It’s been a month since you read the last issue of *Beacon Lights*, an issue devoted to spiritual discipline. Now might be a good time to check in with how you are doing in the disciplines. Maybe you are thinking, “Come on, do I really need to do that already? It’s only been a month.” Consider the story of the conversion of Augustine, a church father who lived in the fourth and fifth centuries. Understanding the life that he lived in response to his conversion should impress upon us the fact that the time to lead a life of godly discipline is right now.

Augustine of Hippo was a restless youth. Despite his godly mother Monica’s instruction, he did not lead a spiritually disciplined life. Far from it in fact. For most of his days as a student, he would in his words, “walk the streets of Babylon, and wallow in the mire thereof.” He was enthralled with the pleasures and philosophies of the world. He knew that the life he was leading was wrong, for he later confessed that his heart was restless until it rested in God.

Augustine spoke of the moment he was converted to a truly godly life. He was sitting alone and heard a child singing the words, “Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it.” Upon hearing these words, he read the first passage he encountered after opening a Bible. The passage was Romans 13:13–14: “Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” Augustine’s response to reading these words was one of faith. “I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.”

Years of searching for the truth among the ungodly philosophies of the world were disposed of in an instant.

Maybe you are thinking that living a godly life as a converted Christian and living a disciplined life are two different things, as if discipline is some sort of higher spirituality attained by only the most holy Christians. Not so. Augustine recognized at the moment of his conversion that a godly life is a disciplined life. The scripture passage God used in his conversion spoke specifically to this—a godly life is not only a putting off of worldly lusts, but also a putting on of Christ. A godly life must exhibit discipline in prayer and scripture reading and the rest of the disciplines. God uses the disciplines to mold and shape his children so that they make a small beginning in a life of holiness and devotion to him. Augustine recognized this and understood that he could not wait another day to change his priorities in life. He spent the rest of his life in devotion to God.

If you read last month’s issue on spiritual discipline, your thoughts may have gone in one of two directions. You may have thought, “I practice all of these disciplines and it can be said of my life as a whole that it is perfectly disciplined.” Since that cannot possibly be the response of any one of us, let’s move on to a more realistic one. “I see the old man in me and realize that my life is not as disciplined as it should be.”

Along the lines of this second, more honest and realistic thought about your life of discipline, you might see some roadblocks to beginning a disciplined life right now. Maybe as you read each article, you became excited. Maybe you were encouraged to begin working towards practicing a few of these disciplines better—or maybe for the first time—in your life. Maybe it’s been a month since you read those...
articles and you still haven’t begun. Maybe you feel guilty because you know you should have started the day you read the articles on discipline. These are all admissions that you know you have failed. This knowledge of your failings has turned your lack of discipline from a sin of omission into a sin of commission. The lack of discipline in your life may have before been something that you didn’t realize until someone told you or you read something (last month) that pricked your heart. But now that lack of discipline is something that is firmly planted in the front of your mind. You can’t not see it. So now your lack of response to this lack of discipline is a sin that you willfully commit.

There is no magic pill that you can take to fix this lack of discipline and it won’t be any easier if you wait until tomorrow to begin. So, what should you do about it? You need to make every part of your life the subject of prayer and it needs to start immediately. You need to stop reading this article right now, get on your knees, and pray. “Father, forgive my lack of discipline. Work in me a heart that desires to have the work of salvation thou hast given me at the forefront of every aspect of my life, so that the life I live is one that lives out of this salvation to the glory of thy name. And that I live not for my own desires, but that I live a selfless life devoted to thee.” By submitting all aspects of your life to God in prayer, he uses those prayers better to show you where you are lacking in discipline and clarify how you must change your way of living.

Maybe as you read each article last month, you felt indifferent. Maybe your response was: “I know I must live a life of spiritual discipline, but I’m still young yet. I’m still growing up. I’m not spiritually mature yet. Spiritual discipline will have to wait until tomorrow, or next year, or three years from now.” As mentioned above, discipline will not get any easier tomorrow. The excuses for waiting for another time to begin are exactly what the devil wants. He wants you to buy into the idea that it is better to wait until tomorrow because that gives him another day to make easy work of you, his prey, while you ignore a life that would strengthen you to fight against him.

Maybe you are in a rut of despair when it comes to spiritual discipline. You are daily thinking about discipline, fighting against selfishness with that desire for holy living, but you feel like you are constantly taking two steps forward, only to fall back three steps. You know that there is no neutral in the Christian walk. It is either positive or negative. If you are not living a life of devotion to God and growing in discipline, you are backsliding.

Fear not, Christian!
Don’t despair!

The fact that you are fighting to live a disciplined life is proof that you are indeed making a beginning in this direction. You know your own weakness, so you don’t trust your strength, ability, or will power to accomplish anything in this. You trust in Christ. So, in the end, the only “magic pill” there is is Jesus Christ, the Great Physician. But it’s not a pill you can buy and take as instructed. It’s Christ’s work of salvation that is already working in your heart, causing you to trust in him for all things, including a life of spiritual discipline. As Augustine read and responded in faith, so must we: “put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh.”

Dear Rev. Langerak,
I write regarding your speech “Safety in the Ark” given at the 2019 Young People’s Convention and recently published in the November issue of Beacon Lights. Upon reading and studying it again, I am reminded of a concern which came to mind upon hearing it as a conventioneer.

My concern rises from a portion of your speech not directly quoted in Beacon Lights, but one that I would like to quote for you now: “And when we say that Noah built the ark by faith, we mean God built the ark. Man didn’t build the ark; God did. That’s because Noah built it by faith.” My concern rises specifically from the portion of the quote in which you say, “Man didn’t build the ark; God did.” This portion of the speech, if you desire to listen to it, can be found at roughly the 20:00 mark of the recording posted by Mr. Kleyn.

Both while listening to the speech at convention, as well as while revisiting it in Beacon Lights, this section brought me to consider the application of this idea to the doing of our good works; for they...
too are done out of a true faith in Jesus Christ. In your speech, you state that because Noah built out of a true faith, he did not truly build at all, but rather God did. As far as I am able to understand, this must also come to mean that because our good works flow out of a true faith in Christ, they too must not truly be our works, but God’s. This idea I find difficult to comprehend and, respectfully, difficult to agree with.

If this is truly the proper way in which I should understand it, I ask how these works would yet be able to display our thankfulness to God. I believe that our thankfulness is seen in our obedience to his commands, an obedience that we are called to carry out. Later in your speech, following the aforementioned quote, you spoke on how the building of the ark revealed Noah’s obedience unto God, with which I whole-heartedly agree. However, I take this to mean that Noah’s obedience is seen in the work that he was called to do, and it can be seen in our lives as well in the works that we too are called to produce.

I recognize that we are only able to perform these good works due to the work of the Spirit in our hearts, but this does not take away from the fact that we are called to carry out and produce them. Philippians 2:12b–13 calls the believer to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

I ask if you agree that your statement (that a work of true faith is truly not the work of man at all, but a work of God) ought also to apply to the performing of our good works. And if this is the case, I ask for an explanation as to how a work of God himself, and not of man, can truly show the thankfulness of man for his salvation. If man in no way performs them, how can they truly be tokens of his thankfulness? And what then is the meaning of Lord’s Day 32, Question and Answer 86, when it asks, “Why must we still do good works?”

Respectfully submitted,

Austin Koole

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**Letter of Response**

**Rev. Nathan Langerak**

**Response**

I thank Austin for his letter regarding my statement that it was God who built the ark, not man. To this statement Austin objects and also properly connects the statement with our good works: “As far as I am able to understand, this must also come to mean that because our good works flow out of a true faith in Christ, they too must not truly be our works, but God’s...I believe that our thankfulness is seen in our obedience to his commands, an obedience that we are called to carry out...I take this to mean that Noah’s obedience is seen in the work that he was called to do, and it can be seen in our lives as well in the works that we too are called to produce.”

