that our at-one-time honored police officers are now being hunted in some major cities. Lawlessness abounds! Things certainly are changing.

Added to this mix is the anxiety-inducing 2020 presidential election, which promises to be nothing less than tumultuous. Given all the increase in lawlessness, and as opposing political parties and ideologies wrestle for power, we cannot help but wonder what will happen during this election. But no matter the outcome of the election, concern arises about what our country will look like after this election! And what impact will there be on the church of Jesus Christ?

In both society and the sphere of government, the young Christian has growing concerns for some seismic changes.

But let’s bring us a little closer to home now, shall we? I hardly need to speak of the changes in our schools and churches resulting from the COVID-19 virus. Government-issued executive orders and
restrictions, all of which we willingly obey, have dramatically changed everything about the way we both learn in our schools and worship in our churches. After over half a year of changes, months of worshiping at home, and weeks of schooling with masks, who among us hasn't wondered at least once, “When will things just go back to normal?”

The young Christian has experienced some unsettling changes in our schools and churches.

But there’s another far deeper concern that you have for our churches, isn’t there? Doesn’t the controversy in our churches trouble you? I’m not trying to set myself forward as one who has the “inside scoop” on our young people, but enough of you have expressed your fears and confusion as you try to make sense of it all. I’d be remiss if I didn’t mention your concerns because they are real. Why is there all this controversy? What has happened yesterday to cause this controversy? What will happen tomorrow in our churches? Do we confess yet the same truth? Where do my friends stand in this controversy? Where do my family members stand in this controversy? And as these anxious questions pile up in your mind and soul, and as you also look around at all the changes in the institutions of men, there is this question that burdens your heart: Will there also now be changes in one of the major constants in my life—the church?

Changes. Fearful changes.

**Jesus Christ is the same.**

The accelerating and ever-growing current of change threatens to unsettle and shake us. On what solid truth can our burdened, anxious souls rest?

Here’s the answer. It’s the same, simple, necessary confession that the Spirit-inspired apostle reminded the early Christians:

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever!” (Heb. 13:8).

Jesus Christ is *the same!* Though everything around us changes, swirls, and churns, this truth sets our souls at ease: Jesus never changes. He is always the same.

He is the same! What wonderful news this is. Do you ever feel overwhelmed at the exhausting speed of change? Finally, something, or Someone rather, is secure! Jesus is the same today as he was yesterday. He will be the same tomorrow as he was today. He is reliable. He is consistent. He is my Rock. He is the same!

What is it about Jesus Christ that is the same? At least these three things:

First, Jesus Christ’s control over all things will not change. Though everything in the world seems to be *out of control,* Jesus isn’t. He is Jehovah God! And as King he sits on his throne directing everything. He is not changed by time. His power is not changed by the institutions of men. With the same authority by which he ruled Roman emperors, he rules over Washington’s politicians. And as time rolls on, his control over *everything* in this world will never, no, *never* diminish.

Second, his love and care for you will not change. His love and care cannot change! He is eternal God! Time doesn’t change him! His love for you is everlasting. It has no beginning. It has no end. His love cannot and will not flicker out. The love he showed you on the cross is the same love he shows you today, tomorrow, and forever! He will never stop caring for you. In the middle of all the changes in your life, in the presence of so many fears and questions, hear your Christ Jesus say, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee!” (Heb. 13:5).

Third, Jesus Christ holds the future. Everything in the future can fall to pieces, but my Savior is the same. The future can be a scary place, can’t it? But knowing your faithful, unchanging Savior holds the future, you can face tomorrow. Do you need this demonstrated? Think about yesterday. Think about many yesterdays. Has Jesus ever failed you? Has he failed you today? Has his care for you changed in any way? Has he given any indication that he won’t hold you up tomorrow and keep you safe? Of course he hasn’t. He is the same. He will faithfully preserve you tomorrow. He will faithfully preserve his church tomorrow. And his faithfulness to you and his church will extend to all eternity.

Young people, the world is changing. We can expect it to continue to change. As you live through and experience these changes, in whom will you place your trust? Do you find yourself more excited about a politician than you do Jesus Christ? Does your confidence for the future rest in a president? Be reminded, no president is changeless like our Christ Jesus. Is there a political party that has your unwavering support? You won’t find salvation in that political party. Whatever promises politicians or parties can make, they aren’t the secure, unchanging promises of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Satisfaction, security, and salvation are *only* found in Christ. Here on earth, we find no lasting city, but we seek the unshakable kingdom built on the solid, unchanging Rock, Jesus Christ. (Heb. 13:14).

We need the unchanging Rock of our salvation, Jesus Christ. The early Christians needed this unchanging, faithful Rock as they were thrown to
I would like to respond to the article “What Does Evangelism Really Look Like?” in the July 2020 issue. I appreciate the enthusiasm for evangelism that Miss Kuiper displayed, particularly on a college campus where the gospel is so despised. It is easy for us to become complacent, since we are so comfortable in our Christian communities of extended family, church, school, and even work that we do not seek opportunities to share the gospel. Therefore, I think that having a conversation about what evangelism actually looks like is very important. However, I do have some concerns that the evangelism portrayed in the article looks more Arminian than Reformed.

