

The background features a stylized illustration in shades of green. On the left, a sword is shown in profile, pointing upwards and to the right. On the right, a hand is depicted holding a shield. The shield is decorated with several circular patterns, some of which are concentric circles. The overall style is clean and modern, with a focus on geometric shapes and lines.

SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

First Annual Meeting Edition

*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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GOOD AND PLEASANT UNITY

Psalm 133

*A song of degrees of David.
Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
It is like the precious ointment upon the head,
That ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard:
That went down to the skirts of his garments;
As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion:
For there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.*

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! Such is the joyful exclamation of the sweet psalmist of Israel. He beholds all Israel coming up the mountain to worship the Lord with one heart and one mind. He sees all Israel gathered to worship God. He hears that with one voice they confess God to be their God.

It had not always been so. For many years the land and nation had been torn by the divisiveness of an evil king. He had torn the nation away from God to bring it into subjection to himself. That king God had rejected. Rejected by God, the king had desperately clung to power and control. In his hatred for God and the neighbor, he had relentlessly persecuted the Lord's anointed. The king had decimated the priesthood and the worship of God. Finally and fatally, he had gone to see the witch of Endor and had come to a terrible end when he met his God on the top of Mount Gilboa.

And still relief had not come. The worthless son of that evil king was propped up in a divisive puppet kingship, and the nation was plunged into a terrible civil war. Tribe warred against tribe, family against family, and brother against brother. The fields were burned; the forests were cut down; the cattle lay bloated in the ditches; the graves of the mighty slain grew in number; a somber, eerie haze of war hung over the land; and a nervous, anxious tension gripped the hearts of the inhabitants of the land.

Yet the house of David grew stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker. Slowly but surely, the tribes gave their allegiance to David, the Lord's anointed. And Jehovah went up with a shout; he set his king upon Zion's holy hill, and all Israel gathered to him. One house, one kingdom, one nation was formed under one head.

And now a good and pleasant scene unfolds before David: all the tribes coming up joyfully to worship Jehovah with one heart and one mind under one shepherd. The groups of pilgrims coming out of their homes stream up to worship Jehovah. There is joy in their minds, happiness in their hearts, praise on their lips, and fruitfulness in the land. Prosperity abounds! Israel dwells safely together, every man under his vine and under his fig tree. There is one head, one heart, and one mind. Israel lifts up its voice again in thanksgiving and worship to God, the God of Israel.

How good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell in unity!

The blessing of God!

For God is unity in himself. He is the one, simple God. There is only one God. And God is simple; he is his perfections. He is love, grace, righteousness, holiness, wisdom, and mercy. All his perfections are one in him, and there is no disharmony or war in him. He is perfectly self-sufficient, fullness and satisfaction itself. Because he is almighty, all his willing and wishing and desiring are perfectly fulfilled, so there are no frustrated desires in God.

And he is triune. He makes brethren dwell together in unity because that is who he is in himself. His blessing consists in delightful unity among the brethren because in that unity he makes them taste his own goodness as the covenant God. Within the divine being of God subsist three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And what delightful, good, and pleasant dwelling together there is among them! The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father. The Father embraces his Son in the Spirit, and the Son presses himself into the bosom of his Father in the Spirit. Sweet communion! Jehovah, the covenant God in himself. Perfect unity in Trinity,

and Trinity in unity. Three dwelling together, the one true God.

Such pleasant unity did God create in the beginning. A unified, harmonious earthly creation concentrated in the heart of Adam, who consecrated all to the glory of God. A unified heavenly realm under a mighty prince of the angels to the glory of God.

Yet not all was well in heaven. Pride tore the unity of heaven, and the devil and his demons were cast out as the enemies of God. Woe to the inhabitants of earth! Into the earth and into the midst of the garden, the terrible fiend came to mar the beautiful unity of that place. And giving ear to the devil, man rent the unity of the earth by his sin! Listen as he defends himself in his sin: “The woman thou gavest me!”

And such is the state of man outside of Christ. The world is torn by strife and divisions, wars and rumors of war, social upheavals, schisms, family feuds, marital strife, interpersonal hatred, envy, and every evil work. Such is all that man can do. To such divisiveness he is driven by the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience. Far from God and at war with each other is the state of man. The only unity that man can create is devilish and antichristian. Man’s unity in the world creates an abominable monster—to whom the dragon gives his power and seat and great authority—who blasphemes the God of heaven and wears out the saints of God. Man’s unity in the church creates only a deceptive creature that looks like a lamb but speaks as a dragon and causes the whole world to worship man and the dragon.

Such man does also in the church of God. Does not the Bible call the heretic a divider and heresy division? What did the heresy of works-righteousness produce in the Galatian churches? “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal. 5:15). Did not those heretics trouble the church, so that the apostle wished they were cut off? “I would they were even cut off which trouble you” (v. 12). Does not the Bible lay at the feet of the lusts of man all wars and fighting? “From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust,

and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not” (James 4:1–2). Does not the Bible lay blame for all the envying, strife, confusion, and every evil work in the church on the application of wisdom that descends not from above? “If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (3:14–16). Surely where false doctrine comes in, where the lusts of men reign, and where the earthly, sensual, and devilish wisdom of man is applied, there will never be unity.

And there too, where the lusts and wisdom of man reign, the true unity of the brethren will be evil spoken of. Man is not only unable to create good and pleasant unity, but he also hates it. Man’s unity, which is only a false and evil imitation of the unity of the Spirit, is a unity against the truth; a unity enforced by command, fear, and terror; and unity in which the truth is threatened, silenced, and finally cast out,

in order that men might enjoy the peace of the graveyard, united together in death.

Indeed, man will dare object against unity in the truth that the unity is, in fact, divisive and dangerous, and man casts the truth out as the cause of division.

A divine creation, a mysterious and spiritual gift of grace, it is when brethren dwell together in unity.

There!

There, where brethren dwelled together in unity, Jehovah commanded his blessing. By command he creates. The unity cannot fail to be any more than light could have failed to come into being when God commanded light to be. His command brings grace to the eternal objects of his grace, and his grace creates good and pleasant unity.

Such was Zion, the city of the great king, where all the tribes of Jehovah went up. Where Jehovah dwelled in his name and where Jehovah’s glory was revealed between the cherubim of the ark. There Jehovah put his king upon the holy hill of Zion. There all Israel was united in its one head, the king after God’s own heart. There all Israel was consecrated in the confession of

He makes brethren dwell together in unity because that is who he is in himself. His blessing consists in delightful unity among the brethren because in that unity he makes them taste his own goodness as the covenant God.

the truth and the true worship of God by one priest.

Oh, they did not merely exist together. They were not merely bound together outwardly as the slats of a barrel are bound together with iron rings. Surely, they did not exist together in a mutual hostility. They dwelled together as brethren: as the loving members of one household of God, as the many members of one body are joined together into one man. They were knit together in a common confession; knit together in a common love of God and of the brethren; knit together and made one in their head; and joined in one heart, mind, and will. When they talked together their speech was with grace seasoned with salt. They all together confessed their sins in their sacrifices to God; all together they confessed that their right to come into the temple and to draw near to God was by the sacrifices and shedding of the blood of the lambs, as that looked forward to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God; all together they worshiped God in the beauty of holiness and offered unto him the fit sacrifice of true worship.

So good and so pleasant!

Good in itself as the creation of God. Pleasant in itself and bringing with it delight for the hearts and minds of the brethren. Good as the very purpose of God for his church, a reflection of and participation in the good and pleasant fellowship of God's own life. There was life with God. There in the presence of God were joys and pleasures forevermore. There the people were united together in the confession of God as their God, enjoyed his fellowship, and had fellowship with one another.

