

The background features a stylized orange illustration. On the left, a sword is shown in profile, pointing upwards and to the right. On the right, a shield is depicted, also in profile, facing left. The shield has a circular design with several smaller circles inside. The sword and shield are rendered in a flat, graphic style with white outlines and orange fills.

# 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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## FAITH WITHOUT PARTIALITY

*My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. — James 2:1*

Who has not heard a man loudly proclaim his faith in the doctrine of marriage? Marriage is for life. There may not be divorce except for fornication. There may not be remarriage while the other spouse is living.

The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ himself taught us so about marriage. So a man proclaims that this is his faith. The precious truth about marriage is dear to his heart.

Until his son divorces his wife, covering his garments with the violence of divorce, covering the altar of God with the tears of his abandoned wife and children, and covering the name of God with blasphemy. This wicked son the father now defends, and for his son the father carves out a large and comfortable place in his life.

Respect of persons.

Have not the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons.

The faith of the Lord Jesus Christ is true faith. It is the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ because it has Christ as its object. In Christ is all the blessing that comes to the believer by faith. This faith is worked by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's elect, uniting them to Christ their savior. It is a gift of pure grace. The believer holds for truth all that God reveals in his word. The believer trusts in God alone for salvation. By faith the believer receives from Christ every blessing of his cross and draws out of Christ all his goodness and grace.

By that faith alone we are saved. Faith without works saves. Faith saves because faith has Christ, in whom all salvation is found.

Having that faith, one also makes a true and right confession of Jesus Christ. The faith of the Lord Jesus Christ is the true and complete doctrine of salvation: the doctrine of the Reformed creeds that summarize the doctrine of sacred scripture. One who has the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ confesses the truth so that no charge can be laid against his doctrine.

There is nothing more glorious that one can say about someone's doctrine and confession than "It is the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ." Confessing that doctrine, he confesses to have the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having that faith, he confesses to have salvation in Christ.

Respect of persons is the sin of partiality in judgment.

Partiality belongs to the sin of antinomianism in the church. Partiality tramples the law of decency and order, the law of God, the law of the church, and the law of society in order to show preferential treatment to another. Because of one's close relationship to another—a friend, a brother, a cousin, a son, or an uncle—he is judged differently. Because one is rich, he bears a certain last name, or he holds a position of influence in the church, he is judged differently. Respect of persons is the sin of judging on the basis of appearances or consequences, not on the merits and facts of the case and regardless of the consequences involved. The partial judge has the facts but will not judge on the basis of the facts. Respect of persons invariably involves condoning sin.

Imagine the scene. There is a judge into whose court two men come. Both are charged with the same crime. The evidence against both is equally strong. It is clear that both are guilty. But the judge acquits his rich and influential friend and condemns the unknown beggar. Everyone would cry out, "That judge is corrupt. His evil judgment is not based on the facts of the case and according to the laws of the land. His judgment is based on the persons who are in his judgment. The one he respects. The other he despises."

Respect of persons.

Have not the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons.

In the church it happens.

Two men come into church. The one is a rich man in fine apparel: a gold ring on his finger; a well-tailored suit; brightly polished, finely crafted leather shoes; a gold tie clip; and jewel-studded cuff links. He is well-kempt, articulate, and knowledgeable of the people. He is highly spoken of in the community. The other is a man in vile raiment. He is obviously poor. The members of the church have a hearty welcome for the rich man and give him an excellent and honorable place in the church. Many crowd around him in the narthex to be regaled by this easy raconteur. But they say to the one in the vile clothes, "Sit here under my feet." They have no greeting for him but contemptuously dismiss him. He stands alone in the foyer.

Respect of persons.

Beloved brethren, have not the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons.

But it becomes worse. This partiality in the church is



not only the evil preference of the rich over the poor, but also the preference of the wicked rich over the godly poor!

The rich man with whom the members of the church attempt to curry favor lives in sin and adds to his wickedness the slander of the truth and the oppression of the people of God. The rich man for whom they carve out a place in their assembly, in their affections, in their narthex, and in their homes is an unbelieving oppressor of the righteous. He is the rich lawyer, the influential doctor, or the well-heeled businessman who divorces his poor, godly wife. He is a man who delights in defaming the denomination, the minister, the elders, the members of the church, and the truth the church holds dear. By respect of persons, the wicked rich are showered with affection in the face of their obvious and impenitent hatred of the truth, their openly ungodly lives, or their public oppression of the people of God. The respecter of persons knows how to treat the wicked enemies of God just right, accords them great respect, opens his fellowship to them, and makes sure that their feelings are never hurt.

Respecters of persons also despise the poor people of God, who are rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of God. Respecters of persons despise the poor woman abandoned by her husband. They nod their heads approvingly as the wicked rich savage the minister and elders. The enemy of the truth or the

impenitent sinner is preferred over the poor who are rich in faith and objects of the oppression of the mighty.

Outrageous respect of persons!

Some sin is a great threat to the church until it happens in your family. Some sin is vile until your son commits it. Some wicked behavior is evil until it is found in your friend. Some evil speaker against the church is judged to be a good and upright person because he is an acquaintance. Because a man in a church is rich, popular, influential, or holds high office, he receives preferential treatment, and the rules are bent or ignored for him. The church will discipline one because he is lowly, but not another because he is mighty.

Beloved brethren, have not the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons. These two things are totally incompatible and antithetical. They cannot exist together. Where respect of persons reigns, there is no faith. Where faith reigns, there is no respect of persons. To have respect of persons is to deny the faith, though one's doctrine is impeccable.

By faith the believer consciously stands before the presence of Christ and lives in the light of the glory of Christ. He understands that Christ is the ultimate judge by whom all are judged.

By respect of persons, we become judges of evil thoughts.

The judge's thoughts are to be concerned only with the truth. Even before he is concerned with justice, he is concerned with truth. Whenever a judgment is based on truth, there will be justice. The judge's task is to seek the truth. The judge's calling is to judge in harmony with the truth in every situation. He must have the facts and judge only on the basis of the facts. He is to have a blind eye and a just balance so that all are weighed equally in the balance of the law. The judge must call evil, evil, and he must call good, good. With such thoughts the judge will always justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, regardless of whether they are rich or poor, bond or free, acquaintances or strangers, or mighty or weak. The gold of the one does not count any more than the rags of the other.

The respecter of persons is a judge with evil thoughts. The judge who respects persons does not reason on the basis of facts and the truth. He is not interested in seeking

the truth but in justifying a friend. He reasons about how his judgment will be advantageous to himself, how he will profit from it, what the costs of his judgment will be, or what the consequences of his judgment might be. Then, seeing and understanding that to judge justly will cost him a friend, or a son, or some earthly advantage, and being unwilling to bear that cost, he judges unjustly.

The carnality and covetousness of it all!

The respecter of persons is carnal, not spiritual. He does not live before the face of God and judge before the face of Jesus Christ. How could he? He does not stand before God by faith. You cannot have the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ and respect persons. The respecter of persons is dazzled by the gold chain of the rich man and the potential for favors the powerful man can offer him. He is interested only in the earthly relationship with his son or family member and thinks not of heaven. The respecter of persons is like the wicked whom he justifies. Claiming to hold the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, his respect of persons betrays evil thoughts and a faithless heart.

What can a poor man give to such a person? Indeed, the poor man—righteous and rich in faith—will offend the respecter of persons with a rebuke of his covetousness, faithlessness, and respect of persons, just as that same poor man offended the wicked rich who hate him.

What a contrast with God! Did God choose the rich of this world? Listen to what Paul says:

26. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:
27. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;
28. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:
29. That no flesh should glory in his presence.  
(1 Cor. 1:26–29)

God chose the poor of this world rich in faith. The spiritual condition of those whom God chose was poverty. Even if a man were as rich as Abraham or Solomon, he would be chosen as a poor man. All became unspeakably poor in Adam. God made Adam rich. God made Adam rich with righteousness, holiness, and true knowledge. Because of his rebellion against God, Adam was stripped of that image of God. Adam became unspeakably poor. All his children became poor, too. They were judged guilty of Adam's sin. And that sin alone is such a debt that they can never pay it. Besides, all Adam's children have a mountain of debt because of all their actual sins. They were loathsome and disgusting in their poverty, and dirty and unwashed in their wickedness. They were lost in sin and darkness.

God did not choose the good, the mighty, the noble, the powerful, and the spiritually rich; but he chose spiritual beggars, his enemies, and disgusting people. He chose them eternally. He appointed them to salvation.

The partial person, the unjust judge, who speaks well of the wicked and oppresses the righteous, has forgotten who he is. He is a respecter of his own person first. He is a partial judge of himself and in himself. He does not judge himself as a wretched and miserable person of the worst sort, whose salvation depends on God's pity alone. He does not see himself as nothing in the sight of God. He is something in his own eyes. But all are beggars.

God made beggars rich. Did his love and favor shown to them in his choice of them give them earthly riches? God gave them the riches of faith. Faith is unspeakable riches. If you have faith you have the world, because if you have faith you have Christ Jesus and are an heir of the eternal kingdom of God. If you do not have faith, though you have the riches of Croesus, you have nothing. To the believer, to each and every believer of whatsoever station or calling he finds himself in this life, God has promised the world. Do not count yourself rich if you have only the riches of gold and silver. Count yourself rich if you have faith. By faith we are saved, by faith we inherit eternal

life, and by faith we are heirs of an everlasting inheritance and God's eternal kingdom.

By faith the believer consciously stands before the presence of Christ and lives in the light of the glory of Christ. He understands that Christ is the ultimate judge by whom all are judged. He understands how Christ judges. He justifies the righteous and condemns the wicked. He will cut off wicked persons. He does not suffer them. He cares not for their gold, and their influence has no influence with him. He is a just judge. There is no respect of persons with Christ. That is his glory.

