Strangers and Sojourners: Chastened

The last several editorials have been capably written by Ryan Kregel, managing editor of Beacon Lights. Now it is again my turn to write them. Our regular readers will recall that prior to Ryan’s articles, I was writing a series of articles under the title of Strangers and Sojourners. In it I began to explore various aspects of our lives as we walk our pilgrim’s way toward our eternal inheritance. I now intend to take up this subject again.

One aspect of being strangers and sojourners is what the Bible calls chastisement. As Reformed, Bible-believing, Christian young people, we need to know what this means.

The reason is that we all experience it to one degree or another and in one way or another. The reason is also that to one degree or another, chastening has for us a negative connotation. It’s a problem for all of us. It is something we don’t like. And we don’t like it because it is contrary to our nature. We like our lives to go pleasantly and smoothly. Anything that goes contrary to the normal flow of our lives or is disruptive in any way is disagreeable to us.

In the grand scheme of things, some problems may be relatively minor, although they may seem at the moment to be important. Did you flunk a test in a difficult course—a test you needed to pass? Did you apply for a job, but someone else got it? Did you apply to a college but get turned down? You are
certainly disappointed by such negative outcomes, but I think you will agree that they are not the end of the world.

More significantly, are you seriously ill? Have you been injured? Have you lost a loved one? Are you being seriously tempted, perhaps by alcohol, drugs, or forbidden sex? Have you had a falling out with your best friend? Are you the object of bullying and mockery, so that your life is miserable? Examples abound—insert your own into this list.

How are we to understand what we regard as these problems? To use the scriptural analogy of strangers and sojourners, these issues are speed bumps and potholes on the road of life. Our lives are sometimes difficult, or at least harder than we would like them to be. The writer to the Hebrews knows us well when he says, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous” (Heb. 12:11). We would prefer that everything in our lives be enjoyable and easy—when it is not.

Let’s keep this in perspective, however. We can do this when we remember the ultimate example of the chastisement of Job. Think of what happened to this God-fearing man. In one day, under the hand and control of God, he lost everything that he had on this earth: all ten of his children, all of their houses, all of his servants, and all of his many animals (which were a measurement of wealth in those days). In addition, he lost his health, being covered with boils. His closest three alleged friends accused him of vague but serious sins that they asserted were the cause of his afflictions. All that remained to Job was his wife, and she proved to be a harridan who advised him to curse God and die. And you think you have problems?

All of this can be summarized by the term chastisement and its related terms: chastening, chastise, chas ten. These words used in scripture are variously translated as correct, rebuke, and punish. Sometimes it has the idea of restraining, so that chastisement holds us back from doing something wrong. It is trouble, pain, problems, difficulty, grief, sorrow, and above all, punishment.

We are all familiar with the idea expressed by these terms. When you were a child, you received a spanking from your father for misbehaving. His intent was to reinforce his teaching and rebuke of you by causing you some pain so that you would not do again whatever it was that you did. Now that you are older, your parents likely no longer paddle your behind. Rather, they correct you by grounding you or perhaps by taking away your driving privileges.

Yet there is more to the idea of chastising than rebuke or punishment. Both the Old and New Testaments connect chastisement with training, teaching, and instruction. In fact, a number of times the same word is used for both ideas. Deuteronomy 8:5 says, “Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the L ORD thy God chasteneth thee.” Chasten here is literally “instruct.” 1 Corinthians 11:32 reads: “But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” The word for chastening used here means “to train” or “to instruct.” Perhaps the clearest connection between the two ideas is found in Psalm 94:12: “Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O L ORD, and teachest him out of thy law.”

Especially 1 Corinthians 11:32 gives us an insight as to the reason God chastens us. Why are we chastened (instructed)? “That we should not be condemned with the world.” The meaning is that if God does not chasten us when we stray from the narrow path on which we must walk as strangers and sojourners, we will follow the broad way on which the wicked world travels, the result of which is eternal condemnation.

Thus chastening is for our good. The Lord in his wisdom chastens us because he loves us, according to Hebrews 12:6: “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” As we walk our pilgrim path, he does not want us to deviate from it, but to remain on it: stay, not stray. This means that our being chastened is not an accident, but is the working and guidance of God’s providence. Very practically this also means that if the Lord does not chasten us, this is a sign that we are like the wicked world, whom he does not chasten. Then we are truly in spiritual trouble. Conversely, that God chastens us is proof to us that we are his children, for he chastens only those whom he loves.

It is worth noting here the difference between chastisement and punishment. They are not the same. The means that God uses for both punishment and chastisement may be the same, but in each case his attitude and purpose are different. God’s attitude in chastening is his love: he uses adversity out of his love and out of the motive of strengthening our faith. His purpose is teaching us to walk on the path.
of righteousness, and his purpose is our salvation. The word *chastisement* (instruction) is and may be properly used concerning his people. In contrast, God’s punishment is rooted in his hatred of sin and of evildoers. His purpose is to put them on the slippery slope that leads to eternal destruction (Ps. 73).

This distinction implies the truth of the antithesis. By means of chastisement God shows his love toward his people in keeping them on the narrow path that leads through the gate that opens into eternal life. On the contrary, by means of punishment, in his hatred he sends the wicked through the wide gate that leads to destruction.

What must be our attitude toward God’s instruction of us?

According to our sinful natures, our instant and automatic response to chastening is rebellion and resentment. The first thing we do is to have a pity party. It is so easy to ask, “Why me? What did I do to deserve my problems and afflictions?

This may not be our reaction. Rather, our reaction must be the same as God’s. And God’s reply to this rebellious questioning is, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Rev. 3:19). Stronger still are God’s words in Proverbs 3:11 and Job 5:17, both of which are quoted in Hebrews 12:5: “Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.” With this answer we must rest, whether or not we understand God’s way with us.

This does not mean, however, that we may not ask God to take away our chastisement. In both Psalm 6:1 and Psalm 38:1 we read the identical words: “O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath; neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.” The psalmist can say this because he has the assurance that by way of promise Christ has taken away God’s hot displeasure with us because of our sins. On the basis of his example we may ask God to remove our chastisement if it is his will to do so. But if this is not his will, we may be assured that he will give us the grace necessary to receive and endure his instruction.

In conclusion, when we pray to God for the removal of his chastisement, we must bear in mind what Professor Herman Hanko writes in *When You Pray*: “Although we must always be careful in our prayers to pray according to the will of God, carefulness is especially necessary when the Lord chastises us. It is possible, when chastised, to be resentful and rebellious, unwilling to submit to God’s will, determined to escape his chastening hand in whatsoever way we are able. At least our first reaction to chastisement is almost always such rebellion. And it is a temptation against which we fight as long as God is not pleased to remove his chastening hand” (93).

### Christian Living

**Abraham Kuyper**

### Implications of Public Confession

**X
The Bud That Bloomed**

“Justified freely.”
Romans 3:24

Finally the moment came in which you could make your confession. The moment came in which you could confess before God and his holy angels, before men, and before Satan, that you had turned to Jesus and that you now acknowledge that he is the Son of the living God. In a sense you could have made that confession even if there had been no church. You can testify of the hope that is in you and you can plead for the holy cause of your Lord and King at any time and place in which those with whom you associate are willing to listen. In fact, readier courage and more fervent zeal are needed in order to testify boldly and heroically for Jesus in the shop, in the office, in the journal, at school, or among your associates, than is needed to confess your Mediator in the midst of God’s people at church.
Your public confession in church differs from that in your daily experience. It cannot be said of your confession in the church that it represents an act of heroic courage. Everyone in church expects to see you rise with the other catechumens who desire the holy supper. All expect to hear you answer affirmatively to the questions that are directed to you. Your action before the congregation is not really a confession in the usual sense. It represents a joining of yourself with those who already confess. Is that not what the congregation of the Lord really represents? It is a group of confessors together with the children they hope to educate to a confession with them and to a confession after them. The congregation is a host of champions for Jesus, but a host whose ranks are always being depleted by death or delinquency, and to which new recruits must constantly be added. The congregation is like a plant. Some of the flowers of a plant are in full blossom; others are still enfolded in buds. When the blossoms wither and fall away, the buds burst into bloom in their stead. The buds belonged to the plant all the while, but they were not yet blooming. The baptized child is analogous to such a bud: it already belonged to the congregation, for it had been baptized. The bud bloomed. The baptized child made his confession.

The public confession before the congregation is less an act of heroic courage than a joining oneself with those whose duty it is to confess Jesus. It is that, and a promise on your part to confess him always, and always with equal loyalty and trust.

Whoever enlists for services in the army of a king must swear an oath that binds him and makes loyalty obligatory. True, it requires courage to take that oath, for although it is made in peace, it must be kept in battle and sometimes at the sacrifice of life. Yet the moment the oath is taken provides no opportunity for one to display one’s courage. It means that on some other day—the morrow, perhaps—one must rush to the king’s defense when one hears the bugle call or sees the banner wave. Then one must rally to the defense with the others, and in perfect obedience to one’s oath, must be willing to sacrifice life and limb for the king.

Your public confession is analogous to that. It represents the occasion on which you swear allegiance to your king, the day on which you enlist for service under his banner, the moment in which you arm yourself with his holy armor. When you make your confession, you swear to be always loyal to him who called you.

In one sense therefore it is a public confession, for by it you assure your fellow believers that yours is the same faith as is theirs. But more particularly it represents a promise to confess throughout your life. It is in no sense a promise that has once and for all been completed. Unfortunately it has been that for too many. With a sigh of relief, these exclaimed after their public confession: “There! Now I have done with it.” But theirs was a false confession. The true confessor, on the contrary, exclaims: “There! Now I may begin.” He means that now he may begin to defend Jesus and may begin to put his fullest and best efforts unstintingly into the master’s service.