First, some of the practices described are typical of contemporary evangelicalism. These include joining a parachurch organization at a university (paragraph 3), where doctrine and theology are minimized to avoid any controversy that might hinder the goal of bringing people to Christ (see Prof. Gritters’ sermon “Christ’s Spirit of Truth,” minute mark 40:40 through 43:28, tinysa.com/sermon/8252039111657), and participating in outdoor worship nights (paragraph 5), which generally focus on testimonials and praise and worship type music rather than the preaching of the word of God.

Second, the goal described fits the Arminian idea of evangelism: that a person makes a decision to follow Jesus (paragraph 5), rather than obtaining a knowledge-based belief in the gospel and joining a true church. (See Rev. D. Kleyn’s article “Reformed versus Arminian Missions” in May 15, 2020, *The Standard Bearer* for a positive explanation of Reformed goals. We must be concerned not only with the individual’s initial confession of faith but also their continued growth in the covenantal life of the church.)

Third, the article uses the promise of experiencing a fuller Christian life, rather than gratitude for salvation and zeal for God’s truth (Lord’s Day 32, Q&A 86), to motivate us to evangelize. The statement that we “experience...full joy rooted in being a faithful witness of Jesus Christ” (paragraph 10) gives our good works of evangelism a place and function that is out of harmony with the Reformed confessions. My concern is that anyone who seeks for spiritual fulfillment in their own faithfulness will be led to despair and doubt. Our joy is always rooted “upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone” (Belgic Confession Article 23), not in our faithfulness or obedience (see Acts of Synod 2018, Art. 62, 66).

Some of these things could be interpreted in a Reformed way, though not without qualification; for example, the phrase “make a Holy Spirit-empowered decision to follow Jesus” could be interpreted as confessing one’s faith. However, the combined effect of the article is to present an evangelism that looks more like an Arminian altar call than the Reformed presentation of the gospel.

We who hold the office of believer do not officially preach, but we must “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). In Acts 4:20 Peter and John displayed tremendous enthusiasm and zeal for antithetical and doctrinal evangelism. I want to encourage our young people, and indeed all of us, to the same zeal for God’s truth, so that “we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”—the things of the glorious gospel of sovereign grace!

In Christ,
Brian Buiter
I would like to respond to Mr. Buiter’s letter to the editor about my article, but I will refrain from a point-by-point answer, as I can understand much of where he is coming from, though I may differ in how I understand or see some of those things. I appreciate the opportunity to clarify a few things.

I can assure the readers of my dedication to growing myself and helping others around me grow in the spiritual calling to evangelism from a Reformed perspective. I have no desire to encourage anyone to disregard Reformed doctrine for the sake of evangelism. I, admittedly, have not done that perfectly. I learned a lot about sharing the gospel in an Arminian-leaning organization, much of which I will continue to use, but I am actively learning and growing in evangelism from a distinctly Reformed perspective. Unfortunately, I think most of us can say that this is an area of weakness in our churches, so most of the practical instruction I have received has come from other sources. I will always be grateful for the training I received and the growth I experienced in my faith during my time with InterVarsity, and I look forward to seeing more help, training, and encouragement in the area of evangelism in the PRC.

Briefly touching on a couple items, I cannot say I completely agree with Mr. Buiter’s generalizations of parachurch organizations and “outdoor worship nights.” The Young Calvinists hosted an event that could be perfectly described as such, and it was not conducted the way described above. Additionally, I appreciate his reference to Rev. D. Kleyn’s article from *The Standard Bearer*. I found it very helpful in understanding how our understanding of the covenant guides the principles of evangelism and missions in our churches.

What was written in the article were bits and pieces of many stories in which I played various roles. I mentioned that there were more to these stories than was briefly summarized. I will admit that the title could use some improvement; as a computer programmer, naming things well is difficult for me (seriously, this is a real issue in the industry), and I didn’t put much consideration into it. I had no intention of painting the picture of what exactly evangelism always looks like; there is no cookie-cutter way, because each story and opportunity is different. The time I had with different people at college or on airplanes did not always lend itself to being able to draw them into our church fellowship, but I am still thankful to have been able to plant seeds that God will use as he will. I had hoped that sharing various experiences would encourage others to see opportunities around them to play whatever role God gives them to play in others’ lives. Hopefully, there will be more experiences that bring others into our own church fellowships.

I wrote this article as one of many in the issue to help encourage one another to obedience to Christ in the call to go—obedience that must stem from gratitude for salvation and a zeal for God’s truth but is inhibited by our sinful nature. Jesus’ last words to his twelve, those who represented his church, were his instructions to them in response to his resurrection. These instructions were what the mission of the church should be until he returned—go into all the world to bring others, all those whom he has called, into covenant fellowship (and all that comes with that). I want to encourage us all to live with these things as a guiding direction in our lives.

As to joy, I speak from my own experience. Whether I word it in any of the following ways—a greater awareness/realization of my fellowship with God, a deeper relationship with God, growing closer to God, experiencing the joys of salvation more deeply—this has been my reality, a change tied so closely to taking up my work more intentionally as a witness to Jesus’ resurrection. I guess I cannot explain it properly, but what I know is that I had no idea how much joy I could have in the Lord until I made Christ’s mission and calling a priority in my life. It takes my eyes off me, it helps guide my decisions for directions I take in my life, and most of all, I joy in knowing I am being obedient to my faithful Father (for his sake, not my own pride or fulfillment) and trying to bring glory to him, as pitiful as my attempts may be. This is the best I can describe my own experience.