Austin buttresses his position by an appeal to Philippians 2:12–13:

> I recognize that we are only able to perform these good works due to the work of the Spirit in our hearts, but this does not take away from the fact that we are called to carry out and produce them. Philippians 2:12b–13 call the believer to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

He writes a series of questions at the end of his letter:

I ask if you agree that your statement (that a work of true faith is truly not the work of man at all, but a work of God) ought also to apply to the performing of our good works. And if this is the case, I ask for an explanation as to how a work of God himself, and not of man, can truly show the thankfulness of man for his salvation. If man in no way performs them, how can they truly be tokens of his thankfulness? And what then is the meaning of Lord’s Day 32, Question and Answer 86 when it asks, “Why must we still do good works?”

His argument is that if we say that a work done by faith is the work of God, not our work, then we are really making true obedience and thus true thankfulness impossible. Perhaps he misunderstands the point being made. The point is that a work of true faith is the work of God. It is the work of God in and through a man. Man cannot claim credit for that work. The man consciously works and does that work. It is God’s work in and through him.

I would say the same for any of the works of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. God built the ark;
God moved Abraham from Haran to Canaan; God conceived Isaac in Sarah’s womb; God blessed Jacob; God subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions; God was persecuted when his people were persecuted. I would say that for every great deed of righteousness that is recorded of God’s people in the Old Testament. God slew Goliath, God tore out the gates and bars of Gaza and deposited them on a hill far away, and God pulled down the temple of Dagon. The issue is not that a man performs them. The issue is who gets the credit for that and how is man’s performing them to be explained? The answer, in a word, is God. All of those works described above and all the works the believer performs by faith are impossible for man. It is impossible for a man to tear out the gates and bars of a city. It is impossible for a man to love his wife or for a wife to submit to her husband. But what is impossible for man is possible with God by a wonder of his grace through faith. By faith through grace God does it in and through them.

Objecting, Austin uses the word “but” where he ought to use the word “and.” He writes, “I recognize that we are only able to perform these good works due to the work of the Spirit in our hearts, but this does not take away from the fact that we are called to carry out and produce them.” He adds to that “but” the words “this does not take away from the fact that we are called to carry out and produce them.” No, indeed, it does not. But the relationship between the Holy Spirit’s work and our calling is different than he states. The work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is the reason that we are called to produce good works.

We should be very careful where we use that word BUT so as not to create a disjunction where God did not put one, in order that God receives all the credit and glory for what we do, and so that our calling to do good works is properly grounded in God’s work in us. With our good works we must be very careful that we do not present the situation this way: God gives all the grace that is necessary to perform the work, brings us to the point of performing the work, and calls us to perform the work, BUT man must also do it. We must not present the situation as though the truth that the Holy Spirit works in our hearts is somehow a threat to the calling and production of good works—as though that truth might take away from the fact that we are called to produce them. The word BUT is out of place in this instance, and really undoes everything that is said before it. So when Austin says that he acknowledges that we perform good works by the Spirit, and then says, BUT, then he undoes in the next statement what he just acknowledged; and the main point becomes that we are called to and must produce good works, and the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts may not be allowed to take away from that fact. The word BUT puts at odds two things that scripture and the creeds join together. The word BUT puts the emphasis on man. Man, then, is the decisive factor in performing the work and man, then, also gets the credit, even though there is a nod to divine grace.

Is there one in whom the Spirit works that does not produce good works? Is not the work of the Spirit in our hearts the very deepest explanation of our good works? Is this not the ground for the answer of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 32 to the question of why the redeemed Christian must still do works, to which Austin referred? We must still do good works, “Because Christ...also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image.” We must do good works because doers of good works is what Christ makes us by his Spirit, and that is what he works in our hearts by that same Spirit so that as good trees we produce good fruit.

Over against the idea that saying that the Holy Spirit works in our hearts might take away from the calling to produce good works stands the very text that Austin quoted: “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” That statement stands as the ground for the believers’ calling to “work out (his) own salvation with fear and trembling.” The apostle does not say it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure, BUT we are also called to and must produce good works. Nor does he say that it is God who works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure, but this does not take away from the fact that you are also called to produce them. Rather, he calls the believer to work out his salvation and grounds that calling in the work of God. All the believer is called to do is grounded in this reality: it is GOD who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. There is no willing and there is no doing of the believer in any willing or doing of God’s good pleasure that is not to be attributed to God. The apostle is saying whatever you do that is pleasing to God, whenever you work out your salvation with fear and trembling, know this, that it is God who works in you that willing and that doing. God gets all the credit and receives all the glory.

Nor does his statement that God works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure threaten or hamper his ability to call the congregation and people of God to work out their salvation. This also
harmonizes with what our Lord said in John 15:5: “I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”

Regarding faith itself the Canons say in Heads 3/4, Article 14, “but because He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also.” Are we to say over against this, BUT man also must believe and man is called to believe? Rather, we join them together. Man is rightly said to believe because God, who works all in all and who works in man to will and to do of his good pleasure, produces in man both the will to believe and the act of believing also.

OFFICE OF ALL BELIEVER: RULING A KINGDOM

The previous article dealt with the idea of office in the kingdom of God. We saw that, being created in Adam to be officebearers, we shared the dreadful consequences of his fall, but that our office is redeemed in Christ. Christ is thus the officebearer in God’s kingdom and sharing his anointing we now function again as prophets, priests, and kings. Nothing less than being rulers in God’s kingdom is the astonishing privilege and calling of every believer. Young person, do you realize that as you do your schoolwork, learn your catechism, relate to your siblings, listen to the sermon, in fact in everything you do and everywhere you go, you are ruling a kingdom? That is exactly what Peter tells those Christians to whom he wrote—all of them: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation…” (1 Pet. 2:9). Every believer is a royal priest, a priest-king.

But now the question arises, “What is this kingdom over which I in the office of believer bear rule?” We have spoken much of the kingdom of God, but what is it? First of all, we must say what it is not. The kingdom of God is not an earthly kingdom. It exists in time and space and is found over the face of the earth, but it is not earthly. This means that its source is not of this earth. Originally, the kingdom of God was centered in a physical garden. As such, its king was the man Adam. But Adam was of the earth, earthy; now the second man, the Lord from heaven, is its king, and so the kingdom is heavenly in character. The kingdom is made up of those things that “[e]ye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor. 2:9). The kingdom is made up of those things that God has revealed to us by his Spirit, and thus it is a spiritual kingdom (1 Cor. 2:10).

At this point, you might be saying to yourself, “Hmm…a spiritual kingdom...is it then a real kingdom?” And the answer is most definitely. In fact, the kingdom of God (or the “holy nation”) possesses every characteristic of a kingdom. Think for a moment of the things that make up a kingdom or nation; all of these the kingdom of God possesses. It has a land: the heavenly Canaan. It has a king: Jesus Christ. It has a constitution: the Bible and the Reformed confessions. It has laws: the ten commandments. It has a government: the elders of the church. It also has an army: God’s people are soldiers who, clothed with the Christian’s armor, wield the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. O yes, the kingdom of God is a real kingdom all right. In fact, we may even say it is the real kingdom of which all the nations of the world are pictures; pictures not in the spiritual, ethical sense, but insofar as they exhibit the elements of rule.

The Bible identifies the kingdom with the church. Ephesians 1 tells us, in the context of his position at God’s right hand, that Christ is exalted to be head over the church (vv. 20–22). Here the idea of “head” is ruler or king. The kingdom of Christ is the church. Christ rules the church by his word and Spirit. This applies first of all to the local congregation, what we call the church institute. Your congregation is the kingdom of Christ, where the special offices represent Christ: the elders are kings, the deacon priests, and the minister functions especially as prophet.

