

The background features a stylized orange illustration. A sword is positioned diagonally from the top left towards the center. A shield is positioned in the lower left, partially overlapping the sword's hilt. The shield has a circular design with several smaller circles inside. 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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BEWITCHED

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?
—Galatians 3:1

Bewitched!
How?
Why?
By whom?
So soon?

Terrible false doctrine against which Paul contended! The lie against which the apostle contended is a Christ-denying error. That error is a God-denying doctrine. That error is a grace-denying error.

Destroying doctrine! That lie destroys. It destroys comfort; it destroys joy; it destroys peace; it destroys harmony and fellowship; it destroys assurance; it destroys families; it destroys congregations; it destroys denominations; and it destroys souls. That is what the lie always does. The lie always and only destroys. This lie, in particular, destroys.

Demonic doctrine! Behind the lie stands the devil, who with all his wicked tricks and devices seeks the destruction of the truth, of the church, and of the souls of men. Oh, we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places!

Bewitching doctrine! It is dangerous for the reason that it bewitches. When false doctrine comes and false doctrine is preached, that can never be harmless. False doctrine always has its effect. Indeed, false doctrine in whatever form it is preached is dangerous. But false doctrine in the specific form in which it was being preached in Galatia—that specific error—was dangerous. Beware the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees! Do not give place to it for one hour!

Listen! What does the false doctrine say?

“Along with faith in Christ Jesus, you also must be circumcised.” “You are righteous by the works performed by grace.” “God revokes the demand of perfect obedience, and the only thing man must do to be saved is believe by grace.” “Our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter the kingdom.” “We have fellowship with God on the basis of Christ’s work and in the way

of our obedience.” “We are filled with the Spirit and Christ dwells in us richly in the way of our singing.” These are all the same error. The error teaches *Christ plus something*—Christ *plus* your obedience, Christ *plus* your activity of faith, Christ *plus* your repentance—as the way to the Father. All of these are forms of the error against which the apostle fought.

And the apostle said, “The error bewitches.” That specific error is a terrifyingly dangerous error. The danger is that it bewitches. The error bewitches, so that the one whom it bewitches does the most inexplicable things. He behaves as though he is out of his mind. He turns away from Christ and turns unto himself. Turning away from Christ, the bewitched one turns away from salvation and turns unto condemnation.

Urgent question! Who bewitched you?

Deadly serious question! Who bewitched you?

In the New Testament scriptures, that word “bewitched” occurs only in Galatians 3:1. The word can mean three different things. First, “bewitched” can mean *to cast a spell upon someone*. Second, “bewitched” can mean *to hypnotize someone*. Third, “bewitched” can mean *to fascinate, to turn one’s eyes away from one thing to another and to fix one’s attention on that other*. All of these meanings of “bewitched” are applicable in the text.

When the false teachers of Galatia came, they said, “Galatians, we know that Jesus Christ died upon the cross, and we know that the gospel is Jesus Christ and his righteousness, and we know that you must believe, *but...* but you don’t enjoy fellowship with God apart from your obedience.” With that teaching the false teachers cast a spell on the congregation.

Bewitching is sorcery, and sorcery is the work of the devil. Behind that error of legalism, in whatever form that error comes, stands Satan. The error of Satan is this: Christ *plus!* Satan is so wicked that he will teach Christ *and* something else as the way to fellowship with God. Satan is so wicked that he will teach faith *and* obedience as the way of salvation. The error that the apostle combatted is a demonic error, a demonic error that works with all

of the power, all of the sorcery, and all of the trickery of Satan. The power behind that error was not the man who preached. The power was not the preacher's words and the force of his persuasion. It is true that when Satan teaches his error, he often uses a very pleasant face, a very pleasant voice, and a very pleasant demeanor. But a man is not the power behind that error. Satan is that power. The spirit that moves and motivates the man to speak such ungodliness as Christ *plus*—Christ's righteousness *plus* your righteousness; Christ's obedience *and* your obedience; faith *and* your faithfulness—is Satan. And when he speaks, he casts a spell.

Who has bewitched you?

The bewitching of Satan is by deception. He is the author and master of all deception. Deception makes a thing appear other than it is. Satan makes righteousness appear as unrighteousness and unrighteousness appear as righteousness. He makes good look evil and evil look good. Such is the power of Satan's deception that he can take the glorious blood of Christ, the eternal righteousness of Christ, the spotless holiness of Christ, and the perfect obedience of Christ and make them look insufficient and impotent. And Satan can take Christ and your obedience, Christ and your act of repentance, and Christ and your activities and make them look sufficient and powerful. Satan takes the perfectly sufficient work of Christ and makes that look insufficient. Satan takes your polluted works and makes them look sufficient. He takes the true minister of the gospel, Paul, and makes him look evil. And Satan takes the wicked servant of Satan and transforms that servant into an angel of light. Satan deceives. By that deception he bewitches, and in that bewitching he destroys. He takes away all comfort, peace, and joy. He takes away salvation. He takes away God and Christ. And Satan kills by that bewitching.

O, foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?

Satan!

He had cast a spell on them so that he could deceive them and, in that misdirection, rob them of the gospel.

And Satan had hypnotized the Galatians.

Could we explain their hypnosis this way? They thought and acted differently than who they were;

they acted in a manner totally out of character; they did inexplicable things. The Galatians became mad and played the part of the lunatic. After they had listened to the false apostles, who taught them to keep the law of Moses in addition to Christ, the Galatians thought that they were positively glowing with goodness and righteousness. Understand that Paul had put on them the robe of Christ's righteousness. But the false apostles taught them that they also must have good works in order to fellowship with God. So the Galatians clothed themselves with the filthy rags of their own righteousness. They paraded about like strutting roosters with their obedience, their repenting, their acts of faith, and

their singing. They thought that they were righteous when, in fact, they were covered in worn, tattered, smelly, dingy, old rags.

Satan could do that to the Galatians because he had fascinated them with something other than Christ.

How does Satan make Christ look insufficient? How does Satan make your righteousness look sufficient? How does he hypnotize you, so that you act so foolishly and so differently than when you first heard the gospel? He fascinates you. To fascinate is *to take someone's eyes and cause them to look somewhere else and then to hold their gaze there*. The eye of faith looks only on Christ. Faith cannot look anywhere else; it is impossible. Faith by its very

definition looks to Christ. But Satan takes the eyes of the believer—the eyes of the believer that by faith are fixed on Jesus Christ—and Satan turns the believer's eyes to his works. Satan says, as it were, "Look over here for a moment. Look at these things. Do not your works matter? Are they all worthless? Did not God work these good works in you and through you? Now will you offend the Holy Spirit and call them dung?"

We must remember the specific form of the error that Satan was teaching and that the apostle was preaching against in Galatia. It was the wicked doctrine of righteousness before God and thus fellowship with God by *both Christ and works*.

It was the same error that the apostle Peter showed by his behavior. Peter by his behavior dissimulated with the

Such is the power of Satan's deception that he can take the glorious blood of Christ, the eternal righteousness of Christ, the spotless holiness of Christ, and the perfect obedience of Christ and make them look insufficient and impotent. And Satan can take Christ and your obedience, Christ and your act of repentance, and Christ and your activities and make them look sufficient and powerful.

gospel. He lied with the gospel. Prior to the coming of certain men from James, Peter had lived like a Gentile. Peter had eaten with the Gentiles. He had fellowshiped with the Gentiles. To the Gentiles he had preached the gospel that Christ is their righteousness. That was because Peter believed justification by faith alone. Living like a Jew or living like a Gentile was immaterial to the truth of the gospel. Christ and Christ's righteousness made those Gentiles righteous by faith alone. They needed nothing else. They did not need a particular lifestyle, a certain way to dress, a specific and peculiar way of speaking, or circumcision and the law of Moses. They were righteous by Christ alone through faith alone. And by faith alone they were filled with the Spirit, and Christ dwelt in them richly. And Peter had fellowshiped with the Gentiles because he was also righteous by Christ alone through faith alone. But when some from James came to Galatia, Peter withdrew. In that withdrawing Peter was saying, "The Gentiles are not righteous. They are still sinners. They still have to do something to be righteous so that I can fellowship with them." By his behavior Peter taught the error that faith in Christ is not enough for righteousness.

Peter's error means that even though you have faith in Christ, you still need to obey in order to be righteous; and in that way of obedience, God's Spirit dwells in you. It does not matter how you define that other thing besides Christ that is necessary; the message is clear: *Christ is not enough*. There is something other than Christ that is necessary for righteousness. By Peter's withdrawing from the Gentiles, he was saying, "They are still sinners. They believe in Christ, but they are still sinners. God does not dwell with them. They are not filled with the Spirit. They are not truly pleasing to God."

Combatting that error, the apostle Paul asked, "Is Christ the minister of sin?"

When Christ became flesh and dwelt among us; when Christ obeyed the law of God; when Christ died upon the cross; when Christ rose again and imputed his righteousness to us by faith only and then poured out his Spirit upon us by that same faith, did Christ leave us sinners and unrighteous before God? Did Christ leave us as those who must still do something in order for Christ to dwell with us or for us to dwell with Christ?

God forbid!

Christ is the minister of righteousness, by whose righteousness we are righteous by faith alone without works. Christ is the minister of reconciliation, by whose righteousness we are brought nigh unto God. Christ is the minister of the Spirit, by whose power we seek things that are above. Christ is the minister of salvation, and he is not a lawgiver as Moses.

But the false teachers in Galatia were teaching that after all of his work Christ left the Galatians sinners who must still do something, so that Christ could be with them, and they could be with him. The false teachers were teaching both Christ and Christ's perfect death *and* man's obedience as the way to have fellowship with God.

The apostle said over against that teaching of the false apostles, "Not only does faith in Christ justify men, but it is also by faith in Christ alone that they truly live to God." Yes! The righteousness of Christ freely given to his people by faith alone also brings with it the Spirit, and by the Spirit they live unto God without any of man's laws, rules, and regulations. The righteousness of Christ gives to his people the best life—life unto God and life with God—because that righteousness is worthy of eternal life.

The truth is not Christ *plus!* The truth is Christ *alone!*

With their error the false apostles took the eyes of the Galatians off Christ. The false apostles said, "What about your good works? Don't they matter? Shouldn't your good works matter for your assurance? We understand, of course, that your fellowship with God is by faith in Christ, but what about your *enjoyment* of that fellowship? Do not your works matter? Is not there something to your works?" Thus the false apostles fascinated the Galatians with their own works.

O, foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?

False teachers!

In his bewitching work Satan uses the false teacher. The minister is charged by Jesus Christ with one task: "Teach me." Christ commands the minister, "Teach me in all of my fullness. Teach me in all of the power of my atoning death. Teach me and my gracious gift of the life-giving Spirit. Teach me as salvation full and free to God's people. Teach me as reconciliation. Teach me as salvation and as life. Teach me alone for righteousness to everyone who believes. I am the way, the truth, and the life!"

And the false minister says, "I won't teach you alone. I will teach you *and* good works."

And when the false minister teaches *and*—Christ *and...*, Christ *and* in the way of your obedience, Christ *and* your faithfulness, Christ *and* your singing—then the false minister speaks with the tongue of Satan. With that word the false minister bewitches: he casts a spell over the church and hypnotizes the people. And when they are in his power, he turns their eyes away from Christ to their works. In that way the false minister destroys: he destroys souls and churches, families and friendships, comfort and joy, and life itself.

O, foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? You no longer obey the truth! Before you obeyed the truth and followed righteousness. Now you are so disobedient.

With all of your obedience, you are nothing but disobedient, disobedient to the truth.

“The truth” in Galatians 3:1 is not truth in a general sense, for instance that one plus one equals two. Truth is not simply the truth that there is a God. The devils believe that and tremble. The truth is not that someone says some things—even some true things—about Jesus Christ, the truth about Christ in all the fullness of his person and natures as crucified as the only ground and foundation of the believer’s salvation and the perfection of all things.

“The truth” is Christ crucified and risen for righteousness to everyone who believes. The truth is Christ crucified as the only way to God. The truth is Christ crucified as salvation itself, so that when by faith we are made members of Christ, all his holy works, perfect obedience, and satisfying atonement when imputed to us are abundantly sufficient to cover all our sins and to make us worthy of eternal life. The truth is Christ, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

And all this the Galatians had seen. They had seen all this in Paul’s preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In that preaching of the gospel, Jesus Christ had been crucified before their very eyes. They had seen Christ in all the glory of his person. They had seen him crucified by the soldiers and between two thieves. They had seen Christ in his agony, pain, and suffering as really as the people who passed by at Golgotha.

There was a word of God there at the cross, and the word of God was the word of salvation. That word of God said, “Let there be a cross; and let that cross accomplish righteousness, holiness, satisfaction, reconciliation, and redemption for my precious people.” And the word of God accomplished these blessings there at the cross.

When the preaching of the gospel comes, that word of God comes—that word of God that created the cross and accomplished salvation at the cross. The word portrays the cross of Jesus Christ before the people of God. They see Christ. They see him with the blood pouring down his head from the crown of thorns. They see him with the blood dripping from the nail holes. They see him being mocked and ridiculed. They see him as he reveals the truth that God is a righteous God and that God will never acquit the guilty, so that if you transgress

his law, you must perish eternally for that. They also see then the truth that Christ Jesus in his incarnation, in his lifelong suffering, and in his atoning death upon the cross satisfied the justice of God and accomplished redemption. When the child of God hears the preaching of the cross, he sees the blood and water pour from the side of Christ, and he hears Christ shout, “It is finished!”

Then by faith the child of God says, “That sacrifice is sufficient. Being justified by Christ’s death while I was an enemy, how much more being reconciled to God shall I not be saved by his life? My God accomplished that in his love for me, in his desire for my salvation, and according to his eternal will, so that I will not perish but have everlasting life. That suffering is sufficient. It is righteousness. It is holiness. It is obedience. There is nothing that can compare to that. There is nothing else that I need in order

to stand before God, to be with God, and to be blessed by God.”

And the false teacher says, “It is not. It is not enough that Christ was incarnate. It is not enough that Christ died on the cross. It is not enough that Christ arose from the dead. You also must do something!”

As soon as you listen to that false teacher and take your eyes off the suffering Christ, who was crucified among you and so portrayed in all his saving efficacy, you have said, “Christ is not sufficient. He is not enough. He is not enough

to bring me to God. Christ is not enough to give me the experience of my fellowship with God. Christ is not enough to cause me to enjoy the assurance of my salvation. He is not enough. I also must do something.”

That was the Galatians’ sin. They had been bewitched, and they were fascinated, not with Christ but with their works. The blood flowing from Christ’s side was still warm, and his cries of agony still echoed from Golgotha, and the Galatians said, “Christ is not enough!” They turned away from that beautiful scene at Calvary, where God had accomplished all their salvation, and they became fascinated with what they had to do.

And in that the Galatians did not *obey* the truth. For all their obedience—they went to church on Sunday; they gave lots of money in the collection plate; they ran good businesses; they were honest with their customers—they were disobedient. That was God’s charge against them: “All you talk about is obedience, but you are disobedient, disobedient to the truth.”

O, foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? You no longer obey the truth! Before you obeyed the truth and followed righteousness. Now you are so disobedient. With all of your obedience, you are nothing but disobedient, disobedient to the truth.

The apostle could have said to them, “O, foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, that you do not *believe* the truth?”

But Paul did not say that. Rather, he said, “Why do you *disobey* the truth?”