A confession such as that offsets the pride that is very imminent at such a time. Whoever supposes he has already attained exalts himself, but he who knows he has taken only the first step feels rather tremulous. It is the tremulous attitude of the soul that best becomes a young confessor. That does not mean that, half-dazed by dread at the immensity of his obligation, he ought to feel inclined to retreat from it. There is no need for remorseful tears at confession, and although it would be an untoward symptom not to be intensely stirred by the experience, yet there ought not to be an emotional display. We read of Jesus that he was often touched by experiences, but only once do we read of him that he wept. By a tremulous attitude of the soul, then, a flagrant emotional display is not meant. By it is meant the quiet, holy tremulousness that is engendered by one’s having a low opinion of himself and a high opinion of the mercy of God. It is engendered by the still, small voice that whispers to the soul, “I am not worthy to be called thy child. Who am I, Lord, that thou art willing so to anoint my soul with thy Holy Spirit? Yea, Lord, I am less than all these spiritual benefits that thou in thy mercy dost manifest to me.”

How different is that desirable attitude from the haughtiness that says, “Others oppose the Christ, but I do not. I will rally to Jesus’ defense, and so restore honor to his cause.” As though Jesus needed any man for that—Jesus, to whom is given all power in heaven and on earth!

Believe it wholly, confess it continually, and let it be your comfort on your deathbed that in yourself you are leprous and wanting altogether, but that in Christ you are justified before God and freed from all sin. In Christ you are so free that if you were to die in this moment, you would be found in eternity
to have an immaculate purity like that of the angels. Satan could find no cause for charging uncleanness against you. You are justified and are justified freely.

Bring that confession to the congregation of believers, and begin to fight one identical warfare with them. They too have nothing of which to boast in themselves. Yes, they are being satisfied with a heavenly nourishment, but it is a milk and wine that is given them without money and without price. They too are justified, and they too are justified freely. Now that you come to make your confession, they praise God. They praise God because another bud has blossomed, because another baptized child has indeed found Jesus to be a Savior, and has therefore desired to remember Jesus’ death. None can boast of anything. All are freely justified. God’s is all the praise and honor.

Editor’s Note
Mark H. Hoeksema

Beginning with this April issue, Beacon Lights presents a series of eight articles on the subject of how young people can serve in the church. We thank Rev. M. DeVries for his introductory article, which appears in this issue. It is our hope and prayer that these articles, written by various people, will be helpful to our young people as they seek ways to benefit the church. Beacon Lights urges our young people not to regard these articles merely as pleasant theory, but to put into practice the many concrete suggestions found in these articles. Young people, you have many talents and abilities, and it behooves you to use them for the good of the church and for God’s glory.

Our Goodly Heritage
Mark H. Hoeksema

Interview with Raymond Bruinsma
Part 2

[At this point I resume the previous discussion].

MHH: You’ve started to answer one of the questions that I was going to ask. That centers on the antithesis. You yourself used that word a few moments ago. Let me break my question up into two parts. It’s been said that the doctrine of the antithesis is not being sharply preached today as it used to be preached. Would you agree or disagree with that statement?

RB: Well, I don’t know. I can’t say that that’s not being preached. It’s approached from a little different angle, because when the minister brings to us the dos and don’ts of the scripture, that’s the antithetical walk that we have to walk. Our ministers have been hitting on these points, but the people aren’t catching it. Our older pastors used to be very sharp on that. That you don’t have today with the younger pastors. But that they don’t preach antithetically, no, I wouldn’t say that that is true.

MHH: The second part of my question is: Do you feel then, based on some of the comments you’ve already made, that people in general, and perhaps specifically young people, are not living the antithesis?

RB: That’s my big concern. They’re not living the antithesis.

MHH: And do you see, for lack of a better word, a development in that over your lifetime? In other words, if you compare today with yesterday, do we have a bigger problem today than we had yesterday? Would you agree with that?

RB: Well, it’s not an easy question to answer. I do see that it’s not as evident as it was a few years back, because of the fact there’s some people are hankering after something to do. We’ve always had our young people’s societies and things of that nature. But it just doesn’t seem like the young people today are interested in things. Maybe we’ve got to inform our pastors that they’ve got to come out and use that antithetical word more often. They preach antithetically, but it’s probably not hitting everybody as it would somebody who understands what the antithetical walk should be.

MHH: The concept should be given a name.
RB: I think it should be given a name. And that’s one thing I will say: our younger preachers are not bringing that out.

That’s why a minister has to be observant and know what his congregation needs. And then they have to start driving that home. I think that our younger preachers should drive that home more—that antithetical walk that’s required of the child of God. We all should know it, but the devil is there to take it away from us if we have it.

MHH: He attacks hardest where the antithesis is sharpest, or at least where it ought to be.

RB: Where it ought to be, right. That’s why I say, let our young ministers get a little sharper on that. I would think that the seminary drives that home to these young men. The antithesis was something we heard all the time. I think these people that don’t hear it, they don’t know what it is. It’s a big word, antithetical. Then you have to walk an antithetical life. But we’re happy in the PR Church, I tell you. Where would you go if you didn’t have the PR church?

MHH: Good question.

RB: People who have gone back to the Christian Reformed Church must be vexing their righteous soul to stay there. How could they do that? It’s not that we don’t have faults and weaknesses. Our churches have faults and weaknesses, too. Absolutely. We’re only human. But where are you going to go to find the truth of the word of God faithfully expounded from Sabbath to Sabbath—that your minister exegetes the scriptures? You can’t find that any more.

When Richard Poortinga’s [a member of the PR churches] brother died, he told his pastor, “I want no eulogies.” That poor preacher didn’t know what to say. Dick said to me, “That preacher didn’t know what to say because he couldn’t give this eulogy of what a good man he was and this and that.” Well, the way the tree falls, that’s the way it lies, right? There’s no changing that. I mean, if that was a child of God, he reaps his reward because he laid down his life here to attain unto the heavenly glory God has prepared for us.

I don’t say there’s anything wrong with mentioning a person. But all you hear is eulogy, eulogy. They don’t take the word and expound it to give comfort to the living. And the dead person doesn’t hear a thing [laughter]. [Here follows a conversation regarding the history of a Christian school controversy involving the congregations of South Holland and Oak Lawn, which resulted in the dissolution of the Oak Lawn congregation. While it is tempting to include Ray’s comments here, he mentions a number of people, at least one of whom is still living, in a less than complimentary manner. It is better not to include this material. I pick up the thread of the discussion at the end of Ray’s narrative.]

RB: South Holland school continued. Rev. [John] Heys was our pastor at that time, and he was kind enough to administer for us a short time, until we could get a new administrator. Mrs. Heys helped out at school at that time because we were missing a teacher too. So, they helped us through that.

MHH: So you must have had some Rocky times.

RB: Oh, we had rocky times here in South Holland, you bet! They were rocky times. That was rotten business when your father [Homer C. Hoeksema] was here and fighting that whole court action [regarding the right to possession of the church property]. I remember your father coming to us. He came in ’54 [it was 1955]. That was right after ’53 took place. He had been out in Doon, wasn’t it?

MHH: Right.

RB: Came from Doon. Came to South Holland. And he got right into the mess when the schismatics were trying to take away the property of South Holland. They claimed they were the faithful Protestant Reformed church. How they ever could say that, I can never understand, because they were contrary to Protestant Reformed teachings.

MHH: But that was the issue, too, wasn’t it?

RB: Oh, it sure was. Aw, look at the issue. You’d see that whole business with DeWolf, First Church, and his heretical statements.

MHH: But knowing that or asserting that is different from being able to prove it. And that’s what they had to do in the court trial.

RB: That’s right.

MHH: The question, in my understanding, was, which group is the true continuation of the Protestant Reformed churches? That was the issue at hand, correct?

RB: That’s right.

MHH: And along with that obviously went the property, because whoever was judged to be the continuation would be awarded the property.

RB: Yes. I have some papers I could show you after
we’re finished with this interview. It was the court’s decision that the property belonged to South Holland PR Church, and not to the schismatics. But they were out after the whole business. On top of that, I had my father-in-law living here, and he was on the opposite side. “Oh,” he said, “you’re following a man.” “I thank God,” I said, “that God gave to us the (late) Rev. Herman Hoeksema to guide and direct us into the truth of his word.” I said, “I’m not following him, but I’m following Christ. But I thank God for Rev. Hoeksema, because he led us into the truth.” I said, “This is exactly what’s going to happen to your group right now. They’re going to lead you right back into the Christian Reformed Church.” “Oh, no!” he said. “That’ll never happen.” It did. It’s a sad history.

MHH: Division within your own family.

RB: Yes, division in my own family. Rev. [Bernard] Kok would come here while my father-in-law was in the garage. He’d come to the front door and my wife said, “He’s in the back yard.” She didn’t invite him in. She said, “He’s in the back yard.”

TB: That’s terrible.

RB: That was pathetic. This man could have those crocodile tears on the pulpit; I remember that as a kid. He was a good preacher. No qualms about that. He was very emotional.

MHH: That court battle went on for quite some time, didn’t it?

RB: It did, because I think your father had to make a couple [more than a couple] trips back here after he left here.

MHH: He did.

RB: In ’59.

MHH: That’s true.

RB: That went on for quite awhile. It was seesawing back and forth, but the judges finally saw it all, and we were awarded the property. It’s sad when you have to have difficulties like that in the church. But God uses it all to strengthen the church. Sometimes when things go smooth and everything seems to be going so nice, people become a little indifferent and say, “Hey, we’ve got peace and quiet,” and then they forget about what we stand for.

MHH: Do you have other memories of the history of the PR church? We have talked about several of them so far. Is there any other event or any other situation that perhaps stands out in your mind?

RB: One thing that stands out in my mind, because I was only a young boy (nine years old), is that my parents left the CRC in Highland, Indiana. My father went to the consistory and there was a Dr. VanDyke who was the minister there at the First Christian Reformed Church of Highland. He said, “Lou, what church are you going to?” He said, “I’m going to the PR church.” “Oh,” he said, “well, I can send you away with my blessing.” (chuckle) I thought that was quite a statement. But this was one of the old-time preachers. He was in the CR church, but I don’t think he went along with that common grace theory. He sent us away with his blessing, and I thought that was a great thing.

MHH: Speaks well of the church at least from a certain point of view.

RB: A certain point of view, right. [Here follows a lengthy discussion that involves numerous people, most of whom are still living. Although a part of history, this material is not beneficial to the discussion and I have redacted it]

[Here follows an addendum to the interview. This subject came up in informal conversation, and I am now going to record it.]

