

The background features a stylized orange illustration. A hand is shown holding a sword diagonally across the frame. Below the hand, a shield is depicted with several circular patterns on its surface. The overall style is minimalist and graphic.

# SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

*Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee,  
O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help,  
and who is the sword of thy excellency!  
and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee;  
and thou shalt tread upon their high places.*

Deuteronomy 33:29

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## ASCENDED ON HIGH

*Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them. — Psalm 68:18*

Regarding the historical circumstance of the psalm, it must be connected to some movement of the ark into Jerusalem. We know this from the first verse of the psalm, which is taken from Moses in Numbers 10:35. Whenever the ark moved, Moses said, “Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee.” And when the ark rested, Moses said, “Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel” (v. 36). So David called upon God in those terms in the first verse of Psalm 68 in connection with the movement of the ark, probably when the ark was moved into the city of Jerusalem.

The ark was the visible sign of God’s presence and royal government in Israel. The ark was God’s throne and the seat of judgment from which he ruled among his people Israel by his grace and over the whole world by his sovereign might. The ark was the place at which he was propitiated with blood and prayers at the seat of mercy and where he forgave the sins of his people and so dwelt graciously among them. From the ark all his grace and blessings flowed to Israel. With God among them Israel was invincible and the center of the whole world.

The Israelites had long lain under distress and misery. The ark had been in exile for a time in the land of the Philistines. When the ark was returned, it was installed in the houses of individuals. Especially during the reign of wicked King Saul, the nation reached its nadir. The priests were slain, and the tabernacle of God lay dilapidated. With the coming of the kingdom of David, God returned visibly to rule the nation and to bless his people. The movement of the ark into Jerusalem must be connected with the coming of David’s throne and kingdom. Raising up David and setting him on his throne, God fulfilled his promise. God’s king sat upon the throne. Through his appointed king God ruled the nation by his grace. The movement of the ark to Jerusalem was a visible symbol of God’s presence among and rule in the nation whom he blessed with the kingdom of David.

But David was only a shadow and a figure of good things to come. With the ascension of the ark in David’s kingdom, we have the type of the ascension of Jesus Christ to reign in his kingdom. In Christ’s ascension God’s ark

went up, and God’s king ascended on high in might to reign as God set his king upon Zion’s holy hill.

In the ascension Jesus left the earth and bodily entered into heaven to sit at the right hand of the majesty on high. Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus went out to a mountain; and in the presence of his disciples, he was lifted up from the earth, and a cloud of glory received him from their sight. From the earth he entered into heaven itself. As high priest of our profession, Jesus passed within the veil, opened a new and living way into the presence of God, and went to make intercession for us. As king Jesus went up on high in might to reign, to receive the book of God’s counsel with seven seals, and to sit down to rule over all things as Lord of lords and king of kings in order to bring about his coming again on the clouds of glory. As prophet he went away to return with the gifts of apostles, evangelists, prophets, pastors, and teachers.

A wonder of grace!

Like the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, and Pentecost, the ascension was a wonder of grace. It was a wonder of grace for the glorification of Jesus Christ. It was a wonder of grace for the salvation and blessing of the church of Christ. In the glorification of Christ, the head of the church, the church is also glorified. In the entrance of the head of the church into heaven, the church is also taken into heaven.

The ascension is a heavenly doctrine. It directs our hearts to heaven. It directs our whole lives to heaven. The ascension teaches us that on this earth we have no abiding place but that we are pilgrims and strangers here, whose home is in heaven, whose citizenship is in the eternal city, and whose hope is in heaven as an anchor of our souls, drawing us ever toward heaven as the goal of our salvation.

God’s will for his people is that they know him, are blessed in him, understand him, and enjoy him as their covenant God in the perfection of his covenant in the new heaven and the new earth. God’s will for his people is not this life but that which is to come.

God’s will for his people never was everlasting life in Eden, even perfect Eden. He never had a plan for his people in Adam, even perfect Adam. Adam would not be the head of the human race to glorify it. The best the human race could be in Adam was earthly. Adam, even perfect

Adam, could not go to heaven. Flesh and blood do not inherit the kingdom of God.

God's will for his people is not everlasting life in this sin-cursed creation; this valley of tears; this world that is the habitation of devils and of ungodly men; this world that is a place of guilt, death, sin, and wickedness. This world is not our home. Our blessedness does not consist in food, raiment, money, gold, silver, or earthly health and well-being.

Heaven is God's will for his people. Heaven is where righteousness and peace dwell. Heaven is where there is an eternal city, the New Jerusalem. In heaven every tear is dried away. The souls of just men made perfect are gathered into heaven. Heaven is destined to be united with the earth in the peaceful and everlasting kingdom of God, when the tabernacle of God is with men. Heaven is heaven because God is there!

*Thou* hast ascended; *Thou* hast led captivity captive; *Thou* hast received gifts for men.

How theological—God-centered—that is.

Jehovah God! The I AM THAT I AM who is the unchanging, omnipotent, sovereign, gracious, faithful God of his covenant, so that we sons of Jacob are not consumed but are brought into the eternal kingdom of God and go to heaven.

How is it that God ascended, received gifts, and led captivity captive? Is he not already fullness and blessedness itself? Does he not already inhabit eternity as the absolutely independent one? Is he not in heaven, into which he must stoop to reveal himself even there to the sons of God who are gathered around his eternal throne?

In Christ, Jehovah God ascended up on high in might to reign.

Man has no place in that work of God except as a sinner. Besides, being only flesh and blood, we are sinners too—black, filthy, guilty sinners. And against such sinners the doors of heaven are completely shut. We are the rebellious! Sunk down deep in the miry clay of sin and guilt, wrapped in the sleep of death, implacable enemies of God, with no thoughts or desires for heaven.

Spiritual rebels do not desire heaven because God is there, and they hate God. They want to be in the earth, and in the earth they want sin. Understand that the rebellious are those who—when God comes to them and speaks of salvation, of heaven, of blessedness, of grace and glory—try to kill the messenger. When God comes in all the goodness of his divine being—comes as blessedness itself—the rebellious hate God and seek to destroy him. Such man has been since Eden.

The fall was the great *rebellion*. It was the rebellion of the whole human race against God out of hatred for God in their hearts. God made man to love, to serve, and to glorify him as man's highest good and blessedness. Man was created to consecrate himself to God with all that man was and with all that he had, so that the entire creation

was to be consecrated to God through the heart of Adam. Man rebelled, and all the light in him was turned to darkness. He is of the earth earthy with no thoughts of heaven. All man's thoughts are carnal, sensual, and devilish.

God must open the doors of man's prison and take him out. God must bring man to heaven, and God must open the doors of heaven. God must draw man unto heaven and translate him into heaven by a wonder of grace. That is what you must understand about the ascension: it is a wonder of grace, a wholly divine act.

God ascended!

And that wonder of grace that is the ascension did not start with the ascension. He that ascended, what is it but that he first descended into the lower parts of the earth? As soon as you speak of someone ascending, you immediately imply that he had been low. Behind that word *ascension* and explaining the wonderful grace of the ascension, is the condescension of God. Before he went up he had gone down into the lower parts of the earth. God had pity on the rebellious.

Oh, not on all of them! No, that is part of the wonder of grace; it is not grace for all but a grace for his people, sovereign and particular grace. God had pity on his people. He willed that they know him and be glorified in him in the highest possible sense, and he chose the way of sin and grace, death and resurrection. He thus willed to lift them out of that misery of sin and death, hell and the grave, and to bring them to himself in heavenly glory.

God descended!

Wonder of grace. Was he not already in the world and present to every creature and in every point of space and time with the whole of his divine being?

God descended and entered the world as a man. For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven!

He entered the womb of Mary and took on himself human flesh. He took on himself the form of a servant. As a man, God took the rebellion of his people on himself. He took all their sin and guilt, all their evil, and all their blackness. He took it, and he made himself responsible for it. He was made sin for us, who knew no sin. He was made a curse. And taking all of that misery on himself, he made himself the object of the wrath of God.

All his life long, from the moment he was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, he walked down a steep and terrible road that went down. Down into the lower parts of the earth and down into hell.

And all along that road that he walked, bearing the sin and iniquity of his people, you see rebellious man on display. When God came to man in human flesh, then man opposed God. When Jesus spoke of heaven and heavenly realities, they laughed, mocked, and ridiculed him. They said he was a glutton and a winebibber and that he had power over devils by the work of the devil. They plotted

and planned his overthrow. They betrayed him and captured him; they tried him and accused him of being a rebel. The lovely and obedient Christ—a rebel!

They condemned him and hung him on a tree to curse him before God and men. Then the darkness came. The sun ceased its shining, the stars did not give their light, and the moon did not rise in the darkness. The very powers of heaven were shaken in the great and terrible day of Jehovah. In the darkness hell came upon Jesus Christ as God came against him in the terror of his wrath against our rebellion.

Oh, yes, he who ascended on high in might to reign, what is it but that he first descended into the lower parts of the earth?

When Jesus had exhausted the wrath of God against the sin of his people, they laid Jesus in the grave. On Sunday morning he arose from the dead. He arose the victor over sin, death, hell, and the grave. They could not hold him.

And forty days later he gathered his disciples on Mount Olivet and talked with them, instructed them, and blessed them; and then he went up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. He went up to heaven. He ascended on high, far above principalities and powers; he ascended far above all heavens that he might fill all things. He entered our prison, and by that he opened the doors of heaven.

He entered first through those doors as the conqueror. He had the right to command those doors to open before him. Lift up, ye everlasting doors! The king of glory shall come in! And who is this king of glory? Who is this king of glory? The Lord, the Lord, he is that king of glory.

Understand that it was not the deity of Jesus that went up. The man went up. Heaven was barred by the wrath of God against man. The presence of God was shut against man. And a man went up and entered into the very presence of God for us. The man, Christ Jesus, who is God in the flesh, went down into the lower parts of the earth. The man, Christ Jesus, entered the very presence of God. A man sat down on the throne of God. A man received from God glory and honor and all authority in heaven and on earth and over hell itself.

That man is our head. Because he is our head, he took our sins on himself and took those sins away for us. As our head he opened heaven for us. As our head he went to heaven for us. And in him we enter into heaven. In him we are reconciled to God. In him we stand before the presence of God. In him we sit now in heavenly places. In him we ascended up on high.

A wonder of grace!

Salvation is of the Lord!

We do not see that with our eyes.

We believe the ascension!

We do not see the reigning Christ. Just as with the naked eye you could not see Christ at the cross, conquering the world, sin, and hell. If you would have looked with the eye of the body at the cross, you would have been as offended as the disciples, and that sight would have revolted you as it did the Romans and all the Jews.

