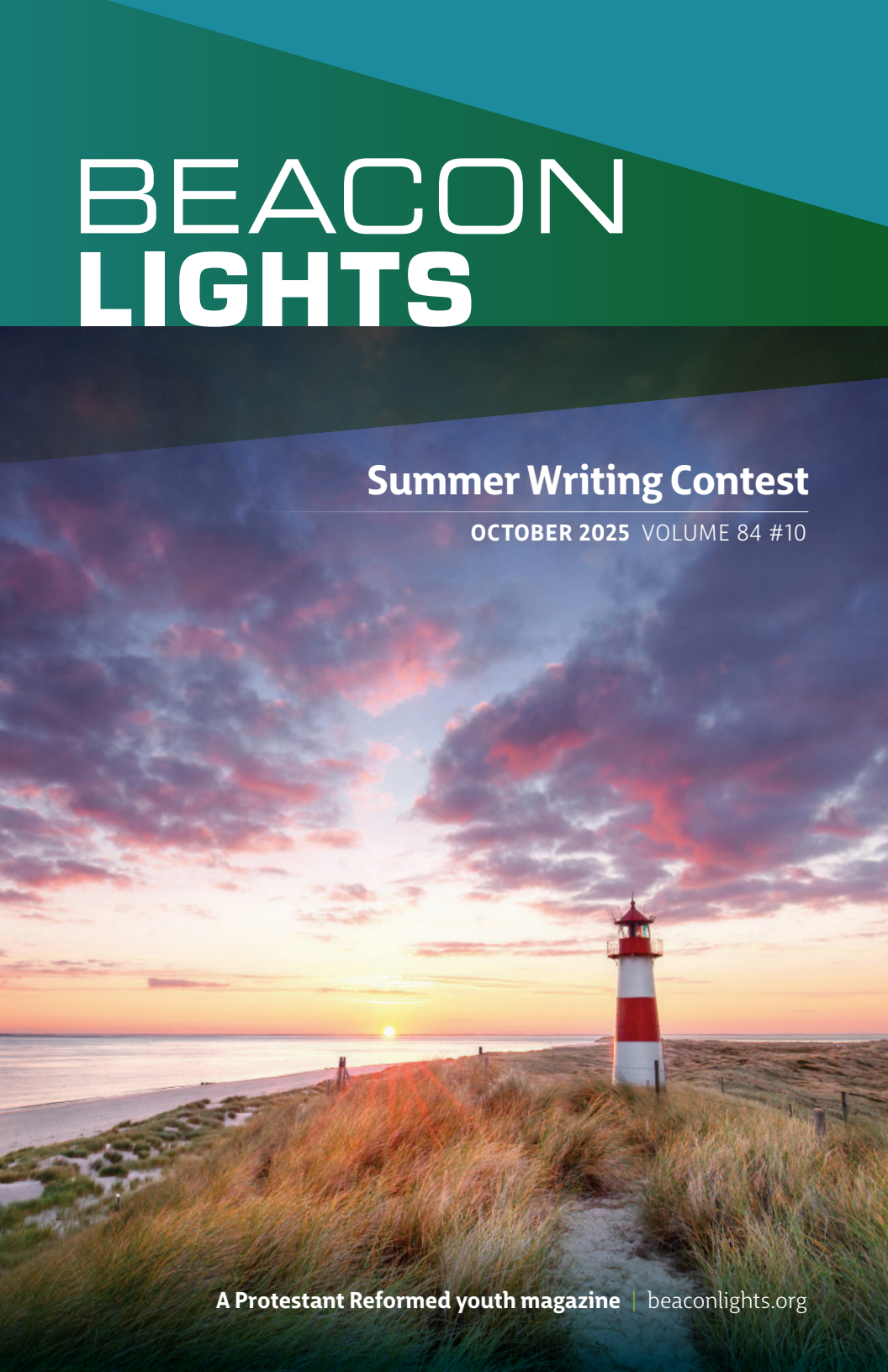
BEACON LIGHTS

Summer Writing Contest

OCTOBER 2025 VOLUME 84 #10



A Protestant Reformed youth magazine | beaconlights.org

BEACON LIGHTS

Beacon Lights magazine is published monthly by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies

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Editorial policy
Beacon Lights is published monthly by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies. The annual subscription price is $18 if paid by card online and renewed automatically or $21 if paid by mailed-in check. Please send all business correspondence, address changes, and subscriptions to the business office.

The articles of *Beacon Lights* do not necessarily indicate the viewpoint of the editorial staff. Every author is solely responsible for the contents of his own article. *Beacon Lights* encourages its readers to contact the business office with any questions or comments. Letters may be edited for printing. We will not publish anonymous letters, but will withhold names upon request. All submissions should be sent to the editor six weeks prior to the publication date and must be written in Microsoft Word format. If any material of *Beacon Lights* is reprinted by another periodical, we will appreciate your giving the source and forwarding the printed periodical to the business office.

***Beacon Lights* online**
www.beaconlights.org

Magazine design and typesetting by Erika Kiel
Copy editing by Stephanie Vink

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THE ISSUE AT HAND Tyler Kamps

Have you ever considered writing for *Beacon Lights* but weren't sure how exactly to get started? Good news, here is your step-by-step guide to writing a great article:

Step 1: pour a cup of coffee

Step 2: press play on some soft piano music

Step 3: sit down at a table or desk, then turn your head and look out the window

Step 4: look slightly upward and stroke your chin until you have that lightbulb moment

Step 5: write, and if you run out of ideas, repeat steps 1–4

All kidding aside, this month features the top submissions from our Summer Writing Contest. There were four categories and age groups. The full prompts for these can be found on our website.

Grades 7–9 wrote on a subject entitled "Reformers and the Word." They were asked to write a brief history of the life and service of a Reformed theologian who was not Protestant Reformed.

The subject for grades 10–12 was "Holding Fast Our Heritage." This year, our denomination celebrated its one hundredth anniversary. Writers were prompted to reflect on what life was like one hundred years ago when our churches were founded. They were asked to compare a young person's life then to today. The "PR100" is also the subject of our current events article this month.

Post-high, ages 18–22, were asked to write about Artificial Intelligence. The full prompt can be found online but, in Ashley Mulder's words, "The topic of AI seemed to have been a particularly difficult one for our young writers, as the BL staff received only two submissions for this category. Fortunately, Mr. Ophoff and Mr. Overbeek were up to the challenge of tackling this complex, nuanced topic. His excellent article on 'Wisdom in the Age of AI' takes first prize in this category. To learn more about the Christian response to the new technology of AI, we highly recommend that young and old alike livestream 1 of 2 recent talks on AI in the Grand Rapids area. The first was sponsored by the PR seminary (Sept. 3, 'AI and the Gospel: Why God will Never Be Pleased with an AI Generated Sermon (nor with the Minister Who Tries),' streamed by Zion PRC) and the second by the RFPA (Sept. 25, 'Intelligence or Illusion? Christian Perspectives on AI,' streamed by Southwest PRC)."

The topic for the post-high, twenty-three and older category, was godly manhood/womanhood. Writers were asked to define what it means to be a man or woman and explain how Scripture defines manhood and womanhood, then relate this to today's cultural views of manhood and womanhood.

We were very excited to see the quality of the submissions, and in this issue we have included the top articles from each category. As a staff, we would like to extend our gratitude to Ashley Mulder for heading up this project; job well done!

Also, a big thanks to all the writers who entered the contest, and congratulations to the winning authors! We were really glad to read through each submission and are encouraged by the next crop of young writers coming up as well as those who are already polished writers.

For anyone interested, this issue also has some practical advice for writing. If you are interested in writing for *Beacon Lights*, please reach out to our contributing writer correspondents found inside the cover. We are always looking for new writers and we encourage you to get involved in this way. We don't require perfection, we just want to hear from those who are willing.

Getting out of your comfort zone

Tyler Kamps

It's been said, growth happens outside our comfort zones. This impacts all circumstances in our lives but especially spiritual ones. Most of us prefer to stay secure in our comfort zones, but sometimes God calls us to something and in order to heed that call, we have to take a step into the unfamiliar. And if God calls us to something, then he has a purpose.

The full expanse of his purpose might not be obvious to us. Ronald Franklin put it like this: "When God calls us into His service, He will almost always push us beyond our competency and out of our comfort zone, so that when we

prosper and have good success in what He called us to, He gets the glory, not us."[1] In this quote is an implication that God equips those whom he calls, and this is backed up throughout Scripture, one example being Hebrews 13:21.

From this truth we can draw inspiration and motivation to get outside our comfort zones. If God is calling and God is equipping, what fears do we still have left? I know, this sounds easier on paper than facing it in reality.

The particular focus I have in mind right now is on writing. For me, writing is something that gets me way outside of my comfort zone. When I was asked to take on this position as editor, I was nervous. I wasn't a writer and the thought of writing something others would read was intimidating.

Naturally, my fear was rooted in me looking at myself as a writer. I didn't see an ability to carry out the tasks asked of me. If my inclination was to look to God first as the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17), I could have saved myself a lot of time and trouble. That is eventually where I turned to, but it took me a while. I continue to work on this.

I would like to share some practical guidance that I have found helpful for getting started writing, if this is something you are considering. First off, pray about it. Don't wait to turn to God when you learn firsthand what writer's block is. Seek him first.

Also, get started way before the deadline. Writing takes time.

I find that writing about my own experiences as they relate to a topic is the easiest way for me to write. When I don't have experience to draw from, I typically will do some research by listening to podcasts, or reading books, or finding sermons on the topic. Be sure to see what the Bible says. Also discuss it with other people and see what they know or what they might want to learn about the topic.

When I was in college, I took a class on entrepreneurship, and one of the professors had us read a short book entitled *Steal Like an Artist*. The basic gist of this book is that there's nothing new under the sun, and most inventions are just a spinoff of an idea that stemmed from another product. Major breakthroughs, like the discovery of electricity, don't happen often. I find writing to be somewhat similar to this concept in that we aren't going to wow readers with some new interpretation of the Bible or find something in the Bible that no one else has yet discovered. But that is okay and that shouldn't stop us from writing.

We can still tell others of our experience and testify of God's goodness

1 Ronald Franklin, "Spiritual Benefits of Coming Out of Your Comfort Zone," Medium, March 23, 2023, https://medium.com/biblical-wisdom-for-life/spiritual-benefits-of-coming-out-of-your-comfort-zone-40f0568c0127.

in our lives. And we might be able to present a new point of view using our own words, which might help someone else understand a topic they had already heard but didn't quite grasp.

