



SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

*Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee,
O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help,
and who is the sword of thy excellency!
and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee;
and thou shalt tread upon their high places.*

Deuteronomy 33:29

MAY 2022 | VOLUME 2 | NUMBER 18

CONTENTS

- 3** **MEDITATION**
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
- 6** **EDITORIAL**
THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL AS
DEMAND OF THE COVENANT (5)
Rev. Andrew W. Lanning
- 10** **LETTER**
Sara Doezema
- 17** **SOUND DOCTRINE**
FAITH ALONE FOR CHRIST ALONE
Rev. Martin VanderWal

- 21** **UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES**
HUMPTY DUMPTY (1):
JABBERWOCKY
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
- 28** **FAITH AND LIFE**
“LET THEM ALONE”
Rev. Martin VanderWal
- 32** **FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!**
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak



Sword and Shield is a monthly periodical published by Reformed Believers Publishing.

Editor-in-chief
Rev. Andrew W. Lanning

Contributing editors
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
Rev. Martin VanderWal

All quotations from scripture are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Quotations from the Reformed and ecumenical creeds, Church Order, and liturgical forms are taken from *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), unless otherwise noted.

Every writer is solely responsible for the content of his own writing.

Signed letters and submissions of general interest may be sent to the editor-in-chief at lanning.andy@gmail.com or

1950 Perry St SW
Byron Center, MI 49315

Sword and Shield does not accept advertising.

Please send all business correspondence, subscription requests, and requests to join Reformed Believers Publishing to one of the following:

Reformed Believers Publishing
325 84th St SW, Suite 102
Byron Center, MI 49315
Website: reformedbelieverspub.org
Email: office@reformedbelieverspub.org

Reformed Believers Publishing maintains the privacy and trust of its subscribers by not sharing with any person, organization, or church any information regarding *Sword and Shield* subscribers.

*For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off,
even as many as the Lord our God shall call. — Acts 2:39*

The promise is to you and to your children! The promise is to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call!

Comforting words!

Spoken to those whose hearts had been pricked by Peter's preaching that they were the murderers of the holy and just one. They had rejected Jesus Christ and desired instead a robber and murderer to be given to them. By their wicked hands they had crucified and slain Jesus. But he had been delivered over by God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge! Crucified and risen, ascended, and then returned in his Spirit. Jesus came, just as he had promised. He came in the Spirit, the evidence of which they all were then seeing and hearing!

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (v. 38).

"For the promise is unto you...as many as the Lord our God shall call" (v. 39).

A gracious promise.

The essential thing about the old covenant is that it was a covenant of promise. God gave the covenant and all that it contained by promise. So Abraham was called the friend of God. The law was added at Sinai, but that was for the sake of the promise, to make salvation impossible by the law until Christ—who is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes—be revealed. By promise God revealed himself as the gracious God of believers and their seed in the covenant.

The whole scripture concerns the promise of God. In the Old Testament God spoke the promise and signified and sealed the promise by types and shadows. In the New Testament God fulfilled the promise in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And Christ returned on Pentecost with the promise, the promise of the Spirit.

The promise is rich, so the Bible speaks of the promise in the plural: promises. All of the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ. All of the promises, though, are as many facets of one sparkling diamond. There is one eternal promise of God, one unbreakable word of salvation.

Those promises individually and taken all together as the one promise of God are the infallible oath of God to save the elect people of God from all their sins, to make with them an eternal covenant of grace, and to bring them to heavenly glory in Christ. The promise is the word of God about what God will do to save believers and their

seed from their sins to the praise of his wonderful grace and his glorious name.

A promise—not an offer!

An *offer* is a declaration of the willingness of someone to do something that depends upon the willingness and activity of the one to whom the offer is made. But a *promise* is a word about what someone will do that is not contingent upon any activity of the one to whom the promise is made.

So a father says to his son, "I will buy you a bike." That is a promise. Or the father says, "I will buy you a bike if you mow the lawn all summer." That is an offer. A promise proceeds from the good will of the one who makes the promise. A promise depends only upon the good will of the one who makes the promise. An offer depends upon the work and willingness of the one to whom the offer is made.

And so, too, wherever the blessings of God depend on or come through the works of man, that is an offer. The promise of God is not that he enables one to repent and believe and that, when one does these things, then God gives his blessing. That is an offer and is not a promise.

God gave a promise. "The promise is unto you...as many as the Lord our God shall call." He gave a word that proceeds from his own good will and that depends for its fulfillment strictly on that good will of God and depends neither in whole nor in part on the one to whom God gives the promise.

A promise that is confirmed with an oath! A sure word.

A promise sealed with a promise so that the heirs of the promise may have a strong consolation! Willing to show to the heirs the immutability of his counsel, God confirmed the promise with an oath! He swore by himself because he could swear by none greater. A holy oath of the triune God: three spoke and bore witness to the truth of God's counsel and promised to save his people from their sins and to bless them with everlasting salvation.

If God's promise fails, then he fails; and if he fails, then he is not God.

Oh yes, this too: if his promise is dependent upon you; if his promise is not realized until men do their part; then God is also dependent, and he is not God.