And such good and pleasant dwelling together in unity does God create in his church. There he commands his blessing. One head he made in Jesus Christ, David's greater Son, God in the flesh. In him first there is perfect unity—a unity of God and man in the one person of the Son. In his person there is unity in which God and man dwell together in perfect fellowship and have perfect friendship. And that he not be an only child, God foreknew and predestinated in him many brethren. And these he calls, justifies, and sanctifies in Christ. He creates one body, one new man, one holy temple of the living God. And these all are united in one Christ with one Spirit, one baptism, and one God and Father.

And they do dwell together in unity. Together with one heart they believe the truth. Together with one mouth they confess the same truth. Together with pure joy they are consecrated to the true worship and confession of God. With joy they confess together their salvation by pure grace and their fellowship with

God through Jesus Christ alone by faith in him alone. Together they give themselves and offer themselves as a new royal priesthood, a living sacrifice of thanksgiving to the God of their salvation to praise his name and worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

There is the sure sign of the presence of his Spirit. There is the sure sign of the presence of Jehovah himself bestowing his blessing and wonderful grace.

So good and so pleasant is this unity!

Such unity in the truth, in heart, mind, and purpose, is like the precious ointment upon the head that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, and that went down to the skirts of his garments. As David beholds the beautiful dwelling together of brethren in Mount Zion, the Spirit takes his mind to a scene beneath Mount Sinai. He sees in the Spirit Moses standing over Aaron with a vial of sweet-smelling oil in his hand—a symbol of the Spirit of God. David sees the oil being poured all over Aaron and that oil running all over his beard and down to the very hems of his garments.

That is what good and pleasant unity is! It is like that oil.

From God, coming down from God. Down, down, down from heaven onto the crown of Aaron's head to the hem of his garment. Unity does not come up from men. It comes down from God. Unity is not the creation of men. Unity is the gift of God. Such unity is a taste of God's own unity, and it emits the sweet smell of the fellowship of God himself.

The Spirit. What—no! the one *who*—comes down from God is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. He is the unity. He unites all the brethren, from the least to the greatest, to Christ first, the only head of the body. And uniting them to Christ, the Spirit is the personal share of Christ's anointing, in which all partake according to the measure of grace given. And Christ's Spirit is the personal union of all the brethren to one another to make one new man.

Consecrating for holy toil! The oil on Aaron's head consecrated him to God. Pointing him out as the one chosen of God and equipping him for the work of God. Aaron was to serve the glory of God. Only as he sought the glory of God did he serve the people and bring them to God by a sacrifice. So precious unity makes one new man, one new body consecrated to the worship, service, and glory of the name of God. Only in unity of the truth, unity of heart, mind, will, and purpose—a unity of Christ by his Spirit—can the church be to the glory of God to confess his name, show forth his praises, and labor in his kingdom. The body that is at war with itself is unable to live and work

and serve its purpose. The body unified, each member and part joined together, is vigorous and strong. So the church in the unity of the truth, confession, will, purpose, and worship by one Spirit, in one head, is able to live unto God.

Good and pleasant unity!

Like the dew of Hermon! The Spirit moves David's eyes from the scene unfolding before him in Zion to look far off to the northeast, where on the horizon he sees through the bright sunshine the misty peaks of Hermon lush and green, full of flocks and cattle, fruitful and teeming with life. All because the slopes were watered by the thick dew of heaven. And the Spirit causes David to see in that dew what unity is. Like the dew descending upon Hermon, so unity descending down out of heaven upon Zion causes to spring forth the glorious scene unfolding before his eyes: all the tribes coming together to worship and praise their covenant God with one heart and one mind and one mouth.

Unity is like the dew of heaven!

So refreshing to the dry and thirsty souls of believers worn ragged by wars and fighting and strife and envy. Down from heaven comes the precious unity of the Spirit uniting them to Christ and uniting all to one another.

Causing the land to blossom and burst forth with new life. Unity is the cause of any fruitfulness in the church. Brethren dwelling together in unity causes the church to blossom and burst forth with life unto God.

Without unity man is a barren desert bringing forth no fruit to God.

But there, where brethren dwell together in unity, is a taste of heaven, even of life forevermore. It is a taste of heaven, for that is what heaven will be—the perfect union and reunion of all things in one head, Jesus Christ, things in heaven and things in earth, each in their place, all united together and all consecrated to God through the heart of Christ to the glory of our covenant God.

We, as brothers and sisters in the Lord of Reformed Believers Publishing, had a little taste of heaven a few weeks ago, and it was thrilling!

There is no nobler duty than to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Let everyone strive in the love of the truth for the truth and for the unity that the truth brings with it. Let everyone strive to keep out the wisdom that is earthly, sensual, and devilish. Let everyone labor to crucify his lusts. Let everyone strive to exert himself to reject all heresies and false doctrines of men that aim to destroy that unity. Let everyone with one heart and one mind know,

believe, and confess the truth. Let everyone embrace all who so confess the truth in the fellowship of love; and let everyone acknowledge no concord at all with anyone who denies the truth.

Then good and pleasant unity will abound, and there will be the sure mark of the presence of Jehovah God himself commanding his blessing there.

—NJL

Together with one heart they believe the truth. Together with one mouth they confess the same truth. Together with pure joy they are consecrated to the true worship and confession of God.



The 109 members of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP), the board of RBP, and the editors of *Sword and Shield* are very pleased to present this special edition of our magazine. The purpose of this special issue is to commemorate the first annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing, which was held October 15, 2020, at the offices of RBP.

Due to government restrictions on indoor meetings, the meeting had to be held in the parking lot on a cold autumn evening. Nevertheless, the setting was thoroughly charming. A large white pavilion was erected and staked in the parking lot, festooned with strings of lights outside and inside that lent a festive air to the meeting as the sun set and darkness stole in upon us. *Sword and Shield* banners decorated the tent walls with the now familiar logo of a soldier hastening to battle, sword and shield prominent. Hay bales, pumpkins, and gourds completed the outdoor decorations and provided the perfect splash of fall color and atmosphere. Inside the tent 160 chairs were filled to capacity, while a couple hundred more people looked in via livestream from their homes. The air was warmed by tall kerosene heaters and the many bodies, so that while the temperature fell into the 40s outside, we were cheerful and cozy inside. In the background was the muffled noise of traffic on 84th Street and a train whistling and rumbling along the tracks east of Douglas Walker Park.

After the meeting there were donuts, coffee, cider, and lingering fellowship. It was a scene made for nostalgia, and I am sure that many already remember the evening fondly.

There was an expectant air to the meeting. This was the first annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing, and there can only be one first. What would it be like? Who knew what to expect? And what would happen next? It was almost as if we were holding our breath in anticipation of what all recognized to be a historic event. As the evening progressed, that breath was let out to carry thanksgiving to God for what he has given in *Sword and Shield*. The Lord has sped forth the magazine and the truth it confesses, and he has made us happy indeed.

“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” (Deut. 33:29).

To charter members and to new members of RBP; to eager readers and to reluctant readers; with gratitude to God we present to you this special First Annual Meeting Edition of *Sword and Shield*. May God speed the truths written herein to your heart, and the next issue into your hands.

—AL



CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS AND PRAYER

On behalf of the board, a hearty welcome to everyone who has come out tonight! This large turnout is a great encouragement. We are glad to see so many of you here taking part in this first public rally of Reformed Believers Publishing.