So the believer is not dazzled by the riches of the rich, the influence of the powerful, or the name of the mighty, because he is dazzled by the glory of Christ and respects only Christ. So the believer likewise casts the wicked out of his affections as hateful to God, instead of showing them favor. The believer strenuously opposes the wicked in their sinful behavior and opposition to the truth, instead of overlooking their sin, coddling them in their wickedness, and excusing their evil.

Living in light of the glory of Christ, the believer does not despise the poor and those who offer no earthly advantage to him. He loves his poor neighbor. Is this not the chief part of Christ's glory, by which he became the glorious judge of all? He condescended to us of low estate. He became nothing for us. He who was rich became poor for our sakes, that we who are poor might become unspeakably rich in him. He did not despise us poor beggars but gave his life for us. If we live in the light of that reality, we, too, cannot possibly be respecters of persons, partial in ourselves, and judges of evil thoughts.

So, beloved brethren, I warn you: have not the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons. By respect of persons, we give the lie to our profession of faith. We choose men over God, Christ, and the truth.

Is that not a terrible lawlessness: the lawlessness of respect of persons! By means of respect of persons, more lawlessness comes: wickedness is tolerated, approved, and excused in the church. In order to do that, the law of God is ignored, trampled, and pushed aside. What rules in the church, then, are the names, faces, reputations, and words of men; and the word of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, is ignored. Invariably this involves the oppression of God's people, for the wicked who we let into our affections will not suffer the people of God to go without oppression.

No, respect of persons is the beginning of denial of the faith, and where it is carried on the faith cannot long endure.

So, beloved brethren, let your faith be without partiality.

—NJL

## OUR PRESENT CONTROVERSY (2)

The present battle in the Protestant Reformed Churches has been waged over one main theological topic: man's experience of salvation and covenant fellowship with God. The topic is man's experience: man's experience of God's friendship, man's experience of salvation's blessings, man's experience of assurance and peace. Specifically, the conflict has been whether a grace principle or a works principle governs man's conscious experience of the covenant and salvation. Is man's conscious experience of salvation by grace or by works? Is man's conscious coming to God by grace or by works? Is man's assurance of his justification by grace or by works? Is man's enjoyment of covenant fellowship with God by grace or by works? Is man's confidence of prayer's answer by grace or by works? In summary, does a grace principle or a works principle govern man's conscious experience of salvation?

It is critical to identify the topic of controversy as man's conscious experience of salvation because the controversy has been plagued by confusion on this very point. There are three main points to develop.

Point One. There is a distinction between the *fact* of man's salvation on the one hand and man's *experience* of his salvation on the other hand. Or, to say the same thing, we could speak of man's salvation from an objective point of view (the fact) and subjective point of view (man's experience of the fact). Or, to say the same thing, the Heidelberg Catechism often asks, "What is the meaning of..." to describe the fact of our salvation, and "What advantage or profit is it..." to describe our joyful, comforted experience of our salvation (for example, Lord's Days 10, 14, 18–19).

The fact of salvation is that God has saved his elect people from sin and death and hell by his grace through Jesus Christ. It is a fact that God loves his people with an eternal and unbreakable love (Ps. 103:17). It is a fact that God establishes his eternal covenant of grace with them in Jesus Christ (Gen. 17:7). It is a fact that Jesus came in their flesh to redeem his people (Heb. 2:14–15). It is a fact that their sins are covered by the blood of Christ's atonement (John 10:11). It is a fact that they have been given the Spirit of their Lord to unite them to their Savior (John 14:16–17). It is a fact that they have been regenerated and are new creatures (1 Pet. 1:23). It is a fact that they have been called out of darkness into God's marvelous light by the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen (1 Pet. 2:9).

It is a fact that they have been united to Christ by faith and that they believe in him (Rom. 11:20). It is a fact that they are justified before God's tribunal for the sake of Christ (Gal. 2:16). It is a fact that they are sanctified and made holy by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11). It is a fact that they are preserved by God in a life of good works and that their salvation cannot be lost (1 Thess. 5:23). It is a fact that laid up in glory they have an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled and that fades not away (1 Pet. 1:3–4). All of this is the fact of salvation.

On the other hand, God not only saves man from sin and death through Christ, but God also gives man the conscious knowledge and experience of his salvation. God has made man a rational, moral, spiritual, personal, passionate creature who personally has a soul and a mind and a will and emotions, so that he knows his salvation, is conscious of it, experiences it, and has various spiritual and emotional responses to it. Salvation is a fact, but it is a fact that touches man in his heart and in his mind. Man enjoys his salvation; he is assured of his salvation; he consciously knows his God and joyfully walks with him in the bonds of God's covenant love. The fact of salvation: God forgives sins. Man's experience of salvation: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven" (Ps. 32:1). The fact of salvation: justification. Man's experience of salvation: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). The fact of salvation: the gift of faith. Man's experience of salvation: "We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him" (Belgic Confession 22). The fact of salvation: the gift of the Holy Ghost. Man's experience of salvation: "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16). The fact of salvation: the covenant. Man's experience of salvation: "What is thy only comfort in life and death? That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1).

Point Two. Though there is a distinction between the fact of salvation and man's conscious experience of his salvation, they are both equally and entirely the gift of God. The fact of salvation and the experience of salvation are

both salvation. They are both the gracious work of God in Jesus Christ. God graciously accomplishes the fact of man's salvation and God graciously bestows man's experience of salvation. Inasmuch as salvation is all of God, both the fact of salvation and man's conscious experience of salvation are all of God.

It is probably well enough agreed that the fact of salvation is entirely a gift of God's grace in Christ. It is worth demonstrating that man's conscious experience of salvation is also entirely a free gift of God's grace in Christ. This truth is taught powerfully in the prophecy of the Lord's Anointed in Isaiah 61. The prophecy of the Lord's Anointed is one of the central prophecies of the Old Testament. This prophecy defined Jesus' mission and work. It explained the purpose for which he was sent into the world. Jesus himself highlighted the importance of this prophecy at the outset of his public ministry. Entering the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus took Isaiah 61 as the text of his inaugural sermon. After reading the passage, he announced his own fulfillment of the prophecy: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). What was the prophecy of the Lord's Anointed? It was a prophecy that God would send his Anointed into the world to rescue his people and to make them happy. It was a prophecy that the Lord's Anointed would give to man the conscious experience of his salvation.

1. The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;
2. To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;
3. To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified. (Isa. 61:1–3)

Not only does the Lord's Anointed liberate the captives, but he gives the oil of joy in the place of mourning and replaces the spirit of heaviness with the garment of praise. He gives the conscious experience of salvation!

The Heidelberg Catechism also teaches that the experience of salvation is a gift. It does this by describing the believer's comfort as being entirely due to Christ and to Christ's work.

What is thy only comfort in life and death?

That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him. (Q&A 1)

Man's conscious experience of salvation is a gift of God's grace in Christ. Therefore, the grace principle of salvation governs man's conscious experience of salvation. Just as the grace principle of salvation governs the fact of salvation, so also the grace principle of salvation governs man's conscious experience of his salvation. That is, man's conscious experience of salvation is due entirely to God's grace in Christ, is worked entirely by God's grace in Christ, and is obtained entirely by God's grace in Christ. Whatever the Bible says about salvation by grace alone also applies to man's experience of salvation. "For by grace are ye saved"—and by grace do ye consciously experience salvation—"through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9).

This means that the works principle of salvation cannot and may not explain man's conscious experience of salvation. Man's good works do not produce man's conscious experience of salvation. Man's good works do not contribute to man's conscious experience of salvation alongside God's grace. Man's good works do not bring him consciously into God's fellowship or assure him of his justification or give him the confidence of prayer's answer. Truly, good works are wonderful and enjoyable, and the child of God delights to do them. But man's salvation, including man's conscious experience of his salvation, is not due to his good works. The works principle of salvation cannot be applied to man's conscious experience of his salvation any more than it can be applied to the fact of man's salvation. Whatever scripture says to rule out salvation by works also applies to man's conscious experience of salvation. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works"—your conscious experience of salvation is not of works either—"lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9).

The truth that man's experience of salvation is a gift from God through Christ decides the controversy,



because a gift is not earned. A gift cannot be earned, for then it ceases to be a gift and becomes a wage. Because man's experience of salvation is a gift, it must be governed by the grace principle of salvation and not the works principle of salvation. All of man's obedient working is as unable to gain him the experience of salvation as it is unable to gain him the fact of salvation. The Lord's word to his servants applies also to the experience of salvation: "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).

Point Three. The controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches has been about this precise topic: Does a grace principle or a works principle govern man's conscious experience of salvation? The reason it is so important to acknowledge this precise topic is that there is no controversy regarding the *fact* of man's salvation. All are agreed and have always been agreed that the grace principle governs the fact of man's salvation. All are agreed and have always been agreed that God accomplishes the fact of man's salvation, and that man does not accomplish the fact of his salvation, nor does man contribute even the slightest to the fact of his salvation. All are agreed and have always been agreed that the works principle of salvation does not and cannot govern the fact of man's salvation.

The problem is that, to this very day, many assume that the only topic under discussion was the fact of man's salvation. We fail to acknowledge that the controversy was never about the fact of man's salvation. The controversy was always about that other topic: man's conscious experience of his salvation. No one applied a works principle to the fact of man's salvation, but many applied a works principle to man's conscious experience of his salvation.