Now you do not see all things put under Jesus' feet. What you do not see, you believe. You look around, and you see sin and wickedness everywhere. You see the devil raging and roaring yet. You see the world in upheaval and turmoil. You see that fear and anguish and despair rule in the world. You see the church very small and threatened on every side, from within and without. You see pain and trouble and turmoil in your lives. You see your sins, and you say, "How can I possibly go to heaven?"

When you say that you believe he ascended, you are saying that Jesus Christ rules and has all authority in heaven and on earth and that nothing can happen apart from his will and his working. You are saying that we have our flesh in heaven; we have our head in heaven; we have an advocate before the face of our Father in heaven. When you say that you believe the ascension, you are saying that you are already in heaven, with Jesus Christ and in the presence of God, over against the testimony of all your sins that you cannot go to heaven. You say that by the power of his Spirit, whom he has sent to you as the earnest of your heavenly inheritance.

Because Jesus led captivity captive!

Captivity explains the state of rebellious man naturally. Captivity explains the impossibility of man's saving himself in any sense. You might say to me that man is a big sinner, and that is why he cannot go to heaven, and I will agree with you. But man's misery is a matter of captivity. When man rebelled against God, man went into captivity.

*Captivity* means to be held by a greater power than your own. That captivity in four words is *sin, death, hell, and grave*. All men are in this captivity by nature. Also, God's elect people are by nature captive to sin, death, hell, and the grave. They are by nature no different from the reprobate. God's people are in a terrible prison—the deepest, darkest, most cruel dungeon of misery.

There is a horror and a depth to that captivity. Can you imagine being in the worst prison that man could ever conceive? You would be yearning for freedom and trying with all your might to get out of that prison. But this is the reality of man's bondage to sin: he loves it! He loves it because in his heart he loves sin and hates God. If anyone would come and offer to take man out of that bondage, would show him the key and the way out, man would tell him, "Go away. I do not want it." That is a terrible captivity.

In the great *rebellion* man became the fierce foe of

God; and all his life long and all history long, he descends deeper and deeper into bondage and captivity. He tightens his own chains around his wrists and his legs. He walks down the steps of that prison deeper and deeper into the foul recesses of the dungeon.

That captivity of man is due to the justice of God. Justly, God delivered man to captivity. Man does not have the right to be free. Man's salvation, then, is not a matter of mere strength. Oh, the one who delivers him must be mighty. He must be God himself. But that might is exerted in the service of justice. In man's rebellion God judged man guilty and delivered him to captivity. The heart of man's captivity and thus of his misery is his guilt before God. Man—all men—sinned against the most high majesty of God, and thus man deserves temporal and eternal punishment. Only the satisfaction of the justice of God can deliver from that prison, so that God releases the prisoner. God's justice cannot be satisfied apart from bearing the wrath of God and bearing that wrath of God so as to finish it. Then to go to heaven, a righteousness that is worthy of heaven must be obtained. Adam had a righteousness fit for the earth. To go to heaven, you must have the righteousness of the Lord from glory.

That is the miracle of Jesus' condescension. He bore the wrath of God against the sins of his people so as to satisfy God. And in all Jesus' suffering, he performed the perfect act of obedience in love for God and obtained everlasting righteousness.

By his might! Only Jesus could suffer that wrath, for he is God come in human flesh. In Jesus, God paid God what God was owed. In Jesus, God accomplished our salvation by satisfying his own wrath. In his mercy toward us, God heaped on Jesus all our sins, in order that he might bear our punishment in our place and that we might escape that punishment and be received into the favor of God. Jesus earned the right to deliver us from our captivity because he paid our debts, and he earned the right to take us to heaven because he obtained a righteousness that is worthy of heaven.

And when we confess that Jesus Christ led captivity captive, it means that he had sin, death, hell, and the grave in his power. He overcame them. He triumphed over them. He put them under his feet. He entered into them and all their horrors in order to defeat them as a matter of strict justice. Since they have no right to hold him—it is impossible that they should hold him—he arose.

And he went up on high. That was his right. In him God opened heaven as a matter of right.

Jesus received from God gifts. A superabundance of gifts. Gifts beyond description in richness and glory. So

glorious was Jesus' suffering that he earned for himself unspeakable glory. He merited for himself glory and honor and dominion and principalities and power. God loaded Jesus with the spoils of his victory. Gifts for men, even for the rebellious.

What gifts? Can we enumerate all those gifts? Daily he loads us with his benefits!

I can speak of at least one of those gifts. Liberty! Freedom from sin, death, guilt, hell, and the grave. We are free from them. It is not possible that they bring us back into bondage. God gives his people the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

And what is involved in that liberty?

Sin, death, and hell can never hold the people of God because they are free from the condemnation of the law. Never again can the law say to the children of God that they must do this or that to enter heaven. Jesus did all that the law requires. He forgives their sins. He takes away their guilt in their own consciences. He speaks the peace of God into their hearts.

He adopts us. He brings us into God's family. He enlightens our hearts and our minds with his Spirit. He lifts us out of our prison. He calls us into the glorious kingdom of God. He causes the light of the knowledge of God to shine in our hearts. He transforms us in the depths of our beings from being rebels and makes us God's children. His Spirit testifies with our spirits that we are the children of God, and he causes us to walk in that glorious liberty of the children of God.

He puts his life into our hearts. He makes us heavenly creatures, whose life is hid with God in Jesus Christ. He causes us to think and to yearn for heaven. He calls us to lift up our hearts to where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Jehovah gives blessing and strength to his people.

That Jehovah God might dwell among them! That simply means that Jesus Christ ascended to realize and perfect God's covenant.

That was God's will for us. Not this life. But heaven. Jesus went to heaven so that we also will go to heaven.

And heaven is the perfect realization of God's covenant. That God dwells with us and that we dwell with him.

And that purpose he accomplishes.

Now already! That is the glory, the safety, the security of the church and the believer. That is the richness and life of the believer and the church. God dwells among us.

That is what my whole life is because Jesus went up on high.

That is what my life will be forevermore because he went up.

Salvation is of Jehovah!

—NJL

You hold in your hands the last issue of the third volume of *Sword and Shield*. That God has given our magazine its place for three years is a testimony to his mercy and grace. There has been no strength in the editors, writers, readers, board, or association to establish or maintain *Sword and Shield*. The strength has been the Lord's, and the honor belongs to him alone.

In this issue you will find a couple of evaluations of Professor Cammenga's doctrine, one in the *Understanding the Times* rubric and one from Elder Aaron Lim of Berean Reformed Protestant Church in Singapore. These evaluations help establish the readers of *Sword and Shield* in the truth of God's sovereign grace over against the Arminian lie that continues to sound out of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Luke Bomers begins a series on the sacrifices of the Old Testament, which sacrifices teach the glorious work of Jesus Christ for our salvation.

The periodical *Christian Renewal (CR)* recently reported on the split between the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Reformed Protestant Churches. The *CR* article is reprinted in full in this issue. The undersigned submitted a letter to *Christian Renewal* in response to the report, which the editor of *CR* said he would run in an upcoming issue. The letter is printed in full in this issue of *Sword and Shield* as well.

My thanks to the readers for taking up and reading what we editors and writers have written for the past three years. I am thankful to God that he gave us this witness for these years.

I have written often in this space about opponents of the magazine who burn their copies of *Sword and Shield*. I recently heard from a recipient who said that he had not read a word of the magazine for three years but had burned every single issue. I was actually quite impressed with his dedication. It takes a pretty sustained commitment over a three-year span to burn every issue! I was hoping to hand-deliver this May issue to him so that I could witness the historic event of its burning with my own eyes and maybe photograph it. (Let the reader understand that I love *Sword and Shield* and that opposition to the magazine only fires my love for the magazine the more. *Sword and Shield* is not my cause in this world—the gospel of Jesus Christ is—but I have loved this magazine.) Imagine my disappointment, therefore, when the recipient admitted that he had not actually gotten around to burning every issue yet. Ah, well. More important is that there are readers who have read every issue for three years. Now that is some real dedication!

May God speed the truths written herein to your heart and the next issue into your hands.

—AL

## LETTER FROM THE BOARD OF REFORMED BELIEVERS PUBLISHING

The board informs the readership of *Sword and Shield* that Rev. Andy Lanning has resigned as editor in chief of the magazine. His decision was entirely his own initiative, and there was no pressure on him from the board to resign.

The board of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP) has accepted his resignation, effective March 27, 2023. We regret the disastrous ecclesiastical circumstances surrounding Reverend Lanning that compelled him to resign the God-given, grand, and glorious privilege that was his as editor in chief of *Sword and Shield*. We judge *his* resignation to be the result of *his* ecclesiastical entanglement in foolish quarrels and controversies about the law, which are unprofitable and useless and which the apostle in Titus 3:9 warned us to avoid. We are thankful that these ecclesiastical matters and troubles involving Reverend Lanning did not have anything to do with the RBP board or its association.

We sincerely thank Reverend Lanning for his labors as editor in chief on behalf of *Sword and Shield* and for his faithful, antithetical witness to the distinctive Reformed faith for the past three years.

The board is very glad to announce Rev. Nathan Langerak's acceptance of the board's appointment of him as the new editor in chief of *Sword and Shield*. We thank him for his willingness to serve in this capacity and are confident of his capable leadership of the magazine.

God has been very gracious to Reformed Believers Publishing to give us three years of publishing a distinctive and an antithetical Reformed witness. We confess that this is of God's grace and that we are entirely dependent upon him to continue this witness.

We remind ourselves and the magazine's readership of the purpose of Reformed Believers Publishing as stated in article 2 of the constitution:

The purpose of Reformed Believers Publishing shall be:

- A. To promote, defend, and develop the Reformed faith, which is the truth revealed in the Word of God and expressed in the Three Forms of Unity, with special emphasis on the truths of the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation, particular grace, and the unconditional covenant.
- B. To expose and condemn all lies repugnant to this truth.
- C. To give a theological and antithetical witness to the Reformed church world and beyond by broadcasting this distinctive Reformed truth to the people of God wherever they are found.

On behalf of the board of Reformed Believers Publishing,  
—Henry Kamps, president

Men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.—1 Chronicles 12:32

## PROGRESSIVE SANCTIFICATION AND THE PREACHING OF THE LAW

The Protestant Reformed Churches repeat loudly and often that they are the spiritual heirs of Rev. Herman Hoeksema. What is becoming increasingly clear is that they are not his heirs. They have departed from Hoeksema; and, departing from him, they have departed from the Reformed faith. When I was still a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches, I noticed that these churches were departing in the doctrine of the preaching of the law and in the doctrine of so-called progressive sanctification.