MHH: Mr. Bruinsma, even though I’ve known you most of my life, I am not aware of what you did for a living, where you worked. I would like to know about that, if you’d be willing to tell me.

RB: OK, I’ll tell you. I worked at Acme Steel for twenty years as a machine operator, machining of rolls of steel they used in the hot mills.

I was always having a problem because I hired into this company before they went union. So the company protected us and said our non-union members do not have to join when they finally went unionized.

But that wasn’t the end of my problems. I did not join the union, but I was confronted every time they had the picket line out there. I would confront these picketers and they’d want me to sign on the dotted line [to join the union]. They said, “Oh, just your signature and you won’t have to do any picket-duty or won’t have to come to the meetings. You won’t have to do anything.” I said, “No. That doesn’t make any difference to me. I cannot join your organization because it’s an organization of the world. I serve Christ. My conscience wouldn’t be free to be joined with a worldly organization such as yours.” I said to them, “What do you fellows do when you’re in a
picket line like this? Some poor soul comes through there and you bash him over the head with a bat because he’s crossing your picket line, because he wants to get in and work. No way will I join up with your union.” “Well,” they said, “you blankety-blank worker, you just go on in. But what are you going to do when this is a union, a closed shop?” I said, “When this is a closed shop, management tells me I have to join the union or get out, I’ll walk right through this gate and walk out. But I still have the freedom to work here because I’ve received this job from God himself. This just didn’t fall out of the air. God led me to this job as my means of livelihood, and I thank him for it. If there’s any thanks left, I would give that to management. That’s where my paycheck is coming from. As far as you fellas are concerned, I have no obligation to you whatsoever.”

They said, “Well, look at that family.” (Because Tena would bring me to work with all five of the children) They said, “You have the union to thank that you can support that family of five children.” I said, “No, you got that all wrong, too. There again, I’ve received those children from God himself, and he’s given me this as my means of livelihood to support this family. So all the thanks goes to my heavenly Father. He is whom I serve, and I have nothing to do with the union.”

That went on for all the twenty years that I worked there. Finally one fellow said to me, “Ray, I want to warn you, because they’re talking about boycotting you somehow or other to get you to join the union or get you out of here.”

That’s when Tena started taking the car and bringing me with the children. When I was on the second shift, she would come at eleven o’clock at night with all five of the children in the car to pick me up. She’d get them out of bed, put them in the car (the children even remember that to this day) to pick me up. Finally we were working only three and four days a week, so I thought, I can’t make ends meet this way. So I’m going to go see if I can find a part-time job.

Right here in South Holland, we have Park Press, a newspaper. So I went over there and they said, “Yes, we’re looking for somebody.” So they hired me as a press helper. So I had to clean up all those ink rolls. My hands would get black with the ink. So I worked there for about two weeks, and they said, “Ray, would you be interested in working in the camera room?” I said, “You know, I’d be interested, but I don’t know the first thing about what goes on in the camera room.” (It’s all photographing the copy and everything) I said, “I know nothing about this.” “Well, we’ll break you in.” Fair enough.

So, I broke in in the camera room, and that’s where I worked the rest of my stay; for twenty-five years, I worked at Park Press, and I retired from there. Park Press was owned by Christian Reformed men, and most of the help was Christian Reformed. So I had a lot easier life because of the fact I didn’t have to tolerate all this cursing and swearing that you have out in the work place. If we did happen to hire somebody who cursed and swore, he was admonished and rebuked. In fact, I had an experience with that.

We had one of our customers coming in and he would always use God’s name in vain. And I called him down. “You know,” I said, “it hurts me. God is whom I serve. You come in here and you use his name in vain, and that hurts and,” I said, “that’s a sin on your part and, you’re going to be held accountable for that.” Twenty years later this same man came in. I was already retired, but I did go back as a part-time helper. He said, “Ray, you remember you talked to me about using God’s name in vain?” I said, “I sure do. I called you down several times for that.” “Yes,” he said. “Well, I’m a Christian today. I know where you’re coming from.” So you see what effect a little word spoken may have? We don’t know how the man lives his life, but he made that confession.

I’ve been retired since 1990. 1989 was my last year of work. So I’ve been busy taking care of Tena and doing all the housework.

**TB:** He does a super job.

**RB:** I do a super job. She just can’t get over it. “You see more places where the dust accumulates than I ever did,” she says. (Laughter)

That was my whole synopsis of my working days. Once my youngest son said to me, “Dad, you spent too much time away from the family,” (which was true), because I was very conscious of supporting the family. I had times I was off, when the company would go out on strike. Then I didn’t have work. I’d go and wash ladies’ windows. I’d clean the house for them. I’d paint houses. I’d grab anything I could. My brother Bill was a block layer, so I’d get a job with him and I’d work at those jobs in the meantime to keep things going. Scrambling, you know? Then I started to sell Nutralite (food supplements). I’d have
to go and talk to people at night after work. And then I was in the consistory and I was in the school board at the same time.

MHH: That’s probably a little much.

RB: That was too much. It started out already when the kids were in Calvin [Christian School in South Holland]. I was on the school board. When we built our own school I got called into the school board and then the church. Between Rev. Heys and Professor Decker coming to South Holland, we were vacant two and a half years, and I was in the consistory and in the school board. We had to teach catechism and take our turn at reading sermons. That was too busy, I have to agree with my son, although they had a good mother. He always said, “I had a good mother. You were out of the house too much, but Mom compensated for that.” I realize I was too, when I look back. But I did it all with a good purpose.

MHH: Probably of necessity.

RB: Of necessity, right. But I can remember Rev. Schipper saying, “When a man is too busy, I don’t care if it’s with school and church work, he’s got to cut back somewhere.” You belong in the home with the family. How many of our husbands don’t make themselves too busy and leave it all up to the wife? That’s not right either, because we are the head of the house. That’s why it’s so important that we marry one in the Lord and in the same household of faith—so you know your wife is going to be teaching these children according to what you would want them to be taught.

MHH: Without doubt. Thank you for the addition. I’m once again a lot smarter than when I came. (Laughter) To be continued…


Is this not true of most children? No matter what occupation their father holds, they see him as Just Dad. I love this chosen book title for it is exactly what Mrs. Kregel goes on to share with us. God used Rev. Herman Hoeksema in many ways in the church of Jesus Christ, but one that is often overlooked is how God used him as a covenantal father. Rev. Hoeksema’s youngest child, Lois, shares with us much of the same pastoral history of her father that you can find in Therefore Have I Spoken, but in this newest book of the Reformed Free Publishing Association she also shares with us a deeper and more personal glimpse into Rev. Hoeksema’s life as a father.

Mrs. Kregel fills us in on the business of her father’s life, at the same time making sure to emphasize that he was a family man. She makes mention more than once of how much Rev. Hoeksema loved and cared for his wife, working to make her life easier, even urging her to get a full-time helper as she weakened in health. Mrs. Kregel also speaks in many places of her father spending time with the children in fellowship after meals, regaling them with stories of his childhood. More than once she also remarks about how he set aside Saturdays as a family day. Even during some of his busiest years in the ministry, she says he still had time for family, playing jacks with them on the landing to their upstairs, or taking the girls on walks downtown, stopping for ice cream. In my opinion, the most vivid display of Rev. Hoeksema’s love for his children is found in the personal letters he wrote to them during his trip to Europe. These are shared in the back of the book, giving a real glimpse of Rev. Hoeksema’s deep love for each child that God blessed him and his wife with.

Mrs. Kregel knew her father well, citing his
strengths and weaknesses, and is not afraid to show that like every one of us, Rev. Hoeksema too was merely a sinner saved by grace. She fill us in on many of his hobbies, which included his love of taking long walks, swimming, painting, blacksmithing, and gardening. She shares his love of preaching, calling it the joy of his life, sharing how as a pastor, he fought the battles in the church head on. He did not hold back, but rather made his preaching stronger, understanding how God used the keys of the kingdom to strengthen his people and how God used them also in the case of the ungodly, so that Rev. Hoeksema would “preach them out of the church” (42). Mrs. Kregel also points out, however, that he had his faults. She writes in detail of his stroke and how he was impatient and complained bitterly during his slow recovery, how he refused to use a cane and was embarrassed by the limp he had after his stroke. She writes of how he mentioned more than once from the pulpit that he was a cripple, until Mrs. Kregel pointed out to him her friend who had had polio and could walk only with crutches, and even then with great difficulty, and asked him how she must feel when he said that from the pulpit.

This book is an interesting and insightful combination of Rev. Hoeksema’s life as a pastor and father, sharing intimate details of his life that you will not find in any other book. It is an easy read and is filled with many family photos and vivid memories. I would advise each one of you to read it for yourself, to learn more about the personal life of Rev. Hoeksema and his love for God’s church, and also for the family God gave him. And if you want to learn even more after reading Just Dad, do a little digging and search out the older book, Therefore Have I Spoken. These two books in my opinion go hand in hand, revealing to us a dear covenantal father whom God was pleased to use for the benefit of his church, to preserve her and to cause her to remain steadfast in the truth. I urge you to set aside some time to sit down and learn more about the personal life of Rev. Hoeksema as his daughter has revealed it in the newest RFPA book, Just Dad.

Monica is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

Federation Board Update

GREETINGS FROM THE FEDERATION BOARD

Greetings from the Fed Board. Although it is only April and many young people are probably not yet thinking about the convention, the Federation Board is looking forward to it and is busy preparing for it. We are currently working to help Southeast PRC, the host church of the 2015 convention, with many different things. This convention will be held at Michindoh Conference Center in Hillsdale, Michigan. The theme will be “The Man-Eating Lion Survival Guide” based on 1 Peter 5:8: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” We greatly encourage every young person to attend this convention. All who are involved in the planning and work of the convention are laboring so that this convention may build the young people up spiritually. This convention will be filled with excitement and fun activities, but we all pray that it will also increase the young people in their love for Christ.