Failure to acknowledge the precise topic as man's conscious experience of his salvation has plagued the controversy and continues to plague the controversy. The plague is that the Protestant Reformed Churches are largely unaware of how deadly was the error that they embraced. The thinking goes, "All of our Protestant Reformed ministers have always taught the same thing through this controversy, and no one has ever taught differently. The same goes for our consistories and other ecclesiastical

assemblies. We have all always taught the same thing." Well, yes and no. Yes, our ministers, consistories, and assemblies have all taught the same thing about the fact of salvation: it is governed by a grace principle. God be praised for this unity! But our ministers, consistories, and assemblies have not all taught the same thing about man's conscious experience of salvation. When it comes to that precise topic, there have been two sharp, antithetical, and irreconcilable theological positions. One theological position is the works principle of man's conscious experience of salvation. That is, man's works obtain, contribute to, and secure his assurance of justification, his confidence of prayer's answer, and his enjoyment of covenant fellowship with God. According to this principle, when it comes to man's conscious experience, man saves himself. The other theological position is the grace principle of man's conscious experience of salvation. That is, God's grace alone obtains man's conscious experience of salvation, with no contribution from or cooperation by

man's works. According to this principle, when it comes to man's conscious experience of salvation, God saves man.

If the Protestant Reformed Churches fail to acknowledge the precise topic of theological controversy, they will be ignorant of the heresy that threatens them. Being ignorant of it, they will fall into it again and embrace it again. The urgent warning must be sounded to the churches: Be aware of this false doctrine! And beware lest it overcome you!

One might ask whether this analysis can really be correct. Has the controversy really been a works principle applied to man's conscious experience of salvation? You don't have to take my word for it. You can test it yourself with the *Acts of Synod 2018*, where the chasm between the two theologies can be most clearly seen. Synod examined and condemned sermons that taught the works principle of man's conscious experience of salvation. The sermons taught, "We do good works so that we can receive God's grace and Holy Spirit in our consciousness. So that we can consciously and with awareness receive the grace and Holy Spirit of God" (62). "Obedience is required here, obedience that I must perform in order to enjoy fellowship with God" (64). "If we but meet these requirements a little bit, by the grace of God, of course, and by God's grace working them in

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us—if we meet these requirements but a little, then we will enjoy a little of God’s fellowship. That’s the truth. If we meet these requirements a lot, then we will enjoy much of God’s fellowship” (65). “We look at our good works in the same way. Never of any value to make me be declared righteous before God, but always of help in finding and maintaining assurance that God has justified me through Christ and Christ alone” (68).

Over against the works principle of those sermons, an appellant to Synod 2018 maintained the grace principle of man’s conscious experience of salvation. “The main teaching...that I object to is the concept that our obedience is a condition that we must perform in order to experience the fellowship of God. I consider this theology to be that of a conditional covenant” (103). “I believe that because the basis of our experience of the fellowship and covenant of God is Christ alone and His work alone, that makes the sole means to that fellowship be faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. I believe the fruit of God’s work of grace in us bringing us into His fellowship is obedience. In that covenant fellowship there will be and must be obedience therefore, but that obedience does not bring us into that experience of the fellowship of God because that obedience is the fruit of that gift and is only fruit” (103). “So the essential question that needs to be

answered is this: Is our experience of the covenant conditional or not? Everything else in my protest hinges on that question” (103–4).

Synod agreed with and upheld the appellant, declaring, “The doctrinal error [of the sermons] is that the believer’s good works are given a place and function that is out of harmony with the Reformed confessions” (61). “The doctrinal error of the sermons then compromises the gospel of Jesus Christ, for when our good works are given a place and function they do not have, the perfect work of Christ is displaced. Necessarily then, the doctrines of the unconditional covenant (fellowship with God) and justification by faith alone are compromised by this error” (70).

This, then, has been the recent controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches. On one side, the heresy that a works principle governs man’s experience of salvation. On the other side, the biblical and Reformed truth that a grace principle governs man’s experience of salvation.

Next time, we will examine the current status of this controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches, sketching the two main phases of the controversy: the events leading up to Synod 2018 and the aftermath of Synod 2018.

—AL

## FROM THE EDITOR

As you will see in this issue, the letters are starting to arrive, to the delight of the editors and, we trust, to the delight of the readers of *Sword and Shield*. Actually, private letters and emails have been arriving steadily since before the first issue of the magazine hit the press. Thank you to all who have written so far, and we invite all and sundry to keep the correspondence coming. With this issue, we are able to print two letters, and we look forward to letters to the editors being a more or less regular feature of *Sword and Shield*.

As you will also see in this issue, other contributors are making an appearance. Professor Engelsma’s incisive review of Sam Waldron’s book continues to be reprinted, this being the second of three installments. We also welcome Mrs. Connie Meyer, who graces this issue with her poetry.

The date of the first annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing is approaching swiftly. That date is October 15 (Thursday) at a time and venue to be announced. This information will not be published in

bulletins, so be sure to mark the date on your calendars now. An invitation is extended to all Reformed believers to join RBP. Applications for membership are available on the RBP website: [reformedbelieverspub.org](http://reformedbelieverspub.org). Applications will be accepted at the annual meeting on October 15, but you do not have to be present to be accepted, making it possible for Reformed believers anywhere in the world to join RBP.

With this issue, the time has come to subscribe to *Sword and Shield*. This is the third and final of the issues being mailed free of charge to introduce the magazine to our readers. We hope that you have profited from the magazine this summer, whether you intend to subscribe or not. Those who would like to continue to receive *Sword and Shield* each month, you can do so at the annual rate of \$24 in the USA and \$36 internationally. The easiest way to subscribe is via the Reformed Believers Publishing website.

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

—AL

June 10, 2020

Editors of the *Sword and Shield*,

Your invitation to write a letter or submit a comment concerning the *Sword and Shield* is the stimulus and purpose for writing this letter.

I was not surprised to receive the letter because I had heard of the intended publication.

At the time I heard of it I was of the opinion that something of this form was not necessary in the Protestant Reformed Church.

It is wrong at this time for ministers of the Word in the Protestant Reformed Churches to announce themselves and be used as members of Reformed Believers Publishers and necessary contributors to the publication of the *Sword and Shield*. Whether the SS is merely an addition to the Standard Bearer or a replacement for the faithful SB, now one hundred years old, is unwise and errant. The Standard Bearer, a necessary periodical produced since 1924 by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, is not regulated by the Synod like the Banner in the CRC. The SB not without errors has since October, 1924, become the periodical needed by the PRC.

Disagreement or dissension that requires correction can be attempted through Reformed church political ways.

The Reformed Believers Publishing (PBP) is permitted legally to publish the *Sword and Shield* because the US Constitution Bill of Rights permits freedom of the press. Reformed writers have always been permitted to exercise this liberty.

The editorial states that you love the Protestant Reformed Churches and this love will be the root of fighting for the truth's sake. Such fighting must not be slanderous or divisive.

Fighting for the truths sake does not make the *Sword and Shield* necessary. The Standard Bearer certainly does publish for the truth's sake.

I may not always want to but I will read the *Sword and Shield* and read it with discernment not because I support it but because it exists.

My allegiance and support is with the Standard Bearer. I look forward to receiving the SB that is usually published two times a month. It's been a messenger of the truth since 1924. May God through the writers keep the SB as a messenger of the truth.

The challenge for the *Sword and Shield* is that it will be a messenger of the truth.

"If any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus

Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness he is proud, knowing nothing, and doting about questions and strife of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmising." I Timothy 6:3-4.

In Christ,  
Agatha Lubbers

Your promise to read *Sword and Shield* warms our hearts, especially because it is a promise made at no small cost to yourself. Even though you may not want to read *Sword and Shield*; even though you do not support it; even though your opinion is that it is unnecessary; even though you fear rivalries and division; even though you judge it to be wrong, unwise, and errant; even though your only reason for reading it is that it exists; yet you will read it. Yet you will read it! Music to our ears! May your example inspire others who also have their doubts and objections to say likewise, "I will read *Sword and Shield*." And upon reading it, you may just find, to your joy and ours, that you also come to support it as a messenger of the truth that teaches "wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3-4).

The Editors



Dear Editors,

I am having a hard time finding a good, written answer to this question: Can conditional salvation ever be rightly explained by saying that Christ fulfilled all the requirements of our salvation?

Would you be interested in answering this question for myself and the benefit of other readers?

Thank you.  
In Christ,  
Annette Kuiper

Thank you for your letter, and your question is a good one: Can conditional salvation ever be rightly explained by saying that Christ fulfilled all the requirements of our salvation? The answer is an emphatic, no. Conditional salvation can never be rightly explained by saying that Christ fulfilled all the requirements of our salvation.

The key concept here is "conditional salvation." Conditional salvation teaches that man's salvation depends upon man. Whether it is man's supposed inherent goodness, or man's work, or man's will, salvation depends upon man. It is "conditional" salvation because man's



contribution to his salvation is the condition upon which his salvation depends. Rome, for example, teaches that man's obedient good works merit eternal life. Man's works are the condition for his salvation. Arminianism, for example, teaches that man's act of believing is the condition for his being elected and saved. Examples could be multiplied, for any theology that teaches that man contributes to his own salvation is a theology of conditional salvation. The question is not whether one uses the word *conditional* to describe his theology, but whether one's theology makes man contribute to his own salvation. Any theology that has man saving himself in any sense is conditional theology.