But it is a promise sealed with an oath!

An immutable word.

It is a rich promise.

The promise is Jesus Christ—the full Christ and all his blessings and benefits that he earned by his cross. All that is in Christ is included in the promise.

The promise includes the gift of faith. Believe! For the promise is unto you. So faith is included in the promise.

The promise includes the remission of sins by faith. So God promises to forgive all the trespasses of his people, both their original guilt and the guilt of their own sins. And implied is that he promises to impute the perfect righteousness of Christ to his people and to declare them worthy of eternal life and every blessing.

The promise includes repentance. Repentance is not something one must do to receive the promise, and repentance is not an activity of man upon which the promise depends, but Peter included repentance in the promise.

The promise is the gift of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. The content of the promise is especially the Holy Ghost given as a gift. The Holy Ghost, who was given to Jesus Christ to be his Spirit at Jesus' ascension into heaven. The Holy Ghost, whom Christ poured out upon his church at Pentecost. The Holy Ghost is the blessing that God gives the righteous.

The gift of the Spirit is the chief difference between the old dispensation and the new. It is not that in the old dispensation God's people had no Spirit and that in the new dispensation they have the Spirit. God's people in the old dispensation also had the Spirit but in small measure. They did not have Christ in reality but in promise in the types and shadows and in all the symbols and figures. Christ came and fulfilled all those types and shadows, and he gives God's people his Spirit, who is the reality of the salvation promised in the old dispensation.

The Spirit as the promise brings Christ and all Christ's salvation. The Spirit applies Christ and his salvation to the hearts and lives of his people and preserves them in it. The Holy Ghost gives all things that Christ has. The Spirit works faith in their hearts and maintains it in them. The Spirit works in their consciences and experiences, so that they know God as their gracious God and Father. The Spirit works in their hearts by the gospel to break the ruling power of sin, to make them new creatures, and to cause them to live holy lives. God promises to avert all evil or turn it to their profit. God promises to preserve his people in this life in holiness until the day that he presents them in heaven without spot or wrinkle and when all tears are dried away. God promises to give them a new heaven and a new earth after this old one is burnt. He promises them the resurrection, body and soul, and acquittal in the final judgment. All things are Christ's, and God promises his people all things in Christ.

The Spirit comes and personally establishes the covenant relationship. By that Spirit God incorporates a man into Christ, shows that man the covenant, and pours out upon him heavenly graces. To receive the promise is to be brought nigh, to be numbered among God's children,

to have God as your God and Jesus Christ as your savior, and to be assured that God will be your God and the God of your seed.

By promise God gives the covenant not merely in an objective way, formally, or legally; but by the promise God gives the covenant in its life and experience, in its blessings and glory.

Is this not especially true because the promise is the Spirit? To receive the Spirit is to receive the experience of salvation. It is especially the Spirit's work to give to God's people the experience of salvation, to cause them to taste that the Lord is good; to give them to know Christ and to be warmed and filled with Christ; to assure them and testify with their spirits that they are the children of God. They know God; they experience God; they enjoy God as their God by the work of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

The promise makes that covenant of grace unconditional. Because the covenant of grace and all the blessings of the covenant of grace and all the experiences of the covenant of grace are by promise, the covenant of grace cannot be conditional. Since the promise is the Spirit, the covenant of grace and all the blessings and experiences of the covenant of grace are the work of the Spirit. Since the promise gives everything, there is nothing left for man to do to establish the covenant, to make that covenant sure, or to experience that covenant.

Sure promise.

Sovereign word.

As many as the Lord our God shall call.

It is not a promise to or for all. A promise for all is a promise dependent on what man does. In order to make the promise to all, the preacher does not have to say that the promise is for all. The preacher only needs to make the promise depend on what man does. A promise for all teaches that there is something that all must do in order to make the promise sure and effectual in their hearts and lives and thus also that their children must do to make the promise sure and effectual in their lives. Man must do this to experience the promise! Man must do that to experience the favor of God! Man must do this to have the assurance of his salvation! That is not a promise. That is an offer. That is not grace. That is works. Then what man must do is not included in the promise. A promise for all is no promise at all.

Surely there is a universal proclamation of the promise. The promise goes to the ends of the earth, to everyone and to every place where God in his good pleasure sends the promise. Even where the promise is preached, God is sovereign!

As many as the Lord our God shall call.

The promise is to you who are listening...as many as the Lord our God shall call.

The promise is to your children...as many as the Lord our God shall call.

The promise is to all who are afar off...as many as the Lord our God shall call.

To whom does the promise come as they sit in the midst of darkness in the world? To whom is the promise light and life and salvation? Upon whom does the promise bestow all the saving benefits of Christ Jesus and his cross? To whom does the promise give the gift of the Holy Spirit?

To as many as the Lord our God shall call.

The calling is the sovereign and living voice of God.

The calling comes by means of the preaching of the gospel. The calling does not come by the preaching of the law. The calling comes by the preaching of the gospel. God sends out ministers of reconciliation, by whose mouths he speaks the gospel of Jesus Christ and by that gospel of Jesus Christ brings the call. The preaching of the gospel is the instrument of the calling. So much so that scripture seems at times to identify them. But the preaching of the gospel and the calling of God that Peter spoke about must be distinguished.