I have not qualified everything I said in this response with “only by the grace of God” or “ordained from all eternity,” nor did I in my original article. One-thousand-word articles are not long enough to connect every dot. Every motivation to do something needs not be the most basic, fundamental motivation to compel us. I had faith that the vast majority of the readership of this magazine knows these most basic truths of the Reformed faith and would assume that position of the writer, but I can
understand that times are not exactly normal at the moment. I hope this response helps interpreting the article from a Reformed perspective less of a stretch.

However God works the mystery of faith and grace and obedience in sanctification, this is what I want readers to consider and what I want to motivate them:

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:18–20).

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” (John 15:10–11).

In Christ,
Kelsey Kuiper

From the Pastor’s Study
Rev. Justin Smidstra

THE INSTITUTION AND FUNCTION OF THE CIVIL GOVERNMENT

The subject we explore in this article is the civil government. A wide range of perspectives on government exists both in the world and in the church. Many are quite negative. It is important for Reformed young people to have a biblically informed perspective on government. To help us do so, let’s answer two questions: What is government? And what is its role and function?

The Institution of Civil Government

The first thing to understand about civil government is that God ordained it. God is the author of this institution. God appoints certain persons to occupy positions of authority and to exercise rule over the citizens within their territory.

Government is not man’s invention, which he can keep or get rid of as he pleases. People debate exactly when God instituted government. Did it begin with Adam’s headship in Eden, or did it originate in God’s command to Noah to execute murderers (Gen. 9:6)? Either way, the fact remains: God ordained government. Romans 13:1 states this clearly: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” The expression “powers that be” or “authorities that be” refers to the civil government. The apostle teaches that the institution of government itself, in whatever form it takes, is ordained by God. Furthermore, the apostle teaches that the present government—that is, the current system and rulers—is ordained by God. In Paul’s day, that was the imperial regime of emperor Nero. For us, the powers that be are the Trump administration.

The bottom line is this: government is God’s institution. Therefore, every Christian must acknowledge that the government he lives under is put in place by God.

Second, God has given civil government real authority to rule. God puts civil rulers into office and gives them authority to do the work of their offices. Civil rulers are God’s representatives. They rule with God’s own authority. This authority consists of the right to make laws and require citizens to obey. God also gives the magistrate power to enforce laws and impose penalties upon lawbreakers. This power is called the sword power. In Romans 13:4 the apostle says of the power of the magistrate, “He beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” The government has the authority to wield the sword, to use physical coercion to enforce its laws, maintain order, and protect its citizens and its realm.

The God-Given Role of Civil Government

Now let’s look more closely at the God-given role
of government. What are the responsibilities and duties of civil rulers?

First, the civil government has duties toward God. They are, after all, God’s ministers (Rom. 13:4, 6). A minister is a servant. Servants have duties to perform in the master’s service. They often fail to do this. A truly Christian ruler is truly rare. Often civil rulers are unbelievers. They disregard God’s word and rule according to their own philosophies and sinful desires. Yet this reality doesn’t negate their duty. They remain God’s servants, whether obedient or disobedient. Jehovah sovereignly controls them and providentially employs them to accomplish his purposes. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Prov. 21:1).

Second, the civil government has God-given duties toward its citizens. Romans 13:4 makes this clear: “For he is the minister of God to thee for good.” Civil rulers are God’s servants. Yes, God has given them authority, but God commands them to use that authority to minister to their citizens.

The chief duty of the civil government is to uphold law and order in society. Government’s function is to restrain the outward expression of man’s wickedness by punishing lawbreakers and evildoers. This is the teaching of Romans 13:4, which designates the magistrate as “the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” Article 36 of the Belgic Confession describes this duty as “the praise of them that do well” and “to restrain the heart. To be effective, the government must use the sword. The government that refuses to punish evildoers disobeys God and fails to serve the well-being of its citizens.

While there is no common grace at work through the government, God does have a gracious purpose for his church. God uses the government to create a stable environment in which the church may worship, preach the gospel, and be gathered from out of the world. For that we must be thankful!

A second duty of the civil government is protecting and promoting the common good of its citizens. We find this stated in 1 Peter 2:14, which states that government is ordained “for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.” Article 36 of the Belgic Confession explains this duty as “the praise of them that do well” and “to have regard unto and watch for the welfare of the civil state.”

The main way the government protects its citizens is by maintaining law and order. It protects citizens by punishing lawbreakers within the realm. But the government must also protect its citizens from outside threats. God has given the government the authority to declare and wage war in defense of its realm and people. Furthermore, it is the government’s duty to protect the freedom of its citizens, to provide security for their lives and property, and to establish policies that are conducive to the common good. The government must uphold justice and promote the welfare of its law-abiding citizens. It is not the duty of the government to promote the true church and persecute the false. It has neither the competency nor the calling to do that. Rather, its duty is to protect the liberty of the church so that believers can live peaceably and in all godliness. In this way, the government has “regard unto and watch for the welfare of the civil state.”