The Fed Board is not only helping with the present convention, but it is also working to establish a better process for hosting future conventions. Members of the Fed Board are working on a project with the steering committee of Southeast PRC, as well as members of past steering committees, to make the planning and hosting of future conventions easier for future host congregations.

The Federation Board also continues to work with Alex Thompson to form a staff for the newly formed “Young Calvinists” group. The Young Calvinists group was established in an effort further to unite the young people’s societies of the PRC, to encourage fellowship between our young peoples and young people.
adult societies, and to create a greater enthusiasm for our Protestant Reformed heritage among young people. This group is presently working to arrange exciting activities for the young people and young adults of the denomination and to publish edifying articles on the Young Calvinists blog. We are always looking for writers for the Young Calvinists blog and are especially looking for a secretary and three others to help with the planning of events and speeches. Please prayerfully consider if you are able to help in any of these areas!

Another committee that will soon be beginning their important work again is the PR Scholarship Committee. The Treasurer and Vice-Treasurer of the Fed Board will be attending the Scholarship Committee meeting this month. This group will again be working to come up with questions for the next Protestant Reformed teachers/ministers scholarship paper. We encourage all those who are studying in college right now and all those who plan to go to college next year to be a teacher or minister to write this scholarship paper and submit it to the PR Scholarship Committee. The information concerning the 2015 Scholarship paper will be available in late March.

Over the next few months, as all of these committees continue to meet, please pray for them. Pray that our work will profit the churches and will benefit the young people of the church spiritually.

Matt is president of the Federation Board and a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

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**Atonement**

Thelma Westra

Poem

Into Gethsemane’s garden
Jesus retreated to pray;
Knowing the path he must travel,
The price for our sins he would pay.

His trial, unjust and so evil
He endured. Yes, he drained the full cup—
The cup of affliction and torment;
On the cross the last drop was filled up.

Incomp’rable anguish he suffered,
Forsaken by man and by God.
The pure, holy lamb bore our vileness—
Bore the wrath of his own Father’s rod.

He perfectly, willingly suffered
Because of his love for his own.
This one sacrifice was sufficient
For all of our guilt to atone.

May we now reflect that devotion
And with joy bear our own paltry pain;
For our light afflictions are meager
Compared with the glory we’ll gain.
The Daily Press

“press toward the mark…” (Philippians 3:14)

Study to Show Yourself Approved
Read 2 Timothy 2:1–15

The Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity about whom I prepare myself to write meditations. Study—to show myself approved unto God, a workman who rightly divides the word of truth. That was the Spirit’s instruction to Timothy, a young pastor. That lesson is necessary for all of God’s children, not only those who are ministers.

We live in a day of unprecedented access to research materials, including those of the religious variety. Much of what I will write in the days ahead is not original to me. As I write, I receive the faithful sermons of our pastor, Rev. Key. I also read the brief book, Signs of the Apostles, by Walter Chantry, and listened to CPRC’s online classes on Belgic Confession, Article 11, as well as several online sermons.

Yet I fear we waste an unprecedented amount of time entangling ourselves with the affairs of this life. We are at war! Do you use the resources at your disposal to equip you for the fight?

Sing or pray Psalter #327. (Our family memorizes Psalter numbers by choosing one per week. I am going to try assigning Psalter numbers to these devotions that way as well. See if you can memorize them!)

The Triune God is One
Read John 16:1–15

“Does each person have his own work in creation and salvation? No, the triune God creates, redeems, and sanctifies” (Essentials, Lesson 6).

We must be careful not to create division in God in focusing on one person of the Trinity. When we falsely conceive of the triune God, we create and serve an idol. Jehovah’s Witnesses charge Christians with worshiping three gods. They are wrong. We worship the God who is three-in-one. The all-important biblical doctrine of the Trinity distinguishes Christianity from all other false religions. And perhaps more than any other doctrine, it demonstrates that God is infinite—never will we fully understand him.

Though God is one, each person of the Trinity remains distinct from the others. That’s why the Apostles’ Creed, which summarizes the articles of the Christian faith, is divided into three parts. The third part is “of God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification” (Q&A 24).

As we study the Holy Spirit in the days ahead, remember, he is one with God the Father and God the Son!

Sing or pray Psalter #327.

The Holy Spirit Guides Us into All Truth
Read John 15:1–14

In the forward of his book, Signs of the Apostles, Walter Chantry writes: “Putting one’s views into print is a humbling business. It invites response and criticism.” Writing these devotionals for Beacon Lights is a humbling business. Applying God’s word on the behalf of others is no small matter. I approach this work with the prayer that the Holy Spirit will enable me to rightly divide the word, but I am not infallible.

That’s why I caution you with regard to how to use these devotionals. The most important part of each day’s meditation is the scripture passage that’s listed. My reflections are only beneficial to the extent that they encourage you to meditate on and grow in your knowledge of the holy and inspired word of God.

How is it that a wife and mother is able to write devotionals? How is it that you are able to understand the Bible and apply its wisdom to your life? Those things are possible only because the Holy Spirit has come. He is the one who guides us into all truth.

Sing or pray Psalter #327.

A Truthless Spirit
Read 2 Timothy 3:1–9

Over Sunday dinner not long ago, a member of our church told us about the day a well-known pentecostal minister visited the congregation that he previously attended to “lay hands” on its members. Soon the platform of the auditorium was filled with vibrating, babbling people. But when our friend’s turn came, “nothing happened.” He left the service that day feeling lonely and confused.

In 2 Timothy 3 the inspired apostle Paul warns his spiritual son against apostate leaders who will arise in the church. These men appear pious. They claim to have the Spirit. They even busy themselves in the study of scripture, but they are never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Theirs is a truth-less spirit. Like Pharaoh’s wise men, Jannes and Jambres, some of these men may even seem to work miracles, but they do not produce the holy fruits of the Spirit. These are men to whom Christ will say on the judgment day, “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:23). For they have not the Spirit of Christ, and are none of his (Rom. 8:9).

Sing or pray Psalter #327.

The Daily Press

“press toward the mark…” (Philippians 3:14)
All Scripture is God-Breathed
Read 2 Timothy 3:10–17
The Holy Spirit does not commune with us through abstract experience. He communes with us through the all-sufficient holy scriptures, which he himself inspired. The word inspired means “God-breathed.” The Holy Spirit himself is the breath of God. He is the one who moved men of old to write down God’s sure word (2 Pet. 1:21). Christ is the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. He is the Spirit of Christ because Christ sent him, and because he testifies of Christ (John 15:26). He testifies of Christ in the scriptures (John 5:39). Never does he contradict the word. Never does he breathe life in as less as sufficient. Rather, he is the one who puts the word of God, which is his sword, into our hands, and teaches us how to war. He writes that living, discerning word of God on the tables of our hearts. He comes to us through the word preached and through the word read. As Jesus himself said, “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).
Sing or pray Psalter #85.

A Spiritless Truth
Read John 6:41–71
There is such a thing as “a truthless spirit.” There is also “spiritless truth.” We belong to churches that emphasize knowledge of doctrine. That’s a strength in our day, in which many are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). But we must examine ourselves to make sure that we are not among those who are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7).

“The human mind can follow the logic of pure doctrine and even assent to its correctness while the emotions are sterile and the will obstinate. Whole churches may be precise, yet lacking in deep worship, practical godliness, and zeal for the Lord of Hosts” (Chantry, 110). Such lack of zeal is nothing less than the absence of the Holy Spirit. “Without the Spirit there may be intellectual understanding but there can be no experimental knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7).

Do you see evidence of the quickening of the Holy Spirit in your life, or are you guilty of “dead orthodoxy”?
Sing or pray Psalter #85.

The Holy Spirit Assures Me of Eternal Life
Read 2 Corinthians 5:1–10
Have you ever gone camping? What fun! But even sleeping in a tent gets old after a while. That’s how Paul describes this earthly life in 2 Corinthians 5. Your body is like a tabernacle, a tent. After living in these tents for a while, we long to go home to heaven. Yet even that longing doesn’t always curb our fear of death. Since the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve, every one of us must face the ultimate statistic: 10 out of 10 people die. You are dying. So am I. It’s only a matter of when we will die, and how.

The writers of the Heidelberg Catechism faced the same reality. That’s why they began their catechism with this question: “What is thy only comfort in life and death?” Since Jesus called the Holy Spirit “the Comforter,” it shouldn’t surprise us to find him mentioned in the answer! “By his Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life.” Are you confident that Jesus has prepared a place for you in our Father’s house? That’s the work of the Holy Spirit in you!
Sing or pray Psalter #85.

The Holy Spirit Makes Me Willing and Ready to Live Unto My Savior
Read Romans 8:1–14
There’s more about the Holy Spirit in Lord’s Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Not only does he assure us of eternal life, but he also makes us sincerely willing and ready, henceforth to live unto our Savior. “Henceforth,” That’s an important word. It means “from this time on.” We don’t sit around waiting until we’ve gone to heaven to live for our Savior. Already in this life we strive to glorify him. And when we sin, we turn to him in repentance, and by his Spirit we resolve once again, henceforth, to live unto him.

Sometimes we can fall into thinking that God does great things through those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. We may look at our plain, predictable lives and wonder how it can be true that God dwells within us. We forget that while God sometimes does do great things through those in whom the Spirit dwells, he always does great things in those in whom he dwells. He makes us hate our sin and long to serve our Savior. That is the work of the Holy Spirit, and it is a great work indeed.
Sing or pray Psalter #85.

The Holy Spirit is the Breath of God (1)
Read John 20:19–31
Take a deep breath in. Now breathe out. In again. Out. God made us breathing creatures to teach us something about himself, for, as we noted several days ago, the Holy Spirit is the breath of God.

There are many similarities between our breath and God’s. Just as your breath proceeds from you, flowing out of your lungs, so the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (John 15:26) and from the Son (John 20:22). When God created man, he “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). One who breathes is alive. Likewise, our God is the living God. All other religions are lifeless and legalistic, but ours is a living faith, a relationship with the God who breathes and whose breath dwells in us. We coordinate our speaking and our breathing. So does God. His son, the Word, is always accompanied by his Breath. That is true in creation (Ps. 33:6), in the inspiration of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15–16), and in the preaching of the word (1 Cor. 2:4).
Sing or pray Psalter #85.

