BEACON LIGHTS

The End Times
Preparing for a Perverse Generation

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“Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?” Matthew 17:17.

What does a perverse generation look like?

If I were to have answered this question in the past, I would have pointed out to you the perverisions of other churches. That would make all of us feel better because, we would tell ourselves, at least we aren’t as bad as them. So, something like this:

In July 2020, Neland Ave. Christian Reformed Church (CRC) installed a homosexual woman, living in a same-sex marriage, as a deacon.

Or this:

Reader, I was shocked and horrified to receive in the mail the November 2020 issue of The Banner, the official church paper of the CRC. The cover had three men holding hands, and the title was “Same Sex Relationships and the CRC.” Troubling enough. But turn to page 11, and what you see is a picture of two lesbians, with the caption which includes their names and the words, “members of Sherman St. CRC in Grand Rapids, MI.” The next page has a picture of a man and his “partner” who are members of First CRC in Toronto, Ontario. The article then allows these members to offer their wisdom to their denomination. Representative is this quote: “I would urge the CRC to stop thinking that the Bible alone has ‘the answer’ to every question it might have on these matters.”

Or this:

My alma mater, Calvin University, has reached a new low. I received in my mailbox an article by the student body president at Calvin University. She is the first LGBTQ student body president. She is bisexual but identifies as queer because it includes a lot of identities.

A perverse generation, indeed.

But what about this?

What about a generation that shows more anguish when the NCAA basketball tournament is canceled than when divine worship services are canceled? What about you, reader? Compare your reaction to the news of your basketball game, volleyball game, or vacation being canceled because of COVID to your reaction when you heard you couldn’t go to church for weeks, even months.

What about a generation that fights tooth and nail to keep their businesses open, or their schools functioning, or their sporting events scheduled, but lays over and plays dead when the governor tells them not to worship? What about a generation that insists on its right to work, and goes back to work, full-time, without missing a shift, but is content with only one service per Sunday for months on end because of the pandemic?

What about a generation that gathers for a choir concert and cries throughout the concert because of the beautiful music, to the extent that the minister who is asked to close with prayer finds it difficult to maintain his composure, yet that same generation doesn’t shed a tear when the gospel of Jesus Christ is compromised?

What about a generation that shows unflinching support for a political candidate, refusing even to hear one word of criticism about that candidate, yet shows something close to disinterest when the name of Jesus Christ is sullied, and his work displaced?

What about a generation that talks non-stop about its favorite sports teams and is joyful beyond measure when they win but despondent and depressed for days afterward when that team loses to its crosstown rival, yet that same generation can’t describe the fundamentals of the Christian faith?

What about a generation that will debate endlessly on any number of topics, but when theological controversy arises, it tries immediately to quell it. Or engages in furious debate in person and on-line, but has not read the documents or studied the issues so that such debate can be held with knowledge of the issues?

What about a generation that wastes four to seven hours (or more) per day on their phones in vanity and entertains itself with novels that glory in things that should be a shame even to speak of (Eph. 5:12), but that same generation lets the 2018 Acts of Synod sit unopened on its bookshelves?

What about a generation that will read anything it can get its hands on regarding sports, hunting, vacations, or business, but refuses to read a new publication that was born to declare the glory of God in salvation and to expose the lie lest it destroy us in our generations?

A perverse generation, indeed.

Do you wonder who I am accusing of this perversity?

Me.

What you read above applied to me, and applies to me. To give one example, I didn’t react well when the Big 10 Basketball tournament was cancelled, or
Wondering with Great Admiration

Not every church that calls itself a church is worthy of the name.

What is the church? According to the Belgic Confession, the church is “a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost” (art. 27).

But drive down almost any busy street, and you will pass building after building with a sign out front that identifies it as a church. What gives? Are all of these churches “holy congregation[s] of true Christian believers”? Or are some of them unholy congregations of hypocrites and blasphemers?

May we even ask that question?

Not only may you ask that question, young person, you must ask that question.

Outside of that holy congregation, there is no salvation (Belgic Confession 28).

So how do we distinguish between the two? Is it something best left to the mighty, the wise, and the learned? Must we mount the ivory tower to learn what distinguishes the true from the false, the holy from the unholy? When you examine your church and I examine mine, how do we determine whether she is true or false?

Who is equipped to determine the true nature of a church? You are. Those who are united to Christ by faith are equipped by God to make a judgment, a righteous judgment, about the true or false nature of a church. Why? Because “we have the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Cor. 2:12). You who are spiritual, judge all things (1 Cor. 2:15). And when someone accuses you of pride or arrogance for saying a church is holy or unholy, you must remember the last half of verse 15; “yet he himself is judged of no man,” and you disregard that evil charge against you.

You make that determination according to the marks of that church. A mark is a distinguishing...
feature. It is something that allows you to know what it is and what it isn’t. Don’t drink from that bottle of picric acid \((\text{O}_2\text{N})_3\text{C}_6\text{H}_5\text{OH})\) in your lab at school. The skull and crossbones is a mark that shows you what will happen if you do. In the last days, there will be a mark that will identify those who belong to the beast.

What are those marks that we use in our examination of the church? Remember, none of those churches that you drive past have the skull and crossbones on the sign out front.