It is becoming clear that the first six issues of *Sword and Shield* have stirred a new excitement and hope among the people of God. There is an awareness that the truth is again on the loose and has been set free. A fresh air is blowing again instead of a stifling and oppressive atmosphere, when for too long the truth has been stifled and silenced.

Thanks be to God for *Sword and Shield*!

I want to thank everyone who was involved in setting up the meeting tonight and in the planning and preparations that were made so that we could have this meeting here.



Henry Kamps

Prayer

Lord, our God and Father in heaven, we exalt and praise thy holy name. We confess that we are guilty and dead sinners, and we thank thee that thou hast quickened us in Christ thy Son.

We thank thee for this meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing and for the many men and women who have joined in the cause of defending and promoting the truth through the printed page.

We thank thee that *Sword and Shield* magazine could be born and make an entrance into the world. And we thank thee for the clear tokens and evidences of thy blessing. We pray for *Sword and Shield*, that it will be a great light to disperse the fog of errors in our churches.

Bless our purpose to maintain the gospel of sovereign grace and the truth that God is God and absolutely sovereign.

Grant us unity so that we may speak with one mouth to give an unashamed and uncompromising witness to the truth in these times of doctrinal controversy, uncertainty, and confusion.

We pray that thou wilt confound and destroy the efforts of the powers of darkness that work to malign our cause and silence our witness and testimony to the pure gospel of grace.

We thank thee for our editor and coeditors. We rejoice in their unflinching commitment and love for the gospel of sovereign, particular grace and the unconditional covenant. Grant to them continued wisdom to write and great courage to contend mightily for the truth—and much grace as they endure many slanders and threatenings for the cause of Christ.

Bless the board in its work. Give continued zeal to publish the truth in spite of strong opposition.

We thank thee for the blossoming list of association members and supporters evident tonight.

Grant our speakers all that they stand in need of. We confess that everything depends upon thy blessing. May this entire program be to thy glory and praise alone.

We pray all this, asking the remission of our sins, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Introduction of Rev. Lanning and His Speech

It is a great pleasure for me to introduce our speaker tonight. He will speak to us on the topic, “A Believer’s Paper: The Freedom of *Sword and Shield*.”

This is a subject in which we are all deeply interested. The appearance of *Sword and Shield* has touched off a firestorm of criticism and objections. The criticism is that we do not have the right to engage in doctrinal controversy apart from the church assemblies. It is denied that the office of believer, through its magazine *Sword and Shield*, may contend against the lie and contend for the

truth. The speech tonight will instruct and encourage us in these important matters that lay at the very foundation of Reformed Believers Publishing and its right of existence as a free witness.

Our speaker was ordained into the gospel ministry in 2006 and has served pastorates in Faith Protestant Reformed Church and Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. Currently, he is the pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church. He is also the editor-in-chief of *Sword and Shield*.

Join me in welcoming Rev. Andy Lanning!

—Henry Kamps



THE FORMAL PRINCIPLE OF THE REFORMATION

At the first annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP), the keynote address was about the fundamental principle that governs *Sword and Shield*. The fundamental principle is this: *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth. The freedom of the magazine to publish the truth is rooted in the office of believer, who has the unction and anointing of Christ. By this unction the believer knows all the things of God that are freely given him in the gospel. With this knowledge the believer is able to judge all things—whether they be doctrines, apostles, assemblies, spirits, angels, or any other thing—and the believer is able to discern what is true and what is false. The reason for the believer’s freedom in discerning and confessing the truth is that the truth is above all. The truth is subject to no man but judges all men. The truth carries the believer with it above all things. Therefore, the believer is able to discern the truth, is free to speak the truth, and is free to condemn the lie. *Sword and Shield* is nothing more and nothing less than a believer’s paper and is a unique way for the believer to discharge his office of believer in confessing the truth and condemning

the lie. Therefore, as a believer’s paper, *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth. The substance of this speech was printed as the editorial in the November issue of *Sword and Shield* under the title, “A Believer’s Paper: The Freedom of *Sword and Shield*.”

In this special First Annual Meeting Edition of *Sword and Shield*, we have the opportunity to examine a bit further the fundamental principle that governs *Sword and Shield*. *Sword and Shield*’s freedom to publish the truth is really just an application of a deeper principle. The deeper principle is *sola scriptura*, scripture alone. The principle of *sola scriptura* is sometimes called the formal principle of the Reformation. There is a connection between the formal principle of the Reformation and the fundamental principle that governs *Sword and Shield*. The president of RBP alluded to this connection in his comments following the speech at the annual meeting. The president remarked, “The principle of the truth above all is really the principle of the Reformation.” It is to that connection that we now turn.

The Material Principle of the Reformation

The great sixteenth-century Reformation was God’s glorious work of reforming his church. God reformed his church by calling a faithful remnant out of the corrupt and apostate institute that was the Roman Catholic Church. God raised up Martin Luther, John Calvin, and many others to teach the truth of the scriptures, to condemn the errors and the wickedness of Rome, and to establish faithful Protestant churches throughout the world. By the Reformation God reformed and preserved his church.

God reformed and preserved his church by his truth. God protected and restored the doctrines of the scriptures that Rome had corrupted and denied. There were many, many doctrinal issues in the Reformation. These included the doctrine of Christ as mediator, the doctrine of the sacraments, the nature of the church, the role of the special offices, the place of the office of believer, the doctrine of justification, the doctrine of sanctification, the doctrines of grace, and the doctrine of the last things, to name just a few. But there was one doctrinal truth that was at the heart of the entire Reformation. That



Rev. Andy Lanning

doctrinal truth was justification by faith alone. Over against Rome's theology of justification by man's meritorious works, the reformers taught the biblical truth of justification by faith alone.

Justification by faith alone is what the Reformation was about. Justification by faith alone was the doctrinal material of the Reformation. For that reason justification by faith alone has been called the *material principle* of the Reformation. The words *material principle* mean that in the Reformation, this doctrinal matter—the *material*—was fundamental, the *principle*. Justification by faith alone was the fundamental matter; it was the issue at hand; it was the essential stuff. Justification by faith alone was the material principle of the Reformation.

The heirs of the Reformation have often expressed the material principle of the Reformation as four of the five *solas* of the Reformation. The five *solas* are five Latin terms that capture the Reformation's teaching over against Rome's theology. The first four *solas* are *sola gratia* (grace alone), *sola fidei* (by faith alone), *solus Christus* (Christ alone), and *soli Deo gloria* (to the glory of God alone). The justification of the sinner is by *grace alone* through *faith alone* in *Christ alone* to the *glory of God alone*. Indeed, not only justification, but all of the sinner's salvation, is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone.

The Reformed theology of salvation is that God saves the sinner without the sinner's cooperation. God makes the sinner live and obey, but the sinner's life and obedience are of no account to the sinner's justification and salvation. What accounts for the justification and salvation of the sinner is grace alone, which is the only source and power of his salvation. What accounts for the justification and salvation of the sinner is faith alone, which is the only instrument by which the sinner receives his salvation. What accounts for the justification and salvation of the sinner is Christ alone, who is the only ground and foundation of his salvation. What accounts for the justification and salvation of the sinner is the glory of God alone, which is the only goal and purpose of his salvation.

These four *solas* stand over against Rome's theology. Rome taught, and still teaches, the sinner's contribution

to his salvation. Rome's doctrine of salvation is not the doctrine of the *solas* but the doctrine of man's cooperation with God. Rome speaks of grace, faith, Christ, and God's glory. But Rome does not speak of grace *alone* and faith *alone* and Christ *alone* and the glory of God *alone*. Rome's theology is that man is justified by faith *and works*, because of God's grace *and man's merit*, on the basis of Christ *and man's right use of God's grace*, to the glory of God *and the glory of the saints who so merited*. The *solas*—the *alones*—of the Reformation cut off all of Rome's *ands*. The *solas* leave grace, faith, Christ, and God's glory without the cooperation and contribution of man. Over against Rome's additions of man, the Reformation ascribed the salvation of the sinner entirely to God.

of the sinner entirely to God.