The Holy Spirit is the Breath of God (2)
Read Acts 5:1–11
Though there are similarities between our breath and God’s, there are also significant differences. Our breathing belongs to our natural, earthly existence. God’s Breath is Divine. This is shown in Acts 5:3–4, when Peter charges Ananias with lying to the Holy Spirit, and in the next verse he states, “You have not lied unto men, but unto God.” Our breathing is
exclusive to ourselves. God’s Breath is from two persons. Our breath is limited by the volume of our lungs. The Holy Spirit is not limited, he is infinite. We breathe many times a day, and when we die, our breathing stops. God’s Breath is one, continuous, eternal Breath. That’s why Jesus refers to the Spirit as the one who “proceedeth,” that is, “proceeds,” in the present tense (John 15:26). Just as God calls himself I AM—not “I Was” or “I Will Be”—so the Holy Spirit is the “I Proceed.” His procession from the Father and the Son is timeless and everlasting.

Doesn’t that make you exclaim with the prophet Isaiah, “To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto him?” (Is. 40:18)?

Sing or pray Psalter #85.

### The Breath of God is a Person

**Read 1 Corinthians 2**

There is another significant difference between our breathing and God’s. Our respiration is merely an action that indicates life. God’s Breath is a self-conscious person: a thinking, willing, intelligent, relational being. He is able to say “I” or “Me.”

Sometimes we may be tempted to think of the Holy Spirit as a force that compels us to live a more godly life. He is not merely a power, but a person. An impersonal force is incapable of intellectual, emotional action. Nor can someone lie to an impersonal force. Yet, as we read yesterday, Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of lying to the Holy Spirit.

As a person, the Holy Spirit teaches us (John 14:26), testifies of Christ (John 15:26), reproves the world of sin (John 16:8), guides us into all truth (John 16:13), speaks (John 16:13), and glorifies Christ by showing to us the things that Christ has given him (16:14). The Holy Spirit does all these things intelligently because he searches and knows the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10–11). He has the very mind of Christ, and he imparts Christ’s mind to us who believe.

Sing or pray Psalter #85.

### The Holy Spirit Teaches Us All Things

**Read John 14:15–31**

I recently watched a video that detailed how different types of technology have been predicted to “revolutionize” education: radio, television, videodiscs, computers, the Internet, smart-boards... The video showed that even though that claim has been made decade after decade, with only the proposed medium changing, education has actually changed very little. By and large, groups of students are still taught by a single teacher, much as they were centuries ago. Why? Effective learning takes place as the result of interaction between a caring teacher and his or her students.

What does this have to do with the Holy Spirit? We learned yesterday that the Holy Spirit is a person: a thinking, willing, intelligent, relational being. He is the person who Jesus said will teach us all things and bring to remembrance the word. As a divine person, the Holy Spirit knows us, his students. He knows our needs. He understands our spiritual strengths and weaknesses. He knows how to apply the word to our benefit. It’s through the teaching of the Holy Spirit that we are able to know the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent.

Sing or pray Psalter #255.

### The Holy Spirit Helps Our Infirmities

**Read Romans 8:15–27**

In Galatians 6:2, Christians are enjoined to “bear one another’s burdens.” To whom do you turn when you are overwhelmed by trouble or temptation? Likely the person in whom you confide is someone who knows you well and loves you: a spouse, a sibling, a parent, or a friend. Perhaps their words of encouragement testify to the truth of Proverbs 12:25: “Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.” And are you aware of and ready to help others bear their burdens? Your tongue has been given to you so that you might edify and minister grace to those in need (Eph. 4:29).

Here is a word of comfort that you can give to one who is burdened: the Holy Spirit is our sovereign friend. He understands our weaknesses and burdens as no one else can, and he helps us bear those infirmities. In the words of John Calvin, “There is then no reason for anyone to complain, that the bearing of the cross is beyond their own strength, since we are sustained by celestial power”—that is, a powerful, celestial Person, the Holy Spirit, who is God himself.

Sing or pray Psalter #255.

### The Holy Spirit Intercedes for Us

**Read Romans 8:26–39**

As God, the Holy Spirit is all-knowing, that is, omniscient. As we saw several days ago, his omniscience makes him the perfect teacher. Among other things, the Holy Spirit teaches us how we should pray and for what we must pray. When the inspired apostle writes that the Spirit makes “intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered,” he does not mean that the Spirit mediates for us before the face of God. That work belongs to Christ: “For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

Rather, when the Spirit makes intercession for us, he “dictates our requests, invokes our petitions, draws up our pleas for us. Christ intercedes for us in heaven, the Spirit intercedes for us in our hearts...The Spirit, as an enlightening Spirit, teaches us what to pray for, as a sanctifying Spirit works and excites praying graces, as a comforting Spirit silences our fears, and helps us overcome all our discouragements.” (Matthew Henry).

What a comfort! Though we know not what to pray for as we ought, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in our very hearts.

Sing or pray Psalter #255.

### Groanings According to God’s Will

**Read 1 Sam. 1:1–20**

Yesterday we considered the Spirit’s intercession in our hearts. What does scripture mean when it says that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings that cannot be uttered? It means that “It is not the rhetoric and eloquence, but the faith and fervency, of our prayers, that the Spirit works, as an intercessor, in us” (Matthew Henry). Sometimes we come before God as Hannah did, so troubled and agitated that we are unable to express what is in our hearts. At those times the Spirit still moves us to enter God’s presence with humble
boldness, there to trust that as our Father he knows our hearts, our grief, and our sincere desire to praise him, and that he will work all things for our good. That is the inexpressible intercession of the Holy Spirit.

What a comfort that the Spirit always makes intercession for us according to the will of God. “The Spirit in the heart never contradicts the Spirit in the word. Those desires that are contrary to the will of God do not come from the Spirit. The Spirit interceding in us evermore melts our wills into the will of God” (Ibid.).

Sing or pray Psalter #255.

April 23

Pray for the Holy Spirit
Read Matt. 7:7–12

In Matthew 6:31-33 Jesus calls us to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, “and all these things”—our earthly needs, like food and clothing—“shall be added unto you.” One way in which we seek God’s kingdom and his righteousness is through prayer. According to Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 116, prayer is necessary for Christians “because God will give his grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires continually ask of him, and are thankful for them.”

In the passage that we read today, Jesus teaches us regarding the frequency and fervency that must characterize our prayers, and reassures us that our heavenly Father will always give us good things. In the parallel passage in Luke 11, Jesus names those “good things.” He says, “How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” “In this way, [we] will set little value on food and clothing, as compared to the earnest and pledge of [our] adoption,” [knowing that] when God has given so valuable a treasure, he will not refuse smaller favors” (Matthew Henry).

Sing or pray Psalter #255.

April 24

Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit
Read Ephesians 4:4–5:5

“God is Person, and in the deep of His mighty nature He thinks, wills, enjoys, feels, loves, desires, and suffers as any other person may” (A. W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God).

That’s why he, through the inspired apostle Paul, warns us not to grieve him.

You probably know what grieves your siblings, your parents, and your friends, because they’ve communicated those things to you. We know what grieves the Holy Spirit, too, because he has revealed that in the word. The Holy Spirit is grieved when we live like unbelievers (4:17–19), when we lie (4:25), when we are sullenly angry or bitter (4:26; 31), when we steal by our refusal to work (4:28), when we use our mouths for foolishness or jesting rather than loving edification (4:29 and 5:4), when we refuse to forgive (4:32), when we engage in sexual immorality (5:3), and when we are covetous (5:3). In short, the Holy Spirit is holy: all the sinful actions of God’s people grieve him.

Sing or pray Psalter #255.

April 25

The Holy Spirit Conforms Us to the Image of Christ
Read John 3:16–36

God gives his Holy Spirit to his children in different measures, but to his Son, Jesus Christ, God gave “not the Spirit by measure.” That is, the Holy Spirit dwelt in our Savior in all of his fullness. “The incarnate Son of God did nothing in this world independent of God the Spirit” (Chantry). “Jesus Christ is the picture of the Spirit’s perfect work. The Holy Spirit was Jesus’ constant companion” (John MacArthur)

Knowing that the Son of God did not live upon this earth without the constant ministry and enablement of the Holy Ghost, “it is not to be imagined that we mere creatures can please God in anything apart from the power of the Spirit” (Chantry). The Holy Spirit is the one who conforms us to the image of Jesus Christ. For what evidence of the Spirit’s work should you and I look? In the days ahead, we’re going to study Jesus’ life in order to better understand the work of the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives.

Sing or pray Psalter #255.

April 26

The Holy Spirit Gives Life
Read Luke 1:26–38

We confess in the Apostles’ Creed that Jesus was “conceived by the Holy Spirit.” That is, “God’s eternal Son…took upon Himself the very nature of man…by the operation of the Holy Ghost” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 35). Because he was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, Jesus Christ was both very God and a real righteous man. Thanks to that work of the Holy Spirit, we have the only mediator and deliverer who is able to make satisfaction for our sins.

Jesus Christ’s human life began as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, he entered the kingdom of men. Not only is the Holy Spirit the creator of our physical lives with God the Father and God the Son, our spiritual lives begin by the work of the Spirit. He gives us spiritual birth, a new heart, and eternal life. Our Savior said, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

Sing or pray Psalter #255.

April 27

The Holy Spirit Regenerates
Read John 3:1–15

The fall of our first parents brought more than physical death: it brought spiritual death. Question and answer eight of the Heidelberg Catechism defines our spiritual condition this way: we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness. We noted yesterday that one is freed from this state of corruption by the work of the Holy Spirit. That work of the Holy Spirit is commonly called “regeneration.” Regeneration means “rebirth.”

According to the Essentials catechism book, regeneration is “the first work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the elect sinner.” Regeneration is wholly the work of the Holy Spirit. Just as a baby has nothing to do with being born into the world, so you and I have nothing to do with our rebirth into the kingdom of
God (Doctrine According to Godliness). Just as a dead branch cannot engraft itself into a living vine, so we are incapable of engrafting ourselves into the true vine.

