



SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Second 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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Editor-in-chief

Rev. Andrew W. Lanning

Contributing editors

Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

Rev. Martin VanderWal

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Reformed Believers Publishing
325 84th St SW, Suite 102
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Website: reformedbelieverspub.org
Email: office@reformedbelieverspub.org

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And he [Elisha] went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them. And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.

—2 Kings 2:23–25

Bethel! A name that brings to mind the patriarch Jacob and God's sweet vision and promise to Jacob. Bethel was the true church that had the word of God and was the place where the fathers worshiped.

In 2 Kings 2 there was a very different Bethel.

Bethel had rejected the word of God. That Bethel was revealed in her children. That Bethel was judged in her children.

Bethel is thought-provoking especially in light of Jericho and the healing of her waters.

19. And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the ground barren.
20. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him.
21. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land.
22. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake. (2 Kings 2:19–22)

Jericho is the city that brings to mind man's rebellion and God's curse.

Elisha the prophet, successor of Elijah, crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. There he performed a miracle—a miracle of astounding power to heal and to give life again to a cursed land.

Then, at Bethel, Elisha performed a miracle of astounding, swift, and awful judgment.

Do not separate those miracles! Together they illustrate the full reality of the power of the preaching of the gospel. The healing of Jericho's waters was first and foremost and thus also first in the history. The mauling of Bethel's children was second and secondary and thus second in the history. But those miracles cannot be understood properly apart from one another.

That they cannot be understood separately from one another is especially important to see in connection with

the person of the prophet Elisha. His name means *my God is salvation*. His whole ministry was devoted to the declaration of that truth. As a prophet he was the instrument by which God's saving word came to his people: an earthen vessel that held a treasure of great price.

So the salt that healed Jericho's waters came in an earthen vessel. The salt healed, yet that salt could not come without the earthen vessel. That was not because the earthen vessel was anything. The vessel's very earthenness assures us that it was nothing; it was not a bowl of silver or of gold but of earth, and thus the vessel was common—yet it was sanctified by the will and word of God to be the instrument by which the healing salt of the promise of God's covenant came to heal his people and their children. Out of them had come only that which was foul, but after their healing, out of them came living waters. That ministry of the word the people of Jericho took to themselves; and by that ministry of the word, they were healed with their children, their fields, their flocks and herds, and their whole land.

Bethel stood in stark contrast to Jericho. The word and ministry of the word had come to Bethel too. By that word Bethel was revealed. Bethel could not have been revealed until the ministry of the word of the gospel came; and in that very coming of the ministry of the word, the true spiritual character of Bethel was shown.

The issue in the text is not first of all the children or the children's mockery of the prophet or even the prophet himself.

The issue is, what was Bethel, and then what was Bethel's relationship to those children?

Bethel was a city and a place of worship. By her own confession Bethel was a place, if not *the* place, for the worship of Jehovah God. Bethel was situated in a heavily wooded area about twelve miles north of the city of Jerusalem. From the walls of Jerusalem on a clear day, the smoke from the sacrifices on the great altar at Bethel was visible. On a still day it was possible to hear the steady thumping of the drums, the intoxicating twang of the viols, and the loud singing of the hymns from the worship in Bethel as the people sat down around the golden calf and arose up to dance and to play.

The contrast between Bethel and Jericho, then, is clear. If Jericho was the cursed city that was representative of the wrath of God against sin, then Bethel was the blessed city. Jericho was synonymous with rebellion. Bethel was synonymous with religion and religious zeal. Bethel's very name means *the house of God*. Bethel's claim and its name meant that God dwelled there; and where God dwelled, the people were blessed by his gracious presence. In God's house were also his children because the owner of the house made those who dwelled in his house his children, companions, and friends. A more religious place on earth could hardly be found, rivaled only by Jerusalem, Mount Moriah, and the temple precinct.

Bethel also had a long history of religion. Was it not at Bethel where Abraham, after coming into Canaan, first made an altar and there called on the name of Jehovah his God? It was to Bethel that Abraham returned to worship during the trying times with Lot. It was at Bethel where the patriarch Jacob saw angels ascending and descending on a stairway to heaven. There God appeared to Jacob in order to comfort him with the truth that God was his God, as he was the God of Abraham and of Isaac his father. To Bethel Jacob returned after his exile in Haran, and there he worshiped the God who spoke to him. When Israel had initially secured the land of Canaan, the tabernacle of God rested at Shiloh, not far from Bethel.

Bethel as the house of God was the former sanctuary of the patriarchs. Surely, if they had been alive in Elisha's time, they would still be worshiping in Bethel. And even more, after the history of Ahab and the worship of Baal, Bethel was a place of revival and reformation in the worship of Jehovah. Even while Judah was in the grip of idolatry, worship at Bethel carried on and even increased.

The Bethel that Elisha approached was the Bethel as reimagined and remade by Jeroboam. When Jeroboam rebelled against the house of David, Jeroboam instituted a new doctrine and a new worship at Dan and at Bethel, but Bethel had the preeminence. In Bethel Jeroboam built a grand altar. In Bethel he fashioned a golden calf and taught the people of Israel that the calf was their God who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. In Bethel Jeroboam instituted a new priesthood not from the house of Aaron but, nevertheless, committed to sacrificing on Jeroboam's new altar. In Bethel Jeroboam created new

feast days that were not according to the law of Moses, but they looked like the feasts commanded in the law of Moses.

Jeroboam turned to the new worship of Bethel to deliver himself from the dire predicament in which he found himself when he rebelled against the house of David: if the people went up to Jerusalem, then their hearts would be turned to David's house, and the people would kill Jeroboam and return to David. Drawing on all of Bethel's past religious significance, Jeroboam pressed that into the service of a new doctrine, a new worship, and a new king. The doctrine was the lies and ignorance of the golden calf. The worship was that of a new altar with a new priesthood made from the lowest and most ignorant men. All that to direct the people's attention away from David—and thus from Christ—in order to consolidate Jeroboam's rebellious rule and kingdom.

Bethel had been set up to be a bold, public rival of Jerusalem. In Bethel there was an air of religious enthusiasm, the claim to a long and distinguished religious pedigree, and a confession to be orthodox. Bethel's purpose was to rival Jerusalem in the affections of the people, to replace Jerusalem, and eventually to destroy it. Bethel vigorously maintained itself against any criticism, jealously guarded its prerogatives, and shamelessly promoted itself as having the true worship of God.

What was Bethel's sin?

Rejection of the word of God.

Bethel substituted the word and commandments of men for the word and commandments of God. Bethel rejected God's word that he cannot be known any other way than in his revelation in the law and the prophets. Bethel rejected the word of God that he can only be worshiped in the way he commands and that he cannot be worshiped by images. Specifically, Bethel rejected God's word that he must be worshiped in Jerusalem, by means of the sacrifices offered by the priesthood of Aaron, and out of hearts that loved and believed the promise of God. Bethel rejected the gospel of Christ. Therefore, in changing the truth of God into a lie and rejecting the true worship of God, Bethel rejected God.

The true worship of God—the truth—is the charge that God gives to his people; and in departing from that truth, they depart from him.

God does not necessarily dwell where there is a long

The church that departs from God in worship, whether in form or doctrine, worships under the judgment of God. That church is...a dying church, inasmuch as there is no blessing of God upon that worship.

religious pedigree, where there are the most people, or where the worshipers are the most enthusiastic and loud.

But God dwells where his word is received. Where his word is obeyed, received, and believed, there is the sure sign of his presence. There God is, and God is blessing his people. There is the true Bethel. Where there is the heartfelt confession of and repentance from sin as typified in the sacrifices; where there are true prophets, priests, and kings ordained by God; where the worship of God is carried on as God ordained, so that the word of truth is preached, and the sacraments are rightly administered, and the songs of God are sung—there is Bethel, the house of God. And where God is, there God blesses and fills his people with his goodness, grace, and mercy. There the people of God rejoice before the Lord their God and sing unto him. There, in the covenant presence of God, his people behold God's beauty and can inquire in his temple. Where God is, there is life and blessing for the believer and his children.

But that new, shameful Bethel. What was she?

She was a type ordained by God to be a sign of a New Testament spiritual reality. Bethel was typical of that institution and spiritual communion that calls itself *church* in the world, that exists in closest connection and proximity to the church of God in the world, that resembles the church of God, and that even at one time may have been the house of God but is corrupt to the core. Bethel was also the spiritual reality of the world in a unique sense. Bethel was the world as that world manifests itself in the apostatizing church and covers itself in a religious veneer.

Bethel manifests itself today wherever there is that institution and that spiritual communion that historically in its generations held to and confessed the word of God and has departed from the word of God but yet maintains a cover of religion, maintains its claim to be church, and in its departure insists all the while that its religion is both right and proper.

Bethel is that spiritual reality where the word of God is deliberately, persistently, and unrepentantly rejected and yet where an outward claim of piety and faith is maintained.

Bethel is that spiritual reality present yet today in which the truth of God is changed into a lie, so that the preaching of the truth is rejected, and in its place a false doctrine and thus a corrupt worship are fashioned after the imaginations of the hearts of men, and all the while that corrupt worship and false doctrine are called the worship of God.

From Bethel opposition to the prophet Elisha came in an unusual form: children. On his way from Jericho, the prophet passed by Bethel. He did not intend to go into Bethel. A group of children came out from Bethel and

mocked the prophet: "Go up, thou bald head! Go up, thou bald head!"

There should not be any doubt about the age of the children. It is true that the Hebrew word for *children* can mean babies to adolescents and even young men. Nevertheless, the Bible adds the word "little." They were "little children." Some argue that the children were young men. They claim this in order to charge the children with a certain measure of responsibility in the crime. Since they were young men, so the argument goes, they should have known better. It was really the fault of those evil children, who might even have been the exception in Bethel.

The point of the text is precisely the opposite. They were little children, who might not even have known their right hands from their left. Those little children of Bethel came out deliberately and maliciously to mock the prophet in the same way children might come out to play a game. They could not help it. It was ingrained into them; it was part of their very nature and environment. They said, "Go up, thou bald head!" The bald head was a reference to two things: to Elisha's prematurely bald head and to the association that baldness had with leprosy. To call him a "bald head" was the equivalent of calling him a plague on the land and nation.

When the children said, "Go up," they showed their unbelief. They were unbelieving children. "Go up" was a reference to the report they had heard of the wonderful miracle that God had performed, in which he vindicated the entire ministry of Elijah by taking him to heaven in a whirlwind without dying. The children did not believe a word of that miracle and ridiculed it. But at least Elijah and with him the terrible and disturbing message and his awful condemnation of Israel were gone from the land. And those children wished the same thing for Elisha: "Go up with him! You plague!" That was not only disrespect of the prophet but also unbelief of the word and the wonders of God.