The material principle of the Reformation was justification by faith alone, as expressed by four of the five *solas*: *sola gratia*, *sola fidei*, *solus Christus*, and *soli Deo gloria*.

The Formal Principle of the Reformation

What about the fifth *sola* of the Reformation? The fifth *sola* is *sola scriptura*—scripture alone. This too was a principle of the Reformation. But whereas the other four *solas* were the material principle of the Reformation—the doctrine that the Reformation was about—*sola scriptura* was the formal principle of the Reformation—how one could determine and judge what the true doctrine was.

one could determine and judge what the true doctrine was. The term *formal principle* refers to the authority by which the material principle can be judged and decided. The term refers to how one can determine what is the truth and what is the lie. On one side Rome taught justification by faith and works. On the other side the reformers taught justification by faith alone. How could one determine who was correct? What authority would judge these two antithetical doctrines? How could one doctrine be known as the truth and the other as the lie? Must one trust his own opinion or experience? Must one trust the opinions of other men, perhaps by finding a majority of men?

This is where the formal principle of the Reformation comes in: *sola scriptura*! Scripture alone is the authority that measures and decides the truth. In order to know

The fifth *sola* is *sola scriptura*—scripture alone. This too was a principle of the Reformation. But whereas the other four *solas* were the material principle of the Reformation—the doctrine that the Reformation was about—*sola scriptura* was the formal principle of the Reformation—how one could determine and judge what the true doctrine was.

the truth, one does not turn to the opinion or wisdom of men, not even to the opinion of a majority of men, but one turns to the word of God. One turns to the word of God alone—*sola scriptura!* The formal principle of the Reformation—scripture alone—expresses the Reformed conviction that the word of God alone decides what is true and what is false.

The formal principle of the Reformation stood over against Rome. The Roman Catholic Church claimed authority in and of itself to decide what was true and what was false. Rome made itself and its men the measure of truth and right. Rome appealed to the opinions and decisions of mere men as having ultimate authority to decide the truth. Rome appealed to the pope, to the decisions of church councils, to the early church fathers, and to the majority opinion of contemporary churchmen. Rome appealed to scripture as well, though even then it corrupted and twisted the texts to which it appealed. But Rome insisted that the measure of truth was scripture *and the church*, not scripture alone. Over against Rome's appeal to men, the formal principle of the Reformation maintained that the measure of truth is scripture alone.

This does not mean that the reformers ignored or disregarded the early church fathers, the ancient councils of the church, or the writings of men. Because God's truth stands eternal, and because Christ causes his church to know his truth in every age, the reformers could appeal to the church fathers who had rightly understood and rightly expounded the scriptures. Nevertheless, the reformers did not consider the writings of men, no matter how holy those men had been, to be equal with scripture. For the reformers the truth of scripture stood above all, and scripture alone was the ultimate and final standard of truth.

The power of the formal principle of the Reformation is that it acknowledges God as the only infallible source and judge of truth. Scripture, after all, is not the word of man, but the word of God. All scripture is given by inspiration of God (2 Tim. 3:16). Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:21). Scripture is not, "Thus saith man"; scripture is, "Thus saith the Lord." To say that scripture alone determines what is true is to say that God alone determines what is true. To say that scripture alone is the formal principle of the Reformation is to say that God alone is the authoritative judge of what is true and what is false. Man's opinion simply does not enter into the judgment of the truth. Man's opinion is fallible; man can err; man is blind; man is fallen; man walks in darkness; man is as ignorant as a beast; man's heart is desperately wicked and deceitful above all things. How can the opinion of man

be the measure of truth? Even if every single man in the world and in all the history of the world said one thing and God said another, God would be true and every man would be a liar (Rom. 3:4). Only God can determine what is true, because God is true (John 3:33), he is a God of truth (Deut. 32:4), and his only begotten Son is the truth (John 14:6). Jesus is the light of the world, whose record is true (8:12, 14). In his light we see light (Ps. 36:9). Therefore, God alone is the source and judge of the truth. God alone reveals the truth through Jesus Christ, as he is made known in the scriptures. The truth of God is the root of the formal principle of the Reformation: *sola scriptura*.

The formal principle of the Reformation was just as important as the material principle of the Reformation. The material principle stood upon the formal principle. The truth of justification by faith alone prevailed in the Reformation because scripture established that truth over against the pope, his cardinals, his councils, his decrees, his emperors, his nobles, and his whole world. Let every powerful human voice in the empire speak against justification by faith alone, and that truth still stood, because the divine voice of God in the scriptures says that justification is by faith without the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:28).

The formal principle of the Reformation is the official position and teaching of Reformed churches. The formal principle is powerfully and decisively expressed in this phrase from article 7 of the Belgic Confession: "The truth is above all." The truth is above all! The truth is above all persons of men. The truth is above all decrees of men. The truth is above all majority opinions of men. The truth is above all consistories and classes and synods. The truth is above all! The Reformed faith confesses the formal principle of the Reformation most fully and clearly in article 7.

The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to be the Only Rule of Faith

We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For, since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures; *nay, though it were an angel from heaven*, as the apostle Paul saith. For, since it is forbidden *to add unto or take away any thing from the Word of God*, it doth thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects.

Neither do we consider of equal value any

writing of men, however holy these men may have been, with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees, or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, for the truth is above all; for all men are of themselves liars and more vain than vanity itself. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, Try the spirits whether they are of God. Likewise, if there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house. (*Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 26–28)

The formal principle of the Reformation is also expressed in article 31 of the Church Order.

If anyone complain that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a major ecclesiastical assembly, and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the Church Order, as long as they are not changed by the general synod. (*Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 390)

“Unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God”! *Sola scriptura*! Even the settled and binding decisions of the great ecclesiastical assemblies of the church are subject to the word of God. Even the decisions taken by a majority vote of the spiritual leaders of the church are subject to the word of God. What settles matters and binds consciences is not merely a decision of an assembly as such, but a decision of an assembly in harmony with the word of God. If an assembly’s decision conflicts with the word of God, then the matter is not settled and the consciences of men are not bound.

Luther at the Diet of Worms

The formal principle of the Reformation was gloriously displayed in what was undoubtedly the most dramatic event of the Reformation: Martin Luther’s stand at the Diet of Worms in 1521. By 1521 Luther was universal-

ly recognized throughout the Holy Roman Empire. His Ninety-five Theses, posted in 1517, had spread far and wide throughout Europe, as had the dozens of books he had written since then. All through the land, men and women who had been spiritually enslaved under the bondage of the pope and his law were set free by Jesus Christ and his gospel of salvation by grace. They could not get enough of this gospel, and Luther wrote and wrote and wrote for their edification and salvation. On the other hand, the pope and his court were sorely vexed by Luther, whose teachings and writings in 1520 were more plainly and more vigorously denying the ultimate authority of the pope in spiritual matters. The gospel of Jesus Christ represented a direct challenge to Rome, as the blessed and

happy people of God were being carried along in that gospel away from Rome through the writings of Martin Luther. The pope had an ally in the emperor, Charles V, who summoned Luther to appear before him at the next official council meeting of the empire—the Imperial Diet—in the city of Worms, where Luther would answer for his writings.

The scene at the Diet of Worms was out of a storybook.