You must understand why the apostle said that because that has to be your bulwark against those who say to you, “Obedience, obedience, obedience, obedience! What about your obedience? Don’t you know that obedience matters?” You must have a strong bulwark against that deception of the false teacher, so that your eyes are not taken off Christ and turned to your obedience and you are bewitched and become fascinated by your obedience. The false teacher always says, “Obedience, obedience, obedience, obedience. You must obey the law of God in order to enjoy God. You must obey the law of God in order to be blessed of God. You must obey the law of God in order to be received of God. What? Do you think that you can experience God’s fellowship when you are walking in sin?”

Obedience, obedience, obedience!

Then the apostle said, “In this matter of your righteousness, fellowship with God, and blessedness, there is only one obedience that matters: obedience to the truth.” If you have obedience to the truth, you have all the obedience that you need because with obedience to the truth you have the obedience of Christ.

What is obedience to the truth? It means that you confess that you and all your work, you and all your obedience, you and all your activity, you and all your repentance, you and all your obedience to the law of God, you in all your humbling of self are nothing. Nothing. You cast all these away as dung and as worthless for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus and to know his righteousness and his obedience. If you become something in your eyes, you disobey the truth. If you are fascinated with what you must do in order to be with Jesus Christ and near to God, you are disobedient to the truth. Obedience to the truth is believing the truth; and believing that truth is doing nothing and resting on the obedience of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the holiness of Christ, and the sufferings of Christ alone for your righteousness before God, so that you draw near to God not with what you have done but by what Christ has done.

God in the truth says, “Christ is everything, and Christ is enough.” God portrays the crucified Christ wherever and whenever God sends the gospel, so that Christ Jesus is crucified before the eyes of the congregation as the only way of salvation. God declares in the crucifixion of Christ that God’s justice is satisfied, that all righteousness is accomplished, that all obedience is finished, and that all who believe on Jesus Christ shall be saved.

The Galatians disobeyed that by insisting also on their works for righteousness. They said, “No, no.” They told God no.

You better remember that. Christ *and*, Christ *plus*, is telling God no! Christ *and*, Christ *plus*, means that God is a liar.

The truth says that the righteousness, obedience, and holiness of Christ he imputes to an ungodly people. By that righteousness they have fellowship with Christ. He takes them within his fellowship; he loves them as his dear children; he turns all things to their profit; and he gives them eternal life, not for what they do or who they are but for Christ’s sake.

But the foolish Galatians had been bewitched. That must have been some power of Satan that he could turn their eyes from Christ.

Can you imagine anything more beautiful than Christ with all his atonement, all his sufferings, and all his obedience?

That must be some bewitching that we could have had our eyes turned from Christ, that we would have given ear to someone who said, “What about your good works?” That we would have said, “Yes, what about our good works?” That is some bewitchment. That is some spell that Satan can cast.

Why?

Because you and I remain foolish. O, foolish Galatians!

God sends the gospel. He raises up true ministers of the gospel, so that by them the very word of God comes and Jesus Christ is portrayed in all his saving power. And we believe that. We are saved by that, but we remain foolish—every one of us. There is a fool alive in every one of us, and this fool wants his works to be something. Thus he so readily gives eyes and ears to the devil. That is why when the false teacher says, “What about your good works?” you will quickly look away from Christ, and you will say, “Ah, what about my good works? Does not God regenerate me? Do not I have the Spirit? And do not I do many good things in Christ’s name?” You will be fascinated with that. And when you say that and are fascinated with your good works, you have just said, “Christ is not enough.” You have been bewitched. You need to hear the gospel every week, so that this foolish man can be destroyed by the gospel.

And yet that bewitching ultimately is of God. When that lie comes, when that lie—Christ *and*—is preached, that lie comes in the sovereignty of God, so that those who are approved may be made manifest and so that those to whom he gave not the love of the truth might be damned.

Even the bewitching is in the sovereignty of God.

—NJL

The Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) of which I was a part from my baptism until May of 2021 were bewitched. They were gradually but inextricably turned from the truth of salvation by faith alone in Jesus Christ to the doctrine of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ and man's activities performed by grace. From that bewitching God delivered me and many others. Through the formation of the Reformed Protestant denomination, we were given a church home, and the gospel of sovereign grace sounded forth again with great clarity.

What we did not realize is that many who joined the Reformed Protestant Churches did not do so out of the love of the gospel. As the apostle said of those who preached Christ in his own day, so we can say about the membership in the Reformed Protestant Churches: "Some...of envy and strife; and some also of good will...one...of contention, not sincerely...but the other of love" (Phil. 1:15–17). As when Israel came out of Egypt, there was a mixed multitude, so with us when we came out of the captivity in the Protestant Reformed Churches, there was a mixed multitude. For many the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches was an opportunity to create a church in their own image, whether that be the image of a broad tent, a generically Reformed church, or a church fashioned according to their pet ideas, ideas that they had held for years while members of the PRC but that had been rejected by those churches.

Many never gave up their legalism that they had learned so well in the PRC. That threat of legalism has reared its head again. The Reformed Protestant Churches are divided by this legalism. This legalism made its appearance in the demand that in the public worship of God, on the basis of the regulative principle, only the 150 psalms of David might be sung and that to sing any other versifications of scripture, including the Lord's prayer, is sinful, specifically a violation of the second commandment and thus is image worship.

How many quickly followed that error! We were bewitched! How soon we had fallen from grace! Many

will never recover as God sends a strong delusion, so that they believe a lie.

By the time this magazine comes into your hands, the Reformed Protestant classis will have made a decision on the doctrine of exclusive psalmody. Perhaps the classis will adopt the false doctrine. Perhaps the classis will reject it. I pray that the classis rejects it and the churches be made secure against that error.

Regardless of how the classis rules, there will undoubtedly be those who do not give up their false doctrine. The fact that many so soon followed after the error is proof not that they had been bewitched but that they had harbored these convictions regarding exclusive psalmody for some time prior and were looking for an opportunity to implement them. Whether bewitched or bewitcher, they will have their psalms and be disobedient to the truth for all that.

The meditation in this issue is on Galatians 3:1. All the changes that have taken place at *Sword and Shield* and in the denomination are to be explained by this verse.

As a part of these changes at *Sword and Shield*, the magazine has a new editor. The editorial in the issue is an edited version of the first section of a speech that was given on the issue of exclusive psalmody based on the second commandment and the regulative principle. In all likelihood I will publish the rest of the speech.

Sword and Shield also has new writers. Rev. Luke Bomers will write in a new rubric entitled *Our Doctrine*. Mr. Tyler Ophoff has agreed to take my place in carrying on the rubric *Understanding the Times*. Mr. Garrett Varnier wrote the first installment of a series on the subject of conversion. The magazine also hopes to begin a new rubric with regular contributions from a rotation of willing writers. These are all exciting developments and signs of good things to come.

May the Lord, the king of his church, be pleased to continue to use *Sword and Shield* to give a distinctive sound for the pure Reformed truth in the time to come.

—NJL

PRAISE GOD, FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW (1): INTRODUCTION

Defining Terms

The Reformed Protestant Churches are being troubled by the preaching and teaching of Rev. Andrew Lanning that the regulative principle of worship as grounded in the second commandment “require[s] exclusive psalmody.”¹

In every argument the position opposed and the terms used must be clearly defined. I have attempted to do that. Throughout this controversy I have tried to deal fairly with the doctrine that I oppose, if for no other reason than that I have had tremendous respect for those who promote exclusive psalmody but also because truth and righteousness demand it. In my conclusions and statements of the implications of exclusive psalmody, I have not been sensational, but I pointed out where the doctrine on its own principles leads.

Reverend Lanning taught that the command of God for the church in her public worship is to “sing the psalms and nothing else.”² That is, for the church to sing anything other than psalms in worship is a violation of the second commandment and is the same as making a graven image.

His definition of the regulative principle is this:

In the church of Jesus Christ only those things that God has commanded may belong to worship, and all of those things that God has not said anything about or that he has forbidden may not be part of the worship of the church... The principle is not this: worship God in whatever way is not forbidden in his word, so that you’re free to do many, many things as long as God doesn’t explicitly forbid it. That regulative principle flows right out of the prohibition against graven

images because a graven image is an attempt of the church to worship God in a way that appeals to her, in a way that her will inclines towards. The regulative principle is this: worship God only as he has commanded in his word, only with those elements of worship that he has said belong to that worship.³

And the regulative principle says, “Do not depart from those psalms to sing something else.”⁴ “The worship of Jehovah in the matter of singing requires the psalms and exclusive psalmody.”⁵

The elements that belong in worship Reverend Lanning finds in the Heidelberg Catechism’s explanation of the fourth commandment: “The preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, *the singing of the psalms*, the public prayers of the church, and the giving of offerings.”⁶ He inserts into the Catechism the words “the singing of the psalms.”

This teaching regarding the regulative principle and the second commandment, I call *exclusive psalmody*. I use the term *exclusive psalmody* for ease of expression. But you have to understand clearly that I do not mean by that term *only sing the psalms in church*. I mean by the term *the doctrine that the regulative principle of worship and the second commandment demand that the church sings only the psalms in worship and that to sing any other versifications of scripture in worship is the dread sin of image worship*.

I believe that it is necessary to state in my definition of *exclusive psalmody* in the form with which we are contending that the doctrine really is not satisfied with versifications of the psalms. The proponents of exclusive psalmody say, “Sing the psalms.” What does “sing the psalms” mean?

1 Andrew Lanning, “The Regulative Principle of Worship,” sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on March 12, 2023; <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=312232237135528>.

2 Andrew Lanning, “Singing the Word of Christ,” sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on October 31, 2021; <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1031212233461017>.

3 Andrew Lanning, “No Image Worship,” sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on March 5, 2023; <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=35232335114953>.

4 Lanning, “No Image Worship.”

5 Lanning, “The Regulative Principle of Worship.”

6 Lanning, “No Image Worship” (emphasis added).

Does this mean sing the Hebrew psalms? Does this mean sing an English translation of the psalms? And then what translation, perhaps the King James translation or the Coverdale translation of the psalms?

However, when the proponents of exclusive psalmody defend their doctrine as sing the inspired psalms and as sing what Jesus sang and what Jesus sings, then that can lead to only one conclusion. “Sing the psalms” means *sing the actual words of scripture*. Versification is a transliteration and an explanation of the Hebrew poetry—its thoughts and theology—into English poetry, and the versification is set to Western music. This is not acceptable for the proponents of exclusive psalmody.

They talk not only about singing the psalms but also about singing the inspired psalms. This is what they mean by inspired psalms:

The *psalms* being the 150 psalms that God has given us in the psalm book, and *hymns* being not inspired compositions of men...In the one category are the psalms, those 150 God-inspired songs; and in the other category are the hymns, which are not the inspired songs of God.⁷

Strictly speaking and based on the above quotation, “sing the psalms” would mean sing the “God-inspired” psalms in Hebrew. I will grant that “sing the psalms” could mean sing a good translation of the psalms. But “sing the psalms” means sing the actual words of the psalms. Do not think that the exclusive-psalmody proponents are content, for instance, with *The Psalter*, the blue book, or even a large revision of that songbook. They are after singing the 150 psalms as closely as possible to the original. I personally have no problem with that.

However, the issue is that proponents of exclusive psalmody ground “sing the psalms” in the second commandment and the regulative principle. So when the regulative principle supposedly says, “Sing the psalms,” it does not mean sing good versifications of the psalms but sing the actual psalm, word for word or almost word for word. They must be clear on what it means to “sing the psalms” because they make their argument look powerful by appealing to the fact that the psalms are inspired and no hymn is. So they say that the psalms are “God-inspired songs” and that hymns are “not the inspired songs of God.” Hymns are “human inventions,” man’s songs.

But the reality is that when we sing from *The Psalter*, we do not sing “God-inspired songs.” We sing some man-made versifications of the psalms, or at best man-made translations of the psalms, such as those made by Coverdale. Here again, in the church’s singing, the focus

is taken off Christ and his work and praising God for it, and the focus has become how close we are to singing the “God-inspired” psalms.

I want to refute the idea that the proponents of exclusive psalmody have not charged sin against the church’s singing anything other than a psalm in worship. I do not know why they are shy or embarrassed about this. They have charged sin. Even if they have not used the exact words, they have charged sin according to their own principle. Let me illustrate: if my principle according to the law is that a man is married for life, then when I confront the divorced man with that principle, I have charged him with sin even if I never use the words. If the principle according to the law is that the church must sing the psalms exclusively in worship, then when I confront those who do not, I have charged them with sin regardless of whether or not I use the words.

The proponents of exclusive psalmody cannot pick and choose when and how far they will apply their principle. Let them be bold. To sing the name of Jesus in the worship service is sinful because God did not command it. To sing the Lord’s prayer in the worship service is sinful because God did not command it. To sing versifications of the psalms deemed too loose is sinful because God said that the church must sing the “God-inspired” psalms. Let them be bold. Do not let them hedge on the principle or hem and haw on its logical applications. They should tell us all the sinful things that we are singing, so that we can know and not have to wonder anymore where they actually stand. I repeat, let them be bold.

Over against this, the position that I am advocating and that I believe to be Reformed is that God says, “Sing the word. Sing that word out of a thankful heart.” That word we have encapsulated for us in the psalms. So we sing the psalms almost exclusively.

Reverend Lanning misstates the position that he opposes—whether deliberately or not, I am not going to judge. He says,

If one wants to maintain that...the regulative principle permits hymns, that is, non-inspired songs, then not only is this the case that you must find in scripture a requirement to sing hymns... We don’t permit human inventions...And not only must you find a specific command to sing hymns, non-inspired songs, but then you must also do it. You must sing hymns in church. You must have a psalter hymnal. You may not have only a psalter. And you may not have only a psalter with one hymn or two hymns. God said,

⁷ Lanning, “The Regulative Principle of Worship.”

“Sing hymns,” and that would mean keep writing them, keep adopting them, keep singing them.⁸

The argument of those who oppose exclusive psalmody is not whether the regulative principle permits hymns. The regulative principle is not about what God permits, but it is about what God commands in his worship. And their position is that God commands his church to sing his word. This command is carried out by singing the psalms, and the same command can be carried out by singing the Lord’s prayer and the Song of Mary. So Reverend Lanning’s argument falls on its face.

Foolish Questions

I cannot answer every single question that has arisen in the controversy regarding exclusive psalmody. To do so would be unprofitable. The many questions being asked regarding exclusive psalmody are like going down the rabbit hole, so that something exceedingly simple is being burdened and obscured by useless questions and unprofitable answers.

Reverend Lanning is to blame for the confusion and endless questions. He states a position and then draws back from its implications; for instance, whether in light of his position it is sin to sing the Lord’s prayer in worship services. He does not define important terms, such as his repeated mantra, “Sing the psalms.”

The doctrine of exclusive psalmody being taught can be condemned for no other reason than that it leads to endless questions and endless calculations about singing and endless strife about whether the church sings purely enough, so that she does not violate the second commandment and she can sing with Jesus.

The proponents of exclusive psalmody claim that they give the simple truth: sing only the psalms because this is what God commands in the regulative principle and because Jesus sings the psalms; but this doctrine, which at first appears righteous, corrupts the regulative principle and engenders all manner of questions and arguments, most of which are distractions from the main issue. We must not be distracted by the flurry of questions and arguments that are being raised.

For this reason I believe that the exclusive psalmody

doctrine and those who promote it are guilty of ignoring the warning of the apostle Paul in Titus 3:8–11:

8. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.
9. But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.
10. A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;
11. Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.”