The primary mark of a true church is what proceeds from its pulpit. A church is true “if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein” (Belgic Confession 29). The other marks (pure administration of the sacraments and the exercise of Christian discipline) flow from this one mark, or sign, of a true church. This is taught in John 8:47: “He that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.” If the minister mounts the pulpit and says words that contradict what God himself has revealed in his word, then you are not hearing God’s words. The members that hear those words and continue to maintain membership in that church, then, are “not of God.” They don’t hear God’s words! And they are fine with it! The church may have a thriving prison ministry, or a really cool coffee bar, or a praise team that sets the hearts of the people afire, but they are not of God. This is described in Jeremiah in gripping language: “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?” (Jer. 5:30–31).

The 29th article of the Belgic Confession also gives us marks by which we can identify the false church.

“She ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God.”

This can happen to a church over the course of many years. Rome is an outstanding example, with its hierarchical structure of pope, cardinals, archbishops, priests, and deacons. But the danger is very real for Reformed churches also. This happens when a church has made a name for itself. It has glittering institutions and powerful figures that it turns to for help instead of turning to the word of God. It considers the writings of holy men, ecclesiastical assemblies, and church rules and statutes to be “of equal value with the truth of God.” Although it would never come out and say it, it considers those things, and not the truth, to be “above all.” Over the course of many years, a church forgets that “all men are of themselves liars and more vain than vanity itself” (Belgic Confession 7). The false church rejects Jesus Christ and his word and takes on itself the yoke of human authority, however that may manifest itself.

Another sin the false church commits, by which she identifies herself as false, is that she corrupts the sacraments (the Lord’s supper and baptism). Rome does this by inventing more sacraments than Christ, as King of the church, has instituted. But a Reformed church can and does violate this principle as well. To give an example from today, a Reformed church violates this principle when it takes the sacrament of the Lord’s supper and allows members to partake separately from their homes, instead of “in the assembly of the people of God” (Belgic Confession 35). A Reformed church’s motive may be pure: they want to keep their people safe from disease and still desire them to partake of the Lord’s supper. But God does not care about our motives. With this action, that Reformed church refuses to submit to the yoke of Christ, and she “adds to and takes from them as she thinks proper” (Belgic Confession 29). She has taken on a mark of the false church.

The final mark of the false church is that she “persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry.” This is the clearest mark of a false or falling church because it involves public actions. It can be difficult to prove that a church is ascribing more authority to herself than to the word of God. But persecution is clear and unmistakable. It is especially grievous because it takes a mark of a true church (proper exercise of church discipline) and uses that God-ordained and holy instrument against righteous men and women.

I don’t like to be rebuked. And neither do you. Chastening is hard and is not joyous (Heb. 12:11). A falling church doesn’t like to be rebuked either. The difference between a falling church (a church taking on the marks of a false church) and you and I individually is that a church has tremendous power to bring on the prophet or prophets rebuking her. Usually, there is just one prophet. Or two. Church history is filled with examples of this. It is impossible to read through the Old Testament and not see the example of a faithful prophet rebuking and then getting persecuted by “all Israel.” The falling church has groups of powerful men (called committees) who exert influence throughout the church, bringing tremendous pressure to bear on prophets who do not fall into line. “Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood” (Isa. 59:7).
This is persecution, as real a persecution as stoning. How does a church become false? It could be a number of different things. It could be a church that is “settled on [its] lees” (Zeph. 1:12). The image here is of a bottle of wine that has sat for so long that the sediment has settled at the bottom. Once there, it begins to harden. When a church has not been disturbed for a long time, it too can begin to harden. This usually happens in connection with great prosperity. Spiritual indifference is the rule because there are no problems, money is had in plenty, the institutions are all glittering and growing, and “peace” reigns all around. God will not do good or evil; all is well (12). Then a prophet appears. He “rebukes her for her errors” and the backlash (the persecution) is swift and fierce.

This idea is closely related to that of Amos 6:1: “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria.” As Calvin points out in his commentary, the condemnation is not that people have their time of leisure. The great wickedness reveals itself when the rebukes appear. God, through his prophet, says, “Repent! Turn from your sin!” The response of people who are at ease in Zion is to yawn. “Repent? Don’t trouble me with that talk. I have a Michigan football game to watch.” Or, “Repent? For what? I have the mountain of Samaria.” Today, this wickedness would appear in the thought (and it only ever remains a thought, never spoken), “Repent? Why would I do that? I am Protestant Reformed!”

The marks of both the true church and the false church are clear. The article ends with this: “These two Churches are easily known and distinguished from each other.” A church cannot manifest both marks and claim to continue as a true church. For example, when a church persecutes and then expels a faithful prophet, she cannot say, “We have the main mark, the pure preaching of the word!” No, she does not. When she takes on that false mark, she reveals that her preaching is not pure but corrupted. The minister that mounts the pulpit of such a church is not sent by God, and the message he brings will be “wormwood” and “gall” to the flock (Jer. 23:15).

Which doesn’t mean that church doesn’t continue as church. It will. In fact, it may very well thrive. From an outward perspective. But what is her standing in the eyes of Jehovah?

Who has that church become? She has become the woman spoken of in Revelation 17:6: “And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.”