How can you know if you have been born again? Like a healthy infant, you will grow. Like an engrafted branch, you will bring forth fruit.

Sing or pray Psalter #287.

**April 28**

**The Holy Spirit Gives Growth**

**Read Luke 2:40–52**

It is the nature of living things to mature and grow. Jesus “grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40). This inner growth was visible to those around him. He astounded the theologians of the day with his understanding of God’s word.

His parents recognized his wisdom and maturity. As Jesus grew physically, he grew “in favor with God and man.”

We noted yesterday that those who have been given a spiritual birth must be characterized by spiritual growth. How does one who is reborn in the image of Christ grow? That growth is the work of the Holy Spirit, but it is a work in which we are called to be active. We grow through careful study and application of God’s word: “My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man” (Prov. 3:1–4).

Sing or pray Psalter #287.

**April 29**

**Kinship to God**

**Read Ephesians 1:1–14**

At present, I am our nine-month old’s favorite person. Whenever I come into view, his face breaks into a smile, and he reaches out his little arms for me.

In The Pursuit of God A. W. Tozer writes, “The moment the Spirit has quickened us to life in regeneration our whole being senses its kinship to God and leaps up in joyous recognition. Isn’t that a beautiful picture? He continues, “That is the heavenly birth without which we cannot see the Kingdom of God. It is, however, not an end but an inception, for now begins the glorious pursuit, the heart’s happy exploration of the infinite riches of the Godhead. That is where we begin, I say, but where we stop no man has yet discovered, for there is in the awful, beautiful, mysterious depths of the triune God neither limit nor end.”

Because Christ’s work has been applied to us by the Holy Spirit, that limitless, endless God is our Father, whom we are called to know more and more. Doesn’t that make your heart leap for joy?

Sing or pray Psalter #287.

**April 30**

**We Are Baptized in the Name of the Father, Spirit, and Son**

**Read Mark 1**

The biblical accounts of Jesus’ baptism are sometimes used to prove the doctrine of the Trinity, for all three divine persons were manifest on that occasion. God the Son received the sign of baptism, God the Father spoke from heaven, and God the Holy Spirit descended upon the Son in the form of a dove.

Water baptism is a sign of a spiritual reality. According to our baptism form, when we are baptized with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, that sign points to these spiritual realities: First, God the Father makes his covenant with us and adopts us to be his children and heirs. Second, he speaks from heaven, and God the Holy Spirit descended upon the Son in the form of a dove.

Sing or pray Psalter #287.
The Holy Spirit Anoints Us
Read Acts 2:1–21

As members of Christ by faith, we share in his anointing with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was active in the Old Testament: he regenerated the Old Testament saints and worked faith in their hearts. He sanctified them. But the extraordinary endowing power of the Spirit was limited to a few. As we saw yesterday, ordinarily those who were anointed with the Spirit were prophets, priests, and kings. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost signaled that the Holy Spirit would now dwell in all of God’s people, including those who were Gentiles.

Because we are partakers of Christ’s anointing, we share his name: we are called Christians. Christians are prophets, who confess the name of Jesus Christ; priests, who present themselves as living sacrifices of thankfulness to him; and kings, who fight against sin and Satan in this life. They are those who look forward to reigning with their anointed, risen, and ascended Lord over all creatures for eternity (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 32).

Sing or pray Psalter #141.

Anointed to be a Prophet
Read Numbers 11:16–40

It’s true that sometimes in the Old Testament telling the future was incidental to the message that God’s prophets brought, but the word “prophet” as it is used in the Bible essentially means “to bubble over.” Like a fountain bubbles over with water, so a prophet bubbles over with the word of God.

Jesus is the Word of God in the flesh. “God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son” (Heb. 1:2). That Son is the “more sure word of prophecy” (2 Pet. 1:19–21). Because we have been anointed with his Spirit, we are able to understand the will and counsel of God in the infallibly inspired written word. We experience the reality for which Moses longed: “Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and the Lord would put his spirit upon them!”

Sing or pray Psalter #141.

Anointed to be a Prophet (2)
Read John 7:37–44

The same Holy Spirit who breathed the scriptures enables us to understand them. 1 John 2:27 reads, “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you.” 1 Cor. 14:32 verifies that a prophet is one who knows and shares God’s word, that others may learn and be comforted. You and I are called to bubble forth with “things touching the king” (Ps. 45:1).

That king is the fountain of living water. He is the Word who said, “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). That’s a strange expression with a beautiful meaning. “Whosoever shall believe in Christ shall have a fountain of life springing up, as it were, in himself...The Holy Spirit is like a living and continually flowing fountain in believers” (Calvin).

When that fountain bubbles within you, it is impossible that you not bubble over with the wonderful works of the Lord.

Sing or pray Psalter #141.

Anointed to be a Priest (1)
Read Romans 12

The words of the familiar hymn “Take My Life and Let it Be” describe the life of the saint who is consecrated to God.

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee. Take my moments and my days, let them flow in endless praise. Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love. Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee. Take my voice and let me sing, always, only for my king. Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from thee. Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold. Take my intellect and use every power as thou shalt choose. Take my will and make it thine, It shall be no longer mine. Take my heart, it is thine own, it shall be thy royal throne.”

Do those words describe your life?

Sing or pray Psalter #141.
What is the place and calling of young people and young adults in the church? I present it as a challenge to you: Be committed to serve in the church.

We have to reckon with the sad reality that many churches, including evangelical and Reformed churches, lose most of their youth in their young adult years. Many churches today complain about the absence of young adults. The sad fact is that many younger nominal Christians have little use for the institute of the church, organized religion, or involvement in a congregation. According to one study, most of the more than 3,000 teenagers interviewed saw religion as a combination of works righteousness (be nice; be good), psychological well-being (feeling good about one’s self), and a distant non-interfering God (he’s there if you get into a pinch). If that’s all that it amounts to, who needs the church? That may be the extreme, but sometimes our young people too can have difficulty going from childhood to mature involvement in the life of the congregation.

**Questions:**

1. Why do you think so many young Christians today see no need to be involved in a congregation?
2. What reasons do you have for being involved in your church?

Perhaps we too have the tendency to take the congregation where we are members for granted. The congregation has probably always been there. We may have been a member there all our lives. We have always had easy access to the church. We have never been prevented because of opposition or persecution from attending the worship services. We have always been able to hear faithful preaching of the gospel. We have always had the opportunity to take part in the life and activity of the congregation. How easy it is to take the church for granted. We often fail to appreciate and love the church, or even realize our need for the church and our calling to serve.

This becomes evident when we have a casual or indifferent attitude toward the church and our membership in it. Maybe we are not very enthusiastic about the worship services. Perhaps we are not very interested in the sermons. We are not really concerned about the welfare of the church. We are involved as little as possible in the life of the church. We try to stay in the background. We simply do not have the time to give the church a prominent place in our lives; we have no time to serve.

Or maybe it’s the case that we get discouraged about the church and develop a pessimistic attitude. It is certainly true that the church has many weaknesses and sins. The church of Christ in the midst of this world is far from perfect, for it is composed of sinners who are saved by grace. That reality can make it difficult to love the church. We can get down on ourselves when we see our own weaknesses, and it is possible to become preoccupied with the weaknesses of other members. Their attitude or behavior can make it difficult to want to serve in the church.

At other times we may see general weaknesses in our congregations or in the denomination. We may be concerned about what we perceive to be a lack of interest in doctrinal distinctiveness. Or we notice a tendency toward legalism or worldliness. Or there seems to be a lack of zeal for mission work. Or we see some pushing for changes in the church with which we do not agree. We then become discouraged and disillusioned with the church. We find it difficult to love it. If the only things we see are the church’s flaws and weaknesses, it is almost impossible to love and serve the church as we ought.

From the perspective of Psalm 48: 12–13 we see our calling to notice the strengths and beauty of the church: “Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks,
consider her palaces.” That doesn’t imply that we are to ignore its weaknesses. They must be noticed and dealt with in the church orderly way. But just as the Old Testament believer was to consider the strengths and beauty of the city of Jerusalem as the city of God, so we are called to behold the church from the viewpoint of what God has made it to be in Christ. The church does not have beauty and strength because of men. The church is beautiful and strong because of its glorious head, Jesus Christ. It is beautiful and strong because God is in its midst and blesses it. This provides motivation and incentive to love and serve the church.

**Questions:**

1. Do you think that you take your congregation, for granted? Why or why not?

2. Why is it so easy to have a negative attitude toward the church?

Taking this a step further, we must consider a truth which we confess together every Sunday in the Apostles’ Creed: the communion of saints. How often do we think about our place in the communion of saints? We are not merely so many individual members of a church. We are all members of one living organism of the body of Christ and so also members one of another.

This is a very practical thing that we must keep in mind. We then live not unto ourselves or for ourselves, but we live for the sake of the body of Christ, also as it is manifest in our own congregations. God has given to each of the saints, also young saints, a calling within the communion. God has through the Holy Spirit endowed each of the saints, young and old alike, with certain gifts and talents, and with a certain measure of grace. By virtue of these gifts and the grace of God, each of the saints has a particular place and calling within the church. Some may seem to be more honorable and of greater significance than others. Nevertheless all of them are needed for the fullness of the communion of saints, also in the local congregation. All of the saints, from the greatest to the least, have a place and a calling in the communion of the saints.

The apostle Paul explains this so beautifully in 1 Corinthians 12. In verse 18 we read, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him (see also verses 23–27). The calling of all the saints of God is therefore to work toward the full manifestation of the communion of the saints to the glory of God. In that calling each of us has need of all the other members of the body, and each of us stands in the service of all of the other members of the body.

The communion of the saints comes to its most glorious manifestation in the institutional life of the church. Above all our calling is to gather with the church in worship. The worship services give opportunity for each of us to exercise his calling as a member of the communion of the saints. We have such wonderful opportunities for fellowship together each Sunday. Also the catechism classes, the Bible studies, and the various societies provide wonderful opportunities to serve by our attendance and participation. But we have to take the time and make the time to be involved and prepared.