We are to be careful to maintain good works, including the proper worship of God without novelty and strange inventions, but foolish questions we are to avoid. The question whether the second commandment requires exclusive psalmody is a foolish question. There are other foolish questions and arguments. For instance, the members of the churches are arguing about whether singing and prayer are the same thing, when the psalms themselves are prayers and meditations. This should not even be a question. They are arguing whether “Praise God” is a hymn or a psalm, when the category

in which a song is placed does not matter for the singing and worship of the church. The church may sing a psalm or a hymn without offense to God. The Reformed church at Dordt included some hymns in article 69 of the Church Order, and some of the versifications of the 1912 psalter are so loose as to amount to being hymns. So there has been much questioning and arguing to no profit.

I warn the churches against that. Let the church strive for the truth and for the application of that truth, but let the churches and all the members avoid foolish questions that come out of the brains of men, by which trouble, strife, and contention are brought into the churches to no profit.

Those who bring in the doctrine of exclusive psalmody are false teachers who are to be rebuked sharply. If they will not turn from that false doctrine, they are to be

We must stick to what the issue is: legalism in worship and the application of the second commandment... The specific form of the legalism is that Jesus Christ does not sing with his church unless she sings the 150 psalms of David.

8 Lanning, “The Regulative Principle of Worship.”

rejected as those who condemn themselves. If we have not already seen the seriousness of their false doctrine, then we should now. The doctrine of exclusive psalmody and the doctrine of singing the word cannot coexist in the Reformed Protestant Churches. We cannot continue our current practice of singing while there are those who come to church with a standing charge of sin against the churches and make that charge plain by standing mute while the churches sing to God.

In the controversy regarding exclusive psalmody, we must stick to the principal issue: Does the regulative principle as grounded in the second commandment require exclusive psalmody, or is this doctrine legalism? If the doctrine is legalism, then it must be condemned as such. If it is not legalism, then the proponents of exclusive psalmody must condemn as wicked modernism the doctrine that the regulative principle teaches the church to sing the word.

To stick to that principal question, a few things must be said about what the issue is not.

What the Issue Is Not

First, the issue is not about singing psalms as Reverend Lanning now asserts. “The church controversy...is about the psalms in worship.”⁹

Here is exclusive psalmody: sing psalms in church...Exclusive psalmody...remains so refreshingly simple: sing psalms in church...The term *exclusive psalmody* simply expresses what God has revealed: sing psalms in church.”¹⁰

The controversy is not about singing psalms versus singing hymns. To make it very sharp, the controversy is not really about what the churches sing at all. To say that the controversy is about psalms, or psalms versus hymns, or singing in general is only an occasion in the same way that the command that the Gentiles had to be circumcised was an occasion, a convenient handle, with which to develop and promote a theology.

Besides promoting the false doctrine of exclusive psalmody, its proponents slander their opponents by unfair and unfounded accusations. If they are against adopting the exclusive psalmody doctrine, they show that they want more hymns introduced in worship, that the churches might as well adopt hymns and give up psalm singing, and that there is something suspicious in a person who does not adopt the doctrine of exclusive psalmody. That is slander and fear-mongering.

That is also a new and offensive test of orthodoxy. The Reformed Protestant Churches are orthodox according to the Reformed creeds. Where did this new test come from? Out of our creedal orthodoxy—especially a renewed love for the doctrine of Christ as our only and complete savior—we were joyfully and thankfully singing psalms. That has been the practice of the churches. We are psalm-singing churches. We could have had wonderful speeches and articles about the glories of singing psalms versus singing hymns. We could have had sermons and speeches about our precious Reformed heritage of singing the psalms. The Reformed churches, if they are truly Reformed, have been singing psalms contentedly since Dordt. But our orthodoxy is not going to be tested by the capricious imposition of a supposed principle.

Second, the issue is not about singing psalms exclusively. I have said before, and I will say again, “I could sing the psalms exclusively.” However, at this point in the controversy and understanding the reason that men want exclusive psalmody, I oppose that doctrine. If someone were to overture classis to change article 69 of the Church Order to read that we sing only the 150 psalms of David, I would want to make clear that the churches do not hold to exclusive psalmody. And to establish that fact, the churches would include a hymn or some other versifications of scripture in the Church Order.

The fathers at Dordt did exactly that because they did not find in sacred scripture or the Reformed creeds the calling to sing psalms exclusively in connection with the regulative principle and the second commandment. If they believed the doctrine of exclusive psalmody, they had every opportunity to make that clear when they adopted the creeds and formulated the Church Order. They did not. When they applied to the Church Order the doctrine of the creeds concerning worship, they added hymns. If the churches today would say, “We want to add some hymns to the Church Order,” I would have a number of reasons against that, the first being that the church today does not have the spiritual wherewithal to do that. The more spiritual church of earlier centuries, as she was given the privilege from God to draft the Reformed creeds, was also given the privilege to instruct regarding the church’s worship and what to sing in worship. This the Reformed fathers did.

If we would only listen to them.

Third, the issue is not about whether we should sing from *The Psalter*, the blue, 1912 psalter with which we are all familiar. The point of my contention against exclusive psalmody is not that the arguments put forward in

9 Andrew Lanning, “Welcome,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 1 (April 15, 2023): 5.

10 Andrew Lanning, “FAQ,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 3 (April 29, 2023): 7.

the Reformed Protestant Churches for exclusive psalmody will lead to the discontinuation of that psalter and therefore I am opposed to that position. *The Psalter* is not above criticism or a revision. But that songbook has proved its worth and has served the churches well, so that by its use the churches sing the psalms.

However, it is the explicit teaching of Reverend Lanning that by singing from *The Psalter* we really do not sing the psalms purely enough. He preached this: “In our own psalter we have the words of man, not in every psalter number. But...we have the words of man, so that we sing sometimes what we ought not sing.”¹¹

And this:

The church becomes dissatisfied with versifications of the psalms that are only summaries of the psalm and that are close but not quite the psalm and that are only man’s interpretation of the psalm. That becomes after a while intolerable to the church because when she sings a man’s summary of a psalm, she’s not singing the word of Christ. And Christ isn’t singing that song with her. Only the church’s voices are heard, but the voice of Christ is not heard in heaven in that song.

And the church becomes dissatisfied with a songbook that doesn’t include every part of every psalm. That’s the case with our own psalter [regarding Psalm 18]...Our own psalter does not have this whole...text in it, so that most of us have never sung Psalm 18 in its entirety with the Lord Jesus Christ in church. He sings the song in heaven. We sing summaries of that song. The church becomes dissatisfied with it and eventually intolerant of it because she wants to sing with her Lord.¹²

And here we come to part of the main point in the controversy. The freedom of the churches to sing praises to God is being displaced by the teaching that when the churches sing the psalms from *The Psalter*, they are not singing the psalms closely, purely, completely, and accurately enough. This is bondage.

Over against this teaching, the churches may rest in their freedom to praise God in worship because the principle is to sing the word. And in *The Psalter* the churches have the word of God as it is contained in the psalms versified for the use of the church.

So I am not defending the blue psalter, nor do I regard

as a threat to the gospel any calls to revise *The Psalter*. I believe that our churches are wholly unequipped for that at present and that God in his providence has spoken clearly to our place in the world right now: it is to preach the gospel of the unconditional covenant of God over against the corruption of that gospel especially in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Pointing out where *The Psalter* could be improved or even proposing that we get rid of *The Psalter* is not the issue.

Not about the Doxology “Praise God”

Neither is this controversy about singing the song “Praise God.” Whether “Praise God” is a hymn or a psalm or a faithful reflection of the theology of a psalm is immaterial. Whether or not “Praise God” was included in article 69 of the Church Order is immaterial. The churches could have easily remedied that by including the song in article 69. The practice of the churches sometimes is not entirely in harmony with the original reading of every article of the Church Order, and so the Church Order can be changed. Perhaps the churches ought to consider updating article 69 to bring it in harmony with our practice. Such a thing could be easily done, so that the article would read as follows: “In the churches only the 150 Psalms of David, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, the Twelve Articles of Faith, the Songs of Mary, Zacharias, and Simeon, and the Doxologies shall be sung.” No one sings the “Morning and Evening Hymns” that were originally included by Dordt. We do sing the doxology “Praise God.” But those who are against singing “Praise God” are not against it because it is not included in article 69 of the Church Order. They are against it because it is a man-made hymn, a human invention.

Reverend Lanning defined psalms and hymns this way:

The *psalms* being the 150 psalms that God has given us in the psalm book, and *hymns* being not inspired compositions of men...In the one category are the psalms, those 150 God-inspired songs; and in the other category are the hymns, which are not the inspired songs of God but the songs composed by men about God.¹³

By this definition “Praise God” is a forbidden hymn.

By an assault on that hymn, Reverend Lanning intended to bring his entire view of singing into the churches. He thought that he had an easy argument: the church may not sing hymns because hymns are man-made;

11 Lanning, “Singing the Word of Christ.”

12 Andrew Lanning, “Recompensed according to My Righteousness,” sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on May 2, 2021; <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=522115542507>.

13 Lanning, “The Regulative Principle of Worship.”

“Praise God” is a man-made hymn, so we cannot sing it. He thought that he had sympathy because of the faithful Reformed church’s insistence on psalm singing and perhaps even an opportunity in the newly formed Reformed Protestant Churches, where there was a reappraisal of what the churches had been doing. But the fight is not about “Praise God.” If someone had come and said, “The churches need to get rid of ‘Praise God’ because there are better options for a doxology,” I would not have fought against that. But the prize was not to rid the churches of “Praise God”; the prize was the denomination’s adoption of the theology of exclusive psalm singing based on the regulative principle and the second commandment.

Regarding the song “Praise God,” Reverend Lanning said,

Dordt allowed a tiny handful of exceptions [to the psalms] because people were just as stubborn then as they are now. Imagine suggesting then that the beloved hymn of prayer before the sermon should not be sung and see what would have happened. Try to suggest now that Thomas Ken’s beloved doxology “Praise God” is a hymn and see what happens. So Dordt made a concession to the people’s will. But Dordt was not enthusiastic about the few exceptions. Dordt suffered the few exceptions...

So also Dordt, which loved psalms, suffered a tiny handful of non-psalms for the hardness of Dutch hearts. But where the article suffers hard hearts, we ought to be ashamed, rather than demand continued room for our hardness.¹⁴

This is another slander of the churches, as though we are defending “Praise God” with our lives. It is also a slander of the Dutch fathers in the Netherlands to say that the explanation of the inclusion of certain songs is that Dordt made a concession to men’s hard hearts, as though they would have defended the “Morning Hymn” with their lives. I don’t believe it. Dordt did not teach exclusive psalmody based on the regulative principle and the second commandment.

Even if Dordt had written article 69 to read, “Sing only the 150 psalms,” that would not have been conclusive proof that Dordt taught exclusive psalmody on the basis of the regulative principle and the second commandment. That Dordt did include some scriptural and popular hymns is irrefutable proof that Dordt did not believe exclusive psalmody based on the regulative principle. And if the Reformed fathers at Dordt did believe

that, then they would not have granted any exceptions. Those were serious men who took proper worship and the law of God seriously.

Besides, there are not exceptions to the law of God in the New Testament as there were exceptions in the Old Testament. We are not children but adults who have the law, the whole law, written on our hearts.

So whether we sing or do not sing “Praise God” is no issue. I could have easily given it up. That doxology is of no consequence to me. There are other doxologies. One is “Glory be to the Father,” which has a massively long pedigree in the churches, so that it is arguable that the apostle John sang it.

To say that Dordt allowed exceptions because of “the hardness of Dutch hearts” is pure slander, and I reject it absolutely.

So also with regard to singing “Praise God.” We are not up in arms because there was a suggestion to do away with singing “Praise God.” I know of no one who cares about that. The issue is not whether or not we sing “Praise God.” You could sing or not sing “Praise God” as far as I am concerned. I would much rather sing psalter number 268. I like it better, and it is a wonderful song for entering into God’s house. But I will not be forced with charges of sin to give up singing “Praise God.” Indeed, when the guiltless are condemned and charged with sin for singing that doxology, then we may not give up that doxology, but we must withstand the legalists and not give place to them for one hour. We may not be cowed by the charges of the legalists about things being man-made and about hymns and so become defensive about singing “Praise God.” We should simply say, “‘Praise God’ is a hymn, and we are going to sing it because there is nothing wrong or suspicious with the church’s singing a hymn.”

Further, we should say, “Now that we have been charged with sin for singing ‘Praise God,’ we are going to glory in singing it as a hymn and a man-made one at that.”

Dordt established that as our liberty. Our calling is to praise God with his own word. Article 69 is an expression of liberty that the churches are free to include other songs in worship besides the psalms. And we ought to stand firmly in that liberty and not be soon moved by the legalists’ howling about hymns and man-made things in the worship service. There is absolutely nothing sinful with singing a hymn in worship.

Those who sing psalms because they think it is sinful to sing otherwise, who charge the churches with sin for singing anything other than a psalm, and who will

¹⁴ “Rev. Andrew Lanning Appeal,” in *Reformed Protestant Churches in America Agenda of the Classis Meeting to be held May 18, 2023*, 45; https://mcusercontent.com/417b9db4fbf7b0604e0d0a6c4/files/6b143e11-1020-2849-66ab-fd671dc4b0cb/Agenda_May_18_2023_Classis_RPCA.pdf. See also Andrew Lanning, “Protest,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 1 (April 15, 2023): 24.

separate from the churches because of that charge of sin can perish with all their psalm singing. It would be better for them if they would just sing a hymn instead of staying on their current path.

The Issue Is Legalism

We must stick to what the issue is: legalism in worship and the application of the second commandment. I am against the doctrine that has been introduced into the churches that God in the second commandment commands the church to sing only the 150 psalms of David in worship and that to sing any other portion of scripture is a sin against the second commandment and thus is image worship and will worship. That doctrine I oppose as legalism. That was my charge from the beginning¹⁵; and after having studied the doctrine even more, that is still my charge today and even more forcefully. That doctrine is the dread error of legalism, and in essence it is no different from the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees.

The specific form of the legalism is that Jesus Christ does not sing with his church unless she sings the 150 psalms of David. So Reverend Lanning preached,

That [Jesus sings the psalms] has implications, too, for the church's singing in worship. That as the church understands what those psalms are, then the church desires those psalms and is zealous for those psalms and becomes intolerant of anything replacing those psalms. The church will not suffer a hymn to come into her midst, that is a man-made hymn. That's not a psalm from the word of God because when the church sings that hymn and all her mouths are open and all her voices are raising to the rafters, the Lord Jesus Christ isn't singing that song, though the church might sing it. That's not the Lord's psalm. It's not the word of Christ. It's not the word of his Spirit, and so the church will not have that hymn.¹⁶

Because the doctrine of exclusive psalmody is legalism, it also robs the church of the peace to which she is called and leads to endless calculations and controversies about whether the church is, in fact, singing the 150 psalms purely, closely, completely, and accurately enough.

Reverend Lanning also preached, "He [Jesus] doesn't sing with the church if her doxology is not a psalm."¹⁷ And yet again,

The church becomes dissatisfied with versifications of the psalms that are only summaries of the psalm and that are close but not quite the psalm and that are only man's interpretation of the psalm. That becomes after a while intolerable to the church because when she sings a man's summary of a psalm, she's not singing the word of Christ. And Christ isn't singing that song with her. Only the church's voices are heard, but the voice of Christ is not heard in heaven in that song.¹⁸

Key to this doctrine is that Jesus is singing the psalms.

So Reverend Lanning preached, "That the Lord Jesus Christ is the singer of the psalms is the key to understanding the psalms, and it's the key to understanding this text [Psalm 18]."¹⁹ Jesus sings the psalms himself in heaven wholly apart from the consideration of his church. If the church sings a hymn in church, then Jesus keeps right on singing a psalm, but he is not singing with the church when she sings that hymn. The calling of the church then is to sing with Jesus and to sing what Jesus sings.