**From the Pastor’s Study** Rev. Jacob Maatman

**HIGH TIME TO AWAKE OUT OF OUR SLEEP**

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” Romans 13:11.

HIGH TIME! to awake out of sleep. Literally, “the hour is already for us to awake out of sleep,” which means that we have already overslept.

What time is it? Christ has already come, and yet he is coming again, and that day is near (Rom. 13:12). With him on that day shall come the perfection of our salvation (v. 11). It shall be a day of glory, light, righteousness, and life everlasting. And yet that day, in a way, has already penetrated the here and now. Already God has caused to shine in our hearts the light of the knowledge of him in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6) and has made us partakers of eternal life through faith in the risen and ascended Lord. We are heirs having the earnest and awaiting full possession of the inheritance that Christ shall give us when he comes again (Eph. 1:14).

We are living in, as some have called it, the “overlap of the ages.” The night of this age—characterized by darkness and sin and death—is far spent. The day of the age to come is near. It was nearer to the Romans at the time the inspired apostle penned these words than it had been when the gospel first came to town and they believed. It is nearer now to us, the church of today, than it has ever been, and of this the signs around us do testify. It is the twilight of the dawn. That means it is high time for us to awake out of sleep. Of course! That’s what you do when the day is near: you get out of bed and put your clothes on.

Sleep (Greek: *hypnos*, whence we get our English word “hypnosis”) here does not mean physical sleep but a spiritual lethargy, torpor, inactivity, doldrums.
In the verses that follow Romans 13:11, the contrast between wakefulness and sleep is set in parallel with the contrast between engaging in the works of darkness and putting on the armor of light (v. 12), between walking honestly, as in the day, and walking in the works of the flesh (v. 13). Putting it all together: sleep implies a spiritual lethargy in relation to the activities of the new man and new life in Christ. But it also implies a being active in the wrong moral direction: activity that belongs to the night—this present age in which we live—and not to the day; to darkness and not to light. But the night is far spent, and the day is at hand. So it is high time we awake out of sleep, put off the old man with its nighttime activities, and put on the new.

Importantly, and strikingly, the word of the text is addressed to believers: to the church at Rome, to the church since then—to us. That means believers are not immune from hypnos. In his commentary on the passage, Herman Hoeksema says, “The figure is that…of one who has just awakened from his sleep but who is still drowsy while the night is far spent and the day is at hand.”

For, though having been called out of darkness into God’s marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9), though having been raised together with Christ (Col. 3:1), though being “the children of light, and the children of the day…not of the night, nor of darkness” (1 Thess. 5:5), yet we are not rid of the old man, of the flesh which to us still cleaves, by reason of which we are not only tempted but are prone to indulge in “a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep” (Prov. 6:10)—and more than a little, spiritually speaking.

The result of indulging in sleep is conversation that is woefully incongruous with light and day, such that believers, instead of putting on the armor of light and living antithetically in this age, allow themselves to be put to sleep by the spirit of this age and flirt with or even engage in works of darkness; such that we consume sedative after sedative that this world offers through media, social media, entertainment, etc., benumbing our spiritual sensibilities.

Are you sleeping? The text puts this question to us. In what are we walking? The works of darkness of first-century Rome are not unlike the same works that appeal to the flesh of young people and young adults of the twenty-first: drunken partying, sexual immorality, strife, and jealousy.

1 Herman Hoeksema, Righteous by Faith Alone (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2002), 634.
LOVERS OF SELF

The end times are described in scripture as perilous times (2 Tim. 3:1). These perilous times will be characterized by men and women who reject God and his sovereignty and who are “lovers of their own selves” (v. 2). Rejecting God, man will live a self-centered life, believing himself to be worthy of all the pleasures of this world. This attitude of self-seeking and self-worth that will continue to increase as the world moves toward its end is a result of an attitude of entitlement.

Entitlement is an attitude or belief that one has earned something for himself or deserves something. Entitlement is tied at the hip to the sins of pride, greed, and jealousy. Entitlement especially rears its ugly head when one looks around himself at what others have and becomes convinced that he deserves what he does not have. The devil, that wicked, fallen angel, is the father of entitlement. Satan was given a glorious position in heaven, and yet he desired the Godhead itself. In his jealousy, he rebelled against God and as a result was cast out of heaven. Seeing an opportunity to separate Adam and Eve from God, the devil set this very temptation of entitlement before them. Taking upon themselves this same entitled attitude, they partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they might become as God.

What about us? Do we have this same sinful attitude? Since we have all fallen in Adam (Rom. 5:12), we can be sure that this attitude of entitlement is one that infects every man. As the end of the world approaches, this sin will abound more and more, and it will certainly entice the sinful nature of the child of God. It is a sin that we must be on guard against and fight against on a daily basis. That is exactly why the apostle, in 2 Timothy 3, warns the church against this sin. Entitlement is a danger to the spiritual well-being of the church and her members. We will examine how this attitude is a danger to the church and how we must guard against it.