From little children!

But they were *Bethel's* children.

And the little children were revelatory of Bethel. Little children reveal their parents, and those children revealed Bethel.

Where did those children learn that disrespect and unbelief?

They learned it in Bethel. They learned it from the priests in Bethel and from the parents of Bethel and from the schools in Bethel. At the root of all that Bethel was and all that Bethel did—worship of the golden calf, rejection of the house of David, and all the changes in doctrine and worship—was unbelief, which unbelief was Bethel's hatred of God.

You might say to me that this is a rather harsh assessment of Bethel. Bethel, after all, spoke about Jehovah and Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Bethel had worship and sang too and was even enthusiastic in its religion. Bethel had priests and sacrifices, and Bethel was the chapel of the king of Israel himself. Bethel had the numbers, the crowds, the festivals, and many, many things that commended Bethel as a very religious place. Bethel's name was that it was *the house of God*, where God was and where God dwelled. Certainly, no evil thing could be spoken of Bethel. Bethel herself said, "We believe the truth." Bethel made its claims to religion and jealously guarded its religious inventions from all criticism.

But in Bethel's children those claims were revealed to be lies. Bethel's spiritual condition was revealed by Bethel's children. The source of Bethel's departure was unbelief. The source of Bethel's unbelief was hatred of God. The end of Bethel's departure was judgment. Bethel could never result in faith and salvation. The children were a window into the religious attitudes of Bethel and into all the religious instruction that went on in Bethel. The children were a window into what that produces and what that brings forth as its seed.

The true church has her seed, and the false church has her seed.

Bethel's unbelief manifested itself particularly in the rejection of the preached word as that came in the ministry of the prophet. Bethel never would have admitted that she did not love God, that she did not worship God, or that she was irreligious.

But where the word of God is rejected, there is Bethel. Where the word cannot receive a hearing, there is Bethel. Where the word is mocked and ridiculed, there is Bethel. And where Bethel is, there is the appalling wickedness of hatred of God and unbelief in his word, all the while claiming faith and the worship of God.

Bethel's appalling wickedness was revealed in the appalling wickedness of her children, which they did not have enough guile to cover. Bethel, that Bethel, had become Bethaven: *not a house of God but a house of wickedness*.

And in her children Bethel was judged. That was God's word in the law concerning his haters, who manifest their hatred of him in their lies and corrupt worship: he visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the

children unto the third and fourth generations of those who hate him.

That iniquity of departure from God in the matter of doctrine and worship, God says he visits upon the children. This means that there is judgment upon the generations of those who depart from God in doctrine and worship. The church that departs from God in worship, whether in form or doctrine, worships under the judgment of God. That church is not a progressive church but a dying church, inasmuch as there is no blessing of God upon that worship.

That church will be judged in her children.

You say to me, "But they were children. They did not know any better." That explains Elisha's reaction to them. He turned and looked. He stopped dead in his tracks at that terrible fruit and awful judgment of God upon Bethel's departure and rejection of the word of God. If it had been Sodom's children, or Gath's children, or Zidon's children, then we would understand. But *Bethel's children!* Astounding!

Understand, God did not judge Bethel first through the bears, but God judged Bethel through the unbelief of her children.

That was not an isolated incident among Bethel's children, but many, many, many of her children were unbelieving. That already was the judgment of God.

Is not the reality that when the parents depart from God, then judgment falls heavily on the children? They are not taught the truth, and they do not know the truth. They are taught lies, and they parrot those lies. They are taught hatred against the word and the ministry of the word, and they parrot that hatred.

As God saves believers and their seed, he judges unbelievers and their seed. In the true house of God, God makes effectual his promise in the line of believers and their seed, so that the children of believers, as children, believe.

In God's judgment on Bethel's departure from him, he gave the parents unbelieving children. That is literally the meaning of the Hebrew word translated as "children" at the end of verse 24. One could also translate that word as *seed* or *offspring*. Here we have the spawn of Bethel's departure and rejection of the word. When the man of God came to Bethel, then Bethel mocked him *in her children*. That is what Bethel had begotten.

And God's judgment upon Bethel's unbelief was the

Here is the call to the true church to maintain the word and worship of God. To maintain the truth and to maintain the proper worship of God. Here is the call to marvel at the astounding works of God: that he saved Jericho, and he judged Bethel!

curse of God. Elisha turned and looked, and he cursed the children in the name of Jehovah. That Elisha cursed the children means that he spoke the word of God's wrath over them, which word worked the children's destruction. That Elisha cursed them in the name of Jehovah means, first, that the curse was not Elisha's private sentiment but the actual word of God upon the children; and second, that the curse was a true revelation of who God is. He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he wills he hardens. All the despisers of the Lord shall be consumed. That is not out of character with God. That is not something that happened only once either, but that is always the reality of the coming of the word. On the one hand, the word heals. On the other hand, there is in that same word a word of wrath that works the curse of the unbeliever and his seed. And in their very rejection of the word, God's attitude toward them is revealed.

About this reality the apostle Paul spoke when he said that the ministry of the word is a savor of life unto life and a savor of death unto death. This is the double power of the preaching of the word. It saved, astoundingly and against all expectation, Jericho and her children. For God has mercy on whom he will have mercy. And the word hardened, astoundingly and against all expectation, Bethel and her children. For whom God wills he hardens. And that same word judges them in their wicked opposition to it.

The word had to come to Bethel in order for Bethel to be exposed in her true, spiritual condition and in order that Bethel's mask and pretension at faith and piety would be torn away. It was not God's will that Bethel be converted, and Bethel herself revealed her astounding wickedness in and through her children in the presence of the word. As long as Bethel was without the word, she lay hidden under her claim of religion. But when the word came, Bethel was exposed and judged.

Here is the call to the true church to maintain the word and worship of God. To maintain the truth and to maintain the proper worship of God. Here is the call to marvel at the astounding works of God: that he saved Jericho, and he judged Bethel!

Here is a warning against trusting in ourselves. If God spared not Bethel, the house of God; the heir of such a rich, spiritual tradition; the very sanctuary of the patriarchs, then he will not spare departure from him and corruption of his truth. In departure there is no blessing but a curse.

And do not overlook the last words of the text. God passed on with his word. The word of God comes and works its work and passes on. The word does not return. The word passes on from the place it curses. There is no failure in that. The work of God has been accomplished.

—NJL

FROM THE EDITOR

A genial welcome to all our readers as you take up this special issue of *Sword and Shield*. The purpose of this issue is to commemorate the second annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing, which was held on October 21.

The setting for the meeting was utterly unique, for the meeting was held in the large work bay of Wonderland Tire in Byron Center, Michigan. The ladies who set up for the meeting had the place looking festive with fall decorations, and they had plenty of donuts and coffee and cider to season our fellowship afterward. It was exciting for many of us to be back in the tire shop, where the members of First Reformed Protestant Church had worshiped for several months while we waited for God to provide us with our own building. Last year, the annual meeting was held in a parking lot. This year, in a tire shop. And I think I speak for everyone present when I say that

we wouldn't trade it for all the buildings in the world. Give us the truth, though it be in a barn or a parking lot or a tire shop. God has given us the truth and beautiful accommodations besides.

This issue contains the speeches, or articles based on the speeches, that were delivered at the annual meeting. Notable for the meeting was the fact that Rev. Martin VanderWal was able to be present at the meeting in person. The opportunity to hear him and speak to him face to face was a great encouragement to all. His speech on the matter of discernment through reading, as that discernment is worked by the word of God, identified what probably has been an overlooked aspect of this reformation: the need for biblical discernment.

I found Rev. Nathan Langerak's speech to be foundational for the reformation that God is working. It exposed the powerful tactic of the devil of convincing

men that the confession of the truth must include a calculation about the honor of man. The speech also laid out in clear and stark terms that there are only two possible evaluations of this past year: either it was reformation, or it was schism. What one says about that must determine what he does about it. The speech was not only invigorating, but I believe it will be one of the “go-to” sources to explain what the reformation has been all about.

The board of Reformed Believers Publishing also has written an excellent article for this issue, reminding us all of the bondage of stifling silence that the Lord has delivered us from. The believer must speak. It is inevitable that he speak. “I believed, therefore have I spoken” (Ps. 116:10). To make the believer silent, you must take

away his faith. To make him silent, you must convince him that people and their feelings are above the truth. So it was in the Protestant Reformed Churches and in the *Standard Bearer*. Thank God—thank God!—that he has delivered us and that he always causes his truth to prevail.

We also include some photos of the evening that we hope will renew pleasant memories for those who were present. We hope that for those who could not be present, the photos also will be a little window to share in the joy of the evening, even if only in a passing glimpse.

May the Lord speed the truths written herein to your hearts and the next issue into your hands.

—AL



CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

Welcome

On behalf of the board, I want to give a hearty welcome to everyone who has come out to join us this evening for the second annual association meeting. Your presence here is a big encouragement to us.

A little over a year ago, *Sword and Shield* was born into the spiritually oppressive atmosphere in which the truth of the gospel was being silenced. On the pages of the magazine, the pure gospel of grace has been set free again. This new freedom of the truth that we now enjoy issue after issue is something most of us have not experienced in our lifetimes.

Reformed Believers Publishing and its magazine constitute a reformatory movement. The truth is again being openly set forth, and the lie is being unabashedly condemned, without regard to persons and institutions.

Tonight is a celebration of this fact.

Our purpose as the board of Reformed Believers Publishing with tonight's program is to encourage one another and to thank God for what *he* is doing.

We love our magazine!

A reformation *is* underway.

Our adversaries may shout, "SCHISM!" at us.

Tonight we again say, "NO! REFORMATION!"

Prayer

Our Father, we thank thee that thou art the same yesterday, today, and forever and that thy promises are absolutely sure in Jesus Christ.

We confess that we are in ourselves dead in sins.

We thank thee for Jesus Christ and his obedience and that in him we have free forgiveness of our sins and a complete righteousness imputed to us that no one and nothing can take away from us. This is our lasting joy before thee.

Bless our meeting tonight, that it may be for our encouragement to go forward in our witness to the truth through the printed page in spite of fierce opposition.

We pray that *Sword and Shield* may continue as a powerful instrument to set forth, defend, and spread the gospel of pure grace and that it may give a sharp, antithetical witness against all error that militates against the truth. And our prayer is that the magazine will build up thy people in the truth wherever they are.

We thank thee especially for upholding and sustaining

our editors in this past year in the very difficult circumstances in which they had to stand. Continue to give them hearts of lions and a burning zeal for the truth of thy absolute sovereign grace in Jesus Christ alone.