This is contrary to the gospel, which teaches that we sing because Jesus is with us and indwells us by his Spirit. Jesus is not singing alongside the church, but Jesus works in and through the church by the indwelling Spirit. Whenever the church sings the truth, she sings because Christ is in her.

This truth of the gospel regarding our worship on Sunday and in all of our lives is the teaching of Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." The key to the passage is that the word of Christ dwells in us richly. This is basic and fundamental to the theology of worship. We have Christ. We have Christ by the gospel. We are one with him and

15 Nathan J. Langerak, "The Indwelling Word," sermon preached in Second Reformed Protestant Reformed Church on March 19, 2023; <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3192322435011>.

16 Lanning, "Recompensed according to My Righteousness."

17 Lanning, "Recompensed according to My Righteousness."

18 Lanning, "Recompensed according to My Righteousness."

19 Lanning, "Recompensed according to My Righteousness."

are kept in communion with him. When God gives to us the gospel, he saves us. By that gospel he also makes our worship perfect in Jesus Christ our Lord. That is first and foremost and everything in the subject of worship. Is the gospel there? For then Christ is there, not merely alongside his church but in his church.

One of the arguments of those who disturb the churches with their legalism is that the reformation of the church at this time demands a reformation of worship. With this I agree. I disagree with the arbitrary and tyrannical imposition of exclusive psalmody as the *form* of that reformation. Rather, I insist that the reformation of worship in the Reformed Protestant Churches took place when the gospel was restored to the pulpit, so that we were brought back to Jesus Christ our Lord and our communion with him and all his benefits by a true faith and through the operation of the Holy Spirit. That is the great reformation of the churches' worship.

The worship in the Protestant Reformed Churches was not corrupted because they did not adopt the doctrine of exclusive psalmody, but the worship in the Protestant Reformed Churches was corrupted because they did not preach the gospel, and they taught the law as the way to fellowship with God.

That same error has come now into the Reformed Protestant Churches in connection with singing. The law, specifically obedience to the supposed meaning of the second commandment, is the way that Jesus sings (fellowships) with us. This is not an advance of the reformation but a deformation. The churches are not moving forward, but the churches are being brought back into bondage to the law, returning like swine to their wallowing and like dogs to their vomit.

Because the doctrine of exclusive psalmody is legalism, it also robs the church of the peace to which she is called and leads to endless calculations and controversies about whether the church is, in fact, singing the 150 psalms purely, closely, completely, and accurately enough. If the doctrine is, in fact, that we must sing only the 150 psalms, the logical end of that is an endless and unsatisfying search by the church to sing the psalms as closely to the Hebrew as possible because that is what Jesus sung and sings. The focus of the church is taken off Christ and placed upon what we do and off Christ's perfect work and placed on our work of singing. The freedom of the church to praise God out of the indwelling word is taken away, and the focus is placed on whether our singing is, in fact, good enough for an arbitrary standard of what is good enough.

Because the doctrine of exclusive psalmody is legalism, it also destroys. It already has. Those who appear to be ready to separate from the Reformed Protestant Churches are going to depart from true churches of Jesus Christ because

of their personal scruples about hymns. In that they will be guilty of schism for making the unity of the church consist in something other than Christ and his truth. Their legalistic doctrine has destroyed the peace of the members' consciences and destroyed friendships as well. The doctrine will also swallow up those who go after it.

Implications and Warnings

I want to make clear that this doctrine of exclusive psalmody also demands the almost exclusive—if not exclusive—singing of the psalms in the home, in the school, and in life in general. The doctrine looks askance at singing hymns and other portions of scripture as undermining the principle of exclusive psalmody in the church. In other words, the doctrine may seem to grant liberty to the church to sing something other than the psalms in the home, school, and life in general; but the practical consequence of exclusive psalmody is that, in fact, singing other biblically based and sound hymns is viewed as undermining exclusive psalmody. This extends also to what the proponents of this doctrine regard as too loose versifications of the psalms, which they—each according to his own judgment—will neither sing in church and will also refuse to sing in the homes and schools.

I speak from personal experience here. In a gathering where songs from *The Psalter* were being sung, there were those who refused to sing whole songs or certain verses of songs because they regarded those songs as too loose, regardless of the fact that the theology of the versification was sound. In other words, what I am pointing out is that this doctrine that promotes itself as merely being interested in the public worship of the church cannot overcome the reality that the lives of the covenant people of God are one and that what is an idol in one place must necessarily be an idol in another place. The doctrine of exclusive psalmody cannot overcome the reality that the church is the center of our lives. Thus what we do in our lives necessarily leads to the same in the worship services.

The doctrine also cannot overcome the logic of its own supposed grounding in Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19. These verses occur in the context of describing the whole thankful life of the believer as it is really and truly one in every sphere of life and as that life proceeds from the believer's union with Jesus Christ. The compelling logic of the passages is that if psalms are to be sung exclusively in the church worship services, they are to be sung exclusively in all of life. This is the compelling logic of grounding psalm singing in the second commandment. The second commandment has to do with our whole lives, and what is sinful in one area of our lives is sinful in another. Note well, that the argument is not,

are there things that the people of God do in church that they do not do in their homes? The answer is, yes. The church institute preaches and administers the sacraments, for instance. Preaching and administering sacraments are not done in the home. But here the question is: Is there something sinful that the people of God do in church that is not sinful to do in their homes? For instance, it would be sinful for me to erect a golden calf in church, and it is likewise sinful to do so in my home. The life of the child of God is one whole. For this reason the psalm-singing church is unashamedly psalm-singing in the church, home, and school.

We must also understand that the proponents of exclusive psalmody as part of the second commandment cannot be allowed to take refuge in the subterfuge that they are like weaker brethren with whom the church must bear patiently, even to the point of not exercising her liberty while the weaker brother is instructed.

On the contrary, the legalist is to be withstood and not tolerated. So his argument is, “Why can’t you just allow me not to sing ‘Praise God?’” Or better yet: “Why won’t you for my sake not sing ‘Praise God?’ And certainly, do not preach against my not singing ‘Praise God.’” Such is the argument of the legalist. He takes refuge behind what the church does to accommodate the weaker brother. But the legalist’s contention in our churches is not that he is weaker and for conscience’ sake cannot sing “Praise God.” With his refusal to sing that doxology, he takes the place of instructor in the church; and with his refusal to sing that song, he charges sin against all the churches. The legalist does not merely say, as would a weaker brother, that he wants to sing “Praise God,” but he feels it would be sin for him to sing it, and then ask to be instructed regarding the reason singing “Praise God” is not sin.

If there is such a weaker brother, pull him out of the fire.

The legalist charges sin against the whole church.

By contrast, the weaker brother, if he thought singing “Praise God” were a sin, would be tempted to sing it when he saw someone sing it and thus sin against his conscience. That is always the thing with the weaker brother: he does what others may do in their liberty but what his tender conscience does not allow. That man can be instructed and grow in his faith and the knowledge of his liberty. With such a poor soul, we would bear patiently and instruct patiently.

However, we are not dealing with weaker brothers. In this instance many of the requests for instruction in the matter of exclusive psalmody are completely disingenuous and stink of entrapment. Most people have made up their minds and only ask for instruction to sound pious. We are dealing with those who seek to instruct the

churches in their own law about singing and so to corrupt the churches from the simplicity of the gospel and who disturb her peace with their own scruples. We may not be intimidated by their not singing “Praise God” while we do sing it, as though in some way we offend the weak. We should not be worried about not giving place to them, as though we injure the weak. We do not offend the weak, but we offend the legalist. And that the Lord taught us to do. He deliberately healed on the Sabbath for the very purpose of establishing the legalism of his opponents and to establish himself as the gospel.

Wrong View of the Regulative Principle

The doctrine of exclusive psalmody is legalism because of its erroneous view of the second commandment and the so-called regulative principle of public worship. The doctrine is legalism especially in its application to singing.

The regulative principle teaches that the various elements of public worship are commanded by God and that what is not commanded is forbidden. Others go farther and define the regulative principle to include not only the elements but also the manner of worship, which allows a vast expansion of the regulative principle into such things as whether accompaniment may be used in singing.

Here we will deal only with the definition of the regulative principle that teaches that the elements of worship must be prescribed by God.

By elements of public worship, we mean the main liturgical actions of the worship services. The Reformed faith in Lord’s Day 38 describes those actions as four elements. There is preaching, the use of the sacraments, calling upon God, and the giving of alms.

The regulative principle does not specify the circumstances of these elements, that is, how each is specifically to be carried out. For instance, we preach every Sunday but celebrate the Lord’s supper four times a year. There is to be singing, but whether there is or is not accompaniment does not matter. There is to be a collection, but whether it is taken by bags or plates does not matter. These all fall under the category of the church’s liberty in worship and her ability to make laws that are for the edification of the churches without binding consciences, as though these things constitute the proper worship of God.

The central and unifying element of all the elements is the word of God. The church is to preach the word of God, partake of the word of God in the sacraments, pray the word of God, and give thanks for the word of God, by which he makes himself known to his church. The regulative principle does not say, for instance, that ministers must preach a series of sermons on a particular book of the Bible, that there must be a common cup in the celebration of the Lord’s supper, that prayer must be

the Lord's prayer, or that in giving there must be a collection for the schools. The regulative principle does not deal with specific circumstances but with principles—timeless truths about worship—and the overall principle is the word as the center of the worship. We are to worship God in church and in our whole lives as he commands in his word, so that in worship we may not invent another way to worship God; and in our lives we may not be self-willed in our stations and callings but serve God as he commands, so that everyone sticks to his calling. The word is the center of the worship. The word is the power of worship. Without the word there is no worship.

For man to prescribe something in worship or as the worship of God that God has not prescribed is will worship. All the passages of scripture that reject will worship likewise reject human laws of men, who upon their own authority prescribe anything in reference to divine worship that God has not commanded, although the thing itself is neither sinful nor forbidden by God. That issue

has to do with prescription. Man on his own authority prescribes a thing as necessary for the worship of God, when God has not prescribed it; or God has prescribed something in the worship of him, but man ignores it.

Applied to singing specifically, the regulative principle says, "Sing the word of God."

Exclusive psalmody teaches that God not only says, "Sing" or "Sing the word" but that God also says, "Sing the psalms and only the psalms." In the form that we are confronting exclusive psalmody in the Reformed Protestant Churches, the lure of it in this principle is the promise that when we sing the psalms we sing with Jesus. Notice that it is sing the psalms first, and then we sing with Jesus. This "sing with Jesus" is a corruption not only of the regulative principle but also of the concept of worship and the believer's relationship with Jesus Christ.

To that matter of "sing with Jesus," I will turn in the next article.

—NJL

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

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

CORRUPTED FROM THE SIMPLICITY IN CHRIST (1)

Introduction

As of the publication of this article, almost two months will have passed since the creation and distribution of a new magazine, *Reformed Pavilion*. I have a few remarks and observations regarding this new magazine by way of introduction. I find the name to be a peculiar one. Looking over the landscape of Reformed magazines throughout the past century, you see the names the *Banner*, the *Standard Bearer*, *Beacon Lights*, and *Sword and Shield*. The names of these magazines indicate that their purposes are to be witnesses to the Reformed truth. They stood as a city on a hill that radiated forth the light of the gospel (Matt 5:14). The names reflect that they are polemical magazines. (And by God's grace, one still remains that polemical witness to the truth.)

Recently, a new controversy has ensued, precipitated by Rev. Andrew Lanning. He and his supporters have

run into a pavilion. It is a defensive measure because they have no ground on which to stand to attack any supposed lie. I understand well what Psalm 27:5, the theme of the new magazine, is teaching. It is a covenantal text. God tabernacles and fellowships with his covenant people. He hides them in Christ and sets his people upon Christ. But the tent into which Reverend Lanning is gathering his supporters is not the safety of the gospel but the law of his own mind, heart, and will. His pavilion is a man-made, hastily put-together tent that, with one gust, will blow over. There is no safety in the defense Reverend Lanning offers.

Standing behind this magazine is a suspended minister, Rev. Andrew Lanning. On March 23, 2023, with the concurrence of the consistory of Second Reformed Protestant Church, the consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church voted to suspend Reverend Lanning,

by judging “Rev. Lanning’s teaching regarding exclusive psalmody in the worship service to be legalism by bringing an erroneous application of the second commandment in the preaching.”¹ This new magazine stands in the service of that false doctrine. That false doctrine is the sole reason for the magazine’s existence. The reason is not the gospel. The reason is not the Reformed truth. The magazine exists for the sole reason to promote the false doctrine of exclusive psalmody as part of the second commandment. There is even a rubric dedicated to it called *Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*.

Sword and Shield is a believer’s magazine. This magazine is non-ecclesiastical. There is no official connection to the Reformed Protestant Churches. And in the office of believer, one has the right to speak the truth in this magazine. Articles and speeches have been dedicated to this truth. The suspended Reverend Lanning had an avenue in *Sword and Shield* to continue to write in defense of the Reformed faith. He had an avenue to lay forth the truth of the gospel in this magazine, but he laid down his pen on the pages of this magazine to start his own. The fact that he resigned from this magazine—a believer’s magazine—but would publish two video posts in his “office of believer” promoting his position betrays him.² The new magazine may claim to be a defense of the Reformed faith, but I maintain that the magazine is deceptive and dishonest with its readers.

Reverend Lanning, one man, decided that it was time for a new magazine. He has thrown off the yoke of the church of Jesus Christ. He attacks and despises the rule of Christ over him through the elders, who judged his doctrine as false. He has thrown off the yoke of a governing board and association. He contends against the counsel of God with his own wisdom and understanding (Prov. 21:30). He attacks the sabbath rest of the church of Christ by allowing his magazine to be sent out on Sunday morning, as God’s people are preparing to go to God’s house for worship. He attacks the confessions and thereby the Holy Spirit, who leads the church into all truth (John 16:13).

The purpose of this article then is to contend against Reverend Lanning, his false doctrine, and all those

who espouse it. His false doctrine is a corruption from the simplicity in Christ (2 Cor. 11:3). Over against the principle of exclusive psalmody as required by the second commandment is the Reformed principle of *sing the word*. I will lay forth positively that truth in defense of the glory of God to the end that God’s people are instructed in his word.

In fervent prayer, we beseech the God of all grace that he will make us men who have understanding of the times. “And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.” (1 Chron. 12:32).

The Controversy Defined

Everyone seems to have a different idea of what is being taught by Reverend Lanning. Ask one man, and he says that it is one thing; ask another man, and he says that it is another thing.

The issue is this: Does the second commandment require exclusive psalmody? Does the regulative principle require exclusive psalmody? In the public worship of God, must we only sing the 150 psalms to the exclusion of everything else as idolatry?

Reverend Lanning understands that this is this issue.

So there is a question of the application of the regulative principle to the singing of the church, especially this question, does the regulative principle require exclusive psalmody?³

And again,

And God’s command with regard to the singing of the worship of Jehovah is that we worship him with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, which refer to the psalms that are given to us in the word of God, so that the regulative principle of worship for the singing of the church in her public assembly is sing the psalms and nothing else.⁴

This is the issue, and do not be misled into thinking otherwise. Reverend Lanning taught that the answer to this question is a resounding *yes*. We must exclusively sing the 150 psalms as demanded by the second

1 “First Reformed Protestant Church Consistory Decisions of March 23, 2023,” in *Reformed Protestant Churches in America Agenda of the Classis Meeting to be held May 18, 2023*, 41; https://mcusercontent.com/417b9db4fbf7b0604e0d0a6c4/files/6b143e11-1020-2849-66abfd671dc4b0cb/Agenda_May_18_2023_Classis_RPCA.pdf.