The calling of which Peter spoke is the divine address of a sinner in the very depth of his being as he sits in his sin, in his darkness, in his guilt, and in his pollution. God speaks in the calling with his own voice—an irresistible voice, a creative voice, a life-giving voice—and God addresses that sinner not only in the ears of the head but also in the ears of the heart. God speaks to the sinner and calls him powerfully and effectually out of the darkness of his sin and death, his guilt and pollution, and calls the sinner into the kingdom of God's dear Son, Jesus Christ. God says to the dead sinner, "Live," and to the hardened sinner, "Repent," and to the smug sinner, "Become nothing." God says to the lame, "Walk," and to the blind, "See," and to the captive, "Be set free." By the power of God's voice—irresistible, creative, and life-giving—they become what he speaks.

God does not say this so that they know what they must do to be saved. He says this to effectually accomplish what he speaks. So the gospel comes to all; and the command to repent and believe comes to all; and the promise is proclaimed to all. God speaks by that to as many as he shall call. God calls by that means and makes that preaching effectual. God does that. God makes the choice upon whom that preaching will be effectual to call them out of darkness, to work faith and repentance in their hearts, to justify them, and to sanctify them.

And God's calling proceeds from the eternal fountain of election. There are not two sources of salvation: God's grace and man's activity, or God's will and man's will. There is one eternal source of salvation in the eternal predestination of God. From this eternal fountain of

God's love, grace, and mercy, the calling issues forth. He called the salvation of his people into existence out of his counsel at the cross. There he said, "Let salvation be," and it was. And he sends out the gospel—not the law, not do this and do that—as the power of God to salvation and calls their salvation into being in their hearts and lives. Whom he did predestinate, them he also called!

The promise is to as many as the Lord our God shall call! The promise is to all whom God calls by his secret and gracious calling in their hearts. All whom God calls are the elect and them only.

Thus also he does not call the reprobate, whom he appointed to damnation, and so the promise of God is not to them. They are not incorporated into his covenant; he speaks no word of promise to them; he gives them no word except a word of damnation and a command to repent and believe, which command, so soon as it comes, works their greater condemnation.

When Peter said, "The promise is unto you, and to your children," he declared that God's saving call—and thus God's election—runs in the lines of generations. It is the calling of the covenant God, the family God, and thus the God who saves his people in the lines of families and shows to them—believers and their seed—his covenant. The promise is a promise to believers and their seed. And this means not only that God's call but also God's election run in the lines of believers and their seed.

"And to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." A promise to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth and to all the nations of the world that all nations be blessed with father Abraham!

Promise received!

The promise is *to* them. It is *to* as many as the Lord our God shall call. The promise is *to* you, and it is *to* your children! That does not only mean that it is meant for them. That is true. God intends it for them and them only. When the gospel of Christ comes and the promise of the gospel is preached, then we must hear this beautiful thought expressed. We are hearing about God's eternal intentions regarding the heirs of the promise. We are hearing of all the divine love and favor toward us that God purposed for us in Christ and that he accomplished at the cross. We are hearing of God's grace and favor to sinners, to the blind, to the lame, to the imprisoned, and to his own wretched enemies. We are hearing of God's intentions to bless us in Christ, to save us from our sins, to take away our guilt, to free us from sin's dominion, to bless us in this life, and to bring us to heavenly glory. Oh, the preaching of the promise is the preaching of God's intention and his naming of the heirs of his promise by name. That is wonderful news for the believer and his children and all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

But Peter preached an even more profound truth. The promise is *to* them; so that God gives, bestows, and makes reality all that he promises in their lives, in their experiences, and for their assurance. According to the divine decree of election and by the powerful and efficacious call of the gospel, God actually bestows all these things on them. He bestows them powerfully and efficaciously on adults, as well as on the children of those both far and near, as many as he calls. He bestows all these things by bestowing on the heirs of the promise his Spirit.

The promise does not wait on a decision or a work or an activity of man. The experience of the promise does

not follow upon some decision, work, or activity of man.

The promise is *to* them, so that when God calls they receive all that the word of God promises and so that God works out all that he intended for them in their hearts and in their lives and in all their circumstances. When God calls, they repent; believe; and are forgiven, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

For the promise is unto you. You are God's child, an heir of the promise, a heavenly creature already. Not, you must yet do this and this; but God realizes his promise that is to you.

—NJL

EDITORIAL

THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL AS DEMAND OF THE COVENANT (5)

Introduction

The burden of these editorials has been that the Christian school is a demand of the covenant. God's covenant of grace with believers and their seed not only requires that the covenant seed be reared in the fear of the Lord but also that believing parents in Christ cooperate in the rearing of their covenant seed in a Christian school. The form of the Christian school may vary according to time and place and circumstance, but the essence of the Christian school is the cooperation of covenant parents in rearing their covenant seed. God uses this means to prepare the covenant seed to serve him as citizens in his kingdom in whatever vocations in this life he has determined for them.