Deliver us all from the paralyzing fear of men and the temptation to silence the truth in its sharpness.

Give the board continued commitment to publish the truth and the needed means to do so.

We give thanks for the growing number of association members, supporters, and friends evident again tonight.

We thank thee for our speaker and for his many years of faithful instruction in our midst. Be with him again this evening, and grant him all that he stands in need of as he speaks to us.

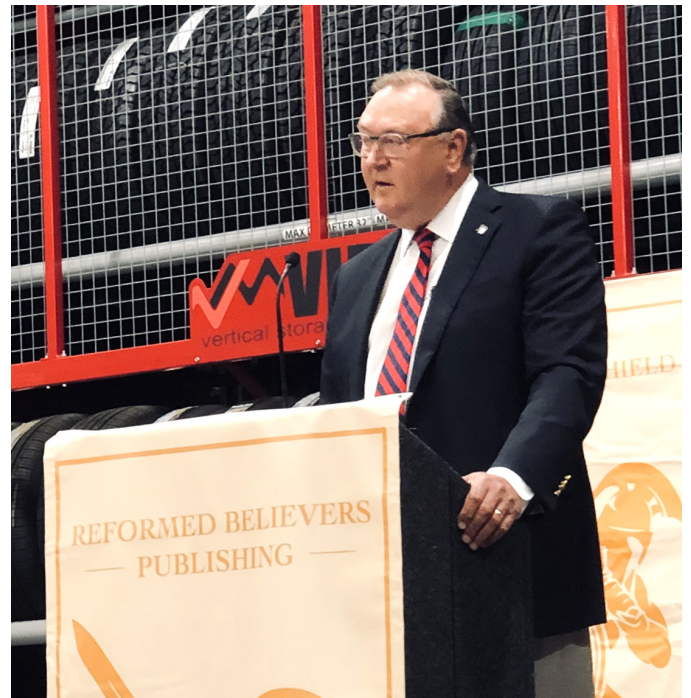
Graciously blot out all our trespasses and sins for Christ's sake.

Amen.

Introduction of the Speaker

We now come to the main part of our program this evening.

It is a great pleasure for me to introduce our speaker. He is going to speak to us on the subject as announced: "Reformation, Not Schism."



Henry Kamps

As spiritual children of the sixteenth-century Reformation, this subject is of deep interest to us.

Our speaker was ordained into the ministry of the word and sacraments in 2007 in the Protestant Reformed Churches. He served the pastorate in Crete Protestant Reformed Church for fourteen years.

Rev. Nathan Langerak is currently serving the pastorate in Second Reformed Protestant Church in Dyer, Indiana.

He also is coeditor of *Sword and Shield* magazine.

He is the author of a two-volume set of commentaries on 1 Corinthians entitled *Walking in the Way of Love: A Practical Commentary on 1 Corinthians for the Believer*. And he is the author of a series of Bible story books entitled *Tell His Wonders*.

Join me in welcoming Rev. Nathan Langerak!

—Henry Kamps

EDITORIAL

REFORMATION, NOT SCHISM

Introduction

I am thankful that I am able to be here tonight and that I can speak to you on the subject of “Reformation, Not Schism.” I want to thank the board for inviting me to speak and the members and supporters of Reformed Believers Publishing for providing a forum in which the subject of tonight’s lecture can be given. I believe that this lecture could not be given in any other forum, especially in the churches out of which we recently came.

We as writers—and I’m sure I speak for the board as well—are encouraged by the support that we have received in our labors to publish the truth.

Little did we know last year in October what was coming!

There are some here tonight who were not at the annual meeting last year, and there are some who were there last year but are not here tonight. Many of those who were at the meeting last year and are not here tonight are the fearful, those who are in bondage, those who are in bondage to the fear of men; and being in bondage to the fear of men, they will not associate with the truth of Jesus Christ and, therefore, with Christ. Those fearful and enslaved ones have many excuses for their bondage: they are not comfortable; they were commanded by their consistories not to be members of Reformed Believers Publishing; they are trying to keep the peace. The bottom line is that they are in bondage to the fear of men.

When we gathered last year, no one could have seen what was coming. Not in our wildest imaginations could we have written that story.

And God had all things planned in his will, and it was perfectly done.

I said last year in the few comments that I made that the appearance of *Sword and Shield* was met with an absolute storm—a hurricane—of opposition. Consistories, in particular, stumbled over themselves to make public statements condemning the magazine. Charges of sin were rushed off to the consistories of the editors.



Rev. Nathan Langerak

Little did we know that the opposition had its eyes on the *offices* of the ministers involved with *Sword and Shield*, that there would be an orchestrated effort to silence the magazine, and that a little more than one year after the appearance of *Sword and Shield*, all three editors would be outside the Protestant Reformed Churches.

No one could have written that story.

All of that happened in the sovereign counsel of God and served for the coming of his kingdom, for the glory of his name, and for the promotion of his truth—the truth of God’s absolute sovereignty in salvation, the truth of the sovereignty of God as the sole source of the believer’s salvation and as the sole explanation of every benefit of salvation. That truth is now sounding forth in a way and in a forum in which it had not sounded forth for many years. Out of that writing in *Sword and Shield*, a new denomination has been formed, and in that denomination that same truth is preached.

As I said, no one could have written that story.

Sword and Shield is not responsible for the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches, but she was a midwife at the delivery of those churches into the world.

That the writing in the magazine played a crucial role in the reformation of the church is unsurprising. It is unsurprising, first, because the one who sits as head of the church and as the lord over all, whose name is Word, caused his word long ago to be written in the Bible. The church is the church of the written word. The written word all through New Testament church history has played a crucial role in the promotion of the truth and in the reformation of the church.

That was true with the church fathers. The writings of Athanasius were essential for the preservation of the truth of Jesus Christ over against the whole world’s running after the error of Arius. That was true during the time of Augustine, when his writings on sovereign grace served for the preservation of the church over against the lies of Pelagius.

That was true at the time prior to the Reformation, when the writings of John Wycliffe and John Hus were used by God to begin the Reformation before the Reformation began.

In the sixteenth century the writings of Martin Luther drove the Reformation, and without those writings

the Reformation simply would not have been possible. Luther’s friend and promoter, Lucas Cranach, guarded Luther against every attempt to silence him, so that Luther could be heard throughout Europe, and Cranach made sure that Luther’s writings were excellently printed and easily recognizable. One of the greatest gifts that God ever gave to the church of Jesus Christ was the printer of Geneva, Robert Stephanus, who saw to it that Calvin had a voice and that his voice was heard throughout Europe and that his books were beautifully printed.

The reformation of the church in the *Afscheiding* was largely due to the writings of Hendrik de Cock, which writings ultimately got him in trouble and led to his suspension and deposition.

The same was true of Abraham Kuyper: his writings served for feeding the people who were starving at that time for the truth of God’s sovereign grace.

Also at the time of the reformation of the church in 1924, the writings of Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof drove the reformation of the church, so that Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof could look back and say, “The reason we were deposed was the *Standard Bearer*.”

The reformation of the church in 1953 would not have turned out the way that it did, were it not for the editorial leadership of the *Standard Bearer* in that crisis.

The reason that Nathan Langerak, Andrew Lanning, and Martin VanderWal are no longer in the Protestant Reformed Churches is the *Sword and Shield*. It was the appearance of that magazine and the truth that was written on its pages—the truth that drove the opponents of that truth mad in their opposition to it—that led to the destruction of these men in those churches. The magazine was hated by the leadership from the beginning because the magazine threatened the stranglehold that the leadership had on writing in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The reformation of the church that has taken place began in the hearts of a group of concerned men, men who were not afraid: men who were not afraid to begin a new paper, men who were not afraid to associate with the truth and to see to it that that truth was published, come what may. Without Reformed Believers Publishing and *Sword and Shield*, the reformation of the church that has begun would not have been possible.

Little did we know that the opposition had its eyes on the *offices* of the ministers involved with *Sword and Shield*, that there would be an orchestrated effort to silence the magazine, and that a little more than one year after the appearance of *Sword and Shield*, all three editors would be outside the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Humanly speaking now, the doctrinal issues that we confronted would have turned out differently had there been different men at the helm of the *Standard Bearer*. The *Standard Bearer* could then have served the purpose that it served in other controversies by giving a clear and compelling witness to the truth of sovereign grace. Such was not the case in this controversy. The men who were at the helm of the *Standard Bearer* had for years, as leaders in the *Standard Bearer*, censored the truth. They had censored the truth, and they had silenced a writer—only one writer that I know of, but there may have been more. That censorship extended beyond the *Standard Bearer*. After I had been unceremoniously sacked as a rubric writer, I was given a voice by the board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association on its blog. The editors then moved by false charges and accusations to have me silenced there as well. I have all the letters and documents that show this. There was an effort to stifle the voice of the truth and to allow the lie to have a platform in the churches. There were efforts, concerted efforts, to give the *Standard Bearer* a different tone, a different face, a different stance. The editors were embarrassed, and vocally so in private, about the writings of Herman Hoeksema at the time of the reformation of the church in 1953. The editors loathed what the *Standard Bearer* did in 1953 for the preservation of the truth, and they were determined that the *Standard Bearer* would never again play that role in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

It is for these reasons that *Sword and Shield* was absolutely necessary. The truth could not be written in the Protestant Reformed Churches, especially in its condemnation of the lie and its warning the people of new dangers. The formation of that magazine led to the reformation of the church, and now these two are fundamentally inseparable.

I want to establish tonight that what we are dealing with *is* the reformation of the church. I don't intend to establish that exhaustively. I intend to establish that in principle. I believe that on the pages of *Sword and Shield* the details have already been established that what God is doing *is* reformational and that what has transpired and led to the formation of a new Reformed denomination is reformational.

The Important Question

I believe that the question that the speech seeks to answer tonight is the most important question that can be asked today. Is what has transpired reformation or schism?

I pose that in the form of a question not because I believe that it is a question. But I pose that in the form of a question because I believe every person—either for or against what has transpired in the Reformed Protestant Churches and by means of *Sword and Shield* and Reformed Believers Publishing—every person, friend or

foe, *must* answer that question. It is foolish of men in the light of what has transpired to dismiss easily, without much thought and reflection, what has happened.

What has transpired?

Explain it.

Was it reformation or schism?

The importance of that cannot be overstated.

In answering that question every other question surrounding what has transpired is answered.

The language that is used to describe what has transpired may not be generic. We may not speak only of the formation of a new magazine or of the formation of a new denomination because in that language and with those terms, no judgment is given and no decision is required. It can all be described as unfortunate, as a big mistake, and as the result of the misbehavior of men. Then we can all wring our hands and lament what has transpired, and we can go on with our lives—I say, if the terms that are used are left generic.