Protestant Reformed ministers teach that the preaching of the law is the preaching of the gospel. They teach that the preaching of the law ministers grace and sanctifies. One of the supposed effects of this preaching of the law would be progressive sanctification. To promote the false doctrine of progressive sanctification, Protestant Reformed ministers, following the lead of Prof. R. Cammenga, point to all the places in the Reformed creeds where the words “more and more” are used. These words are used, for instance, in Lord’s Day 44: “Likewise, that we constantly endeavor, and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 134).

Some time ago Professor Cammenga preached on Lord’s Day 44. I am publishing in this article an excerpt from the end of his sermon. The excerpt is basically the last two points of his sermon. He preaches painfully slowly, and there is not much content, but the reader will get the picture of the current state of theology in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The sermon is entitled “The Marks of Christians.” The second point is entitled “More and More Conforming to the Image of God,” and the third point is entitled “More and More Longing for Perfection.”<sup>1</sup>

Along with that sermon and on the same subject, I am publishing in this article a portion of a sermon by Rev. Herman Hoeksema on Lord’s Day 44.<sup>2</sup> In order to show that what he preached he also wrote, I include in this article a small section of his commentary on Lord’s Day 44 from his *The Triple Knowledge*.

I will let the reader be the judge of who is Reformed: Professor Cammenga or Reverend Hoeksema. They cannot both be Reformed, for their teachings are antithetical to one another. The men are antithetical in their views of the power and preaching of the law, and they are antithetical in their views of progress in sanctification.

I intend to write some articles in *Sword and Shield* on this subject. To start off, I give the reader the following excerpts.

### *Prof. Ronald Cammenga on Lord’s Day 44*

Besides hatred of sin, the Christian’s life is marked by more and more conforming to the image of God. That’s the second part of the 115th answer: “Likewise, that we constantly endeavor, and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God.” The Christian life is the life of holiness. But that holiness is God’s image in us. Once we lost that image. We had that image; we were created in that image. Adam was our first father. He lived in paradise as the image bearer of God. He resembled God, and he resembled God especially in his holiness in perfection.

Through his own sin he forfeited, through his own sin he lost, the image of God; and now the work of God’s grace in us is that he restores that image in us. That’s holiness; that’s heartfelt devotion to God that arises out of that image of God in us. Holiness is not mere outward conformity to ten rules, the ten commandments. Holiness is not exclusively negative: don’t do that, don’t do that, don’t do that. Holiness is not compliance with the laws of the church. But this is holiness according to the new image in us: that we “delight.” That’s the word the 113th answer uses—that we delight in the law of God. Holiness is such a delight in the law of God that we obey God’s law. That’s how the 114th answer sums up the whole Christian life. Really, the whole Christian life can be described by that one word. No, but even the holiest

1 Ronald Cammenga, “The Marks of Christians,” sermon preached in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church on February 5, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=2523202049992>.

2 Herman Hoeksema, “Preaching the Tenth Commandment,” sermon preached in First Protestant Reformed Church on November 4, 1956, [https://oldpathsrecordings.com/?wpfc\\_sermon=heidelberg-catechism-sermons](https://oldpathsrecordings.com/?wpfc_sermon=heidelberg-catechism-sermons).



of men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience. That's the Christian life: obedience. We are not our own, to live as we good and well please. But we belong to Jesus Christ and to God in Jesus Christ, and that means we obey him. Obedience: that's what the law of God demands of us. Every aspect of the Christian life is obedience—obedience to the ten commandments and then to those commandments as they are expanded and amplified in all the exhortations, warnings, and rebukes of the word of God. Really, the whole Christian life can be described by that one word: obedience.

Even the children can understand that. You know what obedience is. You know what it is to obey your mom and dad. You know what it is to obey your teacher at school. That now is how we show that we are the children of God. We obey our heavenly Father. We do what he says. Refrain from doing what he forbids. A Christian obeys all of God's commandments. He doesn't pick and choose. All of God's commandments.

The new obedience that the Heidelberg Catechism speaks of in the 114th answer—that small beginning of the new obedience—does not mean, that small beginning, that we only obey some of God's commandments but not others. Mustn't think that growth in holiness means that you start by obeying commandment one; and then at some time down the road, you work on commandment two; and then sometime down the road, you work on commandment three. Not that. Or that you begin by obeying the commandments on the first table of the law and then later on get to the commandments of the second table of God's law. Not that either. Maybe commandments one through six and commandments eight through ten but not that seventh commandment: fornication, adultery. We hang on to that commandment. Is that what you're doing, young people? We minimize the seriousness of that sin. We excuse it. That's not the mark of the true Christian. The true Christian strives to obey all of God's commandments. That's the nature of the law itself. The law is such that if you break one commandment, you have broken them all. The law is such that it is obeyed in its entirety, or it is not obeyed at all. If there is someone here this morning who is deliberately disobeying one of the commandments of God, holding that sin dear, refusing to break with that sin in his or her life, then the warning to you this morning is to repent—to repent of your sin and sinfulness; turn away from your sin to God in Christ.

The fruit of the preaching of the law now is that more and more we become conformable to the image of God. That's how the second "more and more" comes in. That more and more would become the more earnest in seeking remission; but more and more earnest, says Lord's Day 44, in conforming to the image of God. Not only is it the case that under the preaching of God's law we more and

more know our sins and our sinfulness. That's true, but that's not all of it. More and more we are made conformable to the image of God. More and more, in the case of every regenerated child of God, there is growth, development in holiness. Right alongside of that sinful, fallen, depraved, Adam nature—the old man—God creates a new man, a new man in the image of God. We become new men and new women. And under the preaching of God's word, in particular now under the preaching of God's law, that new man in us grows and develops. In regeneration, after all, we are born, born again. And from the time that we are born, we grow, and we grow into mature men and mature women in Christ.

That is how you must understand, too, the small beginning referred to in the 114th answer. That's not a beginning like *A* is the beginning of the alphabet. What does that matter? It could just as well be *C*. We'll put *A* in the place of *C*, start the alphabet with *C*. It doesn't change the alphabet. That's not the way it is with this small beginning. This small beginning is like the baby. It's a new birth. The baby conceived in his mother's womb grows and grows and develops until finally that baby is born and then grows and grows from a baby to a toddler to a young man, a young woman, to a mature man or woman in Christ. Or that small beginning is like the acorn that you can hold in your hand. That little tiny acorn, but you plant it. That acorn is a small beginning of what in the course of years becomes a giant oak tree. That's the beginning, the small beginning of the new life in us. That small beginning grows and grows and grows, and it does so under the preaching of the law. God does not only use the law to teach us our sin, but he uses the law in order that that new man in us may grow.

There is an important truth here. Listen carefully to me. God uses commands to accomplish that which is commanded. That was true at creation. God didn't think the world into existence. He commanded, and what he commanded came to pass. Let there be light. And that command brought forth the light! That's the case with the preaching of the gospel. God commands us to repent and believe. The *commands* themselves work repentance over our sins and work faith in Jesus Christ. So it is with our sanctification. The ten commandments must be preached as God's commands to us: thou shalt and thou shalt not. And those commands in the preaching of the gospel, God uses to work the more and more of our being conformable to the image of God.

But that more and more that God works through the preaching of the law also includes the more and more for perfection, the longing for perfection. That's included in Lord's Day 44. That's the very last part of the 115th answer: "That we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection

proposed to us in a life to come.” That is exactly because in this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of the new obedience. The holiest! Where does that leave you? Where does that leave me? It leaves us longing for that better day. That’s why 1 Thessalonians 4 ends the way it does, with the resurrection and the second coming of Christ. Then the great desire of the Christian life, perfection, is realized. That’s heaven. Heaven isn’t, first of all, our bliss and glory. Though heaven will be bliss and glory, it will not be, first of all, our being reunited with loved ones, although we yearn to be reunited with our loved ones. But, first of all, it’s the longing for perfection, at long last to be done with the struggle against my sinful nature, at last to worship God perfectly.

Now, the connection between that perfection and our obedience to God’s law is this. First, our obedience to God’s law now. And the joy that we experience in keeping God’s law is a foretaste, a little taste, of the joy of perfection. Second, it is in the way of our obedience to God *now* that we arrive at, we come to, the perfection that is proposed to us in a life to come. As the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says in Hebrews 12:14, “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” And finally, only in the way of holiness do we enjoy the assurance, the assurance in ourselves that one day we will come to the perfection that is proposed to us.

Now, may the preaching on the ten commandments these past weeks have awakened in us a consciousness of our sins and quickened us to fight against our sin. May it have provoked us to holiness, so that more and more we strive to be conformed to the image of God. And may it have quickened in our hearts the desire for the perfection of that better day.

Amen.

### *Rev. Herman Hoeksema on Lord’s Day 44*

The Christian is, in a way, a very mysterious creature, mysterious. You think you can understand Romans 7 as I read this morning? Is that mysterious, beloved? Listen. “For that which I do I allow not.” Notice I, I, I. The same I. That which my person, my ego does, my ego allows not; but what my ego, my person, would, that my person does not. But what I hate, what my ego hates, that my ego does. And then, nevertheless, the apostle says in verse 17, “Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.” That you experience, beloved, that you experience? Remember, the Christian is, after all, not two persons, although he feels in himself, in his own conscience, as if he were. The Christian, don’t forget that, after all, has no two hearts! Has only one heart. And that one heart is reborn, is regenerated—that first of all. That one heart. We must insist on that, beloved. From a natural point of view, he is one person, one nature, one body, one

soul. From a spiritual point of view, he has not two hearts but one heart. In that one heart dwells the Spirit of Christ. That’s the Christian. That one heart is holy, perfect, righteous, loving the law of God. But that is only his heart.

That’s only the small beginning. And that small beginning, beloved, is a small principle—a principle, not simply a beginning, as the beginning of a spool of thread is the beginning. No, that beginning is a principle, the principle of life in his heart. And while in his heart, in which dwells the Spirit of Christ, there is the principle of holiness and righteousness and love of God, in his nature, in his soul, and in his body, there are, let me say, the old habits of sin. The old ruts of sin are in his nature, the rut of sin in his body. Oh, yes, that body is already one thousand years old, you must remember. That body came from my father and mother and from generations preceding. And my soul is intimately related to my body; and so in the body and in that soul, there are deep ruts of sin. And in those deep ruts of sin, the wagon of my life slides with ease, beloved. And so while I’m a new man, a new man in Christ, the old man with the ruts of sin often deceives me and leads me into ways of corruption and iniquity. That is the Christian. The new man in Christ is the principle, is the new heart. The old man is full of ruts of sin, into which the new man easily slides. That is the way it is. Even the holiest of them, beloved, don’t forget that.