Even Luther’s entrance into the city was a grand spectacle. Thousands of citizens lined the streets to behold the man whose earthy speech had so marvelously shown to them the heavenly kingdom. His arrival through the city gates was announced by trumpet fanfare and by shouts of joy. Crowds lingered outside the house where Luther lunched, and the door even had to be blocked lest the crowd break through, while the important people of the city came for a few minutes’ audience with the great and lowly monk.

The next two days, April 17 and 18, saw the greatest showdown of the Reformation. On one side was the might and majesty of Christendom: the emperor and his court, whose soldiers, nobles, priests, electors, jewels, and finery were all on gaudy display. On the other side was Luther in his simple monk’s cassock. The contrast could not have been more stark. On one side was man in all of his might and pomp and glory. On the other side was only an earthen vessel. But in that earthen vessel were hid the treasures of heaven, before which the glory of man is dross!

The Roman Catholic spokesman confronted Luther with some forty books that Luther had written, all laid out on a table in the room. Rome had mastered the art

The power of the formal principle of the Reformation is that it acknowledges God as the only infallible source and judge of truth. Scripture, after all, is not the word of man, but the word of God.

of showmanship, and this was no exception. Throughout Europe the pope had required that Luther's books be burned as heretical, and great bonfires of Luther's works had sent up their smoke to heaven. But here in this room, before the emperor, Rome had collected Luther's books and had specially bound them for the occasion. The Romish spokesman asked Luther if he would recant his works. At his request Luther was granted a day to think about the question so that he could give an appropriate reply. Luther returned the following day with his answer. After being berated by the Roman Catholic interrogator that Luther must not set himself above the judgment of so many men and above the judgment of the church itself, Luther replied with the famous words that express the formal principle of the Reformation.

Since then your serene majesties and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, plain and unvarnished: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the scriptures or clear reason, for I do not trust in the Pope or in the councils alone, since it is well known that they often err and contradict themselves, I am bound to the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. God help me. Amen.*

Over against Rome's demand that Luther subject his theology to the opinions of powerful men, Luther maintained the absolute authority of the word of God. "I am bound to the Scriptures I have quoted!" And, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God!" By his statement Luther declared that the truth would be decided not by popes and councils, and not even by a Wittenberg monk, but by the word of God alone. *Sola scriptura!* The formal principle of the Reformation.

The Fundamental Principle of Sword and Shield

The formal principle of the Reformation—*sola scriptura*—is the deep root out of which *Sword and Shield* grows. The fundamental principle of *Sword and Shield* is that it is free to publish the truth. The emphasis is freedom. *Sword and Shield* is free, absolutely free, to publish the truth. *Sword and Shield* possesses that freedom to publish the truth because the truth itself is free,

absolutely free. The truth does not need permission from man in order to sound forth. The truth does not seek authorization from consistory, classis, or synod in order to speak. The truth is not subject to the consent of man; it is the truth of God! The truth does not conform to man's delicate sensibilities and vain opinions; it is the truth of God! The truth does not quail before emperors, popes, councils, or the great antiquity and succession of godly men. Rather, the truth judges them all! The truth is free and unbound.

The believer has that truth in the written word of God, which is the final judge of all things. *Sola scriptura!* The believer understands the written word of God by the anointing of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the believer is free to confess that truth. He is free to confess that truth by his church membership, joining a church that faithfully proclaims the truth of the word. He is free to confess that truth in his family, worshiping God around the dinner table with the Bible in his hand and teaching his children the meaning and application of the passage. He is free to confess that truth with his coworkers and colleagues and classmates. She is free to confess that truth on the phone with her friend and at her coffee meet-up in the park. And the believer is free to confess that truth on the printed page, as a member of a society of believers who together put forth a magazine for the cause of the truth. Reformed Believers Publishing is such a society, and *Sword and Shield* is such a magazine. *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth.

The fact that scripture alone is the standard by which all truth must be judged means that the believer is free to take scripture and shine its light on everything and judge all in its light. Nothing is off limits! Whether things sublime or mundane, the truth is above them all! In the light of the truth, the believer may judge popes or PlayStations, synods or sales offers, the creation or recreation. The truth is above all. The fundamental principle of *Sword and Shield*—the magazine is free to publish the truth—is thus an application of the formal principle of the Reformation: *sola scriptura*.

This also means that the attacks on *Sword and Shield's* freedom to publish the truth are really attacks on the formal principle of the Reformation. They are attacks on *sola scriptura*. The issue is not whether one agrees or disagrees with *Sword and Shield* on the basis of the word of God. Certainly, *Sword and Shield* is also subject to judgment by the truth. Rather, the issue is whether *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth regarding all things, regardless of the wrath or the pleasure of men. Denial of the believer's

* As quoted by Eric Metaxas, in Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2017), 216. The history recounted here follows Metaxas' description in chapter 10 of this book.

freedom to publish the truth in *Sword and Shield*, as if the believer's freedom in the truth were subject to the judgment and consent of men, is a denial that scripture alone is the final judge of all things. The attacks on *Sword and Shield's* freedom to publish the truth are ominous. In these attacks there is a whiff of hierarchy in the air. There is a potpourri of popery on the wind. And it stinks.

Let the believer beware that the formal principle of the Reformation not be taken from him. Let the believer suffer no man to tell him that the final judge of the truth is man, whether it be pope or synod. The formal principle

of the Reformation is *sola scriptura*, not *sola synodus*—synod alone. Not even *scriptura et synodus*—scripture and synod. But *sola scriptura*—scripture alone! Let all men, including synods, subject themselves to scripture. And let the believer, including in his confessing and publishing the truth, breathe the sweet air of absolute freedom in that truth.

The formal principle of the Reformation: *sola scriptura!*

And its blessed application: *Sword and Shield* is free to publish the truth!

—AL



ANNUAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

Less than seven months ago, the doctrinal, polemical, and free paper that has boldly and faithfully addressed the theological controversy in our Protestant Reformed Churches was only a dream for thirty-two men. *Much* has happened since our April 1 meeting with its unanimous decision to start a Reformed publishing association. What follows is a brief summary of our recent beginning and of the board's current activities.

At that April 1 meeting, exploratory committees were appointed, approved, and assigned tasks. At a meeting on April 24, these temporary committees reported back regarding the various legal, financial, and practical requirements of organizing and publishing a magazine. A constitution was adopted, three editors were recommended and approved, and nine men were elected to serve as the board of this Reformed publishing organization.

A name for our organization could not be selected at the April 24 meeting. Several names had been recom-

mended by the committee whose task it was to do so, but legitimate concerns were voiced, and alternate suggestions were offered. The final approval of our name was by majority vote through email. The same is true of our constitution; approval of the final version, after amendments and corrections, took place by email in the days following the meeting. Recall also that these were the days when our governor had all but completely shut down the state of Michigan. For me, the shutdown was timed impeccably. Because of my reduced hours, I was able to work extensively with a lawyer through email in order to register Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP) as a non-profit with the state of Michigan and with the IRS. Both of these, though requiring many hours of work, were accomplished without difficulty or delay.

Many of our meetings were held digitally, using Zoom. The April 24 meeting, as well as the board's organizational meeting, were held entirely over Zoom. All of our steering committee meetings and many of our board meetings, along with this association meeting, have been hybrid meetings. We are using technology to meet with members who could not otherwise participate in our meetings. Several of our association members are a thousand miles or more away from us. We are livestreaming this meeting for their benefit and for the benefit of all interested persons who cannot attend in person. We welcome and greet those who are joining us in spirit and online. RBP is not only a nationwide gathering of Reformed believers; it is a *worldwide* gathering of Reformed believers.