You ask whether conditional salvation can ever be rightly explained, indicating your own judgment that conditional salvation is wrong. Your judgment is correct. Conditional salvation is the lie, and it is always the lie. There is never a way to make conditional salvation the truth. There is no qualification that will make it true. There is no explanation that can make it right. Conditional salvation is always and forever the lie. The truth is that salvation is purely gracious. Salvation depends upon the sovereign God and never upon man. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9). Even the beautiful God-given good works in which we walk do not contribute to our salvation and are of no account to our salvation, for they are entirely of God in Christ. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

Your question is theologically profound, for your question exposes one of Satan's favorite tactics to deceive the unwary. That tactic is to ascribe conditional salvation to the gracious work of God in Christ. The devil pays lip service to God, to God's grace, and to God's Christ in order to camouflage the God-dishonoring, grace-denying, and Christ-opposing heresy of conditional salvation. The devil takes the lie—conditional salvation—and mixes it with the truth—Christ has fulfilled all the requirements of our salvation. The result of that mixture is still the lie—conditional salvation—but now in a form that appears to honor Christ and so deceives many.

It has always been the tactic of Satan to confuse this issue by appealing to the grace of God and to the work of Jesus Christ as the explanation for how man can fulfill the supposed conditions of his salvation. The argument

goes this way: Man's believing and obeying are the conditions upon which man's salvation depends, but it is God's grace to man and Christ's work in man that enable man to fulfill the conditions. By appealing to God's grace and Christ's work, the devil obscures the fact that salvation still depends upon man. It is still man's believing and obeying that accomplish man's salvation, regardless of where man receives the power to believe and obey. It is still man's fulfillment of the condition that saves him, regardless of how man fulfills the condition. It is still conditional salvation.

This is Rome's tactic in its doctrine of conditional salvation, as taught in Rome's 1563 Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent.

The Synod furthermore declares, that, in adults, the beginning of the said Justification is to be derived from the prevenient grace of God, through Jesus Christ, that is to say, from his vocation, whereby, without any merits existing on their parts, they are called; that so they, who by sins were alienated from God, may be disposed through his quickening and assisting grace, to convert themselves to their own justification, by freely assenting to and co-operating with that said grace: in such sort that, while God touches the heart of man by the illumination of the Holy Ghost, neither is man himself utterly inactive while he receives that inspiration, forasmuch as he is also able to reject it; yet is he not able, by his own free will, without the grace of God, to move himself unto justice in his sight.<sup>1</sup>

Notice in Rome's explanation the repeated appeals to God's grace and Christ's work, so much so, that man is "not able, by his own free will, without the grace of God, to move himself unto justice in his sight." Nevertheless, man still saves himself. Men "convert themselves to their own justification, by freely assenting to and co-operating with that said grace."

This is also the Arminian tactic in defense of conditional perseverance, which tactic was exposed by the Synod of Dordt in 1618–19. Arminianism teaches "that God does indeed provide the believer with sufficient powers to persevere, and is ever ready to preserve these in him, if he will do his duty; but that though all things which are necessary to persevere in faith and which God will use to preserve faith are made use of, it even then ever depends on the pleasure of the will whether it will persevere or not" (Canons of Dordt 5, error 2).

1 The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, sixth session, "Decree on Justification," in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 2:92.



Notice in the Arminian doctrine the appeal to God's work of providing "the believer with sufficient powers to persevere" and God's willingness "to preserve these in him." Nevertheless, man preserves himself, for "it even then ever depends on the pleasure of the will whether it will persevere or not." The Canons condemn this as "an outspoken Pelagianism" (Canons of Dordt 5, rejection 2).

This was also the tactic of the Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder, whose conditional covenant theology infiltrated the Protestant Reformed Churches in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Schilder watched these churches reject conditions by their provisional adoption of the Declaration of Principles in 1950. The Declaration states, "That faith is not a prerequisite or condition unto salvation, but a gift of God, and a God-given instrument whereby we appropriate the salvation in Christ."<sup>2</sup> Schilder's tactic was to insist that he agreed with the Protestant Reformed Churches on the point that faith is a gift. "Any meaning put in the word *condition*, causing it to mean that faith is not *given* but *comes* from ourselves, will be rejected wholeheartedly by all of us!"<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Schilder maintained conditional salvation, for he taught that God makes his gracious promise of salvation to every single baptized child on condition of the child's faith.

When the Form for Baptism declares that, by baptism, God makes promises to us it clearly says, "He makes promises to *this by-name-mentioned-child*." He can safely say this and also teach this to us, because the promise goes hand in hand with the demand. To *this child* is said, "You, child, under the condition (that is to say under emphasized assurance and stipulation) that your faith will be and must be the only way in which all this will happen (therefore you are called and *obliged* to this), the Father *will* provide you with all good and He *will* avert all evil or turn it to your benefit, the Spirit *will* impart to you what we have in Christ."<sup>4</sup>

If it is wrong to camouflage conditional salvation with God's grace and Christ's work, what is the truth of the matter? The truth of the matter is that salvation is unconditional. Salvation is entirely the work of God's grace in Christ without any cooperation or contribution whatsoever by man. Salvation does not depend upon man in any respect or at any point, but depends entirely upon God and his Anointed. To use the language of your question, "Christ fulfilled all the requirements of our salvation." *Christ* fulfilled all the requirements of our salvation. Christ *alone* fulfilled all the requirements of our salvation. God never laid the requirements of the salvation of the elect upon the elect as the condition for their salvation. From eternity God appointed Christ the head and mediator of the covenant and laid the requirements of the salvation of the elect upon him.

Election is the unchangeable purpose of God whereby, before the foundation of the world, He hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault from their primitive state of rectitude into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation. (Canons of Dordt 1.7)

Here is the lie: Salvation is conditional, but Christ fulfilled all the requirements of our salvation.

Here is the truth: Salvation is unconditional, because Christ fulfilled all the requirements of our salvation.

Your question points us to an important lesson about our response to a doctrine of conditional salvation. When we encounter such a doctrine, let us beware of any attempt to explain it, or excuse it, or qualify it, or defend it by appeals to God's grace and Christ's work. It is Satan's lie! When we encounter a doctrine of conditional salvation, let us deny it, repudiate it, condemn it, and reject it. For the love of God's truth!

—AL

2 *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 423.

3 "Good Condition Theory," in Jelle Faber and Klaas Schilder, *American Secession Theologians on Covenant and Baptism & Extra-Scriptural Binding—A New Danger* (Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada: Inheritance Publications, 1996), chap. 7, Kindle.

4 "To You," in Faber and Schilder, *American Secession Theologians & Extra-Scriptural Binding*, chap. 53, Kindle.

*Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.—Titus 2:1*

## FELLOWSHIP OF THE WORD

**W**hat is the value of the prohibition of Genesis 2:17 that Adam not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

It is insufficient only to deny the prohibition as a ground for the error of a covenant of works. The prohibition also has a positive purpose, that is, to establish the truth of the covenant as a bond of fellowship and friendship between the creator and the rational, moral creature that is man. When this positive purpose is well understood, the contribution of Genesis 2:17 to the truth of the covenant is powerful.

How was covenant life already possessed and enjoyed in paradise? What was its fellowship and friendship? What was its bond of communion and fellowship? It was a bond of love, knowledge, and delight. It was the bond possessed between the living God and the bearer of the image of God. But it was that bond enjoyed and exercised. It was that bond as both known and lived in. The covenant was God and man in friendship, each regarding the other with love, each having respect to the other in constant communion. The covenant is life with God.

This exercise of friendship and fellowship with God must also have respect to the great difference between God and man. They were indeed covenant friends. In that friendship was their communion. But one was the creator. The other was the creature. One was the sovereign. The other was the servant. Together they walked, and together they lived, as sovereign and servant.

The glory of this covenant fellowship for both God the friend-sovereign and man the friend-servant was exactly *that* God was sovereign and man was servant. The glory was that the servant was completely dependent on his sovereign. It was the glory of the creature to be dependent on his creator, of man to be dependent on God. Man's glory was to need God. So true was it, that the converse was also true. It was to be the deepest shame for man to be independent of God, as was indeed so shamefully proved.

The prohibition of Genesis 2:17 serves two points for the display of the covenant glory of man as the servant of his sovereign God.

The first point is that the word of God in Genesis 2:17 involved a tree that God's sovereign word distinguished from all the other trees in the garden. That distinction

was made clear in contrast to verse 16: "The LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat." This word of the Lord God is itself important. It means, essentially, that man was meant to live by the word of the Lord. The word of God spoken on the third day gave existence to the trees that the Lord planted eastward in Eden. But God did not leave it to man to discover by himself the trees or to find their fruit nourishing. By his word, man's sovereign friend gave Adam the trees of the garden with their fruit for him to eat. By that word, man might so take and eat of all the trees of the garden in the blessed knowledge that he was eating from the hand of his God, who would always care for his needs.

The second and more significant point is that God by his word distinguished the tree of the knowledge of good and evil from the other trees in the garden. His word distinguished that tree regarding the eating of its fruit. Of all the other trees man might freely eat, but he might not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And man might not eat of it according to the word of God. God by his word distinguished that tree also regarding the consequence of eating its fruit. By the word of God, that tree must become a tree of death: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

What a distinguishing word of God that was! The natural, increased manner of the trees of the garden was so obvious that it is easy to overlook. Trees were created by the word of God for fruit for man to eat, by which eating he might live. Still there is, and must be, the word of God spoken and declared. Thus, God's word of Genesis 1:29: "Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat." The trees of the garden held out their fruit for man to pick and eat. Man might freely eat of all the trees in the garden. But the word of God also clearly distinguished one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, from the other trees in the garden. The divine word threatened death upon the eating of that tree.

Such was the word of God that the sovereign friend spoke to his servant-friend. This word was from friend to friend and from sovereign to servant, determining the nature of their life together. Man's life was to trust the

word of his sovereign friend. Man's life was to live under the word of his sovereign friend. The servant's life was to live near to his sovereign. It was the servant's life to live under his sovereign.