Sometimes it is explained that we gradually, we gradually, increase in holiness. That’s not true. We don’t increase in the small beginning. Not according to the Catechism, not according to experience. It’s not so that when I’m regenerated and when I’m called, that I have a small beginning and then gradually—maybe through the preaching of the word and through instruction—I grow, and that principle grows. No, sir! That remains a small beginning until the day of my death! Oh, ’tis true! That small beginning must more and more dominate. That’s true. That small beginning must more and more rule; that small beginning must more and more have the victory; but nevertheless, it remains a small beginning of the new obedience until the day of my death for you and for me. That’s the way it is.

No wonder that the Catechism finally asks the question, what’s the use then? What is the use? Why must the law be preached at all if that is the case? If I’m not perfect, as the perfectionist has it? The perfectionist, as you know, claims that he can fulfill the law of God. He can, even though he doesn’t always. According to his nature and principle, he can perfectly perform the law. The Reformed Christian says not only that he does not but that he cannot. He cannot. He is so constituted in his nature, in his new man in the midst of his old man, that he cannot. He can’t perfectly perform the law. He cannot. That is the Reformed Christian. And that’s scripture. No

question about it, beloved. If anyone says that he has no sin, he deceives himself, and the truth is not in him.

But if that is the case, if we cannot perfectly perform the law, if we can only have a small beginning of that perfection, why must that law still be preached? Is it, is it not better not to proclaim the law, as the antinomian has it? Antinomianism claims that there is no use anyway, and therefore there is no use to preach the law. The law isn't for the Christian, not at all. Well, of course, the law isn't for the Christians as law, as commandments simply. The law is for the Christian in the spiritual sense of the word. And when the spiritual sense of the law is preached to the Christian, he will certainly derive benefit. But that benefit is not that he will gradually increase in perfection. No.

The Catechism tells us that there is a fourfold benefit of the preaching of the law. First of all, by the preaching of the law, we increase in the knowledge of sin. That is, we gradually have a deeper sense of sin, beloved. That's one thing. We gradually have a deeper sense of sin. What formerly was no sin to us, now, through the preaching of the law, it certainly becomes sin.

Secondly, because of an increasing knowledge of sin, we also flee more constantly to Christ. We must not be discouraged; we must never be discouraged. Faith is not discouraged, even though we see our sins, beloved. That is not the idea of faith. That is not the idea of the preaching of the law. No, the deepening sense of sin must have the result that we flee to Christ! We must have forgiveness; we must have daily forgiveness; we must daily cry out with the publican, "Oh, God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" every day.

The more we hear the law, the more we see the perfection of the law as I proclaim it unto you this morning, the more we seek the blood of Christ. Only in the blood of Christ is there redemption. Only in the blood of Christ is there forgiveness. Only in the blood of Christ are we righteous. We are not righteous in ourselves; we are not righteous in our own nature. We are righteous only in Jesus Christ our Lord. Our state is righteous only in Christ before God. Remember that. That's our comfort.

And in the third place, of course stands to reason, if our knowledge of sin is deepened and if we are sorry for our sin, for our sins—spiritual knowledge of sin is sorrow over sin—if that knowledge of sin is deepened and if we flee to Jesus Christ for forgiveness more and more, then it stands to reason that we pray and long for sanctification. We are not satisfied; we are not even satisfied with our present condition. That isn't it. But longing for sanctification, we pray to God for the Holy Spirit that he may dwell in us and that we may walk, more and more walk, in sanctification of life and heart.

The fact that we confess our imperfection is no excuse for the Christian. Just excuse himself. He longs to be delivered from the body of this death until he arrives in perfection. And, therefore, the final fruit is hope. As the apostle has it, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." We shall be delivered; we shall be perfectly delivered; we shall be perfectly delivered from all sin and imperfection forevermore. And for that state, beloved, for that state we long. And for that state we pray. And for that state we hope. And hoping for that state, we love the preaching of the law, for it tells us that perfection is coming in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Thanks, O Lord, for the preaching of thy word. Sanctify it unto us; cause us to know ourselves in our sin. Cause us to know ourselves in Jesus Christ our Lord, so that we may more and more live according to that small beginning of new life within us, fight against sin, and have the victory and hope for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in glory. Amen.

### *Rev. Herman Hoeksema in The Triple Knowledge*

And notice too that the Catechism tells us that the very holiest of the children of God have but a small beginning of the new obedience in this life. Even he that is farthest advanced on the way of sanctification, and is most consecrated to God and to His service, still has but a small beginning. There is, therefore, principally no difference, according to the Catechism, between the holiest and the less holy, between the beginner and the advanced Christian. It is not true that there are believers who have a very small beginning of the new obedience, and people that have a bigger beginning. On the contrary; according to the Catechism, evidently, all believers, no matter how far they are advanced, are alike in this respect. All have but a small beginning of the new obedience, until the day of their death. It also means that sanctification does not consist in this, that that principle, that small beginning, gradually develops and increases. It remains a beginning. It remains a principle. It remains small until the day that we put off the earthy tabernacle, and enter into the house of God in heaven. Sanctification consists in this, that through the power of the Holy Spirit and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that new principle of life in the heart of the believer, that small beginning, fights the good fight of faith, and more and more overcomes the operations and the power of sin that is in our members.<sup>3</sup>

—NJL

3 Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972), 3:440.

## PROFESSOR RONALD “ARMINIUS” CAMMENGA

Prof. Ronald Cammenga of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) has played a leading role in the apostasy of his denomination. At the beginning of the controversy over justification by faith alone, Professor Cammenga took issue with Mr. Neil Meyer, who had faithfully protested against the Arminian doctrines of Rev. David Overway. Mr. Meyer was faithful to his vow as an elder in the church of Jesus Christ. He exerted himself in keeping the church free from error. Professor Cammenga despises Mr. Meyer’s doctrine and condemns it as antinomian to this day.

Igniting the controversy in 2015, Reverend Overway taught that our obedience is the way to enjoy covenant fellowship with the Father.

The way unto the Father includes obedience.

The way of a holy life matters. It is the way unto the Father.<sup>1</sup>

Reverend Overway taught that if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do. He repeated the same false doctrine in many of his sermons that were protested at Synod 2018. In the judgment of Synod 2018, Reverend Overway’s doctrinal error “is that the believer’s good works are given a place and function that is out of harmony with the Reformed confessions.”<sup>2</sup> Synod 2018 also judged that Reverend Overway’s doctrinal error “compromises the gospel of Jesus Christ” and that by that error “the perfect work of Christ is displaced” (70).

Professor Cammenga, chair of dogmatics at the Protestant Reformed seminary, never said a word of condemnation against Reverend Overway’s false doctrine throughout the entire controversy. Professor Cammenga loves Reverend Overway’s Arminian doctrine. Professor Cammenga believes that man must do something to be saved, assured, and forgiven. After Synod 2018 had repudiated Reverend Overway’s Arminian doctrine, Professor Cammenga revived the same false doctrine and started teaching it on the pages of the *Standard Bearer*.

### *Lawless Militating*

Synod 2018 singled out a heretical statement in one of Reverend Overway’s sermons on Lord’s Day 23:

We look at our good works in the same way. Never of any value to make me be declared righteous before God, but always of help in finding and maintaining assurance that God has justified me through Christ and Christ alone. (68)

Synod 2018 condemned the above statement of Reverend Overway and laid out the truth of Lord’s Day 23:

If we are truly justified by faith in Christ alone, then true faith cannot look to its works to help find or maintain the assurance that is found in Christ alone...The experience and assurance of justification in one’s consciousness is justification, and justification is by faith alone in Christ alone (L.D. 23; B.C., Art. 23). Good works have a proper place and function in the Christian life but they do not function as helps for finding and maintaining assurance of our justification. (69)

Synod 2018 went further and condemned the doctrine that good works assure us of our justification. Synod 2018 quoted from the “Necessary Way of the Covenant,” a document drawn up by the consistory of Hope Protestant Reformed Church.

Justification, which includes the experience and assurance of justification in the sinner’s own consciousness, is by faith alone in Christ alone to the exclusion of all good works. (71)

Lawlessly militating against that good doctrine of Synod 2018, Professor Cammenga resurrected in the *Standard Bearer* the same false doctrine of good works’ assuring salvation.

Good works are used by God the Holy Spirit to strengthen the assurance of believers...

<sup>1</sup> *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2016*, 45.

<sup>2</sup> *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2018*, 61. Page numbers for subsequent quotations from this *Acts of Synod* are given in text.

God has determined that our good works, as the fruits of election and salvation, shall play a role in our assurance. They are mistaken who contend that our good works have nothing to do with our assurance.<sup>3</sup>

The presence of these good works in the believer's life confirm his assurance of salvation...

The Reformed confessions teach clearly that the good works of the child of God are used by the Holy Spirit to confirm in the believer the assurance of his salvation.<sup>4</sup>

Reverend Overway had taught that good works are always of help in finding and maintaining the assurance of salvation.

Synod 2018 condemned Reverend Overway's false doctrine and declared that good works do not assure us of salvation.

Professor Cammenga, lawlessly militating against his own synod and resurrecting Reverend Overway's Arminian doctrine, taught that good works assure us of salvation. Professor Cammenga was criticizing Synod 2018 when he wrote, "They are mistaken who contend that our good works have nothing to do with our assurance." Synod 2018, in his view, was mistaken when it judged that "good works...do not function as helps for finding and maintaining assurance of our justification" (69).

Professor Cammenga is the biggest hypocrite, bar none, in the PRC. He wickedly condemns members of the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) for not following the church-orderly way of protest and appeal, but he sees fit to ignore that church-orderly way himself. Rather than protesting against the decisions of Synod 2018 condemning the doctrine that good works assure us of our salvation, Professor Cammenga lawlessly has taught that good works assure us of salvation.

His lawlessness introduced schism—departure from Christ—into the PRC. His lawlessness plunged his entire denomination into further chaos and unrest. Developing in their apostasy, the PRC have advanced the doctrinal debate. The current Protestant Reformed dogma is that if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do. Since the good works of the believer assure him of his salvation, his good work of repentance is now needed for the forgiveness of his sins.

## *Professor Cammenga's Doctrine of Justification*

Professor Cammenga recently wrote a series of articles on the supposed antinomian doctrine of the RPC. According to the professor, repentance is necessary for the forgiveness of sins. Without man's prior repentance, God's forgiveness of that man's sins will not follow.

That forgiveness follows repentance is the teaching of Scripture. The Bible clearly teaches that God's forgiveness follows God-worked repentance.<sup>5</sup>

Forgiveness actually takes place when by faith in Jesus Christ, God declares in our consciousness, "Thy sins are forgiven."<sup>6</sup>

The teaching that God forgives sin apart from and prior to repentance, that He forgives the sinner in eternity long before he sheds a single tear in sorrow over sin in his lifetime, has been the teaching of the antinomians in the past...