The position that these editorials have set forth is the position of the Reformed confessions and Church Order, which express the teaching of the scriptures on this matter. Perhaps the clearest and most concise statement, and the article from which these editorials have taken their title, is article 21 of the Church Order: "The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 387).

The position that these editorials have set forth has been lost in the Reformed denominations that gave birth to the Reformed Protestant Churches. Our mother (the Protestant Reformed Churches), our grandmother (the

Christian Reformed Church), and our great-grandmother (the Reformed Church in America) have all, to one degree or another, severed the vital connection between God's covenant of grace with believers and their seed, on the one hand, and the Christian school, on the other hand. They have done this by their denial that the Christian school is a demand of the covenant. The result has been and will be the erosion of the Christian school and, in many cases, the loss of the Christian school in the generations of these denominations.

Therefore, these editorials have contended to the readership of *Sword and Shield* that the Christian school is not merely a wise idea of man but that the Christian school is due to the covenant itself and that it remains the demand of our gracious covenant God. In this final editorial in this series, let us examine the vital connection between God's covenant of grace and the Christian school.

A Vital Connection

There is a vital connection between the covenant of God with believers and their seed, on the one hand, and the Christian school, on the other hand. The Christian school and God's covenant are not two disconnected things in the life of God's covenant people. Rather, the Christian school arises out of and is founded upon God's covenant with believers and their seed. Without the covenant there is no such thing as the Christian school. Sever the con-

nection between the covenant and the Christian school, and the Christian school will die. The connection between God's covenant of grace and the Christian school is vital for the school.

What is the connection between God's covenant of grace and the Christian school? These editorials have been describing that connection using the word *demand*. The title of these editorials has been "The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant." In that title the word *demand* expresses the connection. On the one hand, you have the Christian school. On the other hand, you have the covenant. The Christian school is connected to the covenant as a demand of the covenant.

In using the language of *demand* to express the connection, these editorials have followed the language especially of article 21 of the Church Order: "The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 387). The language of *demand* is the language of obligation, of requirement. It is the language that parents shall "have their children instructed" in the good Christian schools and that "the consistories shall see to it."

The language of *demand* is characteristic in the Reformed confessions and Church Order when they speak of the Christian school. Article 41 of the Church Order puts this question to every church in the classis: "Are the poor and the Christian schools cared for?" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 393). That question is not merely an item of interest to the classis, but the question expresses the demand of the covenant that the Christian schools be cared for. If a church would not care for the Christian schools, the classis would require an explanation and would likely issue an admonition to that church to care for the Christian schools.

So also the Heidelberg Catechism's explanation of the fourth commandment uses the language of obligation and demand. It asks what God *requires* in the fourth commandment to keep the sabbath day holy and answers that one requirement is that "the schools be maintained" (Q&A 103, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 128).

So also the questions for church visitation use the language of obligation and demand. "Does the consistory see to it that the parents send their children to the Christian school?" (Questions for church visitation. Questions to the full consistory, no. 18). If a church would inform the classis through the church visitors that they did not see to it that the parents sent their children to the Christian school, the church visitors would ask for an explanation and would admonish the consistory, on the basis of scripture and the confessions, that from now on they must see to it.

The Reformed confessions and Church Order speak of the connection between God's covenant and the

Christian school in terms of a demand because this is how scripture speaks of it. To all Israel God says regarding his words, "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children" (Deut. 6:7).

5. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children:
6. That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children. (Ps. 78:5–6)

All of this language of demand and obligation and requirement expresses the vital connection between God's covenant of grace with believers and their seed and the Christian school. The Christian school has its whole existence and power from God's covenant of grace. Where the Christian school is acknowledged to be a demand of God's covenant, there a Christian school can exist as a Christian school. Where it is denied that the Christian school is a demand of the covenant, there the vital connection is severed, and the Christian school cannot long exist as a Christian school.

The Claim of the Covenant

More can be said about the vital connection between God's covenant of grace with believers and their seed and the Christian school. It is true that the Christian school is vitally connected to God's covenant as a demand of God's covenant. But why does God's covenant demand the Christian school? What is it about the covenant that makes the Christian school an obligation?

In order to answer this, we must examine a specific aspect of the covenant that is perhaps underdeveloped in our doctrine of the covenant and in our understanding of the covenant. We could call this specific aspect of the covenant *the claim of the covenant*.

The claim of the covenant has to do with ownership and possession. The claim of the covenant means that when God establishes his covenant between himself and his elect people in Christ, he makes a claim upon those people. In the establishment of his covenant with them, he declares his ownership of them. He binds his chosen people to himself as his own people, who belong to him. One who is God's covenant friend belongs to God. He is God's friend. He is God's son. He is God's possession. He is God's servant. In the covenant he is God's.

By the claim of the covenant, God also separates his people from the wicked world of sin and darkness. The world has no claim upon God's people, for they are God's people. The devil has no claim upon God's people, for they are God's people. Sin and guilt have no claim upon

God's people, for they are God's people. Death and the grave have no claim upon God's people, for they are God's people. Thus the claim of the covenant is a tremendous comfort for God's people. In their constant battle with the world, the false church, the devil, sin, and death, they rest secure in the comfortable knowledge that God has claimed them as his own and that no man shall pluck them out of God's hand.