As the kingdom of God, the local congregation
is that “royal priesthood,” or kingdom of priests, of which Peter speaks. But we make a huge mistake if we see that kingdom and its work solely, or even mainly, in terms of the special offices. That would be a huge mistake for the simple reason that the fundamental office in the church is not that of minister or elder, but of believer. This is evident when the Bible calls those who serve in the special offices servants. They are, of course, servants of Christ; but they serve Christ by serving the people of God. We may even say that Christ gives the special offices to the church precisely in order that the office of believer may properly function. The special offices are Christ’s gift to the church so that the kingdom is orderly and functions as a royal priesthood.

The kingdom of God is the true church of Jesus Christ wherever she manifests herself in the world. There Christ rules by his word and Spirit. There you have a royal priesthood where every believer in his or her office joyfully serves in submission to their King. But that rule of Christ is over every aspect of the lives of the citizens of God’s kingdom. It doesn’t end with our worship in church on the Lord’s day. And so we live as prophets, priests, and kings wherever we are and in whatever we do: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). And so we carry that spiritual principle and reality (the gracious rule of Jesus Christ) into all our life in the world.

That spiritual principle of the kingdom is all embracing for our lives. Just as an ambassador carries the word of his king or president into another country and there plants the flag of his country, so we carry the word and rule of King Jesus into the foreign country of this world. In all our life as a citizen of the kingdom of God, we take our stand on the side of the living God. As faithful prophets we speak his word over against the lie; as righteous kings we rule ourselves and all that over which he appoints us; and as holy priests we consecrate ourselves and all things to our God.

But you might ask, “How do I apply all of this in my life at Covenant Christian High; how do I manifest my office as prophet, priest, and king?” Or one could say, “Sure, I believe all this, but what difference does it make?” The answer is it makes all the difference in the world. The answer is found in the fundamental Reformed principle that what we believe about something governs our behavior towards it. The question of how we apply this doctrine in our lives could yield some very profitable discussion. Let me suggest a few ways. I will take as an example the young person attending Covenant Christian. How do you live there in the office of believer every day rubbing shoulders with other believers?

As a king (or queen) in God’s kingdom, you take responsibility for your actions. You do this as one who bears rule. You have the anointing of Christ so that you can (and do) bear rule in his kingdom. You rule yourself and all those things over which God has set you. Included in those things is your time and how you use it; your body and how you care for it; your friends and family as good gifts of God. You take responsibility for all these things and use them for the glory of God. That means, for example, you will have your assignments in on time. Your teacher should not have to get after you about them being late.

A prophet is one who knows the word of God and out of that knowledge he or she speaks. The root meaning of the word for prophet in Scripture is “to bubble over.” The picture is of a fountain that gushes up and cannot be contained, so that the idea of prophet is one who bubbles over with the word of God. Practically, young person, that means you need to study the word of God. Your calling as a prophet is to have a deep knowledge of the Bible. And yes, this needs to be a theological knowledge; theology should not be a scary word for you; theology is not just something for seminary professors or your pastor. This is your calling and out of that knowledge you confess God in the world as his prophet. There is a particular temptation here for covenant youth. That temptation is peer pressure, just to go along with the majority. But as a faithful prophet you must confess the truth of God even when you do so alone on certain issues.

It remains to say something about how you live practically as a holy priest at school. The basic idea of a priest is one who devotes himself (or herself) and all things to the service of God. The apostle speaks of this calling in Romans 12: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (v. 1). Part of the service of a priest is sacrifice. The Old Testament priests were always sacrificing animals of one kind or another. Today, however, that function is fulfilled in us as we offer spiritual sacrifices of praise and service. Another element of your priestly office is compassion. Frequently in the gospels we read the Lord was moved with compassion (Matt. 9:36, Mark 1:41). This is because Jesus is our merciful High Priest who is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15). As a priest you reflect
Jesus as you show compassion to your fellow students. There are many opportunities every day to do this. Perhaps there is a student who is socially awkward; the kind of person who finds it hard to fit in. Out of the great love and mercy the Lord has shown you, why not go up to that person and say, “I’ll be your friend.” In so doing you have compassion upon him.

Yours is a high and blessed calling. We spoke a little earlier of how we carry the word and rule of Jesus into this world as his representatives. The flag of his kingdom that we plant in the foreign and hostile country of this world is emblazoned with a red cross. It is the cross of Jesus that is all the power of your life as prophet, priest, and king. It is to that cross that we must all come every day to seek grace for our calling.

Philip is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan. The first article in this series appeared in the February 2019 issue of Beacon Lights.

Consider the Creation Philip Rainey

SCARS ON CREATION: BERKELEY PIT

“The Richest Hill on Earth,” a sign proudly proclaims on the city outskirts of Butte, Montana. This is a bold claim, but the town could back it up for decades. Mining has been the lifeblood for the entirety of Butte’s existence and is the proof behind the claim. The center for Butte’s success is the Berkeley Pit, once an economic boon, now one of the most toxic places on earth. The Berkeley Pit is a lesson in the interconnectedness of humans with creation, the impact of human decisions, and the ultimate power of God alone.

In the 1950s, mining in Butte was at a crossroads. It was the primary means of income for the town, but the richest ore had already been excavated. Yet copper was at a premium price across the world, and there was a lot more copper underground. It would just take more drastic mining methods to reach it. So the Berkeley Pit was opened, swallowing whole neighborhoods in a new, open pit approach to mining. The pit thrived for thirty years, producing enough copper to pave a four-inch-thick, 450-mile-long, four-lane highway. Unfortunately for the community, a steep drop in copper prices after 1974 led to the Berkeley operation being shut down in 1982.

I visited Butte, Montana, this summer, and it felt as though I had been transported back in time. The town still has a distinct western, mining town feel, and mining on a much smaller scale continues in the area. It is overshadowed by the Pit, now a tourist attraction, not for its mining history, but for its legacy as one of the most toxic places on earth. The pit is huge (about a mile long and half a mile wide), the water inside it an eerie green, and warning shots are fired at birds that get too close. The pH of the water is 2.5, so acidic that it would burn through one’s organs if consumed.

What happened here? How could such a rich spot turn so toxic, almost overnight? This question requires a look at the geology of the area. The Berkeley Pit is 1,600 feet deep, significantly lower than any other point in the area. Because of this, all the water in the area flows down to this lowest point. Pumping prevented this from being a problem when the mine was in operation, but when the pit was shut down, the pumps were too. This allowed 2.8 million gallons of water to flood into the pit daily, continually raising the water level.

This becomes problematic not because of the water, but because of what is in the pit, which is then transferred to the water. The primary composition of the remaining pit is iron pyrite, commonly

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
known as fool’s gold. When iron pyrite is exposed to air and water, it reacts, becoming sulfuric acid and rust. This sulfuric acid is then transferred to the water, creating an incredibly acidic environment. Compounding the problem, the acidic water can then break down other metals in the pit, resulting in further dangerous contamination.

This toxic water is currently contained to the pit, though the water levels have steadily risen since the pumps turned off. Rising water levels are well contained until a certain point, referred to as the “critical water level.” This is the place where the water level in the pit intersects with the groundwater level, allowing the toxic water to flow into the groundwater, poisoning all waterflow in the area. This would be catastrophic for all life in the area, and without intervention, this point is predicted to be reached in the next year. Fortunately, some intervention is underway, as three million gallons are now being pumped out and treated to raise the pH and remove metals.

I recently heard the phrase “scars on creation” to describe situations like this and was reminded of Romans 8:22: “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” This passage is in the context of our reception of spiritual life through Christ alone, while our physical bodies are still of the earth and sinful. This results in pain and struggle while we remain on earth. Creation, too, is affected by sin and, with us, awaits Christ’s second coming and renewal.