Materialism

In the United States, God’s people live in a society of great wealth and materialism. The world indulges itself in and pursues the pleasures of this life like never before. Man believes he deserves the finest possessions of this life. Watch a commercial and you will learn that you deserve that sleek new phone, those stylish new sneakers, or that trendy new purse. Check Instagram and you will find the lavish vacations and newly purchased toys of many posted for all to see. Those who cannot afford such things become enraged and in their jealousy demand that these things be given to them as well. They call for high-paying jobs (raise the minimum wage!), free education, and free health care. They believe they deserve these things so that they, too, will have the finances to pursue the pleasures of this life.

What about you, young person? Are you tempted by this kind of thinking? Do you feel entitled to earthly possessions? Do you become jealous when you see others who live in a larger home, drive a nicer car, or carry around a brand-new iPhone? You work hard, don’t you? If you work so hard, don’t you deserve to have some of the nice things that others are able to afford? You can be sure the devil rejoices when he can convince the child of God to think this way. He rejoices when he can cause the child of God to set his heart on material possessions. He will use that to bring the believer to anger, discontentment, and bitterness against God. He will use that to shake the confidence and assurance of the child of God. He will use that to bring about the destruction of the child of God. Beware! These are perilous, materialistic times.

Be not deceived, though. Entitlement is not limited to those who have little. It’s just as much a
temptation to those to whom God has given much earthly wealth and possessions. The one who has been given much might reason like this: “I’m smart and work hard and have earned much for myself.” He fails to recognize that what he has is from God. He believes he has earned his possessions and with that has earned the right to use his possessions however he pleases. He forgets to acknowledge God as the sovereign, providential giver of all things. In doing so, he often places his own desires and pleasures first. He seeks his own kingdom, to the neglect of the kingdom of Christ, the king. Instead of giving to kingdom causes (the church, the Christian school, etc.) as he ought, he hoards his money for himself.

This type of thinking has a way of sinking its hooks into our minds and hearts. Is this true of you, young person? Perhaps you’ve recently acquired a job and have begun to earn an income. It can be easy to consider the money we receive from a job as OUR money. In so doing, our thoughts almost immediately settle on what we can purchase to ourselves with these earnings. Young people, you have the calling to seek first the kingdom of heaven. Do so now! This must not be put off until you are older. God has given you all that you have. Treat the finances he has given you in such a way.

Relativism

In addition to the materialism of this day and age, the child of God lives in a world that more than ever cries out for its “rights.” It demands its rights. It protests for its rights. It rebels against authority in pursuit of its rights. Why would it be any different? Man has completely and thoroughly rejected the Creator and his sovereign rule. He has made a god of himself. Man, having made a god of himself, believes he deserves the right to determine what is evil and what is good. So man allows the right of abortion, the right to divorce and remarry, and the right to homosexuality. To such a degree has man rejected the Creator that he even demands the right to determine for himself whether he is male or female. Man demands the right to (feels entitled to!) his sins.

The result of this entitled attitude is that man now embraces relativism. Relativism is the belief that each man may determine truth for himself. Relativism prevails in our society. So we must ask ourselves, is relativism a danger for the church? It was certainly a danger to the Old Testament church. The book of Judges teaches that every man did what was right in his own eyes. Fighting and resentment was the result among the members of the church, as well as departure from the truth of God’s word.

What about the church today? Will the church today succumb to this lie? Will it take on this same entitled attitude and take to itself the right to determine truth for itself? The church has the word of God. It can openly read and study that word. Certainly, then, it will not attempt to determine truth for itself! Look at the church world around you, young person. It is plain to see that the church has done exactly that. Many churches have openly accepted homosexuality, transgenderism, and all kinds of gross immorality. Many professing Christians have embraced evil and called it good and true. This mindset will only increase in the church world as we approach the end of time.

The danger that the church and her members face in an age of relativism is that they will be ridiculed and persecuted when they call out the sins of society. They will be declared bigots, unloving, and unfair. By nature, we want to be accepted by men. We don’t want to bear the mockery and reproach of those around us. We feel entitled to a good reputation! And so the danger is that we twist the truth of God’s word. We bend it where we can so that we are better able to fit in with this world.

What about you, young person? Are you ready to stand for the truth? Are you willing to have your name dragged through the mud for the sake of Christ and his kingdom? Or do you feel worthy of your own good reputation? Do you seek the glory of your own name over and above the glory of God’s name? There’s no doubt this is a temptation for the child of God. However, our calling is to live for Christ and to expect, then, that we will bear reproach as a result. Christ was hated, ridiculed, and crucified by the world. We must also be ready to bear the hatred of the world. Read Hebrews 11:32–40, and you will be reminded of the bitter reproach God’s people have often faced on account of following Christ. We must be willing even to die for Christ’s sake. We may not feel entitled even to our physical life! Over against the entitlement of this age, we must be ready to deny ourselves and stand for the truth of God’s word.

The Hope of Salvation

What is our defense against entitlement and the dangers it brings for the believer and the church? Put on the hope of salvation! The possessions of this life are temporal. They will rust and fade. Our physical life is like a vapor that quickly vanishes (James 4:14). By contrast, the kingdom of heaven is eternal, incorruptible. You have been given a glorious inheritance in Jesus Christ. Live for Christ and his kingdom.
Live in the knowledge of who you are by nature and what you deserve on account of your sins. Then you will live a life filled with thanks to the one who has given you all things. Then you will live a life of contentment with what God has provided for you. Then you will be ready and willing to suffer, and even die, for Christ. Perilous, entitled times abound and will only increase. By grace, may that glorious hope of our salvation live within us!