But the question—the question that all must face, whether friend or foe—is whether those events were the work of the Lord or the work of men and, therefore, whether those events were reformation or those events were schism.

And in answer to that question is determined your *judgment* on those events.

Then, in that judgment is determined also what your *decision must be* over against those events.

When I ask whether those events were the work of the Lord, I do not mean to ask whether the Lord sovereignly controlled all of those events by his providence, so that all that has transpired happened in the sovereign providence of God. Of course, that is true. Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord has not done it? Men in all their lives, men in their very thoughts and purposes, and men in all their actions are determined by God, and men are hemmed in by God on every side by his sovereign counsel, even when they act wickedly and unjustly. We confess that all the events that have transpired and the very thoughts of men are of the Lord, in the sense of God's sovereign providence. He decreed them, and he carried them out.

Now, when he brought those events, did he bring *reformation*? Did *he* bring reformation, so that his purpose in all those events was the reformation of his church?

Or when God brought those events, did he bring *schism* in this sense: did the Lord by means of those events expose a sect of antinomians and radicals in the church of Jesus Christ? When God brought those events, did he bring to light reformation? Or did God bring to light an ungodly sect that had departed from the truth and that had to be removed from the church for the good of the truth?

Were those events reformation or schism?

The theme of tonight's speech, therefore, places the events that we consider in the light of God's covenant, God's kingdom and church, and the cause of God's truth in all of history. Whether those events were reformation or schism puts those events in terms of the great spiritual struggle for the truth over against the lie that has transpired since Eden. That struggle began with Cain and Abel and ended with Cain's murder of Abel, whose righteous blood still cries from the ground. That great spiritual struggle for the truth puts the events in terms of the unfolding of the enmity that God spoke about in the garden and the enmity that carried through the entire Old Testament in the battle between God's people and the people of the lie and of the devil. That enmity continued in the New Testament between the apostles and the false apostles and false teachers. That warfare was carried on throughout all of New Testament church history in the struggles between Athanasius and Arius, Augustine and Pelagius, Luther and Erasmus, and Hoeksema and the synod, and in the battle for the unconditional covenant in 1953; and now that warfare continues today in 2021.

Was it reformation or schism?

No greater question, no more important question, can be asked.

And every friend and every foe *must* answer the question.

Whether it be reformation or whether it be schism creates a sharp divide, an antithesis. On the one side is the devil, and on the other side is the Lord. On the one side is the truth, and on the other side is the lie. On the one side is the defense of the truth, and on the other side are the proper works of the devil. On the one side is the losing of one's life for the sake of the truth and the saving of one's soul, and on the other side is the saving of one's life and the losing of one's soul. On the one side is the confession of Christ in heaven before his Father and the holy angels of the names of those who stood on the side of the truth, and on the other side is the denial of Christ before his Father and the holy angels of the names of those who opposed and slandered the truth. On the one side is the salvation of God's people and their seed and generations, and on the other side is the cutting off of the unbeliever in his generations. On the one side is the glory of God, and on the other side is the glory of man.

Was it reformation or schism?

When you answer that question, you will rejoice if you say, "It is reformation," for then you glory in the

work of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven. If you say, "It is schism," then you will lament and wring your hands.

Was it reformation or schism?

There is no more important question.

And I remind you that you may not answer that question with the devilish neutrality of Gamaliel: Let us wait and see. If it be of God, who can oppose it? If it be of men, it will fall to pieces. That was devilish neutrality. Only the devil can inspire such words, for those words mean that you need not take the side of the truth. You may let Christ go begging. You may see how the cause of Christ turns out in the world. You may enjoy your peace and safety and your health and comfort until the outcome is known. Only the devil can say such a thing.

You *must* answer whether it was reformation or schism.

Then, in your answer you must carry your position to its logical conclusion. If you say, "Schism," then you must draw that out to its logical conclusion. If you say, "Schism," then you may not draw back from that because in those who draw back God has no pleasure. If you say, "Schism," then you may not at the same time also supinely chalk up what has happened to the misbehavior of men—perhaps misbehavior on both

sides—and perhaps to misunderstanding and to misunderstanding on both sides. All you are doing if you say that it is schism and you will not carry that to its logical conclusion is engaging in cleverly disguised neutrality to save face with your friends and to save your life. And you are avoiding the all-important question whether this is indeed reformation or schism. There may be no neutrality in the battle for the truth.

And when you answer that question whether this be reformation or schism, then you have also answered the question for yourself *what you must do*.

There are many who, in light of the circumstances that have transpired, are in a quandary, but the quandary is of their own making. What to do is not at all difficult to know. I did not say that it was not at all difficult to *do*, but it is not at all difficult to *know*—if you will answer the question whether it be reformation or schism.

There are many who wanted to be here tonight but are not here because they are afraid of the faces of men. There are many who waffle on what has transpired: one day taking one side and the next day taking the other side. They have not answered the all-important question whether this be reformation or schism.

If you have answered that question whether it be

The theme of tonight's speech, therefore, places the events that we consider in the light of God's covenant, God's kingdom and church, and the cause of God's truth in all of history.

reformation or schism, then you have also answered what you must do.

If it be reformation, then you must join this cause. If it be reformation, then you must stand with that reformation, for then you stand on the side of the Lord, and then the Lord stands with you and on your side. And then standing with the Lord, the Lord opposes and the Lord overthrows all who stand against it. If it be reformation, then you must join that as the Lord's work and as the side on which the Lord stands, though the edicts of kings and princes and, indeed, the whole world condemn you as wicked, and though your spouse and your brother and sister and your family and all your friends forsake you and slander you. If it be reformation, then you must join it. You must do so without hesitation, with a conviction, and quickly, lest the Lord weigh you in the balance in which he is weighing the Protestant Reformed Churches, and you with them be found wanting—if it be reformation.

If it be schism, then you must oppose me with all your might. If it be schism, then you must condemn us. You must condemn us, and you must hate us, and you must put us out of your fellowship.

But don't try to have it both ways. Don't say that it was schism in front of your friends and in private tell me that it was reformation. You are two-faced, and you are Janus. Do not say that it was schism and then invite me to your parties. Do not say that it was schism and then wish me the Lord's blessing. Do not say that it was schism and then shake my hand because if it be schism, then I am the most disgusting and despicable person on the planet.

You must curse me. You must deny me your fellowship. You must call me unceasingly to repentance. You may not wish me Godspeed. You may not have me into your house and invite me to your parties, and you must rejoice when I do not come. Then you must engage in a spiritual warfare with me, as God instructed his people in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. And you must hate me for Christ's sake.

But it is devilish, very devilish indeed, to say to me, "You are a schismatic, and I want you to come to Christmas. You are a schismatic; we are yet all brothers." For then you compromise your position, and then I know assuredly that your position is a lie. For when you say to me, "You are a schismatic," and then you invite me to Christmas, you have compromised your position. Then I know there is no truth in it. There is no truth in it at all. And when you say to me, "You're a schismatic, and I want you at Christmas," then you compromise your position, and you demand that I compromise my position. My position is that it is reformation. My position knows no compromise with your position. But in your willingness to compromise your position that it is schism, then I know you speak for the devil,

and I know that your position is a lie. For if it is the truth and I am a schismatic and the cause in which I labor is schismatic, then there would be no compromise with me.

When you compromise, then you show that my position, that it is reformation, is true and that your characterization of the position as schismatic is born of unbelief and malice toward the truth.

So I say that the question is of paramount importance. It is the most important question whether this cause is reformation or schism.

If it is reformation, then it is the Lord's cause. All that has transpired is the Lord's work for the cause of reformation. It is the Lord's work for the advancement of his covenant, his kingdom, and his church and for the preservation of his truth and in his love for his people. Then the Lord is in the vanguard, and the Lord is our rearward. And in this reformation God has worked in the same way that he worked in all reformations throughout church history.

And all the opponents of it will be found liars—if it be reformation.

If it be schism, then it is to be condemned in absolute terms.

I pose the question not because I believe it is a question. The events that have transpired were reformation. As reformation, they are the Lord's work.

Opposing the reformation, you oppose the Lord. Fighting the reformation, you fight the Lord. Slandering the reformation, you slander the Lord. Refusing to join the reformation, you refuse to help the Lord against the mighty, and you bring upon yourself the Lord's curse against the inhabitants of Meroz, who stayed within their walls while the men of Naphtali hazarded their lives in the Lord's battles (Judges 5:23).

It is of the Lord, so that if you refuse to join it, and you retain your comfortable life, and you retain your friends and your family, then you bring upon all of that God's curse, and you threaten your own soul with damnation—if it be reformation. And cursing those who have taken the Lord's side, you will find yourself in the uncomfortable position on the judgment day of having to explain to the Lord—an impossible task—why when he was in prison, you did not visit him; and when he was naked, you did not clothe him; and when he was hungry, you did not feed him. And you will have to explain to the Lord why you did not hazard your life and why you did not love the truth unto death—if it be reformation.

The Events of Reformation

The events to which I refer are those especially that led up to Synod 2018, the events at that synod, and the events that have transpired since Synod 2018 in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

It is becoming clearer and clearer every day that for many years in the Protestant Reformed Churches a number of forces and currents were present and that they all converged at Synods 2016, 2017, and 2018. All of those forces converged for the establishment of the lie and the overthrow of the truth.

That includes Synod 2018. Synod 2018 should be condemned. Synod 2018 is not to be trumpeted as a victory for the truth. Synod 2018 was a victory for the lie. It was a victory for the lie, and it was the establishment of a fatal principle in the Protestant Reformed Churches that led to the suspension and deposition of Rev. Andy Lanning, that led to my suspension, and that led to the putting out of Rev. Martin VanderWal. Synod 2018 belonged to the convergence of the forces that were already current in the Protestant Reformed Churches for years—as many as thirty or forty or more years—before those synods.

At Synod 2018 fatal negotiations were happening *within the very committee that was deciding the doctrinal issue*. Those fatal negotiations established a principle in the Protestant Reformed Churches that led to the overthrow of the truth and that ensured that the truth will never have a place in those churches again.*

The truth was not the main concern of many of the delegates to that synod and of many of the men who served on the committee to judge an appeal concerning sermons preached by Rev. David Overway. Their main concern was not the condemnation of the lie, but their main concern was the reputations of men. Their main concern was, how could synod get out of its sticky situation? The appellant had established beyond a shadow of a doubt that justification—of all doctrines—and the unconditional covenant—of all doctrines—had been denied in the Protestant Reformed Churches and that the false doctrine of justification by faith and works and the false doctrine of the conditional covenant had been taught and defended by the broader assemblies and by consistories in the Protestant Reformed Churches. How could synod extract itself from that sticky situation *without harming men*?