The claim of the covenant is taught prominently in scripture in all of those passages in which God speaks his covenant promise in its well-known covenant formula. The covenant promise is this: "I will be your God, and you shall be my people." In that promise God claims his people as his own ("you shall be my people"), even as he graciously gives himself to be the God of his people ("I will be your God"). God often repeats his covenant promise in scripture from the beginning (Gen. 17:7, for example) to the end (Rev. 21:3, for example). Jeremiah 31:33 is representative of this promise as it is found throughout Holy Writ: "This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." There in that promise is the claim of the covenant: "They shall be my people!"

The claim of the covenant is also confessional. The Heidelberg Catechism opens with the claim of the covenant. "What is thy only comfort in life and death? That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ" (Q&A 1, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 83). God's claim upon his people in his covenant means that they confess, "I belong unto Jesus Christ!"

The Form for the Administration of Baptism teaches that the doctrine of holy baptism is this: God the Father "doth make an eternal covenant of grace with us, and adopts us for His children and heirs" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 258). God's claim upon his people in the covenant means that they are his children and his heirs.

The truth of God's claim upon his people in the covenant is in perfect harmony with the other great truths of God's covenant of grace.

First, the essence of the covenant is the relationship of friendship and fellowship that God establishes between himself and his people in Christ. The covenant is fellowship. The claim of the covenant is that in this fellowship God's covenant friends belong to him as his covenant people. God's covenant friends are also God's covenant servants. As Herman Hoeksema would often say, we are God's friend-servants.

Second, the source of the covenant is God's eternal and unconditional election of his people according to his sovereign good pleasure. The elect and only the elect are

members of God's everlasting covenant of grace. God's decree of election is also the claim of the covenant. By his eternal decree he asserted his claim upon his people. This means that in the unfolding of God's counsel in time, God only makes his covenant claim upon the elect. Right along with election and reprobation, the claim of the covenant cuts through the lines of continued generations. Not every baby baptized and not every child of believing parents are claimed by God as his own but those only whom he has eternally chosen according to his eternal purpose and good pleasure.

Third, the ground of the covenant is the blood of the covenant head and mediator, Jesus Christ. By his blood the Lord atoned for the sins of all of God's people. According to the Canons of Dordt, the blood of the cross "confirmed the new covenant." Also according to the Canons, that same blood of the cross effectually redeemed "out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father" (Canons 2.8, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 163). The claim of the covenant is also grounded in that cross. Christ's blood purchased God's elect people as his own, so that he is now their Lord.

Fourth, the covenant is a covenant of grace. It is unconditional, unilateral, and eternal. The covenant is not established, maintained, or perfected by the will or obedience of man but solely by the gracious will and good pleasure of God. The believer's experience of covenant fellowship is also unconditional. There are no prerequisites unto the believer's enjoyment of God's fellowship, whether the prerequisite be conceived of as the activity of faith, or repentance, or some other aspect of keeping God's law. The truth of the claim of the covenant underscores the graciousness of the covenant in all respects. God operates in the covenant as the sovereign God who forms his own covenant people and who claims them as his own, as a father begets and claims his children as his own.

Fifth, the calling of the covenant is that God's covenant people serve him in all things as their covenant God. God's people have their part in the covenant, which part is not a condition or a prerequisite but is their grateful service of the God who has graciously brought them into his own family and fellowship. The claim of the covenant underscores the calling of the covenant. When God claims his covenant people as his own, their eternal obligation is to serve him in love and thanksgiving through a life of good works in obedience to God's law.

The above is the lightest and faintest pencil sketch of the truth of the claim of the covenant. It is here in the claim of the covenant that we find the vital connection between the Christian school and God's everlasting covenant of grace.

The Claim of the Covenant and the Demand of the Covenant

God establishes his covenant with believers and their seed. Not only the parents but also the children of the parents are God's covenant friends. This means that God in his covenant has also established his claim upon those children, even as many as he has called. Those children belong to God by virtue of his election of them from all eternity. Those children belong to God on the basis of the blood of the everlasting covenant, which redeemed them from their bondage in sin and death and purchased them to be the children of their heavenly Father. The claim of the covenant applies to the covenant seed as well as to the covenant parents.

God's claim upon the elect infants of believers means that those children belong to him. The children are not first of all children of their parents. Although God has given the children to those particular parents in order that those parents may serve God in rearing his covenant seed, the children are God's children. Neither are the children first of all children of the church. Although God has given the children to a particular church in which they may be fed with the gospel and in which they may worship him, the children are God's children. "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward" (Ps. 127:3). The believing parent confesses that his children are "the children which God hath graciously given" him (Gen. 33:5).

Because the children of the covenant belong to God, their calling is to serve God as God's covenant friends. They are called to love him with all of their heart, mind, soul, and strength. They are called to embrace the stations and vocations that God has given them in life and to serve him in those stations and callings. Whether that station be that of a servant or a freedman, an employee or an employer; whether that station be that of a mother or father or childless couple or single person; whether that station be that of rich or poor; whether that station be that of special office-bearer or office of believer; whether that station be strong or weak; whether that station be in this industry or that office building—in whatever stations and vocations God has placed them, they are to serve their covenant God. "As God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches" (1 Cor. 7:17). "That so every one may attend to and perform the duties of his station and calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 124, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 138).