Forgiveness of sins takes place in time and history, therefore, and not in eternity antecedent to the gathering of the church.<sup>7</sup>

According to Professor Cammenga, the teaching that God forgives sin apart from and prior to repentance is antinomian. Professor Cammenga proudly but falsely announced that

this idea that forgiveness precedes repentance never has been the teaching of the PRC and cannot be demonstrated ever to have been a distinguishing doctrine of the PRC...No PRC theologian has ever taught that God's forgiveness of us precedes His work in us to bring us to repentance.<sup>8</sup>

Professor Cammenga should charge his predecessor at his seminary, Prof. David Engelsma, with antinomianism. Professor Engelsma taught eternal justification—the doctrine that God's forgiveness precedes our repentance, the doctrine that God forgives us apart from and prior to repentance.

Eternal justification, or justification in eternity, if a reality, is the decree in God's eternal counsel imputing the righteousness of Christ to the elect, forgiving all their sins, and adopting them as his children for the sake of Christ's death. It is not a decree that God would, in time and history,

3 Ronald Cammenga, "Assurance and Good Works (3)," *Standard Bearer* 97, no. 16 (May 15, 2021): 376.

4 Ronald Cammenga, "Assurance and Good Works (4)," *Standard Bearer* 97, no. 21 (September 15, 2021): 490.

5 Ronald Cammenga, "Antinomian? Without a Doubt (1)," *Standard Bearer* 98, no. 18 (July 2022): 421.

6 Cammenga, "Antinomian? Without a Doubt (1)," 420.

7 Ronald Cammenga, "Antinomians? Without a Doubt (2)," *Standard Bearer* 98, no. 20 (September 1, 2022): 469–70.

8 Cammenga, "Antinomian? Without a Doubt (1)," 420.

reckon Christ's righteousness to their account. But it is a decree actually reckoning the righteousness of Christ to their account. According to eternal justification, by virtue of the decree the elect are righteous with the righteousness of Jesus Christ before they are born, indeed before the creation of the world.<sup>9</sup>

Scripture clearly teaches a justification of sinners outside their own experience, a justification that does not take place by means of their faith, a justification that is a reality prior to the life and faith of New Testament Christians.<sup>10</sup>

Eternal justification confesses the grace of God in justifying the guilty sinner apart from anything in the sinner himself that is the ground or reason for the divine act of justifying. The thinking that regards eternal justification as antinomian must also regard justification by faith alone as antinomian. It is thinking that is offended by grace. The doctrine of eternal justification is not routed by the illicit charge of antinomianism.<sup>11</sup>

Professor Cammenga should also charge with antinomianism his denomination's founding father, Rev. Herman Hoeksema, who strongly advocated for eternal justification.

First, we certainly may speak of our justification from eternity. We are justified in the decree of election from before the foundation of the world...Evidently afraid to over-emphasize the counsel of God, some maintained that one could speak only of justification by faith. They denied eternal justification. But it is very clear that this is not correct...God knew the elect in Christ as justified from all eternity.

The elect do not become righteous before God in time by faith, but they are righteous in the tribunal of God from before the foundation of the earth. God beholds them in eternity not as sinners, but as perfectly righteous, as redeemed, as justified in Christ.

He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel (Num. 23:21).<sup>12</sup>

## *Theological Development in Sister CERC*

Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC) in Singapore, sister to the PRC, has taken notice of Professor Cammenga's new doctrine of repentance preceding justification. Professor Cammenga's theological student, Rev. Josiah Tan, candidly admits that one thing necessarily preceding another thing is a condition: "One thing must be before something else will follow."<sup>13</sup> Conditions are used "in a formal sense" in scripture because God has made some things "to precede other things" (5). In salvation man's activity of believing and repenting must precede God's activity of saving, justifying, or forgiving. If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do.

Jesus Here is teaching, that for salvation/justification/forgiveness of sins to follow, something must happen prior, that is a man believing in Jesus. That is a man, abasing himself and casting himself completely on Jesus. Without this, salvation will not follow. (5)

Reverend Tan openly admits that these are conditions that man fulfills by God's grace. He says, "There is no condition in which man fulfills on his own power, therefore it is ALL OF GRACE" (5). Reverend Tan attempts to deflect the charge of Arminian conditional theology by stating, "Faith is not a condition in which one must have faith of one's own ability" (5). But faith is nevertheless a condition because God has made faith to precede justification. Man fulfills the condition of faith by God's grace. Reverend Tan made it clear: "Is faith a condition for justification or forgiveness?...Is faith a condition? Yes, it is necessary."<sup>14</sup>

One thing preceding another thing is a condition.

Faith is a condition that man fulfills by God's grace.

Further developing his esteemed professor's doctrine of repentance preceding justification, Reverend Tan mixes faith and repentance together, so that they become one entity. According to him, "Repentance is part of faith... you can't have faith that lays hold of Christ without repentance" (14). Reverend Tan's and CERC's doctrine of faith and repentance is that you cannot receive Christ by faith alone without repentance. You receive Christ by faith and by your repentance. Repentance is the condition for receiving Christ.

9 David Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification: Proclaimed, Defended, Developed* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2017), 243.

10 Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification*, 253.

11 Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification*, 256–57.

12 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd edition (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 2:95.

13 Rev. Josiah Tan taught a series of classes on the recent controversy in the PRC. Before his fourth class, the session of CERC sent notes to the congregation, which Reverend Tan then used for his presentation in that class. The quotations are taken from those notes, which can be found at <https://bereanrpsg.files.wordpress.com/2022/04/cercs-4th-class-notes.pdf>. This quotation is from page 5. Page numbers for subsequent quotations from these class notes are given in text.

14 Recording of CERC's fourth class, [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DQiscSIjI811vQ9CZpM3CsLqc5L\\_M7QT/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DQiscSIjI811vQ9CZpM3CsLqc5L_M7QT/view?usp=sharing) (11:07, 14:50).

It has been more than a year since Reverend Tan made those theological developments in the PRC's controversy. Professor Cammenga's silence is a tacit approval of his student's doctrine. Just as the professor did not condemn Reverend Overway's Arminian doctrines, so the same professor does not condemn his student's Arminian doctrines. Professor Cammenga loves his student's conditions. Let the professor come out in defense of his student's theological developments, or let him condemn them, but let him not stay silent.

### *Principles Work Through*

Professor Cammenga made a shocking revelation about his Arminian doctrine: repentance is the necessary condition for the forgiveness of sins. If repentance is not needed, repentance will ultimately be dispensed with.

Therefore, if sins are forgiven apart from repentance, repentance will ultimately be dispensed with.<sup>15</sup>

In this statement Professor Cammenga revealed his blatant Arminianism. Man's work of repentance is necessary to accomplish God's forgiveness of that man's sins. If repentance is not necessary, then it will be dispensed with. The same principle applies to the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone without works. If a man is justified by faith alone apart from works, then by the professor's logic, good works will ultimately be dispensed with. Man must be justified by faith and works if works are not to be dispensed with. If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do.

God's forgiveness of sins must be accomplished by the will and work of the sinner.

God's salvation of a sinner must be accomplished by the will and work of that sinner.

Professor Engelsma was right when he said that

the thinking that regards eternal justification as antinomian must also regard justification by faith alone as antinomian. It is thinking that is offended by grace.<sup>16</sup>

Because Professor Cammenga judges eternal justification as antinomian, he must also judge justification by faith alone as antinomian. Professor Cammenga's thinking is offended by grace. For him and his Protestant Reformed colleagues, if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do.

### *The RPC's Confession*

The Reformed Protestant Churches confess that our good works do not assure us of our salvation. The RPC maintain

the good doctrine of Synod 2018 that "the experience and assurance of justification in one's consciousness is justification, and justification is by faith alone in Christ alone" (69).

The RPC repudiate Professor Cammenga's Arminian doctrine that repentance is necessary for the forgiveness of sins. Lord's Day 7 teaches that the Holy Ghost works faith in my heart by the gospel to know that "remission of sin...[is] freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 90–91). Lord's Day 21 teaches "that God, for the sake of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins... but will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 105). Lord's Day 30 teaches that God's people "are truly sorrowful for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ," not for the sake of their repentance (*Confessions and Church Order*, 117). They do not trust in their repentance for the forgiveness of their sins. Lord's Day 31 teaches that whenever God's people "receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 118).

With this Arminian doctrine of repentance preceding forgiveness, the Arminian professor cannot pray the Reformed prayer of baptism:

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise Thee that Thou hast forgiven us and our children all our sins through the blood of Thy Son Jesus Christ, and received us through Thy Holy Spirit as members of Thine only begotten Son, and adopted us to be Thy children, and sealed and confirmed the same unto us by holy baptism. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 263)

The Reformed church confesses in this prayer that our children receive the forgiveness of their sins through the cross of Jesus, apart from and prior to their repentance.

Repentance is the necessary and inevitable fruit—not the condition, prerequisite, or cause—of God's gracious forgiveness of our sins.

Professor Ronald "Arminius" Cammenga's Arminian doctrine is now entrenched in his denomination and in his sister church. If a man would be forgiven, he must first repent. If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do.

To man belongs all the glory for salvation in the PRC.

From this evil doctrine God has delivered the members of the RPC.

—Aaron Lim

15 Ronald Cammenga, "Antinomian? Without a Doubt (1)," *Standard Bearer* 98, no. 18 (July 2022): 420.

16 Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification*, 256–57.

# SACRIFICES (1): ONE OFFERING OF PERFECTION

*For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.* — Hebrews 10:14.<sup>1</sup>

## *Our High Priest*

**T**he epistolist writes of one offering of perfection, an offering par excellence, an offering that is absolutely sufficient of itself to consummate the everlasting covenant of Jehovah's grace. The epistolist writes of the offering of the body of Jesus Christ our high priest.

Indeed, Jesus Christ is high priest. High priest is his eternally appointed office by the decree of Jehovah God. As eternally beloved and begotten of God, he was elected unto a most honorable and glorious position—the servant of Jehovah. The Father loves his appointed servant, declaring, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth” (Isa. 42:1). And this servant delights in his appointment: “I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (Ps. 2:7).

No man may take this position of honor and glory unto himself but he who is called of God. You and I were not called and ordained to this office. We were not appointed by God to realize his covenant with us. Nor may we intrude ourselves into the place that was given to Jesus Christ. For the moment, let's imagine that we could diligently labor and offer ourselves to God as an offering without spot or blemish. Having done all that his holy law demands, if we were to come unto God to present ourselves and to request his covenant blessings, his response would be, “Who required this of thee? I have given my Son for this office. You despise my appointment of him as high priest!” God the Father elected his Son Jesus Christ unto this honor and glory.