That which draws us together as an association, uniting us as one organism, is the love of the truth. This love is not something that any of us mustered from within ourselves. It is not a carnal love of the world or the things of the world. Rather, this love of the truth is received from God, even as the truth itself is received from God. *Sword and Shield* has sprung out of this organic life of believers.

The June 1 issue of *Sword and Shield* was landing in mailboxes less than two months after our April 1 decision to organize and publish a magazine. The publication of *Sword and Shield* is God's work; all thanks and glory be to him alone! God is gracious, and he is gracious to us for Christ's sake alone.

We give thanks to God for the labors of the many individuals united for this cause of Christ. Rev. Lanning is our very capable and faithful editor-in-chief, whose



Nathan Price

editorials have us anxiously waiting for the next by the time we finish reading each one. Our associate editors, Rev. Nathan Langerak and Rev. Martin VanderWal, contribute breadth and depth to *Sword and Shield*. Together, these three editors provide a polemical defense of God's grace and sovereignty in salvation. Brothers, God has richly blessed us through your writing; keep up the good work. Great editorship and writing are made especially evident through our excellent copy editors. Evelyn Langerak and Stephanie Lanning have volunteered many hours of labor to prepare every issue of *Sword and Shield* for printing. There is also the ever-pressing need to get *Sword and Shield* into the hands of readers. Tami Cleveland has volunteered many hours of assistance to the board in setting up and maintaining our mailing list. To all of you, the board and association thank you. Be of good courage, for the cause is Christ's.

We are excited at the number of subscriptions we have received thus far. Even more exciting is the reality that donations have poured in at such a rate that we

had deferred the start of these subscriptions through the October 2020 issue. Now again, because the content of *Sword and Shield* is so important and generous donations have made it possible, we are deferring these subscriptions through the June 1, 2021, issue! This means that our entire mailing list is receiving *Sword and Shield* free of charge through June 1. God has abundantly provided for all of our needs.

The office of RBP is now sufficiently furnished, while RBP board and committee meetings are held in the adjacent conference room. The location and facility have been very convenient, far exceeding our needs. The meetings and work of the board are very enjoyable. True and meaningful unity can only be had in a common confession of the truth; this also is God's gift to the board of RBP.

Please continue to pray for our editors, the many volunteers, and your board. Most of all, pray for the cause of Christ to be promoted in all our activities and for God alone to be glorified.

—Nathan Price



A WORD FROM THE BOARD OF REFORMED BELIEVERS PUBLISHING

The rally of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP) on October 15 was successful beyond our imagination. A capacity crowd filled the tent. Expectation, enthusiasm, and excitement filled the air as we anticipated a rousing speech entitled “A Believer’s Paper: the Freedom of *Sword and Shield*.”

The *office* of believer is marginalized and even despised in our day. An unbiblical separation between the office of believer and the special offices has crept in. The office of believer is often viewed as having a status below that of the special offices. In this way hierarchy intrudes into the church. This situation is evidenced in the minimizing and silencing of the ordinary members of the church. Access to documents being treated at our church assemblies is made difficult. Delegates to the assemblies openly discourage attendance by church members. Assemblies limit access to proceedings that should be open and public. Believers bringing proper protests to church assemblies are made to feel that they are troublers of Israel instead

of being honored for exercising their Christ-given right to judge decisions of assemblies according to the word of God. Moreover, to top all this, we witness the shameful reality that believers who, in harmony with their God-given calling and right to witness to the truth, have formed a new Reformed publishing association and are publishing a new Reformed magazine are vilified and scorned in the churches.

This is why we are thrilled and excited for a newfound freedom for the office of believer through the establishing of Reformed Believers Publishing and its magazine, *Sword and Shield*. The members of Reformed Believers Publishing restored a glorious opportunity to give a distinctive witness to the truth. They are free from censorship and control by the church institute. It is our privilege to unleash the truth through the magazine that God has provided.

Reformed Believers Publishing gives thanks to God for giving us three editors, Rev. Nathan Langerak, Rev. Andy Lanning, and Rev. Martin VanderWal. We are delighted with their uncompromising and unflinching commitment to the truth of sovereign, particular grace and the unconditional covenant. We thank them for filling the pages of *Sword and Shield* with articles that are sharply antithetical and polemical and that rightly and distinctively divide the word.

Sword and Shield is stirring an entire denomination. Many are reading and discussing *Sword and Shield* and its content. It is awakening many out of spiritual slumber



Jason Cleveland giving the treasurer’s report



The RBP membership pin

and giving them a deeper understanding and more vibrant confession of the truth, so that they are able to withstand the lie of our day.

Reformed Believers Publishing and *Sword and Shield* will pursue and promote true unity, which is a unity of confession of the truth. By founding a new Reformed organization and publishing a new magazine, we express our complete revulsion of a forced peace and unity through censorship and silencing of doctrinal discussion. We give witness to our rejection of the artificial peace and unity of ignorance. We are committed to having the office of believer function properly in the church again.

We believe and confess that the office of believer is a biblical and Reformed reality. By faith every believer is a partaker of the anointing of Christ. As such, they are all prophets, priests, and kings. We believe in the ability of the sanctified conscience of the believer to judge and know the truth. True peace and unity are manifested when the office of believer is allowed to give testimony and witness to that truth.

The rally of Reformed Believers Publishing was a celebration of the Reformation truth of the office of believer. In this regard I quote Abraham Kuyper:

This official work of other organizations [such as Sunday school] is a product of the more common task which is locked up in the office of all believers, to wit, the obligation to exercise constant control in matters of confession, church rule, liturgy, and the activities of the other office bearers. Never may a believer acquiesce simply because the ministers of the church say so. This is Romish, not Reformed. In a Reformed church each believer must have spiritual judgment and must permit this judgment to operate, not out of pedantry or censoriousness, but out of spiritual obedience... Thus all that is confessed within the church, decided, and carried out, must have its constant support in the spiritual enlightening of the conscience of believers ("A Pamphlet Concerning the Reformation of the Church," *Standard Bearer* 56, no. 20 [September 1, 1980]: 474–75).

"Why art thou called a Christian? Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 32).

—For the RBP board,
Gordon Schipper, vice-president



Rev. VanderWal joined the annual meeting from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, and delivered his speech via livestream.

TRUTH, FREEDOM, AND *SWORD AND SHIELD*

First of all, let me thank you for the opportunity to address you this evening. I especially appreciate the opportunity because of all that Reformed Believers Publishing has meant to me over the past while. It has provided me the opportunity to stand fast for the sake of God's truth and confess his truth. By means of this

wonderful instrument and organ of the truth, *Sword and Shield*, a magazine devoted to the truth, we have been able to stand together for the sake of the truth. The support and encouragement that I have received and enjoyed through this publication and its fruit have been such a blessing to me over the past months. The strength to continue in our stand together for the truth and unity is ours to share and grow in by means of Reformed Believers Publishing and *Sword and Shield*. All of us have such a role and a part to play in strengthening each other because *Sword and Shield* is a real organ—an organ for the sake of God's truth and its presence among us in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. I want to spend a few moments giving you a few

remarks about that strength to stand fast and what that means to me.

I listened to Rev. Lanning's presentation very carefully because I think we are covering much of the same territory. I want to express that my remarks go *within* the content of his speech and take us, I think, to the heart of what Reformed Believers Publishing is, as well as its organ, *Sword and Shield*.