2 Reverend Lanning produced two YouTube videos after his suspension. The first, “The Gospel of Worship,” was distributed by Reverend Lanning via an email to the congregation on March 26, 2023. The video can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Zjze-Gmb-0. The second video, “The Origin of Exclusive Psalmody in the Reformed Protestant Churches,” was published on March 28, 2023, and can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFZENkdUqmI>.

3 Andrew Lanning, “The Regulative Principle of Worship,” sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on March 12, 2023; <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=312232237135528>.

4 Andrew Lanning, “Singing the Word of Christ,” sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on October 31, 2021; <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1031212233461017>.

commandment. Worship requires exclusively the 150 psalms, and to sing anything else besides the 150 psalms in public worship is idolatry and a violation of the second commandment. Although some proponents of exclusive psalmody are now trying to back off of this charge of idolatry, this was clearly implied in the sermons by virtue of the fact that to transgress the second commandment is to make a graven image; and if the second commandment requires exclusive psalmody, and the church sings something other than the psalms, then she is guilty of breaking the second commandment and thus making a graven image and committing idolatry. Reverend Lanning also taught this explicitly when he preached,

The second commandment requires as the thankful life of the believer that he sing what God has given to sing, that he sings the psalms of God's word in his public worship of Jehovah, that he not bow down to any graven image, that he not serve any graven image.⁵

Reverend Lanning in his welcome address in *Reformed Pavilion* tries to assert what the controversy is about. He writes, "The church controversy out of which this magazine arises is about the psalms in worship."⁶ I disagree. That is not the controversy. As a church we already sing versifications of the psalms in worship. The controversy is about the 150 psalms being demanded in worship as part of the second commandment and that to sing anything else in worship is the sin of idolatry. That is the controversy. That is what he taught repeatedly. He should be honest, stand behind what he has taught, and inform his readers as such.

This is the reason then that some families and individuals will not sing the doxology, "Praise God," at the beginning of the worship service or the spiritual songs if they are chosen as part of the worship service. If they were to sing these songs, they believe that they would be worshipping a golden calf erected during the service.

The consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church judged on the basis of scripture and the confessions that the second commandment does *not* require exclusive psalmody.⁷ It is not idol worship to sing "Praise God" or the songs listed in article 69 of the Church Order. It is not idolatry to sing the Lord's prayer. It is not idolatry to sing the spiritual songs of Mary, Zacharias, and Simeon. It is not sin to sing those versified portions of the word. God be praised.

Reformed Principle: Sing the Word

The Reformed principle of singing in worship is that we *sing the word*. That principle is confessional, as is the regulative principle. In Lord's Day 35 question and answer 96 we read,

Q. 96. What does God require in the second commandment?

A. That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 125)

In this Lord's Day the regulative principle of worship is taught formally. In this commandment we are given the *how* of our worship. The Reformed view of worship is that whatever element is not prescribed is forbidden. The worship of God must be according to *how* he prescribes in his word. Anything introduced into the worship of God that is not prescribed by God is will worship (Col. 2:23) and must be condemned.

The entire first table of the law has something to say about this worship of the one spiritual God.⁸ In the first commandment we are commanded regarding *who* we must worship. *Who* is the object of our worship? God alone. We must not worship man or his idols in any form. Worship of God then, as the spiritual divine being, must be spiritual worship. We worship him "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

Then in Lord's Day 38 we are taught *when* and *where* our worship must be.

Q. 103. What does God require in the fourth commandment?

A. That I, especially on the sabbath, that is, the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 128)

Worship must be in God's church, which we are called to diligently frequent. We must worship him in that locally instituted church where the gospel is preached purely, where the sacraments are administered rightly, and where discipline is applied faithfully. In this Lord's Day we are also given the elements of that worship. We are taught what that worship should look like in God's church. The regulative principle prescribes the elements or contents of that spiritual worship of Jehovah, which are "to hear His word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor."

5 Andrew Lanning, "No Image Worship," sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on March 5, 2023; <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=35232335114953>.

6 Andrew Lanning, "Welcome," *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 1 (April 15, 2023): 5.

7 The judgment and instruction of the consistory can be found in the *Agenda of the Classis Meeting to be held May 18, 2023*, 41, 48–58.

8 David J. Engelsma, Barry Gritters, and Charles Terpstra, *Reformed Worship* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 5.

The element of worship that the Catechism prescribes as publicly calling upon the Lord includes prayer and singing. That is the truth taught in Isaiah 12:4–5: “In that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the LORD.” In 1 Chronicles 16:8–9 we read, “Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him.” We read this also in Jeremiah 29:12: “Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me.” Finally, Psalm 55:16–17: “As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud.” Lord’s Day 38 takes in hand these texts and many others throughout scripture, which teach that to call upon God’s name means to pray and sing, and joins praying and singing in one element of our worship.

This informs us then of the relationship between singing and prayer. They are essentially the same thing. This is also plain from Psalm 72:20: “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.” The whole of Habakkuk 3 is a prayer of the prophet, which in verse 19 is given to the chief singer of his stringed instruments. 1 Corinthians 14:15 also joins prayer and singing together: “What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.” Prayer arises from the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ in our hearts that cries out in prayer to God, “Abba, Father” (Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Prayer arises out of the regenerated heart as the chief part of thankfulness, and singing is the expression of that prayer set to tune and meter. The Holy Spirit plucks the cords of the heart, and that prayer comes to expression in song from the mouth out of joy for the gracious salvation freely given.

But let us suppose that this law of exclusive psalmody as required by the second commandment were true. If exclusive psalm singing were required by the fourth commandment, then exclusive psalm praying must also be required. Exclusive psalms must apply to both praying and singing because the confessions join them together. Thus it would be idol worship for the church to pray

anything but the 150 psalms. This is absurd though. God does not limit our prayers to a single book of the Bible today, and neither did he limit the prayers of the saints throughout the Old and New Testaments, as evidenced by the multitude of prayers that scripture records for us. We pray free prayers and form prayers in our worship. We pray the word, and we sing the word.

An objection arises when it is pointed out that singing and praying are essentially the same thing in our confessions. That objection comes in this way: “Just because we can pray whatever comes into our mind and that accords with the word of God, so too we can sing whatever comes into our mind, as long as it accords with the word of God?” The Reformed answer to this objection is that our confessions teach us how and for what to pray. All things

that we are commanded to pray for are given voice in our confessions through the exposition of the prayer that Christ himself has taught us. In Lord’s Days 45–52 we are taught the necessity of prayer and the requisites of a true prayer. In these Lord’s Days we are taught how to pray and for what to pray. We don’t flippantly pray whatever comes into our minds, but our prayers arise from true faith out of love and thanksgiving to God. The elect child of God prays because the Spirit lives in him. So too with his singing.

Reverend Lanning, in his sermon “No Image Worship,” taught that publicly to call upon the name of the Lord means to sing the psalms and to pray.

In the fourth commandment, Lord’s Day 38, the elements that belong to worship are the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, *the singing of the psalms*, the public prayers of the church, and the giving of offerings. Those are the elements of worship. That’s what belongs in the worship of the church, that and that alone.⁹

Reverend Lanning imposed the idea of exclusive psalm singing on Lord’s Day 38. He had no basis for this, and he went against the teaching of the scriptures and the creeds by making an improper distinction between praying and singing.

Now Reverend Lanning is teaching that Lord’s Day 35 means that the Catechism is telling us to go back to

Everything is done in the service of the word. That is the teaching of Lord’s Day 35 that we worship him as he has commanded in his word. Preach the word, read the word, administer the word, sing and pray the word, and give offerings for the poor.

9 Andrew Lanning, “No Image Worship” (emphasis added).

the scriptures for the answer to how God commands us to worship him. Proponents of exclusive psalmody use this Lord's Day for the authority to abandon what the confessions teach in Lord's Day 38 about worship. Reverend Lanning writes regarding Lord's Day 35, "When the creeds explicitly send us to Scripture on a matter, the creeds require what the Scriptures require in that matter."¹⁰ This is not correct. Not only is it wrong, but it is also inconsistent. A month prior Reverend Lanning preached in the above-mentioned sermon that the answer to the question of what the church sings is found in Lord's Day 38. Now he writes that the creeds do not have the answer, and so they send us back to scripture. However, the confessions are not teaching us to go back to the scriptures to find each explicit command regarding worship; moving on from Lord's Day 35, the Catechism quickly arrives at Lord's Day 38 to teach us the elements of worship that God has commanded in his word. I find it remarkable how quickly men went from "the confessions settle controversy" to "the confessions can't settle this controversy."¹¹ If we must have an explicit command from scripture for worship in the way Reverend Lanning teaches, then the preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism and the reciting of the Apostles' Creed would also be idol worship, as God does not specifically command them in his word either.

The Reformed principle of worship is that worship is Word-regulated worship. It is a service full of the Word,

Jesus Christ. Everything is done in the service of the word.¹² That is the teaching of Lord's Day 35 that we worship him as he has commanded in his word. Preach the word, read the word, administer the word, sing and pray the word, and give offerings for the poor. We preach the word, that is, right doctrine and the pure gospel of grace. We must preach the truth and not a mixture of the truth and the lie. We read the sacred, inspired scriptures during worship and not a man-made devotional. We administer the word. We administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper that Christ has instituted for the New Testament church, which are signs and seals of the truth of the word of God. We sing and pray the word, that is, publicly call upon the name of the Lord. We may not pray for whatever we want; but we pray out of true faith, out of love for God in thanksgiving, for the things God has commanded. We pray the truth and theology of God's word, and we sing the truth and theology of the sacred scriptures. We do not sing Arminian ditties or songs that glorify man and debase God, but we must sing and pray right doctrine.

And when you want to know what to sing out of true faith and love for God, sing the psalms because they are especially prepared by the Holy Spirit to that end. We do not need to look around to figure that out. God has already given us the answer in giving us a beautiful book of praise, full of songs and prayers. With the recovery of the gospel of grace, the church of Jesus Christ recovers

10 Andrew Lanning, "Protest," *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 2 (April 15, 2023): 23.

11 At the September 2022 and January 2023 meetings of the Classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches, the proper understanding of the authority and doctrine of the confessions was prominently featured in the discussions and was decisive in the judgments that the classes made. In a doctrine class shortly after the January 2023 Classis, Reverend Lanning explained the relationship between scripture and the Reformed confessions. "The result of the Spirit's operation in leading the church into the truth of the scriptures is also that the confessions have authority to decide all doctrinal controversy in the church...As has been said and as we have learned at our last classis meeting, you could come to classis and face a doctrinal controversy and face protests and appeals, and you can decide the matter without ever quoting a verse from the Bible but only basing that decision on the confessions—the doctrine of the confessions—and that doctrine of the confessions has authority to decide the issue for the church...The confessions interpret the scriptures. When we say that the confessions interpret the scriptures, we mean that the confessions take the doctrine of the scriptures and explain that doctrine, state that doctrine, formulate that doctrine so that the church is saying, 'Here's the meaning of this doctrine'...This matter of the confessions' interpreting the scriptures stands opposed to Biblicism. Biblicism is a threat in two ways in the Reformed Protestant Churches. The first way it is a threat is the open confession of a man, 'I am a Biblicist.' That is, a man says, 'Don't bring the confessions to me; I'm not going to decide anything on the confessions.' When you are going to decide the doctrinal issue, I speak to you, 'I want to hear only the Bible, and if you bring me the confessions or bring the confessions to bear on this issue, I'm not going to hear it.' That's Biblicism. The second way that Biblicism is a threat in the Reformed Protestant Churches is much more subtle but just as erroneous; and the second threat is this, that a man says, 'You must interpret the confessions with the scriptures. You have brought to me a doctrine that is clearly stated in the confessions; but now, I don't know what that word means (though that word has a meaning), or I don't know what that doctrine means, or it's at least in doubt. And so, you must now take the scriptures and interpret for me that word or that doctrine of the confessions.' That is a subtle form of Biblicism. Do you see what it does to the confessions? It takes the whole confession away. You don't know what that word means—or you don't want to know what that word means—but tomorrow *I'm* not going to want to know what *that* word means, and the next day somebody else isn't going to know what *that* word means. Now the confessions cannot interpret the scriptures. They cannot be the authoritative—with derived authority—explanation and interpretation of the scriptures, but no one knows what the confessions mean until we have gone to the scriptures and have interpreted the confessions with the scriptures...The confessions in their interpretation make clear what they mean, so that the confessions themselves don't need to be interpreted from the Bible. Beware of that subtle Biblicism...When we go in the direction of Biblicism, any heresy is on the table—any heresy you can imagine—no heresy is off the table, because every heretic has his text; every heretic has his verse."

12 Engelsma, *Reformed Worship*, 7.

her love for the psalms. The psalms are opened up for her, and she tastes and sees that the Lord is good.

What has been lost sight of in this controversy—shamefully—is the gospel. Our eyes have been taken completely off Christ and instead have been placed onto this law that must be met. There is nothing in the controversy about worship being spiritual worship, worshiping in true faith, or worshiping out of thankfulness. Worship is simple. It is not hard to understand. False doctrine has obscured this simplicity. Jesus Christ is the Word (John 1:1). That Word feeds his sheep. Lord's Day 35 concludes by teaching that God will have his people taught, not by dumb images but by the lively preaching of his word. And that word is what regulates the singing in our worship as well.

The right worship of God by his elect people chosen in Christ is God's purpose in creating them.¹³ "This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise" (Isa. 43:21). God will have his name glorified and exalted. He has formed a peculiar people for that purpose. And in glory, his elect people will worship him eternally through his beloved, only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

Errors with Exclusive Psalmody as Law

There are numerous errors in the feeble attempt to defend exclusive psalmody as required by the second commandment.

I will address just a few of them now. A text that is being appealed to for support of exclusive psalmody is Psalm 95:2. "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms." This text does not support exclusive psalmody as Reverend Lanning teaches. The word "psalms" in the text is not to be understood as the 150 psalms of David. The word simply means *to sing a song in praise of God*. In James 5:13, which reads, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms," the singing of psalms simply means that the saints sang a song of praise to God. The word for psalms in the New Testament carries the meaning of rubbing or plucking against the strings of

an instrument to make music. This word is picked up again in Romans 15:9 as "sing" in connection with Psalm 18:49: "As it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name." The people of God sing a song in praise of God. They sing unto his name.

The principle of exclusive psalmody must be carried through all the way to its logical end. The argument is made that if we do not sing the 150 psalms, then we are not singing the word of Christ. But we do not sing the psalms even now. We sing *versifications* of the psalms. This is what Rev. H. C. Hoeksema wrote concerning this point.

From the fact, which we can all see, that we *do not have* and *do not sing* the inspired Word of God in our Psalter or in our Dutch Psalms. This is a catchy phrase, "the inspired Word of God." And it has been appealed to more often in support of psalm-singing...In both our English and Dutch psalters we do not have the inspired word of God, but *versifications based on the Word of God*. All these versifications involve *interpretation*.¹⁴

If the former is true [that we sing *versifications* based on psalms]—and it is—then there can be no *principle* objection to other versifications of Scripture,

whether Old or New Testament, and to hymns in that sense. And no one need shame himself for thinking of it.¹⁵

We can make a beginning on the definition of *hymns* here as well. An issue with the speed of developments in this controversy in the Reformed Protestant Churches is that we have a lack of defined terms. The word *hymn* does not mean the same thing for each person. One might take the term *hymn* and understand that to be an Arminian song such as "Trust and Obey" or some other theologically revolting song that teaches salvation by man. Rev. H. C. Hoeksema took hymns to mean that they are versifications of the word other than the 150 psalms. This is

What has been lost sight of in this controversy—shamefully—is the gospel. Our eyes have been taken completely off Christ and instead have been placed onto this law that must be met. There is nothing in the controversy about worship being spiritual worship, worshiping in true faith, or worshiping out of thankfulness.