Through the lens of this passage, there is startling conviction. In the Berkeley Pit situation, humans destroyed part of creation through domination and exploitation, motivated by greed. This happens around the globe, and it is easy to ignore if it is far from home. Yet it should be something that brings sorrow. God created an initially perfect world that he took delight in. Although we can use the things of creation, the original Hebrew of Genesis 2:15 calls us to serve, guard, and protect it. This implies a different relationship than the one seen in the Berkeley Pit.

Fortunately, Romans 8 does not end with pain and struggle. Just as God is powerful on our behalf to free us from the clutches of sin, he can also free his creation from sin, and he will. In John’s vision (Rev. 21:1–5), he sees a new heaven and earth, and God proclaims, “Behold, I make all things new.” This is not a justification for the destruction of creation, just as God’s forgiveness of our sins is not justification to sin more. Yet it provides hope in a way that can only be found in God’s eternal power. Human power can only provide prevention from further harm at the Berkeley Pit, not restoration.

The Berkeley Pit is a fascinating place from a geological perspective, but it is also an intriguing place to see God. Despite the destruction and sorrow present in it, there is hope for the future of creation, when it, and we, will finally be sin-free and can glorify God together. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1).

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
tongues, we must be aware that great evil can come out of our mouths if we are not careful.

We must also be careful with regards to what we watch and listen to, as these things can have a significant effect on us. The first few times of us hearing that word will be shocking to us, but if we continue watching and listening to these things, it won’t be long before such words will just pass over our heads, and they will become part of our thoughts and vocabulary. The things that come out of your mouth reflect the heart, and they eventually turn into actions. Ask yourself next time you hear bad language in music and other entertainment, “Is what I am hearing here of benefit to me spiritually, and what impact will it have on my relationship with God?” The words you hear will become part of your everyday speech, and you will most definitely not be glorifying God in that! Ephesians 4:29 puts it very clearly: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” We are commanded through the holy word of God to speak that which is good; therefore we must seek to obey the word through faith in Jesus Christ. May we be like the psalmist in Psalm 101:3 in saying that “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.” It will cleave to us if we allow the devil to get a foot in the door, so be vigilant and live according to how God commands us.

Romans 1:28–31 give a list of sins which are of a “reprobate mind,” and one of these sins listed and warned against is being “backbiters.” This too is a sin of the tongue. It is not really a word which we hear too often now, so what does it mean? To be a backbiter means that you talk maliciously and gossip behind a person’s back. We have all been guilty of backbiting, and it is so easy for us to do! Backbiting, however, does no good to anyone, but does much harm instead. Our Lord Jesus Christ is our great example, for he never sinned, but rather lived a perfect life. He taught us to “love thy neighbor” (Matt. 22:39). Love is the opposite of backbiting, so let us refrain from such wickedness and be “peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9).

James 3:8 states that “the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” What an apt description of what we are like by nature! We are totally depraved, and we cannot do any good by ourselves, not even in our tongues. How often do we react angrily to someone and blurt out horrible words without thinking? It is impossible for man to tame the tongue, but nothing is impossible for God. Through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, we, his people, are changed. Through him the tongue becomes an instrument of righteousness and an instrument to praise God.

Our tongue can be used for evil, but it can also be used for good. In all that we do we must seek to glorify our great and holy God in heaven. 1 Corinthians 6:20 speaks of our need to “glorify God in your body,” and, like any part of God’s word, we should strive to obey this command out of thankfulness to him. If it were up to us, we would never be able to do any good. What about when you tell a loved one how much he means to you or when you politely say thank you to someone? These are nice things for us to hear, and it may feel good to say them, but if you do not say them to glorify God then you are not doing good. It is through Christ’s imputed righteousness that we are able truly to desire to glorify God’s name and do good not only with our tongues, but with our whole beings.

We should seek to use our tongues to glorify God. How do we do this? We must come before our father in prayer, “sing praises unto our King” (Ps. 47:6) and engage in spiritual discussions with others to praise his name. Again, some will do these things to “feel good” and to make themselves look holy, but our desire to do these things should truly come from the heart and be to glorify God’s name. Our prayers must not use “vain repetitions” (Matt. 6:7), but we must carefully think about what we say and sing to God. We must think about what we are singing rather than how we sound or appear to others, for this is what the Pharisees were guilty of. They wanted to make people notice how “holy” they were by an outward show, but in their hearts they were not right before God. Make sure your prayers and praises truly come from a thankful heart. When you are hanging out with friends next time, think about whether what you are saying is for God’s glory, or if it is for your own earthly interests.

It is a gift to know when to speak—to be able to know when to open your mouth and when to close it—and it is a true blessing from God. It can be very easy to blurt out the first thought that comes into our heads, and sometimes we may even say that it “just comes out,” but we must stop ourselves and think whether what we are going to say is of worth. Sometimes also in our silence we are doing wrong. If you are at work and someone makes wicked comments about your Saviour or makes fun of your faith, what should you do? If you remain silent in that situation, it is sin against Christ. “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words...
in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38). How easy it is to remain silent in a situation like this, but if you are true about your faith then you will speak up and defend Christ’s name. You know that feeling when you have done something wrong and your parents are ashamed of you. It is a horrible feeling, and we do not like to feel our parents’ shame on us! So then we do not want to upset them again, and we will not do that thing again. This is the case with our heavenly Father. What worse feeling than to feel his shame upon us! We must therefore be prepared to defend our Lord Jesus Christ in all places, and we must not take the easy option and remain silent.

Fellow young people, we are the future of the church. We are the future ministers, elders, and deacons of our churches. Be encouraged to glorify God’s name in your speech, and do not conform to worldly language. Your tongue must be holy before God, and it must reflect Christ, in whom we are able to do good and truly to glorify Jehovah almighty.

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Christian Living Dr. Marco Barone

MEDITATING ON GOD’S WORD CONTINUALLY

The Lord gave to Israel the following instructions: “Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” (Deut. 11:18–19; see also Deut. 6:7–9).

It is striking that these verses command Christian parents to talk, and therefore, meditate, upon God’s word at all times, to remind their children of God’s word during all the main parts of the day: “when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut. 11:19; see also 6:7). These are most solemn instructions, and although the focus of these verses is the highly important work of Christian parents in the religious instruction of their children, these verses contain several clear implications for all believers, young and old.

Dear reader, think about your own life. Parents, what are the most common topics at Sunday dinner? Young people, what are the most common topics of your conversations with your family and friends? Sports? Work? Hobbies? Entertainment? Are we also regularly taking advantage of the word of God that we have received from the preaching, using it as an occasion to discuss, meditate, and edify and encourage one another in the Lord? Out of the abundance of a person’s heart, his or her mouth speaks (see also Luke 6:45).

But you may ask, “those verses are mainly addressed to the teaching of parents to their children. Certainly, you are not saying that I, as an individual Christian, should meditate and talk about God’s word all the time, are you? There is so much else to do and to talk about!” I am certainly not saying that we should do nothing but study and meditate on the scriptures all day. We have our duties, our callings, our jobs, our studies, and the Lord delights in us when we fulfill them to his glory (Col. 3:23–24; see also Eccl. 9:10). We also can enjoy many healthy and innocent recreational activities, for the good of our bodies and minds. However, this does not contradict the fact that the Lord and his word should be our priority and that God’s word should dominate our lives as manifested in our conversations and personal meditations.

David says that man is to be blessed whose “delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Ps. 1:2). David was resolute to praise the LORD continually and at all times: “I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise
shall continually be in my mouth” (Ps. 34:1). Paul instructs us as follows: “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8). And what is there in the world that is more true, more honest, more just, more pure, more lovely, more good, and more virtuous than God's own word as recorded in the holy scriptures (Ps. 12; Prov. 30:5; 2 Tim 3:16–17)?

