

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

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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THANKING GOD ALWAYS

*Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. — Ephesians 5:20*

The Spirit says, “Do not be drunk.” Oh, there is much drunkenness that fills the world during her celebrations. She eats, drinks, and is merry because tomorrow she dies! “Happy holidays” are the words that the worldlings often speak to one another. Their merrymaking will be an alcohol-driven and alcohol-filled merrymaking in celebration of the abundance of earthly things. They will fill themselves with spirits, and they will make merry in hearts filled with an evil spirit.

You could say that their merrymaking is totally unspiritual. But man is never without a spirit, whether the Spirit of Christ or an evil spirit. And when the heart is filled with an evil spirit and the body is full of alcoholic spirits, then the merrymaking is carnal. The worldlings’ merrymaking will be the celebration of merely outward success: a good year on the stock market, a good year in the field, a good year in business, a good year at home. To celebrate their earthly and carnal gains and to enjoy the only pleasures they have, they will fill themselves with spirits.

And consequently, their merrymaking will be full of fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, and foolish jesting. It is a shame even to speak of the things that are done of them in secret. There is no thanksgiving in that merrymaking at all. The very form of the merrymaking, its inner power in the alcohol and its fruits of filthiness and uncleanness, shows clearly that there is no thanksgiving in their hearts. Do not be filled with those spirits, like wine and whiskey. Let it not be so much as is named among the saints.

Rather, give thanks with a Spirit-driven thanksgiving. Do not be filled with those spirits, but be filled with the Spirit, the Spirit of the living Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit is the deep source of all proper thanksgiving. He is the drink that the Lord Jesus Christ provided for his people. He is the living water and the living spiritual drink of their thirsty souls. Whoever drinks of that drink, out of his belly will flow living waters. Be filled with that Spirit. Be filled then with all the fullness of God. Be filled with his grace. Drink deeply from Jesus Christ by faith and be filled with the Spirit and with grace and with all comfort.

The Spirit makes us sing. Sing and make melody in your hearts. Sing to one another. Oh, those filled with wine and whiskey and an evil spirit sing too. They sing the bawdy, worldly, wicked songs of the drunkards, who even make Christ the object of their mockery. They stammer and slur out their sensual, earthly, and devilish songs. Do not sing those things. Do not be filled with those spirits and do not sing those songs, but be filled with the Spirit and sing and make melody in your hearts to the Lord!

Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Speak to each other the words of these psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Singing is the spiritual activity of the thankful heart. That is part of the Christian’s proper merrymaking. Be filled with the Spirit of the risen and exalted Lord Jesus Christ. Drink deeply from him, drawing out of him as from the wells of salvation, and speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts.

And that because we are thankful and already have the joy of heaven in our hearts. The Spirit inspires such joy and gives such a melody in our hearts and makes us thankful because he gives us a taste of the good things to come in glory. The thankful heart is the Spirit-filled heart. The thankful heart is the heart that sings and makes melody to the Lord. Thanksgiving is the constant Spirit-created melody of the believer’s heart. And so the Spirit in Ephesians 5:20 says to us, “Give thanks to God always.” That thanks is the form of the Christian’s whole life.

In your thanksgiving give thanks to God and the Father.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!

God and the Father is the source of all blessedness. He is also the reason for all thanksgiving. He is the one to whom all thanksgiving is given. Of God is everything. Through God is everything. To God is everything.

When the apostle says, “Give thanks to God,” he would have us to consider first God as God. God is God. Man is not God. Things are not God. Money is not God. Success is not God. Pleasure and enjoyment are not God. I am not God. You are not God. God is God!

God is highly exalted in his divine majesty and his perfect excellence. God is the blessed and only potentate, the king of kings and Lord of lords, who only has immortality and who dwells in the light that no man can approach unto, whom no man has seen nor can see, to whom be honor and power forever and ever. He is the God before whom the mighty angels hide their faces and before whom they cry out day and night without ceasing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." The myriads of these mighty angels are God's ministering servants who do his pleasure. God is the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God.

God is God! God made the heavens and the earth, so that the heavens declare his glory, and the firmament shows forth his handywork.

God gave life and breath, being and shape, and a place and an office to every creature to serve him. He made the grass, the trees, the rocks, and the mountains. He made the placid pond and the mighty oceans with their towering waves. He created every animal, from the tiniest microscopic organism to the great whales that play in the sea. He made all things, even the wicked for the day of evil.

God spoke a word, and it was done. He commanded, and it stood fast. God made the angels. God made man and brought this feeble creature out of the dust. God made man a little lower than the angels. In God all things live and move and have their being. Without him was not anything made that was made. God is God!

And all things are in God's hand. He brought them into being, and he sovereignly gives them their existence from moment to moment, so that without him they would cease to exist. For his glory everything was brought into being. He created all things for the perfection of his eternal covenant in the new heavens and earth, for which purpose he also upholds and directs all creatures and the whole creation to its appointed end, and that according to his infinitely good and perfectly wise counsel. Nothing in heaven, on earth, or beneath the earth happens apart from his sovereign will. All things are the works of his hands. All things are decreed and carried out by him. All things—good and evil, fruitful and barren years, sickness and health, salvation and damnation, life and death, things present and things to come—are of him

and through him and to him, to whom be glory forever. God is God alone. God is God over all.

And all of this God does out of his infinitely good being. He alone is good. He is in himself good and perfect. He is the only good and ever-blessed God. He gives life because he is life itself. He gives good and only does good because he is only good in himself. He is the overflowing fountain of all good. He is the living God. He is eternal, ceaseless, divine energy and activity, ever active and ever perfectly at rest. There is in God no struggle, no frustration, no disharmony, no pain, no sadness. He is life. He lives in himself and apart from the creature. And all his life is good.

God lives because he is the triune, covenant God. Oh, the apostle says, "Give thanks to the Father." And

the apostle means to God who is our Father. But when God reveals himself as our Father, that is because of who God is in himself apart from us. God is Father in himself. That he is Father in himself means that he is Son in himself. And that he is Father and Son in himself means that there is perfect love breathed between them. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwelling together in perfect and blessed family fellowship, in perfect love and perfect life. Three persons in one divine being. God begets and is begotten. God

breathes and is breathed. The living, speaking, breathing eternal God.

And so that the creature might know God, be blessed in him, and participate in his blessed life of covenant fellowship, God made all things. The highest good for the creature is to know this God and to love, serve, and praise this God. That was Adam's highest good. In God Adam lived. Apart from God Adam died. To live apart from God is death, death now and eternal death, regardless of the quantity of earthly pleasures enjoyed. All pleasure apart from God is death. All life apart from God is death. All activity apart from God is death.

And surely that is the state of the world in Adam. Adam departed from God and not only brought death on himself but also brought death to the entire human race, so that all men are in darkness and death reigns over all and the creation groans and travails under the immense weight of death.

The good God is good to all. Yes, he is ever good, perfectly good, doing and giving only good, also in this

In thanksgiving we pay nothing back to God...All we can do in thanksgiving is to draw ever more of his fullness and receive grace upon grace...He is perfect in praise, perfect in glory, and perfect in blessedness. We must thank him that we can even thank him!

death-filled and sin-cursed world! His tender mercies are over all his works. That God is good means that he loves the righteous. It means that in love for the righteous he blesses the righteous always and in everything. That God is good also means that he hates the wicked. It means that he curses the wicked always and in everything. God is good to all, and thus all the wicked he will destroy. Fellowship with God is life, but enmity against God is terrible, for then the living God and the God of all things is your enemy, and it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. To bless the righteous with eternal life is God's goodness. And to destroy the wicked with everlasting death is his goodness.

Give thanks to our good God and loving Father!

What is a Father? A Father begets you as a child. Having begotten you as a child, he seeks your eternal salvation all your life long. He does you good and not evil. He loves, comforts, instructs, builds up, encourages, and rebukes you, and he sees to your welfare. He is deeply moved by your distress and reaches out to you in his mercy to deliver you from your woes. He does that all out of love because you are precious and dear to him and because he desires to do you good all the days of your life and not evil. Such is a Father.

God is the Father. He is Father par excellence. He is the Father of Jesus Christ. The triune God is Christ's Father. By the triune God Jesus Christ was begotten and appointed head over all. With the triune God Jesus Christ fellowships in a deep friendship of Father with his Son. All things were made by Christ and for Christ. He is the firstborn of every creature. He is the elect and the beloved of God. He is the eternal and natural Son of God.

In Christ God eternally set his love on his people. In tender pity and deep affection, God appointed his people to salvation and all the blessings of salvation and to all good. All things he has appointed for their good—every event, every circumstance, everything that he sends to them at all times is sent out of that eternal delight in them and for their eternal salvation. So he is not Father to all. He is not Father to the reprobate, whom he loathes. He is Father to his elect and to them only.

God is our gracious Father. His choice of his people was wholly gracious. There was nothing in them that commended them to the Father, not even their misery, for all were equally miserable and unworthy. He chose his people because it pleased him and delighted him so to do.

And out of that choice and for the carrying out of that choice to appoint his people to eternal salvation, the Father sends them all things. Always in love. Everything in love. Always for their good. Never for evil. Always with a view to their blessedness and never with a view to their damnation. All things, I say! Yes, God blesses his people

with regeneration, conversion, faith, justification, sanctification, and glorification. And he blesses them in all their lives—whether sickness or health, whether fruitful years or barren, whether riches or poverty, whether life or death, whether things present or things to come—all things at all times he sends in his grace and for his people's good, to carry out his eternal good pleasure for their salvation. Out of his love for them and in his eternal desire for their salvation, everything without exception comes to them from him, the Father of lights and the giver of every good and perfect gift, on the inexhaustible and living stream of divine grace, in order to embrace them by his grace in all things and to draw them ever nearer to himself, until finally he presents them without spot or wrinkle in the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Oh, give thanks unto him and bless his name!

To return praise, glory, and honor unto him, from whom all blessings flow.

In thanksgiving we pay nothing back to God. He gives and gives and gives and overflows in goodness to his people. We pay nothing back. All we can do in thanksgiving is to draw ever more of his fullness and receive grace upon grace. We return nothing to him that is not already his. We give nothing to him that he does not already have. He is perfect in praise, perfect in glory, and perfect in blessedness. We must thank him that we can even thank him!

Give thanks to him! To be thankful is to acknowledge God as God and the Father and to acknowledge, therefore, that all things come from him and that they come from him in his grace and mercy and for our salvation.

Give thanks to him! To be thankful means to use what God gives to his glory. All things come from him not to be hoarded or abused but to be used for his glory.

Give thanks to him! To be thankful is to enjoy what God gives. Oh, yes, how unthankful would it be when he gives good gifts to his children that they would spurn those gifts and complain of them.

Give thanks to him! To be thankful is to receive with humble submission to his will all that God sends to you. With everything that you are, with all that you have, with all your being—with heart and mind and soul and body—and with all your substance give thanks unto him.

Always for everything.

Always be thankful. Let not a moment pass in unthankfulness.

Be thankful for everything. Surely, if we are to be thankful always, then this means to be thankful for everything.

Be thankful to God for his salvation given full and free to his beloved people. Always he is working out our salvation.

Be thankful to him in riches. Be thankful to him in

poverty. Be thankful to him in health. Be thankful to him in sickness. Be thankful to him in fruitful years. Be thankful to him in barren years. For in everything and upon everything that he sends to his people, he sends his blessing, showers us with his favor, and works all for our eternal good.

Be thankful to him always and for everything. For he sends nothing upon us and gives nothing to us except what he has determined must serve our eternal salvation and welfare.

Give thanks in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. This means that you are in Christ. It must be so. Outside of Christ there is no thanksgiving because outside of Christ there is no grace, blessing, or salvation. Give thanks in Christ because he covers all sin and grants the forgiveness of sin to those in him. Especially does he forgive our unthankfulness, grumbling, and discontent! Especially does he forgive our God-forgetfulness. Especially does he forgive our oft carnality and all our abuse and waste of God's gifts. Give thanks because you are Christ's. Because you are Christ's give thanks to God always and for everything. Christ Jesus is the great and perfect gift that God and the Father has given to us his people, so that belonging to Jesus Christ our savior, all things must be subservient to our salvation. In Christ nothing can harm us or take away from the promise of salvation that God gives to us. In Christ God sends all things in his love. In Christ nothing can separate us from the love of God. For in Christ, being justified by faith, we have peace with God!

Give thanks to God and the Father always and for everything because you are Christ's and Christ is God's. Thus you are God's, and he is yours. In Christ you have God as your God.

In Christ you can, you may, and you will give thanks. In Christ you may give thanks to God. Man outside of Christ may not give thanks to God. Outside of Christ man only has a terrible and unpayable debt with the living God. And so all that man may do, if he would do anything at all, is to pay that debt. He cannot give thanks, but he must pay. And because he has sinned against the most high majesty of God, man has an infinite debt that he must pay temporally and eternally. Man outside of Christ can only daily increase his debt in all that he does, until at the end of his thankless and godless life, he goes to hell to pay his debt eternally. Always and in everything man has a debt with the living God, so that always and in everything man must pay. And he gives no thanks at all.

And so outside of Christ, always and in everything, there is a terrible curse of God against man. And God comes against man always and in everything in his wrath, so that sickness and health, riches and poverty, fruitful years and barren—all things at all times—serve his damnation.

And sinful man outside of Christ cannot give thanks. With his wicked and black heart, with all things and at all times, he lives in God's world in enmity against the living God. In riches he blasphemes and says, "Who is the Lord?" And in poverty he curses and says, "Where is God?" At all times and in all things, he cannot give thanks because of his sinful human nature. He is a slave to sin and hates the living God. Thus he will not give thanks either, not in anything ever. For he is devoid of the Spirit of Christ and full of sin and enmity against God. Oh, outside of Christ there is no thanksgiving at all. Man cannot, he may not, and he will not give thanks to God. Ever. For anything. For he is guilty before that God. He has no peace with that God. And he hates that God.

But in Christ. Oh, give thanks in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord because you belong to Jesus Christ; because God has chosen you in him; because God has redeemed you with his precious blood from all your sins and from all the power of the devil; because in

Christ he is favorable toward you; because in Christ he has freed you from your terrible debt and delivered you from the punishment that your sins deserve; because in Christ he has earned for you perfect righteousness; because in Christ you are reconciled to God; because in Christ you are adopted as his children and heirs; because in Christ you are at peace with God; and so because in Christ all things at all times, good or bad, serve your salvation, give thanks in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Do not be filled with wine, wherein is excess. You can partake of that good gift of wine in your Christian merrymaking. You can use and enjoy in your joyfulness the good food that God gives to you. He gave oil to make man's face to shine and wine to make glad his heart. But do not be filled with wine. Do not be drunk! Be filled with the Spirit of the living Lord Jesus Christ, by whose power we are saved and delivered. And by whose power we give thanks to God always for everything. Not only occasionally but at all times. Not only for things agreeable but also for things disagreeable. For in everything God is good to us because he was good to us in Christ to save us and to deliver us from our sins and to give us the promise of eternal salvation.

—NJL

Be thankful for everything.
Surely, if we are to be thankful
always, then this means to be
thankful for everything.

REFORMED? NOT AT ALL! (2): MANGLING SCRIPTURE

Shallow As a Mud Puddle

Professor Ronald Cammenga of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary began a series in the *Standard Bearer* titled “Antinomian? Without a Doubt.”¹ The series is long-winded. Cammenga says that he intends to write “a few articles,” which notice, no doubt, was received with a sigh of relief by the readership. Instead, he now writes on and on. He still is not finished.

Besides being long-winded, the articles are shallow, if they are nothing else. What is the gist of the whole series? What is the profound doctrine and deep truth for which Professor Cammenga contends? Repentance is before forgiveness! “See,” says he, “scripture teaches that repentance is before forgiveness, and the creeds teach that repentance is before forgiveness. And John Calvin and the Reformed tradition and the Protestant Reformed fathers taught that repentance is before forgiveness.” If the problem with the articles were only their shallowness, one would be tempted to dismiss him. Many have.

But the articles are also as false as they are shallow and long-winded. The question for Professor Cammenga is—and really it is the only question for him—why is the concept that repentance temporally precedes forgiveness so significant? Why is it so important for Professor Cammenga to contend that repentance is before forgiveness? Instead of belaboring the point that scripture and the creeds teach, and that Calvin and apparently the whole Reformed and Protestant Reformed tradition taught, that repentance is before forgiveness, he must sharply and clearly answer the question, why is this order so important to him? He leaks out the answer, but let him write on it as a theologian should and not come at the answer by fits and starts. If scripture and the creeds teach, and Calvin and the whole Reformed and Protestant Reformed tradition taught, that repentance precedes forgiveness, then Professor Cammenga also does not show why that order is so important in scripture and the creeds and why it was so important for Calvin and the rest.

I do not for a minute believe that the authorities that Professor Cammenga cites teach and taught what he is teaching. Scripture and the creeds do not contend, and

Calvin and the rest did not contend, for the mere order of repentance then forgiveness. By merely stating that we must repent and that God will forgive our sins and then quoting from all his supposed authorities, Cammenga is being deceptive. He intends to teach that all these authorities agree with him and with all the baggage that he freights in on his supposed order of repentance and then forgiveness.

However, I believe that I have an answer to the question of why it is so important for Professor Cammenga that repentance precedes forgiveness. The reason is that because for him there are activities of man that precede the blessings of God; there is a certain and vital sense in which man is first; God cannot and may not forgive man without man’s repenting first. Professor Cammenga is a man-first theologian. For him it is not enough that God elected you, and it is not enough that Christ died for you, but you must also do something; something vital on the part of man is necessary in the application and experience of salvation and without which all God’s promises are never fulfilled. In other words, Professor Cammenga should stop playing around that he is contending for the fact that repentance precedes forgiveness because he is contending for conditions in the experience of salvation, which he cleverly disguises as a mere concern about what comes first and second.

This fact comes out in his deceitful handling of scripture and the creeds, in which all he can find are first repentance and then forgiveness.

Besides being labored, shallow, and false, his articles are just plain monotonous. I pity the congregation that would have to eat these stones for bread and scorpions for meat.

In this article I will examine Cammenga’s exegesis of several scripture passages to determine if, in fact, the passages teach first repentance and then forgiveness and that too along the lines of what Cammenga is after: that God cannot and will not forgive apart from man’s act of repentance.

Everyone must remember what Professor Cammenga is contending against. He is contending against the idea

1 Ronald Cammenga, “Antinomian? Without a Doubt,” *Standard Bearer* 98, no. 18 (July 2022): 418–21.

that there is forgiveness from God apart from repentance. Thus Cammenga is contending against the idea that there is forgiveness in eternity. He is contending against the idea that there is forgiveness at the cross. He is contending against the idea that the forgiveness of the sinner comes into the sinner's possession by faith alone without respect to repentance, that is, that God forgives the sinner wholly through faith alone. Cammenga is contending that forgiveness is strictly if and when man repents.