Man's life was to be antithetical. His life was to be in antithetical obedience to the antithetical word of his sovereign Lord. Where the word of his Lord said yes, man was free to go and free to do. "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat." Where the word of his Lord said no, man was not free to go and free to do. Under the word of his Lord, he must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The antithesis was between life and death, between obedience and disobedience, between eating of all in obedience, and eating of the one in disobedience.

In light of the above, the statement of the Belgic Confession in article 14 becomes clear: "The commandment of life which he [Adam] had received he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life." Two critical, related words in this line are most significant. The first is the word "transgressed," which signifies the action of crossing over the boundary between right and wrong. What lay on one side of that boundary was man in the life he received from God and in fellowship with his God, obeying God's commands of Genesis 2:16–17. His life was eating and not eating according to the word of God. On the other side of that boundary was eating what God had by his word prohibited, and prohibited upon the spoken penalty of death. "The commandment of life...he transgressed."

The second critical, related word in article 14 is "separated." This word touches on the union between the friend-sovereign and the friend-servant. According to this article, the "life" of the friend-servant was God. Accordingly, man's death was that he separated himself from God, his life. In and by man's disobedience, he revolted from his fellowship of obedience. Departing from God in transgressing his sovereign friend's commandment of life, man departed from his life. In that departure from God was man's death.

An important phrase in article 14 is "the commandment of life." "Commandment of life" refers to the word of God, the expression of the will of the friend-sovereign to his friend-servant. For this point we go beyond the *content* of that speech, the commandment of life that man transgressed, and consider the aspect of the covenant that *is* speech, the communication of words from friend to friend, from sovereign to servant.

As noted before, the covenant word, or speech, does not make or establish a covenant relationship. The covenant relationship as a bond of fellowship and friendship was part of man's creation in the image of God. In

that fellowship, however, the covenant word occupies an important place. It is the exercise of the sovereignty of God in friendship toward his servant. The word is the exercise of that bond, the revelation of the will of the sovereign Lord toward his beloved servant. The word is also the gift of opportunity to the Lord's servant. The word distinguishes the way of service, how the servant lives to walk with his Lord, doing always and only what is pleasing to his Lord. The word distinguishes that way antithetically. It sets out what is pleasing over against what is displeasing. It explains the way to keep, as well as the way to keep away from.

Another important point regarding the covenant word is its solid relationship of prohibition to judgment pronounced: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." To be sure, this is a negative word. But it is a negative word of covenant that describes what lies outside the scope of proper covenant fellowship. The word establishes the relationship between disobedience and death, what must happen when the commandment of life is transgressed. The importance of this negative covenant word is that it divinely establishes the word of God as a covenant word that is solid and sure. Though indeed negative, it is still a sure and everlasting word from the mouth of the covenant God, whose name is Jehovah.

From the very beginning, then, even before the fall, we are meant to understand something of the immutable word of the covenant God. Just as the prohibition with its threat was a sure word, so will be the divine word of covenant promise, namely, that God in Christ will forever be the covenant God of his elect people.

The importance of the word of God in Genesis 2:16–17 as a covenant word is made clear in the New Testament commentary given in the words of Jesus Christ. His answer to Satan in the first temptation—"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"—was indeed a reference to Deuteronomy 8:3 and the manna in the wilderness that Israel received day after day. However, there are good, biblical reasons for understanding Jesus' words as referring also to Genesis 2:16–17. Chief among these reasons is that exactly where the first Adam miserably fell, there the second Adam stood gloriously. The word of God that man transgressed, the Son of man kept perfectly.

Another reason is Jesus' reference to the "mouth of God," or the word of God. In the case of Christ, yes, stones can be turned by a divine word of command into bread. But it is the will of God's word that must be obeyed, though obedience means certain, deep, gnawing hunger. Man must live by the word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, not by bread only.



Integral to the life of man is the word of God to him. By that word, man is to walk in covenant fellowship with his God. His walk must have respect to that word as a word of his sovereign friend. It is not only a divine word of friendship but also a divine word of service. Man's life is a life of a servant-friend. His friendship is to live in service to his God by the word that proceeded out of the mouth of the sovereign. By the word that directs man and governs him, he must live in humble obedience to his God. Man's glory as servant is to obey, to live out his yes to the yes of his sovereign friend and to live out his no to the no of his sovereign friend. Together they must walk in life, the servant following in his heart and way the word of his sovereign.

At this point it is helpful to see the great significance of the covenant word in distinct relationship to the covenant life of man that he already possessed by virtue of his creation. The covenant word was not a means for attaining, according to the erroneous covenant of works. But the covenant word was a means for man to exercise and enjoy covenant fellowship with his God as man already possessed it. Genesis 2:16–17 was the word of God for man to live by, in both its positive and negative parts.

It is an easy matter to think about the negative part of this word: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." It is easy because it was by that word that man did die. That word of God, his sovereign friend, man disobeyed—an act of enmity. By that word of his sovereign friend, certain and sure, man brought upon himself the judgment declared. He ate and he died. That negative side determined the subsequent history of the world, including the necessity of the death of the Son of God, the second Adam. The second Adam must come to bring covenant salvation, restoring and exalting to heavenly fellowship the elect, fallen into sin by the sin of the first Adam.

However, the first, positive word—"of every tree of the garden thou mayest feely eat"—must be given its proper place of consideration. As stated earlier, this word of the sovereign creator-friend was a clear, providing word. By that word of provision, man was to eat. The word of God, the sovereign friend, provided man, the servant-friend, his food to eat. That word was for the

servant to hear. In its light, man was to see all the trees of the garden as food given him by his sovereign friend. That word man was to remember as he worked in the garden to dress it and to keep it. By that word, he was to know that the bodily strength he used to carry out the directive of his sovereign would be replenished by the same word of his God. By that word, man was to approach the trees of the garden when he was hungry. By that word, he was to reach forth his hand to pick and to put in his mouth to eat. By that word, he was to feel in his body his strength renewed and his life sustained. By that word, he was led to give thanks to his sovereign friend for the faithful supply of his need. Indeed, man lived, and must continue to live, by the word of his God, his sovereign friend.

In the blessed way of the word of God was man to live, departure being death itself. "For the commandment of life which he had received he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life" (Belgic Confession 14).

Another matter in scripture highlights the importance of the speech of God in relation to the bond of the covenant. That

is the presence of God, which is described in these words: "They heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen. 3:8).

As our first parents knew the meaning and significance of what they heard, they went into action: "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden" (v. 8). The voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day was his presence, his personal presence with the two creatures he had created in his image.

The presence and voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day cannot be considered the first encounter between the creator and the rational, moral creatures he had made in his image. They hid because they knew what God's voice meant. As before his voice made their hearts rejoice and brought them forward in delight to meet with their God, so after their sin God's voice caused them to hide among the trees. That voice, as the word of God, was his fellowship and friendship with his servants.

—MVW

Indeed, man lived, and must continue to live, by the word of his God, his sovereign friend.

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

## HOW OTHERS SEE US

Robert Burns' memorable poem about a louse he spotted crawling on a woman's bonnet in church contains the lines below. He imagines what the woman would do if she knew she had a louse in her hair. Since the Scottish original is unreadable to those unfamiliar with the language, I quote from an English translation:

Oh, would some Power give us the gift  
To see ourselves as others see us!  
It would from many a blunder free us,  
And foolish notion:  
What airs in dress and gait would leave us,  
And even devotion!

It is important that the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and her sisters understand how others see us. It might from many a blunder free us!

That gift was provided recently. How others see us was made clear in a recent exchange that was brought to my attention by Sonny Hernandez at Reforming America Ministries.\* The exchange occurred on the Facebook page of Rev. Daniel Hyde that Sonny Hernandez follows. I should say *followed*. Reverend Hyde peevishly blocked Sonny from commenting on the page after an exchange between the two men.

Social media is not a domain I inhabit, but is one with which I am familiar. Characteristic of social media is that what would otherwise be kept out of a respectable publication by cautious editors is allowed free reign on social media. I doubt that what Reverend Hyde wrote would ever see the light of day in a book published by a respectable publishing house. It is actually quite sad that publishing houses today do not publish what men really think. This belongs to the age in which we live that is squeamish about theological controversy, so that editors keep a tight grip on language.

Martin Luther, for instance, as he wrote in his time could never get published in today's publishing circles. He was much too fierce. He will be published as a historical curiosity, but if someone sent an article like Luther wrote against the pope and the false doctrines of Rome to about any magazine published today, the article would be rejected out of hand.

So in this instance, I am thankful that on social media, Reverend Hyde opened up.

I doubt that what he wrote on social media would find a place in a meeting of representatives of the United Reformed Churches with representatives of the Protestant Reformed Churches. On social media men are free to be who they are and say what they think, whereas otherwise they keep a tight, buttoned-up, professional façade. Safe among professing friends, people open up on social media, and surprising things come out.

Rev. Daniel Hyde is a respected minister in the United Reformed Churches. He also serves as an adjunct professor at Puritan Reformed Seminary and at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. He has written many books. He is erudite and prolific. He runs a website and works other aspects of social media. He has many followers.

As background, it is necessary to understand that on November 13, 2012, at the thirty-eighth annual gathering of the ecumenical organization known as the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), Daniel Hyde gave a speech in which he called for more unity among the various member churches of the organization. He chastised the churches of NAPARC for being like the factious and squabbling members of the church at Corinth. With that admonition in mind, he called for more unity among the member denominations and pleaded that the many doctrinal differences that divide the churches not be allowed to stand in the way of unity. On his own admission in that speech, the doctrinal differences that should not be allowed to hold up closer unity among the member churches of NAPARC include such important doctrines as creation, the atonement, and the relationship between justification and sanctification. He did not mention his own denomination's division from the Christian Reformed Church over women in office. This is apparently still a legitimate reason for the separation of these two denominations. Instead of removing obstacles to unity through discussion of doctrinal differences and coming to an agreement about the meaning of the truth by exposing lies that militate against the truth and cause the division, Reverend Hyde's proposal was akin to stepping over these doctrinal obstacles in order for the member churches to peacefully coexist with the doctrinal differences—a thing not possible, since unity can only be in the truth.