Sometimes we are afraid to bring up God’s word in our social gatherings, perhaps fearing to appear unusual or to break an accepted pattern. But what a great encouragement we find, unsurprisingly, in the scriptures! Whether it is a family member who sincerely asks us for the reason of our hope (“when thy son asketh thee....” Deut. 6:20) or a friend who (perhaps annoyed) asks us why we “always bring up the Bible,” we answer according to the great truth that motivates us: “We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand” (Deut. 6:21). Purely by grace, the LORD saved me from that great and terrible bondage of sin that I could have never defeated by myself! The LORD brought me into his kingdom of light! He imputed unto me the perfect righteousness of Christ! The LORD gave me his Holy Spirit who is always with me! How can I stop talking and witnessing of such immeasurable and eternal benefits! It is because of these (and many other) priceless spiritual blessings that we, by God’s grace alone, out of gratitude conduct our lives, our thoughts, our meditations, and our conversations so that we can say with the psalmist: “I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Ps. 34:1).

Yes, our old man always wants to do the opposite of praising, meditating and talking about the Lord, and Satan always works to distract us with anything but God’s word. We feel unable, and sometimes, unwilling. And the reason why we so often feel this way is simple: left to ourselves and according to our old man, we are unable and unwilling to meditate on God’s word day and night. But blessed be God, because in him, through Christ, we have not only all our salvation, but also the power by his Holy Spirit to walk in newness of life! Blessed be God, who has given us his Holy Spirit dwelling in us, bending our wills to his will, renewing our minds to see the greatness of his name and work for us in Jesus Christ. Move on, dear saint, in the strength of the Lord, the only author and captain of our salvation, and partake of the means of grace that he has established for his people.

God enlarges our hearts in the way of spiritual exercise...When God enlarges the heart of his child, he does so not without, but through the heart-exercise of the renewed and sanctified saint, longing and yearning, praying and seeking, searching the word, dwelling in the midst of God’s people, fighting the good fight, walking in the way of his good commandments. Thus the saint goes from strength to strength, rejoicing in the Lord and confiding in his promise.¹

As we continually and daily cling to Christ alone by listening to and reading his preached and written word, by praying, fellowshipping with the saints, and striving for godliness, the Lord works in us in his good appointed time, so that we may increasingly make the psalmist’s confession our own: “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97).

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¹ Herman Hoge, All Glory to The Only Good God (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2013), 299.
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“press toward the mark...”
(Philippians 3:14)

**February 8**  Read 1 Peter 1

As you read through the book of 1 Peter over the next five days, you will discover the answer to the question, “What does it mean to live as a pilgrim on this earth?” First, to live as a pilgrim on this earth means not to place our hope in the corruptible things of this world, but in that which is incorruptible. As Christians, we recognize that everything on this earth is going to be destroyed when Christ comes again. The temporary nature of the things that surround us helps to emphasize that they are not worthy of our hope and trust, nor can they save us.

So where can we find hope? Although the trials and troubles of this earth may cause grief, the knowledge that this is only our temporary home keeps God’s people from despair. “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). As a child of God, you can have confidence that even though your life on this earth could end at any moment, you have eternal life reserved for you in heaven by the power of God and the blood of Jesus Christ. Sing or pray Psalter #351.

**February 9**  Read 1 Peter 2

Even though we are only pilgrims on this earth and our eternal citizenship is in heaven, Christians are still called to be good citizens of this world by submitting to the government of the land in which they live. This chapter reminds us that these governments have legitimate authority from God; therefore we must obey and respect them unless they command us to do something contrary to God’s law. It is reassuring for Christians to remember that even the most powerful, wicked rulers of this world are in the hand of God, and he uses them to accomplish his will.

By honoring the earthly authorities that God has placed over us, we show honor to our heavenly Father as well. We show honor to God by honoring our president, government, and civil officers. We show honor to God by honoring our employers and teachers. We show honor to God by honoring our parents. Can those around you see that you honor God by the way that you respect the people he has placed in authority over you? Sing or pray Psalter #353.

**February 10**  Read 1 Peter 3

In order to live as pilgrims on this earth, we must live in a very counter-cultural way. We must order our lives according to a heavenly standard instead of an earthly standard and seek the approval of God instead of man. Our relationships must be visibly different from those of the world around us. In contrast to the ideals of modern feminism, Christian wives must live in submission to their husbands, and Christian husbands must honor their wives. Christian women must seek to cultivate godliness rather than being obsessed with their outward appearance. When a Christian is wronged, he must answer with compassion instead of retaliation.

Are you living your life in a way that is visibly different from the world? Can those around you recognize that you have sanctified God in your heart? As a Christian, your life should give occasion for people to ask you why you are different. And you must “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (v. 15). Sing or pray Psalter #356.

**February 11**  Read 1 Peter 4

If we are going to live as pilgrims on this earth, we must expect to suffer. Christ experienced physical and emotional suffering during his time on this earth, and so will every believer. This suffering can come in many forms. It could be simply difficulties and discomfort in our daily lives. Or it could be more extreme, such as open persecution and the threat of physical injury or death.

This promise of suffering is not meant to
discourage believers, but to encourage them. These sufferings are not something to be ashamed of, but rather something to delight in. How is it possible that we can be happy, not just despite our trials, but because of them? One thing that puts our suffering into proper perspective is comparing the suffering that we experience on this earth to what the ungodly will experience in the judgment day and for eternity. When Christians experience suffering in their lives, they can rejoice because in a small way they are sharing in the suffering of Christ and having fellowship with him. We can also rejoice because our sufferings are for the glory of God! **Sing or pray Psalter #357.**

**February 12**  
**Read 1 Peter 5**

While living as pilgrims on this earth we face the constant threat of attack from Satan and his host of demons. Verse 8 describes Satan as a “roaring lion” who is on the prowl, seeking to find prey to devour. There will never be a time on this side of glory when we are completely safe from the threat of Satan’s attacks; therefore we must strive always to be ready. In fact, it is when we are distracted and weak that he is even more likely to attack.

In order to be ready for these attacks of Satan, we must be sober and vigilant in our lives on this earth. To be sober means to be of sound mind. If we partake in an excess of alcohol or other mind-altering substances, we are more susceptible to the attacks of Satan. To be vigilant means to be watchful. We cannot be vigilant if our minds are too distracted by the entertainment and cares of the world around us to think about the things of God. Pray that the Spirit will work sobriety and vigilance in your heart and life so that you are prepared to fight against the attacks of the devil. **Sing or pray Psalter #359.**

**February 13**  
**Read Hebrews 1**

The first two verses of the book of Hebrews show a contrast between how God spoke to his people in the Old Testament (the prophets) and how God speaks to his people in the New Testament (his Son). All the Old Testament prophets pointed to the coming of Jesus, the greatest prophet. Jesus was the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament, the word of God made flesh. And by his authority the apostles carried on Jesus’ earthly ministry after he ascended to heaven.

Today we no longer receive new revelation from God like the saints did in the times of the prophets, during Jesus’ earthly ministry, and in the apostolic times. But we have been given the Holy Spirit to continue to illuminate God’s revealed word to us. Therefore, it is important to ask for the Spirit’s guidance and blessing whenever we read the holy scriptures. Prayer and scripture reading must always go hand in hand. **Sing or pray Psalter #360.**

**February 14**  
**Read Hebrews 2**

Why did Jesus Christ, our Savior, have to be both truly God and truly human? Heidelberg Catechism question and answer 16 reminds us that “the justice of God requires that the same human nature which hath sinned should likewise make satisfaction for sin.” The penalty for sin is death. Both physical and spiritual death is required in order to satisfy the wrath of God. Only a mediator who has a truly human nature would be able to experience physical death, because God cannot die.