¹³ Engelsma, *Reformed Worship*, 5.

¹⁴ Homer C. Hoeksema, "Reply to Brother Rooda," *Standard Bearer* 37, no. 1 (October 1, 1960): 22.

¹⁵ Hoeksema, "Reply to Brother Rooda," 23.

completely legitimate for the church. We do not sing the psalms now. We sing versifications based on the psalms. Any principled objection to singing the word of God must also object to singing versifications of the psalms today.

The fact is that even if one only were ever to sing out of the blue psalter, according to Reverend Lanning, that too would not be good enough. In a sermon on May 2, 2021, he taught the following:

The church becomes dissatisfied with versifications of the psalms that are only summaries of the psalm and that are close but not quite the psalm and that are only man's interpretation of the psalm. That becomes, after a while, intolerable to the church, because when she sings a man's summary of a psalm, she's not singing the word of Christ, and Christ isn't singing that song with her.¹⁶

The current psalter we use, which contains versifications of the 150 psalms, does not even fulfil the requirement of the second commandment according to Reverend Lanning. Certainly, psalter revision or some other alternative will be required for Reverend Lanning and his proponents.

Anyone who believes that this principle of exclusive psalmody as required by the second commandment is a defense of the current psalter is gravely mistaken. The principle of exclusive psalmody will be an endless stream of controversy over purity of worship. Psalter revision will not be sufficient to satisfy the requirement. One will need to chant the psalms, at a minimum, because *versifications* based on the psalms is idolatry as well. But chanting from the Scottish psalter will also not be good enough, as that is also an *interpretation* of the psalms from the Hebrew, versified and adapted to meter and rhyme. One will need to chant the original Hebrew in order to meet the requirement of exclusive psalmody and to be singing the words of Christ. An arbitrary law will have to be made at some point by Reverend Lanning to determine when the law of exclusive psalmody has been met and therefore for the church to know that Christ is singing with her.

A Jealous God

The false doctrine that exclusive psalmody is required by the second commandment has serious implications. This position condemns the singing of the New Testament church through the ages as idol worship. This position

makes God a weak, tolerant, impotent God, a God who for close to two thousand years has allowed idolatry in his church. He is a God who has winked at this sin and suffered an idol to be erected because his church was not singing exclusively the 150 psalms.

Philip Schaff, in his *History of the Christian Church*, details the singing of the church during the apostolic period (AD 1–100) and the ante-Nicene period (AD 100–311):

But to this precious inheritance from the past [the psalms of the Old Testament], whose full value was now for the first time understood in the light of the New Testament revelation, the church, in the enthusiasm for her first love, added original, specifically Christian psalms, hymns, doxologies, and benedictions, which afforded the richest material for sacred poetry and music in succeeding centuries; the song of the heavenly hosts, for example, at the birth of the Saviour; the “Nunc dimittis” of Simeon; the “Magnificat” of the Virgin Mary; the “Benedictus” of Zacharias; the thanksgiving of Peter after his miraculous deliverance; the speaking with tongues in the apostolic churches, which, whether song or prayer, was always in the elevated language of enthusiasm; the fragments of hymns scattered through the Epistles; and the lyrical and liturgical passages, the doxologies and antiphonies of the Apocalypse.¹⁷

The psalter was first enriched by the inspired hymns which saluted the birth of the Saviour of the world, the *Magnificat* of Mary, the *Benedictus* of Zacharias, the *Gloria in Excelsis* of the heavenly host, and the *Nunc Dimittis* of the aged Simeon. These hymns passed at once into the service of the Church, to resound through all successive centuries, as things of beauty which are “a joy forever.”¹⁸

For almost two thousand years the church of Jesus Christ has sung other hymns and spiritual songs alongside the psalms. When the gracious gospel of justification by faith alone was restored by the Reformation and the great Synod of Dordt, the church also restored the singing of the psalms to their rightful place of honor, but the reformers never required exclusive psalmody on the ground of the second commandment. Reverend Lanning

16 Andrew Lanning, “Recompensed according to My Righteousness,” sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on May 2, 2021; <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=522115542507>.

17 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, rev. ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2006), 1:463–64.

18 Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:227.

condemns Martin Luther as an idol worshiper, who was known for writing hymns. Reverend Lanning condemns John Calvin as an idol worshiper, whose congregation sang the Song of Simeon after every celebration of the Lord's supper. Reverend Lanning condemns Rev. Herman Hoeksema as an idol worshiper, who advocated for hymns and spiritual songs in the church. Reverend Lanning condemns Rev. John Heys, who wrote music for and sang the Lord's prayer, as an idol worshiper. Reverend Lanning condemns most of the New Testament church and his forefathers. That is how serious this charge is that Reverend Lanning has made.

One man decided that for two thousand years, God allowed in his church this idolatry of singing songs other than the 150 psalms. God's people bowed themselves down to the golden calf by singing "Praise God" and other spiritual songs. And God was weak to stop his church from worshipping an idol. He tolerated this idolatry.

What does God say in Exodus 20:5? "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." I the Lord am a jealous God. God is jealous for his own honor and glory. He is jealous because the sin of idolatry is an affront to his eternal, holy, and triune being. The sin of idolatry is deadly serious to him because it is an assault against that glory. He promises to visit that iniquity of the fathers to the third and fourth generations.

Jeroboam the son of Nebat was infamous for causing Israel to sin by worshipping the golden calves (1 Kings 12:28–33). He set up images in Dan and Bethel and said, "Behold thy gods." Israel's worship became more and more abominable and disgusting. She plunged deeper and deeper into idolatry and the corruption of her worship. God is a jealous God. He judged Israel's worship in her generations. He judged that sin of the ten tribes upon the children and children's children until finally they were consumed and destroyed by the Assyrians. God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. God does not

take lightly the corruption of his worship. He judges that sin of the fathers upon the children.

It is not that the church of Jesus Christ is opposed to the charge of idolatry in itself. The child of God who knows his nature, knows his sin, knows that in himself all of his worship is filled with idolatry before the face of the thrice-holy God. The child of God knows his need for the one who worshiped God perfectly in his stead, and he is comforted by the gospel that Jesus Christ worshiped perfectly for him. But for Reverend Lanning to preach that to sing anything other than the 150 psalms in worship is idolatry is to unlawfully bind the conscience of the child of God and to rob him of the comfort of the gospel.

Conclusion

The worship of the church of Jesus Christ is word-regulated worship: preach the word, administer the word, read the word, pray and sing the word, and give offerings to the poor. The Reformed principle of singing is *sing the word*. That principle is confessional. The law of exclusive psalmody as part of the regulative principle is legalism. The law of exclusive psalmody as part of the second commandment is a law of man that Christ does not command in his word. That law is an attack on the church; it is an attack on the confessions; and it is an attack on the Holy Spirit who leads the church into all truth (John 16:13).

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). I fear for the souls of those who have been removed from the simplicity of the gospel and have been corrupted by the subtilty of the serpent.

Next time, the Lord willing, I will take up the conditional covenant theology that has been taught in the church by Reverend Lanning that Christ does not sing with the church unless the law of exclusive psalmody has been met. The theology is a mutation of the theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

—Tyler D. Ophoff

SACRIFICES (2): THEIR OVERARCHING DOCTRINE

Introduction

In the previous article we considered our Lord's one offering that has perfected forever them that are sanctified. What God decreed in his eternal counsel concerning the consummation of his covenant of grace was brought to completion by the high priest, Jesus Christ. He accomplished all that was needed to bring a guilty and damnable people unto the living God for intimate fellowship in his holy sanctuary, such that already now we sit together in heavenly places in Christ. That offering was his lifelong suffering for the sins of many and his diligent obedience to the will of God in the place of his elect, which culminated in Christ's high priestly service on the cross as the bloody sacrifice.

At the end of the previous study, we noted that the incalculable number of sacrifices offered daily in the temple for over a millennium could never perfect what the righteous servant of Jehovah perfected. Those sacrifices could not take away sin once and for all. They could not ransom a single life from hell. They could not satisfy the divine justice of the Holy One of Israel, whose majesty was profaned and truth slandered by the treacherous rebellion of man. Those sacrifices brought nothing to completion, for they were not what God had determined in his wisdom to reconcile a people unto himself. Or better, those sacrifices brought nothing to completion, for they were not the one through whom God would show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us.

Those sacrifices of the old dispensation were merely the shadow of a body, a body of the mediator, who stands in his appointed place in history and is revealed only in the fullness of time according to the good pleasure of Jehovah. Those sacrifices were not the glory of God to be revealed, but they were dim reflections of his marvelous light. Those sacrifices were not the very image of him who lives and was dead and is alive forevermore, but they were figures ready to be disposed of at the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in our flesh. They pointed ahead to the cross, where mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissed each other.

But now the Lord God of Israel has visited and redeemed his people. The dayspring from on high has

visited us. Simeon took up the Christ in his arms and declared, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, O Lord!" And this one, being the first to announce the glad tidings of his gospel, declared, "It is finished!" even as he willingly laid down his life and fulfilled every type and shadow of prophecy. Now he is seated in heaven at the right hand of majesty as the lamb that was slain, executing all things in heaven and on earth unto the great and notable day of the Lord. And then the holy city, the new Jerusalem, shall come down from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband, and the tabernacle of God shall be with the redeemed. God shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and he shall be their God. The fruit of God's labor in his Son, our high priest!

Such an office and power that belong to Christ may not be ascribed to any other man, much less to a goat or a bullock. However, those sacrifices of the old dispensation, fulfilled and abrogated two thousand years ago, do teach yet today. We confess in Lord's Day 6 of the Heidelberg Catechism that God represented the holy gospel by those sacrifices. Furthermore, Belgic Confession article 25 teaches that "we still use the testimonies taken out of the law and the prophets, to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 89, 55). Sacrifices confirm us in the holy gospel! They continue to speak, ministering to our faith in the risen and exalted Lord. And so, we take up a more extensive study of the sacrifices, as they confirm us in the doctrine of the labor of our eternal high priest, who, on the basis of his one offering and sacrifice for sin, continually intercedes on our behalf and brings us into fellowship with the Father.

The particular focus of this article is to give ourselves both a general reacquaintance with the sacrifices prescribed by God through Moses as well as to examine their overarching doctrine.

Five Sacrifices

The book of Leviticus opens with a treatment of five different kinds of sacrifices: the burnt, meat, peace, sin, and trespass offerings. "The LORD called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the

LORD...” (Lev. 1:1–2). What follows are seven chapters of instruction regarding those various sacrifices.

Chapters 1–3 deal with the burnt offering, the peace offering, and the meat offering, respectively. The Israelite would have been familiar with those three sacrifices, for those sacrifices had already been brought to light in sacred history. Burnt offerings were what Noah offered unto Jehovah when Noah departed from the ark and sacrificed clean beasts and birds, what Abraham offered when he sacrificed his only and beloved son Isaac in the land of Moriah, and what Job offered for his children and for his foolish friends. Meat offerings were known prior to that point, for God in Exodus 30 forbade their usage upon the altar of incense. Regarding the peace offering, it is possible that the meal shared between Jacob and his brethren was of this sort. Furthermore, after Moses sacrificed peace offerings at the base of Mount Sinai, he ascended the mount with the elders of Israel for a meal in the presence of their covenant God (Ex. 24). That Israel was already familiar with those kinds of offerings is indicated by the fact that they needed no introduction when God prescribed them through Moses (Lev. 1:3; 2:1; 3:1).

In contrast to those first three sacrifices, the sin offering given in Leviticus 4:1 through 5:13 and the trespass offering given in 5:14 through 6:17 were unknown to Israel prior to the Exodus. That those offerings were new to the Israelite is evident not only by the fact that those offerings have no earlier mention in scripture but also that they have a unique introduction in Leviticus. The discourse on burnt, meat, and peace offerings continues uninterrupted in chapters 1–3. But when 4:1 introduces the sin offering and 5:14 introduces the trespass offering,¹ both begin with the words, “The LORD spake unto Moses, saying...”

What follows in the remainder of chapter 6 and in chapter 7 are further regulations regarding those five sacrifices.

Until the law came by Moses, bloody sacrifices were marked with great simplicity. Later, elaborateness marked the sacrificial system, and the number was increased to five. Though these five sacrifices had many common elements, each possessed unique features that set them apart both in practice and in the mind of Israel. And so the question arises, why five?

In early volumes of the *Standard Bearer*, Rev. G. M. Ophoff gave a thorough examination of those different sacrifices, and his conclusion regarding the divine wisdom in prescribing those different sacrifices was as follows:

All these kinds of sacrifice were needed to bring out the whole truth in connection with the work of Christ; they were needful to the believer as the instruments for the adequate expression of the faith that was in him, of his contrition, gratitude and praise, thus of the response of his heart to the grace of God that he experienced. The manifold riches of grace called for such an elaborate ritual sacrifice, if anything like a complete representation was to be given and supplied, namely a shadow service in the face of which every feature of redemption and salvation of the elect of God stood out in plain relief, and thus a service that as performed in faith and love betokened all the hallowed and variant states and feelings of the true people of God.²

In harmony with this conclusion, Ophoff examined the sacrificial system not only from the viewpoint of how the body of Christ was typified in the various sacrifices but also with special emphasis on the inner condition of the elect sinner who brought those offerings by faith.

However, my scope in treating the sacrifices is narrower, for I intend to give particular emphasis on how those different sacrifices show forth the richness of Christ’s one offering that has perfected forever them that are sanctified. Thus the present study is more confined to the doctrines of Christology. And what will stand in stark relief as I treat those different sacrifices will be that the cross was vicarious satisfaction.

Atonement or Satisfaction?

Vicarious satisfaction—this is the precise term that exhaustively expresses all that Christ has done on our behalf as our mediator. It is the overarching doctrine of the cross as typified in the Levitical sacrifices. This is the genus under which subsumes the finer points of doctrine described and depicted by the various sacrifices. But this needs an explanation.

This needs an explanation because we are, perhaps, more familiar with another term that is frequently used when describing the nature of Christ’s offering of himself as a sacrifice unto God—*substitutionary atonement*.

Atonement is a theological term that has common usage among us. When we were taught the distinctives of the Reformed faith over against Arminianism under the acronym TULIP, we learned that *L* stands for limited atonement. As young people we were taught substitutionary atonement from the *Essentials* catechism book in the lessons on Christ’s state of humiliation and the Lord’s

1 It should be noted that the trespass offering begins in Leviticus 5:14 and not in 5:1, as many Bibles indicate.

2 G. M. Ophoff, “The Offering by Blood,” *Standard Bearer* 14, no. 14 (April 15, 1938): 333.

supper.³ If you were to look in the back of *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, under the “Doctrinal Index to the Creeds” and the “Doctrinal Index to the Liturgical Forms,” you will find in the Christology section that the work of Christ is subsumed under the heading “Atonement.” And this is the heading that Hoeksema gave in his *Reformed Dogmatics* to his treatment of the nature of Christ’s sacrifice.⁴

Atonement is the term in the King James translations of the Hebrew word כפר, and it is the important word used in connection with the Levitical offerings. For example: “He [the offerer] shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement [כפר] for him” (Lev. 1:4; see 4:20, 26, 31, etc.). The great focal point of the entire sacrificial system was the day of atonement (כפר), when the blood of the first goat was brought all the way into the most holy place and sprinkled on the mercy seat (more literally, the place of atonement since the Hebrew word for mercy seat is a derivative noun from כפר) and when the second goat was sent away into the wilderness to be seen no more. “On that day,” said Jehovah, “shall the priest make an atonement [כפר] for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD” (16:30). Over one hundred times this term appears in the Old Testament.