In the committee the lie negotiated with the truth, and the lie's only plea was this: the men who taught the lie are good men, and you all know that. That was the fatal compromise of the truth. In the committee the lie won. The lie won for itself the right to negotiate in the committee and at the broader assembly. The lie raised itself to the position of a partner with the truth. And the lie dared to require of the truth—require of the truth!—*that the truth be quiet in the interests of men*. The lie's position was this: the lie can be taught, the lie can be tolerated, and the lie should not be condemned as long as the men who teach it are nice men with good reputations and names

for orthodoxy. And when the truth compromised—no, when the truth *negotiated*—with the lie, the truth lost.

That is what the fathers at Dordt recognized. The lie may not negotiate with the truth. So when the Remonstrants pleaded for a place at the synod, at least to air their grievances as equals, the Remonstrants were refused.

The case that was before Synod 2018 demanded to be *judged* by the truth, not to have a negotiation between the truth and the lie about *how* the lie would be condemned. The case was not about a way for the lie to carve out for itself a position of *bargaining* with the truth. But as soon as the truth allowed the lie to do that, the truth lost. The truth was lost.

Delegates could vote for the advice of Synod 2018, upholding the appellant, even if they did not believe a word of it, and it didn't matter at all because Synod 2018 was going to be overthrown. Many who voted for the advice were not so concerned about its precise wording, but rather they believed the underlying principle in the advice *that the lie need not be condemned sharply but can be called something other than it is*. At Synod 2018 the lie had established the *principle* that you cannot condemn the lie without a careful, considered judgment about the reputations of men. When doctrinal issues come before synod, then the issue is not about the truth or the lie; it is about the reputations of men. If you cannot condemn the lie without considering first the reputations of the men who teach the lie, then the lie wins every time. When those are the rules of the game, the truth is fatally compromised as *truth*. The truth does not negotiate with the lie. The truth does not treat the lie as an equal partner. The truth always condemns the lie for what it is. The truth condemns the lie as the lie in the sharpest, clearest possible language. Men are to be judged by what they teach!

At Synod 2018 the truth lost—lost deceptively. Synod 2018 may go down in history as the devil's greatest victory. It was a shocking, astounding victory for the devil. It fooled even men who loved the truth—so stunning was the victory. The devil had established and now has established in the Protestant Reformed Churches this principle: You cannot condemn the lie for what it is. You cannot condemn conditional justification as conditional justification. You must call it *a compromise of justification*. You cannot condemn the conditional covenant as the conditional covenant. You must call it something else, anything else, because the reputations of men are at stake. False doctrine is not determined by the words that men speak. Indeed, a man can preach something false, and it cannot be condemned as false because it has been determined before that he is a good man and has a reputation for orthodoxy.

* See Hilgard Goosen, "Why Did the Goosen Family Leave?" *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 9 (November 2021): 25–32.

Synod 2018 was the devil's most stunning victory that I know of in all of church history. There has never been a synod like that in church history. In all of church history, there has never been a synod where the devil won *in the name of the truth*. In all of church history, there has never been a more stunning example of the devil's transforming himself into an angel of light. So stunning, I myself was fooled. I cannot be fooled anymore. It was a victory for the devil, and it would be simply a matter of time before that principle worked through.

That principle was the operative principle in Rev. Andy Lanning's deposition: you cannot condemn the lie without a careful consideration of the reputations of men first. Only if reputations are carefully bolstered, carefully fluffed and massaged, may you then in the most tepid of terms suggest—perhaps, maybe—that there might possibly be an error, not a false doctrine, but an error here. Maybe. Possibly. Perhaps.

That was the operative principle in my suspension. As one of the elders of Crete said, "We do not need this now," meaning we do not need the full-throated condemnation of the lie and the full-throated proclamation of the truth.

It was that principle that led to the discipline of Rev. Martin VanderWal because he had not carefully considered the reputations of men before he condemned the lie.

It was that principle, too, that was for a long time operative in the Protestant Reformed Churches. It was that principle that was operative at the *Standard Bearer* for many years. Long before I was suspended as a minister of the Protestant Reformed Churches, I was sacked as a writer for the *Standard Bearer*. The editorial committee that sacked me lied to my face when the men said that I was being sacked because I was "hard to work with." One of the members of the *Standard Bearer* staff let the cat out of the bag at the meeting where I was dismissed, that I was *not* being canned because I was hard to work with, but I was being let go because my writing was making the meetings of Protestant Reformed ministers with ministers of other Reformed denominations uncomfortable because I condemned the lie—condemned the lie in uncompromising terms. I condemned the lie by name, I condemned the lie by denomination; and that could not be found on the pages of the *Standard Bearer*. You cannot condemn the lie without a careful consideration of the reputations—and now also of the *friendships*—of men. "I have friends who believe that. I have friends who go to that church. You can't condemn the lie." And they sacked me because I did not take into consideration the reputations of men.

It was that principle—long operative in the Protestant

Reformed Churches—that led to the charges of sin against the group of concerned men, against the formation of Reformed Believers Publishing, and against *Sword and Shield*. We had not carefully considered the reputations of men before we formed the association and began publishing the magazine.

It was that principle that led to the litany of charges—so many charges I lost count and stopped caring—against myself, Reverend VanderWal; and Reverend Lanning—everything from rebellion, to schism, to being ringleaders of an unruly mob—all because we had not carefully considered the very tender and delicate reputations of men in our promotion of the truth.

Those events led to the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches, which formation has now been branded as schism.

Was it reformation or schism?

Reformation is the work of Christ.

Schism is the sinful work of men.

Was it reformation or schism?

Was Christ behind it?

Or was it merely men? Unruly men, unbelieving men, and ungodly men? For as I said, if it was schism, then I am the most wicked man on the planet.

It was reformation.

For the Truth's Sake

Everything that has happened points to the fact that it was reformation. Everything that is happening now points to the fact that it was reformation. Only the blind or the willfully ignorant or the malicious cannot see that it is reformation.

First of all, there are historical factors. Reformation of the church is not necessary when the truth holds the reins of power. Then when the lie comes against the truth, the truth is preserved, and reformation is not necessary. Reformation is necessary when the forces of the lie hold the power in the church and have the majority. That was certainly the truth in this case. Men who agreed with promoting the lie or sat supinely by while the lie savaged the truth were in all the positions of power. They ruled in the consistory meetings, so that whole consistories were populated by men like that. They sat at meetings of classis and synod. They taught in the seminary and served on all the denominational committees. They were not interested in the truth. They themselves said so. They were interested in the reputations of men. They had the power, so reformation was necessary. That is true of every reformation. When the lie lays hold on the reins of power, then it is the work of Christ to break the power of the lie by means of reformation.

Second, there is the whole matter of persecution.

Who is persecuted today? Who has lost today? Who has suffered loss of family, friends, schools, churches, businesses, and names? To all those who would charge me with schism, I say, “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Who has lost today? In reformation you lose your life, but you gain your soul.

Third, in this reformation there is a repetition—an eerie repetition—of history. A closed church paper: when did that happen before? The “mighties” all lined up against the truth? The corruption of the assemblies? A few ministers speaking the truth?

But these are all historical, you might say, anecdotal evidences—powerful in my mind, but they are not the weightiest to answer the question whether this was reformation or schism.

The weightiest and really the only question is, was the truth at stake?

Was it?

No one can doubt that now. There was a life and death struggle of eternal consequence over the truth. I must add that it is my very conviction that the Protestant Reformed Churches had the truth and the truth in its purest expression. That conviction also requires of me to put this conflict in terms of the truth. The truth was that denomination’s greatest and, in some sense, her only possession. That truth was threatened. The battle was over that truth.

The great big lie is that those events were all about the misbehavior of a group of concerned men who were raising discord, sects, and mutiny and were having secret meetings and starting a secret society in the Protestant Reformed Churches. I heard that all myself, also in the consistory at Crete. The great big lie is—and the expert of lies himself, Joseph Goebbels, said, “If you’re going to lie, then lie big”—the great big lie is that this was all about the misbehavior of ministers—ministers who were driving their own agendas. Reverend Lanning was guilty of misbehavior. Reverend Langerak was guilty of misbehavior. Reverend VanderWal was guilty of misbehavior.

No one is talking about misbehavior now. Many *Standard Bearer* articles, blog posts, email and text exchanges, family letters and discussions, ministers’ chat lists, and coffee room conversations are only about *one thing*: what is the truth? No one gives two snaps about misbehavior because the Protestant Reformed Churches got rid of the perceived troublemakers. Now, clearly the truth—truth—is at stake. Even our opponents talk about almost nothing else except what we believe and whether it is true

or false. The truth is at stake. It always has been. When the truth is at stake, that is reformation, not schism.

And the truth that is at stake could not be of greater importance. We are now arguing about *justification!* We have gone all the way back to the sixteenth-century Reformation. The Protestant Reformed denomination is overthrowing 1517—not 1924, not 1953, not 1834, and not 1618–19. But 1517! That is what we are arguing about: justification.

That is not my analysis. That was the Protestant Reformed Churches’ own analysis about the venomous snake that the denomination holds now in her own bosom. She said, “The doctrine of justification is at stake.” She said that timidly because she was not interested in defending that, but Christ extracted that admission from her. The Protestant Reformed denomination has compromised the faith going all the way back to the Reformation. How are the mighty fallen!

And I have proof for this. The doctrine of Joe Blue Col-

lar in the Protestant Reformed Churches is this: “We are justified in the way of obedience.”

The theologian of the Protestant Reformed Churches, who could run circles around me theologically speaking, teaches that in

a certain sense man precedes God and that justification is by faith and repentance *unto* righteousness. This is all completely shocking. This is a complete overthrow of the truth of salvation by grace alone, on which basis the Protestant Reformed denomination was formed.

Christ himself spoke of the seriousness of those issues. When the issue is justification and man’s gracious salvation, the question is whether when a man goes to church he goes home justified or not and thus whether he lives in peace and the assurance of his salvation or not. When the issue is justification, the question is whether when a man appears in the final judgment, he will be justified or not. There is no more serious issue. These events, all of them—from the first protest, to the first meeting of the group of concerned men, to all the writing, to the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches, to the ongoing battle for the truth—these events are reformation, not schism.

Jesus Christ, lord of lords and king of kings and lover of his people, saw them enslaved and in bondage, and he visited to free his people from the oppressive slavery and bondage of cruel men who were robbing them of their comfort and joy in Christ, displacing him in their affections and love, and dishonoring him and the glory of his name and the glory of his Father’s name in their wicked doctrine.