Our calling to serve as young Christians goes beyond the institutional life of the church and extends to our calling toward one another in all of life. Acts 2:41–47 presents a beautiful picture of the love and concern of the saints in the early church for one another. The apostle Paul states in Philippians 2:4, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” How easy it is to just focus on ourselves! How much of our lives are spent living unto and for ourselves?

The Heidelberg Catechism emphasizes this aspect of our calling to serve in answer 55: “…that every one must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts for the advantage and salvation of other members.” It is easy for us to neglect this aspect of church membership. It is easy for us to become self-centered. Then our concern is a matter of what is in it for me: how am I served by my membership in the church?

Our care and concern for others will manifest itself in visiting the fatherless and widows in their afflictions (James 1:27). Opportunities to serve in this way abound: visiting those in the hospital or nursing home, the widows and widowers. We will comfort and assist the sorrowing and those who are troubled or distressed.

Our service will also manifest itself in seeking to help those who are struggling spiritually or who have fallen into a way of sin. We will seek them out to encourage and admonish them in love. We will strive to lead them in the way of repentance. Motivated by the desire to help and serve, we will kneel with them at the cross.
Questions:

1. To use the language of 1 Corinthians 12, do you think we as younger Christians tend to think of ourselves as less honorable members of the body of Christ? Less important, less necessary? Why?

2. What is implied and included when James 1:27 speaks of pure and undefiled religion as being “to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction”?

3. To paraphrase a famous quotation of President John F. Kennedy: “Ask not what the church can do for you; ask what you, as a young member of the church, can do to serve others in the church.” What do you think about that?

For many years now in American culture, the presence of a “generation gap” has been assumed to be an inevitable reality. I think that too often our church life conforms to that assumption at precisely the time when you young people and young adults most need to be involved in the broader life of the church as a whole. It is so easy in the church, perhaps especially in larger congregations, to divide everything according to age groups. We’ve discussed our unity in the body of Christ, in the communion of saints. But that must be shown in real life in the congregation. That should be reflected in how we love, serve, and live with each other, regardless of age.

If our congregational lives are exclusively or even primarily segregated according to age, it is difficult for young people to have, enjoy, and serve in relationships with those who are both older and younger. Don’t misunderstand: our young people’s societies and young adults groups are important, necessary, and very valuable. But your involvement and service in the church ought to go far beyond that, and I’m very thankful that very often it does in many ways.

But I challenge you to do more to serve. Be committed, already now, to serve in the church. Be a good example for those who are younger; perhaps be a friend or mentor to a young person. Be able to say that you are a friend of this couple and their children, or of that older single woman or man, or of one of the shut-ins. As a younger Christian, be hospitable. Scripture says (1 Peter 4:9), “Use hospitality one to another without grudging.” Share your life, your interests, your hobbies, your sporting events, programs, choir concerts, or musical talents with others. Hospitality—no, you may not have your own home to invite somebody over to provide a meal, but you can still, in a self-giving way, involve others in your lives, and that is the heart of hospitality. Increasingly become a self-giving part of the church. Love the church. Serve the church, and you will grow and flourish there.

Questions:

1. Do you agree that this calling to hospitality applies to younger Christians?

2. Do you feel our congregations are too segregated according to age? If so what can we do to improve that?

3. Are there more opportunities to serve for young men than there are for young women?

4. What place should prayer have in your serving in the church?

5. How about supporting the kingdom causes?

We need the church. We do as young people and young adults. As much as we love God and love the glory of God, we ought to love God’s church, value our membership there, and live in the consciousness of our calling to serve the church. Our attitude toward the church ought to be the attitude expressed in the hymn:

“I love Thy kingdom, Lord,
The house of Thine abode,
The Church our blest Redeemer saved,
With his own precious blood.

I love Thy church, O God!
Her walls before Thee stand,
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,
And graven on Thy hand.

For her my tears shall fall;
For her my prayers ascend;
To her my cares and toils be given,
Till toils and cares shall end.”

Rev. De Vries is pastor of Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan.
Where We Stand
Erin Huizinga

The Bible Tells Me So

As the college of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), Calvin holds to the position of the CRC on human sexuality, articulated in 1973 and 2002. We believe that homosexual orientation is not a sin, and we strive to love our gay, lesbian, and bisexual students as ourselves, as God expects of us. We also affirm that physical sexual intimacy has its proper place in the context of heterosexual marriage.

*Sexual behavior is chosen; sexual orientation is not.
*Being attracted to persons of the same sex is not culpable or sinful.

—LGBT Students & Homosexuality FAQ

This is Calvin College’s stance on homosexuality that has been adopted from the Christian Reformed Church. The church’s views on this controversial matter have laid the foundations for Calvin College’s toleration of several different lifestyles today. This stance is a compromise between two extreme and opposing views: the conservative Christian view that homosexuality—both as a thought and an action—is a sin condemned by God and should not be tolerated, and the liberal Christian view that homosexuality is not a sin, but is a way of life that a person should be able to practice freely. This position raises a problem for students here at Calvin who, like me, find themselves disagreeing with Calvin’s acceptance of this lifestyle, but are afraid to voice their opinions because of the welcoming, open community stressed at Calvin or the possibility of offending someone and sparking passionate, heated responses to such seemingly “hateful” opinions. Many who share my conservative viewpoint on this issue also have trouble explaining exactly why they think the way they think about homosexuality; however, I understand exactly why I believe the way I do, and humbly wish to offer an explanation. The Christian Reformed Church justifies its stance on homosexuality using flawed and anti-biblical reasoning; therefore, this position should not be advocated so vehemently here at Calvin College.

As times are changing, Christians and churches are finding themselves challenged by new, prominent issues. Many now insist that because this change is inevitable, the church’s stance on homosexuality must change as well. No longer should the church be holding firm to its original, conservative views that have condemned homosexuality. Now it should open its arms and embrace the people with the identity it has once condemned. This change is blatantly obvious here at Calvin College, a Christian college that “seeks to be a community where lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons are treated with respect, justice, grace, and understanding in the Spirit of Christ” (LGBT Students & Homosexuality FAQ). The church has never been so accepting and even—dare I say—loving towards those who identify themselves as homosexual. Yet we must remember that “I the Lord do not change,” as Malachi 3:6 says. If God does not change, his laws and his expectations for his people certainly do not. God’s commands in the Bible have not changed, but have remained the same since he commanded them. Only man’s interpretations of what God has decreed and man’s attitude towards these decrees are different. However, just because the times are changing and our society today is calling for tolerance and acceptance of many sins does not mean that the church should now stray from its previous, biblically set principles. Yet this movement toward change in the church seems for the most part unstoppable.

One must also be aware that in the church today, an emphasis on emotions has been placed over biblical rationality in its stance on homosexuality; this has carried over to Calvin College as well. In an argument at this college—a Christian college that helps students to “evaluate different points of view in light of Scripture” (LGBT Students & Homosexuality FAQ) “how these people feel” often carries more weight than what God actually says in scripture. In our society today, one must take great care not to
hurt anyone’s feelings; if one’s opinions or belief system does offend someone, he is considered a “hater” and guilty of “hate speech.” Our society also plays on the emotions by making it seem as if those offended are “victims” and we should “feel bad for them.” All of this has created an overbearing aura of openness and acceptance of all kinds of lifestyles in American society today, and this aura has carried over to this college. Yet one needs to remember: although feelings are important, they should not cloud rational thinking. And even though emotions play such a heavy role in the way everyone thinks, they cannot and should never be the basis for an argument, especially one about such a controversial matter as this. A Christian must keep in mind the wise words of Rev. Ronald Van Overloop, minister at Grace Protestant Reformed Church: “Feelings are real, but they are not the source of truth.” The truth about the issue of homosexuality must be found only in the infallible word of God.

The main argument of people here at Calvin College is that God does not actually condemn homosexuality in the word of God, and so there is nothing on which to base a stance against it. This is false, however, and God does in fact condemn this sin in several places. But before explaining further, a common misconception I have heard must be addressed and countered. Many say that because Jesus Christ does not speak about—and therefore does not condemn—homosexuality anywhere in the Bible, it must not be a sin. Yes, it is unfortunate that Christ never specifically addresses homosexuality. However, he does give us Matthew 19:4–5, mentioning the creation order of Genesis 2: “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’” (NIV). Throughout his ministry, Christ defends the purity of God’s ordinance of marriage between man and woman. This implies his position on the issue of homosexuality, even though these verses do not directly mention it. However, it is understandable that confusion and arguments about his stance on the issue may still exist, and that is where the writings of the apostle Paul come in, offering clarification where Matthew and the other gospels do not. Paul was an apostle of Christ, so he had the necessary authority to say such things about homosexuality in the name of the Lord, and he did, as I will explain shortly.

Now that that issue is out of the way, let’s begin with the most obvious (and most controversial) passage in the Bible that condemns sins including homosexuality: the seventh commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Most if not all Christians agree that this commandment forbids things like cheating on a spouse and engaging in sex before marriage. However, this commandment has a much deeper meaning than that. Jesus Christ says in Matthew 5:27–28, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (NIV). The Lord says very plainly that even the lust that one has toward another—not just the action—breaks this commandment. This clarification is also shown in the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 41: the seventh commandment forbids “all unchaste acts, gestures, words, thoughts, desires.” But how does this connect with homosexuality?

In order to answer this question, one needs to look at the main passage in Scripture where homosexuality is mentioned. This can be found in the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church of Rome in Romans 1:21–32:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened...Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another...God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error...Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them (NIV).

These verses show that both men and women were guilty of practicing homosexuality in those days, and Paul condemns them both for these actions. He says plainly that these men and women are punished by God: they “received in themselves the due penalty for their error” and “deserve death.” In 1 Corinthians 6:9 Paul also mentions this sin: “Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom
of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men” [“nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind” in the KJV]; again, 1 Timothy 1:9, 10 says, “We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful...for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality” [“for them that defile themselves with mankind” in the KJV]. Those who live the homosexual life will not “inherit the kingdom of God,” as 1 Corinthians says, and are “lawbreakers and rebels,” “ungodly and sinful,” as 1 Timothy says. In all of these passages, Paul shows that homosexuality is a sin, and therefore it must be punished by God.