Dan teaches at Covenant Christian High School and attends Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church with his family.

**SLIDING TOWARDS SODOM BY REJECTING KNOWLEDGE**

If a king knew his glass was poisoned, would he ever dare drink it? No, the king would turn it away to protect his life because he knows the glass is deadly. He would not even dare to sip from the cup. The poison would not only be rejected, but the king would execute whomever introduced such a threat. In this moment, the king applies his knowledge of the contents of his glass and makes a wise decision.

This king’s decision to shun the poisoned cup is an example of worldly wisdom. As Christians, we must add a key distinction to how we define wisdom. Wisdom is the proper application of knowledge with a view to God’s glory. What knowledge especially should we then apply to walk wisely as we live our lives amidst this corrupt world? All the decisions we make should be guided by one sovereign principle: the will of God’s command. God gives his eternal commands regarding how we must walk as his children. In order for us to make wise decisions based on God’s will, God must write his word in our hearts.

When Abraham and Lot decided to go their separate ways, they had to choose where to live. Lot consciously bore a responsibility to God to separate from the world and live as a pilgrim and stranger. As Lot looked upon all the land, he saw a fertile plain, but within the plain “the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly” (Gen. 13:13). The men of this wicked city walked in ways totally contrary to God’s law. They rejected creation’s testimony of God and walked contrary to their consciences. Yet Lot foolishly walked toward and eventually dwelled in the city.

Is this not how we too see sin enter into our lives: first a glance, then a look, then eventually the realization that we have fallen headlong into a sin? With Lot, we reject knowledge, walk foolishly, and thereby look like the world (Sodom) a lot of times. We should strive to run like Abraham, with our eyes turned away, “keep[ing] the way of the Lord” (Gen. 18:19).

In many ways, Lot began to value his own personal pursuit over God’s command and revealed a heart corrupted with sins from Sodom. He chose greed over God’s prescribed generosity and took the plains of Jordan for his cattle because “it was well watered everywhere” (Gen. 13:10). Despite knowing of the exceeding sinfulness of Sodom during his wandering, Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom. Now Lot could live in a plentiful plain and have his cattle well-fed. Surely all would go well. However, this viewing of Sodom set Lot on a steep slope on which he slid to ultimately dwell within the city and live in opposition to God’s warnings. Quickly Lot became caught up in the wars of Sodom, taken as a prisoner, and saved by Abraham (Gen. 14). In his capture, God taught Lot of the corruption of Sodom, yet Lot still returned. There he defiled God’s institution of marriage and the call to chastity, and he offered his daughters to prevent the grosser wicked homosexual desires of the Sodomites. Finally, despite being directly told about the destruction that would come upon Sodom, Lot “lingered” and finally had to be pulled away to safety by the angels (19:16).

Abraham starkly contrasts Lot. He pursued a righteous walk in keeping God’s commands and lived according to the knowledge and wisdom God had given him. Abraham humbly offered Lot whatever land he preferred and graciously allowed him to take the most fertile plains (Gen. 13:8–9). Then Abraham formed a weak army with his servants to save Lot from wicked men’s hands, knowing that God, the Almighty, would give him the victory (14:14–16). Abraham then refused to be rewarded lest any man should think his blessings came from the men of this earth. Abraham rightly acknowledged that all glory must be to “the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,” not to these wicked men (v. 22). When Abraham heard of the judgment of Sodom, where his nephew Lot lived, he virtuously pleaded that the righteous be not
destroyed with the wicked (18:23). In all his ways, Abraham walked wisely by seeking first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33).

Let it be said of us that we too walk in wisdom according to the knowledge God has given us and that we too seek first the kingdom of God. As a distinctly Reformed body of believers, God has blessed us with his doctrine and preserved and refined us through countless assaults, and many of us are privileged to have been taught this doctrine in our homes, under the preaching, and in the catechism classrooms from the days of our youth. The devil will tempt us to think God’s word is inconvenient or that there is a better way. Do I really need to stay separate from the world? Do I need to confess all of God’s glory? Must I ALWAYS be patient, even when my friend refuses to apologize? Looking at Lot’s example, we heartily answer, “Yes, yes, yes,” and “Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently” (Ps. 119:4).

Heed the warning we see in Lot’s life. Do not be destroyed for a lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6). Study the scriptures, for they are profitable so “that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Paul speaks directly to us “youth” in 1 Timothy 4:12–13, 16, encouraging us as we walk in a dark world to “give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” and “in doing this [we] shalt both save [ourselves], and them that hear [us].” There can be no room for us to slide closer to Sodom or the world around us. The antithetical gap should only grow more pronounced through time as we remain steadfast and increase in our knowledge of God’s word while the world continues to cultivate its sinful darkness. Test yourself with these questions:

- How do I look different from the world?
- Do my coworkers see the hope that is in me?
- Are my friends worldly?
- Do I speak like the world?
- Am I actively learning God’s law and doctrine, and living according to them?
- Do I have the passions or motivations of the world, such as Lot’s greed?