The realm in which the covenant children will serve God is the creation. The creation includes all of the creatures which God has made: heaven and earth, sea and dry land, plants and animals and man, food and drink. The

creation includes all of the powers that God has made: number and order, tides and seasons, light and darkness, sight and hearing, labor and rest, electricity and atomic power, waves and particles. The creation includes all of the society of man, who is the king of the creation: nations and kingdoms, communication and decisions, friendship and enmity, language and understanding, art and invention, work and play. The creation is a vast and wonderful realm of unending variety. In this tremendous realm of the creation, the child of God serves his God. "O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches" (Ps. 104:24).

God's covenant children will serve God in the realm of the creation as God's covenant friends and servants. They do not live in the creation as worldly men do, who know not God and who set themselves against Jehovah and against his anointed. Men who use the creation in the service of sin and corruption. Men who rebel against their stations and callings and use those callings as they suit them. Rather, God's covenant children enter into their stations and vocations in all the manifold realm of creation in order to serve God consciously in those places. Everything that God has given becomes the tools of the child of God with which he may serve his heavenly Father. Numbers and letters, equations and words, his job at the factory or the farm or the office or the home, his house and his car, his family and his friends, his vacation and his play, his diligence and his sleep—all are his instruments of thanksgiving and service to God. He adds one to one and blesses God as the God of order. He reads his book and blesses God, who has given language and understanding. He works his shift and thanks God for his daily bread. God has claimed him, and his life in the creation is grateful service to his covenant friend and sovereign. "Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it" (Ps. 90:17).

In all of this creation, the covenant child of God will serve God as one whose eternal home is not this earth but the new heavens and the new earth. Though he has much wealth on earth or is very poor, he counts none of his wealth to be his treasure. Though he live many days or few, he counts his time upon this earth to be that of a stranger who sojourns in a foreign land. His home and his treasure are in heaven with Jesus Christ, who has translated him into God's heavenly kingdom of righteousness. He labors and lives in this world with the constant prayer, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,
5. Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet. 1:3–5)

The covenant child of believing parents, who is claimed by God and who will live his life in the vocation that God gives him in the realm of the creation, must be reared and trained for that life. Here is the vital connection between the covenant of God with believers and their seed and the Christian school. The Christian school can do justice to the wide range of instruction that the covenant children must have in order to live as God's friend-servants in this life. More importantly, in

the Christian school the parents and other believers can labor together to see to it that all of the covenant children of God are properly reared and prepared for their stations and callings. God has claimed our covenant children as his own, to serve him as his covenant friends. In the Christian school we labor together to see to it that our covenant children are trained for their glorious calling of gratitude.

This ends this series of editorials on the Christian school as demand of the covenant. May the Lord again impress upon us the confession of our fathers: "The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant."

—AL

LETTER

Dear Editor,

I write in response to your editorial in the October 1 issue of *Sword & Shield*, entitled "The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant." I admit that right now I feel like a ship tossed to and fro when it comes to this whole issue of whether homeschooling is indeed condemned by the doctrine and demand of the covenant or not. I hear arguments on one side, and leave the conversation convinced that they are right, and then hear arguments on the other side, and leave thinking, well, maybe they're right. So I turn to the scriptures and the confessions with pen in hand to find the solid ground, namely Christ, upon which the covenant and covenant education is built. After studying Deuteronomy 6, Psalm 78 and the explanation set forth in your editorial as well as HC LD 12&21, BC Art. 27&28, and the Form for the Administration of Baptism, which all instruct us regarding our calling as members of the body of Christ and of the covenant, I have a few questions regarding exactly what the demand of the covenant is and how homeschooling in and of itself is inherently and inevitably individualistic.

I agree that there is a shared responsibility that we all have toward all the covenant children in the church. Whenever we are "by the way" with the covenant seed, we are to be an example of how they are to live as children of God (Titus 2), we are to tell them the wonderful works that God has done (Psalm 107), and we are to instruct them in the way that they should go (Col. 3:16). However, while we are fellow brothers and sisters with the covenant children in Christ and thus have a covenantal calling toward them, we are not their parents and, thus, do not have the calling to

parent them. We do not take on the calling of their parents. God has given them to a particular set of parents and God has particularly called those parents to rear and instruct them. Throughout the Bible, God repeatedly calls parents to this work of rearing and instructing the children God has entrusted to their care (Eph 6:4, Prov. 23:19-22, Deut. 4:9, Deut. 21:19). At baptism, the *parents* take the vow to instruct those particular children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. And, at baptism, the congregation stands as a *witness* to that vow. As witnesses, we are responsible to ensure that the parents are faithful to their vow. We are responsible to ensure that *the parents* rear and instruct their children. And this is the congregation's responsibility, not only because the congregation witnessed them take the vow at baptism, but also because, ultimately, they are *God's* children (which is signified by baptism) and thus must be instructed in the fear of His name.