As the one possessing this high priestly office, Jesus Christ is authorized and qualified to function in the name of God and to serve God in behalf of God's covenant.

He who authorizes and qualifies is the Spirit. “I have put my spirit upon him,” declares the Father (Isa. 42:1). “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,” proclaims the righteous servant (Isa. 61:1). And upon Jesus Christ the high priest was the Spirit poured without measure.

Just as you and I were not appointed to the office of

high priest, neither are we qualified for such a work. Possessing the Spirit without measure would simply consume us mere men. But our high priest is not a mere man. He is almighty God in our flesh. And in the power of the eternal Spirit—the Lord Almighty—Christ performed all his work and gave himself as an offering of a sweet savor unto his Father.

Father. Son. Holy Spirit. Who gives this offering? The triune God provides this one offering of perfection in the Lord Jesus Christ. All things are of and through and unto God. The works outside of his own triune life are indivisible.

This elect and anointed officer functions in the name of God and serves God in behalf of God's covenant as high priest.

What is the essence of priestly work? This: *to sanctify*. The high priest consecrates himself and all things to the living and holy God. Particularly, the text teaches that the high priest sanctifies a people. “Them that are sanctified” are carried by him very near unto God—yea, into God's own heavenly sanctuary—for covenant fellowship.

Behold those articles borne into God's holy presence by the high priest. Upon his shoulders were two stones, and hanging over his chest was the breastplate. In onyx were inscribed the names of the children of Israel. Over his heart laid the church as precious jewels. Wherever he went, he carried with him an elect people whom he represented. Just as he is their high priest, so also is he their head.

Thus in the ascending of our high priest far above all heavens, we now sit together in heavenly places before the face of God. And there in Jehovah's presence we remain forever. The realization of God's covenant! The heart of Christ's high priestly work is to consummate God's everlasting covenant of grace. A most honorable and glorious office is his.

## *Them That Are Sanctified*

Into Jehovah's house, the beauty of holiness, entered this high priest as the head and representative of a sanctified

<sup>1</sup> This was the text for my specimen sermon at the January 2023 Classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches.



people. “Them that are sanctified”—a wondrous and gracious description!

For who are these people?

They are those who in themselves are crooked and perverse. They have no right of access unto the living and holy God. Having transgressed the covenant of God in their first high priest and head Adam, they do not belong to the household of Jehovah. They belong to the household of Satan. They are sold under sin and death. Their rightful dwelling place is the fiery furnace of hell, wherein is wailing and gnashing of teeth. Under the verdict of God’s holy law, they deserve not the blessing and fullness and fatness of God’s table, but they deserve the cursing and emptiness and famine of outer darkness.

Furthermore, setting aside for the moment this right of access unto God—but not ignoring it—it must be said that these people possess a polluted and vile nature. Their entire being conflicts with the purity of God’s sanctuary. His house is clean and without spot. But they are filthy from their skin to the core of their existence. His house smells pleasant, scented with the sweet fragrance of life. But to them belongs an aroma of death. The corruption of their nature has the repulsive stench of decay. His house resounds in glorious harmony to the praise of his perfect righteousness. But their being is a nauseating cacophony of wickedness.

Furthermore, setting aside this polluted nature for the moment—but not ignoring it—it must be said that if these people were to come before God’s majesty and not ceaselessly give unto him what is rightfully his—namely, perfect love with every power and ability that they possess—then he may not suffer them a moment longer. As the righteous God, nothing less than perfect righteousness is due unto him. Those who withhold righteousness from him are wicked and rebellious and must be consumed by the holy fire of jealousy for his name. But these are a people who, being inflicted with the disease of original sin, are incapable of withholding their filth.

Them that are sanctified? These are not a holy people but defiled!

Imagine a filthy sow bursting through your front door to wipe her slop on your white carpet and to root around in your pantry with her grimy snout. What is more, she has a stomach bug and spews out from both ends. Imagine a man of the stock of Adam intruding himself into God’s house...

Yet that is not what the epistolist says about them. They are sanctified! They are without spot or blemish and brought nigh unto the holy, holy, holy one to dwell with him forever in covenant love. Wondrous and gracious words!

They are sanctified by the one offering of the high priest, Jesus Christ. For those whom he bears upon his shoulders and whose judgment rests upon his heart, he gives a vicarious offering that they may be sanctified.

He does not labor for all men. His high priestly work is strictly particular. His offering is in behalf of those who belong to God’s covenant according to an election of grace. The Old Testament high priest did not bear upon his shoulders the name of every man under heaven but only the names of those who belonged to Israel. And why were *those* names etched in the two stones upon his shoulders? Because those names were written in the eternal registers of God’s kingdom from before the foundation of the world. Note that the names of the elect were not inscribed into wax tablets! They were etched into onyx. They were forever borne by their priest because of the unchangeable, eternal reality of God’s decree. The high priest, Jesus Christ, performs his duties for his elect and for them alone.

### *A Perfect-Complete Offering*

His offering for his elect is one. “By *one offering* he hath perfected...”

One person gave this offering. That one person was the divine and eternally begotten Son of God. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.

For this one offering God equipped his righteous servant with a body. “When he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but *a body* hast thou prepared me” (Heb. 10:5). The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

This “body” should be understood as a true and complete human nature. Christ had both a body and a soul. His mind and will were human. He possessed human rationality and affections. “*In all things* it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren.” For since the soul was lost as well as the body, it was necessary that he should take both upon himself to save both. God ordained for Jesus Christ an individual human nature, drawn from Mary his mother, out of the line of David. The body that he possessed also had a weakened human nature. Being able to experience pain in body and soul, he truly suffered the consequence of the fall.

Yet this body was sinless. Adam was not Jesus’ head because the person of Jesus Christ is divine. The person is the eternal *Logos*, who is ever with God and who is God. Original sin cannot be imputed unto him whose person comes from above the heavens. And being free from condemnation in Adam, Jesus was not tainted by human corruption and pollution. Moreover, God so prepared this body in the tomb of the virgin’s womb without the means of man, so that he was conceived and born a holy thing.

This was the body that was prepared for Jesus Christ. This was the body that he offered.

The offering of Jesus’ body constituted the whole of his existence. That is the oneness of this offering too. You must understand that this one offering was the whole life of Jesus Christ. All that transpired from his conception in

the womb of Mary to his death on the cross was one act of service and obedience.

And Jesus did not go through his life as an isolated individual. Rather, in everything that he did, he did it as the representative and head of his people. He bore for his whole life the curse due for his people's sins. Their guilt was always upon him. He suffered his whole life long in their behalf. And all of his love toward God was in their stead.

This one offering culminated in our high priest's sacrifice on the cross. The entire life of Jesus Christ was priestly service under the shadow of the cross. Only there can the curse be removed. Only there can sin be expiated. Only there can he give to God the perfect payment for sin that God was owed. Consequently, only there can the greatest expression of love unto God be rendered. Bearing the sins and guilt of his people and loving his Father to the end, Christ's service must lead to that altar. And there he gave this offering.

One lifelong act of obedience unto death by one person.

And because the one who gave this offering was God, this sacrifice was of infinite value. His divine person ascribed infinite worth to his work. All of his suffering was an infinite retribution to the divine justice of God. All of his obedience was the obtaining of infinite righteousness before God. That is why one offering could perfect.

Indeed, his offering did perfect. "For by one offering *he hath perfected...*"

The meaning of that verb *hath perfected* means *to bring to completion*. By these words the text sings of the eternal good pleasure of Jehovah God. God willed this one offering. For Christ says in verses 6–7, "In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do *thy will*, O God." It was the desire to perfect this will of God that consumed our high priest during his entire earthly ministry.

And by these words "hath perfected," the text shows that you and I are sanctified for a purpose. What is the purpose of God according to which he willed this one offering? "Let my name and covenant be glorified. Let it be glorified in this highest possible sense and to the greatest possible degree." God is wise, just, good, and the over-flowing fountain of all good. And he will have all men know his glory.

More specifically, the purpose of God was to bring a people unto himself by his own right hand and his mighty arm; to effectually draw a people out of their death and alienation from him unto life and intimate fellowship with him; to save them by grace alone; to manifest his righteousness and covenant mercies by showing forth vessels of mercy in that great and final day.

And God brought his own good pleasure to completion. *He* did. He did through his elect servant, Jesus

Christ. For nothing less is in harmony with the living God, who lacks nothing and who possesses all things in himself, to perfect the works of his hands. As he is in himself, so he is in all that he does. All his works reflect his glory. This offering must be perfected by him alone.

This offering is perfect apart from the willing and doing of man. God needs no man to enrich his triune covenant life. God needs the counsel of no other being to determine the end and course of history. And God needs the aid of no creature to perfect his work.

Where was man in God's work of creation, when he called forth all things out of nothing? when he set the firmament in its place? when he individually named the multitude of stars, bringing them into existence? when every fish and fowl and beast and creeping thing were given their being? Man was yet in the dust. *God* completed his work of creation.

So too in *all* of God's works. Is he not one? "Hear O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut. 6:4). His works are perfect-complete. His works are always and only perfect-complete. Our God is one.

What was needed to perfect the sanctification of men in Adam? Redemption. We must be purchased from our slavery to sin and Satan and delivered from the sentence of death, rendering to God what God is due for our transgressional debt. Atonement and propitiation. Our sins must be covered, satisfying the wrath of God that justly belongs upon us on account of our sins. Reconciliation. We, who are by nature deserving of God's curse, must be made the proper objects of his love and favor. Remission. All our wickedness recorded in the judge's ledger—the handwriting of ordinances that is against us—must be purged.

And God gave such an offering through the mediator, Jesus Christ. *He* is the one who has perfected redemption. *He* is the one who has perfected atonement. *He* is the one who has perfected satisfaction to God on account of man's sin. *God* is the one who purged away sins by his Son's blood. He is the self-sufficient God who made satisfaction for himself.

Heed the testimony that this one offering is perfect-complete!

The testimony of this offering's perfection is that there is no more sacrifice for sins. Where remission of sin and iniquity is, there is no more offering. Furthermore, the testimony of this offering's perfection is that Christ sat down at the right hand of majesty, henceforth expecting his enemies to be made his footstool. Christ ascended into the heavenly sanctuary and presented himself as the Lamb that had been slain. If that offering had not perfected, if that offering had left any sin remaining, if that offering had left undone any righteousness, if that offering had not purely consecrated to God with fervent love, then God could not receive Jesus Christ into his house. But now has

he entered once. And there he remains, continually interceding for us and presenting himself as the Lamb that was slain. And smelling the sweet savor of his Son's sacrifice, God receives us in covenant fellowship through our head.

### *The Despising of This One Offering*

Who would contend against this truth?