There is great reward and blessing in this holy walk. For those who walk after God’s commands, God says, “Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart” (Ps. 119:2). Pray to God that you might “receive power” of the Holy Ghost to live this way (Acts 1:8). It is only by him we are given the wisdom to live the antithesis. Through him we perform these works and enjoy the blessings of living in the light of Christ apart from the darkness of Sodom.

Luke is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

Christian Living  Michelle Drnek

HOPE IN PERVERSE TIMES

Iniquity shall abound. A falling away. The man of sin. Deceivableness. Evil men growing worse and worse. Pleasure in unrighteousness. The Bible is full of warnings about the dangers of the end of the world, including the dangers of the increasing sinfulness of the last times. This can cause us to worry and fear. One may wonder, will I fall away? Will the increasing sinfulness of the world around me claim me too?

How can I be so confident? Because God’s promises assure us. Your salvation does not depend on your works but is based on Christ’s righteousness. Oh, if you and I had to look at our works, we would have to be terribly afraid. Along with the wicked, we would be calling out for the rocks to cover us and hide us from God when he comes to judge (Rev. 6:15–17). No man can stand on his own before God

Will I Fall Away?

If we take an honest look at ourselves, we see that the old man of sin within us desires many of the evils in the world around us. We are tempted by, and often we fall to, gods of self-seeking and pleasure, and to all kinds of unrighteousness. Maybe we wonder, how are we any different? We love those same sins. When we look inside our own hearts we wonder, will I fall away? Will the increasing sinfulness of the world around me claim me too?

No, child of God. I say with confidence: you will not fall away. Even though you say with the apostle Paul, “The evil which I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:19), you will not fall away. How can I be so confident? Because God’s promises assure us. Your salvation does not depend on your works but is based on Christ’s righteousness. Oh, if you and I had to look at our works, we would have to be terribly afraid. Along with the wicked, we would be calling out for the rocks to cover us and hide us from God when he comes to judge (Rev. 6:15–17). No man can stand on his own before God
and be justified (Ps. 143:2); we would be destroyed.

But, thanks be to God, we do not stand on our own! Peter tells us that we are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Pet. 1:5).

Think first of all about what is meant by “the power of God.” Is there anything that God is not capable of doing? He cannot sin or go against his own nature, but other than that “there is nothing too hard” for the one who created the heavens and earth (Jer. 32:17). In that power, God has promised that he has saved us. Romans 8:29–30 tell us that those whom God predestinated “he also glorified.” Do you see that past tense—“glorified”? It’s a done deal, a sure thing. He who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). There is absolutely no doubt about this because there is no doubting the power of God.

He keeps you in his power “through faith.” What is faith? First, it is being united to Christ, being made a part of his body. Just like your head and the rest of your body go together as one and cannot be separated, you and I are part of the body of Christ under our head, Jesus Christ. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches us, based on passages like John 14:2 and Ephesians 2:6, that right now Christ is in heaven “as a sure pledge that He, as the Head, will also take up to Himself, us, His members” (Lord’s Day 18, Q&A 49). Your place in heaven is sure. Christ’s body must be where he is; you are part of his body; you will be in heaven with him.

Faith is also a knowledge of who God is and a confidence that forgiveness of sins and everlasting life are your own. This faith is a gift of God. You, child of God, have it! The Holy Spirit in your heart causes this confidence to grow. It is my prayer, and the prayer of your parents and other brothers and sisters in Christ, that the Holy Spirit will continue to work this confidence in your heart, that you may be able to know the breadth, length, depth, and height of Christ’s love for you (Eph. 3:16–19).

You are kept by the unlimited power of God through faith unto salvation. Although you and I fall daily into sin and must humble ourselves repeatedly before God in repentance, he continues to forgive! “Though [you] fall, [you] shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth [you] with his hand. For the LORD...forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever” (Ps. 37:24, 28).

**Why Must I Bear With All the Increase in Wickedness?**

Sin is awful! Although it often doesn’t sadden us as it should, a Christian’s confession is that “I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word” (Ps. 119:158). We hate to see the name and fame of God blasphemed. Already we see so much sin around us...and it’s only going to get worse?! How discouraging!

When we look to the things of this earth, we will be discouraged. But why does God promise that sin will get worse? What good is there in an increase in sin?

For one thing, the increase in wickedness will be used by God to try us. Will we stand in his grace; or will we fall, and then grow in humility and grace when we come on our knees asking for forgiveness? This is an important tool used by God for our good and our salvation, to purify us and to strengthen our faith. Your faith “be[ing] found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:7) is God’s good purpose.

You may have learned this about the intertestamental period: the 400 years without God’s word through the prophets were a time of darkness. After such deep darkness, the light shines more brightly, as it did with the birth of Jesus Christ. The same is true with the end of the world and the growth of sin. God uses such darkness to stir in us a deep longing for Light. We groan under the sinfulness of the world around us, and this causes us to desire more deeply the coming of the Lord. And when he appears, our desire to be separate from sin in a way that we can never be while we live on this earth will be much stronger than it ever would be if we never saw or noticed sin. A motto used by John Calvin and the city of Geneva was “Post tenebras spero lucem,” which means, “After darkness, I hope for light.” May that be your hope, and mine too!