Jesus being both fully God and fully human is essential for our salvation, but it has other benefits for Christians as well. Since our Savior took on a human nature, he understands what it feels like to be tempted in the flesh. He experienced pain and hunger and sadness while on this earth, so he knows exactly what we are going through when we suffer. What a blessing it is to have a merciful and faithful High Priest who will comfort and help his people! **Sing or pray Psalter #361.**

**February 15**  
**Read Hebrews 3**

It is obvious when reading Hebrews that the recipients of this letter were in danger of succumbing to apostasy. The author warns them to guard their own hearts against sin. He also tells them to help their fellow saints remain faithful by exhorting one another daily (v. 13). Believers are not meant to live in isolation, where they are much more susceptible to sin, but to be a part of a local church so that they can be encouraged and encourage others.

It is very tempting to be a part of a church only in a very superficial way, without sharing our true selves and our struggles with sin. We may be afraid of the accountability that comes along with true church membership, or of what people will think of us. But in order for believers properly to encourage one another, we must openly confess our sins and confront sins in others. Are you part of a church family where you are being exhorted and encouraged regularly? Do you also exhort and encourage others in love? If not, ask yourself if you need to be more open and honest in sharing your struggles with your fellow believers. **Sing or pray Psalter #365.**
February 16  Read Hebrews 4

Hebrews 4 promises rest for God’s people, but verse 11 instructs, “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest.” What does this phrase mean? It emphasizes the fact that we need diligent faith in order to enter into the true rest that only God can give. This kind of rest must be pursued because Satan is on the attack, always trying to steal our rest by convincing us to try to find it ourselves in things lesser than God.

Yet even the true rest that we experience on this earth is only a small taste of the eternal rest that God’s people look forward to in heaven. Both in this life and in the life to come, we can rest and trust in what Jesus has accomplished for us in his death on the cross. So let us labor diligently to enter into that rest, and not be content with the false rest that the “self-care” methods of this world have to offer. Where do you seek your rest? Sing or pray Psalter #366.

February 17  Read Hebrews 5

Have you ever prayed to the Lord for guidance and wished that he would just speak from heaven and tell you exactly what to do? Maybe you are wondering which classes to take, what school to attend, which job to choose, who you should date, or how you should handle a difficult situation. Although a direct answer from God does seem easier, a better prayer request would be for the wisdom to make a good decision.

Children who have matured into adults do not continue to ask their parents to make every single decision for them. Instead, they use what they have learned from their parents and teachers to make their own choices. As God’s spiritual children, over time we also develop wisdom to discern both good and evil (v. 14). We internalize the basic principles that we have been taught since childhood, combined with our experience and continued study of the Bible, in order to build a framework for making good decisions. We can never attain perfect wisdom in this life, but we should continue to pray and strive for increased spiritual maturity, as the author of Hebrews admonishes his readers to do. Sing or pray Psalter #367.

February 18  Read Hebrews 6

Being a Christian is the most joyful life that a person can have, but it is also hard work. Hebrews 6:11–12 contains a warning to those who were tempted to avoid this work and be inactive in their Christian life. The bondage of the sin of slothfulness is that it not only hinders your own spiritual progress, but it also hinders the message of the gospel and has the potential to deliver you right into the hands of your enemy, the devil.

Many Christians today also face the temptation to be slothful in their walk as Christians. Author Gary Thomas calls sloth, or spiritual laziness, the “great spiritual assassin of our time.” He explains the consequences of spiritual laziness as “wasting our lives in a spectacularly nonscandalous fashion so that we don’t see just how destructive it is.” A slothful attitude is one that puts your personal comfort above all else and tries to avoid things that are inconvenient or uncomfortable. If you recognize that spiritual laziness is a temptation in your own life, pray that God will work in your heart an increased desire to mature as a Christian and live zealously for him. Sing or pray Psalter #369.

February 19  Read Hebrews 7

The author of Hebrews was writing to believers who were having trouble coming to terms with the new covenant. That is why throughout the book you see the superiority of Christ emphasized. Christ was the basis for all the promises of the old covenant, yet some Jewish people still had a hard time setting aside the earthly office of high priest to embrace the promised High Priest.

The fact that Christ is a high priest after the order of Melchisedec demonstrates that he is superior to the Levites. The Levites (represented by Abraham) paid tithes to Melchisedec, showing that his priesthood was greater. And while the Levites had recorded births and deaths, the lineage of Melchisedec is left intentionally vague in the Bible in order to emphasize that his priesthood was eternal. In this way he is a picture of Christ, who lives yesterday, today, and forever. As New Testament believers, we can be thankful that we have an eternal high priest who does not need to sacrifice for our sins over and over again but paid for them all in his one sacrifice on the cross. Sing or pray Psalter #372.

February 20  Read Hebrews 8

It can be tempting to think that it was easier for the Old Testament believers to have faith because of all the wonders they experienced firsthand in the days of the prophets and kings. But however amazing these wonders were, they were still an incomplete revelation compared to what we have today in the
holy scriptures. Since we possess a fuller revelation today, we are certainly without excuse for unbelief.

In contrast to the Old Testament, in the New Testament God’s law would be written on his people’s hearts, instead of just on tablets of stone. When God writes his word on our hearts and the Holy Spirit works in our bodies, God makes his will the desire of our hearts instead of our own will. How amazing it is when a child of God can say, “I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart” (Ps. 40:8). Sing or pray Psalter #373.

**February 21 | Read Hebrews 9**

The title “Christ” is used many times in this chapter and is in fact the most frequently used title for Jesus in the entire New Testament. After doing some research I found out that the word “Christ” comes from the Greek word “christos,” which means “anointed one.” It also corresponds to the Hebrew word “messiah” that was used in the Old Testament, which also means “anointed one.”

To be anointed meant to be set aside by God for a specific task. There were many people who were anointed by God throughout the Bible, but the most important was Jesus. He was sent by God for the specific task of our salvation. Yet all the other people who were anointed before him also served our salvation in a unique way by setting just the right events in order to carry out God’s plan. What an amazing thing to think about! Sing or pray Psalter #378.

**February 22 | Read Hebrews 10**

After reminding the readers of Christ’s great sacrifice for us on the cross, verse 22 of this chapter begins a series of three admonitions beginning with “let us.” Since Jesus has delivered us from our sins, let us show our thankfulness by drawing near to God, holding fast to our faith, and encouraging one another in good works. This is the proper response of believers to God’s faithfulness—worship and obedience. Outward worship alone is not enough to show that a Christian is sincere. This worship must be accompanied by sincere devotion that results in obedience to God’s will. A person who claims to be a Christian and attends church on Sunday but lives an unholy life the rest of the week is a hypocrite.

Yet we know that by nature all of us are tainted with sin and hypocrisy. Thankfully we stand before God clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ. It is only by his strength that we will be able to worship God sincerely and delight to do his will. Sing or pray Psalter #380.

**February 23 | Read Hebrews 11**

The heroes of faith that we read about in Hebrews 11 knew God. They knew his character and what he had done for them; therefore they had confidence in his promises. They were able to act out of this confidence by means of God-given faith and do great things, such as build an ark even though it had never rained before or pack up their entire family and journey into a strange country not knowing where their final destination would be.

You also know the character of God by reading what he has revealed to us in his word. You know what he did for Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and all the others. And you know what great things he has done in your life. Since God has worked faith in your heart, you can confidently believe in him and in the all the promises of the gospel even if they are yet unseen. You can face the future without fear just as the heroes of faith did. What a wonderful gift! Sing or pray Psalter #381.