Reformed Christians should be thankful for civil government. Although government offices are often filled by unbelievers, and although civil rulers often govern contrary to God’s word, nevertheless, the powers that be are ordained of God. These powers are God’s ministers to us for good. Jehovah himself
ELECTIONS MATTER

Have you had your second tower moment? You need not have a memory of that day to grasp the concept. When the first plane flew into the World Trade Center tower on September 11, 2001, it was thought by many to have been a tragic accident. When the news broke that the second tower had been hit by another plane, we knew that it was part of a finely tuned sequence of events that had been years in the making. At that moment many Americans learned that there were those who sought to destroy our country and her freedoms.

For many readers this could be your first opportunity to cast a vote. Some may say that their one vote will not decide the outcome of any election. While this may be true, voting is an opportunity to be a good steward of a great gift, your voice. In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30) we are taught to use our intellects, opportunities, and time in service to God. By not voting, we are burying our talents in the sand. Let us not be called wicked or slothful by our Lord.

Our political system was established and ordained as part of God’s perfect plan for his church (see Rom. 13:1–7). Voting publicly recognizes that we submit to the authority of the political system in our nation as established by God. Voting is a privilege not to be taken for granted. Those of us who reap the benefits of living in a democracy should play a part in upholding democracy.¹

During congregational meetings, confessing male members have the God-given opportunity to vote for men who they believe will best serve the church as elders and deacons. To not participate in a congregational meeting is to squander an opportunity to serve the church. Earthly elections on a local, state, and national level should be viewed in the same light.

¹  http://www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk/latest/10-reasons-christians-should-vote-in-the-election/

²  https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/

We are exhorted in 1 Timothy 2:1–2 to pray for and offer thanks for our kings (leaders, whether we agree with them or not) and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. If we are to do all this, shouldn’t we care who our leaders are, and shouldn’t we want to have a role in their selection?

We are to discern what our elected officials are doing for or against the church. View the platforms of the leading parties, and you will find out what is important to them. Does the candidate stand for the lives of the unborn? This position affirms the sixth commandment not to kill. Does the candidate support a group that wants to “disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure”?² The destruction of the traditional family unit is a stated goal of many. This dismisses the God-ordained role of the father and mother in the family. These are the kinds of things we need to search out before the election.

Become an informed voter. Learn the issues that will affect the life of the church and her members. Voting is the process by which the person of God’s choosing is selected. By casting a vote you become part of that process and a means to fulfill his will!

God uses sinful humans and weakest means to fulfill his will. Remember, we are not looking for the candidate that is a fount of virtue. Sometimes we have to hold our noses and vote for the one who will best allow the church to live peaceably.

The year 2020, by the hand of our Lord, has brought with it a series of unfortunate events. The coronavirus, business shutdowns, stay-at-home orders, Orwellian controls over our lives, churches shut down, protests and riots in certain American cities—even in Grand Rapids! There are many voices clamoring to abolish the police. Society is fast sinking in an abyss of anarchy and lawlessness.

Satan has been working long and hard to get God...
out of schools and universities. The unborn in many areas of our country are an endangered species. These sad circumstances are not new.

Our freedom of speech is not so free. Non-conforming messages can get you banned from social media platforms. Speak out against a popular movement, and you might be out of a job. How long before our freedoms are further restricted and the pressure to conform will affect a pulpit near you?

Never in our lifetimes have there been greater differences in our choices at the ballot box. Yes, elections matter. This is our second tower moment. This is our second tower election. Voting is one way a Christian can defend God’s church and her members.

Dan is an elder at First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**From the Pastor’s Study** Rev. Martyn McGeown

### MAY CHRISTIANS VOTE FOR OR SUPPORT IMMORAL CANDIDATES OR LEADERS?

Not every question can be answered by appealing directly to a text of scripture. The Bible has nothing to say about the modern practice of voting. At the time when the Bible was written, the government was either a theocracy, where God ruled in Israel through a hereditary monarchy and priesthood, or God’s people were under totalitarian dictatorships, where they could not choose the leader of the nation. For example, no human being was elected Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar to office. The only voting commanded in the New Testament is the choosing of officebearers to serve in the church.

Immorality in an officebearer is cause for suspension and deposition from office. An officebearer must be “blameless” and “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2); he must not be “given to wine,” a “brawler,” or “covetous” (v. 3). The same qualities are required in Titus 1:7. The members of the congregation must seek such men and elect them to office.

Politics is an altogether different sphere. A president, congressman, senator, or other elected official functions very differently from an officebearer in the church. Therefore, such qualities, although desirable in a political candidate, are not decisive. Immorality, while distasteful, is not disqualifying in an elected official, unless the sin is also criminal.

To put it very simply, if a Christian may not vote for an immoral candidate, he may not vote at all, for very few political candidates are moral. Some Christians believe that they should not vote. They are free to opt out of the political process. However, they will still have to live under the leaders elected by their fellow citizens. They will still have to honor them, and they will benefit from or suffer under their legislative decisions. Other Christians cannot in good conscience vote for an immoral person. That is also a matter of Christian liberty. The Bible neither commands that we vote for an immoral candidate, nor does it forbid our doing so. The Christian who decides to vote must not despise his brother who does not vote. The Christian who decides not to vote must not judge his brother who votes. Politics must never be the cause of disunity in the church.