When Jesus was on the earth, he gave us many signs of his coming. He taught many parables related to his coming. He commands us to be watchful. The signs he has given help us to be watchful and are proof for us that he is really coming; he is keeping his promise! While the signs may not seem pleasant, they have a pleasant message: “Behold, I come quickly!” The signs say, “I am keeping my promise!”

Look up! Lift up your heads! Even as you see a discouraging increase in sin, your redemption draweth nigh (Luke 21:28)!

Michelle attends Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan with her husband Jon, and children, and is a wife and mother in the home.
THE DAILY PRESS
“press toward the mark…”
(Philippians 3:14)

HOW TO LIVE IN THE LAST DAYS

The believing child of God has always been called to be distinctly different from the world in their attitudes and actions. But as the end of the world draws closer and closer, and man becomes more and more wicked, the radical differences between the church and the world will become even more apparent. This increase in wickedness culminating in the rise of an especially perverse generation is one of the signs that Christ’s second coming is imminent. In contrast to the general moral decline of society, the Bible provides clear instruction on how we are called to live as Christians in these last days.

For the great majority of people who are alive at the end of the world, the return of our Savior will be completely unexpected. 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and other passages say that the Lord will return suddenly like a thief in the night. The perverse generation living at the end of time will be unaware of what is happening just as the people of Noah’s day refused to acknowledge that they were about to be destroyed by the flood. They had been warned but chose to live in ignorance. Instead, the world will be wrapped up in their own day to day affairs, the pursuit of pleasure, and obtaining earthly things. Are you living daily in the awareness that Christ is coming soon? Or are you too busy with your earthly life to give it much thought? God’s people are reminded repeatedly in the Bible to watch for the signs of the times and be ready for Christ to come again. Luke 21:28 tells us, “And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.” As Christians, we are called to carry out our daily work faithfully while being mindful of what is to come.

When the signs of the end times, such as global unrest, natural disasters, wars, and uncontrolled diseases, become more and more frequent, even the world will start to take notice of what is happening. Think about the widespread panic and anxiety that has been a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The world will refuse to recognize these things as indicators of Christ’s second coming but instead attribute them to other factors. Their response will be one of fear because their hope is only in the comforts of this world. But the child of God must not be fearful. Christ is our hope, in this life and the next. We do not need to fear any trials and tribulations that we will face on this earth, even death. We must live by faith, having confidence that this is all part of God’s perfect plan and that something much better is coming. Do you have the comfort and hope of Christ in your heart? Share it with others! Our evangelism efforts should increase in urgency as the judgment day draws closer and closer.

As the end of the world nears, humanity will openly and unashamedly give themselves over to sin. “Iniquity shall abound,” as Matthew 24:12 states. We read in 2 Timothy 3:2, 4 that “men shall be lovers of their own selves...lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” Willfully ignorant of the coming judgment day, the world will have a false sense of security because it seems like they are getting away with a life of sin with no consequences. False teachers will try to sell sin packaged as the gospel, and many will be deceived. And this will all lead to the most deceptive false teacher—the Anti-Christ. In stark contrast to this sinfulness, Christians are called to be children of the light, shining bright against the darkness of the perverse generation that surrounds us. Titus 2:12–13 gives an excellent summary of how to walk as children of the light by instructing the church to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious reappearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” Although we will always struggle with sin in this life, we must pray that God will work sanctification in our hearts and lives by his grace so that we are able to testify to his glory with our lives on this earth.

This month we will be reading through a selection of chapters from the New Testament that specifically address the subject of the end times. As you
read through these chapters, be on the lookout for the differences between the attitudes and actions of the world and the church. Also, take note of the many signs of the end times that are listed. Think about the events that you have experienced or seen in the news recently, and recognize how close we are to Christ’s second coming. And finally, notice the true comfort that God gives his people as they face the end times. Although the prospect of living through the Great Tribulation and the reign of Anti-Christ is daunting, none of the chapters that you will read leave God’s people without hope. I was amazed when I was studying these passages at all of the beautiful verses of comfort for the believer. I encourage you to choose one or more of these to memorize if you are struggling with anxiety about the increasingly wicked world that we live in.

It is true that the godly will suffer persecution. It will continue to get worse and worse and eventually reach a climax in the Great Tribulation—the greatest persecution that the church has ever faced. How can we stand strong? Read God’s Word (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Pray for strength for yourself and your fellow believers (2 Thess. 2:16–17). And encourage one another with Scripture, such as these words of Jesus to his disciples from John 16:33, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” We may not know the exact details of the persecution, trials, and suffering that the future holds, but we do know how it will end. We know that Christ will have the ultimate victory and that these things are necessary for him to come again and take us to glory. In heaven, God will wipe away all the tears from the eyes of his people; there will be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain (Rev. 21:4).