The truth that they are ultimately the children of God is why we often call the children in the church the children, not only *of* the parents, but also the children *of* the church. However, we must be careful that we do not misunderstand this. That the children of believing parents in the church are also children of the church does not mean that the church stands in a relationship to these children that is the same as the relationship that the earthly parents have with these children. It is not as if all the parents of a church all share children so that all the adult members of the church stand as parents to all the children in the church. This is the principle that lies behind the socialist "children of society" or "it only takes a community to raise a child" movement. We are

not one big family that raises all of our children together. This idea of togetherness is not covenantal, but socialistic. The covenantal idea of togetherness is our unity and shared brotherhood in Christ (LD 21, BC 27). It is the unity we and our children and we and all the other members of the church have as members of the one body of Christ. And, as we have seen, such unity in Christ implies a certain calling one toward another to direct one another to our Father (Rom. 15:5-7, Eph. 4:1-6), to build one another up in the faith of our one Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (I Cor. 2:12-16, Eph. 4:11-16), to speak the truth one to another in love (Eph. 4:15), to rebuke one another when we do not live as children of God and do not walk in the Spirit of truth (Rom. 15:14, Eph. 5:11, I Thess. 5:14), to encourage and comfort one another in the gospel of our one Lord and Saviour as we face the temptations and trials of this valley of the shadow of death (I Thess. 5:11, Rom. 1:11-12, 2 Cor. 1:4, Eph. 4:29), to use our various gifts for the good one of another (Rom. 12, I Cor. 12, Eph. 4, HC QA 55, BC Art. 28), and, in all of this, to endeavor jointly to glorify God's name (Rom. 15:6). Thus, just as much as we have the calling to instruct one another as adults, we have the calling to instruct the children. Again, I agree that each and every member of the church has a certain calling in the instruction of the covenant seed. However, I believe it is a calling each member has individually.

Thus, I do not understand how the doctrine of the covenant demands that *all* the members and parents of the church *join together* and *cooperate* in the rearing of all of their children. Is this really a demand of the covenant? Parents must *join together* and form a school in order to fulfill their covenant calling? It is argued that this principle is established in Deut 6:4-9 and Psalm 78. Page 11: "When God says, 'O Israel, teach thy children,' he is saying, 'O Israel teach thy children together.' Psalm 78 also requires togetherness in the instruction of the covenant seed." However, every time I read these passages, it seems like bigger and bigger of a stretch to say that these passages are instructing the church as a whole in what they are to do all together as one group project rather than instructing the church as a whole in the common calling that each individual parent has toward his particular children.

In the case of Deuteronomy 6, the individual character of the calling I believe is evident from the following: 1. The immediate context. The same grammatical form is used in Deuteronomy 5 in the giving of the 10 commandments: "O Israel...thou shalt..." Yet, we understand that the 10 commandments come to each of us individually. They come to all of us in common, but they are to be applied to each of us personally. I do not see why we would not understand Deuteronomy 6 in the same way. All fathers have the common calling to rear and instruct their children, but they all have this calling personally and are to fulfill it individually within their own homes and with respect to their own

children. 2. The language of the text itself. The language of the text emphasizes that this is a calling that the fathers carry out within their own homes. The language of the text depicts the life of a father among his children: "when thou sittest in thine house, and walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut 6:7). The text (vs. 9) also speaks of "the posts of thy house" and "thy gates" which belong to that one father personally. Later in the chapter, in verse 20, we read of the sons asking their fathers, "What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you?" This is a question that normally sons would ask of their own fathers rather than of all the fathers in the church. It seems clear to me that the text has to be talking about the common calling that each and every father in the church must fulfill individually.

In the case of Psalm 78:4 where we read, "we will not hide them from their children," I believe "their children" refers to the children of their fathers, that is, the generations of their fathers, or, their fathers' grandchildren. In teaching their own children of the works of the LORD, the fathers in Israel were not hiding those works and praises of Jehovah from the generations (or children) of their fathers. That "their children" refers to the present fathers' own children who are also the children of the fathers' fathers rather than referring to the children of all of the other fathers in Israel at that time is evident from the following verses 5&6. The passage reads: "1 Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. 2 I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: 3 Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. 4 We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. 5 For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: 6 That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children:"

While I believe the demand of the covenant is simply that parents must rear and instruct their children in the fear of the LORD rather than that parents must rear and instruct their children *together*, I do not deny that a christian school *may* be necessary for *many* parents to fulfill their calling. In today's world, which requires more and more education to live in society and fulfill one's God-given calling, parents may find that they need help in educating and rearing their children. On the one hand, many parents cannot meet the academic demands their children need and therefore need to send them to a school. On the other hand, sending them to the public school requires a whole lot more work in rearing their children as they must now warn them of the dangers in the world, warn them against developing friendships with their ungodly classmates, scrutinize everything their children are

being taught, and un-teach all of the lies presented to their children, replacing those lies with the truth regarding their Creator in every aspect of their study of His creation. The parents soon find this to be an almost impossible situation. To fulfill their calling, therefore, the parents find that they need a christian school. Recognizing the gift of teaching given to some of the other members, they band together with like-minded parents to form a christian school in which their children will be educated and reared in the fear of the LORD. The other members of the church also support that christian school, since they are responsible to ensure that the parents are fulfilling this calling and thus must assist the parents in fulfilling this calling when needed.