As I reflect on this past year, I can see that God has used writing as a means for my own spiritual growth. God has led me to trust him more. There are months where the topic is something I find easy to write about, and others where I can't seem to get anything on paper. It is especially in the months where I come up empty that I feel a dependency on God and turn to him in prayer to be equipped for the work ahead.

Another benefit of writing is that your understanding of the Bible and theological concepts expands. When you are writing on something you might be less familiar with, you are forced to research, and when it comes to the Bible, you can't possibly mine all the depths of its riches. And once you scratch the surface you are going to want to keep going.

Writing has also helped me to organize my thoughts on a subject so that I can clearly explain what I know and believe. There have been times I have felt confident in my knowledge on a particular subject, but when it came to explaining it to someone, I found myself struggling to articulate clearly, even when it was a concept I thought I knew like the back of my hand.

I would like to encourage others, whether it is in your comfort zone or not, to consider writing. This could be for *Beacon Lights*, in the Young Calvinists blog, or in other areas outside of what you might have to do in school. To those who are young, don't be nervous about writing. As 1 Timothy 4:12 points out, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

It is important to share your take on a subject with others. There is diversity of age, skill, experience, and much more in the body, and God designed the body this way on purpose. There is wisdom in hearing a variety of opinions and experiences.

As you venture outside your comfort zone, trust that God will equip you for the callings he has placed upon you. Then when you see success, remember who receives the praise.

Reformers and the word

Grades 7–9

First Place

John Knox: The Faithful Reformer of Scotland

Hannah Drnek, Trinity PRC

John Knox was a bold and resilient man, uncompromising in his beliefs in the face of slavery, royals, or even death. God used this steadfast man to bring about the Reformation in Scotland.

Knox was born in Haddington, Scotland, in the year 1505. Not much is known about his parents, but they provided him with a decent education. He was taught in his hometown by Roman Catholic teachers who prepared him for the clergy. In this school, Knox was required to speak Latin at all times, and he became quite skilled in the language. At the age of seventeen, Knox was sent to the University of Glasgow. There, he was taught by the famous scholar John Major.

Knox became a priest in 1540. He was considered a steadfast Roman Catholic, but sometime between 1542 and 1545, Knox came to believe the Protestant faith. It is unknown exactly when and why, but some factors contributed to his conversion. For one thing, he often listened to the instructions of George Wishart, a Reformed preacher. Knox became close friends with Wishart and agreed with his teachings. Another cause of Knox's reform was his conversations with John Calvin and Theodore Beza, who were both central figures in the Reformation. These influenced Knox to become a Protestant.

In 1546, George Wishart was burned at the stake by Cardinal Beaton of St. Andrews for his preaching. Many Protestants were angry about the martyrdom of the beloved pastor. Protestant nobles invaded the cardinal's castle and killed Beaton. Then they invited Protestants, including Knox, to live in the castle. Knox took up their offer. Later, Knox was asked to be the pastor at the castle. Knox agreed, and in his first sermon, he compared the pope to the antichrist. Knox showed that he was not afraid

to boldly speak the truth about the Roman Catholic Church.

Knox was not able to stay in the castle for long. In 1547, French warships attacked and captured the castle. Everybody in the castle, including Knox, was taken captive. After being taken to France, Knox was sentenced to the galleys as a slave. This means that he was forced to row the oars of a ship. Knox suffered this way for about a year and a half before Edward VI, the king of England, arranged his release with the king of France. Knox was released, but he came out of this trial with damaged health for the rest of his life.

After his release, Knox made his home in England. Here he met a woman named Marjorie Bowes and married her. Knox worked hard with the reformers in England. He was offered a bishopric but declined. Knox was kept very busy in England; he often preached every day of the week. But he was forced to leave his work in England after King Edward VI's death. His daughter, Mary Tudor, came to the throne. A loyal Roman Catholic, Queen Mary wanted nothing better than to restore Catholicism to England, even at the price of Protestant blood. Knox was persuaded by his friends to flee, although he thought the issue of keeping England Protestant was urgent.

From England, Knox traveled to Geneva. Here he wrote a pamphlet attacking Queen Mary. John Calvin was in Geneva at this time, and he and Knox often discussed theology and church government. During Knox's stay at Geneva, he preached, taught, and visited church members constantly. He grew to have great influence in the city. Knox grew in his knowledge of doctrine and church government, such that he was able to complete the Reformation in Scotland.

In 1559, Knox traveled to Scotland, where he would stay for the rest of his life. He steadily led Scotland on the road to being a Protestant country. Knox, remembering his knowledge gained in Geneva, instituted a Presbyterian system of church government. A Parliament met and created the Scottish Confession of Faith. Knox was a leader in all of these events. In some places, riots would occur where the people would destroy Roman Catholic altars, monasteries, or images.

Knox even had several interviews with Queen Mary of Scotland, who wanted her country to stay Catholic. The queen tried valiantly to change Knox's mind, but he stood firm throughout the interviews. In 1567, Queen Mary of Scotland was removed from being queen. It was decided that in the future, the ruler of Scotland had to be Protestant.

In 1570, Knox had a stroke. He recovered from it and retired to St. Andrews. He was so weak that he had to be carried to the pulpit, but he still preached. On November 24,

1570, John Knox passed away and entered into eternal rest. Through many trials in his life, Knox stayed faithful unto death and was given a crown of life in heaven.

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Second Place

The Life and Service of Herman Bavinck

Grace Wynia, Calvary PRC

I chose Herman Bavinck for the subject of my essay. He was an important Dutch Reformed and Neo-Calvinist theologian. Neo-Calvinism is a theological movement that focuses on God's control over all areas of life. He emphasized biblical living everywhere in life and left a lasting impact on modern Reformed theology.

He was born to Jan and Geziena Bavinck on December 13, 1854. His father was a respected pastor for the Christian Reformed Church, and his family was part of the Seceder Church, which broke away from the state Reformed church. He grew up in a town called Hoogeveen in the Netherlands.

In 1873, he began going to school at the Theological School in Kampen. He studied there for a year. Afterward, he went to the University of Leiden, because he wanted a prestigious and scientific education. His education there was a big part of the development of his theological career. At Leiden, he studied Semitic languages and systematic theology. During his time there, he was known for being an excellent student and graduated with a doctor's degree in theology "with honours." He finished his thesis on the ethics of Ulrich Zwingli in 1880.

After he graduated, he was a pastor at Franecker Christian Church for one year. Then he became a professor of dogmatics at the Kampen Theological School. Along with dogmatics, the study of the truths of faith according to God and his works, he taught about the scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity. In 1891, he married Johanna A. Schippers. He had one daughter, named Johanna, who they called Hannie. Very little is known about her.

In 1895, at the age of thirty-five, Bavinck wrote *Reformed Dogmatics*, a four-book collection that teaches about different theological perspectives. It is known for giving detailed information on the topics of the Roman Catholic religion and the open-minded Protestant views. It is an important contribution to Reformed theology and has been revised and published many times.

He also wrote many other books about God and the Christian life. A few examples of these books are *The Wonderful Works of God*, *Christian Worldview*, *The Christian Family*, and *Christianity and Science*, along with many others. He was greatly influenced by the work of Abraham Kuyper, a Dutch theologian who also believed in incorporating faith into every part of life. Bavinck also collaborated with him later on, and both of them were important leaders in the Neo-Calvinist movement.

In 1902, he began teaching theology at a university in Amsterdam. He taught there for several years until he joined the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1906. There, he wrote important essays on Christian views of science. He also wrote about the relation of thought and being. In 1908, he traveled to the United States and gave Stone Lectures, a series of speeches about Calvinism and its effect on society, at Princeton Theological Seminary. He spoke about God's revelation in history, thought, and more topics. These speeches are still important in modern theology.

In 1911, he was named to the Senate of the Netherlands Parliament. His time there was marked by his many political writings and contributions to the church's part in politics. He also explored the status and role of women in society and its relation to the church.

On the morning of July 29, 1921, Herman Bavinck died of illness due to a heart attack in Amsterdam. He had struggled with recovering from the heart attack for several years before he died. He is remembered by his many books, essays, and speeches that he had made about his beliefs and Christian living over the sixty-six years of his life. He has left a lasting impact on the modern theology of today.

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, prophets and teachers; for the perfecting of saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11–12).

Third Place

Bringing the Word to the Wilderness: The Story of Rev. Albertus Van Raalte

Isaiah Koops, Georgetown PRC

Throughout history, Reformed leaders have stood fast in the belief that the Bible is the true Word of God. As it says in 2 Timothy 3:16–17, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (NKJV). This has been true across centuries, continents, and countless generations of believers.

One such leader who believed this was Rev. Albertus Van Raalte, who loved God and his Word but was persecuted for his unwavering faith. Because of this persecution, Van Raalte brought his people to Holland, Michigan, in search of religious liberty. He not only established a town but also a lasting legacy of Christian schools, colleges, and churches across West Michigan.

On October 17, 1811, Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte was born in the small town of Wanneperveen, Netherlands. As he grew older, a strong passion for medicine developed. Because of this, he enrolled at the University of Leiden, a historic Protestant university. While attending, he was struck with a severe case of typhus, a deadly disease that nearly killed him while he was studying there. But God had other plans. Van Raalte prayed and promised that if God saved him, he would devote his life to ministry. God answered his prayer, and Van Raalte switched his major from medicine to theology.

After college, he pursued ministry and was ordained into the Secession Church in 1836 after a CRC examination. Around this time, Van Raalte also married Christina Demoen. He began preaching in Overijssel, and while there, he saw a very large need for employment among the people. Because of this, he started a very successful brick factory to provide jobs for the poor locals. Despite his efforts, he and his congregation still faced extreme poverty and persecution from the incredibly liberal Dutch government.