\* A record and critique of the exchange can be found at <https://www.reformingamericaministries.com/single-post/2020/05/06/In-Defense-of-the-PRC-A-Response-to-Daniel-Hyde%E2%80%99s-Blatant-Lies-and-Slander>.

For me personally, I would insist on agreement that the truth is what is officially maintained in the Protestant Reformed Churches, especially regarding such topics as the covenant of grace and the rejection of common grace and the well-meant gospel offer. Relating this to my denomination and Reverend Hyde's denomination, in any meeting of representatives of the two denominations, what would need to be discussed would not be current doctrinal issues or denominational struggles, for instance federal vision, but that the federal vision has its roots in 1924—in common grace and the well-meant offer of 1924, officially adopted in the Christian Reformed Church and still maintained by the United Reformed Churches.

I critiqued Reverend Hyde's 2012 speech to NAPARC. His call for unity among the member churches was not unity in the truth, the only unity that scripture and the Reformed creeds know.

In early May of this year, for some reason Rev. Daniel Hyde posted his 2012 speech on his website and took to social media to promote it. Apparently, he is still inclined to the thinking he promoted in that speech to NAPARC, and he would still urge the organization to go in the same direction. In his renewed promotion of his speech, Reverend Hyde savaged my critique of his speech with a mocking little meme about the Protestant Reformed Churches.

I have no idea why in his mocking meme he made the issue about the PRC. The critique was my own. There may be others in these churches who agree with my critique as well. It is equally likely that some in the PRC want these churches to join NAPARC as member churches and desire close ties with the United Reformed Churches.

Certainly the Protestant Reformed Churches have made official declarations about NAPARC as an organization. NAPARC does not promote unity in the truth. NAPARC and its member churches *say* that they are faithful to the creeds. However, it is a demonstrable fact that these member churches have departed from the creeds in significant instances, such as common grace, the well-meant gospel offer, and the conditional covenant. It is a demonstrable fact that some denominations belonging to NAPARC have exonerated federal vision teachers, and others have failed to discipline these teachers and allowed them to flee to other denominations that are more favorable to their federal vision teachings and where they continue to spread their false doctrine.

But the critique that Daniel Hyde mocked was that of an individual. He used my critique as an opportunity to savage a denomination with which he disagrees about important gospel issues. He substituted mockery for argument.

When Sonny Hernandez called out Reverend Hyde on his attack, he responded with more mockery.

What does Rev. Daniel Hyde of the United Reformed

Churches think of the Protestant Reformed Churches? I would add, what does Reverend Hyde of the United Reformed Churches think of the truth of sovereign and particular grace officially maintained by the Protestant Reformed Churches? How does he see us?

He wrote, "Talk to any former PRC member and you'll learn their theology really quick; we're the truth (sic) church on earth and if you leave us...we call that a cult and spiritual abuse nowadays." He did not state what he thinks the PRC believe about someone who leaves the denomination. He leaves that to implication, an implication that makes these churches a cult and spiritually abusive.

His followers chimed in similarly. One, Steven Carr, wrote, "The PRC is a group of sectarian schismatics and not a faithful church. There, I said it." And, of course, there were allegations of "hyper-Calvinism," the tired old trope that is trotted out whenever the Protestant Reformed Churches' rejection of the Arminian notion of the well-meant gospel offer is brought up and the opponents do not want to deal with the careful and nearly one hundred-year-old arguments raised against the well-meant gospel offer by Protestant Reformed theologians.

While I disagree with the comments of Reverend Hyde and his friends, the candor is appreciated. I am a member of the Protestant Reformed Churches. I love these churches. I love the truth they maintain. If someone sees these churches as cultic, unfaithful, spiritually abusive, sectarian schismatics who teach the false doctrine of hyper-Calvinism, then I for one would like to know that.

Then I also know that when there are professions to want to hear what the PRC have to say on some subject, that is not true either. Who wants to hear from cultic, unfaithful, spiritually abusive, sectarian schismatics who teach false doctrine? I would not. I do not even think it is possible to engage in a serious argument with such people. Daniel Hyde apparently thinks the same thing. He does not engage in real argument, but descends into mockery.

The mockery is serious. Disagreement about the truth is one thing. Opposition to the truth in the form of serious argument is one thing. Writing back and forth about what constitutes the truth is one thing. It is proper that the language in these exchanges and debates be spirited and vigorous, since the debates are about the truth. I wish there were more. Such a debate today must include questions about God's covenant and salvation by grace. All these things are still in dispute. Especially, such a debate must include the questions of whether or not there are conditions in the covenant; whether God's gospel is an offer of salvation graciously extended to all, or the gospel is the promiscuous preaching of a particular promise; whether God shows a common grace to all men and restrains sin in their hearts by his Holy Spirit, so that



they can perform much good in the eyes of God, or God shows grace only to his elect; whether God has a sincere desire—will—to save all who hear the gospel, or God wills to save only his elect and brings all salvation into their possession by the gospel, while the rest he rebates and by the gospel hardens them.

It is quite another thing entirely to mock churches that bear the name Reformed, that stand for the Reformed truth on these matters, and that testify sharply against errors and false doctrines that militate against the truth. Disagreement and mockery are two different things.

The seriousness of the mockery is that the Protestant Reformed Churches are true churches of Jesus Christ according to the marks of true churches. They preach the pure gospel, administer the sacraments according to Christ's command, and exercise Christian discipline against the impenitent. They have stood courageously—and virtually alone—with a testimony to the gospel of pure, sovereign grace in a Reformed church world that has departed from that truth. They are true churches, or I would not be a member of them and a minister in them.

This also means that these churches have Christ in them. The local churches that make up the Protestant Reformed denomination are the kingdom of Christ in which he rules in the hearts and lives of his elect people by his Spirit and word and in which Christ is king. In its explanation of the petition for the coming of God's kingdom in the Lord's prayer, the Heidelberg Catechism says, "Rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee; preserve and increase Thy church" (A 123). When the churches speak Christ's truth, they speak his word and in his name. This is in harmony with Christ's words to his disciples: "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me

receiveth him that sent me" (Matt. 10:40). The application of the truth to the various issues and situations that confront the world and the church world—especially false ideas of church unity today—is a legitimate use of the truth. One can disagree with that. One can separate from that. One can depart from the truth. One can argue and oppose that truth. But to savage it with mockery is a different matter altogether.

Then there is the name calling. A cult? Not faithful? Sectarian schismatics? Hyper-Calvinists? With no evidence given? This is the tactic of dismissing with a name one you will not deign to answer. The enemies of Jesus Christ did that to him too. They called him a Nazarene and said that no prophet arises out of Galilee (Matt. 2:23; John 7:52). Instead of hearing Jesus and evaluating what they saw and heard and coming to the only possible conclusion, namely, that he is the Son of God, they dismissed him with a word! Their dismissal led to the mockery of his trial and the cross. So the Protestant Reformed Churches today are dismissed as a cult, perpetrators of spiritual abuse, sectarian schismatics, and unfaithful churches that teach the dread error of hyper-Calvinism. Thus, they are not worthy to be listened to or answered with an argument.

This also shows that whatever expressions of interest there may be within the United Reformed Churches in the Protestant Reformed Churches' joining NAPARC, or in the PRC's testimony against the doctrinal errors of the old and the new day within the quarters of the United Reformed Churches inhabited by Rev. Daniel Hyde and his friends, there is no interest at all in what the Protestant Reformed Churches have to say. They dismiss us.

At least we know what others think!

—NJL

## FAITH AND LIFE

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.—Romans 12:1*

## PRIESTLY ETHICS

*Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.—1 Peter 2:9*

An essential distinctive of Reformed ethics is that it must spell out its proper relationship to the Reformed doctrine and theology of sanctification. This relationship is essential if Reformed ethics is going to truly characterize the life of the redeemed covenant people of God. If Reformed ethics is

going to be only a system to look at from a distance or if it is going to be a cold, analytical study, it does not need to be tied to sanctification. But if it is going to define what must be and truly is the walk of the people of God by grace through faith alone, then it must include the doctrine of sanctification.

It is all too easy to downplay this necessary relationship. There is, after all, a certain distance between the two. They do belong in different departments. The doctrine of sanctification belongs to the department of theology proper. It has its proper place in a book of systematic theology or Reformed dogmatics. On the other hand, ethics is not a subdivision of theology proper, but belongs to practical theology. In a large divinity school, the department of theology has professors who teach the doctrines of sanctification. A department of ethics is likely to be found in a completely different building.

But if this is going to be a Reformed divinity school, a tunnel or bridge must be constructed between the office of sanctification and the office of ethics. A Reformed work on ethics must be fully informed by the doctrine of sanctification. It must be made perfectly clear that Reformed ethics is strictly impossible without the Reformed doctrine of sanctification. The doctrine of sanctification alone can explain how the regenerated child of God is truly an ethical creature, equipped to do what God's law requires, and doing it.

Pride also makes it easy to set aside the relationship between ethics and sanctification. While it is true that pride is opposed to both the truths of sanctification and ethics, it will try to find a hiding place. In the interest of such a hiding place, pride may readily grant sanctification by faith alone without works. But it will work very hard to separate ethics from sanctification in order to find independence from God. So in sanctification everything may be ascribed to God alone. However, in ethics man must have his due because of his willingness to do or his doing of the good works of the law. God may sanctify him, but man himself must do the law of God.