Cammenga also lies against the position against which he contends by saying that the Reformed Protestants teach that repentance is not necessary. This is wholly false. Repentance is a good gift of God, and we call all men everywhere to repent.

However, this is a different matter than the discussion of how God forgives sinners. He forgives them by faith alone. Leave repentance out of that discussion. Professor Cammenga's position is that man must first repent, and then and only then can and will and may God forgive that man. A shorthand way to express this is repentance first and then forgiveness, and without repentance there is no forgiveness in any sense. Cammenga seeks to prove this from scripture and the creeds.

Professor Cammenga writes, "The Bible clearly teaches that God's forgiveness follows God-worked repentance."² It really does not matter that Cammenga adds to his sentence, "God-worked." This is no different than saying that faith is a God-worked condition unto salvation. When conditional theologians talked about conditions, then they always added that there is grace by which man fulfills the condition. The point of conditional theology is that there is that which man must perform—whether by grace or not—upon which an activity of God waits. Professor Cammenga's doctrine is that God's forgiveness follows man's repentance, and without repentance there is no forgiveness.

Solomon's Prayer

For proof Professor Cammenga turns first to 1 Kings 8:

1 Kings 8 contains Solomon's prayer to God on behalf of Israel at the time of the dedication of the temple. Included in his prayer is his supplication that, "If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not,) and thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy" (v. 46) and in the land of captivity they "repent, and make supplication unto thee" (v. 47), "Then hear thou their prayer" and "forgive thy people that have sinned against thee" (vv. 49-50).

Clearly, God's forgiveness of Israel's sin follows their repentance. (421)

The question is whether, in Solomon's mind and in the thought of the Holy Spirit, the point of 1 Kings 8 is that God's forgiveness follows his people's repentance. Is the whole emphasis of the passage what man must do to receive God's forgiveness? Was Solomon teaching what Cammenga teaches, that there is no forgiveness before Israel repents?

By his teaching Cammenga corrupts Solomon's prayer from beginning to end. What is this prayer? Is it the bare statement that man's act of repentance precedes God's act of forgiveness? Solomon's prayer extolled the unmerited grace and the unfailing mercy of God, whereby he keeps covenant with a sinful, undeserving, and needy people; and throughout the prayer Solomon was teaching the people to trust in this free grace of God for all their blessedness and for eternal life itself.

Solomon opened his prayer praising God.

23. And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:
24. Who hast kept with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him: thou spakest also with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day.
25. Therefore now, LORD God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that thou promisedst him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel; so that thy children take heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me. (1 Kings 8:23-25)

The last phrase is important: "So that thy children take heed to their way, that they walk before me as thou hast walked before me." Inexplicably, the King James Version translates a Hebrew phrase that means *except only* or *save only* or *only if* by the words "so that." When Jehovah spoke these words, he was not talking about the result of his promise to David, namely, that as a result of his promise the house of David would be faithful. Then the promise of God would be a failure, for the house of David was not faithful. She was unfaithful on a monumental scale, and her unfaithfulness brought about the destruction of the ten tribes and ultimately of the temple and Jerusalem and nearly the whole nation of Judah.

2 Cammenga, "Antinomian? Without a Doubt," *Standard Bearer* 98, no. 18 (July 2022): 418. References to subsequent quotations from this article are given in text.

Rather, Jehovah added these words that make the promise sure only in Christ and on the basis of his righteousness. Jehovah's ending words spelled the end of the royal line exactly because a mere man could not bear that burden in God's kingdom to be perfectly faithful. Christ alone of all David's sons was that faithful man, and David in his love and zeal for God was a dim earthly type. The promise of God is sure in Christ alone and on the ground of his righteousness. In Christ God forgives all the sins of his people, and in Christ God keeps covenant with them. Solomon prayed not that God would do something if his people did something. But Solomon prayed that God would keep his covenant with an unfaithful people for Christ's sake, for the sake of God's promise, and for his name's sake, since "there is no man that sinneth not" (1 Kings 8:46).

This fact that Solomon prayed on the basis of God's promise and grace is made plain right after the passage that Professor Cammenga cites to attempt to teach that man repents first, and then God forgives.

Solomon prayed,

51. For they be thy people, and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron:
52. That thine eyes may be open unto the supplication of thy servant, and unto the supplication of thy people Israel, to hearken unto them in all that they call for unto thee.
53. For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord God.

Cammenga's doctrine is that there is no forgiveness apart from repentance and that unless repentance precedes forgiveness, God cannot and may not forgive.

But Solomon gave the reason that God forgives. Solomon in effect said that God had forgiven: God forgives because God had forgiven. This prior forgiveness of God lies behind the reference in these verses to Israel's deliverance from Egypt, which was a type of our deliverance at the cross of Christ. God delivered his people Israel from the bondage and tyranny of Pharaoh, which is a type of our bondage to sin. There is no deliverance from the bondage of sin apart from the forgiveness of sins. God saved and delivered his people Israel because he had forgiven them in the blood of the passover lamb. God washed them in the Red Sea and consecrated them to himself because he had forgiven them. And someone might say, "Oh yes, but that applied to the Israelites at the time of Moses and Aaron." However, that is not what Solomon says. He gives the ground for God's future

forgiveness of Israel when Israel would repent. And Solomon prayed to God that God would forgive his people. He will forgive because he had forgiven!

What is repentance in the 1 Kings 8 passage that Cammenga cites? Repentance is the mark of God's people. This Solomon also pointed out when he said about those who repent and regarding the ground of God's forgiveness of them: "For they be thy people" (v. 51). This is what repentance brings out: they be God's people. Repentance is the mark of God's elect.

Cammenga says that repentance is "God-worked," but he does not explain why repentance is God-worked. It is God-worked because God elected his people. Repentance is God-worked because God forgave them. The sinner has no right to repent. He has the right only to perish. Because God forgave—at the cross—he also forgives and works repentance in his people, so that they call on him in truth. They pray for forgiveness not because they repent, but they pray for forgiveness on the basis of God's promise, which they believe by a true faith. Repentance rests on the knowledge of the mercy of God, who justifies the ungodly. Cammenga's order of repentance for forgiveness demands this kind of thought: we have repented, and so let us pray for forgiveness. His motive is mercenary: we have repented, and God says that he forgives those who repent, so Lord, forgive! The order of Solomon is the order of grace, so that we say, "In his profound mercy God has promised to forgive the ungodly sinner. Lord, forgive!"

Cammenga's exegesis of the part of Solomon's prayer to which Cammenga refers is this: repentance clearly precedes forgiveness, and repentance precedes in such a way that God does not forgive unless and until man repents. There is no forgiveness in eternity. There is no forgiveness at the cross. There is only forgiveness if man repents.

I say that Cammenga's exegesis is shallow. He is up to no good, but his exegesis is at the very least a silly and shallow way to handle scripture. That is all he can get out of Solomon's moving prayer. Cammenga does disservice to Solomon and to the Holy Ghost, who inspired Solomon's prayer and who searches the deep things of God and set down in scripture such deep things for our instruction.

Solomon's prayer has seven petitions, and Cammenga mangled the seventh petition. But use Cammenga's method with Solomon's other six petitions, and what does Cammenga's method mean for the other six?

Solomon prayed, "If any man trespass against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar... then hear... and do, and judge thy servants" (1 Kings 8:31–32). So applying Cammenga's method, we arrive at this profound

point: *clearly*, an oath must first be laid upon a man, that oath must first come to the altar, and only then will God judge his servants. Profound! Cammenga would miss the whole point that Solomon makes later that God is a good and righteous judge, who always curses the wicked and blesses the righteous, a fact on which the remainder of the prayer rests.

Solomon prayed, “When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy...and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house: then hear...and forgive the sin of thy people Israel” (vv. 33–34). Applying Cammenga’s method, again *clearly*, we have the idea that turning from sin, confessing God’s name, and prayer are first before God hears and forgives. But now not only repentance is first but also confession of God’s name, which is really faith. So now faith and repentance clearly precede God’s forgiveness. Cammenga would miss the whole point that God had chastised Israel with the enemy only when the people deserved to be annihilated and that God calls them his people throughout. Now, why is it that God chastised them and did not annihilate them? Because in God’s eyes they had already been forgiven, and he must bring them to see their sins by the hands of an enemy. God did not chastise them so that they could be forgiven but because he will not have his people live in their sins and be destroyed.

Solomon prayed, “When heaven is shut...because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin...then...forgive the sin of thy servants” (vv. 35–36). Applying Cammenga’s method, we again *clearly* have the idea that not only repentance and confession of the truth but also praying toward the proper place precede God’s forgiveness. Cammenga would miss the whole point that God’s people had an inheritance that came to them through the death of the one who promised it and by whose death they were forgiven and had the right to that inheritance: “Thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance” (v. 36). God gave the land to them, and it was theirs because he had forgiven their sins. Otherwise, they had no right to the land.

Solomon prayed, “If there be in the land famine...pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust...caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them...what prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: then hear thou...and forgive” (vv. 37–39). Applying Cammenga’s method, we again *clearly* have the idea that knowing the plague of one’s own heart precedes God’s forgiveness. God will not forgive until a man knows the plague of

his own heart. Cammenga would miss the fact that Solomon prayed that God “give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest.” Not that God would give to every man according to the works of his hands because then the man who knows the plague of his own heart knows also that he will surely be condemned for that plague. But “according to his ways”! Out of man’s heart are the issues of his life. In that heart is faith, faith by which the man is justified without works, and out of which heart he seeks God for the forgiveness of sins and the healing of all the plagues of his heart. That faith is manifested by the man’s calling on God for forgiveness and in the man’s deep sorrow for sin and his fear of the God who justifies freely such an ungodly sinner. But this would pass Cammenga by in his quest for what is first and what is second.

Solomon also made a request for the strangers: “Moreover concerning a stranger that...cometh out of a far country for thy name’s sake...when he shall come and pray toward this house...hear thou in heaven” (vv. 41–43). Applying Cammenga’s method, we again *clearly* have the idea that first one must be a stranger and come from a far country and pray, and only then will God hear. And it would pass Cammenga by that God, the gracious and merciful God, is a God of strangers too, and he draws them to himself by his great name. Cammenga’s sermon on these verses would probably be a recounting of all the great things that a stranger did and how he crossed hill and dale to come to God, and Cammenga would miss the whole point of the text: “For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm” (v. 42).

Solomon prayed, “If thy people go out to battle against their enemy...and shall pray unto the LORD...then hear thou in heaven” (vv. 44–45). Applying Cammenga’s method, we again *clearly* have the idea that the people must first go out to battle against an enemy, and then God will hear them when they pray. *Clearly*. And Cammenga would miss the whole point that the cause of God’s people wherever he sends them is God’s cause that he alone maintains and that by prayer his people cast that cause back to God as the one and only one who can maintain it.

Professor Cammenga does the same silly sort of thing with the 1 Kings 8 passage that he holds aloft against us, when he writes, “Clearly, God’s forgiveness of Israel’s sin follows their repentance.” That *clearly* is not the point. It is not the point simply that forgiveness follows repentance, and I do not believe that is what Cammenga is after either. He means not simply that forgiveness follows, but he means that God cannot and God will not forgive unless man repents first and that there is no forgiveness

of God apart from man's repentance. Cammenga means that in a certain, vital sense man is first in the matter of repentance, and apart from his repentance, he is completely unforgiven.

But the Holy Ghost and Solomon ground *all* of Solomon's petitions in the fact that there is forgiveness already before God's people offer a word of prayer, since God delivered his people Israel from Egypt. Because he has forgiven, he also forgives. Similarly, he delivered his elect church at the cross and forgave us all our sins before we shed one tear. So also God forgives because he has forgiven.

David's Psalm

Cammenga turns next in his proof-texting to Psalm 32:

Psalm 32 records the experience of David when he fell into his sins of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. In verse 5 we read, "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." God forgave David's sin only after he repented of and confessed his sin. In the way of repentance, God forgave David's sin. (421)

Now Professor Cammenga advances his argument. Previously, he was arguing about what is before and what is after: repentance *clearly* is before forgiveness, and forgiveness *clearly* follows repentance. But regarding Psalm 32 Cammenga tells us that his *before* and *after* are equivalent to saying "in the way of repentance, God forgave David's sin."

I am quite certain that I know why Cammenga does that. He is trying to give his doctrine a pedigree back to Herman Hoeksema, who coined the term *in the way of* in the middle of the conditional covenant controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 1940s and 1950s. Whatever one thinks of the phrase *in the way of*—I for one do not need it and do not like it—and whatever one thinks Hoeksema meant by the term, what it does *not* mean is *before* or *after*. You can say that when Hoeksema coined the term, he specifically rejected that sense when he gave the phrase as a substitute for the word *condition*. He did not want conditions.

A *condition* is very simply expressed as *A* is before *B* and in such a way that without *A* then *B* does not come. It does not matter if *A* is God-worked, God-wrought, fulfilled by grace and the Holy Spirit or not. *A* in that sense is a condition.

Cammenga needs to stick to his *before* and *after*: repentance before forgiveness and in such a way that without

repentance forgiveness does not come. *Before* and *after* even at the most basic level are not equivalent to *in the way of*. Hoeksema never would have needed to coin that phrase if he could have expressed his theology with a simple *before* and *after*.

But does Psalm 32 teach that God forgave David's sin only after David repented? Is the psalm teaching that repentance comes before forgiveness and that without David's repentance he was unforgiven? This means that there is no forgiveness at the cross, and there is no forgiveness in eternity. There is and only may be forgiveness when and if a man repents. This is Cammenga's gospel. This gospel he finds in Psalm 32:5.

In his eagerness to proof-text against us, what Cammenga fails to do is compare scripture with scripture in his interpretation of Psalm 32:5. Either scripture contradicts scripture, which is blasphemous, or Cammenga is wrong and corrupts the truth. There is a historical account of what is recorded in Psalm 32. In 2 Samuel 12:13 we read, "David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die."

This is the gospel.

To understand what Nathan said, note first the word "also." The word "also" does not mean that David repented, and then God also forgave. The word "also" must be interpreted in light of the other significant words: "hath put away thy sin." The specific form of the words "hath put away thy sin" indicates a past event with present significance. In the past, before Nathan said a word and before David shed a tear, Jehovah had forgiven David his sin.

Since the cross was not yet, except in the decree, the meaning is that Jehovah by an unchanging and eternal word forgave David his sin. So real and sure was that word that David had been forgiven before the cross happened. It is because of that unchanging and eternal word of God that the cross happened, to fulfill that word and carry it out and unfold it. In the cross we see God's eternal word of forgiveness displayed before us. God manifested his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

And that unchanging and eternal word of forgiveness explains the word "also." The meaning is that Jehovah, according to his unchanging and eternal word of forgiveness, gave to David his repentance too. Nathan's meaning is that God gave to David his repentance, and God also forgave. Jehovah did not do that so that he might be able to forgive David. God already had forgiven David. Rather, God gave to David his whole salvation, repentance, and forgiveness. It was not God's will that David continue in his sin, so God granted to David repentance.

It was not God's will that David flounder in doubt, so God justified David—an ungodly man—without works and by faith only.

David's relief, joy, and blessedness was not that God justified a repentant person but that God justified an ungodly person. He justified David when God caused David to understand that God had forgiven him and that David was the apple of God's eye and the delight of his heart. Eternally, God willed that for David, so God worked it. Nathan said that there is an eternal and unchanging forgiveness that explains everything about what happened to David as he describes it in Psalm 32. Because David had been forgiven, Jehovah broke David's bones instead of killing him. Because David had been forgiven, God gave to David repentance. Because David had been forgiven, God also spoke to David through Nathan to preach the gospel to David that God "also hath put away" David's sin.

There is no forgiveness after repentance in 2 Samuel 12:13. There are two benefits that Jehovah gave to David—or a twofold grace—the one, repentance and the other, forgiveness. Both proceeded from God's eternal good pleasure for David's salvation. The one is not dependent on the other. That one is never present without the other is not because they are dependent on each other, but both are dependent on the mercy of God alone, who saves his people from their sins completely. Nathan said, "The LORD also hath put away thy sin." David was forgiven on the word of promise, which word is sure as God is sure and eternal as God is eternal.

According to Titus 1:2, that word of promise God spoke before the world began: "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." Eternal life comes by righteousness (or forgiveness of sins). If God promised eternal life, he promised (or spoke) the word of remission too. Faith by which alone we are justified understands and knows this promise as that was fulfilled at the cross of Christ.

The Wisdom of Solomon

Cammenga turns next in his proof-texting to what he, no doubt, regards, and what many Protestant Reformed ministers regard, as one of the bulwarks of their false doctrine of repentance before forgiveness. He writes,

In Proverbs 28:13 we read, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." They who confess their sins shall have mercy—God's mercy, the mercy of forgiveness. They enjoy the mercy of forgiveness who confess and forsake, that is, repent of their sins. (421)

Professor Cammenga makes another shift. Previously, *before* and *after* came to mean *in the way of*, and now, the unrepentant sinner does not even have the mercy of God. A man is cast adrift of the mercy of God when he understands that he is sinner, and the man can claw his way back to mercy by his repentance. Is that what Proverbs 28:13 teaches?

Sins are transgressions of the law of God, and sins reveal the inner hatred against God that lives in man, and those sins deserve temporal and eternal punishment. There is no remedy within man for man in his sins. There is no payment that a man can make for his sins. One sin is so terrible an offense against the holy, righteous, and glorious God that it deserves a lifetime of misery now and for the sinner to be cast into outer darkness after that. That is why God in mercy provided a remedy in Jesus Christ. God will not have our sins go unpunished, so he punished the same in Jesus Christ. This is the gospel of the text. This is the kernel of heavenly wisdom. Always in all the wisdom of Proverbs is hid the Wisdom of God, Jesus Christ. Cammenga can only find man in the text and what man must do. Thus his wisdom too is earthly, sensual, and devilish. God calls to foolish men to get wisdom; and to man as he is a sinner, God calls him to confess and to forsake his sins and not to cover them.