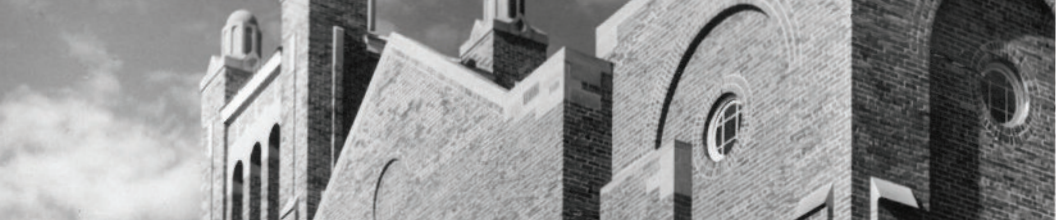
Because of this, Van Raalte and his congregation boarded the ship *Southerner*, headed for New York City. Originally, he had wanted to settle in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, but a blizzard stranded them in the dense, unfamiliar wilderness of West Michigan. After careful thought, they decided to stay because the location met the congregation's needs well. It was here that Van Raalte named the settlement Holland and started the First Reformed Church of Holland. The

journey was long and uncertain, but they had confidence God would help them, even during all the struggles that they had.

As the church and settlement grew, Van Raalte founded Hope College in 1851 to prepare young people living in Holland to preach and teach the Bible and to find good jobs. While living in Holland, the Civil War broke out, and his sons Dirk and Benjamin fought in the war. After their return, Van Raalte finally settled down and bought land on 16th Street in Holland.

However, he soon became restless again. He sold the land to his son Benjamin in order to start a new colony in Amelia County, Virginia. That colony failed, and Van Raalte returned to Holland, where he passed away at the age of sixty-five, just shortly after celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the city he founded. He may have passed away, but his dream of religious freedom never did.

Even after all these years, what Van Raalte established is still here: churches, schools, and many generations of lives changed by the Word of God. He didn't just bring people to Michigan, he brought them closer to Christ.



Holding fast our heritage

Grades 10–12

First Place

Holding Fast Our Heritage

Sam Baker, Hull PRC

We live in the roaring twenties. We wake up in our houses heated and cooled, with many modern amenities. In our houses, we have all sorts of entertainment and hobbies. One hundred years ago, they were living in the roaring twenties too!

In 1925, the United States was exposed to massive change. There was economic prosperity under President Calvin Coolidge. The invention of the automobile and the plane were starting to take hold of the country. Radios were starting to appear in homes, seamlessly connecting millions of people to talk shows, news networks, and other forms of entertainment. The culture was changing too. Prohibition was in full effect, and women were enjoying the right to vote.

During this chaos and change, the Protestant Reformed Church in America was established. The culture was invading the church. Liberalism was slowly creeping in. In Presbyterian and Reformed churches, battles were being fought over the acceptance of new doctrines that chipped at the essential truths of the Christian faith. Evolution and Christianity butted heads in the battle of the Scopes Trial. Liberal ideas were slowly seeping in.

Now we shift toward us today. We live in a different kind of roaring twenties. We have enormous culture shifts and changes. We have economic prosperity. We have fancy cars and airplanes to fly cross-country with. We have TVs, computers, phones, laptops, and even virtual realities. We have AI and advancements that no one from one hundred years ago could have dreamt of.

The broader church world continues to fight, but has lost major ground against liberal ideas. In mainline churches and colleges, doctrines like evolution, pride, acceptance of sinful living, divorce, and so much more continually beat against the church. Yet we have been able to avoid this ravaging of liberalism, just like in 1925, because we stand

and fight against it. We also, in God's great wisdom, are small and shielded from these major attacks.

We fight different battles than they did. They couldn't know anything by a simple search on a phone or a computer. They didn't have access to online libraries like we do. They didn't have access to travel like we do. We must not become bogged down in these tools; this privilege to study and to learn in our day goes so unappreciated. Also, we can connect with saints from other churches and from other continents. We can strengthen our faith through these means. We also have a fantastic tool for evangelism on the Internet. We can listen to thousands of hours of sermons and read thousands of pages of magazines and books all on our phones.

Jesus warns us in Luke 12:48, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask more." In 2025, much has been given. We have technology, health, wealth, safety, and shelter from the world. Much has been given to us; proportionally, much is expected from us. We ought to be the best Christians we can be! We ought to be spreading the good news of the gospel of Christ! We must use the tools set before us to grow and learn. We must use the tools given to us to reach those in darkness at every turn of life.

The biggest similarity that we have with the saints from one hundred years ago, even from one thousand years ago, is that we are joint heirs in the same covenant as them. We have the same Holy Spirit working in our hearts. We have the same blood shed for us on the cross. We live in an almost completely unrecognizable world from one hundred years ago. However, one day we will all live in a perfect world together, singing praises to the King of kings for eternity.

We will live forever in the truth of Revelation 21:1–4: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

As long as we are on this side of Jordan, whether it be in 100 BC, AD 300, 1517, 1925, 2025, and every other year we are here, the devil will continue to attack the bride of Christ, the church. And the church will persevere and continue only by the grace of God. To God be the glory, great things he has done!

Second Place

Holding Fast the Heritage of the Protestant Reformed Churches Over a Century

Emily Boverhof, Edgerton PRC

One hundred years ago the Protestant Reformed Churches were formed. People of all ages were part of this new denomination, including young people. There have been many significant changes in the world and in the church over the last hundred years. Life for a young person today is very different from a young person when our denomination began in 1925, such as the availability of Christian education. However, there are certain things that have not changed, like the doctrines that our churches hold to and temptations presented by the world to young people.

A significant similarity is the Protestant Reformed Churches themselves. A century older than their beginning in 1925, the Protestant Reformed Churches still hold to the same truths as they did then. As a young person, I defend the same doctrines that the young people who attended the Protestant Reformed Churches one hundred years ago did. God has graciously preserved our denomination, giving me the same understanding of him as young people a century before me. It is a blessing to be able to attend a church that clearly shows the marks of a true church of Christ.

A major difference in my life than that of a young person a hundred years ago is that I have the privilege of attending a Christian school. When the Protestant Reformed Churches started, there were no Christian schools for the young people of our churches to attend. A century later, the Protestant Reformed Churches are affiliated with five high schools for their young people to attend, as well as fifteen grade schools for children. Living in Edgerton, I attend Southwest Minnesota Christian rather than a Protestant Reformed high school, but the difference between attending a Christian high school rather than a public school is still evident. Many teachers in our schools today have been trained in conservative Reformed Christian universities, ensuring that they are teaching the same doctrines as our church does.

As I get older, I realize more and more how important Christian education is. Even though I attend a high school not affiliated with our churches, I had the privilege of attending Free Christian School, a Protestant Reformed grade school. This allowed me to have a firm understanding of the truths I believe and our denomination confesses before starting high school. Now, as I attend Southwest Christian I am able to defend the doctrines the Protestant Reformed Churches confess.

Young people one hundred years ago probably would have attended a country school. Many of these schools had general Bible classes, but their teachers would not have taught from a Protestant Reformed perspective as teachers in our schools do today. These young people would have already been in high school by the time the Protestant Reformed Churches were formed. They were not as educated in the differences between their beliefs and those they were attending school with as I am. God has watched over our denomination and prospered it to give young people the opportunity to receive Protestant Reformed education from kindergarten through twelfth grade. This Christian education prepares us for temptations presented to us by the world.

Another difference in my life is the heritage of the Protestant Reformed Churches. This year marks the one hundredth anniversary of our denomination. A hundred years ago our denomination was new. Publications such as *Beacon Lights* and *Ignited by the Word* did not exist. Now I have the opportunity to read material written specifically for my age by writers who share the same beliefs as I do. A young person a century ago did not have this privilege but helped pave the way for these resources to be available today.

Today, as in 1925, the world of sin tempts young people. The young generation of the 1920s is known for celebrating sins and dressing immodestly. The world looks at this era as a good time of prosperity and development. In actuality it was an era of sin. One does not have to go far in studying the "Roaring Twenties" to find that sinful and illegal actions characterized this age.

The same temptations face young people in the 2020s. School dress codes are a constant reminder that the temptation to dress immodestly is prevalent today just as it was in the 1920s. Drinking in excess is also a sin that is made common, as it was a century ago. Satan keeps tempting us to follow these wicked ways. He has changed the form in which temptations come to us over time, but the truth of his deception remains the same. As the end of time draws closer, Satan does more and more to make a life of sin look like a good, easy, and popular way to live.

The most important comparison to be made between my life as a young person and that of one a century before me is that the truth of God has endured over this time. He has promised us in his Word that he will never change. "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Mal. 3:6). "Lord" in this verse is in all capitals, meaning he is Jehovah, the I Am That I Am. It is a great comfort to know that God does not change.

Long before the Protestant Reformed Churches existed, this was true. God has not ever changed in his attitude toward us his people. While earthly churches and bodies of believers might change what they believe or have disagreements over what the Bible says, God will never change. His Word says and means the same in 2025 as it did in 1925 and will still be the same in 2125 if the Lord tarries.

God's grace has preserved our churches. He has brought many changes to the lives of young people, but has not changed himself. Even in the trials that we face in our lives, he has promised to never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5).

Third Place

Faith Before Phones

Kara DeJong, Doon PRC

Colossians 3:2 "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

A hot summer breeze floats through the air one afternoon as a softball team of young Christian women make their way up to the team bus. Excited talking and laughing fills the bus as each girl finds a seat. Slowly, the noise dies down and the last coach climbs the stairs to the bus. A senior on the team stands up and begins to read and explain a Bible verse from her phone for devotions, *"I can do all things through Christ…"* While she is talking, a faint buzz can be heard from the back of the bus and a soft rustle as a girl reaches to quiet her phone. Devotions continue to go on as if nothing happened, but each girl is silently relieved that she hasn't been the one to interrupt.

Before getting on the road to the game, the team prays together. Once again, the prayer is interrupted by a quiet buzzing, this time coming from the front of the bus, although it is hastily muffled. Finally, the coach leading prayer says "Amen" and continues to make a few more comments before the game. He finishes with saying, "I think we have made it a habit for at least one phone to go off during every single devotions this year. We can do better than that. Our time with God's Word should be more important than our phones."

Around a century earlier, a peaceful quiet fills a young family's home in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on a Sunday afternoon. They, too, have a phone, hanging on the kitchen wall, although it has recently stopped working. Essentially, it resembles a wooden box, much larger, bulkier, and less modern than the phones of

the softball girls. The peace is suddenly interrupted as a repairman enters to fix the broken telephone. Immediately, he is demanded to leave by the father of the house. Shocked, the man quickly packs up his tools and gets out of the house.[1] Fixing the phone was not more important than the family's observance of the Lord's day.