What is an immoral person? How do we know if a person is immoral? According to which standard can we judge a person’s morality? Some look at a candidate’s marriage. Many politicians are divorced and remarried, making them impenitent adulterers. Other politicians marry only once, but they are notorious for their infidelity. Some politicians are devoted parents, as far as we can tell, but they are vociferous advocates for the murder of the unborn (abortion). Some politicians are happily married and faithful in their marriages, but they are idolaters: Roman Catholics, Mormons, Jews, etc. Many politicians are covetous, proud, and power-hungry, hardly Christian traits. In many cases, we simply do not know about a politician’s personal life. Politicians seek to avoid scandals by keeping such details private as much as possible.

Another matter to consider is this: if a politician is personally repulsive, does it really affect me? If a politician commits adultery, he hurts his spouse, children, other family members, and close friends, but does his infidelity concern me? If a politician tells
lies—and most, if not all, politicians tell lies—do his lies affect me? If a politician is greedy, covetous, and power-hungry, do those sins affect me in my personal life? We do not tolerate open violation of God’s commandments in the church, and especially in our officebearers, but the church is not called to judge the world. If the president is immoral, Paul’s words are pertinent: “For what have I to do to judge them also that are without [outside the church]? Do not ye judge them that are within [inside the church]? But them that are without God judgeth” (1 Cor. 5:12–13a). If the president were a member of a Reformed church, however, and lived in open immorality, the elders of the church would be duty-bound to discipline him.

We do not look to political leaders for moral leadership, but to fulfill the function of government: to pass legislation that enables the church, as much as possible, to “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Tim. 2:2). The function of government is to be “a terror…to the evil” (Rom. 13:3), to punish evildoers, to reward the good (or at least to leave the good alone), to protect the nation from her enemies, and to promote order in society. If a wicked man promotes a policy platform protecting freedom of speech and religion, I would vote for him rather than for a less openly immoral person who promotes a policy platform that would curtail the church’s freedom to preach openly about certain sins.

Another factor is this: what is the significance of my vote? When I choose a candidate, is my vote an endorsement of everything that the candidate represents? Do I, by my vote, express my approval of the candidate’s entire life, behavior, and philosophy? Or is my vote negative rather than positive? In other words, am I voting for Candidate A to prevent the election of Candidate B, whom I view as worse than Candidate A? Perhaps Candidate C has the ideal policy platform, but he is (in my judgment) unelectable. Therefore, I still vote for Candidate A to prevent the worst option, Candidate B. These and other factors come into play when I vote.

My advice, for what it is worth, is to look past the personality and morality/immorality of the candidate running for office, and look at his policy platform and record. If I wanted a tradesman to work in my house, I would not ask about his morality but about his competency. Morality is important, but not the most important factor in the “hiring and firing” process. May the Lord give us wisdom in this area of life too!

Rev. McGeown currently serves as a missionary-pastor in Limerick, Ireland and has recently accepted the call to serve as the pastor of Providence Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.
government that God has placed in authority over them. This king and kingdom had taken him away from his home and family as a spoil of war. You would think that he had every right to be angry and rebel against them. But Daniel and his godly friends recognized that God had placed Nebuchadnezzar and his officials in this position of authority, and they acted accordingly. Right away in chapter 1 we read of Daniel and his three friends facing the issue of eating meat that had been offered to idols. Note the respectful attitude that they maintained in the way that they spoke to the Babylonian officials, while still staying firm to their convictions. Again, in chapter 2, when the commander of the king’s guard was sent to kill him, verse 14 says that Daniel acted with “counsel and wisdom.” As you continue to read through the book, you will notice that this respectful attitude and speech characterize Daniel throughout his life.

Yet, although he remained respectful to the authority of the king, Daniel still recognized that God is the ultimate authority, and he must be honored and respected above all men. From an earthly perspective, it would have been easy and beneficial for Daniel to compromise his beliefs in order to gain favor with Nebuchadnezzar. At certain points his life was even at risk because he refused to stop praying to God and worship the king instead. But Daniel knew that “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). He valued the health of his spiritual life over his physical life. Can you say the same?

Daniel’s actions in exile clearly showed his great faith in God. He had confidence that God was taking care of him even in this strange land. He did not have to fear what the Babylonians had in store for him. Daniel knew that, although Nebuchadnezzar thought he was in control, God truly rules in the kingdoms of men. The great faith of Daniel was a tremendous witness to the people around him, including Nebuchadnezzar. What is your witness in this election year? Are your neighbors being led to Christ by your respect for authority and the way that you speak about the government of our nation? How about your social media followers?

This great faith of Daniel was nourished by a healthy spiritual life. Daniel was a man of prayer. When he faced oppression and even the threat of death from the government, his first reaction was not to run and hide or to find other people to talk about it with, but to pray (Dan. 6:10). We also read in Daniel 9 about him searching the scriptures. He was well aware of the Old Testament laws, including God’s commands to be submissive to authority. Following the example of Daniel, we should be faithful students of scripture and pray for wisdom to know how we should interact with the government of our land in a way that is glorifying to God.

When you read though the book of Daniel, you will notice that the first half of the book is different than the second half. The first six chapters of Daniel are written in the style of historical narrative. In reading about the details of Daniel’s life in Babylon, we are reminded that God’s providential hand carefully orchestrates all the events of history. He brought about the fall of Jerusalem and the rise of Babylon to power. He directs everything, from the small events of our daily lives to big events such as presidential elections. God appoints kings, presidents, and other rulers, and he removes them at his will. Even though powerful world leaders think that they are in control, God is ultimately sovereign over them all. What a great comfort for the believer!