There was a life and death struggle of eternal consequence over the truth.

It was reformation.

You can agree, or you can disagree, and I will never convince you. Only Christ can convince you. I'm simply laying out for you that there are two—only two—positions.

If it was schism, then you must condemn us—roundly and in the harshest terms.

The criticism is not nearly harsh enough. You haven't called me enough names yet. You haven't pointed out how wicked I am yet. You surely haven't called me to repentance enough yet. You're not nearly harsh enough—if it be schism. It is okay; I can take it. You need to ramp up your criticism—if it was schism.

But you cannot play both sides and say that I am guilty of schism and then invite me to your coffees, birthday parties, and gatherings because then you are a hypocrite. And I know that your very charge of schism is hypocrisy.

But if you agree that it is reformation, you must join. You must come out of that corrupt denomination, for the denomination has taken the foul doctrine of salvation by

works into her bosom and shelters those who have taught that false doctrine for a long time and has corrupted the article of the standing or falling church and brings on herself the judgment of Christ, whom she has cast out.

Come out from her, and be ye separate.

That is not my word. That is Christ's word—if it be reformation.

And you must come out even though your children or your friends or your whole family oppose you, even if your very spouse opposes you, with the hope that perhaps, God being gracious, they may be won by your chaste conversation coupled with fear.

You must come out and away from the bondage of false doctrine and slavery to the fear of men.

You must come out, and you will lose all. I can assure you.

But Christ will take you up. He will comfort you with his blessed gospel.

Thank you.

—NJL



ANNUAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

The board expresses its thanks to God for all of the marvelous ways in which he has preserved and prospered Reformed Believers Publishing during this past year. We have seen and experienced God's faithfulness to us. We confess that this is all the Lord's doing and none of our own; we are privileged to be used by God in this work. God has used *Sword and Shield* to bring about reformation in the instituted church, to encourage believers, and to witness to the truth over against the lie.

Some highlights of our work this year include the publication of one regular issue of *Sword and Shield* magazine every month. To be clear, every issue of *Sword and Shield* declares the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ alone; this is exceptional. By *regular* I mean to say that the magazine has gone out every month as planned, according to the design of the editors and board. There have been several additional special issues, including two letters editions, an issue giving all of its pages to a discussion of Malachi 3:7, and, most recently, an issue addressing theological

errors afoot in Reformed circles. Thanks to all of those who have written letters for publication in *Sword and Shield*. It is our pleasure to publish and to respond to them. We have found the letters editions to be very popular among our readership.

God has generously provided for all of our needs this past year. We are thankful for your continued giving. Your financial support of this organization has been so generous that we have deemed it unnecessary to collect subscription fees. The board desires to see *Sword and Shield* continue to be supported through donations alone. We ask that you remember Reformed Believers Publishing in your giving and consider whether our cause is a righteous cause before God.

Throughout this past year the board has continued to work together to carry out the purpose of Reformed Believers Publishing. Many things in our lives have changed. Many of us have new churches, new schools, and new friendships. Most of us have suffered loss of the same on account of our witness. Despite these significant

changes, Reformed Believers Publishing has not only been preserved, but also the organization has prospered. This is one of the benefits of being a believers' organization: the organization has a common purpose that supersedes and transcends nationalities, denominations, personal agendas, and the politics of men. That purpose is to give witness to the truth of God's word in the Reformed church world. God has given us believers unity in the truth; this is the foundation upon which we labor. Since this is a believers' organization publishing a believers' paper, the board encourages you all, both men and women, to consider writing a letter or an article for publication in *Sword and Shield*.

The board has been working on some new projects. Of particular interest is the work that we have done in developing a blog. Rev. Nathan Langerak has agreed to be the editor-in-chief of the blog, and Hannah Kamps has accepted the volunteer position of administrator and moderator. The first series of blog posts will focus on the origins and early history of Reformed Believers Publishing. We are not sure how soon we will be able to go live with the blog or how frequent the posts will be, but stay tuned to our website and *Sword and Shield* for updates.

We are excited that there are a good number of new members again this year. We thank God for those who have signed up to take a part in this labor. We thank God for the willing spirit of the men who have allowed their names to stand for nomination and for the men who will continue to serve on the board in the year to come. It is remarkable that none of the board's nominations were rejected. We are sincerely thankful for the volunteers who do so much to get *Sword and Shield* into print and into your hands every month. Thanks to Evelyn Langerak and Stephanie Lanning for your careful editing. Without your work *Sword and Shield* would be only a shadow of its beautiful form. Thanks to Tami Cleveland for your continued help on the administrative side of things. This collection of efforts and willingness to serve spring out of our unity in the truth, which unity is God's gift to us.

Speaking of thanks, the board expresses a hearty thanks to our editors: Rev. Andy Lanning, Rev. Nathan Langerak and Rev. Martin VanderWal. Through your pens, our magazine sets forth the gospel of Jesus Christ issue after issue. We are thankful for your continued faithfulness to our purpose. Reformed Believers Publishing is



Nathan Price

privileged to provide a platform that is free from ecclesiastical overlordship. We are keenly aware of the sacrifices you have made in order to continue your association with us and with *Sword and Shield*. Brothers, we encourage you in this your work, and we exhort you to be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our cause is the cause of Christ. Please pray for this righteous cause. We board members labor in the strength of our savior. Pray for us as we carry out this work.

Please continue to remember Reformed Believers Publishing with your financial gifts.

We give thanks to God for Reformed Believers Publishing and for *Sword and Shield*.

Especially remember to give thanks, not for the magazine as such, but for the *content* of the magazine: the glorious truth that God sovereignly establishes, maintains, and perfects his covenant and causes us to experience covenant life with him.

All glory be to God alone!

Thank you.

—Nathan Price

unhindered by considerations of persons and institutions, is committed to the pure gospel of sovereign grace, come what may! This free witness was an entirely new thing and reality that many of us have not seen or experienced in our lifetimes.

Immediately at its appearance there were very strong reactions and concerted attempts to turn people away from reading *Sword and Shield* by slandering it. And there was much effort through intimidation to discourage the resolve of Reformed Believers Publishing and its editors to continue publishing the magazine. By God's grace these attempts to silence the free witness of *Sword and Shield* were all unsuccessful and to no avail.

Then, this past year a very trying, serious, and powerful moment came when opposition to *Sword and Shield* and its free witness became hot and ferocious. It took the form of an all-out, orchestrated, and determined blitzkrieg unfurled by an organized and united leadership in the PRC against the magazine's three editors and the magazine itself. These ruthless and bitter foes used the weapons of deceit, manipulation, schemes, and tricks, which are all weapons of this world, to ecclesiastically murder the three editors of *Sword and Shield* and to cast them out of the Protestant Reformed Churches. This "lightning war" was designed to put an *end* to the dreaded and hated *Sword and Shield* and its free witness to the truth and its exposure and condemnation of the lie that was being harbored in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

God helped us and preserved our righteous cause!
This special issue of *Sword and Shield* commemorates

these events and our recent second annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing, held on October 21, 2021, in the spacious Wonderland Tire facility in Byron Center, Michigan. A large, enthusiastic crowd of members, friends, and supporters turned out for what was an inspiring reformation rally. The hearty and resounding singing of the psalms in the cathedral-like atmosphere of the high ceilings of the tire shop expressed our joy and added a special flavor to our celebration.

To any with eyes to see it, the Lord is abundantly using *Sword and Shield* as a mighty instrument in the recovery of the pure gospel of sovereign grace and in the destruction of the lie. Amazingly, the past year witnessed the reformation of Christ's church, which is now established in a new denomination and progressing. These events mark and highlight the *strategic* importance of antithetical and polemical *writing* and *publishing* to effect reformation, especially in times of doctrinal error and confusion, and to develop and defend the truth.

Our adversaries nervously shout, "Schism! Schism!" at us, but the empty charge rings hollow.

To the chagrin of our foes and adversaries, *Sword and Shield* marches on in *truth and war*.

Sword and Shield has taken back doctrinal territory from the enemy, chasing it from the field, and the magazine has reached a beautiful stride and is proclaiming the truth of pure grace issue after issue.

All praise and thanks to God our savior, and to him be the glory now and forever.

—For the RBP board,
Henry Kamps, president



KEEPING UP THE BATTLE

I also would like to add my thanks to the board and to the organization for making possible this forum of the magazine for the publication of the truth of the gospel of peace. I'm thankful tonight as well for the keynote address that we heard, which was not only stirring and established beyond any doubt the reformation that God has worked, but which I believe also represents an advance in our understanding of what has happened in the Protestant Reformed Churches, not only in the last few years but for our generation. And it struck me as something I had not seen before but is immediately obvious once it is pointed out: that the devil's tactic to introduce the lie was to make the reputation of man *the thing*, so that we fear the reputation of man and coddle the reputation of man; and in all of our care for the reputation of man, it becomes impossible to condemn the lie. I'd like to acknowledge the advance that we have been led in tonight by God through our speaker in that understanding.



Rev. Andrew Lanning

And that fits in with the brief comments that I would like to make about the magazine. I want to call attention to one characteristic of the magazine that we must maintain by the grace of God. That characteristic is the polemical nature of the magazine. *Sword and Shield* is a fighting magazine. It intends deliberately to go to war. If anyone ever forgets that, you need only look at the cover and the soldier hastening to the battle; and the title of the magazine, *Sword and Shield*; and remember that this magazine intends to be polemical. That is the character of the magazine that is hated—absolutely despised—by those who are not friends of the magazine but its foes. They *hate* that the magazine fights. But the magazine must fight. It *must* fight. Regardless of whether the editors or the board or the association like to fight, the magazine *must* fight.

That is because reformation, which the Lord has worked, is war. Reformation *is* war. It is war against the lie. It is war against the host of Satan. It is war against the false church. It is war against the flesh. Reformation *is* war, and the magazine must fight. And the reason that reformation is war is because reformation stands in the cause of the truth. The Lord Jesus Christ, by his sovereign power, works reformation by establishing the truth. And the Lord Jesus Christ is a man of war. His garments are dyed red with the blood of his enemies. His sword, which proceeds out of his mouth, is sharp, and it cuts. The Lord Jesus Christ is a man of war, and his truth is a warring truth.

That too is remarkable because the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ is the most peaceful thing there could be for the believer. There is nothing more peaceful for the believer than the truth of Christ, because the truth of Christ is the truth of justification; and being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And the truth of Jesus Christ is his fellowship with his people, his communion with them, so that in Jesus Christ we have great peace and with Jesus Christ we have great peace. That is the truth by which the Lord Jesus Christ has picked us up and carried us along in this reformation.