For young people, what is the first thing you reach for to look at when you wake up in the morning—your Bible or your phone? Which number is higher, your daily screen time average, or your daily time spent in God's Word? Have you made your phone a higher priority in your life than spiritual things? One hundred years ago, the same technology we have access to today did not exist. But today we have phones as both a blessing and a challenge for our faith.

When the Protestant Reformed Churches began in 1924, mobile phones were not used at all. Young people would have noticed major events like the first winter Olympics held in France in January, as well as the Summer Olympics later that year, and the first flight around the world in April.[2] Calvin Coolidge was the president of the United States. The Synod of Kalamazoo convened in June, where the three points of common grace were adopted by the Christian Reformed Church.[3] Undoubtedly, even young people studied these teachings of common grace, which were rejected by their newly formed Protestant Reformed Churches.

Living without the technology of today was a blessing in some ways. Teenagers from these years lived without the distraction of phones, allowing them to focus more on school and other activities. Face-to-face interaction was unavoidable, since texting was not an option. But also, long-distance friendships and relationships were more difficult. When young peoples' conventions began in 1939, young people were not able to keep in touch simply by text messaging or Snapchatting each other. While they did have the *Beacon Lights* magazine, which began in 1941, teens couldn't simply use their phones to read daily Bible verses, listen to sermons or podcasts, or quickly research confusing topics. So while not having phones may have been a blessing for young people's fellowship, it was also a challenge for communication and learning.

1 Story adapted from Cornelius Hanko, *Less than the Least* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2017), 31–32.

2 "1924: A Year in the Collections," Smithsonian, https://www.si.edu/spotlight/1924.

3 Michael De Vries, "Lessons From Our Beginning: What 1924 Has To Teach Us Today Concerning Our Calling as Spiritual Youth in a Carnal World," *Beacon Lights* 52, no. 6 (1993): https://beaconlights.org/sermons/lessons-from-our-beginning-what-1924-has-to-teach-us-today-concerning-our-calling-as-spiritual-youth-in-a-carnal-world/.

Now phones are a common aspect of young people's lives. They can be a resourceful blessing in many ways. Keeping in touch with friends from convention, or even a long-distance relationship, has never been easier with simple text messaging and Facetime. Apps like the King James Version Bible app and the Psalter app are helpful resources. They are even used by groups like the young people's conventions or the earlier mentioned softball team for singing and devotions. God is pleased when his people use the resources they have been given for his glory.

Finally, phones today can challenge young people's faith. They create temptations to prioritize screen time and entertainment over schoolwork, catechism, and personal devotions. How often do young people not leave the church building as soon as the service is finished, only to sit on their phones in their car, rather than fellowshiping with other saints? The temptation for teenagers to entertain themselves with sin is greater than it has ever been, with wicked music, sinful movies, and immodest ads and posts on social media just one scroll away.

God commands us in Ephesians 5:16 to "redeem…the time, because the days are evil." No one can say that endless scrolling through social media reels and posts is redeeming God's time. Schools are forced to ban phones to prevent distractions while learning. Phones create many, many temptations for young people of the church.

As the young people of a century ago did not need phones for their Christian walk, so the young people today should not prioritize their phones over spiritual things. As totally depraved sinners, we know that it is impossible to resist temptation on our own. So, prayer to God is very necessary to set boundaries and remain spiritually minded. Seek first those things that are above, and through this you will glorify your Creator. Be like those saints of a century ago—set down your phone, and pick up your Bible!

Artificial intelligence

Post-high, age 18-22

First Place

Wisdom in the Age of AI

Paul Ophoff, Crete PRC

The world today is constantly changing faster than we could have ever imagined. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer a concept of the future, and we are living in the early stages of its development and application as it is being used in seemingly every big-name company. How can we, as Christians, use this gift to the glory of God? How can we be mindful of the risks that this new technology brings?

ChatGPT, the largest AI chatbot, was not first launched until 2022, but that is not the birthplace of AI. I am in college for computer science at Dordt University, and we often talk about the advances of AI in recent years. I was surprised to learn that AI has been around since the 1950s. Traditionally, AI was used in algorithms that could beat you at checkers and chess or predict stock market changes and marketing strategies. More recently it has been tied to Amazon Alexa or Siri on your phone, but since then it has developed into many more categories. I mostly want to investigate the controversial Generative AI.

Imagine you want to become an author, but you do not know how to properly write books. Before you get to any of the writing, you spend years reading other books and learning how characters interact, how the plots grasp your reader's attention, how emotions unfold, and you start to recognize patterns. Using that knowledge, you begin to create your own unique story that uses the same patterns that you learned about from your reading.

Generative AI works in a surprisingly similar way by finding patterns in the stories it reads and then using what it learns to make something unique and original. As much as possible AI tries to mimic the thought process of the human mind, even using the term "neuron" to talk about weighing the importance of certain information. This can be dangerous for the Christian

as it allows for the abuse of this technology. It is easy to use AI to create thoughts and ideas that can seem very human-like to us.

There is often much criticism especially in the Christian community about AI being a danger to those who rely on it. I believe that this criticism is important, and it raises some serious ethical and moral questions regarding whether it is proper to use AI. I admit that dependence on these AI systems will often hinder development in creativity and critical thinking skills, but I also believe that the benefits surpass the risks.

AI systems can instead be an amazing tool for us to use at our disposal. I often use AI tools to help improve my personal or work emails—whether it is to sound more professional for upper management, make my message clearer, or adjust the tone to be more polite. AI is also a powerful tool for research. Instead of spending hours searching for answers to specific problems, you can often find what you need in seconds. One example would be a student trying to learn about gravity and how it works. AI can quickly summarize studies on gravity and can help the student understand without needing to dig through dozens of unnecessary articles.

How can we serve God with this gift? Historically, we have used innovation to spread the gospel. Look at the printing press! Instead of taking months (or even years) to handwrite a single Bible, the printing press allowed for hundreds of copies to be made in the same amount of time. Or look at the capabilities of recording and livestreaming that we use today in our churches to reach those who cannot be there in person or to reflect on past sermons.

Look at the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, where Jesus tells a story about a master who entrusts his servants with a specific amount of money, and on his return expects of his servants to have used the talents as wisely as they could. He calls us to use the resources he has given us, not to try to avoid and dispose of them as much as we can.

I truly believe that the church can embrace AI in the same way. AI-based applications can analyze Scripture to offer passages for faith-related questions that we may have been struggling with, or maybe even someday allow easier connection between churches of like-minded faith. It is important that when used wisely, AI can become a powerful tool for advancing the kingdom of God in ways that we cannot yet imagine. However, believers must remember that AI is a tool, not a substitute for the wisdom of God.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." – James 1:5

For AI to be used for God's glory, Christians must be able to discern

the truth from the lie. The same goes for the information from any book, website, blog post, movie, or any form of media; false views will always arise. Oftentimes AI is programmed to promote secular ideologies or even anti-Christian beliefs. I ask to approach AI thoughtfully and with discernment. Like the passage from James says, if you lack wisdom, look toward God and it will be given to you, not manmade interpretation.

Technology is not the future of our faith; that right alone is reserved for God. We should not rely on AI to make our moral decisions, because it lacks the true wisdom that is revealed to us through the Holy Spirit. It is also very possible that at some point in time the world will corrupt content generated by AI to present false doctrines in the light of a twisted form of Scripture. Believers must be rooted in the truth of the Bible rather than interpretations that are driven by algorithms.

AI is not going away, and the influence that it has will only continue to grow. As we navigate this new frontier, may we be faithful stewards of this new tool that God has allowed us to develop. By being cautious and approaching this age with care, it may be possible to use this technology to the honor and glory of God, if we remember to stay rooted in our Lord.

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." – Colossians 2:6–7

Second Place

Do Not Wait!

Gabe Overbeek,
Byron Center PRC

Rome's aqueducts served as a brilliantly engineered water supply system spanning hundreds of miles throughout the great empire. This ancient infrastructure was so impressive that the wealthiest Romans had access to running water in their homes and vacation villas, and the vast majority of average citizens could utilize public water fountains. Today, it is estimated that over 99 percent of Americans have access to potable water, and although it is almost impossible to pinpoint an exact number, some say that there are over 2 million miles worth' of water main pipes buried beneath our feet here in the states.

In the time between the height of ancient Rome's grandeur and our present day, approximately 1,900

years, great feats of human innovation came and went with the rise and fall of civilizations and nations, but never have we had it better than we do now. It may have taken hundreds and thousands of years before humans developed technology like the chariot, or the steam engine, or modern automobiles, but the meteoric rise of the global Internet and digital communications is unlike anything we have ever seen in history. Computers began the journey less than one hundred years ago, followed by the adoption of the Internet into modern American life within the past twenty-five years, which was then made widely accessible in the pockets of millions of people by the introduction of the first iPhone in 2007, making it younger than most of you reading this article! Behind all these advancements in the "Information Age," as the past century is dubbed, is the lurking presence of what we now call Artificial Intelligence.

I am confident that most of your grandparents had never even heard that term used until the latter half of their lives. Sure, it has existed for quite some time in the technology industry, but there is no doubt that the manifestation of this tech has reared its head the most aggressively within only the past couple decades. Christians sojourning in this valley of the shadow of death for all of history have at various points been rightfully hesitant to adopt this world's technological advancements into their antithetical lives and Bible-believing households. Believer, if there ever was a time to be hesitant and practice wise discernment, now is that time.

Artificial Intelligence (AI), as it is now implemented, is meant to be a replica or carbon-copy model of the human intellect. It has access via the worldwide web to the collective human wealth of knowledge, which it then uses to produce responses and create videos and images that seem and appear to be indistinguishable from actual human interaction or creation. Let us take a moment to consider where else one might find the potential power of unbridled deception.

"Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made" (Gen. 3:1 NKJV). Being the father of lies himself, Satan knew how to deceive Adam and Eve to the point that they took his advice over against the commandment of Jehovah God. So it seems that one principle can be applied to both our perception of AI and the force that drove the first humans to sin against their creator: Satan's tireless pursuit to deceive the whole world (Rev. 12:9). And to deceive the world into believing what? That he is king, and God has no authority.

As has always been the truth throughout all of time and continua, what the devil meant for evil, God

meant for good (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28). If our infinitely wise God can use even sin for the good of his people, then surely we are not called to cower in fear of potentially evil technology in our world. Rather, let us in Christ's strength repurpose what our enemy uses against us for the glory of our heavenly Father.