The last six chapters of the book of Daniel are written in an apocalyptic or prophetic style. This type of literature is direct revelation from God, usually given by means of visions or dreams. It can sometimes be confusing to read apocalyptic literature because it contains a lot of symbolism, but it is worth the effort because there is much to be learned from it. As God’s people lived through the time in history when these prophecies came to pass, they were given renewed confidence in his promises and purposes. When we read today the prophetic visions that God gave to Daniel, we are also reminded of God’s good purposes for our lives. He is on his throne in heaven, controlling all things for his glory and the good of his people.

Daniel was rewarded with earthly safety and favor as a result of his trust in God, but this is not the experience of all of God’s people. Many Christians have been killed for not compromising their beliefs, and this will continue to happen until Jesus comes again. Like Daniel, we too are exiles in this strange, pagan land. We do not know what God has in store for us as we face increasing civil unrest and the implications of the current global pandemic, among other things. But we can still “dare to be a Daniel,” as the familiar Sunday school song goes. Even if it seems as though we are standing alone and the future is uncertain and frightening, we can stand firm in God’s promises and his presence.

Placing our hope in a certain president being elected is foolish. Placing our hope in having certain civil freedoms is foolish. Placing our hope in any earthly thing is foolish. We can only hope in our heavenly Father. His kingdom is not of this
He can never be impeached or defeated or taken off the throne. No citizen of his kingdom can ever be carried away as a spoil of war. His kingdom is everlasting. Although we are exiles for a short time in the kingdoms of men, as elect children of God we find our hope in the citizenship of a heavenly kingdom. Therefore, no matter what happens, we praise, bless, and honor our heavenly Father, as Nebuchadnezzar did in Daniel 4:34: “whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation.”

**Reading Plan**

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<th>November 8</th>
<th>Read Romans 13:1–7</th>
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<td>November 9</td>
<td>Read Psalm 137</td>
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<td>Read Daniel 1</td>
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<td>November 15</td>
<td>Read Daniel 3:19–30</td>
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<td>November 16</td>
<td>Read 1 Peter 2:13–25</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #50</td>
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<td>Read Daniel 4:19–33</td>
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<td>November 19</td>
<td>Read Daniel 4:34–37, Psalm 33</td>
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<td>Read Daniel 5:13–31</td>
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<td>December 6</td>
<td>Read Daniel 11:40–12:4</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #357</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 7</td>
<td>Read Daniel 12:5–13</td>
<td>Sing or pray Psalter #358</td>
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Herman Hoeksema (HH), the minister of the gospel whom Jesus Christ used to found the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRC), is little recognized by the Reformed and Presbyterian community of churches or, with the rare exception, by prominent Reformed or Presbyterian theologians.

Indeed, there is a conspiracy of silence, to keep him hidden from view. He is the buried reformer.

There are reasons. Churches and theologians are unwilling to acknowledge the gross injustice of the prestigious Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRC) in its condemnation and discipline of this sound minister. In addition, they are determined to consign to oblivion the gospel truths that HH confessed and defended. Also, these churches and theologians desire to ignore in their own fellowships the presence of the grievous theological and ethical errors that are the consequences of rejecting the fundamental biblical, Reformed truths that HH proclaimed.

The deliberate burying of HH by the Reformed community is indication both of its embrace of false doctrine and of its bad conscience.

Briefly told, the history of HH is the following. The son of an immigrant Dutch mother, reared in the poverty and other hardships of a broken home (his father was an ungodly deserter of wife and family), HH became an extraordinarily able minister in the CRC. He soon became pastor of the largest congregation of the denomination. No doubt, his ability and prominence occasioned the envy of many of his colleagues, ministers being as guilty of the “green-eyed monster” as others. But the cause of the controversy that resulted in the expulsion of HH from the CRC was doctrinal—HH’s confession of the gospel of grace.

The deliberate burying of HH by the Reformed community is indication both of its embrace of false doctrine and of its bad conscience.

In reaction to HH’s uncompromising proclamation of salvation by sovereign, particular grace, including vehement, uncompromising condemnation of the Arminian heresy of universal grace dependent upon the will of the sinner, the CRC adopted a novel, unorthodox, anti-creedal doctrine of “common grace.” In three points, this doctrine denies the gospel of grace as authoritatively confessed especially in the Canons of Dort. It teaches that God has a saving grace, not for the elect alone, but for all humans: universal (ineffectual) saving grace. In this grace, God offers salvation to all with the sincere desire that all accept the offer and be saved (the well-meant offer, which is the CRC’s own description of the preaching of the gospel). This first point is the denial of election; of particular, or limited, atonement; and of irresistible, or efficacious, grace.

Second, fallen, unsaved sinners retain some good and ability for good after the fall of Adam, by virtue of God’s alleged common grace. This is the denial of total depravity. This remaining goodness permits, if it does not require, fellowship of Christians with the ungodly, especially in the form of cooperation to create a good, Christian society and culture. Thus, the vitally important reality of the antithesis is compromised. The antithesis is the spiritual separation and warfare between the church and the world.

Third, God’s common grace enables unbelievers to perform works that are good—good in the estimation of God. The CRC and all other churches that hold to common grace deny that all the works of the unregenerate are sinful. This plainly is the repudiation of the Reformed doctrine of total depravity. Invariably, the denial of total depravity, especially in connection with the well-meant offer, takes form as the teaching of free will, the ability of the sinner to accept the well-meant offer of God and thus save himself. And this is the full-blown heresy of Arminianism and Pelagianism.