As I was thinking about what to talk to you about tonight, John 8:32 kept coming back to me: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The two terms there, *truth* and *freedom*, really represent what we are and what we have by and in the truth through faith. That is, the truth makes us free. The truth makes us free in such a way that we rejoice in the truth and we become more deeply rooted and grounded in the truth by faith, so that we understand that our freedom is such a joy and happiness in the truth that we keep going back to the truth to draw from its wellspring and to drink deeply of the freedom that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. Now, we keep in mind that our freedom is exactly in the truth and upon the truth, and no other place.

In fact, the very context of John 8:32 distinguishes the truth from the lie and teaches that the lie is only slavery and that only in the truth is there freedom. This is the truth that is in God's word. This is the truth that leads us to our Lord Jesus Christ and God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is also the truth that we have in the Reformed creeds. They are confessions of faith. They are the summary of the faith, they are the standard of the faith, and they continually bring us to the foundation that is in God's holy word, the scriptures. And in the confessions is our freedom. Upon the confessions is our freedom. It is the way that the truth makes us free and we enjoy freedom in the truth.

The truth brings the knowing believer freedom from the darkness of the lie. The knowledge of the truth is the fruit of the effectual grace of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit graciously, powerfully, as well as sweetly and gently, illuminates the heart and mind of the elect child of God. The Holy Spirit so works a desire and delight for the truth, to have that truth fill the regenerated heart and mind with its light and to dispel all the shadows of darkness. The truth must chase out all that is false and of the lie. As that is done, the believing child of God rejoices in the truth as his freedom. The truth sets him free! He understands the freedom of his salvation. He is free from sin, free from its guilt and condemnation. The truth also frees him to seek in truth the God of his salvation. The truth frees him to live with his God and to walk with him in covenant fellowship and friendship. He is free to serve

his God and the truth that makes him free. In this service he truly delights because in the truth he is free.

This brings me to what ties me and what binds me gladly and willingly to the truth: the Formula of Subscription. Part of the Formula reads:

We heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of...the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, do fully agree with the Word of God.

We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching or writing.

We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine, and particularly those which were condemned by the above mentioned synod, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these, and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors. (*Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 326)

All of these "articles and points of doctrine" represent a room, a building, or a house that we are free to live in. It is our freedom to be built on the truth. It is our freedom to be surrounded by the truth. So it is proper and right and necessary that we have, and we have built, something akin to a house that is founded on the truth of God's word and that arises out of that truth: as ecclesiastical assemblies, magazines, preaching, teaching, and discussions of believers. The truth lives in our homes, among our families; it lives in our hearts. All of it is a beautiful house. And that house is our freedom. It is our freedom to live *in* that house; it is our freedom to live *on* that truth; it is our harmony. And it is Reformed Believers Publishing that is an extension and an expression of that freedom that is in the truth.

Because that freedom of the knowledge of the truth is precious and delightful to us, we delight in that house. We rejoice to know its integrity—that it is built squarely on the foundation of the truth that makes us free. We know that its symmetry, beauty, and ornamentation are all that they are because the house is centered on its foundation. The blessedness of life in the house for believers and their seed is all from its foundation on the truth.

But that truth is always under attack. Satan, the enemy of God and of the church, furiously and proudly strives to take away the freedom of the church in the truth and to bring the church back into the bondage of sin and the lie.

So Satan works to remove the truth from the church. The deceiver endeavors to introduce the lie in the most deceptive ways, in order to avoid detection. He works through confusion and carelessness just as much as through apathy and pride. He seeks an entrance to insert the lie in the most innocuous manner and perhaps under the guise of righteous and holy motivation. His aim is to exchange the truth for the lie, beginning at the smallest point and spreading through to take the whole. Such is the history of apostasy throughout the history of the church.

There is another way to look at these same tactics of the adversary, as an attack on the house that is built on the foundation of the truth. By introducing false doctrine, the devil's method is to take the house that is built on the truth off and away from that foundation of the truth. He introduces various means. He can introduce humanistic elements: man; man's pride; man's works, effort, and will. And with that he tries to introduce heresy into the church, which will be followed by apostasy. It takes wisdom and discernment to see Satan's introduction of error into the church of Jesus Christ. That is why believers need discernment. Discernment that is fueled by love for the truth and love for the freedom that is in the truth is of great value.

In this house founded on the truth we have lived, some of us for our whole lives. We know the house and our freedom in it. We love the house. We treasure it. We have invested our lives in it, and we desire to pass it on to our children, for it to be their dwelling. In our love for this house, we understand the absolute need of the foundation it is built upon. Without the foundation under it, we have no house.

But something happened. Some of us felt a movement. Some felt it keenly, some slightly, while others felt nothing at all. What happened to the house? And you might look at the house; you might look at the walls; you might look at the windows; you might look at the doors; and you say, "It's still the same house, the same persons, the same assemblies, the same magazines, the same preaching and teaching"; but there still remains a sense that something has moved. So you go down to the foundation. You look down at the truth, and you say, "Where is this house with respect to the truth? Is it where it needs to be? Is the bottom of the house properly aligned with the foundation? Has it been moved, if ever so slightly?"

Has the house moved? Can you tell?

There is a way to tell. "Ye shall know the truth, and

the truth shall make you free." How is the freedom? Has the freedom that you possess and enjoy because of the truth been altered in your heart and soul? Do you feel that freedom curbed or diminished? Freedom to rejoice in grace? Freedom to walk humbly with your God? Freedom to speak and live in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free? Freedom from the rules and opinions of men? Free from legalism? Free from fear of men? Free from respect of persons? Free to discuss and deliberate? Free to write? Free to publish?

Walk through the house. Go from room to room, exploring the corners even to the outside walls. Wherever you go, do you have that sense of freedom that comes from the truth? Or in some rooms or corners does that freedom grow dim or even cease its existence in your heart and soul? Where are those places? Are they off the foundation of the truth? Are they off the foundation of grace, the truth that makes us free?

And then the question arises further: do we have the freedom that we are supposed to have and meant to have, grounded and rooted in the truth, or is that freedom somehow affected? Do we feel bound, do we feel controlled, by some other kind of element? It is the responsibility of believers to remember wherein their freedom lies. It is the responsibility of officebearers in the church of Jesus Christ, having signed the Formula of Subscription, to say, "The church must be founded upon the truth." It is the responsibility of believers to ask and to look and to say, "Are we always grounded on the truth? Is the house *always* built on the truth? Or is it moving? Is it moving its place? Is it changing its direction? Where is the house going, if it is going anywhere?"

That is the point of Reformed Believers Publishing and *Sword and Shield*. *Sword and Shield* is the means that you have given to me and to the other editors to be able to take up and realize our vows that we made when we signed the Formula of Subscription. Let me quote that again: "We not only reject all errors...we are disposed to refute and contradict these, and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors." *Sword and Shield* is our opportunity to communicate the truth to Reformed believers. It is our opportunity to lay out the foundation to ensure that Reformed believers stand squarely upon the truth and remain there. For there alone are we truly made free—by the truth.

Your support of and care for Reformed Believers Publishing are for the spiritual house of faith for Reformed believers. You have begun now to see among us the benefits

The blessedness of life in the house for believers and their seed is all from its foundation on the truth.

of the magazine. There is growing awareness of where we must be with respect to the unchanging truth of God's word, and where we are. Reformed believers are growing in their understanding of the truth that makes us free and seeing the importance of maintaining and defending it. Love for the truth and the freedom it brings are evident in the support of *Sword and Shield*. Reformed Believers Publishing is growing in membership. Subscriptions to *Sword and Shield* are on the increase. It is especially a blessing to see the appreciation and love expressed for the magazine with so many letters and notes of encouragement. And I want to urge you to continue to express that encouragement and gratitude for the magazine.