AI in the hands of sinners saved by grace becomes a very powerful tool for the deepening of our knowledge of God's holy Scriptures. In writing this article, AI has been of assistance to me in finding applicable Bible passages and historical data. If you want a comprehensive list of all Bible passages that explicitly speak of God's sovereignty, you can have it in a few seconds with AI. If you have questions about something your pastor preached in a sermon last week, you can be a twenty-first century Berean and enlist the help of AI to find biblical evidence to determine "whether those things [are] so" (Acts 17:11). Be cognizant, however, of our human frailty, and call upon the name of our God asking for wisdom (which he gives liberally [James 1:5]) so as not to replace ordinary methods with AI, namely by using AI for all your answers rather than meeting with your pastor or discussing topics with a brother or sister in Christ.

AI and its implications must not strike fear into our regenerated hearts, for we do not have to speculate how the world will behave as Christ's appointed coming moves ever closer. From 2 Timothy 3, we know the world will love themselves more than each other, they will seek pleasure and desires more than God and his will, and although they have the "form of godliness," none of their "good" actions come from an acknowledgment of the regenerating work of Christ in the hearts of undeserving sinners. These are all flipped perversions of God's will, because the enemy wants to upend and distort every good and holy understanding of the saving knowledge of God.

What then truly is the Christian's calling in the age of AI? It is twofold: First, do not wait! Do not wait until you are older before you take your faith seriously. Do not foolishly wait for a miraculous divine experience before you place your trust in the living God. Do not wait until your sinful living results in some horrible calamity for yourself and/or others before you cry out to Christ to cleanse you from your unrighteousness and sanctify you. For these are signs of the times in which we are called to look forward to the arrival of our Savior Jesus, clothed in all power of heaven and earth, who comes to bring us home!

Second, proclaim to yourself and to others the Messiah's powerful comfort, "The gates of hell shall not prevail" (Matt. 16:18). Jesus has already won the victory, so that as the cup of iniquity fills, and God

directs the course of time, nothing can deter us from firmly placing our trust in the God of our fathers by the enabling of Christ's spirit within us…not even the rise of Artificial Intelligence!

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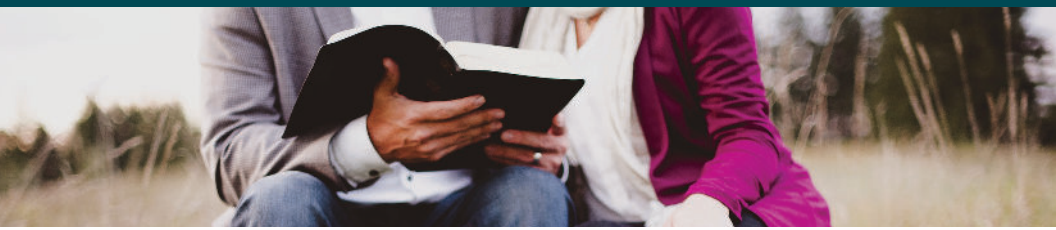

Godly manhood/womanhood

Post-high, age 23+

First Place

Biblical Womanhood

Mikaia Looyenga,
Hope (Redlands) PRC

If one were to ask the question, "What is a woman?" the answers received will vary greatly. The world will have us believe that womanhood is a club that anyone who claims it can join. The feminist would lead us to think a woman is a strong, independent powerhouse of a creature who needs no man, no help or intervention. According to a dictionary, it is quite simple: a woman is "an adult, female human being." While the answer can be simplified to such a statement as the dictionary definition, we, as

children of God and studiers of his word, recognize that this definition lacks the beautiful truth and the full meaning of what it is to be a woman.

Biblical womanhood is countercultural and offensive to the world, even in circles of a "conservative" or "traditional" nature. The world militates against the biblical view like their life depends on it. What, then, is this view of a biblical woman? She is a beautiful creation of the Almighty God. A biblical woman is a redeemed child of God, who stands apart from the world in her beauty, submissive heart, modest spirit, and encouragement of others, ultimately working to reflect the bride of Christ.

The Bible is full of examples of strong, biblically grounded women: Sarah, Deborah, the Proverbs 31 woman, Mary, Anna, Lydia, Tabitha, Priscilla, Eunice, and Lois. It is noteworthy that God used each of these women in remarkable ways, and yet no two of them are the same. Some are noted for their tenderness and teaching; others for their obedience and love. Several are even noted as women of strength in character and leadership.

However, each woman on this list has the same essential thing in common. Yes, they all had XX chromosomes, but more importantly, they all took very seriously the love of their Lord, and they all reflect the image of Christ in the unique way in which God has called them. There is beauty in their lives that emanates from their heart.

Women were created by God to be beautiful creatures. Women are created in the image of God and uniquely meant to reflect his glory and beauty! A woman's physical beauty is obsessed over by the world, and yet it is only a small part of the treasure that God has designed. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."[1] The true beauty of a woman is internal, the kind that radiates outward from her pure spirit.

Such a woman may not be beautiful by man's standards, but the biblical woman will value such beauty far more than the external. In 1 Peter 3 a biblical woman finds encouragement to align her standard of beauty with God's desires. "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible."[2] Internal beauty does not fade, but instead grows in the heart of a biblical woman out of her love for God.

Inner beauty is not only something that befits a woman of God, but it strongly flows into the biblical image of Christ and his bride. God has created both men and women to give a more complete

1 1 Samuel 16:7

2 1 Peter 3:3–4

picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. A biblical woman then is to be the image of the church. The church is the bride of Christ, the one who loves him most ardently, and therefore we, as biblical women, ought to fashion our hearts and lives in this way.

As the bride of Christ, the church lives in submission to her head, Jesus Christ. If we are to be a picture of the loving bride of Christ, biblical women must do the same. The word *submission* sends up fireworks and draws the women of the world forward with guns blazing! Submit? Yes. But the calling to submission is not the affront that the world would make it seem. To quote John Piper in a daily devotional,[3] "One of the unique things about women is that they are called by God to receive from man and honor man and support the leadership and the protection and the provision of godly men."

Women are given both the calling and the incredible ability to support and lift up men in the same way that the church lifts up and seeks to bring honor and glory to Christ. This is true of single women and married, young and old. Submission is not the ability to be a doormat, but the ability to place trust in the godly men in our lives to provide and protect, love and lead as Christ himself leads the church. To submit to the man in our life who has been given leadership is a protection and a blessing because it means we have someone to stand between us and the world, someone who makes the difficult decisions for us and who will stand before God, who will hold him accountable for our protection.

When we willingly submit as the church does to Christ, we stand apart from the world. Such a spirit in our hearts is a witness to our husband, our children, and all those that we come into contact with. Submission is a beautiful, protective, God-glorifying attitude of the heart that flows out of a love for our God.

Along with submission, a gentle, quiet, and modest spirit is, in my opinion, the attribute that sets a godly woman apart from the world more than any other. The women of the world want to scream their opinions, to flaunt their bodies, to take "advantage of men before they themselves get taken advantage of." How contrary to the word of God is the attitude of the world!

In contrast, biblically grounded women value modesty. Like the trait of beauty, this virtue starts on the inside. How can we as godly women behave modestly when our hearts are not aligned with this purpose? Women of modest spirit are not the first to make their opinions known, not the first to share the new gossip that they have heard, not the ones to "wear the pants" in

3 Desiring God online devotional

their relationship. "But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."[4] This is a woman who causes the world to speak highly of her husband, Jesus Christ.[5] This is the blessed daughter of the King who fears the Lord and delights to walk in his ways.[6]

Another trait of the church is to encourage the people of God. Biblical women are encouragers. They are mothers, mentors, friends, sisters in Christ. In whatever role we have as a woman in Christ's body, we are to foster an attitude of love and care for God and his ways. Older women can help the younger. Young women can seek to be an example to the children as well as the other people in the church. God has given women the ability to communicate well, and we can all seek to encourage and build up our sisters in Christ more fully.

Seeing all of the qualities given in the word of God concerning womanhood, we may be tempted to give a discouraged exhale. How can we ever live up to the high biblical calling? If your reaction to these commands is dejection, then hear this word of God to you: "Ye are bought with a price."[7] "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine."[8] "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness…as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."[9] The biblical woman is beautiful, yet not in her own strength. She is robed in the righteousness of Christ and adorned with the blessings of salvation given to her by her Savior, her husband.

The bride of Christ is valuable to him, and so also are we all as individual reflections of the church of God. In contrast to the ideas of a woman that this world believes, a woman is not a club to join, a force to rally behind. A woman is a beautiful creation of God intended to reflect the beauty of himself and the role of his church. A biblical woman will seek to walk in the ways of God's word, desiring to be beautiful on the inside, submissive, modest, adorned with the blessings of salvation and the fruit of the Spirit, rather than the brash, temperamental woman of the world whose beauty is only skin deep.

A woman of God is above all one who seeks to bring honor to Jehovah out of a deep and everlasting love for him. This is the woman for whom Christ paid the ultimate price. This woman's value is measured in the

4 1 Peter 3:4

5 Proverbs 31:23

6 Psalm 128:1

7 1 Corinthians 6:20

8 Isaiah 43:1

9 Isaiah 61:10

blood of the Savior. What a love! Can we not see the incredible value that we as biblical women have? Both as a picture of Christ's bride and as individual believers, we are bought with the greatest payment Christ could pay. "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies."[10] In fact, in the eyes of our heavenly Father, we are beyond any value that this world could offer.

10 Proverbs 31:10

Second Place

Biblical Womanhood in the Context of Intersex Conditions

Rebekah Buiter,
Hope (Redlands) PRC

The Paris 2024 Summer Olympics sparked controversy around the world between LGBTQ activists and conservative Christians who oppose biological men participating in female sports. Imane Khelif, a boxer competing in the women's division, won an unusual round in the 2024 Olympics after an opponent gave up following a particularly powerful punch. Khelif's Italian opponent, Angelina Carnini, claimed that she had never before felt a punch delivered so forcefully (Apnews.com). Christians on social media immediately began to share their opinion, stating the dangers of transgender women being allowed in biological women's spaces.