Wonder of wonders, from among all the sinful sons of Adam, who would otherwise naturally cover their sins and perish in those sins, God in his mercy appointed some of those sinful sons of Adam to salvation in Jesus Christ. Then in order to accomplish his will for their salvation, God in his mercy sent Jesus Christ into the world to be the head and mediator of that elect people. God came in the flesh and was made in the likeness of sinful men. To Jesus Christ God imputed all the sins of his elect people. God poured out all of his divine and just wrath against the sins of his people on Jesus Christ, so that all the temporal and eternal punishment that their sins deserved was taken by Jesus Christ. And because he is God and man, God in the flesh sustained the burden of that wrath of God and made satisfaction for those sins at his cross. God covered all the sins of all his elect people at the cross of Jesus Christ. That covering is the only covering of sin that there is. It is the only covering that God accepts because that covering takes away sin. And God raised Jesus from the dead as the testimony that God justified and forgave all his elect people at the cross. And God sent the gospel into the world to declare to his people that he had reconciled them to himself in his Son, Jesus Christ. They must be reconciled because they are reconciled. They must shout that being forgiven by faith through their Lord Jesus Christ they have peace with God. And confession of sin and forsaking that sin

are the fruits of faith in Christ. A sinner does not hide his sins, because he believes that God hid those sins in the cross of Christ. A sinner does not cover his sins, because he believes that God covered those sins by the only covering that takes away sins, the blood of Jesus Christ. Do not hide your sins! Do not cover your sins! Confess your sins to God because of the only covering in the blood of Jesus Christ.

So over against man's foolish and unbelieving treatment of his sins, there is a sure word of God. He who covers his sins shall not prosper. One who covers his sins congratulates himself on how he has deceived and duped men and how they think that he is really sorry. And he is so hard that he thinks in his wicked heart that he has succeeded in covering his sins before God. But God knows all our hearts and the secrets within. That man shall not prosper. *To prosper* means to bring to a successful end or to arrive at a set goal. I suppose we can apply it in a certain sense in this life. The sinner who covers his sins shall not prosper in this life. If he is reprobate and unregenerated, he exists under the wrath of God, and that man goes from hardness to hardness. Whereas at first there was a slight twinge of his conscience, soon his conscience is seared with a hot iron. Whereas he was at first satisfied with a little of his sin, soon his sin devours him. He may appear to have a fine and successful life, but he is a total failure. If he is God's own who has fallen into so terrible a state, then God's hand will be heavy until that man confesses his sins. God never lets his people prosper in their sins. God will dismantle their lives to bring them to confess.

But surely *to prosper* means more. All creation must pass through a great process to arrive at God's appointed goal in the perfect kingdom of Jesus Christ in the new heavens and new earth. Then all the elect church and all the creation with all the angels and all the creatures will be to the praise of God's glory in Jesus Christ, through whom God will rule all things forever. The sinner who covers his sin shall not prosper. He will never arrive there. Oh, he will go to God, for it is appointed unto men once to die and afterward the judgment. But that sinner will not prosper there in the judgment, but he will hear the words of God, "Depart from me, you wicked evildoer." And he will not prosper everlastingly in hell.

There is also a promise of God to the one who confesses his sins: he shall receive mercy.

Mercy is the tender pity of Jehovah God toward his elect people in their misery and his powerful will to deliver them from that misery. In his mercy God elected his people. In his mercy God sent Christ to die for them. In his mercy God forgave all their sins at the cross. In his mercy God comes to them with the gospel of Christ. In his mercy God calls them to stop covering their sins and

to confess and forsake those sins. In his mercy God works the knowledge of sin. In his mercy God turns his people, and they are turned. And heaping mercy upon mercy, when they confess and forsake their sins, he causes them to taste his mercy yet still more. He receives the repentant sinner in mercy.

To receive mercy means that God testifies to you of the pardon of all your sins for Christ's sake; it means that God will not turn away the confessing sinner. God will not spurn the confessing sinner but will receive him into his everlasting arms and bless the sinner with peace. This is the promise of the gospel to all who repent and believe. The promise is that you will receive mercy. It is not that you must first repent, and then and only then God can and will forgive. Your repentance is simply one small part of the mercy that has embraced you from all eternity and that will continue to embrace you until it presents you without spot or wrinkle in the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Peter's Sermon

Cammenga also writes,

Acts 2 records Peter's Pentecost sermon. In verse 38 Peter calls those in his audience to repentance: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." They are to "repent...for the remission of sins." Once more, forgiveness ("the remission of sins") follows repentance. Repentance is the God-ordained way to forgiveness. (421)

Professor Cammenga makes a total hash of Acts 2:38. I note that yet again his doctrine takes on a new form. Earlier he contended that repentance is before forgiveness, so that God may not and cannot forgive without repentance. Now Cammenga quotes a text that is translated as "repent...for the remission of sins," and he interprets that as "repentance is the God-ordained way to forgiveness." So now *before* and *after* and *in the way of* and *God-ordained way to* are all synonymous, and this all is supposed to be an interpretation of the words of Peter: "Repent...for the remission of sins." Really, Cammenga is shying away from the full import of Peter's words. For Peter said, "Repent...into the remission of sins," and Peter annexed to that the promise: "And you shall receive the promise of the Holy Ghost." If Cammenga is right, then he must take Peter at his word: repentance is not only the *God-ordained way*, but repentance is also that which brings the sinner *into* the forgiveness of sins, which, of course, is rankly heretical.

First, the passage does not read as Professor Cammenga says. The passage reads, "Then Peter said unto

them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the promise of the Holy Ghost.”

I can be brief in establishing the falsity of Cammenga’s interpretation. If the meaning is repent for the forgiveness of sins, and this means repentance is the God-ordained way to remission, then Cammenga must add baptism to the thought. So the full thought would be repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. And if we take the passage in light of his previous doctrine, then the meaning is that God will not forgive you until you repent and until you are baptized. But that interpretation is nonsense and Roman Catholic. Baptism itself is the seal of the forgiveness of sins received by faith only and not by faith and repentance. Then Cammenga also leaves out of view that Peter speaks not only about the gift of forgiveness but also adds the promise of the Holy Spirit. So if Cammenga’s meaning is right that it is repentance—and baptism—first and then remission, then one has to add that the promise of the Holy Spirit is contingent on repentance and baptism. So the full thought on Cammenga’s interpretation is that it is first repentance and baptism, and then God will give forgiveness and the promise of the Holy Ghost. With that interpretation Cammenga also has the promise conditioned on man’s repentance. If Cammenga’s interpretation of Acts 2:38 is correct, then he must necessarily espouse a conditional covenant, a covenant conditioned on man’s repentance. But then you do not have a promise but an offer or a possibility.

Peter was saying to the crowds, “Repent and be baptized in the name of Christ into the remission of sins or unto the remission of sins.” The repentance is the evidence of faith whereby they are justified without works. And baptism is the seal and confirmation of the righteousness they receive by faith without works. When Peter said to the people, “for the remission” of sins, then he was not indicating the end or terminus of their repentance or that into which repentance would bring them, but he was preaching the promise of the gospel that remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit are given to believers, believers who are made manifest in repentance and who are sealed with baptism. The words “into the remission of sins” must be closely tied with “be baptized.” We are very really baptized into the remission of sins because that is what baptism seals to us and to our children, and the Holy Spirit is who is promised to those who are forgiven by faith without works.

The promise is what Cammenga leaves out. He is constantly missing God and Christ in all his interpretations. He leaves out what Peter and the other apostles did preach, which was the promise rooted in election. Peter grounded his call to repentance in the free, eternal,

and unmerited grace of God in election and in God’s fulfillment of the promise at the cross of Christ: “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). The promise is given in election. The promise is fulfilled by God without the work or activity of man. And the promise is likewise freely given and bestowed by the grace of God. Because the promise is surely and infallibly bestowed on those whom God ordained to eternal life, then I call to faith, repentance, and the rest, certain that God will make his own manifest in the world. God does not need their repentance to forgive them. He already did forgive, and he makes that known to his elect in the gospel to bring them to repentance.

John’s Message

Cammenga says,

The teaching of the apostle in I John 1:9 is: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” If we confess our sins, and we will as the elect children of God, then God is just to forgive our sins. Since confession of sin is the fruit of repentance over sin, the apostle teaches clearly in I John 1:9 that repentance precedes forgiveness. (421)

What do you do with this kind of exegesis? Look what Cammenga does with election. He does the same thing with election that the Arminians did. The Arminians would speak about election but only after the fact of what man did. So the Arminians went about preaching the offer of salvation and that there is that which man must do to be saved. And when their man supposedly arrived in heaven, then they would speak about election. Election simply became an explanation after the fact and thus was emptied of all force. Cammenga does the same thing here: “If we confess our sins, and we will as the elect children of God.” Election here is a dead letter. Cammenga lets the statement of John stand as a fully conditional statement: “If you do this, then God will do this.” And the condition is fulfilled by God’s grace: “And we will as the elect children of God.”

In the context John’s message was “that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (v. 5). To that light you must come, and in that light you must walk. In that light you have fellowship with God, and your joy is full. If we say that we have fellowship with God and walk in the darkness, then we are liars, and the truth is not in us, and we do not do the truth. But walking in the light, we have fellowship with God and with one another. And so the exhortation is urgent: “Walk in the light! Do not walk in darkness!”

And that exhortation comes to us now in this life: “Walk in the light now in all that you do and with all that you are. Also with your sins!” Can we walk in the light in this life any other way? You cannot escape the reality that God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. And you are a sinner! You are a sinner in Adam, and you are a sinner in your actual deeds. The only way that you can walk in the world is as a sinner.

Yes, I understand that you are a saint. And as a saint you will say that for all your obedience and all your good works, you remain a sinner, and you perform those things as a sinner. And so the exhortation is, “Sinner, walk in the light and do not walk in darkness!” On account of that message, John comes to the church with comfort. The point of the text is the comfort to the guilt-stricken sinner. The point is not what the sinner must do. The point is the comfort to the guilt-stricken sinner in whom God is. How shall the sinner walk in the light of God in whom is no darkness at all? He cannot as a sinner walk in the light with his sin in any other way than to confess that he is a sinner.

A *confession* means that you speak together with someone else. Is it that you say with the neighbor who has accused you that you are a sinner and agree with his assessment of you? Yes, but it is also that you say with God that you are a sinner. Do you not understand that this is the only way that you can confess sin? You must walk in the light. You must be in the light. And you must have fellowship with the light. And in that light as a sinner, you see your sins, and you hear God’s evaluation of your sins, and you confess that. The confessing sinner, the one who truly confesses, is of God’s covenant in the world. And so standing in God’s covenant and being of God’s party and walking in the light, we see our sins, know our sins, and we say of our sins what God says of them.

That confession is the wonderful power of the truth that is in you. If one says that he has no sin, the truth is not in him, but the lie is in him. And under the power of that lie, he says that he has no sin. And having no sin, he hates the gospel. Those are the two realities about mankind. Either man is under the power of the truth, or he is under the power of the lie. Either under the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ or under the power of the devil. And it is under the power of the truth—because the truth is in you and the light shines in your heart and you walk in that light—that you say, “I have sin!” And so that confession is the manifestation, the evidence, that you walk in the light and that the truth is in you. John’s “if” is not an *if* in the conditional sense of the word but an *if* by which the children of light are distinguished from the children of darkness. John did not say, “*If* you do this, and you will by grace, then God is faithful to forgive.” But John

gave the clear mark of God’s children, who walk in light, and it is that mark by which they are distinguished from the children of the devil, who walk in darkness and have no sin.

John traces all this back to the purpose of God. The point of the text is not *if* you do this—by God’s grace, of course—then God will do this other thing. The text is a statement of God’s purpose. The text is in the form of a purpose clause: he is faithful and righteous *in order to* forgive your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. It is only because God is faithful and righteous that he does forgive the confessor and cleanses him from unrighteousness. That God is faithful means that he does what he says, gives what he promises, maintains his covenant, and fulfills his eternal word! His faithfulness points to his immutability, that he is the same from eternity to eternity, and so also that faithfulness points to his eternal purpose to deliver his elect people. That God is righteous means that his will is always in harmony with his righteous being and that all his work is in harmony with his righteous will. His eternal word is, “I forgive you, my child, your sins.” And his righteousness is that in the blood of the cross he has blotted out your sins. He has already forgiven you. According to his eternal word and according to the eternal cross and at the cross of Calvary, he has forgiven. A one-word summary for his faithfulness and his righteousness is *Jesus*. To prove to you that he is faithful and righteous and has blotted out your sins, God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. If you do not believe that, then the truth is not in you, and you will never say, “I have sin.” It is not the terror of punishment; it is not the desire to obtain with God; it not the sinner thus reasoning—if I confess, then he will forgive—that leads to confession. It is the fear and knowledge of God that moves the sinner to confess his sin. Wonderful power of the truth. If you confess, God has given the truth to you, and he works in you that confession.

But Cammenga leaves us with a condition fulfilled by grace. He leaves us with man and what man must do.

Christ’s Exhortation

Cammenga also writes,

In Luke 17:3, Jesus exhorts that “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.” Here God’s behavior with respect to us is the model of our calling with respect to each other. If our brother sins against us and repents of that sin, we are called to forgive him. Why are we called to forgive our repentant brother? Because this is God’s way with us: when we repent, He forgives us. Of course He does. He is the One who has worked repentance over sin

in us. He has brought us to confess our sin. Since our repentance is the fruit of His work of grace, He will certainly receive us and forgive us. (421)

Professor Cammenga asks a good question: “Why are we called to forgive our repentant brother?” He gives a bad answer: “Because this is God’s way with us: when we repent, He forgives us.” Cammenga’s application is that God tells us to forgive the brother if he repents. So that must mean that God forgives us if we repent. Then the opposite also holds: if the brother does not repent, he remains unforgiven; and if we do not repent, we remain unforgiven of God. I find in this the excuse for the conditional love of the members of Protestant Reformed Churches. Their practice follows their doctrine. And they treat each other with brutality, because after all, the brother did not repent. Or he did repent and you did not accept it, so you are the bad guy.

Is that why we forgive the brother who is repentant? What even does it mean to forgive the brother who is repentant? What does scripture say about this? There are three important passages in this regard that show Cammenga’s application to be false.

Colossians 3:12–13 says,

12. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;
13. Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do* ye.

Ephesians 4:31–32 says,

31. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:
32. And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.

And Colossians 2:13–14 says,

13. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;
14. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

The first question is, what does it mean that “God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” and that “Christ forgave you”? On Cammenga’s understanding of God’s forgiveness, it means that *when* or *if* you repent, then

God forgives you. Otherwise, God does not forgive. But scripture tells us what it means that “God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” and that “Christ forgave you.” According to Colossians 2:13–14, God forgave us at the cross, where he has quickened us with Christ, “having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us...nailing it to his cross.” The verb form in Colossians 3 and in Ephesians 4 is the exact same verb form as is used in Colossians 2:13–14. It is a verb form that emphasizes a completed action with lasting effect. The idea is that God forgave at the cross all your sins once and for all; he forgave that you are a sinner by nature; he forgave all the sins that you have committed, are committing, and will commit. You are once-and-for-all-time forgiven in the cross. You are forgiven freely, graciously, and without any act or restitution on your part. Repentance does not come into it. God justified the ungodly at the cross, and he justified the same ungodly in their consciences by faith, having shown them by his law that they are sinners. Repentance is not what man does in the way of which God forgives that man. Repentance is what God causes man to see and to admit, and seeing and admitting that, then the gospel of justification by faith alone is sweet and glorious to him.

Now, in that way forgive too. You seek the sinner’s repentance not so that you can forgive him. It is not about you. Seeking a sinner’s repentance is about the sinner. He will not admit that he is a sinner, and in that he shows that he is deceived and under the power of the lie. And you seek to show him that he is a sinner. In a sense you have already forgiven him. When you seek his repentance, it is because you know that God already has forgiven all his people’s sins and that he justifies the ungodly. If this man is a child of God, then his sin has been blotted out. But he will not admit that he is a sinner. And as a sinner yourself, you seek to show him that he is a sinner.

And it is precisely this gospel that you bring to the sinner when you forgive him. It is not your forgiveness that matters. It is God’s forgiveness that matters. When you forgive the sinner, you submit to the fact that God has forgiven the man who hurt you, and you bring that fact to him. This is what the apostle teaches in 2 Corinthians 2:7: “So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.” In this passage forgiving him is comforting him. And you comfort with the only comfort that there is for sinners, and that is Jesus Christ, the righteous, at whose cross all the sins of the elect sinners were blotted out.

So is repentance necessary? Yes! Is repentance the reason you forgive a man? No. You forgive him because God

already forgave him at the cross, and you want that man to know that. You forgive him as God forgave you!

Cammenga does similar things like the above with the creeds. I could answer him as I have with his scriptural explanations, but I feel it is a waste of time. I have already answered his most blatant twisting of the creeds in the previous article. The rest of his use of the creeds follows that line.

And from all this we see that Professor Cammenga is not Reformed at all. He is Arminian.

Now, the pressing question is, why is it so important for Cammenga that repentance, as he says, is before forgiveness? Cammenga asks some questions in his articles that shed light on how far he is from the Reformed faith when he says that repentance is before forgiveness.

He asks,

Why ought the sinner to repent if his sin is already forgiven? Why ought the church member under discipline repent of sin on account of which he is

going to be excommunicated if his sin is already forgiven by God? Why ought there be any call to repentance in the preaching of the gospel if forgiveness has already been granted by God? Why ought there be any warning that, if the sinner does not repent, he will perish if God has from eternity forgiven the sinner? Why should the child of God at day's end humble himself before God and plead for the forgiveness of the sins committed against His Most High Majesty if he already enjoys the blessing of God's forgiveness of his sin? (420)

Then as the very last sentence an article, he asks, "For if forgiveness takes place in eternity, what need is there for repentance in the lifetime of the Christian?"³

Oh?

What is that?

I will deal with that next time.

—NJL

3 Ronald Cammenga, "Antinomians? Without a Doubt (7)," *Standard Bearer* 99, no. 18 (July 2023): 425.

FROM THE EDITOR

The issue that you find in your hands promises to be another edifying collection of writings from our regular contributors.

Tyler Ophoff takes up the battle for the office of all believer. This office was and is being denied practically in the Protestant Reformed Churches, as Tyler convincingly demonstrates. This denial of the office of all believer in large part explains the existence of *Sword and Shield*. This magazine is the believer's witness to the truth, not the witness of the church institute. *Sword and Shield* is a free paper, free from all ecclesiastical control, and is the witness of the believer taught by the Lord and moved by the Spirit to confess Christ before men. Tyler's series will be an important addition to the subject of the office of all believer.

Rev. Luke Bomers picks up his series on the sacrifices, which is proving to be very informative writing. In all of his articles, we see the gospel of the free forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake.