But that truth, which is of utmost peace to the believer, is a bloody truth. It is a warring truth because that truth condemns in no uncertain terms every lie that is opposed to it. And that truth condemns the lie for the sake of the sheep, for we are in danger of being deceived by the

devil's deceit, his stunning deceit; and, as was pointed out tonight and emphasized tonight, the stunning victory that the devil had in our mother church. So I would like to encourage us in the word of God regarding the polemical nature of this magazine and that we not shy away from the battle and the bloodiness of it and the

continued fighting character of the magazine. May God grant us the grace that we not withhold our sword from blood but that we continue to trumpet the truth to the condemnation of every lie.

Thank you.

—AL

READING FOR DISCERNMENT

I want to begin by underlining the remarks made earlier by Reverend Langerak in his speech about the reformation (not schism) brought about in the church of Jesus Christ, that its real occasion was the beginning of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP) and *Sword and Shield*. The real occasion was not blog posts or protests or appeals or sermons preached. It was *Sword and Shield*. The leadership in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) saw *Sword and Shield* to be such an imminent threat that the magazine required consistories of Protestant Reformed churches to spring into action. Consistories had to issue condemnations of the magazine. Ministers had to warn their congregations from their pulpits and keyboards about the magazine. The magazine itself drew the charges of schism and slander. *Sword and Shield* was the reason that consistories acted so swiftly and decisively against officebearers and members with the key of Christian discipline. Even though the ecclesiastical decisions themselves never mentioned the periodical, its publication provided the energy and motivation for the actions of the PRC.

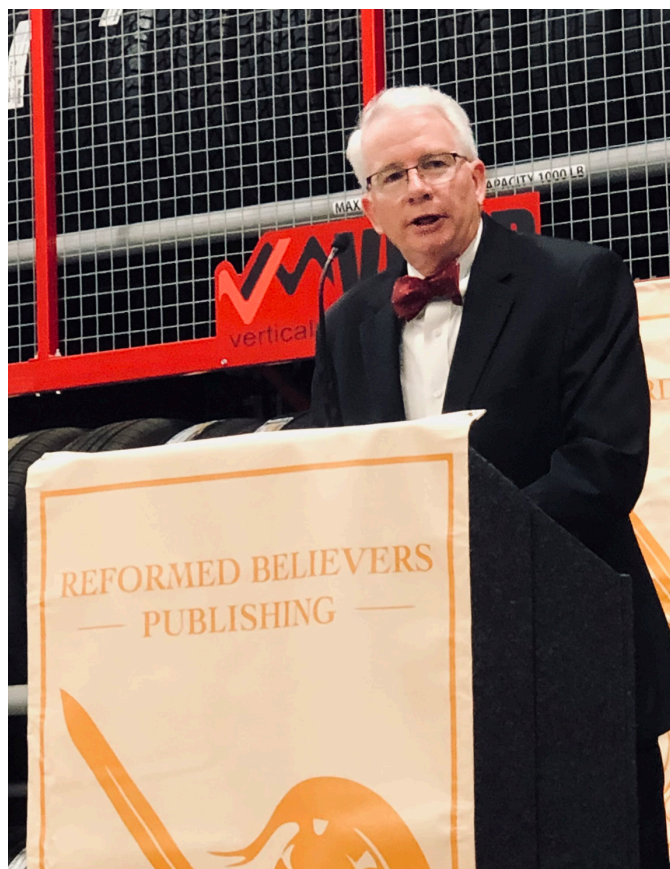
But what made the magazine such an imminent threat?

It was not because the magazine was schismatic and slanderous. It was not because the magazine was being published by a society of Protestant Reformed men known to have certain grievances with the leadership of the *Standard Bearer* and the denomination and their weaknesses and failures. It was not even because the magazine was perceived as a rival to the *Standard Bearer*.

It was because of the magazine's discernment.

The Protestant Reformed Churches had been covered with the smoke and fog of confusion. Confusion dominated consistories, classes, and synods of the PRC. Confusion characterized the officebearers of the churches. Confusion filled the minds of Protestant Reformed members who were trying to understand the events unfolding

in their churches. Preaching and teaching from the pulpits created the confusion. The attempts of deliberative ecclesiastical assemblies to justify that preaching and teaching against protests furthered the confusion. Questions about what was being preached and taught were either ignored or did not receive straight answers. The *Standard Bearer* failed to lead by making things clear as the deliberative assemblies addressed the ongoing trouble.



Rev. Martin VanderWal

The denomination's leadership worked both to downplay the troubles and to rework them into an entirely different matter. No, these troubles were not about the role of good works in salvation, to exclude them. Rather, the troubles were about ensuring that the churches knew and understood how necessary and important good works are for continuing blessings from God.

That deliberate confusion was threatened by *Sword and Shield*. *Sword and Shield* threatened with its clear light of discernment. Its articles exposed the original doctrinal issue. Its articles revealed exactly how deliberative assemblies failed in their work to condemn the false doctrines with the clear light of God's word. The magazine's articles further showed precisely in what way the *Standard Bearer* in its articles and editorials practiced perversion of and distraction from the true issues.

Sword and Shield brought discernment. It blew away the smoke and burned through the fog.

It is important also to take note of where Reformed Believers Publishing stands in relationship to history. Reformed Believers Publishing in the present stands where the Reformed Free Publishing Association stood at the beginning of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the early 1920s. At that time the *Standard Bearer* brought a similar, unwelcome discernment into the Christian Reformed Church. The magazine discerned in the light of God's word and the Reformed creeds the error of common grace and the error of the well-meant offer. The *Standard Bearer* also discerned the work of other Christian Reformed ministers and writers who were introducing doctrinal errors into the denomination. Correctly, the *Standard Bearer's* discernment was perceived as a threat to the introduction of these errors. By means of the ecclesiastical assemblies, the Christian Reformed Church rejected the clarity and sharpness of the *Standard Bearer*, first by the Christian Reformed Synod of 1924 and then by Classis East and Classis West of Grand Rapids in the depositions of Rev. George Ophoff, Rev. Henry Danhof, and Rev. Herman Hoeksema with their respective consistories.

But now where are the *Standard Bearer* and the Reformed Free Publishing Association?

How is the clear discernment of *Sword and Shield* and its support by Reformed Believers Publishing to be kept from the same awful end of confusion?

By the continued exercise of discernment. By the continued exercise of discernment on the part of believers—not merely by the editors and not only by those taking their place on the board of RBP, but also by believers who practice discernment and require discernment both in their churches and in organizations such as Reformed Believers Publishing.

Hence the subject of my speech: "Reading for Discernment."

First, discern reading. Screens of every kind—tablet screens, cell phone screens, computer screens—you ought not to think of as good for reading. These screens are mediums that include all kinds of distractions. Whether you can turn the distractions off makes little difference. When you use screens, you expect distractions. As you use screens for many other purposes besides reading, having them in front of your eyes keeps your mind open to all those different purposes, a distraction in itself. We have learned to use screens chiefly for entertainment, not for serious thought or critical evaluation. All of these factors inhibit good reading habits.

Additionally, censorship of the Internet is more and more a real possibility. Faced with the real possibility of no longer having access to Christian books and materials online ought to make us keen to build up libraries of physical books and magazines. Even printing material that we find on the Internet will not only make for better reading than reading online but will also ensure that we can keep it as part of a library that we can access at any time because it is in our own physical possession.

When we pick up and read physical books, magazines, and even printouts, we are engaging in an activity that we have developed from earliest childhood. This is the way that we have been taught to read. It was part of our education in the home and in the school. Information is in books. We find the books and go through them to find out what we need to know. Having physical books in a library means we can look over them, read them, and remember what we have seen and read in them. Even the physical action of picking up a book and looking at it brings back into our minds what we have learned from it.

Second, in considering all the books that you have read or can read, among them all you discern one book that towers completely above them all. It is the only book not written by any man. It is the book written by God alone: his holy word, the Bible.

There are three ways in which we must discern the Bible. The first way is to discern it as a holy book. Written by God alone, it is the word of God. It is the speech of the invisible, infinite, and eternal God. It is the word of him who sits on his throne established forever in the heavens, and before whom the nations are as nothing. It is the voice of him who does his good pleasure throughout the heavens and the earth, all the works of his hands. Discerning this truth, we must open up that book and be filled with a sense of awe, wonder, fear, and reverence.

The second way in which to discern the Bible is to know it as a book that is delightful and lovely, telling us the wonder of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, our savior and redeemer. The Bible shows to us the wonder of our salvation by the eternal mercy of God in the gift of his

only begotten Son. It describes the incomprehensible wonder of our complete savior, who graciously works every part and aspect of our salvation from beginning to end; to whom to belong is our great, everlasting, and unshakable comfort. We are to find our enjoyment and peace in all the promises that declare the fullness of our salvation as the work of our faithful God in his Son, with the end of perfect conformance to his holy image. Knowing scripture's message, we discern it as the sole fountain of the knowledge of our salvation and our happiness and joy to open, to read, and to store up in our hearts.

The third way to discern the Bible is to know it as the book of all discernment. It alone is the source of all light and the fountain of all truth. The exclamation of the Holy Spirit in Paul is very clear: "Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). The proper object of that discernment is first of all ourselves, not other persons nor other institutions. Scripture's first purpose must be self-judgment.

It is so easy to fail in this third matter of discernment. We live in an ungodly time, when everyone demands affirmation. We look for affirmation of ourselves. We look to affirm our viewpoints and utterances.

We need to have our institutions affirmed. We become easily offended when we are criticized for the slightest lacks and failures. It is easy to look to God's word only for affirmation, to prove that we are right.

Let us discern the word of 2 Timothy 3:16. The very same word that informs us that the word is "given by inspiration of God" also tells us for what purpose it has been so inspired. Two of the words—"rebuke" and "correction"—that explain that purpose deny affirmation. They affirm instead the discipline of the word. The word of God comes to us as we are walking in our sinful ways, thinking our sinful thoughts, and following our sinful desires. It comes to us in our proud, vain seeking of self-affirmation. It tells us that we are in the wrong way. Scripture must rebuke and correct us.

Taken together, these three ways bring us to the first proper object of discernment: ourselves. This is the way prescribed to us in Psalm 19. This psalm glorifies the law of God first by praising its perfection and second by the application of that perfection to the people of God.

7. The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

8. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.
9. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

In the light of that perfect word of God, the inspired psalmist speaks of himself. "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults" (v. 12).