There are several reasons that this relationship between ethics and sanctification must be prominent. The first reason is that for Reformed ethics to be what it is supposed to be, living and prospering in the lives of Reformed believers, it must be wholly powered by the Holy Spirit alone. Reformed ethics cannot be just a system set out in the Bible. It must be a system expressing itself really and concretely in the lives of God's covenant people.

A second reason is closely related. Reformed ethics honors Christ as both the ethical power and perfect pattern of this ethical system living in believers. They can be and are ethical creatures because Christ renews them after his image, conforming them to him.

A third reason is that only the wondrous grace of sanctification can properly maintain the biblical ethic.

This third reason is powerfully demonstrated in the history of apostasy. Apostate ethics is a horrifying spectacle. Apostasy has an ethical system. Divorce for any reason and remarriage after divorce are judged ethical by churches. The LGBTQ movement is not only to be

tolerated, but it is also Christian and holy to support it. Opposition is simply bigotry that must be condemned and disciplined as unethical. Selfishness in marital and familial abandonment is encouraged as the holy pursuit of self-fulfillment. Churches and denominations are prolific in their support of anarchist movements, all in the name of biblical justice. Liberation theology is resurrected as social justice. In short, cut apart from the sovereign grace of sanctification, ethics must falter and fail as a system. First, it will center on outward appearances. Ultimately, it will oppose true holiness in every form. Observance of God's law without grace must ultimately turn to anarchy.

Sanctification protects the biblical system of ethics by maintaining the heart as the center of all ethical conduct, and that heart as governed by the effectual grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Only in the light of the truth of sanctification can ethics truly be a comprehensive system of Christian conduct and behavior. It is broad in its scope. It covers the believer's entire life. It covers the church universal. As scripture identifies one law for the whole church through the whole world and in every age, so must the one biblical system of ethics be proper to every member of that church. Reformed ethics is also comprehensive in its depth. It demands a consistency between outward conduct and inward life. It has no room for hypocrisy. It has no room for virtue projected or signaled. Its source must be the regenerated heart. Outward, formal behavior without and apart from a renewed heart is likened to whitened sepulchers, beautiful on the outside but within filled with dead men's bones.

The consistency between outward conduct and inner thought and desire is a prominent feature of the law of God itself. There are the ten commandments, but there is also the summary of the law. While the ten commandments address outward conduct, the summary of the law spoken by Christ identifies that law with the inward virtue of love. The tenth commandment requires the heart to be free of covetousness. As the apostles and prophets applied the law of God, they called not only for reform of outward conduct, but also constantly addressed the heart. In the word of the Lord, they constantly denied any virtue to outward performance, but addressed obedience as a matter that had to proceed from the heart. Repentance and true sorrow over sin were the constant demands they inculcated. They never encouraged mere reform of outward character.

Reformed ethics also makes clear that this comprehensive system of biblical ethics has a definite and proper direction to it, a definite spiritual, moral direction. Out of the heart flow the issues of life. Out of the heart the man speaks. A good tree bears good fruit. This is the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism. As the third section is marked by the words "Of Thankfulness," it explains how

the child of God shall show his gratitude to God for his deliverance, the third thing he must know to live and die happily in the comfort of belonging to Jesus. Lord's Day 33 defines good works as "only those which proceed from a true faith." Lord's Day 24 speaks in the same way: "it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness."

The Reformed doctrine of sanctification makes this direction clear. The work of grace in the elect sinner begins with regeneration in his heart. His regeneration is fundamentally his entrance into the kingdom of God. Regeneration is his essential newness and goodness in the kingdom of God that are the fountain of his entire life and walk as a Christian, a life and walk that demand their full, glorious end in the perfection of heaven. But it is also that life that must spread throughout the believer's nature with all its newness. It must permeate his inner faculties and run along through to the outward members, to bring the regenerated child of God into the way of holiness and obedience in a life full of good works. The tree is made good to bring forth good fruit.

Sanctification thus works neither contrary to the human nature nor above the human nature. It works both upon the human nature and in the human nature, so that the believer's nature works by the power of grace alone to produce all manner of good. Salvation is by grace alone, and that salvation includes the glorious wonder of divine sanctification.

Sanctification alone makes man into a proper ethical creature. It gives him eyes to see the wonderful perfection of the law of God. It gives him ears that delight to hear the commandments of God's law. It gives him a heart that not only inclines to hear, but also delights to obey. It gives him also the proper coordination of heart, eyes, lips, and hands to be obedient to God in all sorts of good works. True conversion leads to a life of good works. The people of God strive to put off the old man and put on the new man. No longer do they walk in sin. They turn from sin to walk in paths of righteousness for the sake of the name of their God.

This is the work of God that is beautifully expressed in Paul's prayer for the church at Thessalonica. "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). It is only this understanding of sanctification that enables God's people to see how the good works they do lead them to the fountain of those good works, their eternal election by God. "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:2).

This proper operation and direction of sanctification for Reformed ethics is most clearly demonstrated in Romans 12:1–2: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." This passage represents the priesthood of believers in the ethical reality of their sanctification.

The distinct power of this passage is that it is the first point of transition from the doctrinal portion of the epistle, comprising the first eleven chapters, to the practical portion of the epistle. All the instruction in consecrated living from Romans 12:3 to the end of the epistle is the implication of these first two verses of Romans 12. The remainder of the epistle details in what ways the church carries out the exhortation of Romans 12:1–2. It is how its members present their "bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God."

It is how they are "not conformed to this world: but...transformed by the renewing of your mind."

These verses powerfully display the regenerated and sanctified minds of believers. The proper system of Reformed,

biblical ethics has its presence in their minds. Reformed ethics never portrays the believer as a cold machine that mindlessly stamps out good works day after day. It does not simply move the fingers and lips to do and speak well independently of heart and mind. Reformed ethics begins with the heart and works through the mind into the actual performance of the law of liberty. The law written on the heart according to the new covenant brings its strength into the mind. The mind apprehends the law of God as the proper instrument for framing and driving the believer's entire nature to the glory of the God who has redeemed him from sin and death.

The Reformed believer is blessed to come to the exhortation of Romans 12:1–2 with his mind already filled with the glorious doxology of the last verses of Romans 11. Having finished with the glorious doctrine of sovereign and unconditional double predestination, the doxology extols "the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (v. 33). The chapter ends with the all-embracing words, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (v. 36). This doxology is given to fill the believer with the substance of his life of consecration to God. Of God and through God, he has received his blessed salvation. Therefore, to God must be all things, including the believer's whole life, a life lived in all its fullness to the glory of God.

Sanctification alone makes man into a proper ethical creature.



Those same mercies from God are the ground for the beseeching word of Romans 12:1.

With their minds the members of Christ's church are called to present their bodies as living sacrifices. This sacrifice is a holy sacrifice and acceptable to God by the blood of Christ. This sacrifice is called "your reasonable service." The Christian's "reasonable service" is the activity of his consecrated mind following after God's law and actively seeking every opportunity that presents itself in order to show his love for God. He thinks upon that law, from its root of love to its points of application brought out in scripture. He thinks about his abilities and gifts. He sees them as a stewardship given him through the grace of Christ and thus to be consecrated to the "reasonable service" of his Lord. He considers the opportunities opening before him every day. He applies his mind to discern how he might best use them to serve his blessed Redeemer. He gladly fills those opportunities with concrete expressions of loving service to his Savior, showing grateful returns of ardent love to him who first loved him so much.

That ethical life of the mind is further described in the second verse of Romans 12 in two ways. First, the mind is identified as the central place of the transformed life of the believer. "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." The mind is no longer to be conformed to its old patterns and ways, those of the old man of sin. The believer may no longer be "conformed to this world." He must instead be transformed. The old ethical pattern of sin and ungodliness must be consciously and deliberately rejected with the mind. The mind is to be consciously and deliberately renewed by comparison to

the law of God. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word" (Ps. 119:9).

The second way is found in the last half of the verse, the purpose of "the renewing of your mind." That purpose is to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." The object of the believer's proving is the will of God, that is, the law of God. With his mind he is to understand that will of God as it covers all of his life. He is to understand its regulative nature. Then he is to put it to use. He must use it as a guide for his heart, his mind, and his body. It must form and direct his desires, thoughts, words, and deeds. Afterward he is meant to reflect on the ways in which his entire life bears that stamp and impress of God's law, coming to the definite conclusion that, indeed, the will of God is "good, and acceptable, and perfect."

Reformed ethics wondrously defines the will of God that is to be proved. As the will of God is divine and divinely revealed, so it is "good, and acceptable, and perfect." It is the beauty of Reformed ethics to bring out that beautiful and wondrous perfection of the law of God. But Reformed ethics does not end there. Reformed ethics gloriously manifests itself in the execution of the Christian's office as priest. It describes both what the Christian must be and do as priest and what he is and does as priest. Reformed ethics describes the way in which the believer does "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Because "of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

—MVW

## BOOK REVIEW

# THE CRUX OF THE "FREE OFFER" IS THE CROSS! (2)

*The Crux of the Free Offer of the Gospel.* Sam Waldron.

Greenbrier, AR: Free Grace Press, 2019. 143 pages, softcover, \$18.00.