For the special 1953 issue in October, we took a break from the new rubric, *Running Footmen*. This is the rubric that is filled by interested believers on various topics of their choice. This month's contributor, Alisa Snippe, takes on Professor Cammenga's book for children on the ten commandments. He loads the children of the Protestant Reformed Churches—and their parents—with backpacks filled with bricks. Perhaps someone should tell him that for the man who so offends a little one, it is better for him that a millstone be hung around his neck and he be drowned in the midst of the sea. He is long hardened in his false doctrine, as Alisa demonstrates by quotations from his egregiously false 2003 sermon on *Christ is not enough*, but perhaps he may still listen.

We have another contribution from Garrett Varner as he continues his series on the beatitudes.

For the rest we hope that you find this issue food for your souls.

—NJL

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

THE OFFICE OF ALL BELIEVER (1): AN INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Sword and Shield is a believer's magazine. It is your magazine. It does not belong to the editor or to the various writers but to you, dear reader. You hold an office in the church of Jesus Christ—the office of all believer. Our Heidelberg Catechism speaks of this in Lord's Day 12. Although the Catechism does not use the term *office*, the Catechism speaks of “anointing.”

Q. 32. But why art thou called a Christian?

A. Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may confess His name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him; and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life; and afterwards reign with Him eternally over all creatures. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 96)

The child of God is an officebearer. He partakes of the anointing of Jesus Christ by faith and is equipped by the Holy Spirit to that office. “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things” (1 John 2:20). You have the right to confess the name of Christ in your office as prophet. You have the right to present yourself a living sacrifice to God in body and soul, in all things at all times, in your office as priest. You have the right to fight against sin and Satan in your office as king.

It is always necessary to boldly, ceaselessly, and loudly trumpet the truth of the office of all believer. It is necessary because it is a doctrine that is violently and relentlessly attacked. It is not only those who hold the special offices that have an office in the church, but each elect child of God in the body of Christ holds an office. The men who are not appointed to the special offices or the women who cannot hold the special offices all hold the office of all believer. The mother with young children who labors in the glorious calling of the home holds the office of all believer. The child in school holds that office. So also does the single man or woman in the church. The entire New Testament church holds this office.

And what a glorious privilege it is to hold the office of all believer. It is your privilege to speak the truth of Jesus Christ and to condemn the lie. It is your privilege to serve God in consecration to him. It is your privilege as one who has the victory in Jesus Christ to fight “not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). This anointing is a privilege because by nature we have no right to hold this office as God's friend-servants. God's decree of election is the source of this office. And the elect, being joined to Christ by faith, have the privilege and the right to partake of his anointing.

The office of all believer is a militant office. You stand as soldiers on the front line of the battlefield. You stand as warriors in the kingdom of God, wielding the whole armor of God, with your loins girt about with the truth, wearing the breastplate of righteousness, having your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel, and taking the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:13–17). This is the reality of your office given to you by your partaking of Christ's anointing and your being equipped by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, what a glorious office you hold!

And this magazine stands in the service of your office. I contend that this is the only magazine where that is true. The *Banner* is full of drivel and cultural hogwash. The *Standard Bearer* abrogated and abandoned that truth. *Sword and Shield* stands in the service of your office as prophets, priests, and kings to write! The *Running Footmen* and the *Insights* rubrics are dedicated to this office, the latter of which is a tremendous opportunity for those who desire to exercise their office by writing. Submissions may consist of quotes or statements that struck you in your reading and study. They may involve your summary of the truth of a quotation or your rejection of a statement as being contrary to the truth of scripture and the Reformed confessions.

This magazine stands in the service of your office to speak the truth until the Lord Jesus Christ returns on the clouds of glory to manifest his perfect victory as our chief

prophet, chief priest, and chief king. Jesus Christ, the servant of Jehovah, is the perfect officebearer, the officebearer par excellence. Of his anointing all his elect people are partakers.

This article serves as an introduction to future articles that will set out to answer the following questions: What is the office of all believer? We often hear the phrase, but what does it mean to hold the office of all believer? Who holds this office? Why does one hold this office? What does one do in this office? Where did this office come from? What are the attacks on this office? All these questions and more will be answered in the months to come, the Lord willing.

Rome's Doctrine Shattered

This doctrine of the office of all believer is relentlessly attacked. The false church hates this right and privilege of the believer to speak the truth, to serve God in his office in obedience to the scriptures, and to contend against the lie. The post-modern world attacks this office by asserting that there is no truth and questions the fact if truth can even be known. False churches, void of the truth, console each other that every church has a little truth. There are different levels of the truth. One church is more pure, or one is less pure. That church over there might dishonor God with the well-meant offer or that one with divorce and remarriage or that one with theistic evolution, but no one really knows the truth anyway, so we can all hold hands together, and no one had better speak out against others to condemn them. That is the antichristian power that ultimately will unite the antichristian religious power as the beast that will arise out of the earth in service of the antichrist (Rev. 13:11–18). But the true church, made up of believers and their seed, knows the truth, confesses the truth, and damns everything that stands opposed to the truth as a proper work of the devil, as smelling like the sulfur of hell.

It was the Reformation that recovered the doctrine of the office of all believer from the Roman Catholic Church. It is not too much to say that without the recovery of the office of all believer, the truth of *sola scriptura* would never have been recovered either. The two went hand in hand and were intimately connected. When the truth of scripture was tossed out, so also was the office of all believer.

Rome, in the centuries prior to the Reformation, carefully had been erecting an elaborate sacerdotal system

founded on a direct apostolic succession of the clergy. Every pope could trace his office directly back to the apostle Peter. And then with sweeping assertions, Rome declared that only where the pope is, there is the church. And this apostolic succession of ordination filtered down also to all the lower levels of the clergy, including the cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and priests. This priesthood was set up as the lifeblood of the church, instead of the word of God.

Rome propped up her clerical system on dreadful eisegesis of Matthew 16:18, where we read that Jesus said to Peter, “I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

The context of this text is Christ's question to his disciples, “Whom say ye that I am?”

Peter answered and confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

The confession that Jesus is the Christ is the rock upon which the church is built. Rome took Matthew 16:18 and to this day uses it as proof that it was the *person* of Peter upon whom Christ would build his church, not upon Peter's *confession* that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed of God.

Rome insisted that only members of her clergy, who were part of the line of apostolic succession, could hold the offices of prophet, priest, and king. A believer could not know the will of God and could not confess the truth of sacred scripture. He was not a prophet. A believer could not enter the throne of God unless it was mediated to him by a priest. A believer was not a priest. A believer had no right to rule and fight against the lie and Satan. Rome ruled the believer and was the absolute authority. The believer was not a king. This doctrine of Rome is treacherous, violent, and wicked.

This elaborate, wicked system that was erected by Rome essentially set the priesthood between God and the sinner. Laymen were not even allowed to read the Bible without the permission of the priest. The relationship between God and the child of God was mediated through the clergy. But nowhere was this more evident than in Rome's doctrine of penance, repentance, and forgiveness. The sinner had to confess his sins to have forgiveness. In confession he had to go to the church. Only there, through the mediation of the church, was the opportunity to repent and recover the grace and friendship of God. The one confessing sin went to the confession booth in order for the priest to absolve the

The child of God is an office-bearer. He partakes of the anointing of Jesus Christ by faith and is equipped by the Holy Spirit to that office.

sinner of the experience of the guilt of that sin. Rome understood that the forgiveness of sins was in one's experience. Rome made a distinction at that crucial point between the objective accomplishment of Christ's work and how that work came into the possession of the child of God. The priest stood in between God and the sinner as the way to experience the forgiveness of sins. And really, grace and every blessing of salvation were mediated through the clergy to the sinner as they came into the possession of the sinner. There was no other way. If someone wanted to go to God, he had to go to the church, and the church in turn would go to God for the sinner. The church stood in the place of the sinner before God's face.

It was Martin Luther who picked away at the "three walls" of Rome and in doing so caused the elaborate edifice of Rome to come crashing down into a heap of rubble.

Three walls of Rome must tumble down like the walls of Jericho. The first was that the spiritual power is above the temporal. This claim Luther countered with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers...The second wall was that the pope alone might interpret scripture. This assertion was met...by the claims of lay Christianity to understand the mind of Christ. The third wall was that the pope alone could call a council.¹

With this summary in mind, let us read Luther's position on the office of all believer in opposition to the hierarchy of Rome:

The Romanists have very cleverly built three walls around themselves. Hitherto they have protected themselves by these walls in such a way that no one has been able to reform them. As a result, the whole of Christendom has fallen abominably.

May God help us, and give us just one of those trumpets with which the walls of Jericho were overthrown to blast down these walls of straw and paper in the same way and set free the Christian rods for the punishment of sin, [and] bring to light the craft and deceit of the devil.

Let us begin by attacking the first wall. It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and for this reason: all Christians are

truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office. Paul says in I Corinthians 12[:12–13] that we are all one body, yet every member has its own work by which it serves the others. This is because we all have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike; for baptism, gospel, and faith alone make us spiritual and a Christian people.

We are all consecrated priests through baptism, as St. Peter says in I Peter 2[:9], "You are a royal priesthood and a priestly realm." The Apocalypse says, "Thou hast made us to be priests and kings by thy blood" [Rev. 5:9–10].

Therefore, when a bishop consecrates it is nothing else than that in the place and stead of the whole community, all of whom have like power, he takes a person and charges him to exercise this power on behalf of the others. It is like ten brothers, all king's sons and equal heirs, choosing one of themselves to rule the inheritance in the interests of all. In one sense they are all kings and of equal power, and yet one of them is charged with the responsibility of ruling.

Therefore, just as those who are now called "spiritual," that is, priests, bishops, or popes, are neither different from other Christians nor superior to them, except that they are charged with the administration of the word of God and the sacraments, which is their work and office...A cobbler, a smith, a peasant—each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops.

The second wall is still more loosely built and less substantial. The Romanists want to be the only masters of Holy Scripture, although they never learn a thing from the Bible all their life long. They assume the sole authority for themselves, and, quite unashamed, they play about with words before our very eyes, trying to persuade us that the pope cannot err in matters of faith, regardless of whether he is righteous or wicked. Yet they cannot point to a single letter... Since these Romanists think the Holy Spirit never leaves them, no matter how ignorant and wicked they are, they become bold and decree only what they want. And if what they claim were true, why have Holy Scripture at all? Of what use is Scripture? Let us burn the Scripture and be satisfied with the unlearned gentlemen at Rome who

1 Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1950), 144–46.

possess the Holy Spirit! And yet the Holy Spirit can be possessed only by pious hearts. If I had not read the words with my own eyes, I would not have believed it possible for the devil to have made such stupid claims at Rome, and to have won supporters for them.

Besides, if we are all priests, as was said above, and all have one faith, one gospel, one sacrament, why should we not also have the power to test and judge what is right or wrong in matters of faith? What becomes of Paul's words in I Corinthians 2[:15], "A spiritual man judges all things, yet he is judged by no one"? And II Corinthians 4[:13], "We all have one spirit of faith"?

We ought to become bold and free on the authority of all these texts, and many others. We ought not to allow the Spirit of freedom (as Paul calls him [II Cor. 3:17]) to be frightened off by the fabrications of the popes, but we ought to march boldly forward and test all that they do, or leave undone, by our believing understanding of the Scriptures... Balaam's ass was wiser than the prophet himself [Num. 22:21–35]. If God spoke then through an ass against a prophet, why should he not be able even now to speak through a righteous man against the pope? Similarly, St. Paul rebukes St. Peter as a man in error in Galatians 2[:11–12]. Therefore, it is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error.

The third wall falls of itself when the first two are down. When the pope acts contrary to the Scriptures, it is our duty to stand by the Scriptures, to reprove him and to constrain him, according to the word of Christ.

Would it not be unnatural if a fire broke out in a city and everybody were to stand by and let it burn on and on and consume everything that could burn because nobody had the authority of the mayor, or because, perhaps, the fire broke out

in the mayor's house? In such a situation is it not the duty of every citizen to arouse and summon the rest? How much more should this be done in the spiritual city of Christ if a fire of offense breaks out, whether in the papal government, or anywhere else!²

The reformers, beginning with Martin Luther, moved the Roman Catholic clergy right out of the picture and restored the office of all believer to its rightful place. The false church would no longer be allowed to stand between God and the elect sinner. The truth was restored that the only mediator who brings his people before the throne of God is Jesus Christ. He alone is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

The Reformation removed the obstructions which the papal church had interposed between Christ and the believer. It opened the door to direct union with him, as the only Mediator between God and man, and made his gospel accessible to every reader without the permission of a priest.

There are three fundamental principles of the Reformation: the supremacy of the *Scriptures* over tradition, the supremacy of *faith* over works, and the supremacy of Christian *people* over an exclusive priesthood.³

The truth of the office of all believer is a precious Reformation heritage. The Reformation and the Reformed churches restored the glorious place that the child of God holds in relation to God in Jesus Christ. And the Reformation gave to the believer the most glorious gift of all, the sacred scriptures themselves as the sole rule of faith and life in the church. *Sola scriptura* was the cry and the trumpet blast of the Reformation. Every believer had the right and privilege to know the scriptures, to confess them, and to defend them, many times to the loss of his or her own life. It is in the scriptures that the believer knows God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit by faith, and which knowledge is life eternal (John 17:3).

The office of all believer is a militant office. You stand as soldiers on the front line of the battlefield. You stand as warriors in the kingdom of God, wielding the whole armor of God.

2 Martin Luther, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 44:126–37.
3 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 7:15–16.

The View of the Protestant Reformed Churches

It should come as no surprise then that the Protestant Reformed denomination, whose doctrine of repentance preceding forgiveness of sins is a close relative of Rome's doctrine of penance, has also returned to Rome in its rejection of the office of all believer. Rome's doctrine of a priesthood has reappeared in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). In the PRC there is a priesthood of "scholars" and learned men that stands between the believer and God. This priesthood has reappeared in the officebearers, especially the ministers and professors, who impose themselves between God and his people, between their office of all believer and the truth of sacred scripture.

The so-called scholars stand between God and the people in their doctrine alone. It takes a scholar in the PRC to duck and weave through the theological web that has been created. The scriptures are perspicuous. They are clear and easy to understand. The believer, given the Spirit of Christ by faith, can know the will of God that is contained in the scriptures. But the clergy stand in between God and the sinner. Protestant Reformed ministers make endless distinctions: the forgiveness of sins is not justification; the objective accomplishment of Christ's work on the cross is over there, but the subjective reality depends on the believer's believing or repenting; justification is different than the experience of justification; unconditional covenant union is one thing, but conditional covenant communion is another.

The result is that the common folk sitting in the pew are handicapped when it comes to confessing the truth of scripture and the confessions. They do not know on their own which is the correct view of justification or forgiveness or remission of sins. When a question comes to members of the PRC, they run to their ministers or to the seminary professors for the answer. The doctrine of Jesus Christ must be mediated to them through the so-called scholars. Members of the PRC might as well not even open their Bibles to know what the will

God preserves his truth and gives to his people the precious and glorious privilege of confessing the truth and damning the lie, serving the Lord God as a royal priesthood, and fighting the battle of faith, knowing that we have the victory in Christ.

of God says. But if they were to exercise their office and by faith search the scriptures and the confessions, they would find that the word of God stands opposed to what the supposed learned men are teaching. The confessions say that justification is forgiveness of sins (Belgic Confession 23). You have unconditional covenant union and unconditional covenant communion in your experience apart from works by God's sovereign, particular, saving work alone. Your forgiveness of sins is a saving benefit of covenant fellowship by your being one in Jesus Christ, who is the head of the covenant (Jer. 31:31–34).

The office of all believer is denied and rejected in the PRC. When controversy arose in the denomination, we were told that these matters were too deep to understand. "These are some deep theological waters," wrote Professor Dykstra.⁴ The scholars were the ones who had all the answers. The scholars were the only ones who should be involved. And the common peasants were not to concern themselves with such lofty matters. We were made dependent on the supposed scholars. The one who held the office of all believer, anointed and equipped by the Spirit, who had no learning like the scholars, could not possibly

understand the truth of the sacred scriptures. The mother anointed with the Holy Spirit to her holy office was despised. She was labeled as an unruly woman.⁵ The man who exercised his office by writing protests or by merely having conversations about sermons was vilified for his speaking the truth.

Nowhere was this attitude expressed so boldly as on the floor of Synod 2018 when Professor Gritters, in discussing the matter of Psalter revision in relation to the overwhelmingly negative response that had come from the survey to the members of the churches, denigrated the office of all believer as "the squawkings of the people."

This rejection of the office of all believer carried over to the pages of the *Standard Bearer*, which is supposed to be a non-denominational magazine devoted to the office of all believer to speak the truth. Articles were

4 Russell Dykstra, "Synod 2018: Obedience and Covenant Fellowship," *Standard Bearer* 94, no. 18 (July 2018): 415.

5 "I have been troubled from the very beginning of this movement [the Reformed Protestant Churches] on account of the dominance of strong-willed and outspoken women." See "Response to Wingham's 'A History of the Controversy' by Prof. R. Cammenga," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 7 (October 1, 2021): 22.

censored from being published. Believers' mouths were shut from confessing the truth and condemning the lie. The pages of that magazine were closed against the office of all believer.

Then a new magazine, *Sword and Shield*, was started for believers to speak the truth. Consistories railed against it as divisive and warned members to beware of it. Consistories did not trust the discernment of the Spirit and the office of all believer and exercised authority over their congregations that did not belong to them.

We were not told it would be mailed to the members of our congregation...We also intend to request that the publisher immediately remove the members of GPRC from their mailing list.⁶

We did not provide the publishers of this magazine with the addresses of our members nor did they seek the consistory's approval to mail the magazine to the members of our congregation.⁷

Lately, this rejection of the office of all believer can be found in the recent actions of the PRC regarding Classis East. The May 2023 agenda of Classis East consists of a few hundred pages of material that only the officebearers were allowed to read. Only one page was left available for the common peasants to read. This is not something new either; the censorship and limiting of information has been going on for years already under the guise of the issue being a matter of discipline and love for the brother, when in fact the issue is false doctrine being preached and written publicly.

The Protestant Reformed hierarchy knows how to keep things under lock and key. Only the "scholars" may know what is going on. The office of believer may not read certain magazines or ecclesiastical agendas, may not judge, and may not confess the truth of the word of God over against the lie. I stand amazed that the constituents in the denomination tolerate being beat to a bloody pulp by the ministers, professors, and the assemblies.

That the lie festers in the PRC is judgment upon the denomination from the hand of the Lord for her corruption of the word of God. The PRC long ago denied the right of the believer to speak the truth. The only path remaining for any concerned member is endless protesting and appealing with the hope that maybe the scholars will declare that the protestant has gone through enough hoops. In Rome only the pope could call a council, and in the PRC only the supposed scholars can decide if a protestant may appear at a council and observe or speak to matters that concern him in the church. The ministers and clergy hide behind closed doors and hidden agendas in the hope that the people will lose interest and go away, while the false doctrine and the ones who teach it can never be touched.