Men would.

Men do.

The Jews did. They forsook the true temple of God and crucified Christ. Then they continued with the sacrificial service in the temple, despising the fulfillment and perfection of the old types. They brought their bullocks and goats, which had never perfected anyone for over a millennium. They made daily offerings for sin, even though God had manifested the way of reconciliation. And in AD 70 God visited them in his wrath, crushing their idols and stamping out their vain worship.

Yet that contending against Christ's one offering is always present in the church. There will always be men who hate its perfection and cling to their works as those things which bring covenant life to perfection.

"The more you embrace God, the more you feel the love of his embrace," they say. That's clever. That's devilishly cunning. By such a doctrine you can appeal to the hearts and emotions of children and parents. "Don't you feel closer to your father when you sit on his lap and give him a big hug? So it is with your heavenly Father!"

But, I retort, where is Christ in your analogy? Apparently, he sits on the other side of the room, just watching. Rather, *Christ* is your fellowship with your heavenly Father. He stands as your high priest in the heavens. He presents himself to God as the Lamb that was slain, petitioning God to receive you in him. And in him God has fellowship with you. What you do isn't your fellowship with God. Christ is.

So arrogant are such men who despise the perfection of this one offering that they actually stand before Christ and assert, "Have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" (Matt. 7:22). Or this: "Have we not repented?"

Truly, repentance is a wonderful work. Repentance is the greatest thing that a man can do. There is more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine just men who need no repentance. But there are men who dare approach the cross of Jesus Christ—the place where he gave one offering of perfection—and say, "I have repented." Then they look around at others who are gathered at the

cross—those who have counted their repentance as dung—and ask condescendingly, "Why are you here?"

Such men are not partakers of this offering.

Nay, Christ's labor was for the ungodly. His offering was for those who have nothing in themselves to give unto God. These are the sanctified who have access unto God. They have access to God solely because of the offering of their head. And their experience is this: God is my salvation.

The doctrine of this text explains the necessity for the existence of the Reformed Protestant Churches.

It was taught in our former denomination, "If a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do."<sup>2</sup> Another takes a less direct approach, claiming, "There is a vitally important sense in which, in our salvation, our drawing nigh to God precedes God's drawing nigh to us."<sup>3</sup>

Such doctrine proceeds not from the truth that Christ's offering on the cross was perfect-complete. If something is completed, there remains nothing left to be done. If those who are sanctified have been perfected *forever*, then every blessing of heaven and every experience of salvation flow powerfully out of this offering without the cooperation of man. The one who makes complete is God in Christ. Them that are sanctified are the *objects* of God's handiwork. They are passive in this completion! They are passive in being brought nigh unto the holy and living God.

*Passive? Passive sanctification?* How dare one speak this way!

Yet the Spirit's grammar is clear and explicit: "Them that *are* sanctified." Them that *are being* brought nigh unto God.

You don't bring yourself unto God. He carries you into his presence. He seats you at his table. He gives you rest under the covering of his sanctuary. And it is right for him to do this by virtue of the one offering that he has provided through his righteous and elect servant.

Where is the activity of man? Here: that, after being seated in the presence of the living and holy God and filled with his riches, the redeemed offer the fruit of their thankful lips unto their covenant Lord and friend. Salvation's joyful song is heard where'er the righteous dwell.

### *The Power*

Perfected. *Forever!*

You can understand the everlasting power of Christ's one offering this way, speaking foolishly: if in heaven God saw you apart from Christ for one moment, you would again be in your guilt and cast off forever. Only in

2 Kenneth Koole, "What Must I Do...?," *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 1 (October 1, 2018): 7.

3 David J. Engelsma, "Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum and Terry Dykstra, June 16, 2021," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (August 15, 2021): 11.

continual communion with this one offering of perfection is there power of everlasting sanctification. But for them that are sanctified to be separated from their high priest is impossible. They belong to him by the irrevocable decree of him who is faithful and true.

Perfected forever—here is your blessed assurance that you are and forever shall remain a living member of Christ's body and church! Here is the truth that God, who is rich in mercy according to his unchangeable purpose of election, does not permit his people to continue in sin and perish finally in their backslidings. With respect to this one offering that has perfected forever, it is utterly impossible that you should not be certainly and effectually renewed unto repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for your sins. It is utterly impossible that you should not seek and receive remission in the blood of the mediator. It is utterly impossible that you should not experience the favor of a reconciled God. It is utterly impossible that you should not at last inherit eternal life.

Truly, this offering is an offering par excellence.

### *The Old Testament Shadow*

The perfection and oneness of Christ's offering as our high priest stands over against all of the offerings given in the old dispensation of the covenant.

Those sacrifices were not one.

The number of sacrifices offered on the brazen altar were incalculable. There were morning and evening sacrifices offered daily. There were additional sacrifices offered on the sabbaths and on the feast days and on the new moons. Then there were different kinds of sacrifices: burnt, peace, meat, sin, and trespass offerings. There were sacrifices for transgressions, for vows, for purifications, for thanksgiving. And all those were given over and over and over again. If you brought an offering for sin, and you left the tabernacle and committed the sin again, then you had to bring another offering. If you were defiled by a dead body and brought an offering for cleansing, but leaving the tabernacle you touched another dead body, then you had to repeat the sacrifice.

Continuous was the offering of sacrifices under the law. They could not stop being offered. Morning and evening. Sabbaths and new moons and feast days. Year by year. For a millennium and more.

But that is not all.

There was not one man who stood as priest for all those sacrifices. There were many. Generation upon generation went by. Aaron was succeeded by his son and his son's son and so on throughout the law and the prophets. A hundred high priests or more were needed to continue that ministry. And beside them, there were the thousands of priests and Levites who aided the high priests with the sacrifices.

Not one.

Neither could the old dispensation of the covenant perfect anything.

Blood was spilled continually. Morning and evening. Day after day. Year upon year. And on the great feast days, the streets of Jerusalem ran red. Yet in all those sacrifices there was no perfection.

Yes, in all those things there was the shadow of good things to come. But all those things were not Christ's one offering of perfection. There was no intrinsic power of sanctifying the people in the blood of bulls and goats. The evidence is that if those sacrifices had perfected anything, then they would have ceased needing to be offered. But in all those sacrifices there was only the remembrance of sin.

Consider the pinnacle or heart of the sacrificial system, the great day of atonement. On that day atonement was made for all the people, and the precious expiating blood was carried all the way into the innermost part of the sanctuary to be sprinkled upon the covering of the ark. On that day two goats were presented before God. Sins were transferred to them by the laying on of the high priest's hands. The first goat was offered upon the altar, and the other—a complementary picture to the first goat that was sacrificed—was led outside of the camp into the wilderness. By sacrifice sin was removed from the camp of Jehovah. Yet after all those things, the Israelite who went home in the evening from the courts of the tabernacle thought to himself, "We will need to do the exact same thing next year." There was no power in the sacrifices of animals to remove sins and sanctify a people once for all.

Yet, as those who partake of the new and better dispensation of God's covenant, we may learn much about Christ's one offering of perfection through a study of the sacrificial system that God gave to Moses.

The sacrifices of the old dispensation were the shadow of the body of Jesus Christ. He stood in his appointed place in history, revealed in the fullness of time according to the counsel and wisdom of God. And the glory of God ready to be revealed in him cast a shadow over the entire Old Testament. Those sacrifices were not the very image of him who has come, yet they were certainly figures of the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. Those sacrifices were patterned after eternal and glorious realities that stand in the heavens.

Therefore, there is much that these sacrifices can teach us about the nature of our Lord's work as high priest. Their testimony confirms us in the doctrine of the holy gospel. To demonstrate this, I will work through the sacrificial system of the Old Testament in a series of coming articles, the Lord willing.

—Luke Bomers

## *A Division that Continues to Shake the Protestant Reformed Churches*

By John Van Dyk

Over the last few years, and possibly farther back, the waters in which the Protestant Reformed Churches sail have been stirred by inner turmoil, and the concentric rings that resulted continue to disturb and foment.

This somewhat insulated Reformed denomination of 33 churches with around 8800 members (but fewer now) underwent a serious and nasty division within its ranks, over matters of theology and orthodoxy, which came to a head in 2021. The result was that a small group of members and ministers (one deposed) left to form a new denomination called the *Reformed Protestant Churches* (RPC). Leading the new group are three former PRC ministers: Andrew (Andy) Lanning, who was deposed from the PRC ministry, and former PRC ministers, Martin Vander Wal and Nathan J. Langerak.

Prior to leaving the PRCs, however, the disgruntled ministers were charging (and continue to charge) that the PRC was and is tolerating heresy in its ranks on matters of the doctrine of justification (faith and works; a conditional covenant and on church order matters).

Claiming to have been “banned” from sharing their concerns in the denomination’s publication, *The Standard Bearer*, the men launched their own magazine giving themselves a voice to counter that of the *SB* and those who write in it, their one time brother colleagues who now are clearly adversaries.

The new magazine called *Sword and Shield* was swift to wield its cudgel against what it saw as censorship by the *SB* editors and publishing board. The new magazine is under the supervision of an organizational board called Reformed Believers Publishing, paralleling the arrangement *The Standard Bearer* has with the board that supervises its work—Reformed Free Publishing. The editors of *Sword and Shield* are Andrew Lanning (editor in chief), and contributing editors Langerak and Vander Wal. The magazine was also swift to secure the high ground, stating in essence that they (the editors) would publish the truth, and nothing but the Biblical and confessional truth in contrast to what they considered the compromising and a compromised *Standard Bearer*.

Both sides in this bitter dispute would likely agree that the flashpoint for the Protestant Reformed churches was Synod 2018 and its decisions concerning a minister charged with heretical teachings. But the breaking point was in 2021 when disciplinary decisions were taken against the dissenters, which led to the three ministers, one seminary student, and now portions of at least ten congregations leaving. The upheaval has also somewhat adversely affected missions stations connected to the PRCs in the Philippines.

Both magazines have been on the offensive in this battle.

The result of all of this skirmishing is divided churches, divided families, divided friends—long time fellow believers no longer worshipping with nor speaking to one another, and a scattering of the sheep.

### *What Happened?*

One source in the Protestant Reformed Churches suggested that the background of the split actually goes back two or more decades.

He told CR, “There were fault lines under the surface for many years, particularly in the Grand Rapids, Michigan area. But the occasion which brought about the split was the preaching of a minister in the Hope PRC in Grand Rapids in 2015 and beyond.”