However, the term *atonement* all but disappears in the New Testament. In the King James Version, atonement is used once in Romans 5:11: “Not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” But the Greek word in this verse (καταλλαγή) would be better rendered as “reconciliation” instead of “atonement,” for this is how the word is translated in 2 Corinthians 5:18–19: “All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” In fact, there is no one Greek word in the New Testament that is equivalent to the Hebrew כפר.⁵

Rather, there are many different Greek words that convey the rich thought of the Hebrew כפר. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit speaks of ἱλασμός, or “propitiation.”⁶ Propitiation was needful to appease the wrath of God, which justly belongs upon all men for their sin and rebellion against him. By the offering of himself, Jesus Christ turned the wrath of God from us, where it rightfully belonged, and turned it to himself. We must add that, in the light of God’s counsel, God was never angry with his people but ever beholds them as beloved and redeemed in his Son. Neither is Christ a third party who interposes himself between a vengeful God and a sinful people, but Christ was sent by God to turn away his wrath that rightfully belonged to us. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation [ἱλασμός] for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit speaks of ἀγοράζω and λυτρόω, or “redemption.”⁷ Christ by his one offering redeemed us from our slavery to sin and Satan, which our sin rightfully deserves. When man fell God executed upon man a sentence of death to sin and Satan, according to the justice of God’s perfect law. And since the law demands payment of the penal debt incurred by the sinner, what was needed was a ransom, a purchase price, to be paid to God. This purchase price came from God. God paid God what God was due for our sins. He redeemed us from hell and the grave through Jesus Christ, who is the ransom of our souls and the price paid for our redemption. The work of Christ as it bears upon the elect sinner is deliverance from the curse of the law by the payment of an equivalent ransom price. “Christ hath redeemed [ἀγοράζω] us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Gal. 3:13). Our savior, Jesus Christ, “gave himself for us, that he might redeem [λυτρόω] us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). “Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed [λυτρόω]

3 Herman Hoeksema, *Essentials of Reformed Doctrine: A Guide in Catechetical Instruction*, rev. ed. (2006), 34, 56. This book is the basis of instruction for our young people. There is this question under “Extra Work” in Lesson 16: “What is meant by the substitutionary atonement of Christ?” And Lesson 27 on the Lord’s supper teaches that the bread and wine are signs “of the broken body and shed blood of Christ by which Christ made atonement for our sins.”

4 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 1:559.

5 The word ἐξίλασκαμαι that is used for כפר in the Septuagint does not occur in the New Testament. The closest Greek words are ἱλάσκαμαι (in Heb. 2:17 as “reconciliation”), ἱλασμός (in 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 as “propitiation”), and ἱλαστήριον (in Rom. 3:25 as “propitiation” and in Heb. 9:5 as “mercyseat”).

6 כפר contains the idea of propitiation. For example, when God gives his promise in Ezekiel 16:60–63 that he surely remembers his covenant, he assures his people that despite their shameful ways, “I am pacified [כפר] toward thee for all that thou hast done.”

7 כפר contains the idea of redemption. The derivative noun of כפר can also take the sense of “ransom” or “the price of a life.” For example, “They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom [כפר] for him” (Ps. 49:6–7).

with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:17–19).

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit speaks of ἄφεσις, or “remission of sin” and “forgiveness.”⁸ Closely connected is καθαρίζω, or “cleansing” and “purging.” Christ by his offering expiates all sin, so that all guilt is utterly removed and so that the moral obligation to be punished for that sin is annulled. “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord... Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission [ἄφεσις] of these is, there is no more offering for sin” (Heb. 10:16–18). “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge [καθαρίζω] your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (9:14). That man is blest whose transgression is forgiven and whose sin is covered. That man is blest unto whom Jehovah does not impute iniquity. We emphasize this aspect in light of our condemnation of the Protestant Reformed doctrine that the cross was not forgiveness.⁹

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit also speaks of καταλλαγή, or “reconciliation.”¹⁰ In the state of guilt, speaking from the viewpoint of the sinner, the sinner is the proper object of the wrath of God. In the sinner’s own mind and conscience, he is an enemy of God. In the state of righteousness, the sinner is the object of God’s love and favor. In the sinner’s own mind and conscience, he is the friend of God. Here we must studiously avoid the idea that God must be reconciled to man. Rather, God is the one who reconciles. God is God. God remains the sole subject when dealing with the ungodly but elect sinner. Man remains the sole object. “All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor.

5:18–19). Thus atonement is never the cause of God’s love, for he is absolutely unchangeable in his being and thoughts in eternity. Rather, atonement is the effect of his eternal love, for God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son. And the people of God were reconciled unto him at the cross when he did not impute their transgressions to them but to Christ.

These are the words that the New Testament uses. Though the term *atonement* disappears in the New Testament, it is certainly present behind the other words that are used to describe the nature of Christ’s offering.

Neither does the term *atonement* appear in the Reformed creeds. And that is not surprising considering the etymology of the word. *Atonement* is a rather late word, arising in the sixteenth century with the original meaning of “being at one with others,” or at-one-ment. It was soon adopted as a theological term meaning “reconciliation of man with God” and “satisfaction or reparation for wrong or injury, propitiation of an offended party.”¹¹ But the creeds are not lacking for words either when describing the nature of Christ’s high priestly service. Consider the language of Belgic Confession article 21, entitled “The Satisfaction of Christ, Our Only High Priest, For Us.”

We believe that Jesus Christ is ordained with an oath to be an everlasting High Priest, after the order of Melchisedec; and that He hath presented Himself in our behalf before the Father to **appease His wrath** by His **full satisfaction**, by offering Himself on the tree of the cross and pouring out His precious blood to **purge away our sins**, as the prophets had foretold. For it is written: *He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and numbered with the transgressors, and condemned by*

8 This is, perhaps, the most fundamental idea of כפר. When God is the subject of כפר, it takes the definite sense of “to make expiation” or “to grant remission” or “to forgive.” If God does not כפר, the sinful and guilty man must die: “It was revealed in mine ears by the LORD of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged [כפר] from you till ye die, saith the Lord GOD of hosts” (Isa. 22:14). If God does כפר, man lives and is saved: “He, being full of compassion, forgave [כפר] their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath” (Ps. 78:38). In the Old Testament anything affected by sin or uncleanness could not stand before the holy God and required כפר, which was accomplished supremely by the manipulation of sacrificial blood—the means that God has ordained and provided.

9 For a further exposition of this, see Nathan J. Langerak, “Unforgiven (1): A Hypocrite Speaks,” *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 11 (February 2023): 14–19; “Unforgiven (2): Handling the Word of God Deceitfully,” *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 12 (March 2023): 14–19; “Unforgiven (3) Unless One Becomes an Adult,” *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 13 (April 2023): 15–22 or Rev. A. Lanning’s March 8, 2023, doctrine class entitled “The Cross as Forgiveness in the Creeds”; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wux_s-Sz0Bw.

10 כפר ultimately ends with reconciliation, as is indicated in Ezekiel 45:17: “It shall be the prince’s part to give burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and drink offerings, in the feasts, and in the new moons, and in the sabbaths, in all solemnities of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin offering, and the meat offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings, to make reconciliation [כפר] for the house of Israel.” The end of the offerings was a covenantal meal and fellowship between God and his people.

11 <https://www.etymonline.com/word/atonement>.

Pontius Pilate as a malefactor, though he had first declared Him innocent. Therefore, He **restored that which He took not away, and suffered, the just for the unjust**, as well in His body as in His soul, feeling the terrible **punishment** which our sins had merited; insomuch that *His sweat became like unto drops of blood falling on the ground*. He called out, *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* and hath suffered all this for **the remission of our sins**.

Wherefore we justly say with the apostle Paul, that *we know nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified; we count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord*, in whose wounds we find all manner of consolation. Neither is it necessary to seek or invent any other means of being **reconciled to God** than this only sacrifice, once offered, by which believers are made perfect forever. This is also the reason why He was called by the angel of God, *Jesus*, that is to say, *Savior*, because He would save his people from their sins. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 47–49; emphasis in bold added)

In conclusion, the word *atonement* itself is a suitable theological term, so long as we understand all that is implicated by its usage. We do not go so far as Hodge did to dismiss the term *atonement* as “ambiguous” and “too limited in its signification for the purpose assigned to it.”¹² Hodge’s contention was this:

It does not express all that Scripture declares that Christ did in order to satisfy all the demands of God’s law. It properly signifies the expiation of sin, and nothing more. It represents only that satisfaction which Christ rendered to the justice of God in vicariously bearing the penalty due to our sins, but it does not include that satisfaction which Christ rendered in his vicarious obedience to the law as a covenant of everlasting well-being.¹³

Over against what Hodge contended, when we use the term *atonement* in connection with the one offering of the body of Jesus Christ, we use it in a technical and theological sense that means much more than the idea that Christ expiated the sins of his people. He certainly bore away all of our sins and blotted out the handwriting

of ordinances that was against us by his blood, nailing it to the cross. But Christ did not simply take us up from our infinite debt to zero. Through the whole of Christ’s life, there ran an element of infinite humiliation, especially in his death. Therefore, every act was, in one aspect, an item of vicarious suffering, and in another aspect, an item of vicarious obedience to the will of his Father. When we use the word *atonement*, we include this passive and active work of Christ. He fulfilled all righteousness. It is as Hoeksema said,

Mere passive suffering is no sacrifice. Even the damned in hell suffer the wrath of God without ever atoning for their sin. To satisfy the justice of God one must perform an act that is the perfect antithesis of the act of willful disobedience of man in the first paradise. His act must be the perfect “yes” over against the sinner’s “no.” This is exactly what Christ accomplished on the cross. Voluntarily he entered into death and suffered the deepest agonies of hell, not for his own sins, but for the sins of those whom the Father had given him.¹⁴

Yet we can sympathize with Hodge’s sentiment. He wished to do justice to the perfect offering of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if there remains any ambiguity, then there is another word that simply captures all that has been said above. *Satisfaction*.

Preferred: Satisfaction

I prefer the word *satisfaction* to atonement. This is the overarching doctrine in the light of which I will examine the various Mosaic sacrifices.

For, first, *satisfaction* is the word of the creeds. It is the word that Belgic Confession article 21 uses to summarize Christ’s high priestly sacrifice. And it is the word of article 20:

We believe that God, who is perfectly merciful and just, sent His Son to assume that nature in which the disobedience was committed, to make *satisfaction* in the same, and to bear the punishment of sin by His most bitter passion and death. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 46–47; emphasis added)

Satisfaction is the word of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Days 5–6, 21, and 23:

12 Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Atonement* (Philadelphia: Westcott & Thomson, 1867), 33–34; <https://books.google.com/books?id=Va9ZAAAAMAAJ>.

13 Hodge, *The Atonement*, 34.

14 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:547.

Q. 12. Since then, by the righteous judgment of God, we deserve temporal and eternal punishment, is there no way by which we may escape that punishment and be again received into favor?

A. God will have His justice *satisfied*; and therefore we must make this full *satisfaction*, either by ourselves or by another.

Q. 16. Why must He be very man, and also perfectly righteous?

A. Because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which hath sinned should likewise make *satisfaction* for sin; and one who is himself a sinner cannot *satisfy* for others.

Q. 56. What believest thou concerning “the forgiveness of sins”?

A. That God, for the sake of Christ’s *satisfaction*, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long; but will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God.

Q. 60. How art thou righteous before God?

A. Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that, though my conscience accuse me that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect *satisfaction*, righteousness, and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 87, 88, 105, 106–7; emphasis added)

And *satisfaction* is the word of the Canons in 2.2–3:

Since, therefore, we are unable to make that *satisfaction* in our own persons, or to deliver ourselves from the wrath of God, He hath been pleased in His infinite mercy to give His only begotten Son for our surety who was made sin, and became a curse for us and in our stead, that He might make *satisfaction* to divine justice on our behalf.

The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and *satisfaction* for sin, and is of

infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 163; emphasis added)

Second, *satisfaction* was also the word of the fathers. It is *the* word that is used to describe Christ’s high priestly work as sacrifice. Heppé used the word when he made a distinction in Christ’s high priesthood between his *satisfactio* and his *intercessio*. He then quoted from the Leiden Synopsis and from Bucan, respectively.

The priesthood of Christ is the function of Christ by which he appears before God (1) to keep the law accepted by himself in our name, to offer himself to Him as the sacrifice of reconciliation for our sins, (2) and by his intercession with Him to obtain us His everlasting help and the gift of the H. Spirit and to apply them effectively, Heb. 10:7-8f. (Lo, I am come to do thy will)

How many parts are there of this office?—Two: satisfaction, by which he had fulfilled the law and paid up the ransom for the sins of the world; in respect to this part he is called redeemer and savior and lamb or victim: and intercession, by which Christ solely desires that his sacrifice should avail for ever with God the Father for the reconciliation of his elect, brings our prayers to the Father and bestows upon us confidence to approach Him.¹⁵

Satisfaction, according to the usage of the word, already captures not only the passive nature of Christ’s work but also his active obedience. Here is Heppé once more:

The satisfaction rests entirely upon the voluntary obedience with which Christ gave himself up for the world, by his subjecting himself on the one hand to the will or mandatum of the Father for the elects’ sake and on the other hand to punishment for the transgression of the law for them also, i.e., by his complete fulfillment of the law (his *oboedientia activa*); and his bearing on the Cross the full punishment for the transgression of the law (his *oboedientia passiva*).¹⁶

The active and passive righteousness of Christ were never separated from each other, and therefore, except in their logical discrimination, we should regard them as the inseparable parts of one organic whole. The whole earthly life of Christ, including his birth, was one continued self-emptying even unto death. Every moment of his life,

15 Heinrich Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 458.

16 Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 458–59.

in the form of a servant, was of the nature of holy suffering. Every experience of pain during the whole course of his life, and eminently in his death on the cross, was, on his part, a voluntary and meritorious act of obedience. He lived his whole life, from his birth to his death, as our representative, obeying and suffering in our stead and for our sakes. And during this whole course, all his suffering was obedience, and all his obedience was suffering.

And so, satisfaction is the overarching doctrine according to which we will further examine the sacrifices. Satisfaction encapsulates all the various concepts that scripture assigns to Christ's one offering, and satisfaction emphasizes both Christ's suffering and his obedience to the will of his Father.

A Vicarious Work

The high priestly work of Christ on the cross was also substitutionary, or vicarious. This means that Christ

suffered and died in the place of the elect as their head, so much so that it was as though we died at the cross. The Lord's supper form states this clearly in the second part of self-examination:

Secondly. That every one examine his own heart, whether he doth believe this faithful promise of God that all his sins are forgiven him only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given him as his own, yea, so perfectly *as if he had satisfied in his own person for all his sins and fulfilled all righteousness.* (*Confessions and Church Order*, 268; emphasis added)

This is also the explicit teaching of scripture. But we will have to pick up here next time.