Discerning scripture as the holy word of God alone fills us with a deep sense of awe and fear. Such an awe and fear does not make us flee away, however, as we delight to see in scripture the wonder of our salvation. In that salvation we must discern the evil in ourselves, from which we seek our redemption in the blood of Christ, and which

is our depravity, the great enemy against which we must fight all the days of our lives. We also discern the truth and righteousness that we must pursue and embrace with all the strength promised and granted us in that same word of God. We trust in the power of the Holy Spirit, the author of his glorious word, to conform us more and more to the image of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Discerning ourselves by the word of God, we have a proper understanding of the discernment that the word of God gives us. That discernment is far more than being able to tell some differences between good and evil, between the truth and the lie, and between right and wrong. Discernment is the ability to see deeply these differences when they lie beneath the surface of things. Discernment is more than setting the Bible alongside of whatever must be discerned in the light and moving back and forth between the two to see what is true and false. Discernment means also having scripture with its truth living in our hearts and minds, so that while reading we can identify what is true and what is false. Discernment is also the ability to go beyond merely knowing and understanding for ourselves what is right and what is wrong in all that we read. Discernment is the ability to explain to fellow believers what is right or wrong and why it is right or wrong. Discernment is a gift to be shared for the benefit of the communion of the saints in the truth of God's word and the application of that truth.

Reading for discernment means reading. The reader must practice discernment in order to grow in it. Reading widely is necessary. Do not read only material that stands

Healthy suspicion will also help you discern when men you have come to know and trust turn into paths of error, so that you can labor for their correction and restoration.

in agreement with the truth of God's word. Read also material that is published by the world. Read material that is published in the church world in general. Read material that is clearly heretical. As you read, practice discernment. Practice discernment not merely to see what is true and what is false. Discern why and how what is true is true and why and how what is false is false. Discern what you find to be questionable. Take time to think through and to see whether what you first see as questionable might actually be true and thus important for your increase in knowledge or, if it is actually false, why it is false, and thus grow in your discernment.

Even when you read material from sources that you trust, reading for discernment means that you always maintain a certain degree of suspicion, even healthy suspicion. Keep in mind the powerful exclamation of Romans 3:4: "Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged." Healthy suspicion will keep you from blindly following any man. Healthy suspicion will also give you the strength to ask important questions if you discern error in the writing of those you trust. Healthy suspicion will also help you discern when men you have come to know and trust turn into paths of error, so that you can labor for their correction and restoration.

It is indeed helpful for the editors of *Sword and Shield* to know that their readers are discerning readers!

So it is helpful in the church of Jesus Christ when its fellowship is made up of reading and discerning members. In such a fellowship of discernment, members are able to serve each other in the cause of the truth for the maintenance and development of the truth. In this fellowship not only are officebearers helped in their faithfulness to the truth of God's word, but there is also encouragement for the development of the truth. Discernment learns to look deeper not only into what is written by men but also into God's word itself, to see more and more into its glorious and wondrous depths. Discernment also helps to bring those depths out into the communion of God's people, for greater strength in the pursuit of the truth to God's honor and glory and the salvation of God's people.

Much fruit there is also from reading for discernment. Practice and training yield results.

One example is the federal vision. When this heresy was introduced into conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches and denominations, it had arrived along a certain, definite pathway. Before Norman Shepherd introduced it to his students at Westminster Theological Seminary and published his popular book *Call of Grace*, the federal vision had been presented and worked out by others further away from those circles of influence. Another man, far more

popular in evangelical and liberal circles, N. T. Wright, had developed his theology in a book he had written, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, in which he worked his historical revisionism. He denied that Paul's message and theology were about justification by faith alone for salvation. They were really about which people are truly God's covenant people: whether the Jews alone or everyone who believes and does good works. But Wright himself was influenced by other theologians less popular and more academic, E. P. Sanders and James Dunn. Those two theologians did much of the exegetical and theological work that N. T. Wright then applied in his popular writings.

Who indeed would have read widely enough to run across theologians like Sanders and Dunn? Who, upon reading those theologians, would have been able to discern the errors in their work? Who would have been able to see those errors running through such authors as N. T. Wright and Norman Shepherd? Who would have been able to see how the errors of Sanders and Dunn would come to have their enormous, destructive influence in all conservative Presbyterian and Reformed churches? Who would have been able to see and sound the alarm, explaining clearly how the destruction would be channeled in?

How powerful a tool discernment is!

Reading for discernment also produces strength. From the word of God, the believer is deeply impressed with the glory of God's word that towers above all the vanity of men to see their names and reputations as nothing. Delight in the word of God as it gives the knowledge of Christ the savior far exceeds any delight in men or the writings of men. Discerning the word of God with all its clarity and light gives the ability to see through confusion generated by the writings of men who hide their errors and heresies in that confusion. So impressed with the word of God, discernment refuses to be impressed with the names of men. Discernment is strong to pursue the truth and to discard and repudiate all that stands in its way.

Reading for discernment is also safety. It helps you grow deep roots into the word of God. That growth happens because you are always returning to that word of God for proper discernment. That happens when you go back to that word by opening it up and finding out from it the light that shows what is true and what is false. It also happens when you go back to that word as you have learned it to have it in your heart and mind. But that very same movement is the activity of faith. You are trusting that word to be the light you need to discern everything else you read.

Those deep roots are important in the present time of confusion and apostasy. Amid all the winds of doctrine that blow, you remain in your place. You cannot be blown every

which way or tossed to and fro. You cannot be enticed by the multitude to follow the winds of false doctrine. You cannot be seduced by the lie. You have the truth as your rock and your strength, knowing it in all its glorious power.

In a similar way, reading for discernment helps you follow the truth, no matter the cost. You see that your salvation does not lie with this or that church institution. You understand that the church institute must serve the truth of God's word. When the church fails to serve that word alone, compromised by the fear of man or respect of persons, you understand that the institution has become a great liability instead of a strong asset. You understand the glory and preciousness of the truth, to pursue it at all costs. Even though

the cost is institution and financial security or the love and acceptance of family and friends, no cost is too great to follow the truth of God's word wherever it takes you.

May God graciously grant Reformed Believers Publishing and *Sword and Shield* the continued provision of clear, discerning testimony from the word of God. May he grant them to continue that faithful testimony for the growing discernment of believers. May he also graciously grant a readership built up in the faith to discern properly all that they read, including *Sword and Shield*. So may God graciously grant by these instruments faithfulness to his word of truth for years to come!

—MVW



CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father which art in heaven, thou hast caused us great astonishment. Thou hast given us terrible things to see in thy great judgment. We have seen hearts hardened, ears and eyes closed, minds cut off. We have seen the lie in such high places. Where there was esteem for the truth, honor for the truth, and love for the truth, the truth has been driven out and banished. It is indeed true, as spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ, thou art the God who hides things from the wise and understanding and has revealed the same things unto babes; for, lo, it has seemed good in thy sight. We stand in awe and wonder of thy judgment. And who are we, that we should have our eyes opened, our understanding opened, given the ability to discern and see and to understand *thy* truth? Who are we, that thou hast given to us the honor of forsaking and leaving, the honor of suffering, the honor of being cast out for the cause of thy truth? Indeed, it is a privilege.

And we give thee thanks that thou hast given to us this undertaking that is true reformation in a company, in a society, that we may know the blessed bonds of fellowship in the truth even as standing for the truth. And so we pray, prosper this cause that is ours to care for this evening, Reformed Believers Publishing. Bless it in its endeavor to hold aloft the banner of thy truth that thou

hast given to those who fear thee, the truth of salvation by sovereign grace alone, without works in any wise or in any respect. We pray, so preserve, maintain, bless, and prosper this endeavor, that there may be held up even by our hands, as guided by thee, a testimony to the truth that sets us free.

We thank thee not only for the proceedings of this evening; we thank thee not only for the speakers; but also we thank thee for the use of this meeting to strengthen us and encourage us in this cause. We thank thee also for our fellowship in these bonds of the truth. We pray that thou wilt continue to prosper us and bless us in them, all by thy grace and mercy alone.

And we come to thee acknowledging how unworthy we are of this multitude of thy blessings and benefits upon us. We know that we constantly forfeit them in our thoughts and words and deeds by the depravity of our nature. And so we pray, remember us always in thy great mercy. Forgive us of our sins; impute to us the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ; and may we know and be assured of our free and full justification by thy grace and mercy alone through Jesus Christ our Lord, given to us poor, ungodly sinners. And so all this we pray in Jesus' name alone. Amen.

—MVW



Reformed Believers Publishing
325 84th St SW, Suite 102
Byron Center, MI 49315

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

Ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. —Jude 3

Earnestly contend for the faith because there are certain men crept in unawares! They were baptized into the fellowship of the church as infants, or they were converted later in life. They speak of God, Jesus Christ, and the Lord who bought them. They are able to write eloquently of the history of the church. On their lips are many spiritual things. Within them are manifested many powers and gifts. They entered seminary and were taught the truth. They were examined by classes and synods and declared eligible for calls. They preached in pulpits, sat in consistories and councils, were delegates to the assemblies, and were chosen to teach in the seminary. No one suspected them in the least.

And without fear, either of the judgment of God or men, they feed themselves in the church according to their own lusts; trees of withered fruit and of no fruit. What promise they showed is revealed to be only withered fruit of a dead tree and thus no fruit at all. Born dead, they appeared to be regenerated, but dead they are still. Trees twice dead! Plucked up by the roots, for Christ's Father never planted them into his Son.

These men were ordained of old to this condemnation that they should oppose the faith, turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, go in the way of Cain, run greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perish in the gainsaying of Core. The truth they do not know, and in those natural things that they do know, they corrupt themselves.

Contend earnestly for the faith, against them.

The world and carnal Christians will insist that such men do not exist, and in that they themselves will be swept away by the raging waves that are these evil men and their false doctrine.

For saying that they do exist and for contending against them, as did Enoch, you will also be hunted and relentlessly pursued.

Contend earnestly that such men do exist and have come against the truth and are an abiding enemy of the church in every age. As Cain was after Eden, as Core was in the desert, and as Balaam was on the plains of Moab, so do these men creep in unawares into the church, sown by the devil in his relentless war on the truth.

Contend against them for the faith once delivered to the saints. This is the faith delivered to the saints first for their salvation by separating them from this present evil world and separating them in Jesus Christ their only lord and savior. All saints in common are partakers of this great benefit. This is the faith, then, that is also delivered to the saints as a sacred trust to keep unspotted and undefiled until the day of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Contend for the faith. Exert a tremendous effort for the faith against those men who are crept in unawares. War and fight for the faith. Make a distinction! Not all who are tricked by these men will go lost with them; have compassion for these, and with fear pull them as it were out of the fire that has been kindled already around these evil men. Let no earthly bonds and ties hinder you. Hate even the garment spotted by the flesh. By all means and at all times, contend earnestly for the faith.

—NJL