For his refusal to subscribe to the doctrine of common grace in these three points, HH was disciplined by the CRC in 1924. It stripped him of his office in the CRC and expelled him from the fellowship of this denomination. For rejecting the three points of common grace! For defending the gospel of grace as confessed by the Canons of Dort! In various ways, the other reputedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches honored this ecclesiastical murder of HH and treated this orthodox, godly man as a pariah. And they do still!

Thereupon, HH was used of Jesus Christ to form a new denomination of Reformed churches—the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRC).

For the next forty years, until his death in 1965,
the man—an indefatigable worker—was pastor of a huge congregation, preaching every Sunday; editor of The Standard Bearer magazine; professor of theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary; author of many books; and frequent lecturer on many doctrinal subjects.

He was my professor for the three years of my seminary training, from 1960–1963. Stories of my experiences with this remarkable man of God, I have related in a series of articles in Beacon Lights under the heading, “I Remember Herman Hoeksema” (October 2008–December 2009). The articles are available from Beacon Lights.

Through HH, Jesus Christ, who is the Truth, gave the PRC especially two magnificent doctrines of the Reformed faith and a vitally important ethical truth (a doctrine concerning the Reformed, Christian life). The doctrines are particular, sovereign grace and the truth of the covenant of grace as intimate fellowship of God and his elect people, including the children of believing parents. Fundamental to this doctrine of the covenant is that the covenant and its salvation have their source and governance in election. In the covenant, as in missions, “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). God has made his covenant, not with all humans and not with individuals apart from Jesus Christ, but with the Seed of the woman, who is Jesus, and all those who believe in him by divine election (Gal. 3). Covenant (saving) grace is unconditional, as is saving grace in missions and evangelism. Grace is unconditional. For it is grace. A grace that is conditional, that is, dependent upon the will and works of the sinner, simply is not grace. A conditional grace is a new form of works.

The ethical teaching that Jesus has entrusted to the PRC is marriage as the lifelong, unbreakable bond between one man and one woman (Matt. 5:31–32; 19:3–9; Mark 10:2–12; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:1–3; 1 Cor. 7). It is one of church history’s surprises that the son of a broken home powerfully sounded and developed the truth of the unbreakable bond of marriage. Perhaps this is no surprise at all. Who more than a child raised in a broken home realizes experientially the blessedness of marriage?

The importance of these truths is writ large on the pages of holy scripture.

How these truths expose prevalent errors of theology and life in Reformed Christianity today, and preserve the PRC in the truth and holy life of the gospel, is evident to all.

I mention only two instances. First, much of supposedly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian Christianity in North America today is bedeviled by the heresy of the federal vision (FV). The FV blatantly denies all the five points of Calvinism, as well as justification by faith alone (see my Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root). The source of the heresy is the theory of a conditional covenant, conceived as a conditional contract between God and all who come under the preaching of the word, especially all the baptized children. This theory reigns in the churches in which the FV now appears. The churches cannot resist the heresy because of this erroneous doctrine of a conditional covenant, which they share with the FV.

One implication of this doctrine of the covenant is the rejection of the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of saints. According to the theology of a conditional covenant, many with whom God originally established his covenant and thus in whom he began the work of salvation fail to keep the conditions of the covenant and go lost. Some sheep do not hear and heed the Shepherd’s voice, wander off, lose their salvation, and perish eternally! (See, to the contrary, John 10.)

Second, the Presbyterian and Reformed churches in North America are plagued with a veritable flood of divorces and remarriages. Openly, these churches now excuse, permit, and justify even the remarriages of the guilty parties (those who committed adultery) in the preceding divorces. There is no stemming of the flood. There is no effort to stem the flood. The cause is the refusal to accept the teaching of the Bible that marriage is an unbreakable bond for life. The result is indescribable misery for many godly husbands and wives, to say nothing of deserted baptized, covenant children. The worst is the shame that it brings upon God. His name as “Faithful One” is etched upon the marriages of those who confess him as their God.

HH’s teachings and warnings are validated today by Jesus Christ in the evils that result from the rejection of them. And the evils are great. They are devastating, divine judgments upon the disobedient, who condemned and executed a faithful prophet of God and servant of Jesus Christ, or who connived at the condemnation. Reformed theologians and churches cannot but notice the evils in their own communions. One cannot but notice a destructive plague. But they remain silent. Having killed the prophet (ecclesiastically) and his prophecies in 1924, they bury him and his teachings today.

Some Reformed theologians are burying HH today in another way, which is also shameful. They have come to realize that the covenant is not a cold contract, but a warm bond of fellowship between
God and his believing people, symbolized by marriage. They burst on the scene with this truth as though they themselves discovered it, without so much as a word acknowledging that HH taught this one hundred years ago, as they well know. It is as though a contemporary scientist announced to the scientific world that he had recently discovered that the earth rotates about the sun, without any mention of Copernicus. They too bury HH in their own scandalous way.

The PRC and the churches with whom they are in fellowship honor the prophet—and benefit from his prophesying. Not because of him, but because of his Master! Not because they were his doctrines, but because they are the gospel of his Lord!