### End Times Reading Plan

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Sing or pray</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 8</td>
<td>Read Matthew 24:1–28</td>
<td>Psalter #3</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 9</td>
<td>Read Matthew 24:29–51</td>
<td>Psalter #23</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 10</td>
<td>Read Matthew 25:1–30</td>
<td>Psalter #57</td>
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<td>January 11</td>
<td>Read Matthew 25:31–46</td>
<td>Psalter #59</td>
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<td>January 12</td>
<td>Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–28</td>
<td>Psalter #124</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 13</td>
<td>Read 1 Corinthians 15:29–58</td>
<td>Psalter #126</td>
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| January 14 | Read 2 Corinthians 5 | Psalter #129 |
| January 15 | Read 1 Thessalonians 4 | Psalter #131 |
| January 16 | Read 1 Thessalonians 5 | Psalter #134 |
| January 17 | Read 2 Thessalonians 1 | Psalter #139 |
| January 18 | Read 2 Thessalonians 2 | Psalter #146 |
| January 19 | Read 2 Timothy 3 | Psalter #156 |
| January 20 | Read 2 Timothy 4 | Psalter #161 |
| January 21 | Read 2 Peter 3 | Psalter #176 |
| January 22 | Read Revelation 5 | Psalter #182 |
| January 23 | Read Revelation 6 | Psalter #194 |
| January 24 | Read Revelation 7 | Psalter #198 |
| January 25 | Read Revelation 8 | Psalter #206 |
| January 26 | Read Revelation 9 | Psalter #216 |
| January 27 | Read Revelation 10 | Psalter #221 |
| January 28 | Read Revelation 11 | Psalter #224 |
| January 29 | Read Revelation 12 | Psalter #232 |
| January 30 | Read Revelation 13 | Psalter #239 |
| January 31 | Read Revelation 14 | Psalter #252 |
| February 1 | Read Revelation 15–16 | Psalter #259 |
| February 2 | Read Revelation 17 | Psalter #264 |
| February 3 | Read Revelation 18 | Psalter #275 |
| February 4 | Read Revelation 19 | Psalter #303 |
| February 5 | Read Revelation 20 | Psalter #317 |
| February 6 | Read Revelation 21 | Psalter #403 |
| February 7 | Read Revelation 22 | Psalter #407 |
FOUR WONDERFUL THINGS UPON THE EARTH PART 3: THE SHIP

“There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: ...the way of a ship in the midst of the sea.” (Prov. 30:18–19)

The ship bobs on the ocean, seemingly weightless as it slices through the waves. By the power of its sails, it plows up a wave, crashes through the top, then slides down the far side. It is a wonder to behold, from the towering masts, massive spread of white canvas, and the foaming water against the wooden hull of the ship. All alone on the ocean, the sailors find their way using the stars and the sun.

Today, we don’t use sailing ships the way they did years ago. We take for granted that our speedboat or pontoon will float on the lake. Perhaps we know the science behind why ships float, and maybe that takes away the mysterious wonder of watching a ship on the ocean.

But, sometimes, we see the large cargo ships and battleships and it can still be a wonder to us, even knowing the science that God has created into his orderly world, that something so large and made of metal can float instead of sink. With GPS marking locations, it can seem less amazing when a ship travels across the ocean and arrives at its destination.

But imagine you are back in those old sailing ships, trying to plot a course across the ocean with nothing but the stars to guide you. The ocean doesn’t have any marked paths. It is vast and overwhelming.

Life often feels like that. We lack a clear direction, and we can feel overwhelmed.

But God knows how to direct us through the sea of this life. He directs our way, and we can trust him to guide us. His direction in our life is a true wonder, and one we should take more time to marvel at and appreciate.

Tricia is a member of Unity Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.
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:
Hannah Jo, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brett Westra—Calvary, IA
Hope Sylvia, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Heath Heynen—Calvary, IA
Payton Rae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nick & Jessica Ikerd—Georgetown, MI
Lucas Vern, son of Mr. & Mrs. Zach & Amanda Klamer—Grace, MI
Charleigh Mae, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle & Jessie VanDyke—Grace, MI
Emmett John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle & Sarah Kooienga—Holland, MI
Enoch Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy & Brittany DeJong—Loveland, CO
Jessie Lou, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Tunis & Kayla VanBaren—Randolph, WI
Harper Sutton, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle & Alyssa DeJong—Sioux Falls, SD
Jude Andrew, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle & Hannah Tanis—Southwest, MI
Charlie John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan & Brittany Karsemeyer—Trinity, MI
Emmalyn Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Devin & Emily Hiemstra—Trinity, MI
Rayna Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nick & Ashley Leatherman—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:
Sarah Zevenbergen—Doon, IA
Samuel Lubbers, Alexis Kaptein—Georgetown, MI
Anna DeVries, Olivia Huizinga, Dylan Meulenberg, Kyle Meulenberg—Grace, MI
Micah Bleyenberg—Redlands, CA
Ethan Kuiper, Ellyse Jabaay, Jordan Pipe, Lauren Riemersma—Southeast, MI
Caleb Potjer—Southwest, MI
Kaylie DeVries, Joel Bylsma, Hannah Dykstra, Travis Dykstra, Brady Kuiper—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. Zachary Lubbers and Miss Brooke Mulder—Georgetown, MI
Mr. Jaden Poortinga and Miss Georgia Lanting—Loveland, CO
Mr. Isaac Wicks and Miss Alyssa Kleyn—Spokane, WA
Mr. Evan Kikkert and Miss Lydia Kamps—Wingham, Canada