The LGBTQ community and their allies latched on to these hastily drawn conclusions. "Imane Khelif is not transgender!" they cried. Rather, Imane Khelif suffers from Differences of Sexual Development (DSD), a condition included under the umbrella of intersex. It was reported that Imane Khelif had been disqualified in prior competitions because a test showed XY chromosomes (USAtoday.com). News outlets perpetuated confusion by saying that Imane Khelif is not intersex since Imane Khelif doesn't identify as such. As these events gripped the attention of the world during the summer of 2024, the church was faced with a new question to ponder when answering the question, what is a woman? Is a woman strictly defined by her chromosomes?

While examining the conditions labeled "intersex," Christians must remember to interpret the fallen world through the lens of God's perfect word. It is tempting to empathize with the difficulties that intersex individuals face and conclude that gender is not binary after all, attempting to carve out a third gender category. Instead, intersex conditions must be viewed

as a deviation from God's perfect creation and a consequence of Adam's fall into sin. In these cases, the process of conception and fetal development did not follow God's original design for the human body. It is important to note that every intersex individual was conceived with the genetic instructions to develop into a man; therefore, intersex individuals are men with a congenital condition.

Some intersex men have an unusual pairing of the X and Y chromosomes. During the process of conception, the child received an extra X chromosome, resulting in Klinefelter Syndrome (XXY) (Mayoclinic.org). These men appear male but do not develop to maturity, remaining infertile and often suffering other health and developmental issues. Men with Swyer's syndrome have XY chromosomes, and they possess functioning female reproductive organs with the exception of the ovaries. These men experience DSD, since the gene for the Sex-determining Region Y protein was not expressed (Clevelandclinic.org).

Other intersex men develop Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS), also experiencing DSD to varying degrees (Clevelandclinic.org). Their bodies do not respond to the male hormone androgen and do not develop male anatomy as they should. Some men have complete insensitivity to androgen; outwardly they look female, but they do not possess female reproductive organs. Other individuals are partially insensitive to androgen, and they have ambiguous or immature male genitalia. Some individuals discover that they are intersex during their teenage years, while others remain unaware of their condition their whole life.

When looking to define "woman" in the context of these intersex conditions, one must consider the woman's creation and purpose. The creation of the woman is one of God's marvelous works. In the beginning, God created a perfect world, the pinnacle of which was the creation of man, male and female (Gen. 1:27). When Adam was in a deep sleep, God formed Eve from his rib (2:21). Even though Eve was formed *from* man, she remained completely *distinct* from him. God gave Eve only female genetics, with two X chromosomes. These chromosomes were properly expressed so that the genetic information perfectly corresponded to Eve's physical appearance.

The woman was also created as God's image bearer of righteousness, knowledge, and holiness (Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24). Before Eve considered in her heart and took with her hand the forbidden fruit, Eve had a pure heart and clean hands (Ps. 24:3–4). She enjoyed perfect communion with God as his friend-servant. This state of perfection did not last, and the woman became God's *fallen*

creature who is only reconciled to God through Christ (Gen. 3:16).

The woman must confess that it is only through the redeeming work of Christ and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit that the image of God can be restored. Through regeneration, the woman is created anew in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), and the image of God is restored in principle. Throughout her life she is called to put on that new man of Christ (Eph. 4:24) and so be conformed to his image.

God created the woman for the purpose of marriage and procreation (Matt. 19:4–5). The physical and psychological qualities of the woman are perfectly suited to the purpose of nurturing and raising children. In the marriage state, God gave the woman the calling to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). The renewed and transformed woman presents her body as a living sacrifice unto God in this regard (Rom. 12:1–2). She may not jealously cling to her body, unwilling for it to carry the marks of childbearing and rearing. Instead, she renews her mind, not spoiling it with the philosophies of this world that tell her bearing children is irresponsible and inconvenient (Col. 2:8). She confesses that her body belongs to her faithful savior, Jesus Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1), and willingly offers it up in service to God.

The regenerated woman is created in Christ for the purpose of good works (Eph. 2:10). She follows the examples of Tabitha, the Shunnamite woman, and Priscilla to selflessly serve the poor and widows and to support the ministry of the word. She follows the example of Hannah, who was characterized by prayer. She waits upon the Lord with quiet trust (Ps. 37:1–7). Unlike Rebekah, she does not find solace in the works of her hands to accomplish God's will. Instead the faithful woman prays, "Establish thou the work of [mine] hands" (90:17) as she executes the office of believer by serving, teaching, and guiding others in her God-given spheres (Titus 2:3–4; 1 Tim. 2:9–15).

Returning to the question on the Olympic stage, the church answers, "A woman is a sinful person with XX chromosomes, originally created in the image of God. Through regeneration and the ongoing work of sanctification by the Holy Spirit, that image is restored. By grace, the woman is able to fulfill her God-given purpose to live a life of good works, including bearing and raising godly children in the marriage state." The church must maintain a firm stance on biblical womanhood against all the pressures from the world to compromise.

Like the Pharisees did to Jesus, the world likes to pose tricky questions to the church to cause her to stumble. The church must be wise as serpents and harmless as doves when answering gender-related questions,

especially because intersex children are also born into Christian families. Godly parents who are unaware of their child's condition will raise their female-presenting intersex child as a little girl. The discovery of the condition will be tumultuous for the child, having assumed the cultural and social role of an aspiring young woman all his life. The child may struggle with his identity and contentment with God's will. In these circumstances, the church is called to "put on…bowels of mercies" (Col. 3:12) and show great compassion to these individuals.

The church must consider these individuals as valuable members with a place and purpose in Christ's church (1 Cor. 12:23–24). Matthew 19:12 says, "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb." Men with known intersex conditions fall into this category of eunuchs, and they are called to a life of singlehood, dedicating their lives to the service of the church (1 Cor. 7:32).

All of God's people, male or female, must find their identity in Christ and not in their gender. Identity in Christ as one of his chosen sheep is steadfast and sure (John 10:14, 27–29). Men and women must look to Christ for deliverance from their sin and the effect of sin on their bodies. They must look forward to heaven where their bodies will be perfected and their gene expression corrected.

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Third Place

Biblical Womanhood

Abigail Mingerink, Crete PRC

What is a woman? The answer to that question has been a recent topic of debate. Our culture of tolerance says that a woman is someone who says she is a woman. Stanford University defines *woman* as "a term used to describe someone who self-identifies as a woman or as feminine based on what is important to them."[1] The so-called LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) community has taken up the charge for "women's rights," challenging gender roles and preaching that womanhood is a social construct that needs to be molded to fit the new sexually liberating culture.

Our transgressive culture defines woman according to their self-identity, but what does God say? Genesis 2:18–25 recounts God's creation of the woman. God crafted Eve out of a rib of Adam, intricately creating her to suit and serve Adam, yet both also created in God's image (1:27). God gave her to Adam and he called her Woman because she was taken out of man (2:23). In naming her, Adam showed both his authority and union with Eve.

In this account and throughout Scripture we can see several things that are noteworthy to our distinguishing what a woman is. God's intricate forming of Eve out of the rib of Adam is different from the way that God created Adam out of the dust of the ground. This gives a glimpse into some of the differences in the very essence of what a woman is. In Genesis 2:22 the word translated as *made* is a different word than the word used for the creation of man in 1:26–27 and 2:7. It means "build" like in architecture, which distinguishes the detail and craft God put into making her.[2]

In the creation account we see that God did not create an Adam clone or another man to fellowship with Adam in the garden; nor was he content to let Adam be by himself. Instead, God created Eve as a helper, perfectly complementing Adam, to help him in his work in the garden. God created women physically different from men. He gave to woman the physical ability to bear and feed children. That does not mean that a woman who is barren is any less a woman than one who has children, but the reproductive organs capable of producing a child still are a distinguishing difference

1 "Woman," Educational Terminology Glossary, Stanford Medicine, accessed July 21,2025, at https://mededucation.stanford.edu/glossary/woman/#:~:text=%E2%80%93%20noun%20%E2%80%93%20A%20term%20used%20to,identity%2C%20and%2For%20physiology.

2 Joel R. Beeke et al,. "Genesis," The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible, Reformation Heritage Books, 2014.

between man and woman. He made women physically weaker to perfectly accompany the man as the provider and protector.

In addition to the physical differences, women were also created more emotional, compassionate, caring, and gentle. These differences are useful and helpful for raising children. The apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:7 speaks to this when he calls women the "weaker vessel." This calls to mind some of the physical, spiritual, and emotional differences of women as a perfect companion to man. Women are weaker, more fragile compared to men, like a beautiful vase as opposed to a sturdy, cast-iron cooking pot.

This is not because women are not as good as men; they are just suited for a different role. A fragile vase would not be very useful for cooking, just as a cooking pot would not make a very good centerpiece. In the same way, God in his wisdom created women and men to be different.

The Bible does not make women merely dainty and helpless wallflowers. In Proverbs 31:10–31, we find the well-known description of the virtuous woman. This woman is not helpless–she is busy. She is given as an example of a godly woman and how a godly woman acts and carries herself. She is trustworthy (v. 11), she does good to her husband and venerates him (vv. 12, 23) and works to serve the household (v. 13). She labors (vv. 13, 16) and is strong in those labors (v. 17), often doing hard work and many domestic duties to run her household well (vv. 15, 19, 22). A godly woman according to this text is charitable (v. 20), prepared (vv. 18, 21), clothed in strength and honor (v. 25), wise and kind (v. 26), not idle (v. 27), and a blessing to her children and husband (v. 28). Ultimately, she fears the Lord (v. 30) and produces these works as fruit (v. 31).

Today's culture is in glaring opposition to the virtuous woman. It says that women should not "belittle" themselves by serving others, particularly husband and children. Instead, women should be as successful as they can be, looking out for themselves, making sure that they do not have to depend on anyone. Women who work in the home and have "traditional gender roles" are often looked at as less than or not as important and even oppressed.

Today's transgressive culture is all about breaking the gender norms and stereotypes and challenging the very idea of womanhood. It focuses on self and making sure a woman feels "validated" and "authentic." Feminism has been shouting that women are no different than men; that anything a man can do, a woman can do just as well.