But one would argue that these passages only condemn the action of homosexuality. These people “committed shameful acts” (as Romans 1 says); it does not mention or condemn the thought/desire that may or may not be controllable. Therefore, the feelings and desires a homosexual has towards another of the same sex cannot be wrong—as long as they are not acted on—as Calvin College and the Christian Reformed Church believe. Right? Wrong. These people had “sinful desires of their hearts,” and were “inflamed with lust for one another”; these lusts and desires are feelings that every homosexual person has—not necessarily actions. Yet Paul condemns them just the same as he does actions. Also, remember what Christ said about the seventh commandment, how even the lustful thought or desire for another (outside of marriage) is a sin. What Christ teaches also applies here. Even if people do not act on these homosexual urges or lusts, they are still sinning in their hearts.

But does all of that really condemn the homosexual orientation? Although feelings often include lust, one might argue that these don’t necessarily go hand-in-hand. In order to answer this, I would like to point out Genesis 2, where God created Adam and Eve. Here we see that the nature of man as God created him—even before Adam sinned and became corrupted—proves that the homosexual orientation is a sin, because this orientation goes against this God-given nature. God created Adam and Eve, a man and a woman, opposite genders, with the man to hold dominion over the woman. He also instituted marriage when he created them. As Christ quoted in Matthew 19, God created man to be “united to his wife” (Genesis 2:24). Through holy matrimony, God also gave a man and wife the ability to conceive children through the intimacy of sexual intercourse. In a same-sex relationship or marriage, the couple seeks to mimic this God-given relationship. Yet they cannot truly experience how marriage is supposed to be, because they are going against the very nature which God has designed them to have. A same-sex couple defies the very purpose of the relationship—to glorify God by picturing the perfect relationship that Christ (the bridegroom) has with the church (his bride). A homosexual couple is also unable to have children as God had instituted to be one of the results of marriage. Since these relationships are not rooted in God’s principles for holy and acceptable marriage, and are certainly not natural God-ordained relationships, they are a sin. Again, even the desires for this kind of relationship are sinful, because the desires themselves are unnatural, contrary to the ones God has ordained as natural. Going against the very nature that God has bestowed every human being with by even having a “homosexual orientation” is a sin.

I would also like to review briefly the Reformed doctrine of total depravity as a way to answer those who support the homosexual orientation. Reformed Christians understand and believe that “surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me,” as Psalm 51:5 says. We were born with a sinful nature (an “old man of sin” as it is called in Romans 6:6) because of our forefather Adam’s sin in the garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve fell, the whole of creation fell with them. Because of this fall, all of mankind now has a sinful nature and an all-consuming desire to sin against the commands of God. This desire to sin is therefore a sin itself.

The supposed “homosexual orientation” and the resulting feelings can now be included here. When men and women declare themselves to be of a homosexual orientation, they are “exchanging” (as Paul says) their natural God-given orientation and instead giving in to their old man of sin and the “sinful desires of their hearts,” as Romans 1 says. These feelings, these desires, these attractions are toward something that God’s word blatantly teaches against, as shown earlier. Even being attracted to someone of the same sex is unnatural and thus sinful. Therefore the homosexual “identity” itself is a sin, and so Calvin’s stance that “being attracted to persons of the same sex is not culpable or sinful” goes against what scripture and Reformed doctrine teach.
Yet the Christian Reformed Church and Calvin College hold to that stance, accepting this sin. The mentality found everywhere, both in society today and now at Calvin College, is to applaud when someone “comes out of the closet” and accepts their homosexuality as an identity. Look at Chaplain Mary Hulst’s tweet in 2013 in response to a student’s article in Calvin’s newspaper called “LGBT Feature: Ryan’s Story.” This is a heart-wrenching and emotionally-charged article about how he came out to the world that he is gay, and he now unashamedly accepts his new sexuality (Calvin College Chimes LGBT Feature). “Crazy proud of @ryanstruyk;” she tweets from her @PastorMary2U account. Many students also supported and cheered on this “coming-out” by Ryan. This is proof that Calvin College does not treat homosexuality as a sin that, just like any other, must be fought against. Instead the chaplain, Calvin’s religious leader and representative head, “proudly” supports this sin.

These feelings and thoughts can and must be fought against, because the Lord commands them to be. Although according to total depravity, the sinful nature we are born with is in a sense unavoidable because we are all necessarily born with it, this old man of sin must be fought against continually. “Abstain from all appearance of evil,” as 1 Thessalonians 5:22 says. “Flee fornication,” as 1 Corinthians 6:18 says. “Mortify it,” as Rev. Van Overloop says. Yes, fighting against this, and any other sin, is definitely not easy. I know firsthand that it’s not, since one of my very good friends is struggling with overcoming this sin at this moment. But she will keep fighting this long and tiring battle because that is what God commands of his beloved children. 1 Corinthians 10:13 should be kept in mind here: “God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” If my friend, or any of God’s children, gives up on this battle and accepts these homosexual tendencies as part of who she is, this would pave the way for her fall into more of that sin. Calvin College should be counseling its students who are fighting this sin, helping them deal with it and overcome it, which is what the Bible calls us to do.

I don’t want to condemn anyone—really, I don’t, nor do I intend to do so. Take notice that throughout everything I have explained, I am condemning just the sin, not the person. Only God can and will judge the heart. But I, as well as all Christians and Christian institutions, must follow the law of God. God’s word condemns homosexuality as a sin, no matter what form it takes, and his church must as well. Because the Bible calls us not to tolerate sin, the CRC church and Calvin College must not be so accepting of it either. As Isaiah 5:20 says, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil.” So vehemently to advocate the tolerance of this sin within the ranks of Calvin College is to go against the infallible word of God, the seemingly highest authority at this college.

**Works Cited**


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Erin wrote this paper for an English class at Calvin College. She is a member of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.
God’s Cleansing Work

This morning I woke to a freshly washed world;
I pondered, just what does this mean?
It pictured to me how God takes sinners’ hearts
And renews, makes them perfectly clean.
How great a redeemer is needed for this
Each day there’s a mountain of guilt!
Each day there is mercy abundant in scope;
On this promise my faith has been built.
I thank thee, dear Father, that thou in thy grace
Looked down upon sinners and saw
Not our sins, but the blood of the sacrificed Lamb;
The fulfillment complete of the law.
Give me eyes, Lord, to see, and a heart to rejoice
In the beauty surrounding this earth,
Knowing this merely is a portrayal of all
That thy work of salvation brings forth.

Poem

Thelma Westra

Church News

Melinda Bleyenberg

BAPTISMS

“. . . that He will dwell in us and sanctify us to be members of Christ,
applying unto us . . . the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of
our lives.”

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:
Nora Jordan, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jason & Cassie VanOostenbrugge—Faith, MI
Zander Gray, son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin & Kathy Koole—Faith, MI
Jude Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Tara VanderKolk—Georgetown, MI
Evelyn Jean, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jon & Emily Kuiper—Georgetown, MI
Adam Dale, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mark & Bethany Feenstra—Georgetown, MI
Ari Jon, son of Mr. & Mrs. Alex & Heather Dykstra—Georgetown, MI
Iyla Rose, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Ashley Looyenga—Grandville, MI
Quinton Lee, son of Mr. & Mrs. Seth & Lenora Badby—Grandville, MI
Ava Helene, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mark & Candace Meulenberg—Grace, MI
Aaliyah Emma Jane, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ben Peterson—Grace, MI
Treyton Douglas, son of Mr. & Mrs. Trevor & Kelly Wassink—Holland, MI

Thomas John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Anna Wassink—Holland, MI
Jayme Lee, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff & Nicki Westra—Holland, MI
Judah Alan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matthew & Christina Overway—Hope, MI
Lincoln James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dowie & Becky VanderSchaaf—Providence, MI
Jayden Gerry, son of Rev. & Mrs. Eric & Cherith Guichelaar—Randolph, WI
Joel Willem, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff & Marisa Krosschell—Randolph, WI
Benjamin Asher, son of Rev. & Mrs. Brian & Michelle Huizinga—Redlands, CA
Garett Robert, son of Mr. & Mrs. Pete & Nicole Hanemeyer—Trinity, MI
Becklan Allen, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan & Faith Richards—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”
Proverbs 3:6

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:
Joel Kaiser—Grandville, MI
Jonathan Kaiser—Grandville, MI
Justin Hiemstra—Trinity, MI
The Sheep’s Path

Once there were two shepherds who had pastures next to each other. On one side of the fence, the shepherd had a large flock, but he didn’t care for it. The grass in the pasture was dry and brown. Without a shepherd’s guidance, the sheep all wandered in the same paths every day. They wore the grass away along those paths until all their paths were dirt. When it rained, the dirt became an icky mud that stuck on the sheep’s fleece and hooves. They slipped and fell often.

On the other side of the fence, the shepherd tended his small flock carefully. He kept his pasture green by watering it. He rotated the flock to different parts of the pasture so they did not eat all the grass to the roots. When he moved the sheep, he did not let them walk in the same place, but made sure they walked the narrow paths. When it rained, his paths remained grassy and mud-free. His sheep never fell.

Sometimes one of the shepherd’s sheep would look at the sheep in the other pasture. Sometimes the shepherd’s sheep were jealous. The other sheep looked like they had more fun. They could go wherever they wanted. They could eat whatever grass they wanted. They didn’t have to listen to any shepherd.

Any time one of the shepherd’s sheep ran into the other pasture, they discovered that the paths were all broad and muddy. The nasty grass on the other side of the fence never tasted as good as the shepherd’s grass. When the shepherd rescued them and returned them to his pasture, the sheep found out that they were content following the shepherd’s paths. His paths were always good.

Questions to think about:
1. Read Psalm 23 and Matthew 7:13-14 by yourself or with your parents. What do these passages mean?
2. If sheep are allowed to walk in the same place over and over again, they will wear a dusty rut into the ground. A good shepherd keeps sheep from doing this. How does our shepherd prevent us from following the rut of the world and follow his right paths?
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August 10-14, 2015
Michindoh Conference Center
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“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” 1 Peter 5:8