I want to end on a personal note. I have been privileged to exercise myself in writing for the magazine, and it's been such a tremendous blessing in these past months. Standing for the truth in the Protestant Reformed Churches, even for the truth established by our synod, has brought trouble. Faced with suspension and threatened with possible deposition turned so much upside down. But in the midst of that trouble, in the midst of that difficulty, I enjoyed a tremendous sense of peace and

of help. Thinking of my livelihood stripped away, standing in our churches stripped away, support stripped away, and a voice for the truth silenced, yet I had a tremendous sense of peace, security, and strength. That sense was from the truth and the freedom of that truth identified in John 8:32: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." I want to stress: for the enjoyment of that peace and that security, Reformed Believers Publishing was a tremendous help. I received from the board not only expressions of support in that trial, but also the pledge that they would continue to be glad to have me writing for the magazine. That support involved the board. It involved the organization of Reformed Believers Publishing. It involved its membership, now growing and increasing. It is my privilege to testify to you this evening the importance that Reformed Believers Publishing has had for me in my trials. You must know that as an organization we together can enjoy and rejoice in that same support as we together know the truth that truly makes us free.

Thank you.

—MVW



COMMITTING OUR WAY TO GOD

I want to begin by thanking the board of Reformed Believers Publishing as well as the other individuals who made this night possible. I also thank the board for the opportunity given to me to make a few remarks at this first annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing. I also express my appreciation for the keynote speech and the emphasis on the freedom of believers to publish the truth. This was an altogether uplifting and edifying evening.

Let it be said tonight on the occasion of the first annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing that the publishing of *Sword and Shield* and the formation of Reformed Believers Publishing were absolutely necessary in the Protestant Reformed Churches. They are absolutely necessary for the defense and the development of the truth. St. Augustine said that the truth is like a lion. You do not need to defend the truth. Unleash it, and the truth

will defend itself. With *Sword and Shield* and Reformed Believers Publishing, the truth has been unleashed, and that truth unleashed will do its work according to the will and purpose of the sovereign God and the Lord Jesus Christ, whose truth it is.

I do not know, and no one can know, what that purpose is. But let it be said tonight, the unleashing of the truth has raised a *storm* of opposition, a storm of opposition whose winds blow with such fierceness that no labor of man could make any headway against them, a storm of opposition against which only a work and labor of God can succeed. *Sword and Shield*, because it stands in the service of the truth, is a labor of God. It is God's work, and God will give that work its fruit and effect.

And let it be said tonight as well, with regard to that storm of opposition, I regard that storm of opposition as proof positive that *Sword and Shield* labors in the cause of

the truth. Only the truth could stir up such a storm. And I regard that criticism and opposition as a privilege from the Lord Jesus Christ. “Woe unto you,” he said, “when all men speak well of you.” If all men speak well of you, if the appearance of your magazine and of your organization is greeted with universal applause, you had better question both your magazine and your organization. The very fact that *Sword and Shield* and Reformed Believers Publishing are damned by many is a blessing from the Lord Jesus Christ. “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and say all manner of evil against you falsely.” We take our place with the prophets, with the apostles, with Jesus Christ, and with faithful ministers and believers of every age.

And let it be said tonight too, at this first annual meeting, we commit our cause to God because our cause is not ours in the end. It never was. It is God’s. It is God’s, who is the truth, who will have his truth heard, and who will give his truth free course over against whatever man might throw against it. And so again I say, the truth is



Rev. Nathan Langerak

like a lion: you do not need to defend it. I do not need to defend it; you do not need to defend it. Unleash it, and the truth will defend itself!

And with that, let us commit our way to God in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, thou art a sovereign God, and thou art holy and righteous. All thy judgments and ways are perfect. Who is a God like unto thee, a God who sees all, who hears all, who knows all, who judges all? Thy word, O God, is truth, at the heart of which stands our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who was born of a woman, who was crucified, who was dead and buried, who rose again and ascended into heaven, where he reigns head over all, and head of his church, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

And, Lord, as we are engaged in the cause of thy truth, we beseech thy blessing upon all our labors and endeavors that we may be faithful; that we may confess thee before men, though all men deny thee; that we may speak with boldness in a world where boldness is denigrated; that the truth may be applied in every area of life, that it may judge all things; and that we may be given the freedom to speak in our own hearts and minds and before the world, in order that thy name and thy truth and thy kingdom and thy cause may advance victoriously.

And Lord, grant us strong faith that we may believe the truth of the resurrection of our Lord that the victory is already ours, that the fight is won, that the battle is over, and that the gates of hell can never prevail against thy truth and thy church and thy people.

Lord, bless the gathering tonight. May the word spoken by our speaker be an encouragement to us. May it be the means whereby that principle of the office of believer lays hold on our hearts to give us the courage, the commitment, the boldness and fearlessness, the fortitude and strength, mentally and bodily and spiritually, to engage in this most glorious and righteous cause.

And, Father, pardon all our sins. Be with us as we fellowship in what remains of the night. Keep us from evil, Lord. We ask all of this for Jesus’ sake.

Amen.

—NJL



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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

Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.—2 Timothy 2:9

The glorious gospel of Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead! So Jesus was crucified. The wonder-child, born of Mary, born under the law, was delivered to the cross because of our offenses. And God raised Jesus from the dead because of our justification. Because at the cross he paid the debt of our sins, made satisfaction to God, and obtained all the blessings of salvation for his elect, God raised Jesus, declaring him to be the Son of God with power by the Spirit of holiness.

So the gospel declares Jesus Christ to be the only way of salvation. The command of the gospel to all is to repent and believe in Jesus Christ and to call on him for salvation. The promise of the gospel is that all who do will certainly be received of God in mercy. The threat of the gospel is that all who turn from Christ in unbelief will be damned.

A beautiful word! Declaring that salvation is found in no other name than Jesus Christ.

A powerful word. For by that gospel the Word of God comes. The Word of God by which he commanded the heavens and earth to be. The Word of God revealed in Jesus Christ as the God of our salvation!

The Word that effectually carries out the will of God. By the gospel the Word of God comes to save his own people; to summon them out of darkness into God's marvelous light; to turn them, so that they are turned; to call them, so that they come; to open their hearts; to renew their wills; to work faith, so that they believe; to justify, sanctify, and glorify all those and those only whom God has ordained to eternal life.

The Word that also hardens all those whom God has appointed to destruction.

Awesome Word of God that comes by the gospel to build the heavens and to tear down the kingdom of Satan! Unbound in everything to which God sends it. Irresistible to accomplish God's purpose. Never returning to him void.

What a contrast! The apostle suffered great trouble in the gospel. As the servant of the Lord called to preach the gospel, he could never be separated from that gospel. In their treatment of him, men showed what they thought of the gospel he brought, of the Christ he proclaimed, and of the Word of God himself!

"An evil doer," they said! They maligned the apostle as one who stirred up trouble in the world; a destroyer of laws and customs; a worker of division and licentiousness! How did they slander his gospel in order to turn all men against it? "He teaches that we should sin that grace may abound! Antinomian!"

What did he say about his ministry? Beaten, whipped, and stoned; in peril of his own countrymen, in peril of the heathen, and in peril among false brethren; even now languishing in prison, in peril for his life!

One can bind an apostle—or any minister of the word—but the word of God is not bound! It cannot be. It is the word of God. Its power is of itself. Its purpose is irresistible. It overcomes bonds, imprisonments, even death. For surely that is the gospel. What man wickedly crucified and buried God raised. The Word of God is not bound!

So it is always. The sovereign God uses even the hatred and opposition of men to accomplish his purpose to gather his church, comfort his people, and destroy the kingdom of darkness.

—NJL