The first red flagged sermon that came to light was from John 14:6. The minister at the center of the controversy who has since resigned from the ministry, said in his sermon that

Jesus is the way to the Father not only in the sense of his atoning work on the cross and justification by faith, but also in the sense of his work of sanctification in our lives. There were other controversial statements, such as: “...the way to the Father includes our obedience” and “obedience matters, it is the way to the Father.” Objections to his preaching were raised and then other sermons were scrutinized by members of the church. Initially, most of the consistory supported the minister although one protesting elder was deposed. The classis also initially supported him, but the synod did not.

The difference for those who left had to do with judgments made or in their view, avoided. For the dissenting ministers who would eventually leave the PRCs, what was being preached by the one minister under investigation, was blatant heresy, pure and simple. The classis and the synods, on the other hand, deemed it to be “serious error that is out of harmony with the Reformed creeds.” The assessment was that the minister was out of his league in his understanding of some tenets of Reformed theology. But the damage was done and the controversy continued to stir, to rise and to boil over.

Things continued to fester from 2016–2018. By the spring of 2018, a massive denominational split was a definite possibility. Synod 2018 sided with the protest of an individual against a number of sermons delivered by the minister under scrutiny. But as CR was told, following an examination of the minister himself on the basis of his answers he was judged to be orthodox, until another sermon that he preached later in 2018 on the reward of grace in the Heidelberg Catechism (LD 24) led to more protests, which finally led to his resignation.

His departure from the ministry, voluntarily, did not lead to a restoration of peace, however. The most vociferous among the protestors called for his deposition instead. While some saw gross heresy, the ruling body (synod) held to the position that the minister had given to the believer’s good works “a place and function out of harmony with the Reformed confessions” (Acts of Synod 2018, p. 61). This difference in assessment was at the heart of the divide as the two sides dug in, in opposition to each other.

The continued public criticism led in January 17, 2021 to Rev. Andrew Lanning’s deposition from the ministry. Two days later a letter of separation from the denomination was received from Lanning and his church. Continued agitation by Rev. Langerak led to his suspension by the consistory in April of 2021. On May 5, 2021 another letter of separation from the denomination was issued by Rev. Langerak and those who left with him. On July 6th, 2021 a third minister and a small portion of the congregation led by Rev. Vander Wal issued its letter of separation as well. And on July 4th, a portion of a fourth church withdrew from the denomination.

### *Charges/Counter Charges*

Since then, and from the PRC’s perspective, the dissenters continue to be “schismatic.” According to PRC Professor Brian Huizinga’s article in the *SB* of Jan. 1, 2023, they seek to draw more members from the Protestant Reformed churches. Huizinga, a professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament at the seminary writes, “Together now, they create more schism and try recruiting more followers by slandering the PRC with preposterous and oft-repeated

claims like ‘the PRC teaches salvation by works’ and ‘the PRC hates the gospel and persecutes those who love it’ and ‘the PRC is the great whore of Babylon.’ Under the judgment of God, schism always begets more schism and endless fragmentation until finally even chief friends are estranged and, most grievous of all, a generation of children is scattered.”

Obviously the RPC leadership sees it quite differently. Its spokesmen have labelled the crisis as one of a glorious “reformation,” on par with the original formation of the Protestant Reformed churches in 1924, and even all the way back to the original reformation of the Church in 1517. In an article in *Sword and Shield*, RPC minister Andy Lanning writes, this latest “reformation of the church that has taken place began in the hearts of a group of concerned men, men who were not afraid: men who were not afraid to begin a new paper, men who were not afraid to associate with the truth and to see to it that that truth was published, come what may. Without Reformed Believers Publishing and *Sword and Shield*, the reformation of the church that has begun would not have been possible.”

In another article, this one referring to the PRC Synod 2018, Nathan Langerak writes, “Synod 2018 was the devil’s most stunning victory that I know of in all of church history. There has never been a synod like that in church history. In all of church history, there has never been a synod where the devil won in the name of the truth. In all of church history, there has never been a more stunning example of the devil’s transforming himself into an angel of light. So stunning, I myself was fooled. I cannot be fooled anymore. It was a victory for the devil, and it would be simply a matter of time before that principle worked through.”

### *Noisy Gong; Clanging Cymbal*

The division has been nasty; the rancor palpable, and the evidence of this is chronicled publicly and monthly in the RPC’s *Sword and Shield*.

For its editors, *Truth* with a capital T resides alone in the new denomination—the Reformed Protestant churches (see the Jan. 2023 issue of *Sword and Shield*)—and all who desire to live in that Truth need to join it, since all other Reformed denominations, according to Lanning, are “an abomination of hell.”

Speaking at a public meeting in a Protestant Reformed church recently, seminary professor Huizinga described these difficult past few years as a time of “chastening” for the denomination. God was not rejecting the PRC’s, he said, but was chastening them as a loving Father would his son, a chastening that though painful, was necessary. And just as King David, a man after God’s own heart, was harrassed, mocked, accused and had rocks thrown at him by Shimei, son of Gera, recorded in 2 Samuel 16, neither

did God abandon his servant, and David did not allow Shimei to be killed because he realized that in this painful and trying experience he saw it as the Lord's will.

*“Though with a scornful wonder,  
Men see her sore oppressed,  
By schisms rent asunder,*

*By heresies distressed,  
Yet saints their watch are keeping,  
Their cry goes up, ‘How long?’  
And soon the night of weeping  
Shall be the morn of song.”*

(Verse 3 of *The Church's One Foundation*)

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## Letter to Christian Renewal

To: Christian Renewal  
Re: Letter to the editor

March 27, 2023

Thank you to Mr. John Van Dyk and to *Christian Renewal (CR)* for the February 18, 2023, article entitled “A Division that Continues to Shake the Protestant Reformed Churches.” As one of those who is named in the article, I submit a couple of brief observations, with the request that they be published in *CR* at your convenience.

First, I appreciated Mr. Van Dyk's focus on doctrine in his article. Doctrine was and is at the root of the split between the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). The doctrinal issue between these denominations is not whether Jesus is our righteousness *and* our sanctification (he is) or whether God gives his people faith *and* works (he does). The doctrinal issue is whether the child of God comes to God by faith *alone* in Christ *alone* or by faith *and* works. Both before and after the split, those who now make up the RPC have maintained that salvation, justification (including forgiveness of sins), covenant fellowship with God, peace with God, and all other blessings are received by faith alone in Christ alone, while works are the beautiful, necessary, inevitable, and non-instrumental fruits of faith. Both before and after the split, those who remained Protestant Reformed have maintained that some aspects of salvation—whether the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God, or the conscious experience of God's blessing—come by means of faith and works. I realize that I am merely making an assertion here without demonstrating it. However, since its first publication in June 2020, the magazine *Sword and Shield* has been chronicling and demonstrating this doctrinal difference. I daresay that you could almost choose an issue at random (free at reformedbelieverspub.org) and find at least one article on this doctrinal difference.

The doctrinal issue between the PRC and the RPC is not a little quibble in a corner. It is the heart of the gospel, and it is a question that faces every Reformed and Presbyterian church member. Does your church teach salvation by grace alone in Christ alone through faith alone without works? That alone is the gospel. Or does your church teach salvation by grace “alone” in Christ “alone” through a condition and a prerequisite, whether that condition is your believing, your repenting, your feeling, or your working? That is a false gospel.

Second, I want to correct a misquotation in Mr. Van Dyk's article. I did not say that “all other Reformed denominations...are ‘an abomination of hell.’” I did say that NAPARC is an abomination of hell. I stand behind that statement because NAPARC is a formal relationship among Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in spite of doctrinal differences among those denominations. The doctrinal differences are significant: creation versus evolution, the nature of faith and assurance, and the well-meant offer of the gospel, to name a few. I consider formal fellowship at the expense of the truth to be devilish and antichristian. It is not God and his Christ who forge official relationships at the expense of sound doctrine but the devil and his antichrist. Thus my statement that NAPARC is an abomination of hell. Perhaps that sounds harsh, but it truly is dangerous to the souls of Christ's sheep to join them to false doctrine. Officebearers in NAPARC churches have an obligation to stop trying to cozy up with teachings that will get their sheep killed. That warning is not a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal but the more excellent way of love.

Thank you again for the article and for considering publishing this reply. I plan to publish Mr. Van Dyk's article and this reply in the May 2023 issue of *Sword and Shield*. I will send a copy of the issue to *CR*'s office.

In Christ's service,  
Rev. Andy Lanning



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## FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

*Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.—2 Corinthians 13:11*

*He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen.  
Even so, come, Lord Jesus. — Revelation 22:20*

**T**he coming of Jesus Christ is the great event of all of history. The first coming of Jesus Christ was the object of the longing of the saints of the Old Testament. Likewise, the second coming of Jesus Christ is the object of the longing of the saints of the New Testament. With Christ's ascension into heaven, there was also the promise of his coming. As the disciples saw him go, so he will return on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

And surely, he comes quickly. It seems that he lingers. Yet he comes. He comes in all the events of New Testament history. So soon as he was received into glory, he immediately began his coming again. And he shall appear! It will surely and certainly be. He is coming, and he will arrive at the appointed hour on the clouds of heaven. Every eye shall see him, even those who pierced him. Then he will arraign the world of men, angels, and devils before him and conduct the final judgment—that great theodicy—in which God will be justified and all things will be revealed in the light of God's judgment over them. Then shall we ever be with the Lord.

Thus the church, longing for the presence of Christ, prays too, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

Such a weighty prayer! He is coming. Let him come! That is a prayer for the coming of wars and rumors of wars. It is a prayer for the social and political upheaval of the nations. And so it is a prayer that our lives be interrupted and disturbed. It is a prayer that famine and pestilence come and ravage the world. And so it is a prayer that perhaps some of our loved ones die. It is a prayer that in the church there comes a great falling away. So also, then, it is a prayer that the sword of the gospel divides among our families and acquaintances. It is a prayer for the coming of antichrist, one-world government, and one-world religion and thus a prayer for the coming of a terrible persecution on the church. It is a prayer that all the things that Christ testified will come to pass do come to pass. Let the horses run from the book of him who sits on the throne, and let destruction follow in their wake! Let the trumpets sound in history to announce the coming of Christ! Let the vials of God's wrath be poured out in the final destruction of the world! Let judgment come. And let Christ come!

Except the end of all these things will be the coming of Christ, we would never pray, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus! Come exactly as you have testified that you will come. Come quickly!"

No, we are so carnal and so earthly. The prayer of the church is very often, "Come, Lord Jesus, but not yet, not in this way, and not in this place." When Christ comes, war, famine, pestilence, and apostasy come; then we shrink from his coming and lose sight of him who comes through those events.

So Christ gives his solemn word that all the things that must come to pass shall come to pass. He gives his word that in the happenings of those things, he is coming. He gives his word that he shall come and that through all those terrible events, he will at last arrive, so that where he is we will be also. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

—NJL