**February 24 | Read Hebrews 12**

The author of Hebrews here distinguishes a difference between the fear of God’s wrath and the fear of God’s holiness. Both types of fear cause man to tremble because of the greatness of God, just as the Israelites quaked when they approached Mount Sinai. But the fear of God’s wrath inspires only terror in the hearts of those who do not know God’s holiness.

In contrast, the fear of God’s holiness inspires worship and wonder in his people. We do not need to be afraid to approach Mount Zion like the people of Israel were. In the new covenant, we understand that by grace God’s wrath for our sin has been satisfied by the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ, our mediator. Therefore, we dare to come to God’s throne in worship and prayer, certainly with proper reverence, but also with confidence that he will surely hear and answer us. We also know that we have right fear of the Lord when it moves us to “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (v. 28). Sing or pray Psalter #383.

**February 25 | Read Hebrews 13**

We live in an ever-changing world. Our circumstances and our social and financial status may vary from year to year. Even our own bodies, minds, affections, and perceptions are constantly changing. Consequently, it can be difficult for our human minds truly to grasp the immutability of God. He is
infinitely the same. As verse 8 reminds us, he is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” God is unchanging, his word is unchanging, and his law is unchanging. Therefore, the way that he desires to be worshipped does not change either.

This attribute of God is reassuring for his people, but it serves as a caution to us as well. Have you ever trusted in a person, place, possession, or circumstance for comfort, and then it changed? Let that experience remind you that God is the only one who is worthy of our trust. And since he never changes his mind, our salvation is secure. These words from the familiar hymn “Great is Thy Faithfulness” beautifully state the assurance that God’s people have because of his inability to change: “Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father. There is no shadow of turning with thee. Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not. As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.”

Sing or pray Psalter #385.

February 26   Read 2 Timothy 1

Paul wrote 2 Timothy while he was imprisoned in Rome. This is likely one of the last letters that he wrote, since he would soon be executed at the command of Nero. Aware that his death was imminent, Paul writes to his beloved colleague Timothy and encourages him to be bold and strong in the Lord. This idea is mentioned no less than 25 times in 1 and 2 Timothy. Because of this frequency, it appears that Timothy was probably a godly but naturally timid person.

Can you relate to Timothy? Are you afraid of speaking up in front of others to defend your faith? Does sharing the gospel make you uncomfortable? Pray for the strength and diligence to fulfill your calling as a Christian even in the face of discomfort and opposition. “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord...but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (v. 8). Sing or pray Psalter #386.

February 27   Read 2 Timothy 2

Paul reminds Timothy that he is involved in active spiritual warfare, and therefore is comparable to a soldier on the battlefield. Soldiers expect to endure hardship, to go into battle to defend their cause. We must expect the same as Christians today. Being a follower of Christ requires self-denial (Matt. 16:24).

A soldier also willingly detaches himself from the things of civilian life in order to go and fight. He leaves these things behind, not because they are necessarily bad, but because they are distractions. We must expect to do the same. If something is distracting us from fighting the battle of faith, we must lay it aside.

As a soldier in the Lord’s army, Jesus Christ is our commanding officer. We must pledge total obedience to him, just as a soldier obeys his commanding officer without question. By the power of the Spirit working in our hearts, we, like Timothy, can be soldiers for the cause of Christ, vessels of honor set apart for service (v. 21). Sing or pray Psalter #388.

February 28   Read 2 Timothy 3

The list of sins in verses 2–5 that describes the human condition in the last days matches the culture of this ungodly world to a tee—love of themselves, love of money, boasting, no respect for authority, slandering others, a lack of self-control, brutality, and seeking pleasure at all costs. You only have to spend a few moments on social media or watching any popular show in order to recognize some or all of these characteristics. As Christians, we are commanded to turn away from such things, but this is especially difficult in today’s culture. Commentator David Guzik explains, “People who do the things on this list are not only common today, but they are often our cultural heroes.”

If we spend time with these people, either in person or by allowing them to entertain us on our screens and in our earbuds, they will have an influence. 1 Corinthians 15:33 reminds us, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” In order not to be conformed to the ideals of this world, we must keep our minds on heavenly things. Does the entertainment that you seek out train your mind to think like the world or according to God’s will? Sing or pray Psalter #391.

February 29   Read 2 Timothy 4

A challenge for Timothy, and also for pastors today, is to keep their sermons centered on God while still holding people’s attention. Many people have “itching ears” (v. 3), meaning they desire novelty and entertainment instead of sound doctrine. Others may complain that preaching is “too doctrinal” and want more practical application. But what they do not realize is that doctrine is the structure that determines our practice. You cannot have one without the other. While pastors must certainly make sure to point out specific practical applications to the congregation, the majority of the sermon must
be about the doctrine (proven from scripture) that governs why we should act in a certain way.

We must be careful not to have these same “itching ears” when listening to the preaching or when choosing our devotional and Bible study materials. Are you attracted to easy reading, entertaining stories, and good feelings? Or are you choosing materials that encourage you to dig deeply into God’s word and evaluate your life against the truths found within? Sing or pray Psalter #392.

March 1 Read 2 Peter 1

Verses 12–15 of this chapter express a personal concern that Peter had for the church to whom he writes. He is concerned that they will forget the true knowledge of God that he has reminded them of in the previous verses. Throughout his ministry, he has endeavored to remind them of the truth as much as possible, but now as he nears death, he fears that they will not remember the truth after he is gone.

How often are you so caught up in the busyness of life that you neglect to keep in mind the things of God? Satan is at work in the packed schedules and commotion of our everyday lives. He triumphs when we are too distracted to fight actively the battle of faith. It must be a priority to pray and read the Bible daily (v. 19), attend worship services and Bible study, and have fellowship with godly friends. All of these activities will keep the truth fresh in our minds and hearts so that we are able to fight against sin. Sing or pray Psalter #397.

March 2 Read 2 Peter 2

In this chapter, Peter warns the churches about present and future false teachers. False teachers will always be a problem for the church, and increasingly so as the second coming of our Lord rapidly approaches. False doctrine is seldom easy to identify. Satan and his cohorts are very deceptive and devious. The message of these false teachers usually sounds good on the surface, leading many to be deceived. It is usually man-centered instead of God-centered, so it appeals to our human nature. False teachers are seeking popularity, not to turn people to God, so they tell people exactly what they want to hear in order to gain followers.

God will judge false teachers severely, as you can see from this chapter. Make sure that you are not part of their camp! It is necessary to know the truth of the gospel well or you will not be able to identify the lies of false doctrine. Can you say along with the psalmist, “I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me” (Ps. 119:30)? Sing or pray Psalter #401.

March 3 Read 2 Peter 3

As we wait for the second coming of our Lord, what kind of lives should we live? Our attitude should not be like that of children who try to behave right before Christmas so that Santa Claus will bring them presents. We do not live in obedience to God’s commandments to earn our salvation or because we are afraid Jesus will “catch us being bad” when he comes again. Rather, we strive to live godly lives because we have been saved and have the Holy Spirit in us. We wait, not in fear, but in hope!

As redeemed people of God who have the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we are able to grow in grace and in the knowledge of God during our time on this earth. We are able to cultivate all the virtues of grace, the fruits of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control. We are able to use our knowledge of God to fight against doctrinal errors in order to preserve the truth. Is your life characterized by this godly conduct as you wait for the second coming of our Lord? Sing or pray Psalter #403.

March 4 Read Jude

In the Old Testament we read many accounts of the endless cycle of human unfaithfulness and divine chastisement that characterized God’s covenant people. This gives way in the New Testament to a new and better covenant. God has made an everlasting covenant of grace with his people and adopts us to be his children and heirs. Jesus washed away our sins by his death on the cross and made us partakers of his death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts, sanctifying us and daily renewing our lives. It is only because of the power and work of the triune God that New Testament believers can say that they are being kept for Jesus Christ.