The fact is, the people love it this way. "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jer. 5:31). The people are happy to remain in a burning house and to give up their office of all believer. They will not lose one thing for the cause of God, Christ, and his truth. They have turned aside every one to his own way. And every man does that which is right in his own eyes.

In forming the Reformed Protestant Churches, God had his people march around Jericho. And the walls of the Protestant Reformed edifice have come crumbling down in a heap of eternal ruin. God preserves his truth and gives to his people the precious and glorious privilege of confessing the truth and damning the lie, serving the Lord God as a royal priesthood, and fighting the battle of faith, knowing that we have the victory in Christ.

Next time, the Lord willing, I will examine the office-bearer par excellence, Jesus Christ, of whose anointing we partake by faith.

—TDO

⁶ Letter to the congregation of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church, June 6, 2020.

⁷ Letter to the congregation of Unity Protestant Reformed Church.

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.—1 Timothy 4:13

SACRIFICES (4): AT THE ALTAR

An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.
—Exodus 20:24–25

The Record of God's Name

Great art thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised! Thou hast made the earth by thy power. Thou hast established the earth by thy wisdom. By thine understanding thou hast stretched out the heavens. When thou dost utter thy voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens. Thou causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. The lightnings with rain thou dost make. Thou bringest forth the wind out of thy treasures.

Thou didst set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, making for thyself a name. Thou didst bring forth thy people Israel out of their bondage with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and a stretched-out arm, and with great terror. Thou didst give to them the land that was sworn to their fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey. They came in and possessed it. Thou didst cause thy people Israel to ride upon the high places of the earth and to eat of the increase of the fields. Thou didst make them to suck oil out of the flinty rock, feeding them with the butter of kine, the milk of sheep, the fat of lambs, rams bred of Bashan, the choicest of wheat, and the pure blood of grapes.

Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Jehovah—thou art great, and thy name is great in might—who would not fear thee, O king of the nations?

Thou art God!

El Shaddai art thou. Terrible power and strength are in thy almighty hand. Yet once, it is a little while, and thou wilt shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry lands—all nations! Might and wisdom are met together in thee. As thou hast determined the end

from the beginning, so thou upholdest all things by the word of thy power and workest all things after the counsel of thine own will. When thou speakest, “Be fruitful and multiply!” thy blessing infallibly comes. None is able to withstand thee. When thou speakest, “Depart from me, ye cursed ones!” thy word makes unspeakably miserable and desolate. None can say, “What doest thou?”

Adonai art thou. Yea, Lord of lords and king of kings. Thy throne is established in the heaven of heavens, and thou hast done whatsoever thou hast pleased. Shall there be evil in a city, and thou hast not done it? *Adonai Tzevaoth* art thou. Enlisted within thy hosts are all things in heaven and earth. The sun, moon, and stars are thy soldiers. The hornets go before thy people to drive out the enemy. Assyria is in thine hand as an axe. Cyrus thou hast called by name to perform all thy pleasure. The myriads of angels are thy ministering spirits, going before thy face to do thy bidding. The great dragon himself—that old serpent who is called the devil and Satan—is an instrument under thy power, destroying the flesh of thy wayward sons, so that thou dost bring them to repentance.

Yahweh art thou. I AM THAT I AM. Jehovah God. Merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Thou dost keep mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and thou wilt by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generations. A rock thou art! A God of truth! And all thy ways are judgment, for thou art just and right.

Thou art the first and the last, and besides thee there is

no God. Thou art Father and Son and Holy Spirit. *Trisagion!* Unity in trinity and trinity in unity.

What is thy name, but *all* that thou hast revealed concerning thyself in thy personal names and infinite perfections and glorious persons and awful works? What is thy name, but who thou *art*? To love thy name is to love thee. To call upon thy name is to call upon thee. To forget thy name is to forget thee. To take thy name in vain is to count thee as dust blown about by the wind. But thou art God, and there is no other name in all the earth besides thy name that is to be praised. Thy glory belongs to no other.

The only adorable God—how excellent is thy name in all the earth!

Our parents assigned us names at birth, but no man names thee. Can the finite understand the infinite? Can a worm fathom the unending expanse of the majesty from on high? As thou dost comprehend thine own boundless being in thine own eternal present, thou needest no name. But a name of truth hast thou given to thyself in thy speech unto men. And *thou* dost name thyself, for thou dwellest in the light.

The sun hast thou given a small measure of glory. Radiating with such energy, its temperature ascends into millions of degrees. Unapproachable is that celestial light of the daytime. Should a man encroach upon the sun's doorstep, he would be incinerated into space dust.

But thou art the light of light, the sun of righteousness, powerfully emanating in the constant fullness of thy divine being. Pure and infinite energy of fervent heat art thou. *Holy* flame art thou, an eternal burning that a deluge of water cannot quench. If the sun is unapproachable in its glory, how much more art thou, who called light into being and fixed its abode in the stars? "Holy! Holy! Holy!" cry the seraphim, while covering their feet and their eyes in thy courts.

Thou art Jehovah. That is thy name. And thy glory thou wilt not give to another.

Thou art Jehovah, whose name is Jealous. And jealous art thou for thy name. Jealous art thou for those who are called by thy name. Jealous art thou as a fire. Those who love thee know thy burning passion as covenant mercy. Those who hate thee know thy burning passion as wrath.

Thy light pierces through the blackness of darkness along the lines of the antithesis, either to save or to destroy, to refresh or to dry up, to redeem or to cast into bondage, to build and protect or to cast down and destroy.

And at sundry times and in divers manners, thy light arose upon men.

Now, wherever thou dost record thy name, O Lord, there thou didst command an altar to be made. "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me...in all places where I record my name."

Thou didst record thy name in the plains of Moreh, appearing unto Abram thy friend. There he was in the presence of the enemy—the Canaanites, the Hittites, the

Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Abram stood over against those who had changed the glory of thy name into an image made like unto a corruptible man, who had turned thy truth into a lie. He stood as the visible representative of thy cause in the earth over against the seed of the serpent. He was among many peoples who had to be overthrown, that his seed might dwell in the land. Abram was unto them a savor of death unto death, a despicable and threatening presence. But lo! Thou didst appear unto him, saying, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." There is thy

name! Thou art a God who fulfillst all thy promises, who gives a spiritual inheritance in pure grace. There in Canaan was thy name recorded, and Abram built thee an altar.

Thou didst record thy name in the mountains of Moriah, having proved the faith of Abraham and manifested thy work of grace in him. What is this, that he must sacrifice his seed? the one in whom all thy promise dwells? Will God destroy his own work? Never! Thou callest the things that are not as if they were. Thou quickenest the dead. So by faith Abraham offered up Isaac upon the altar and received him again from the dead in a figure. And in the stead of Abraham's son, thou didst provide a ram. Jehovah-jireh! Thou wilt provide. Thou wilt see to it that the covenant is fulfilled through the death and resurrection life of a substitute. There upon that altar of Moriah was thy name recorded.

Thou didst record thy name in Rephidim, swearing unto Moses that thou wouldst war with Amalek perpetually until the remembrance of that nation was blotted

Whenever God came to the earth to record his name, that name was always Jesus Christ and him crucified. Through the crucified Christ alone is how God will be known. Through Christ crucified alone is how God will be worshiped. The cross is the only altar where men may gather and say, "I have seen the face of God and lived."

out from under heaven. Amalek—the manifestation of all that opposes and exalts itself above thee. Amalek—the enemy at enmity against thee, who says in his heart, “Who is Jehovah that I should restrain myself from cutting his people from off the earth?” Amalek—who, when thy people are weak and weary, discovers the opportune time to swoop down upon them to destroy them and mock thee. But thou art Jehovah-nissi! Thou art a banner over thy people. Under thy name thy people do valiantly, for thou art he who treads down our enemies. The battle against our ancient foe belongs to thee. Thou hast sworn! Either thy name must fail or Amalek must perish from off the earth. There in Rephidim was thy name recorded, and Moses built thee an altar.

Thou didst record thy name under the oak in Ophrah, visiting thy people under the affliction of Midian and Amalek. Cruelly, the enemies assaulted thy people with wave after wave of destruction. The enemies were a plague of locusts, leaving no green thing in their wake. There was no sustenance left for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor ass. Thy people resorted to dens and caves and strongholds. But then thine angel appeared to Gideon and spoke those wondrous words, “Jehovah is with thee!” Israel did not perish from off the face of the earth, but Israel had a deliverer. For thou didst cherish the thoughts of thy people, thoughts of peace and not of evil. Thou art Jehovah-shalom! There upon a rock the angel sealed thy words with a wonder: fire arose on the rock and consumed Gideon’s offering. In Ophrah was thy name recorded, and Gideon built an altar unto thee.

Thou didst record thy name before Manoah and his barren wife, after Israel had been delivered into the hands of the Philistines for forty years. Israel had become such a miserable and evil wreck that she was not even crying out to thee for deliverance anymore. But thou didst send thy angel to bring glad tidings to a barren woman that she would beget a child, a Nazarite unto thee and a deliverer from the hands of the adversary. And when Manoah enquired of thine angel concerning the angel’s name, thine angel showed his name to be Wonderful. Wonderful because thou art wonderful, O God! Wonderful because thou only performest wonders. Wonderful because thou workest what eye has not seen, nor ear heard. From man’s perspective thy church goes down to extinction. But thou art the Lord of wonder-working power, with whom all things are possible. Such is thy name! And wondrously did thine angel work, igniting fire upon the altar-rock and ascending up in its flame. There among the Danites was thy name recorded.

And in due time thou didst choose to put thy name in Jerusalem. Taking up thy residence among thy people in the temple mount, thou didst command the altar to be erected in thy court. Where that altar is, there thy

great name is recorded. There thou dost cause thyself to be remembered. From thy court issues forth the call, “O ye seed of Abraham his servant, remember his marvelous works that he has done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth!”

When a great man builds himself a house with a courtyard, he places in that courtyard that which gives him delight and honors him. Perhaps he will install a large granite fountain, with its quatrefoil pool, with its fountain head exalted high in the air, with its water spilling over tiered basins. Perhaps, if he is enamored of sculpture work, he will choose to display a patinated bronze statue: a man with rippling muscles or some ferocious beast. Perhaps he will dig a koi pond, supplying it with the most exquisite of fish and surrounding the pond with the most desirable of foliage. Then when guests walk through his courtyard, they are filled with awe at his wisdom and his eye for beauty.

But for those who enter the righteous gates of thy sacred house, O Lord, the first point of focus is thy altar. It is the altar that bears record of thy name, and it is thy name that is worthy of delight and all honor.

Great art thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised!

Holy Ground

Now, put off your shoes, O man, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground!

You approach the place where God has recorded his name. Do you know with whom you meet? Jehovah has declared, “In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee.” Who is at the altar? He whose name is Jealous! The Holy One of Israel!

Holy ground!

That place is holy because God has called it holy. God has come down to a world fallen under the corruption of sin to redeem that world from the curse, to sanctify it unto himself, and to lift it up into the everlasting kingdom of heaven. He has come for holy covenant fellowship. He has come to draw his people unto himself, to whisper his wondrous secrets to them, to show them that they are his eternal delight. They are his people, the sheep of his pasture, the seed of Abraham his servant, the children of Jacob his chosen. They belong to him. They are consecrated to him and to him alone. They exist for his glory and for his praise alone. That place is holy because it is called by God’s name.

Holy ground!

The holiness of the altar was set apart in the mind of the Israelite. He watched as Moses and Aaron cleansed the altar for seven consecutive days after it had been built. The Israelite watched as Moses took of the holy oil and sprinkled it seven times, declaring it to be a most holy thing. The Israelite was told that only the priests could minister on that

altar, themselves sanctified and free from blemish. Holy was that altar, for holy is the name that it bore.

Holy ground!

And now, in the altar of his sanctuary, Jehovah gives himself a face of fire. That altar is not the only place where God gave himself the form of flame. God came in the smoking furnace and burning lamp to pass through the parted animals before the passive attendance of Abraham. God came in the fire that set ablaze the desert shrub that demanded the attention of Moses. God descended upon Sinai as a fiery torrent. He kept the night watch in the pillared torch over his desert pilgrims. Forever he sits upon the throne of heaven, eyes ablaze and fiery streams issuing forth from his presence.

There in the bosom of the altar rests the record of God's name as a continual burning. A flame not from man but of God. For when Moses and Aaron laid the first sacrifices upon that altar of the tabernacle, the glory of Jehovah issued forth from the tabernacle in an illustrious blaze and licked up the offerings. When both Gideon and Manoah spread their gifts upon the altar-rock before the angel of the Lord, *God* called forth fire out of the stone. When Solomon had made an end of praying at the dedication of the temple, heavenly flames descended upon the brazen altar and set it ablaze. And that same fire of Jehovah also fell down upon Carmel, devouring the offering and wood and stones and dust, licking up the water in the trench.

Holy ground! Jealous is he for his name and glory.

Thus the holiness of that altar is inviolable. None can profane God's name and live. Those who compass his altar must be perfect. Do you not know his law? Be ye holy, for he is holy! Our God is a consuming fire!

Most clearly was this truth impressed upon the Israelite who stood upon the slopes of Mount Ebal, having just witnessed his God make Jericho a trash heap and Ai a dumpster fire. There on Ebal Joshua built an altar unto Jehovah in the presence of the people as Moses had commanded. Joshua inscribed Moses' law into the mountain's raw stone. Then the Levites took up the words of the law with a loud voice: "Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image...Cursed be he that...Cursed be he that...Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them."

Then thundered the solemn noise of a million voices, "Amen."

Let that man be accursed who keeps not the whole law. Let him be cursed in the city and in the field. Let him be cursed in what he gathers from the field and in what he stores away. Let him be cursed in his offspring and in all of his labor. Let him be cursed when he goes in. Let him be cursed when he goes out. Let pestilence cleave to him. Let God blast him with disease and with sword.

Let heaven be brass over him and the earth be iron under him. Let him be slain by the enemies and his carcass be food for the birds. Let him grope about in the daytime. Let him taste the fire of God's wrath every day as he sinks down into the place of everlasting burnings. Let him be accursed, for our God is holy!

Worthy is our God of all love and perfect obedience! He *must* be loved. He must be loved as the only good and ever-blessed God. God must be man's whole delight and true bliss. God must be man's constant joy. Holiness must reverberate through the whole of man's being, from the depths of his existence to the extremities of his body. Never may there be any dissonant chord struck in that man's life with God. *Holy* must man be unto God. And holy must man be in God's presence. Anything less than absolute righteousness is not worthy of the place where God's name is recorded.

God is not a God who has pleasure in wickedness. He is terribly displeased with sin. He loathes evil with his whole being. He has no fellowship with evil. He hates all workers of iniquity. He abhors the bloody and deceitful man. Fools shall not stand in God's sight. Cursed be he that confirms not all the words of the law to do them!

This same testimony arose whenever a man approached the altar of the tabernacle. In that most holy sanctuary rested the holy throne of Israel's lawgiver. At the base of his throne were the two stone tables of the law. Beneath his seat was the most rigorous demand of perfection. All who come unto him must be holy!

Holy ground!

Says the living God, "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified" (Lev. 10:3). In what tremendous context were these words uttered? These words came unto Aaron, whose two oldest sons had just been burnt to a crisp while carrying strange fire before the Lord. And what became of the two hundred and fifty rebels, who under Korah insisted that they were holy and might enter into God's sanctuary of themselves? They also were turned into briquettes.

Who can stand before God's indignation against evil? Who can abide the fierceness of his anger against sin? His fury is poured out like fire. God is jealous for his name's sake. Jehovah will take vengeance on the evildoer. God reserves wrath for his enemies.

Approaching that altar is an astounding thing. Do you understand who comes to meet with you?

Nay, but man is altogether brutish and foolish, void of counsel and without understanding! Jeshurun waxed fat and forsook God who had made him. Even those who have heard his most glorious name have lightly esteemed the rock of salvation. Does not God's name sing of his holiness? But man has corrupted himself. He is a perverse and crooked generation.

When a sinner is confronted with the holiness of God, he has abundant reasons to be filled with terror. Everything warns the sinner that he should beware of God. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven, and in that wrath the sinner pines away and dies. In the sinner's own conscience, the handwriting of God witnesses against him and accuses him before the judge of heaven and earth. God appears to him as an enemy.

God appeared to Jacob at Bethel, and Jacob trembled, saying, "How dreadful is this place!" Gideon cried out, "Alas!" Manoah wailed unto his wife that they would surely die. Isaiah howled, "Woe is me! for I am undone. I am a man of unclean lips, and I have seen the king, Jehovah of hosts!" And whenever that fire of Jehovah descended from heaven, all of its witnesses threw themselves to the ground and shouted. Such is sinful man when confronted by the holiness of God. Man falls apart at the seams.

"In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee," says Jehovah. But who may abide the day of his coming? Who shall stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire.

Holy ground!

A Place of Blood

But, lo! Ye sons of Jacob are not consumed!

Not consumed! How can this be?

Here dwells the name of the living God. He is purest light. He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and he cannot look on iniquity. He is a consuming fire that devours all that is not holy, all that is not absolutely consecrated to him. In devouring wrath he licks up all that is profane. His anger waxes hot against all rebellion against his law.

Not consumed! How can this be?

I am a man of unclean lips. I have lips that are polluted and defiled. I have lips that will take God's most holy name and corrupt its glory. If I speak in his presence, I will surely profane his truth. When I contemplate his works, his perfections, his names, his persons—how is it that I am so dull as not to collapse in the dust and tremble before him? But it is not just my lips; my whole nature is rebellious against him! A terrible disease is within me. I am the one who has despised his good and holy law both day and night, in waking and in sleeping, in working and in playing. Over and over I return like a dog to my vomit, like a pig to the mire. I grovel in the dust. I am carnal and sold under sin. What I feel in my nature is this: I hate God! I despise that magnificent name! I have counted the record of himself as an altogether loathsome thing. I have

not said, "Let thy name, O Lord, be magnified and all else be abased." But I have boasted, "Let thy name be trampled in the dust and altogether reckoned as chaff in the wind while *my* name is exalted in the earth." Who is the whoremonger? Who is the thief? Who is the murderer? Who is the Sabbath desecrator? Who is the despiser of all in authority? Who is the idolator? *Who is the God-hater...*

Not consumed! How can this be?