### "Argument" of Slander

Nevertheless, other aspects of his defense and promotion of the theory of the well-meant offer are noteworthy, if for no other reason than that they are part and parcel of the defense of the offer by many others. First, there is his repeated use of the tactic of slander to defend the free offer against the objection by the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). The slander is that the PRC are "hyper-

Calvinists." What makes the PRC hyper-Calvinists, according to Waldron, is their denial of "God's indiscriminate desire for the salvation of sinners," which desire "is the crux of the Free Offer" (9–10). Waldron references this denial, which supposedly constitutes hyper-Calvinism, to a Protestant Reformed book. Hyper-Calvinism, of which false doctrine the PRC are the outstanding proponents in our day, is the denial "that God desires the

salvation of all who hear the gospel” (33). Not only is the charge false, indeed slanderous, but it too, like the author’s explanation of the preceptive will of God, betrays ignorance, or malice, by its misunderstanding, and misrepresentation, of the error of hyper-Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism is not the doctrine that God loves only some humans (with His saving love in Christ crucified) and in this love, and grace, wills to save some only in the preaching of the gospel. This doctrine is *Calvinism*, as a school-boy catechized in a Reformed church knows by heart and as even the world of ungodly intellectual scholarship knows, to say nothing of Calvinism’s religious foes. Hyper-Calvinism, which thinks to advance beyond this Calvinism (“*hyper*”!!!), denies that the church may seriously call (exhort, command) anyone to repent and believe who does not show himself as regenerated and already saved. The church may issue the gospel-call only to those who show themselves saved and therefore elect, adding the promise that one who believes shall be saved only to the ears of such a (supposedly) saved person.

Hyper-Calvinism is not the doctrine that God is gracious in the preaching only to the elect. This doctrine is Calvinism—pure, sound, orthodox, historic, creedal, biblical Calvinism. But hyper-Calvinism is the denial of the promiscuous call of the gospel on the (mistaken) ground of election. If Waldron refuses to accept the description of hyper-Calvinism by this reviewer, to whose book on hyper-Calvinism Waldron refers repeatedly, let him hear such an authority as Herman Bavinck. Undoubtedly referring to hyper-Calvinism, Bavinck describes those in the “camp of the Reformed” who “got to the point where they only preached the law to the unconverted and offered the gospel only to those who had already learned to know themselves as sinners and felt the need for redemption” (*Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt, vol. 4, 35).

It serves the purpose of the advocates of the well-meant offer to label those who deny the well-meant offer as hyper-Calvinists. But the charge is neither right, nor brotherly. It is theological slander. And it ought to cease, in the interests of theological accuracy, if for no other reason.

To put the best construction on it (I respond to slander with a judgment of charity), the charge that the PRC and others who deny the well-meant offer are hyper-Calvinists arises out of the conviction that the well-meant offer is necessary for the promiscuous preaching of the gospel, including the indiscriminate call of the gospel to all who hear, “Repent, and believe.” The thinking of Waldron and his allies is that without a theology of a (saving) love of God for all and a sincere desire of God for the salvation of all, a church cannot preach the gospel to all. This was exactly the charge of the Arminians against sound Reformed theology at the Synod of Dordt. Particular grace makes

promiscuous preaching impossible. Dordt responded to this charge, or fear, as the case may be, in Canons 2.5:

Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.

This article of the Canons does not respond to the Arminians’ charge by compromising Dordt’s confession of particular grace. It does not respond by affirming universal grace in the preaching in contradiction of particular grace in the decree. But the article demonstrates that Dordt’s confession of particular grace is, in fact, no hindrance to promiscuous preaching. Such preaching does not contradict the truth of particular grace, but is in perfect harmony with the truth of particular grace.

The preaching of the gracious promise is general, or “promiscuous.” The gracious promise itself, originating in God’s gracious will to save, is particular: “whosoever believeth in Christ crucified.” But the particularity of grace in no wise hampers or restricts the preaching of this particular grace, including the serious exhortation to all hearers to believe and the declaration to all that everyone who does believe shall be saved. Pure, sound Calvinism is not hyper-Calvinism. To charge it with hyper-Calvinism is slander. By this time in the Reformed community, to continue to make the charge is *deliberate* slander, or inexcusable ignorance.

### *Where Has Reprobation Gone?*

Another feature of Waldron’s book that cries for notice is its failure to interact with the creedal, Reformed doctrine of reprobation. If Waldron even mentions reprobation, except to defend Iain Murray’s unconscionable elision of Arthur Pink’s treatment of reprobation from his—Murray’s—reprint of Pink’s *Sovereignty of God*, I missed it. Silence on reprobation in a book advocating universal grace in the preaching of the gospel is understandable. It is impossible to harmonize a saving love of God for all humans with Dordt’s and Westminster’s creedal doctrine of reprobation.

And then Waldron’s defense of Murray’s omission of Pink’s doctrine of reprobation from the reprint by the Banner of Truth is as significant as was Murray’s omission itself. Whether Pink changed his mind about the doctrine as he aged is not the important thing. What is significant is that ardent advocates of the well-meant offer are quite willing, if not eager, to banish the doctrine of reprobation to oblivion, and to defend those who do so. The reason is obvious and conclusive in the controversy over the well-meant offer: the doctrine of reprobation condemns the theory of

the well-meant offer as heresy. It is impossible to reconcile the offer with reprobation. Since reprobation is an essential element of predestination, inability to reconcile with reprobation is inability to reconcile with predestination. Since predestination is the source and foundation of all salvation, inability to reconcile the offer with reprobation is, by virtue of this fact, to damn the offer as heresy.

If Pink did in weakness change his mind about reprobation (something that a reader of Pink finds difficult to accept), a lover of the gospel of sovereign grace would

have included the chapter on reprobation in the reprint of Pink's book, regardless of the change of mind of the author, unless the author strictly forbade doing so, which no one alleges. And if a lover of sovereign grace were reflecting on Murray's omission of the chapter on reprobation, he would not defend the omission, but criticize it as fatal weakening of the gospel of salvation by grace alone. Murray did not do the one; Waldron did not do the other. Both declined on behalf of the well-meant offer.

—DJE

## PLEASANT PRAISES

*Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely.*  
—Psalm 147:1

# THE HORSE'S NAY

The horse in might and strength of ride,  
The pounding hoof, the loping stride,  
The limbs of him who runs the race,  
His muscles strained in forward pace:  
Admiring these we all have seen—  
Until God shows us what they mean.

God takes no pleasure in their sight,  
These legs of man and horse in flight.  
“Run here, run there. The spurs are in.  
By all your working you will win  
The favor of God's blessed smile.”  
*Nay, nay, that man earns hell by guile.*

One might object to such a scare:  
“You'll make men sin without a care!  
They'll never strive to do good deeds.  
If God has finished all, who needs?”  
From man's perspective this seems true.  
If all is done, what's left to do?

The problem lies in fine disguise.  
The man who runs, who strains, and tries  
To gain more favor, love, and grace  
Will forfeit all he has in place.  
Grace never comes by deed of man,  
Nor love and favor by his plan.

Both love and grace are gifts divine,  
For God is love and Christ is mine.  
Now can you see the fallacy  
Of running in a race to be  
What you already have and are?  
*Nay, nay, you'll never get that far.*

So why run any race at all?  
That question's answer has no stall.  
With freedom's reign around the horse  
He gallops forth in fervent force  
On ever joyful, solid course.  
*Nay, nay, assurance is the source.*

—Connie L. Meyer

*He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.* —Psalm 147:10–11

*This certainty of perseverance, however, is so far from exciting in believers a spirit of pride, or of rendering them carnally secure, that, on the contrary, it is the real source of humility, filial reverence, true piety, patience in every tribulation, fervent prayers, constancy in suffering and in confessing the truth, and of solid rejoicing in God; so that the consideration of this benefit is\* an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works, as appears from the testimonies of Scripture and the examples of the saints.* —Canons of Dordt 5.12

\* This is the correct translation of the phrase as noted in Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers: An Exposition of the Canons of Dordrecht* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), 727.





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## FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!

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

*Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD. —Psalm 150:6*

“Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD.”  
God gave breath to every creature that breathes. God gave man his breath. That breath is part of the life-force in man that makes him a living creature. Breathing, he lives and moves in the creation. When his breath goes from him, he returns to the dust from which he was taken.

“Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD.”

Praising Jehovah is what the inanimate creation does. The heavens declare the glory of God. The firmament shows forth his handiwork. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their words have gone out to the ends of the earth.

Shall we come behind the inanimate creature? Shall we come behind the mighty and roaring deep, the mountains and soaring peaks, the fire and hail, snow and vapor, and the stormy winds that fulfill God’s command? All praise Jehovah.

With their breath all the animals praise him. The lions that roar to him for their food, the little creeping and chirping creatures, the flying and singing fowls of the heavens, the beasts and all cattle speak nothing but the praise of Jehovah.

The whole earth is full of his glory.

“Praise ye the LORD.” That is his command. It comes to all. Kings of the earth and all people; princes and all the judges of the earth; men great and small, rich and poor, bond and free. Let all who have breath praise Jehovah.

Praising Jehovah is the perfect work of the angels, his ministering spirits whom he made flames of fire. From the beginning they praised. They sang for joy when God created the world. They fill the heavens with their cries to the thrice-holy God. They sang glory to God in the highest one night in Bethlehem.

It was the undoing of the devil that he would not praise God but sought the praise of God for himself. Cast out of heaven with all his demons, they are reserved in chains of darkness until the time of judgment. In their condemnation they will serve for God’s glory.

“Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD.” How much more should not man praise him?

Miserable man, the king who became a slave, his mouth was shut to the praise of Jehovah. His heart is black and hard against the glory of God. Seeing the glory of God in all creation, he holds the truth in unrighteousness and makes for himself an image to praise. Worshiping his idols, he makes himself the worthy object of the wrath of God revealed from heaven against that ungodliness of men.

“Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD,” O ye his saints who know his grace. In his sanctuary, among his people, praise ye Jehovah. The saints are partakers of a more glorious breath than the natural, the breath of the Spirit of Christ. That Breath of God, renewing their hearts, enlightening their minds, giving them every blessing of salvation and the promise of eternal inheritance in heaven, also opens their mouths to praise Jehovah for his goodness.

“Praise ye the LORD.”

—NJL