The calling of believers therefore is earnestly to contend for the faith, knowing that they are preserved in Jesus Christ, and the wicked they fight against are being kept by God for judgment. Jude’s doxology beautifully expresses this doctrine of the preservation of the saints: “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and
March 5  Read 1 John 1

The incarnation of Christ is an amazing thing to think about. The eternal Word of God actually came down to earth and was accessible to man in a way that had never been experienced before. Jesus was able to be heard, seen, touched, and learned from. Our glorious Lord took on the lowly human nature of his people in order to save them from their sins!

As an actual eyewitness to the incarnation of Christ, John was eager to discredit some dangerous teachings that were creeping into the church at that time. One was the heresy of Docetism, which taught that Jesus only appeared to be a man but was really a spirit. Another heresy was an early form of Gnosticism, which also denied that Jesus actually became a physical man. We must learn the truth of the incarnation so that we can praise God for this wonderful gift, but also so we are able to identify such errors if they threaten our own church. Sing or pray Psalter #407.

March 6  Read 1 John 2

How can you really be sure that you are a Christian? Verse 3 answers this question by stating, “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” Simply put, if we love God, we will obey him. However, as we were reminded yesterday in 1 John 1:8–10, this obedience is not a complete eradication of sin from our hearts (which is not possible on this earth), but rather a humble awareness of it. True knowledge of God shows us the depth of our sin and our complete dependence on the work of Christ for our salvation.

Genuine sorrow for sin evidences a living faith just as genuine obedience does. Nevertheless, the fruit of our union with Jesus Christ by the Spirit is a small beginning of obedience to God’s word. In any deliverance that we experience from trials, sin, and temptation throughout our lives we can see the grace and mercy of God bestowed on us, and therefore be assured of our salvation. Sing or pray Psalter #413.

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How can believers be confident that God hears and answers their prayers? Verses 21–22 of this chapter remind us that we can have boldness to draw near to the Father “because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” But does this mean that we earn God’s attention by obeying his law? Certainly not.

If you put these verses together with the context and what we meditated on yesterday, you can see that the assurance we experience as a result of the Holy Spirit’s work in our hearts and lives also leads us to come confidently to our heavenly Father in prayer. Since Jesus shed his blood for us on the cross, we are able to begin to keep God’s commandments. And since Jesus shed his blood for us on the cross, we are able to have communion with God in prayer. *Sing or pray Psalter #433.*

**Poem**

*James Jonker*

**ALPHA AND OMEGA**

In the beginning, the eternal Word,
By might unmeasured and unknown to man,
Spoke, and the depths of nothingness were stirred;
And in that great beginning time began.

And in time’s fullness, man by sin fast held,
That Word was flesh, time met eternity;
The finite and the Infinite were weld,
And God and man was hanged upon a tree.

But in time’s glass will drop the final sand,
The cloud-clothed angel with a lion’s roar
Shall set his fiery feet on sea and land,
God’s end be reached, and time shall be no more.

Lord, strengthen Thou our failing sight, we pray,
Till with the eye of faith we see that day.
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:
Emmett David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan & Joni Buiter—Doon, IA
Iris Noelle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Austin & Lisa Potjer—Doon, IA
Allison Reina, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ross & Brittany Kooienga—Georgetown, MI
Maven Jolie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Lisa Kooienga—Georgetown, MI
Devyn Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy & Lisa Kortering—Hudsonville, MI
Silas John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Daniel & Rachelle Wierenga—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Jared Walker, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Sarah Kiel—Kalamazoo, MI
Watsyn Jak, son of Mr. & Mrs. Andrew & Jessica Ezinga—Loveland, CO
Trent Kody, son of Mr. & Mrs. David & Amy Brands—Loveland, CO
Ayesha Emory, daughter of Bro. & Sis. Jomar & Analin Madium—Maranatha, Philippines
Judah William, son of Mr. & Mrs. Andrew & Ricci Brummel—Providence, MI
Rabany, Shekina, John Caleb and Elyana, children of Bro. Emman and Sis. Ruby Ann Jasojaso—Providence, Philippines
Jeruel, son of Bro. Ruel & Sis. Jenny Dela Fuente—Providence, Philippines
Hannah Lou, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Rob & Jessica Westhuis—Southwest, MI
Tess Kristin, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Marc & Andrea Velthouse—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH
“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 10:32
Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:
Justin Kleyn—Byron Center, MI
Taylor Kuiper—Byron Center, MI
Bro. Julius Arragona—Berean, Philippines
Bro. John Noel Longalong—Berean, Philippines
Sis. Abigail Prosia—Berean, Philippines
Braden Kuiper—Doon, IA
Sam Teunissen—Doon, IA
Casey Vink—Doon, IA
Michael Altena—Georgetown, MI
Zach Kaptein—Georgetown, MI
Drew Poortinga—Georgetown, MI
Ryan Westra—Georgetown, MI
Cole De Vries—Grace, MI
Rachel De Vries—Grace, MI
Travis Peterson—Hudsonville, MI
Leah Bos—Loveland, CO
Bro. Emman and Sis. Ruby Ann Jasojaso—Providence, Philippines
Dylan Kamps—Southeast, MI
Mitchell Huisken—Southwest, MI
Austin Van Donselaar—Southwest, MI
Juline Hiemstra—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. Cole De Vries and Miss Rachel Rowe—Grace, MI
Mr. Justin Brands and Miss Emily Kuiper—Southeast, MI
Mr. Jeff Hofman and Miss Grace Medema—Byron Center, MI
FOUR LITTLE THINGS UPON THE EARTH (1): THE ANTS

“There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer” (Prov. 30:24–25).

As the early summer sun beamed down a grassy field, the littlest ant marched from his home in the ground, following the rest of his brothers and sisters. They marched in a line, one by one, as the dirt squished wet and sticky beneath their feet from the spring rains.

Even though he was little, the littlest ant picked up a grass seed, heaving it onto his back. The seed was almost as big as he was, and it took all his strength to lift it. But he joined the line of his brothers and sisters as they marched home, all carrying grass seeds on their backs.

As the mid-summer sun beat down on a field of flowers, the littlest ant marched from his home in the ground, following the rest of his brothers and sisters. They marched in a line, one by one, as the dirt rose dry and dusty beneath their feet.

Even though he was little, the littlest ant picked up a flower seed, heaving it onto his back. The seed was round and hard to carry, but he balanced it on his back with two of his legs. He joined the line of his brothers and sisters as they marched home, all carrying flower seeds on their backs.

As the late-summer sun scorched a wheat field, the littlest ant marched from his home in the ground, following the rest of his brothers and sisters. They marched in a line, one by one, as the dirt hurt beneath their feet, hard and cracked after a hot summer.

Even though he was little, the littlest ant picked up a grain of wheat, straining under its weight. The seed was bigger than he was, but the littlest ant panted and tottered into the line of his brothers and sisters as they marched home, all carrying grains of wheat on their backs.

As the cold winter winds blew, the littlest ant remained snug in his home. He and his family had plenty of food stored up to last for the winter, and they didn’t need to worry.

The Bible tells us we are to be like the ants, especially the harvest ants that lived in the area where the Bible was written. The harvest ants work hard all summer while they can, storing up food for the winter when they can’t work. God uses this means of their hard work to provide for them.

God also uses the means of our hard work to provide for us. Your dad works hard all day to provide money for food and clothes. Your mom helps out by working at home or working a job when times are hard. And you are called to work too. You work at your studies at school. Or you work at home helping out your mom and dad with chores.

We are to be wise like the ants and work when God gives us the work to do. Sometimes God takes jobs away. Sometimes He gives illnesses that make it hard to work. Someday you will graduate from school and have no more studies to do. You are to work hard now, while you can work and study, to be prepared for where God calls you in the future.
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