—LB

CONTRIBUTION

BE CONVERTED (1): REPENTANCE DEFINED

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. — Acts 3:19

The biblical doctrine of conversion, or repentance, is the big issue of the day. It is the big issue of the day within our mother church, which maliciously lies against the truth of the gospel of repentance. Let us be very clear from the outset that repentance, or conversion, is itself a very comforting truth of the gospel. It is nothing to be turned away from or cast aside. For there have been those in church history who have shied away from preaching the call to repentance for fear that they may appear to teach Arminianism. Such avoidance of the doctrine of repentance is unjustifiable and may never have any place in the Reformed Protestant Churches.

It is part of our freedom as churches that we may rightly issue forth the call to repent without that call becoming a contingency upon which some blessing of our salvation depends. For that is what was declared concerning repentance in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and

what is yet being declared from her pulpits. Time would fail me to list off all the speeches and sermons, letters and blog posts that have been published in the PRC since the separation of 2021. In those churches the doctrine of repentance is used as nothing more than a byword for conditions and conditional experience. It belongs to our reformation as churches that God has restored again to us the biblical and creedal doctrine of repentance. This is no new doctrine. It is not foreign to the Reformed fathers or to the Reformed creeds. And it is not foreign to them because it is not at all foreign to scripture.

The biblical and creedal doctrine of repentance is the old paths, wherein is the good way. It is the sound doctrine that reveals to us Jesus Christ and his salvation. Revealing to us Jesus Christ, the doctrine of repentance reveals to us God himself in all the glory and loveliness of his triune being.

The lie militates against those old paths. The lie is a new path, laid down not by God but by man and his wisdom. Man and his wisdom teach that in order for man to be forgiven man must first repent. Man and his wisdom teach that in man's repentance there is a certain sense in which man's act of turning precedes God's act. There is the lie. There is a new path. There is man and his wisdom. And while it may seem that this has become redundant, it can never be overstated that this lie displaces Christ. For there is nothing more serious in all the world than to displace Christ. Because there is no Christ in that doctrine, there is no rest. There is no rest in that doctrine because Christ is utterly absent.

Therefore, it is a cruel deception and a mockery of Jesus Christ when the minister mounts the pulpit on Sunday and starts his sermon with many glowing words and phrases about Christ, the cross, and salvation and then proceeds to hinge that salvation, at least in its experience, on man's activity of repenting. Repentance as man's act is the main thing and not Christ, to whom belongs salvation, forgiveness, and all the blessings of salvation, which he accomplished. There Christ is displaced. There is no room for Christ in that doctrine.

The gospel does not hinge the forgiveness of the elect sinner on his repentance. Instead, the gospel declares unto the one who repents that his sins are already forgiven in Jesus Christ. God turns to us in forgiveness because God turned not away from Christ but poured out upon Christ all his just wrath and holy indignation against our sins. And while Christ personally never had any sin of which to repent, at the cross he accomplished for us perfect righteousness. Because of that righteousness, it is as if Jesus Christ had said, "Forgive, Father, their sins and impute not their trespasses against them. Turn to them in thy grace and mercy and impute unto them my perfect righteousness on account of which I accomplished for them all the repenting, believing, and good works necessary to be righteous in thy sight and worthy of eternal life." Christ is the thing in man's repentance. Therefore, it is because of Christ that I not only am able to repent but that I also have the right to repent. And that repentance is not aimless or without good reason. Since the elect sinner is forgiven in Jesus Christ, he repents.

In our treatment of conversion, we will be studying

what is sometimes called *regeneration in the broader sense*. As in regeneration, there is a narrower sense in which we may speak of conversion. When God regenerates the elect but in himself totally depraved sinner, God renews the elect sinner after God's own image and likeness unto true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness according to the implanting of the new life of Jesus Christ. By the operation of the Holy Spirit, the elect sinner is given a new heart that is broken out of love for God and that sorrows over sin. This love for God and sorrow over sin are fruits of the wonderwork of regeneration, so that it can rightly be said that the elect sinner is, in principle, converted unto God. God turns the elect sinner away from his sin and changes his mind about sin, so that, whereas the sinner formerly loved sin and lived as a willing servant under its dominion, the sinner now is set at enmity against his sin and his heart is full of zeal and love toward God.

However, of primary interest in this series of articles will be conversion as the wonderwork of God's grace, whereby he efficaciously and irresistibly turns the elect, regenerated sinner away from the way of sin unto the way of righteousness, from bondage to sin and the devil to the service of God. This conversion is also referred to in scripture as *repentance*. In the sense that conversion is a spiritual turning of man from his sins to God in Jesus Christ,

conversion is the same thing as repentance. The two are virtually synonymous, so that when we speak of the one, we are also speaking of the other.

Conversion logically comes after regeneration in the order of salvation. This placing of conversion after regeneration may not be conceived of in a strictly temporal sense but in a logical understanding. For one must first be made alive before he can repent. However, this is not to be understood as if God in regeneration gives to man everything that he needs to repent and then leaves man on his own. For without the continued operation of the Holy Spirit, there can be no conversion.

Rather, it is important for us to acknowledge at the outset that the Spirit is the first cause of man's repentance as he is the first cause of regeneration, calling, and justification. The indwelling of the Spirit of Christ indicates that all of man's repenting, all of his believing, all of his acts of obedience to the law of God are wrought in him in communion with and by the operation of the Holy

The biblical and creedal doctrine of repentance is the old paths, wherein is the good way. It is the sound doctrine that reveals to us Jesus Christ and his salvation. Revealing to us Jesus Christ, the doctrine of repentance reveals to us God himself in all the glory and loveliness of his triune being.

Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the worker in man's repentance. The Spirit is the author and the finisher of our faith. He also works our repentance, which is the fruit or the evidence of faith (Acts 2:37–38).

As with every other blessing of salvation, our entire salvation can be comprehended within this one word: *conversion*. In conversion God gives to the elect sinner Jesus Christ and all his benefits. It is in light of this understanding of repentance that we understand that conversion simply cannot be a prerequisite to any other blessing of salvation, whether that be justification, sanctification, or glorification. God does not give grace to me to be converted or even to convert myself in order that he might reward me with forgiveness or any other blessing of salvation. For the root of conversion can be traced to God in his eternal counsel. The origin of conversion is election, so that election appointed conversion to the elect sinner in Jesus Christ. That conversion Christ really merited for the elect sinner at the cross. And it is by the Spirit of Jesus Christ that God really converts the elect sinner, so that by virtue of the grace received, he is rightly said to repent.

The root of the word translated as *repentance* or *conversion* literally means *a change of mind*. That conversion involves a change of mind can be understood by even a precursory glance at the Greek word for *conversion* in the New Testament: *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*). The common prefix *meta* is also used in the English word *metamorphosis* to refer to a change of being or substance. Like a caterpillar undergoes a drastic change of substance and a certain putting to death of that which belonged to its former substance before it can emerge as a beautiful butterfly, so also, when we speak of *repentance* or *conversion*, we refer to such a profound turning around that it can be referred to as a real change of mind. Whereas formerly sin was good, and God was evil, after conversion there is the opposite.

Belonging to repentance is a true, deep sorrow that results in a breaking of one's heart over his sins and a fleeing to God in Jesus Christ for forgiveness (Isa. 55:7). Conversion for the elect, regenerated sinner involves his ego, so that he can know and understand spiritual things spiritually and have thoughts and feelings concerning his sin. In other words, the elect sinner who is converted does not merely have an external motivation but an internal motivation. The converted sinner knows what he must do, and his motivation to do what is right is internal. The converted sinner does not need to be told how to live. Rather, the converted sinner knows his sins and hates them, so that he turns from his sins unto God for forgiveness.

And it is this repentance as a deep, profound change of mind, which is characterized by a heartfelt sorrow over

sin, that evidences itself with various fruits. These fruits work to distinguish true repentance from false repentance. For when we speak of true or genuine repentance, the opposite must also be true that there is a false or hypocritical repentance. It is that hypocritical and false repentance that is demonstrated repeatedly in sacred scripture. It is the sorrow of the world, which can be summarized as mere remorse or regret.

After Cain had slain his brother, Abel, in cold blood, he complained to God that he would be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth, which was the sorrow of the world (Gen. 4:14). After Esau had forsaken his birthright for a mess of worldly pottage, he sorrowed but was ultimately rejected because he found no room for repentance (Heb. 12:17). When Saul pleaded with Samuel to receive honor before the elders of Israel after he had transgressed the commandment of the Lord by sparing Agag and all that was good out of the land of the Amalekites, Saul concerned himself only with the people and his own name and honor (1 Sam. 15:30).

In Joel 2:13 God condemned all Israel's rending of their garments, by which they were making a fair show of repentance, all the while passing over their fences to commit adultery with their neighbors' wives. When Judas Iscariot went into the temple and confessed that he had betrayed innocent blood, he refused to confess his sins to God and instead continued on in unbelief and despair until he ultimately committed suicide.

Contrary to the sorrow of the world, which works death, the godly sorrow of repentance is the sure fruit of the one in whose heart God has worked faith. It is that repentance, therefore, which possesses certain identifiable fruits or outward evidences by which that repentance can be tested. Some of those fruits are given in 2 Corinthians 7:10–11. There the apostle Paul addressed his joy in God that God worked conversion in the hearts of the members of the church in Corinth by means of the word and Spirit of Jesus Christ, which word had been declared unto them by means of Paul's first letter. In this expression of gratitude, the apostle by a single word, "carefulness," laid his finger on the Corinthians' drastic change of mind and heart.

Whereas before the Corinthians had taken sin lightly, so that sin of even the most egregious sort had been tolerated in the church, later, by the operation of the Spirit of Christ, sin became exceedingly sinful and offensive unto them; and consequently, sin was put out of the church through the means of church discipline. Whereas before hatred, enmity, and strife had reigned, later there was love for God and for one another in the truth and unity in the Spirit. And it is concerning that church, in which God had worked repentance, that Paul expressed the reality

that there were several indelible marks of their repentance, that it was not a sorrow after the world but after a godly sort.

The first mark of saving conversion given is that there was a clearing of themselves. We may understand that phrase “clearing of yourselves” to mean an apology. There is an apology given to those against whom the sin had been committed, by which the converted sinner “clears himself” of his sins. The converted person confesses his remorse over his sins to those whom he has offended by those sins and seeks forgiveness. An impenitent man is full of guile and will not clear himself of his sins. Instead, that man abuses the apology and uses it as a way to thinly cover his sins and continue on in them. That man has no real intention of changing his course but is willing to pull down the shades over his sinful life in order to continue in his sins. That man might work to correct a few vices in his life and may even find himself speaking an outward apology from time to time, but he will never make a full apology for those sins so as to clear himself of them.

Following the first mark of saving conversion are several other marks, including an indignation or fiery hatred toward the sins of the past and the sin of one’s nature, by which the converted person hates and flees from sin in all its forms and condemns himself as nothing before God and worthy only of condemnation in himself. This realization does not lead to despair but rightly acknowledges the danger of damnation and humbles the sinner underneath the mighty hand of God. There is a longing for the perfection of heaven, a renewed zeal for righteousness and good works, and a revenge that is a serious desire or effort to right all wrongs inflicted by one’s sins and to make restoration or reparations wherever possible.

The godly sorrow of repentance is not the sorrow of disappointment, loss, sympathy, getting caught, shame, or regret. The heart of the repentant sinner is truly broken over sin, not first because damage has been done to self but because sin is an offense to God. The source or explanation for godly sorrow is not in the world but in God himself, operating by his Word and Spirit in the heart of the converted person.

According to the Heidelberg Catechism, conversion is not merely a one-time event, but it characterizes the entire life of the elect sinner as that life is the continual mortification of the old man and the quickening of the new man.

Q. 88 Of how many parts doth the true conversion of man consist?

A. Of two parts: of the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 121)

In every moment of every day, the elect sinner stands in need of the grace of God in conversion. Conversion is not a mechanical doctrine, which acts as a ladder or a bridge that gets the converted person from regeneration to justification or to any other blessing of salvation. Conversion is not a transaction in which the elect sinner does something for God and then God repays him with some blessing such as the forgiveness of his sins. Rather, conversion is the living reality of the elect sinner who knows himself and his sins; and growing in that knowledge more and more, he hates and flees from sin and seeks more and more earnestly for the remission of his sins in Jesus Christ.

We ought rightly to understand that when the Catechism treats the conversion of man, it does not give us a formal definition of conversion but informs us of what conversion consists. In other words, we are not given in the Catechism a definition of conversion as to its essence, as a deep, profound change of mind and heart. Rather, we are given a summary of what conversion looks like in the life of the elect sinner, that which John the Baptist calls bearing fruits “worthy of repentance.” Conversion is the concrete expression that repentance takes in the heart and life of the believer. There is an outward fruit of that inward turning of man from his sins unto the living God.

Furthermore, it would be helpful to notice the close connection in the Catechism between conversion and the preceding article on saving faith, which assures the heart and necessarily bears fruit in the form of good works (Lord’s Day 32). Faith alone whereby I am justified and faith alone whereby I receive as a gracious gift of God that forgiveness which is mine in Jesus Christ. Faith that joins me to Jesus Christ as to the true vine and makes me bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. And it is the elect sinner as he has been joined to Christ and receives all his salvation, including the forgiveness of his sins, by faith alone who also is rightly said to repent.

And it is this repentance or conversion that God commands of man. Whenever the gospel is preached, that gospel comes and issues forth a call or a command. God commands all men everywhere to repent. There is an urgency to that calling, so that the one who repents is saved. And the one who does not repent is not saved but is at least unbelieving, if not reprobate.

It is especially within the sphere of the call to repent that the Reformed Protestant Churches have been slanderously charged with making man a stock and a block. Lord willing, in the next installment of this series, we will come to see this as a welcome charge, and we will consider how we ought rightly to understand repentance in connection with the call of the gospel.

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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

Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law. —Romans 3:31

Serious question! “Do we then make void the law through faith?” Whoever makes void the law makes God void, for the law is of God. The law is the revelation of God in his perfect justice. The law reveals that God is God and that God alone is to be served, worshiped, and glorified with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength; and the law teaches that for God’s sake you must love your neighbor as yourself. The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. The law teaches that God rewards every man according as his work shall be: to the perfect, perfection; to the contentious and disobedient, indignation and wrath! For God is God.

Do we make the law void? Do we strip the law of all meaning, make it worthless, and empty it of all power to teach and to instruct? For then, we do the same to God, because the law is his oracle.

Such is the charge against the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is what the apostle means by the word “faith.” He means that you are righteous before God and worthy of eternal life wholly apart from a consideration of your deeds, activities, or good works. He means that your good works cannot add to your righteousness and that your sins cannot take away from your righteousness. He means that you are not under law, so that the law cannot say, “You must do this in order to live.” And the law cannot say, “You must not do that in order to live.” The law cannot curse you for not keeping it. The law cannot bless you for keeping it.

Do we make void the law by that doctrine? God forbid! Let it never be suggested for one moment that such is the case.

Rather, we establish the law! Only the doctrine of justification by faith alone does justice to the law as the law of God. Only that doctrine teaches that the law has been fully and completely satisfied in its righteous demand, so that also God has been fully and completely satisfied in his righteous demand.

For the doctrine of faith teaches Christ. The doctrine of faith does not teach what you must do to be saved. The doctrine of faith teaches what Christ has done to save you. The doctrine of faith teaches that Jesus Christ as the only-begotten Son of God assumed our flesh and was born of a woman and made under the law to redeem us from the curse of the law. That God might be God! That God receive his due! That God’s people might be redeemed and their righteousness might be a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, a righteousness of the Son of God, whereby they are exalted not only above all the judgments of men but also above all the judgments of the law. The law cannot curse or condemn you—not because the law was made void but because God’s justice revealed in the law was satisfied by God in Jesus Christ.

Hallelujah!

—NJL