Prof. David Engelsma is emeritus professor at the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

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**Poem Thelma Westra**

**TRIALS TO TRIUMPH**

The trials of life are not easy to bear—
The illnesses, poverty, snares,
Disappointments, failures, the death of a friend,
And feeling that nobody cares.

But friend, don’t despair, you don’t suffer alone;
Your heavenly Father is near;
He answers our prayers, sends grace unsurpassed,
Allaying our heartaches and fear.

Just looking around us may fill with alarm—
Our self-pity fills us with grief—
But looking above to the one in control
Brings us peace; what a blessed relief!

God uses these trials our souls to refine
As silver is tried in the fire;
Earthly cares overwhelm; God draws us to him
Where His mercy is all we desire.

So focus, dear friend, on Jesus our Lord,
On him all our burdens to cast.
What we’ve borne is so small compared to our gain,
We emerge, triumphant at last!
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:
Noah James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Liz Koerner—Byron Center, MI
Ruby Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Leah VandenToorn—Byron Center, MI
Shyanne Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan & Brianna Tamminga—Calvary, IA
Alexander James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy & Gina Hilt—Calvary, IA
Abel Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dillon & Ashley Brummel—Calvary, IA
Myla Monica, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Leah Ferguson—Edmonton, Canada
Jace Matthew, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dave & Alexa Wassink—Georgetown, MI
Jacoba Mary, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mark & Bethany Feenstra—Georgetown, MI
Declan Chad, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Kezia Van Baren—Grace, MI
Madeline Rae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Josh & Jolynn Cammenga—Holland, MI
Liam Philip, son of Mr. & Mrs. Phil & Holly Cnossen—Hudsonville, MI
Amy Lynne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Peter & Cindy van Iperen—Immanuel, Canada
Josiah Mark, son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Holly Tolsma—Immanuel, Canada
William Peter, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron & Kayla Wierenga—Immanuel, Canada
Quinn Adisyn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle & Katie Hanko—Lynden, WA
Charlotte Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Andy & Allison Kooy—Peace, IL
Ella Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ed & Jess Van Dyke—Randolph, WI
Lyla Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Zach & Lauren Feenstra—Redlands, CA
Heidi Kay, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Maria Meelker—Redlands, CA
Nathaniel Glenn, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jacob & Bethany Feenstra—Redlands, CA
Micah John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mike & Kellie Jabaay—Redlands, CA
Emily Rose, daughter of Rev. & Mrs. Matt & Sarah Kortus—Redlands, CA
Maverick James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Paul & Marlena Kirschenman—Sioux Falls, SD
Archie James, son of Mr. & Mrs. John & Lynn Kalsbeek—Southeast, MI
Reid Thomas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Caleb & Deanna Spriensma—Unity, 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:
Connor Courtney—Byron Center, MI
Crystal Brummel, Shaely Brummel, Thomas Brummel, Shane Kooima, Ethan Van Bemm, Jon Van Ravenswaay, Justin Vander Veen, Dawson Vis, & James Warnjes—Calvary, IA
Jeremy Griess—Loveland, CO
Jedidiah Moore—Loveland, CO
David Howerzyl—Redlands, CA
Sophia Snippe—Southeast, MI
Brittany Bysma—Trinity, MI
Nickolas Bysma—Trinity, MI
Hannah Mulder—Trinity, MI

MARRIAGES
“For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14
Mr. Gary Gritters and Miss Natalie Snippe—Byron Center, MI
Mr. Steven Brummel and Miss Jori Eriks—Calvary, IA
Mr. Devin Terpstra and Miss Arika Engelsma—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Jake De Vries and Miss Olivia Engen—Grace, MI
Mr. Isaac Van Baren and Miss Elizabeth Kalsbeek—Redlands, CA
Mr. Justin King and Miss Rachel Bartelds—Trinity, MI
FOUR WONDERFUL THINGS UPON THE EARTH PART 2: THE SERPENT

“There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: …The way of a serpent upon a rock” (Prov. 30:18-19).

Snakes can seem creepy and sinister as they slither through the grass, unseen until they are right by our feet.

But there is something wonderful and mysterious about the way they move. They don’t swim like a fish. They don’t fly like a bird. They don’t have legs. Yet, somehow, they can move forward at incredible speed.

That’s because a snake’s scales are made from keratin. Keratin is the same thing as your fingernails. As a snake bunches its muscles, some of its scales grip the ground, helping the snake push itself forward.

Even though the serpent must slither on the ground on its belly, God provided a means for this reptile to move. It shows the way God cares for his creation, even for the animals that we might find creepy or icky.

While we usually associate the snake with Satan, the serpent isn’t always used as a picture of Satan.

While Moses was leading the Israelites through the wilderness, the Israelites complained, and God sent a plague of snakes among them, and many were bitten and died. Yet, God told Moses to make a brass serpent and set it on a pole. Whoever was bitten by one of the poisonous snakes and looked to the brass serpent on a pole was healed of the venom and lived.

In John 3:14, Jesus explains that the brass serpent that Moses made in the wilderness was a picture of Jesus being lifted up on the cross. Just as the people who looked to the brass serpent were saved from the snake venom, so God’s elect will, in his grace, look to Christ on the cross and be saved from sin. Here, a snake was used as a picture of Christ.

While many of us don’t like snakes that much, they are still a wonderful part of God’s creation, provided with a mysterious and wonderful way of moving.

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