This kind of thinking makes way for transgender ideology because if men and women are equal, then men can become women and vice

versa. This leads to the extreme of some saying that men can be women as long as that is how they truly feel. Accepting this transgender ideology is becoming the norm. According to a PEW research poll conducted in 2024, 43 percent of adults polled say that society is not accepting enough of transgender men/women as opposed to 19 percent who said society is too accepting and 36 percent who say current acceptance in our culture is about right.[3]

This is in total opposition to God's word about womanhood. Instead of looking to validate feelings of self and others, we ought to be seeking God's will when it comes to gender, sex, and gender roles. Being a woman is not something that can be changed, and it is not about how one feels. Instead, it comes down to God's will in his creation of each individual. David acknowledges God's perfect creation of each of his people in Psalm 139 when he says in verses 14–16, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." This beautiful psalm shows that God perfectly crafts each part of his people and forms them individually according to his own good will.

Our God is a good, all-wise God who created two separate and distinct sexes, and only two. He makes no mistakes and he has a purpose for everything and everyone he creates. Instead of listening to what the culture has to say about womanhood, we do best to seek God's word on the matter. What a precious thing is a woman who fears the Lord, for "who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies" (Prov. 31:10).

3 Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Kim Parker, "Views of the impact of changing gender roles," *Pew Research Center*, October 17, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/10/17/views-of-the-impact-of-changing-gender-roles/.

PR100: A week to remember

Joshua Hoekstra

On Monday afternoon, the lawn buzzed with energy. As I looked at the gathering crowd, I sensed something I couldn't quite name. Old friends reunited after years apart. Families registered for the week ahead and gathered around the tour information tent with anticipation. Laughter rang out as children met and quickly bonded over games and candy at the snack tent.

I felt both excited and nervous. Years of planning had led to this. Would the week go well? Would there be problems? Would this event leave people feeling encouraged? Above all, would it glorify God? Amid all these thoughts, there was something more. Something sweet.

The theme of the Protestant Reformed denomination's one hundredth anniversary (PR100) celebration was grace. It was an obvious choice, yet one that could easily have been taken for granted. But God had prepared our churches to take this moment seriously, humbly, and with thankfulness.

Grace has always been the central doctrine in our small denomination. Through the years, its sovereign, particular, and unconditional character has been challenged and defended. In the past decade, we've learned something by experience: grace is given to those who don't deserve it. It is not earned by our effort, but it is enjoyed as we walk in the paths of righteousness.

At the PR100, people arrived with humility, thankfulness, and eager hearts. Through the speeches we learned how to "teach grace," "live grace," and "defend grace." But throughout the week, with humility at the forefront, we also discovered how to enjoy it in both the small and the big moments.

One of my favorite small moments came while giving golf cart rides. Who knew they could be so enjoyable? Simple conversations and

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classic small talk. "How are you doing?" "Where are you going?" "How's the week been?" "Who did you talk to?" "What do you think?" From the dorm rooms to the cafeteria, over to the chapel for devotions, and on to sectionals and activities, I heard from so many saints. Joy was evident. Thankfulness too. And all of it was directed to God.

One man told me, "I'm tired." He said that this simple admission brought joy. He had prayed to God, thanking him for the many activities and blessings that left him weary. Mothers told me their children were exhausted by the end of each day because there was so much for them to do.

The sectionals spurred talk of a teacher's college, denominational statistics, teaching, and even some energetic topics on the Revolutionary War. And then came the tours! On golf cart rides I heard stories of history, about a childhood name that was found still etched on a pew of old First Church, the moving experience of singing psalms in historic sanctuaries, and gratitude for Dr. Swieringa's speech, and others like it. Small moments. These small moments added up. With each ride, I caught a glimpse of how others were enjoying the week, and their joy became my own.

On Wednesday evening, after the third speech, while walking out to the parking lot we saw one of the big moments of God's grace towering above creation. A full rainbow stretched across the eastern sky. In God's perfect plan, he had written a message of his covenant promise to us in radiant color. It was a reminder that he never forsakes his people and that he is greater than our sin. We needed that comfort.

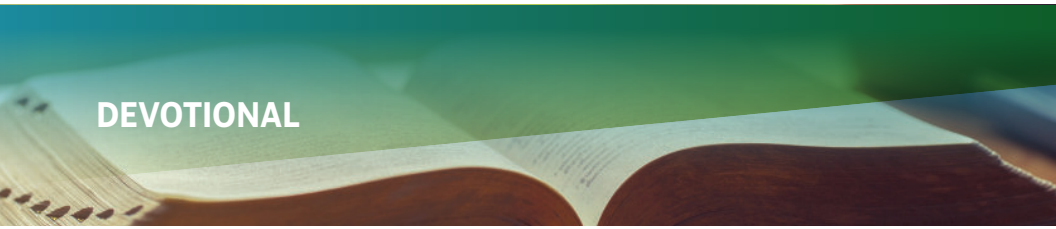
The week culminated in two big moments. Thursday overflowed with cotton candy lines and rides of every kind. Some of the elderly even braved the rope swings. Ministers raced each other down the giant slide, and one elderly saint, Ray Ezinga, joined in. Nothing slows down a cowboy, not even old age.

But the pinnacle of the week came that evening in DeVos Performance Hall. There, 2,500 saints gathered for a singspiration, lifting voices together in thanksgiving and praise. Words cannot capture the beauty of that night.

The concluding comments that night urged us to stay focused on God's grace. The message reflected on the past hundred years but also set a path forward. God's grace, in all its beauty, in the way he has unfolded it to our small denomination, is a message we must carry into the future.

As the final notes faded and four hundred choir members filed off stage, I sat in the orchestra row and realized what made the week so sweet. The thing I could sense but could not name on Monday was now clear to me. It was covenant

communion. Experienced already on Monday as we gathered on the lawn, then in every speech, every meal, every devotional, every sectional, every tour, every activity, and every golf cart ride. Sweet, covenant communion. A blessing we will cherish all our days.



Acts 1–10: The beginnings of the New Testament church

Rebekah Buiter

The book of Acts follows the words of Mark 16:15–16, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." These words were Christ's commission to the church to spread the gospel over the entire earth. The book of Acts is a record of the apostles' obedience to Christ's command as they go out and begin to spread the gospel and establish churches in Asia Minor.

The content of the sermons preached in Acts 2–7 contains three main points. First, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah. "For David speaketh concerning him…Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne…This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:25–32).

Second, Jesus was crucified and we are personally responsible for killing him. "But ye denied the Holy One and the Just…and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath

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raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses" (Acts 3:14–15).

Third, through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ there is salvation. "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38–39).

This preaching has a twofold effect. The preaching of God's word is powerful to accomplish God's will in the salvation of his people and the condemnation of the wicked. "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11).

Positively, the preaching of the gospel works faith in the hearts of God's people. In Acts 2, after Peter preached his sermon, three thousand people repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus. In chapter 4, after Peter healed the lame man and preached in the temple, the church grew to five thousand men.

Negatively, this preaching stirs up active opposition. Jesus warned his disciples in John 15:18–21 that the world would hate them and persecute them. The wicked are not passive dissenters when they hear the gospel preached. Instead, as the book of Acts shows, they desire to kill those who preach Christ crucified and risen again. The rulers of the Jews were "grieved" (Acts 4:2), then they were "filled with indignation" (5:17), and not much later they "took counsel to slay them" (v. 33). After hearing Stephen's sermon in chapter 7, they took up stones and killed him. This progression of events shows us that the wicked's hatred of the gospel leads to the killing of God's people.

In the face of this persecution, God does not leave his people helpless. Jesus promised his disciples that he would send the Comforter. Pentecost was the outpouring of this Comforter, the Holy Spirit. He filled the apostles with boldness when they faced the Sadducees in Acts 4:13. After the apostles were let go (chapter 4), they returned to their company and the believers prayed for them: "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word" (v. 29). After this prayer, the ground shook and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

This prayer is one that all of us should be praying for our own ministers. The world is growing increasingly hostile toward Christians. Already our ministers face cultural and societal pressures to lessen the offense of the gospel, but soon they will face the threat

of imprisonment for preaching the whole counsel of God. We must pray that the Holy Spirit will give them boldness, and that they will not fear the threatening of wicked rulers to stop preaching the pure gospel of Jesus Christ.

May this month's devotional impress upon you the words of Jesus: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24).

Date	Read	Study	Psalter
Oct. 8	Acts 1:1–5	What was Jesus busy doing between his resurrection and ascension?	183
Oct. 9	Acts 1:6–11	What was wrong with the disciples' question, and how does Jesus address it?	200
Oct. 10	Acts 1:12–20	What is significant about the inclusion of Jesus' brethren in the list of disciples in the upper room?	370
Oct. 11	Acts 1:21–26	What was the criteria Judas' replacement had to meet, and what was the purpose of apostleship?	145 v. 6
Oct. 12	Acts 2:1–4	What were the three signs of the Holy Spirit being poured out? How do the signs correlate with the work of the Holy Spirit?	141
Oct. 13	Acts 2:5–13	What do these verses teach about the miracle of speaking in tongues (over against the charismatic teaching)?	258
Oct. 14	Acts 2:14–21	Which prophet foretold the outpouring of the Holy Spirit?	287
Oct. 15	Acts 2:22–24	How was Jesus approved of God?	424
Oct. 16	Acts 2:25–28	How is Jesus' resurrection proof that he is the Messiah?	29
Oct. 17	Acts 2:29–36	Why is it important that Peter show from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Messiah?	243 vv. 1–2, 5–6, 9–15
Oct. 18	Acts 2:37–47	What was the response from the Jews whom Peter preached to?	51
Oct. 19	Acts 3:1–11	What material things did the lame man beg for everyday and what did he end up getting at the hand of Peter and John? What was his resulting spiritual condition?	426