Cursed be he that confirms not all the words of the law to do them! And were not *many* of the sons of Jacob consumed in their generations? With many of them God was not well pleased, and they were overthrown in the wilderness. The northern tribes were sowed to the wind. Jerusalem was made an astonishment and a proverb, a byword among all the nations. But is their rebellion not my own? How can this be? It cannot be anything in me...

and that is true. Behold that altar!

A bloody altar!

A bloody altar—for "thou... shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen." Four horns extending upward—crimson with blood. The base of the altar—stained with blood. The ground beneath the altar—a pool of blood. The throats of animals

being slit—a stream of blood. Blood sprinkled here. Blood tossed there. A place of slaughter.

A bloody altar—for judgment has taken place. A judgment has been passed. Blood has been shed. A torrent of holy flame has descended from heaven and devoured the guilty. God has come and judged. And he has accepted a perfect substitute in my place. The red stains on the altar have not come from my body but from *Christ's*.

Blood of propitiation. Blood of reconciliation. Blood of cleansing from all sin. Justified by blood. Peace in blood. Sanctified by blood. Made nigh unto God through blood. Blood for sprinkling the heart from an evil conscience. Blood for purging the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Precious blood of the lamb of God!

A bloody altar—this is where Jehovah has recorded his name! He is a God who fulfills all his promises and gives to his people an eternal inheritance. Jehovah-jireh is he—a God who provides the perfect substitute and raises the dead. Jehovah-nissi is he—under his name we cannot be destroyed. Our ancient foe has no power over us. Satan and his seed cannot touch us. Sin cannot hurt us. Death cannot swallow us. Jehovah-shalom is he—a God

Under the name of Christ
crucified, I forever shall dwell in
the midst of everlasting burnings.
God is the fire, and the body of
Christ is the desert shrub. I shall
never be consumed in Christ, for
he was consumed in my stead.

who brings peace, having reconciled us to him in love. Wonderful! Wonderful is his name, and wondrously he works. We have both seen and heard the name of our God. And here at his altar, all of his works in time and history converge in one—Jesus Christ *crucified*.

The crucified Christ is the only name that God will have his people know. Behold how that one name refracts in most wondrous and diverse splendor throughout all the pages of holy scripture. Whenever God came to the earth to record his name, that name was always Jesus Christ and him crucified. Through the crucified Christ alone is how God will be known. Through Christ crucified alone is how God will be worshiped. The cross is the only altar where men may gather and say, “I have seen the face of God and lived.”

A bloody altar!

And an altar that does not belong to all men. God chooses where his name will be recorded in the earth. God chooses who will stand in the blood of that sacrifice. God chooses who will know his name in truth. To whom does this altar belong? It belongs to those who are chosen from before the foundation of the world, according to God’s good pleasure and *not* according to anything that the chosen have done.

“An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me...And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone.” Let the altar be of earth, unadulterated with the works of men! Or if the altar be of stone, then let it be raw stone, unhewn and untouched by the instruments of a man! The will and the doing and the achievement of man must never come into view and try to embellish that altar. This is the sole glory of that altar: Jesus Christ whom God has sent. Behold what wonderful things *God* has wrought! Let that altar whereon the name of God is recorded be undefiled with man. Not by deeds of the law but by an election of pure grace do that altar and its testimony belong to God’s remnant.

Do not inscribe your works upon that altar.

Do not bring your works, for then you pollute and defile God’s holy name. Even obedient Abraham, who offered up Isaac by faith, counted all his works as dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. Abraham’s name and Abraham’s faith are not memorialized upon the mountains of Moriah, but Abraham called the place Jehovah-jireh. “Faithful is my God!”

Do not bring your works for a blessing. For what does God say? “In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and *I will bless thee*.” An altar of earth or stone is where God comes to bless his people without their works. An altar of earth or stone is where God comes to bless his people in Christ. If you bring your works for a blessing, you have corrupted the whole business.

And be warned, the holiness of that place is inviolable!

Not consumed!

Under the name of Christ crucified, I forever shall dwell in the midst of everlasting burnings. God is the fire, and the body of Christ is the desert shrub. I shall never be consumed in Christ, for he was consumed in my stead. In Christ I am HOLINESS TO THE LORD. And lo! That Pentecostal Spirit of Christ—the *holy* Lord from heaven—has descended upon the church and taken his dwelling place in my heart. And I am not consumed! I shall live forever in the midst of holy fire.

What an altar!

Holy ground! A bloody altar! An altar of stone! The holy record of God’s name.

In that place where God has brought his name to remembrance, he has overcome, by a wonder of grace, the curse of the ground and lifted up the ground into his everlasting kingdom. Through the altar of the cross, God does not annihilate this world. He redeems it. He purges it. He sanctifies it unto himself.

Confidence in Him

O holy Father, thy truth has plucked the chords of the hearts of thy people!

If thou shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? My iniquities prevail against me. But thou shalt purge them away. There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. O Jehovah, correct me, but not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing. Correct me but without judgment.

O send out thy light and thy truth. Let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto thine altar, unto thee my exceeding joy. If the swallow finds a place for a nest in thine altars, how much more shall I find refuge in the place where thou recordest thy name? My hands thou hast washed in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Jehovah. There I will publish with the voice of thanksgiving and tell of all thy wondrous works.

O send out thy light and thy truth. Assure me of thine eternal good will toward me. Reveal thyself to me, a sinner, in the face of Jesus Christ. Teach me of thine exceeding great power to save to the uttermost, of thy covenant friendship and love. Speak of thy boundless grace and mighty power unto salvation. Blot out my sins, for not only to others but to me also are remission of sins and life eternal. Bathe me in blood and clothe me in righteousness. Justify the ungodly. Then shall I boldly enter thy sanctuary and dwell in thy presence.

O ye enemies, will ye contend with me? Then let us stand together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. For near is he who justifies me. And he is a consuming fire.

—LB

And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword.—Leviticus 26:7

BACKPACKS FILLED WITH BRICKS

Introduction

The doctrine of the assurance of our election, the assurance of our salvation, the assurance that we are children of God is a treasured doctrine. It is a doctrine that we hold dear to our hearts, for it is our comfort, our peace, and our joy. “Knowing himself as claimed by a God of sovereign mercy, the redeemed one has peace, and joy unspeakable, and he glories in the cross and will glory in God forever more.”¹

Lord’s Day 7 teaches,

Q. 21. What is true faith?

A. True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also *an assured confidence*, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are, freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 90–91, emphasis added)

True faith is “an assured confidence.” True faith *is* assurance! It is assurance of my election, of my salvation, and that I am a child of God. True faith *alone* is assurance. This assurance is given solely by the grace of God, apart from my obedience and apart from my good works.

We are justified *by faith alone*. *Alone* safeguards the doctrine of justification from all corruption. The word *alone* clearly and simply affirms the biblical teaching that sinners are justified exclusively by means of faith in Jesus Christ. *Alone* denies that the good works of the sinner are the means that justify along with faith. Faith alone is the instrument whereby the elect sinner appropriates Christ and all of the benefits of salvation that Christ earned for his people. And one of the blessings of salvation is the assurance of it.

This beautiful doctrine of the assurance of salvation was stolen from us when we were members of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). And this doctrine has been and is being stolen from those who are still members of the denomination. The false teachers in various Protestant Reformed churches today do not want assurance for their members. These false teachers think that preaching assurance makes men careless and profane. Protestant Reformed ministers and professors persistently teach and defend their doctrine that the Spirit is sent into your hearts *so that you can believe, so that you can obey, so that in the way of your faith and in the way of your obedience, you might have the joy of your salvation.*

In direct contradiction to the teachings that your obedience and your law-keeping merit for you one of the blessings of salvation (assurance) that Jesus Christ earned for you on the cross is the gospel that we hear in the Reformed Protestant Churches each Sunday. “The sending forth of the Spirit [in Gal. 4:6–7], therefore, is the act of God to give unto you the experience, the joy, the assurance of your salvation.”² By the work of the Spirit alone, we have the assurance of our salvation. To give us the assurance of our salvation is to give us salvation!

The ministers and professors in the PRC set themselves up as preaching and teaching holiness, righteousness, and godliness in the church. But there is no joy and comfort in their preaching. They are robbing the people.

Martin Luther aptly describes these teachers as

only teaching their own dreams, which they do not understand and which only confuse the people, because they cannot show how one can achieve what they set forth, but only point to ourselves, and thus men are strengthened in their old nature and habit, whereas they ought to lead people away from it.³

1 G. M. Ophoff, “Sovereign Election,” *Standard Bearer* 15, no. 8 (January 15, 1939): 192.

2 Nathan J. Langerak, “The Sending of the Spirit,” sermon preached on July 24, 2022, in Second Reformed Protestant Church, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=724222244552001>.

3 Martin Luther, “Sermon on The Sum of Christian Life,” in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Concordia, 1959), 51:287.

And now the PRC's preeminent theologian of false doctrine, Professor Cammenga, has set his sights on the children. In case his corrupt doctrines had not reached the ears of every child in the PRC, he has begun a campaign and doubled down on his efforts to teach the little ones to look to themselves for the assurance of their salvation. His campaign begins with writing a seemingly innocent little book titled *The Ten Commandments for Children*. Professor Cammenga is a wolf in sheep's clothing. And in writing a book with children ages six to nine in mind, the professor preys on the lambs.

The False Doctrines of Professor Cammenga

It is not my intent to write a book review proper of *The Ten Commandments for Children*, but I want to expose what I believe is the heart of Professor Cammenga's book. Let us head straight to chapter six, which is titled "Knowing That We Are God's Children." After an orthodox first paragraph, Cammenga lays out his feast of false doctrine:

There is one more important reason that we obey God's commandments. When we obey the law, God assures us that we are the children of God. Assurance means to be sure of something. The word "sure" is part of the word assurance. When you have the assurance of something, you know that it is true. You have no doubt about it. Children should have the assurance that their parents love them. They should have no doubt about that. God uses our good works to assure us that he is our God and we are his people. This assurance is also called knowing God. How can we know that we know God? The apostle John put it like this: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (I John 2:3). When we keep God's commandments and do good works, God strengthens our assurance.⁴

And there you have it. Do you see what he does? He adds to faith. He teaches that your obedience merits something, in this case the assurance that you are a child of God. It does not matter what orthodox doctrine precedes or follows this paragraph. Even the Protestant Reformed Synod of 2018 judged (weakly) regarding Reverend Overway's sermons that "the orthodox statements in the broad context of these sermons cannot be

used to justify these erroneous statements, but rather the orthodox statements are compromised by the erroneous statements."⁵

Cammenga can write in the next paragraph that we are not saved because we obey God's commandments and that every child of God knows that he obeys God's law only because God works that obedience in him. But Cammenga has already laid out the poison, so it does not matter if dessert follows his main course.

Children in elementary school are reading this book; little children are being read this book before bed; parents are using this book as a family devotional. One Protestant Reformed family wrote in a book review that this book is "a valuable book for all ages." Many children are in grave danger.

Of course, Cammenga will have his defenders, who will claim that what I take issue with in his book is taken out of context and that I am making baseless and sensational charges. But the fact of the matter is that he clearly loves his false doctrine, and he preaches and teaches it perennially. This false teacher unabashedly and stubbornly maintains his false doctrine. In fact I am sure if anyone would ask the professor outright about any of his statements quoted in this article, he would agree that he preaches and teaches them. He is not subtle with his false doctrine; he is brazen and bold in teaching it. He is thoroughly Arminian and wants nothing of the doctrines of grace.

Professor Cammenga teaches three doctrines that are especially grievous. It is worth our time to prove these specific false doctrines of the professor, particularly as they are connected to the subject and content of his book, the law of God as laid out in the ten commandments.

First, Cammenga believes that the law *is* the gospel, that the law is a means of grace.

It has ever been the teaching of the Reformed that the law serves as an instrument of grace.⁶

God uses the preaching of the law... positively, as a means of grace.⁷

And under the preaching of God's Word and, in particular now, under the preaching of God's law, that new man in us grows and develops.

That small beginning grows and grows, and it does so under the preaching of the law. God does not only use the law to teach us our sin, but

4 Ronald L. Cammenga, *The Ten Commandments for Children* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2023), 18–19.

5 *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches 2018*, 69.

6 "Protest of Prof. Ronald Cammenga," in *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches 2017*, 274.

7 Ronald Cammenga, "Thou Shalt and Thou Shalt Not: Preaching Commands," speech given on October 29, 2021, for the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary Conference: The Lord Gave the Word, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1031212047332844>.

he uses the law in order that that new man in us may grow.⁸

For Cammenga the law is also “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” But Romans 1:16 does not say that the gospel *and* the law are the power of God unto salvation. The Holy Spirit says that only the gospel is that power. The gospel is what saves God’s people. The gospel gives faith and the Holy Spirit. The preaching of the gospel is the savor unto life. The gospel is that salvation is all of God and nothing of man, which salvation is freely given us because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ by faith alone.

There is no power in the law. The law cannot make me live better; it cannot make me live a holy life. The law does not even motivate me to keep it! It does not give the Spirit. The law does not save. The law only condemns me. The law is always bondage and misery and terror of sin and of the judgment of God. The law only ever makes me ask if I did enough. And it only tells me that whatever I did do, I did not do it good enough.

The law only ever brings people under sin. The law never makes them holy. Only the gospel does this because the gospel brings the Spirit.

The preaching of the law is *not* the preaching of the gospel.

Second, Cammenga does not believe that Jesus Christ is a complete savior.

It is not enough for salvation that God has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It is not enough that there is a Jesus. It is not enough that this Jesus was born of a virgin; that this Jesus lived a perfect life; that this Jesus taught and defended the Word of God; that this Jesus suffered under the wrath of God in an atoning death; that this Jesus arose with his body from the grave on the third day; that this Jesus is ascended in power at the right hand of God in the heavens. Not enough for salvation. God must not only have sent Jesus into the world, but I must come and you must come to Jesus. I must become one with him so that I enjoy his fellowship and share in his salvation. For salvation it is necessary that I come to him. And if I do not come to him, there

is no salvation and no enjoyment of the blessings of salvation.⁹

This heretical sermon was protested at the Protestant Reformed Classis East in 2004, but the sermon was never condemned as false doctrine. It never ceases to amaze me that this sermon still stands today in the PRC. Refusing to condemn this sermon is an indirect form of approval. This is such a vile paragraph that it cannot possibly be explained away or excused by anyone claiming to be a child of God. What Herman Hanko wrote about John Wesley’s Arminianism holds true for the PRC, that “denigration of the cross led to disinterest in doctrine.”¹⁰ This is clearly the case in the PRC, for how else can this sermon stand except that the denomination does not care about the truth?

Nearly twenty years later Cammenga reaffirmed what he truly believes about Christ’s work. In a sermon on Lord’s Day 11, which says that Jesus is a “complete Savior,” who “saveth us, and delivereth us from our sins,” Cammenga preached,

The Catechism is not teaching here that Jesus accomplishes himself personally every aspect of the work of our salvation. He does not! There are other works alongside the work of Jesus.¹¹

This bears repeating: “There are other works alongside the work of Jesus”! Hear again from Hanko: “The error of not giving the cross its full due leads to an emphasis on human effort that denies the cardinal doctrine of sovereign grace.”¹²

“It is not enough” means it is not sufficient that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, died an atoning death, arose on the third day, and ascended into heaven. “Other works alongside the work of Jesus” means that something more is required besides Jesus’ work. But article 22 of the Belgic Confession states, “For any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides Him, would be too gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Savior” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 50).

Too gross a blasphemy!

Third, Cammenga believes “another gospel: which is not another” (Gal. 1:6–7). The “assurance” that Cammenga teaches is no assurance at all. For Cammenga

8 Ronald Cammenga, “God’s Law for His Redeemed People (19): The Marks of Christians,” sermon preached on February 5, 2023, in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=2523202049992>.

9 Ronald Cammenga, “Jesus’ Call to the Weary,” sermon preached on October 12, 2003, in Southwest Protestant Reformed Church.

10 Herman Hanko, *Contending for the Faith: The Rise of Heresy and the Development of the Truth* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2010), 275.

11 Ronald Cammenga, “His Name Is Jesus,” sermon preached on May 2, 2021, in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=5221181459852>.

12 Hanko, *Contending for the Faith*, 275.

justification is not by faith *alone*, but justification is by faith and works, particularly the works of obedience. What he teaches regarding good works, obedience, a holy walk, and faith is un-Reformed; it is Arminian. Cammenga's doctrine of assurance follows:

Although God works the assurance of faith under the preaching of his word, we are active in this whole matter of the assurance of faith. God does not drop assurance out of the sky on us, and now we have it forever, can never be taken away from us, and we have nothing to worry about as regards this matter of the assurance of our faith; but God's people are active, busy in this whole matter of the assurance of their faith.¹³

Only in the way of holiness do we enjoy the assurance, the assurance in ourselves, that one day we will come to the perfection that is proposed to us.¹⁴

Coupled with that infallible fruit of election [faith], as really the main fruit of election that the apostle refers to in the text [1 Thess. 1:4–6], he identifies two, closely related, *additional fruits* of election, by *means* of which they may know their election of God... The first of those other fruits of election is holiness. Holiness. Obedience to God by keeping his commandments and doing his will.¹⁵

This sermon is subtly treacherous because Cammenga's false doctrine is tucked deep inside many orthodox statements. This subtlety is common with heretics: they teach their views, shrouded in Reformed language and sounding as much like the truth as they can, and they deceive many along the way. We must remember that the sermon is about the assurance of our election, and the only fruit of election that is a means is faith! Fruits as Cammenga means them, as good works, cannot be means. Fruits are only fruits. His subject matter is the assurance of our election, and he adds works to faith.

In addition to being motivated by the glory of God, the gaining of others and the strengthening of our own assurance of faith are legitimate motivations for doing good works.¹⁶

Now, because of the weakness of our faith, our God ordains certain means for the strengthening of our faith, the confirmation of our faith. And one of those things is good works. *By the good works that the child of God performs, those good works that arise out of faith, those good works that are the fruit of the Holy Spirit living in your heart, we may be assured, says the Catechism, by the fruits thereof that we are the children of God.*¹⁷

The doctrine of the circumcision taught by the Judaizers in Galatia was that something must be added to the work of Jesus Christ. You stand before God with Christ, but you must also do something, whether that be your coming to Christ or your activity of faith or your good works. Over against this false doctrine, Paul says in Galatians 2:21, "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

The "gospel" of Professor Cammenga is that righteousness comes by the law. This is another gospel, a false gospel, which is no gospel at all.

The Truth over against the Lie

Let us now take a breath of fresh air and spend some time basking in the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Herein lies peace, comfort, and the assurance of salvation.

Scripture, the Reformed confessions, and the Reformed tradition all stand opposed to Cammenga's theology. Over against Cammenga's teachings that the law is the gospel, we see in Romans 8:3–4 the contrast, the distinction, between the law and the gospel.

3. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:
4. That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

The gospel is that Christ fulfilled the whole law. As Martin Luther so beautifully wrote,

13 Ronald Cammenga, "Saving Faith as Assurance," sermon preached on March 14, 2021, in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=31421175035658>.

14 Cammenga, "God's Law for His Redeemed People (19): The Marks of Christians."

15 Ronald Cammenga, "Assurance of Our Election," sermon preached on December 27, 2015, in Hope Protestant Reformed Church, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=13162223444>, emphasis added.

16 Ronald Cammenga, "Assurance and Good Works (5)," *Standard Bearer* 98, no. 14 (April 15, 2022): 328.

17 Ronald Cammenga, "The 'Must' of Good Works, (cont.)," sermon preached on June 19, 2022, in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=61922174930217>, emphasis added.

Therefore, keep these two [the law and the gospel] widely separated from each other...on the one side your life and holiness and the judgment seat, which demands and drives you to have a good conscience and live rightly toward men, but on the other side your sin before the mercy seat, where God will lovingly welcome you and take you into his arms like a beloved child with all your sins and frightened conscience and will no more remember any wrath.¹⁸

In his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, Ursinus wrote of several distinctions between the law and the gospel.¹⁹ In the section titled “In What Does the Gospel Differ from the Law?” Ursinus taught that the law was engraved upon man’s heart in his creation and therefore is known naturally, while the gospel is not known naturally but is divinely revealed to the church alone through Christ. Ursinus also taught that the law teaches us what we ought to be and what God requires of us, but the law does not give us the ability to perform it, and the law does not point out the way to avoid that which God forbids. The gospel, however, teaches us in what manner we may be made such as the law requires: the gospel proclaims unto us the promise of grace, by having the righteousness of Christ imputed to us by faith. The law promises life to those who are perfect. The gospel promises life to those who are justified by faith in Christ. The law is the letter that kills, and the law is the ministration of death (2 Cor. 3:6–7). But the gospel is the ministration of life and of the Spirit. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

Over against Cammenga’s teachings that Jesus Christ is not a complete savior, we read in answer 30 of the Heidelberg Catechism that

one of these two things must be true, either that Jesus is not a complete Savior, or that they who by a true faith receive this Savior must find all things in Him necessary to their salvation. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 95)

This is also declared in Belgic Confession article 22, which is worth reading again:

For it must needs follow, either that all things which are requisite to our salvation are not in Jesus Christ, or, if all things are in Him, that then

those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation in Him. Therefore, for any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides Him, would be too gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Savior. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 49–50)

Regarding Cammenga’s claim that the law is a means of grace, our Reformed confessions know of no such thing. Lord’s Day 25 teaches that “the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which He offered for us on the cross” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 108). The preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments are the means of grace taught in our three forms of unity.

And over against Cammenga’s wretched doctrine of good works and assurance, we read in Romans 5:1, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God though our Lord Jesus Christ.” *By faith* we have peace with God. Assurance.

The peace of the child of God

is assurance of salvation—*undoubted* assurance of salvation—as the benefit of justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the believer... Any religion, including corrupted forms of the Reformed faith, that withholds assurance of salvation from believers, or grounds assurance elsewhere than in justification by faith alone, sins against genuine “experience.”²⁰

As Luther so ably put it,

[My faith] does not rest upon me and is not founded upon my works, as if that were why God should be gracious to me, as the false, feigned faith does by mingling together God’s grace and my merit.²¹

The Canons of Dordt teach beautifully that Christ’s death purchased faith for the elect and that Christ confers that faith upon the elect.

It was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross...should effectually redeem...those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation

18 Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 51:283.

19 Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (1852; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company), 104–5.

20 David J. Engelsma, *The Reformed Faith of John Calvin: The Institutes in Summary* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2009), 243.

21 Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 51:281–82.

and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death. (Canons 2.8 in *Confessions and Church Order*, 163–64)

God conferred upon us faith! That is the assurance of our salvation, and it is apart from anything we have to do.

The man who *through faith* is sure in his heart that he has a gracious God, who is not angry with him, though he deserves wrath, that man goes out and does everything joyfully. Moreover, he can live this way before men also, loving and doing good to all, even though they are not worthy of love. Toward God, therefore, he stands in a relationship of *certainty* that he is secure for Christ the Mediator's sake, that he does not wish to cast him into hell, but rather lovingly smiles upon him and opens heaven for him.²²

Our relationship toward God is one of certainty and confidence, through faith, without our works of obedience.

So a man is made wholly perfect toward men through love, but before God, *not through the law*, but through Christ, whom he apprehends by his faith as the mercy seat, who lays down his holiness and gives it to me, so that in him I have what I need for salvation.²³

The believer's assurance of his righteousness in Christ is strictly by faith, regardless of his works. The only thing that man is in salvation is ungodly. The ungodly are justified! Only the ungodly. The law justifies no one.

The true meaning of "that everyone may be assured" in answer 86 of Lord's Day 32 has been corrupted. The PRC has snuck "salvation" into this Lord's Day, as if we are assured of our salvation by our good works. But Lord's Day 7 teaches faith in Christ to be our assurance and confidence of our salvation! Lord's Day 32 is not attempting to teach the assurance of our salvation. It is teaching the assurance of our faith. Faith inevitably produces fruit. And that fruit is a mark of faith.

The truth about our good works, first, is that our good

works are the purpose of our salvation. The reason that God saves us is that we may bear fruit, that we may do good works. Good works are the demonstration of our faith, so that God may be glorified!

Glory to God alone!

That is the purpose, and the *sole purpose*, of the good works of the Christian. This is also expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism, which teaches us that the purpose of good works is "that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us." The glory and praise of God is not a purpose, nor even the chief purpose, but is *the sole purpose* of the good works which the Christian must and may and can perform.²⁴

Second, the truth about good works is that the child of God loves good works and wants to do them.

Third, the truth about good works is that they are necessary. God commands that we do good works, but they do not earn us anything. Good works are only ever fruit. It is a monstrous lie on the part of Professor Cammenga to teach that good works are not only fruit but that they have other functions too, specifically the function of assuring one of his election and salvation. The professor despises the doctrine of free salvation.

Neither does he

understand the marvelous mystery of justification by faith.

For rather than causing men to rest secure in their sin so that they become careless and profane in their walk and conversation, the power of justification has the effect that it causes men deeply to abhor sin, to repent in dust and ashes, and to walk as children of light in the midst of this world.²⁵

Because of the glorious truth of justification *by faith alone*, we are in a relationship of peace with God, and we are assured of our blessedness and God's favor. We are assured of our salvation. God walks with us by his Spirit and speaks to us by his gospel. That is how we know that we are children of God. That is how we are assured of our salvation, and we have this assurance before we ever do one good work.

22 Luther, *Luther's Works*, 51:283, emphasis added.

23 Luther, *Luther's Works*, 51:283, emphasis added.

24 Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972), 3:36, emphasis added.

25 Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge*, 2:380.

Teaching the Children

The false apostles written of in the book of Galatians cast the people's assurance back upon man—upon man's obedience, upon man's righteousness, upon man's activity. And this is exactly the corruption that Cammenga teaches in his *Ten Commandments for Children*. It is a hallucination, a delusion, to believe for oneself and then to teach one's children that, though we are not perfect, and we cannot achieve perfection, we are still something before God; that we can merit something by our good works; that we can look to ourselves and look at our good works to be assured that we are children of God. It is a sin to believe this. It is an offense to God.

Cammenga is offended by grace. He believes that the gospel will make the little children careless and profane.

Cammenga believes that if he teaches the children the law, teaches them to look to themselves for the assurance of their salvation, that he will make spiritual people. But spiritual people are not created by the law. They are created by the gospel. Teaching someone not to steal, not to murder, or not to covet does not make that one spiritual. The law is not the gospel. The law cannot give anyone the power to obey it. The law is weak through the flesh. The children do not need

to become obedient; they must become ungodly. Romans 4:5: "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." This doctrine makes spiritual people.

Cammenga troubles the children (and believers of every age!) when he teaches them that the assurance of their salvation depends on what they do. He troubles them by making them think that they have to be something! He makes the children to labor for their salvation! Even a child can look within himself and see the evil. A child knows himself to be born in sin; he knows that he continually sins and that he is unable to produce what the law demands. No one keeps the law because the required obedience is perfection! And no child can attain perfection.

Cammenga fills the little children's backpacks with bricks, then sends them on their way. And those heavy backpacks are crushing the children with their burdens.

Cammenga fills the little children's backpacks with bricks, then sends them on their way. And those heavy backpacks are crushing the children with their burdens. The weight is unimaginable. There is no rest for these tired little souls.

The weight is unimaginable. There is no rest for these tired little souls.

Rev. J. A. Heys very clearly laid out that burden when he wrote,

If I have to do something *before* I can enjoy the consciousness of my salvation, then I **tremble with fear**, and I have **no joy or certainty of salvation**. Conditional theology exactly **takes all my joy away, for it takes Christ away**. And He is my righteousness which exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees. When I am afraid of the terrible wrath of God, then I can only find one place to hide and where I can breathe freely and where I can find peace. And that is behind Christ. He must be *before* me, must be between me and God. And I must be in Him and know that God judges me in Him. But if I have to hide behind a work of mine that God requires of me, if I have to believe that there is a condition that I must fulfill, I will never be conscious of any salvation.²⁶

The children need the gospel. Only justification by faith alone affords peace of conscience. Only that truth will remove the

heavy burden placed upon their backs.

Teach the children that they are nothing, that they are ungodly, that they are disobedient, that they are empty in and of themselves. Teach them that when they obey, *Christ is their righteousness*. And teach them that when they disobey, *Christ is their righteousness*.

Teach the children that keeping the law is not attainable. We are in captivity to the law of sin, which is in our members (Rom. 7:23). When the law is preached, sin is revived! Teach the children that God freely forgave their totally depraved natures and forgave all of their sins because Jesus Christ is the perfect man. He died for all of their sins and imperfections. Christ fulfilled the whole law.

Teach the children the proper place of the law in the life of the child of God. The law is not the gospel. But the law is the source of the knowledge of our misery. The law is also the rule for our lives of gratitude. Christ poured

26 J. A. Heys, "Afraid of the Gospel (7)," *Standard Bearer* 30, no. 5 (December 1, 1953): 111, emphasis in bold added.

out his Spirit on his church; he gave us himself in our new, regenerated hearts, so that we love and delight in that law. Our hearts are filled with thankfulness for our salvation.

Teach the children that they are imperfect perfect Christians. How imperfect is a perfect Christian? He delights in God after the inward man; and at the same time, everything he delights in, he does not do! Everything he hates, that he does. Can the regenerated child of God keep the law? do the good? No! He wills the good in his perfect heart, but he does not do the good. He hates sin in his heart, but he still sins.

The gospel makes man nothing. It makes our children nothing. The gospel is not for a good person or an obedient person. God justifies the sinner! God shows his power and greatness by utterly transforming the ungodly, filling the lives of the church with love. Of ourselves, there is no desire for God; our flesh dominates. God gives us his Spirit; and because we have that Spirit, we will walk in that Spirit. It is inevitable! The Holy Spirit is the power in our lives. There is no peace, no joy, and no assurance apart from the glorious doctrine of salvation by grace alone, in Christ alone, by faith alone.

Fallout in the Denomination

The grievous consequence for the PRC's tolerance of false doctrine is a rapid departure from the truth. The Protestant Reformed Synod of 2018 has been heralded within the denomination as the synod that finally called out the false doctrine that had been disturbing the peace of the denomination. Supposedly, Synod 2018 rooted out that which had compromised the gospel of Jesus Christ and exposed the doctrinal error that "when our good works are given a place and function they do not have, the perfect work of Christ is displaced."²⁷

But here we are, over five years later, and those same good works are still commonly given a place and function that are not found in scripture and the confessions. *In the way of your obedience* is now a corrupted phrase that did not help the PRC back to the path of right doctrine. It is a phrase that allows false teachers to peddle their wares of good works attaining the assurance of salvation. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. And the leaven of false doctrine was not hated for the lie that it is; the leaven of false doctrine was not rooted out; and it has now permeated every congregation. Christ has been displaced for years and years.

Practically speaking, when a denomination harbors

false doctrine long enough, the people naturally become tolerant or indifferent. And many are ignorant, for how can they recognize false doctrine when their ministers and professors either love the false doctrine or are too afraid to preach clearly against it?

I would like to point out some of the practical consequences of false doctrine having a home in the PRC for so many years, which I believe are further evidences that the denomination has left the truth.

Professor Cammenga is a seminary professor of dogmatics in the theological school of the PRC, who regularly preaches and writes false doctrine. Yet classis after classis and synod after synod goes by with nary a protest against him. The PRC has departed from the truth.

This same theologian has now written a children's book on the ten commandments. This coming from a man who believes that the law is the gospel! Who believes that your obedience to those ten commandments will assure you of your salvation!

But let us not kid ourselves; Cammenga is not the only professor who holds these beliefs. Let us hear from Professor Dykstra:

Everything points to Jesus Christ, the savior, and because the law points to Jesus Christ, the law is gospel. It is gospel. It isn't that we say, "Oh, we have a gospel, and we have a law," and try to separate the two. The law is gospel to us. It's setting forth Jesus Christ crucified, the Lord of all, our king.²⁸

And we cannot forget about Professor Gritters:

So for the praise of God, the assurance of my own salvation, and the good of the neighbor, we must be doing good works.

If perhaps you are doubting your salvation... then your pastor or someone else may say, "But look at what God has produced in you in your life." You'll have all kinds of objections to that kind of reasoning, but that's not a bad method to use with someone who doubts his salvation. "Look at your fruit."²⁹

This is the comfort that Professor Gritters brings to the troubled saint: "Look at your fruit." Clearly, the PRC has departed from the truth.

In publishing Professor Cammenga's book, the Reformed Free Publishing Association has dusted off a project that was shelved years ago due to, among other things, doctrinal

²⁷ *Acts of Synod...2018*, 70.

²⁸ Russell Dykstra, "The Reformed, Covenantal View of the Law," sermon preached on March 19, 2017, in Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=31917115537>.

²⁹ Barry Gritters, "Must We Still Do Good Works?," sermon preached on July 24, 2016, in First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=730161745482>.

concerns. But the board members who were troubled by the manuscript that would become this book are no longer members of the PRC, having fled to the Reformed Protestant Churches. Which means that there was no time like the present to roll out the red carpet for Cammenga's book for children. Clearly, the PRC has departed.

This same publishing house then went on to host a book release party for *The Ten Commandments for Children*. Captured in photos is a room full of standing adults and many children sitting at the feet of Professor Cammenga while he reads his false doctrine to the little ones. Clearly, the PRC has departed.

Furthermore, this false doctrine for children has extended past use by parents in the home to semi-official instruction in the church. I was made aware of a note in the bulletin of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in June of this year that "the Sunday School students are asked to meet briefly after the morning service today for their papers. *The Pre-K/Kindergarteners won't have any papers. Instead, they will be reading from Prof. Cammenga's new book The Ten Commandments for Children each week.*" I shuddered when I read that. Now, we are talking about four-, five-, and six-year-olds! Did Southeast's consistory put a stop to the use of that book? Were there any parents who were troubled by the use of that book? Did parents allow their children to sit under the teachings of that book?

Southeast church filled the children's backpacks with bricks. The shoulders of preschoolers and kindergarteners are being made to bear the crushing weight of a doctrine that is an offense to God.

Rev. Herman Hoeksema wrote in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, "We know very little of an infant's life, but it is certain that long before what is usually considered the age of discretion there can be and is a decided influence of the Word of God upon the covenant child."³⁰ The flip side of that coin is the influence of false doctrine, which may not and cannot be overlooked or minimized. False doctrine also has a decided influence on young minds.

The decomposition we have witnessed since leaving the Protestant Reformed denomination is unimaginable. There is no "safe" church within the denomination. Every minister that I am aware of who has preached false

doctrine makes his rounds on the various pulpits. Reverend Koole and Professor Cammenga, who many even in the denomination recognize to be the chief offenders of the gospel of peace, regularly preach all over the country. Every minister partakes of the sin of departing from Christ in doctrine by silence or connivance. "Silence is also a denial of God's truth, whatever a man may hold in his mind."³¹ There may be a minister who does not preach false doctrine himself, but because he will not preach explicitly against the lie that is taught within the denomination, he is only half a minister.

To those still listening in the PRC: Don't you want your minister to warn you about the lie? especially the lie within your midst? Don't you want your elders to keep you and your children safe in the truth of the gospel? Don't you desire a consistory that will not tolerate false doctrine for a moment, in any way, shape or form? especially if the form is a children's book? This has not been the case! And you should be filled with a holy anger, especially for your children.

But here is the rub: If a minister perhaps recognizes the horror of little children being subjected to the deadly false doctrine taught in *The Ten Commandments for Children*, how could he stop it? To challenge the book would be to challenge the professor. And then there is a real problem. Because challenging that false

doctrine would require losing one's life. And that is a very high cost. But no cost should be too high when the gospel is at stake. Where is the love for the truth in the PRC?

Professor Cammenga is a teacher of false doctrine, but the other ministers and professors in the PRC are the grand compromisers, willing to sell their convictions for the price of peace with a heretic.³²

Clearly, the PRC has departed from the truth.

Conclusion

The Ten Commandments for Children is sinful indoctrination of little ones. I can only pray that God opens the eyes and ears of the parents in the PRC so that they recognize the terrible lie of conditional theology taught in that book: that "when we obey the law, God assures us that we are the children of God"; that "God uses our good works to assure us that he is our God and we are his people";

The children need the gospel.
Only justification by faith alone
affords peace of conscience.
Only that truth will remove the
heavy burden placed upon their
backs.

30 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 2:312.

31 Hanks, *Contending for the Faith*, 274.

32 Hanks, *Contending for the Faith*, 274.

that “when we keep God’s commandments and do good works, God strengthens our assurance.”³³

To anyone who still has an ear to hear: recognize Cammenga’s doctrine for the filth that it is, namely, Arminian conditional theology. Recognize that doctrine to be the same doctrine that the former Rev. David Overway preached. Recognize that there was, at one small moment in time, a holy horror that that theology was taught in the PRC. Are there yet any souls who are troubled by the lie and its steady beat in the PRC?

To the people whose souls are vexed because they see the false doctrine that is taught within the walls of the PRC: do not linger! Especially for the sake of your children!