Oct. 20	Acts 3:12–18	What made the lame man strong?	277 vv. 1–4
Oct. 21	Acts 3:19–26	Why is the gospel brought to the Jews first?	137
Oct. 22	Acts 4:1–12	Why does Peter continue to accuse the Jews of killing Jesus?	110
Oct. 23	Acts 4:13–22	What is Peter's response to being told not to preach or do miracles in Jesus' name?	33 vv. 1–2
Oct. 24	Acts 4:23–37	What did the believers pray for? Do you pray this prayer for your ministers?	326
Oct. 25	Acts 5:1–11	How are we also prone to making a show of charity for recognition in the church?	175
Oct. 26	Acts 5:12–28	What was the main reason the rulers of the Jews did not want the apostles to preach in Jesus' name?	157
Oct. 27	Acts 5:29–42	What was the apostles' response to persecution?	317
Oct. 28	Acts 6:1–8	What problem was brought to the apostles, and what was their solution? Were women chosen?	113 v. 1
Oct. 29	Acts 6:9–15	Who stirred up the people against Stephen?	161
Oct. 30	Acts 7:1–36	Why is the Old Testament so important to New Testament believers?	325 vv. 1, 3
Oct. 31	Acts 7:37–60	What did Stephen say that incited the rulers to stone him?	303
Nov. 1	Acts 8:1–8	What did God use to spread the gospel outside of Jerusalem?	257 vv. 1, 3, 4
Nov. 2	Acts 8:9–25	Why don't the gospel and money go together?	40 vv. 1, 4
Nov. 3	Acts 8:26–40	How do these verses show that preaching is necessary for salvation?	323 v. 1
Nov. 4	Acts 9:1–22	Why does Jesus choose a man who breathed "threatenings and slaughter" (v. 1) against the believers?	83
Nov. 5	Acts 9:23–43	How do the disciples receive Saul? How do the Jews and Grecians receive him?	188
Nov. 6	Acts 10:1–23	How does God prepare Peter to preach to the Gentiles?	238
Nov. 7	Acts 10:24–48	Who can receive remission of sins?	166

Philistines: People of the sea

Dr. Brendan Looyenga

Of all the enemies of Israel mentioned in Scripture, none feature more prominently than the Philistines. While they are most visible during the period of the late judges and early kings, the Philistines were present in the land of Canaan from the time of the patriarchs all the way to the Babylonian captivity—a span of about 1500 years! But despite their familiarity, some things about these people might come as a surprise. This month we'll take a look at the unexpected origins of the Philistines and how this explains several unusual details mentioned in the Bible.

One of the first things to know about the Philistines is that they were always a people of mixed ancestry rather than a single tribe or united nation. In the Bible their identity is tied more to the geographic region of southwest Canaan than to descent from a single ethnic group. This becomes more obvious by looking at the differences in how the Philistines are described during different biblical eras.

The "early Philistines" mentioned in the book of Genesis were present in the land when Abraham arrived around 1950 BC. The name of their "king," Abimelech, is distinctly Canaanite in origin, as was their city-dwelling way of life (Gen. 26:1–8).[1] Living among them was a tribe of unusually tall people called the Avims, who were apparently related to the other "giants" living in southern Canaan (Deut. 2:20–23). It is probably from this tribe that Goliath of Gath was descended, though he was born hundreds of years later.

In addition to the giants and city-dwelling Canaanites were Amorites who had migrated south

1 Christopher Eames, "Are 'Philistines' During Abraham's Time Evidence Against Bible Historicity?" Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archeology, February 24, 2022, https://armstronginstitute.org/663-are-philistines-during-abrahams-time-evidence-against-bible-historicity.

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from Syria and took with them their worship of the idol god Dagon.[2] Amorites were a semi-nomadic people who lived a pastoral lifestyle raising animals outside cities. What made all these people "Philistine" was not hereditary descent from a single tribe or ethnic group, but their unique, blended culture in the southwestern tip of Canaan.

The Philistine people described in Genesis, however, were not the same people that Israel encountered during their conquest of Canaan. During the time of the judges (ca. 1450–1100 BC), successive waves of "Sea People" from islands far to the west were making their way around the Mediterranean in search of a new homeland. Though it's not clear what caused this migration, their movement from west to east resulted in a wave of societal collapse that led to the downfall of several great Bronze Age civilizations like the Hittites, whose coastal cities were sacked and burned to the ground.

The climax of the Bronze Age Collapse was a great battle between a confederation of Sea Peoples and the army of Pharaoh Ramesses III in the Nile delta around 1177 BC. Although Pharaoh's army prevailed in keeping the invaders out of Egypt, some of them settled just up the coastline in Philistia. These "later Philistines" were an aggressive, warlike people who would cause problems for Israel over many generations. They brought with them the ability to work with iron, giving them a technological advantage over Israel during the time of the judges (1 Sam. 13:19–23). From this period onward the Mediterranean world transitioned from the Bronze Age into the Iron Age.

The culture of the Sea People who settled in the land of Philistia around 1100 BC was different from that of the Canaanites. They made different pottery, ate different foods, wore different clothes, and used a type of armor unlike that of the various Canaanite tribes (1 Sam. 17:4–7). And although they were pagan polytheists, they worshiped different gods, specifically those of the Greek pantheon like Zeus. All these differences discovered by archaeological studies of the early Mediterranean Iron Age are consistent with an origin of the later Philistines in the Greek islands far to the west, not in Canaan itself.[3]

The Bible is even more specific. Several times it refers to a place called *Caphtor* and tells us that people from this location were responsible for displacing the former inhabitants of Philistia (Deut. 2:23; Jer. 47:4; Amos 9:7). Other ancient references to this place inform us that Caphtor was another name for the island of Crete, which at this point in history was part of

2 "Dagon," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed August 9, 2025, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/dagon.

3 Armstrong Institute Staff, "Israel's Philistine Foes," *Let the Stones Speak*, vol 3(1), 61–63.

the Mycenaean civilization based in southern Greece. Though the later Philistines were culturally "Greek," they were actually from Crete.

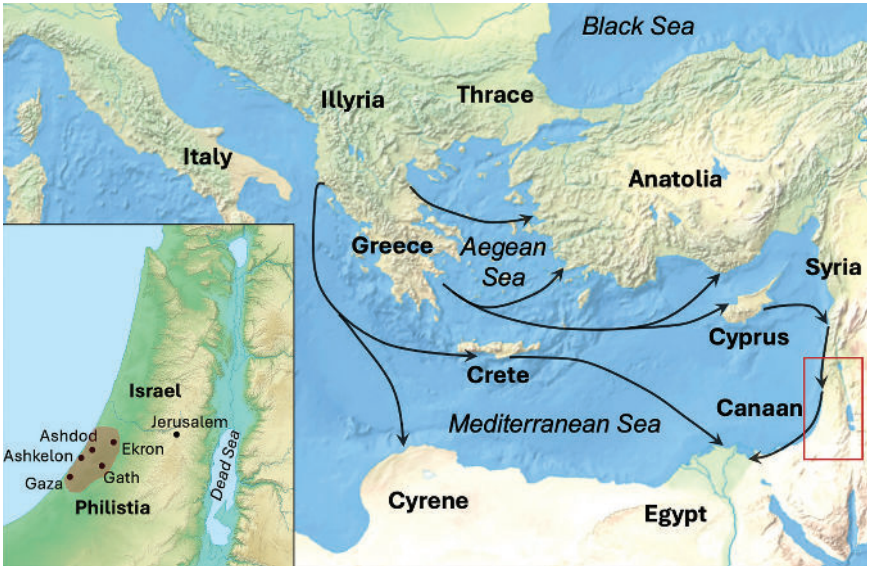
The names of two specific Philistine tribes mentioned in the Bible further reinforce the identity of these people. These tribes are the Cherethites and Pelethites, who remarkably became the elite bodyguard for David and Solomon (2 Sam. 8:18; 1 Kings 1:38). The name *Cherethite* is an English transliteration of the Hebrew word for a person from Crete (1 Sam. 30:14), while the *Pelethites* are known from Egyptian texts as the Peleset, a tribe of Sea People who were defeated by Ramesses III.[4] Exactly how these Philistine tribes became part of the Israelite military is unclear, but it seems that the time David spent in Philistia while fleeing from Saul allowed him to gain their permanent loyalty and service. Whether they were also Old Testament converts to the worship of Jehovah isn't noted in Scripture.

We do know, however, that most of the Philistine people were pagan and adopted Dagon—the local Amorite deity—as their chief god (Judges 16:23; 1 Sam. 5:2–7). This might seem odd to us, but when two polytheistic cultures came into contact it was common for them to adopt a blended religion based on the similarities between their gods. We call this process *syncretism* and can find examples of it all over the ancient world. Similarities between Zeus and Dagon, who both functioned as "father-gods" within their respective pantheons, may explain why the Philistines chose him rather than Baal or Ashtaroth. For pagans, honoring a local god was always the safest option.

While many connections between the Philistines and Mycenean Greeks were noted in this article, we close with one lasting aspect of their common heritage—a shared love for seafaring. As people of the sea, the Greeks were known for voyaging far and wide, establishing trading colonies wherever they went. When Greek explorers from the classical times of Athens and Sparta rediscovered the port cities of Ashkelon and Gaza, they called the region *Palestine*—a Greek transliteration of the name Philistine. This name was later used by the Romans and has stuck to this day.

There is a bit of irony in knowing this history. Even today there is an ongoing war between Israel and the Palestinians. And while these aren't the same people that David fought (the Babylonian captivity and later invasion of Muslim Arabs changed the ethnic makeup of the region), the geographic outline of the struggle is much the same. If you have time, take a look at the region of Israel called the Gaza Strip. It sits on exactly the same soil as ancient Philistia!

4 Christopher Eames, "Are 'Philistines' During Israel's Time Evidence."



The Philistine Sea People

Both the Bible and modern archaeology clearly demonstrate that the Philistine enemies of Israel were part of the broader invasion of "Sea People" at the end of the Bronze Age. For unknown reasons, a wave of invaders from the Greek islands—including Crete—migrated eastward around the Mediterranean all the way to Egypt. After being defeated by Pharaoh Ramesses III in 1177 BC, some of them settled in southwest Canaan. Their primary region of power (see inset) was a strip of coastal plain, which included five major cities that functioned somewhat like the later Greek city-states.[5]

5 Map adapted from Eric Gaba, *Wikimedia Commons*, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0.

Church news

Ruth Baas

Baptisms

Isaiah, son of Curtis & Esther Lehnert Byron Center, MI

Kade Joseph, son of Ian & Elena Wierenga Lacombe, CAN

Olivia Ruth, daughter of Adrian & Elisabeth Gaastra Redlands, CA

Audrey Rose, daughter of Jason & Emily VanTil Southwest, MI

Autumn Grace, daughter of Tyler & Lisa Koole Southwest, MI

Adeline Elaine, daughter of Keagan & Olivia Flikkema Unity, MI

Photo: *Loveland PRC*

Confessions of faith

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Leah Zylstra Lacombe, CAN

Willem Mowery Loveland, CO

Kayla Howerzyl Redlands, CA

Adam Potjer Southwest, MI

Trenton Hanamaayer Trinity, MI

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