The big tent that is now the Protestant Reformed Churches has covered the masses from the weather, and they are now soothed to sleep by the sweet sound of raindrops. They think all is well. But false doctrine abounds under this tent. And Professor Cammenga is ready and willing to teach the children to look to themselves for the assurance of their salvation.

It is fitting to conclude with words from men of God who faithfully taught and continue to teach the flocks that God entrusted to them.

Regarding the false teachers in the PRC,

Let them remain in their vicious circle until they too humble themselves; we, however, will not remain in that circle, but step out of it as far as ever we can, into that free circle and place where stands the mercy seat. And we appeal to it with full right, because we did not invent it with our own brain. It is rather [God’s] own Word which declares it and threatens stern, terrible judgment upon them who come with their own holiness, as if they could stand before God with that, and pay no regard to the mercy seat of Christ.³⁴

Over against the wicked teachings contained in *The Ten Commandments for Children* is the truth that

assurance is not found in the way of your obedience. Assurance is found in the cross of Jesus Christ and is the gift of the Spirit of the risen Lord sent into your hearts by the God of your salvation, who willed that you know his love and have the peace that passes all understanding. That assurance is the irresistible work of the Holy Spirit, and he frees us from the bondage of the law, so that we walk at liberty.³⁵

—Alisa Snippe

33 Cammenga, *The Ten Commandments for Children*, 18–19.

34 Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 51:278.

35 Langerak, “The Sending of the Spirit.”

THE BEATITUDES (2): BLESSED MOURNERS

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. — Matthew 5:4

Introduction

For someone to say that the beatitudes are preached wrongly in our mother church is an understatement. The amount of confusion that surrounds the preaching of the beatitudes is exemplary of a greater issue in the ministers' preaching of much of the sacred scriptures. Whereas the beatitudes ought to be blessed comfort for the people of God, the beatitudes become a series of virtues in scripture, which when one compares himself to them, he can be assured of his own salvation and blessedness. Some preach that the beatitudes are meant merely to encourage the church to pattern herself after a set of virtues, while others make the "doing" of these spiritual virtues the way in which the church experiences the blessing of God, so that the blessing becomes a mere possibility. The gospel of the beatitudes is altogether cast aside in favor of a doctrine of man and his experience.

Surely, the beatitudes have something to say about the believer's experience. The beatitudes are not abstract statements of fact devoid of any practical significance. However, the beatitudes are also meant to teach us something about our salvation. In the beatitudes God is everything, and man is nothing. This must be determinative for a proper understanding of the beatitudes, as well as for any other passage in scripture. That God is everything and man is nothing is the essence of all pure religion, and it stands at the heart of God's sovereignty in salvation. Therefore, when the text proclaims blessing upon the poor in spirit, we may not understand that as a mere possibility for the church to be blessed when she first does something or adheres to some spiritual virtue. Nowhere in the beatitudes in either the King James Version or in the original Greek is there the slightest hint of a potentiality or a conditional statement. Blessed are the poor in spirit—period. Blessed are the meek—period. There is absolute certainty of blessing upon those who are poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourn, and the others mentioned in the beatitudes.

Neither may the beatitudes be treated as individual statements lacking any logical connection between themselves. The citizens of the kingdom who are poor in spirit also mourn and are meek. The citizens of the kingdom hunger and thirst after righteousness. It is utterly impossible, then, for a citizen of the kingdom to possess one spiritual virtue and not another. All of these things are true of a citizen of the kingdom. And those who do not possess these spiritual virtues cannot be called citizens of the kingdom. It is that simple. Those whom God blesses he also makes poor in spirit, meek, and all the rest.

Last time we considered the first beatitude. In the first beatitude Jesus preached to his disciples the most basic principle of the citizens of the kingdom: they are poor in spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." That is striking. It is blessed, happy even, to be poor? And yet those were the words of the Lord Jesus on the mount. A carnally minded person would perhaps expect Jesus to say, "Blessed are the rich." The carnally minded would wrap the blessing of God in a neat little package that takes the form of the earthly. Earthly riches and earthly prestige, honor, and glory are the blessedness of the carnally minded person. That all goes well for a man is esteemed greater riches than the treasures of the kingdom of heaven. However, the blessing of God is not in things. Instead, to be blessed is to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. And those who are the proper citizens of that kingdom and the objects of the blessing of that kingdom are the poor in spirit.

Not all are poor in spirit. Many are rich in spirit, supposing to themselves that they are something and have whereof to merit with the just and holy God. However, the poor in spirit have been made to stand before the very presence of God and to confess about themselves that they are nothing but debtors with an insurmountable debt that they cannot even begin to repay. The poor in spirit are blessed not because they worked for their blessedness, but they are blessed because for their sakes

Christ became poor and suffered the penalty that was due to them for all their indebtedness to God. Those God has redeemed. It is those whom God blesses.

And now we read the words of the Lord Jesus: "Blessed are those who mourn."

Blessed are those who mourn? Again we are faced with an almost unbelievable statement by the Lord that the world cannot receive. The world madly rushes from experience to experience, seeking all the thrills and pleasures of this life, supposing that an outwardly happy life is a blessed life. But notice that is not at all what the Lord says. Blessed are those who mourn. The citizens of the kingdom and thus the proper objects of the blessing of God are mourners. This is the reality concerning them.

This beatitude as such is not an encouragement for us to mourn. The beatitude is not a call to action. Many break the passage down that way. The gospel of the passage is not "Mourn; and in the way of mourning, you will be comforted." This beatitude is not an encouragement for us to confess our sins before God, so that in the way of our mourning, we shall know and experience the blessedness of comfort. Neither does this beatitude establish the possibility of comfort through mourning. If there may be comfort only in the way of our mourning, then there never will be any certainty of comfort or blessing. Comfort will be a mere pipedream. However, that is not at all the meaning of the text.

Instead, the text is a pronouncement of blessing upon those who mourn. Unto them the Lord Jesus declares that they shall be comforted. This beatitude is a promise that is Jehovah God's holy oath concerning those who mourn. It is as if God had said, "Let me be destroyed as God if I fail to perform that which I have promised, to bless all those who mourn."

The Blessed Mourning

What, then, is this blessed mourning that we read about in the second beatitude? By the very fact that some mourners are blessed, the text implies that there is a certain mourning that is not blessed. The mourning that the passage speaks of is the exact opposite of its antithesis, which is the sorrow of the world that works death. The world may mourn over many things. The world may mourn over regrettable decisions, undesirable consequences, or unplanned catastrophes. The mourning of this beatitude

is not the mourning of guilt, nor is it the mourning of despair. These forms of mourning all have their end in death. There is no blessing in these sorts of mourning, but there is only cursing. Rather, the blessed mourning of the passage is that which is deep and profoundly spiritual, involving the inward manner of the heart. The blessed mourning is not the sorrow of the world that works death, but it is that godly sorrow that works repentance.

The living reality of the man and woman whom God has made poor in spirit is that God makes them to sorrow over their sins. For Jesus does not speak to those who are already in the kingdom of heaven in its final state of perfection, but he speaks to those who yet dwell upon this earth. In this world there are pain and suffering, as they are the grave effects of the curse of God against sin. Sin has broken through this present world

and makes life in this world a source of constant pain and struggle for the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. For the sin that plagues this present world is in their very natures, is always working in them, and is a continual source of grief of mind to them.

The sure sign of the man and woman who have been made poor in spirit is that they sorrow over their sins. A greater knowledge of one's sin and the

greatness of its offense necessarily produces within the heart a greater sorrow over sin. This is the truth concerning these mourners. There is a profound change of mind concerning sin that takes place. There is a turning from sin and a fleeing from sin. This mourning proceeds out of a heart that has been broken on account of sin.

What, then, is determinative for this blessed mourning? The blessing of God stands behind this blessed mourning as the source or origin of this mourning. The eternal will and good pleasure of God for these mourners is to bless them. Therefore, they mourn. For who in all the world truly mourns over sin? Indeed, if the question ever came to man whether he could sin freely without any consequences or whether he could mourn over sin, then man would always choose to sin. Man by nature always chooses sin because man by nature is the servant of sin and the enemy of God. Man by nature holds the truth that may be known of God under in unrighteousness and would rather perish in his sins than turn from his sins unto the Lord his God. For this reason the world does not mourn. Instead, the world celebrates sin. The world laughs at sin and parades about sin in

The blessing of God stands behind this blessed mourning as the source or origin of this mourning. The eternal will and good pleasure of God for these mourners is to bless them. Therefore, they mourn.

a maniacal frenzy. The people of the world scoff at the very thought that they should sorrow over sin. By their lack of concern over sin, they would even imply that God approves of their sins or, at the very least, turns a blind eye to them. According to the judgment of God, all whom God has not eternally willed to bless shall perish in their maniacal laughter, so that they no longer laugh but mourn and weep.

However, the mourner is blessed in his mourning. The blessed mourner sees his sins as offenses to God. Since those sins are offenses to God, those sins are also offenses to the blessed mourner. He sees both his original sin and actual transgressions. The blessed mourner trembles and is wearied at the feeling of his infirmities, the pull of his natural disposition to commit sin, and the weight of the curse of God against sin in the world, as that world continues under the grips of the prince of the power of the air. The blessed mourner notices how easily he is tempted and how easily he falls into sin. The blessed mourner is a broken-hearted person. The evil that he wishes to avoid, he does; and the good that he wishes to perform, he does not accomplish, so that even the very best of his works become unrecognizable to him because they are covered in sin. In the night watches one can often find this blessed mourner exclaiming alongside the apostle, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24).

The Cause of This Mourning

What, then, explains the mourning of these blessed mourners? We are not now discussing the occasion for their mourning or the reason for their mourning. For their mourning is occasioned by sin. On account of their indwelling sin and their actual thoughts, words, and deeds, they mourn, sometimes very grievously. However, sin is not the cause of their blessed mourning. While the cause is not so clearly stated in Matthew 5:4, we must understand the close connection between this verse and its preceding context. Those who are poor in spirit are such because the kingdom of God has reached down to them and caused them to know and confess the weight of their debts that they owe to God and their own absolute inability to repay those debts. Such is the effect of God’s gracious rule in the hearts of his people by his word and Spirit. It is therefore the most basic principle of those who are the citizens of that kingdom that they are poor in spirit.

Similarly, it is whenever the kingdom of heaven comes in all its power to those who are poor in spirit that they also mourn. Because the king of the kingdom of heaven reached down in grace unto them and laid hold upon them, they were also translated out of the kingdom of

darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. This same gracious rule of God, whereby he caused them to stand before his presence and to confess their own nothingness, also then causes them to sorrow over their sins.

There can be no explanation concerning the mourning of these blessed mourners other than that the kingdom of heaven has confronted them. Unless the kingdom of heaven reaches down and causes a man to mourn, he will perish in all his laughter and in his maniacal giggles over sin, by which man makes an open mockery of God.

However, it is at this point that we must be very clear on what the relationship is between this blessed mourning and the mourner’s name and place in the kingdom. Establishing this relationship in the clearest possible way is necessary considering many who make man’s repentance a prerequisite for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Not only is man’s repentance not a prerequisite or a condition that man must fulfill to enter the kingdom, but man’s repentance is also not the way unto the conscious enjoyment or experience of covenant fellowship with God in that kingdom.

Rather, this blessed mourning is a gift of the kingdom. Those who are members of the kingdom of heaven through faith in Jesus Christ have been made to partake of all the gifts and riches of that kingdom in Jesus Christ. How, then, can one know that the kingdom has come to a man or a woman? Simply stated, that man and woman to whom the kingdom of God has come mourn for their sins. That is really the first sign or proof that the kingdom has come and laid hold upon a person. For it is impossible that those who have been brought into that kingdom do not mourn. This blessed mourning is the powerful and efficacious work of God in Jesus Christ by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, this mourning is the life of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. When the kingdom of heaven reaches down and confronts man in his sins, the mourning that takes place is not merely a one-time event. When the text mentions the blessedness of those who “mourn,” it is not referring to a single event but to ongoing activities of the citizens of the kingdom. The reality of their indwelling sin, their ever-increasing debt, and their utter lack of any goodness in themselves is a constant source of sorrow for the citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

This life of mourning is not primarily outward, although there may be an outward expression of sorrow. Rather, this life is primarily inward. It is a profoundly spiritual life. Surely, there may have been a time in the life of the blessed mourner in which he or she can remember being first arrested by God and caused to mourn over his or her sins. There are certainly moments throughout the lives of the blessed mourners in which

they wander in the way of sin for a time and are returned to the way of serious repentance. And their mourning is not paralyzing. Blessed mourners live as citizens of the kingdom. As citizens of the kingdom, they continue to mourn all their lives. From an outward point of view, these mourners appear just like everyone else. They are husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, children, teachers, and students. However, in all their lives they live out of the principle of broken-heartedness over their sins, a genuine turning from their sins, a sincere sorrow over their sins, and a profound change of mind concerning their sins.

The Blessed Comfort of the Blessed Mourner

Blessed be those who mourn. Sometimes it does not seem that way. Oftentimes we can become so consumed by our grief that we may foolishly wonder whether the Lord truly does bless those who mourn. However, it is with the word of this passage that Jesus dissuades all our sinful doubts and fears. The word of this text comes and calls us not to be faithless but believing. For God promises that those who mourn shall be blessed.

Over against this stands a sharp antithesis. Cursed shall be those who laugh at sin and maniacally mock God in their sins. While those maniacal giggles are still on their tongues, they are being cursed by God. There is no blessing for them but only cursing and bitterness, whereunto they were appointed. Now they laugh, but their end shall be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

The blessedness of those who mourn is given in the words “for they shall be comforted.” The form that the blessing of God takes in the hearts and lives of those who mourn is that of comfort. Truly, the mourning itself is a blessing from God. However, the text gives us even more. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

Here in Matthew 5:4 we have clearly demonstrated the blessedness of those who mourn. They *shall be* comforted. The tense of the verb does not strictly relegate the blessedness of those who mourn to the future, even to the absolute future. Surely, in the absolute future when there shall be no more sin and no more death in the new and everlasting age, then all tears shall be wiped from their eyes. In the absolute future, then, this present, sin-cursed world shall be taken up into the new and everlasting kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. Our glory shall be fully manifested when the tabernacle of God shall be with men. Then shall we see God face to face in Jesus Christ and shall know even as we are known.

However, the meaning is more this: blessed are those who mourn; for according as they are certainly blessed, they certainly shall be comforted. There is an infallible connection between those who mourn and their being comforted. The blessedness of those mourners is that they shall be comforted. This comfort shall be theirs infallibly. We know and taste that comfort now in no small measure in the preaching of the gospel. While we yet are in this world and have yet to deal with the sinful lusts of our flesh, God uses means whereby he bestows such comfort upon us, who are aggrieved because of our sins.

What does it mean to be comforted? Literally, it means *to call to the side of*. How often do we not walk into church grieving and distressed over our sins? Having fought the battle of faith the whole week long, we come battered and bruised into the pews. Our eyes are weary with tearful anguish over our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. And then—wonder of wonders—we are comforted. By the preaching of the gospel, God comes and calls us by his sovereign and efficacious voice. When God speaks, he calls into existence the things that are not as though they were, and he raises the dead. Whenever God calls unto sinful men and women whom he has willed to bless, he breaks through to their hard hearts, softening them from their impenitency, and creates in them true godly sorrow over their sins. When God calls them, he binds their wounds and gently heals the broken-hearted ones with the balm of Gilead: Jesus Christ.

What is the only comfort of these blessed mourners? Their comfort is that they with body and soul, both in life and in death, are not their own, but they belong unto their faithful savior, Jesus Christ. The comfort of the blessed mourners is in the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ, whereby Christ bore the penalty of all their sins on account of which they ought to have remained comfortless and wallowing in their sins and despair. The comfort of the blessed mourners is that, through every fiery trial and temptation in this vale of tears, the Lord Jesus preserves them by his strength and power, keeping them in communion with him, so that they are at no time separated from him. The comfort of the blessed mourners is that the Spirit, who is himself called the Comforter, witnesses internally to the truth of the gospel in their hearts, so that they are constantly assured of their salvation and their blessedness in Jesus Christ. This comfort is sure and steadfast unto those who mourn.

—Garrett Varner



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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

For our God is a consuming fire. —Hebrews 12:29

This text stands as the reason that the church of the new day must serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire.

The original Greek of this verse includes the word *also*: for our God *also* is a consuming fire. He is gracious. He is merciful. He is full of tender compassion. He is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. He is *also* a consuming fire.

That he is a consuming fire means that he is holy. He is the Holy One, who does all things for his own sake; who seeks his own glory, honor, and praise; and who, therefore, always consumes everything that does not bring to him the honor that is due him. And so the church of the new day, of the new testament and the new covenant, must serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

From this God we have received a kingdom that cannot be moved. We have received it graciously. It is a kingdom that has broken into the world with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And it is the kingdom that will break in at the last day, and the coming of the kingdom will shake the heavens and the earth and all things. God made this world to be shaken. Never did he have the present form of the world as his purpose, but his purpose was always the eternal kingdom in Jesus Christ, his Son. And so God made this world to be shaken. This world must be shaken according to the eternal purpose of God and by the coming of the kingdom that he promised in his Son.

God shook the world in paradise the first and introduced the way in which his kingdom would come—the way of sin and death and of grace and redemption. And did God not shake even the earthly form of this creation in the flood? His kingdom came in typical form when its coming shook Mount Sinai. But the very thing that was shaken—only the ground—signified that Israel looked for an earthly kingdom, an earthly city in an earthly land. That too must be shaken. It was shaken in the destruction of Jerusalem. It was shaken ultimately at the cross, so that form shall never return.

In the resurrection the new day has come. And the church of the new day has received from God in Jesus Christ a kingdom that cannot be shaken. And yet a little while, yet once more, the one whose voice shook merely the ground at Sinai will shake all things, so that those things that cannot be shaken may remain, and the kingdom of Christ will have come in its fullness. And that kingdom we have received: graciously and freely without any of our efforts but through the gift of God, who loved us and gave his Son, Jesus Christ, for us.

And having received that kingdom, let us have thanksgiving! This is the meaning of “let us have grace” (v. 28): let us have thanksgiving and with that thanksgiving to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. All the thankful service of God must be with reverence and godly fear. Can it be that if you bring to God your works and your repentance and your holiness that you fear him? You have forgotten that he is a consuming fire. He consumed Christ, and you have displaced him.

In all the service of the living God, never may it be forgotten that he is *also* a consuming fire. And so all of your service of God must be filled with reverence and godly fear: deep humility before God as sinners and a lovely childlike fear of God, who is a consuming fire.

—NJL