Again, I maintain, however, that, while parents may come together in their endeavor to fulfill their covenant calling to rear and instruct their children, that doesn't mean that the principle of the covenant demands that they *must* all come *together* to rear and instruct their children *together* in *one* christian school. The demand of the covenant is that parents instruct their children in the fear of the Lord to the utmost of their power and that the whole congregation sees to it and provides assistance using their unique gifts and abilities as needed. If parents are not able to fulfill their calling without setting up a christian school, then the christian school is necessary and is a demand of the covenant. However, parents that are able to rear, instruct and educate their children themselves through homeschooling are not defying the demand of the covenant simply because they do not send their children to the christian school. They have the calling to support the christian school as they are responsible for seeing to it that the other parents are faithful in fulfilling their calling and for assisting the other parents in fulfilling that calling, but they do not *have* to send their children to that christian school in order to fulfill the demand of the covenant. To be clear, I believe there are many benefits to educating the children together in a christian school, which benefits ought to be considered, even if one is able to instruct their children themselves. There are many things I learned at school being with children that are all different and come from different homes that I could not have learned at home. The covenant friendships developed are valuable. Certainly, there are benefits. Yet, the demand of the covenant is simply that the parents rear and instruct their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord and that the church sees to it that they are instructed in the fear of the LORD, for they ultimately are the children of the LORD. The mandate that parents must send their children to the christian school, I believe, is a mandate that goes beyond the demand of the covenant.

Because I do not believe "all together" is an essential principle of covenant education, I do not see how a home-school could not be considered one of the christian schools that CO Art. 21 directs the office-bearers to maintain. As you pointed out, the necessity of the christian school is the

necessity for ministers and office-bearers in the church. Thus, it makes sense that Art. 21 follows a series of articles regarding the office of the ministers of God's Word in the Church Order. The children need to be instructed in the arts and sciences and must see God in all of these subject areas so that they can apply themselves unto wisdom in every area of life and may be equipped for their callings both in the world and in the church. However, I contend that this can be done in a home-school just as well as in a more formally instituted multi-parent run school. I see no reason why a home-school cannot be a good christian school. Considering the home-schools to be good christian schools as well, I believe CO Art. 21 directs us to take care that they are also maintained.

When it comes to the covenantal instruction of the covenant seed, therefore, I believe these four principles must be understood:

1. What is the "togetherness" of the covenant? Our togetherness is in Christ and in our calling to build one another up into Him as members of one body, using our gifts for the edification one of another. Our togetherness is not that we get together and all together educate our children in one christian school. Together means that, as members of one body, we are all corporately responsible, so that we assist the parents in fulfilling their calling as needed using the gifts God has given us in order to ensure that all of the children are reared in the fear of the LORD. Together does *not* mean that, as one body, we together become as one parent of all the children of the church so that we form a school in order to instruct all the children together. We together, as one organism in Christ, share in one purpose and calling and are united in our commitment to ensuring that all of the children are instructed in the fear of His name. Although we all have a common calling, we do not have to fulfill that calling together.
2. Who has the calling to rear and instruct the covenant seed? God has established families comprised of parents and their children, and God gives the calling to rear and instruct their children to the particular parents that God has given those children to. The language of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 emphasizes this calling of parents within their homes.
3. What is the calling of the church with respect to the parent's calling to rear and instruct their children in the fear of the LORD? The calling of the church with respect to the rearing of the covenant seed is to instruct them as fellow members of the body of Christ as they are "in the way" with them, to ensure that the parents are fulfilling their calling to rear and instruct them in the fear of the LORD, and to help and assist the parents in fulfilling that calling if needed. This is where a christian school often comes into the picture as parents seek help in fulfilling their calling.

4. Is the formation of the christian school and sending one's children to the christian school *the* demand of the covenant? While a christian school *may* be the fruit of parents' endeavoring to fulfill the demand of the covenant to rear and instruct their children in the fear of the LORD, the school *as such* is not demanded by the truth of the covenant. That parents can fulfill their calling without banding together to form a school is evident from the fact that parents in the OT fulfilled this calling without forming a school.

If I am completely missing a crucial aspect of the covenant and working *together* is indeed a covenant principle, then my question is: How far does this demand to rear *all together* extend? At least 2 families in the church working together (since the form of the school isn't essential, perhaps it takes the form of a few families here and a few families there homeschooling and getting together to share ideas and curriculum and to spend time fellow-shipping together once a week)? Or, at least half of one congregation working together (perhaps one half of the congregation prefers one form of education and the other half another form so that two separate christian schools are formed in which the children are educated)? Or, does the covenant demand that *all* parents of one congregation send their children to *one* and the *same* school? Or, does this "*all together*" extend to all the parents of one denomination within a certain mile radius? Or, all the parents of one denomination wherever they might live throughout the country? Or, all like-minded parents that know of each other in the world? To be honest, the more questions I ask, the more I feel like I am beginning to legislate godliness. But, what exactly does *rear together* mean?

When it comes to judging whether a member of the church is being covenantal or individualistic, my question is: Is homeschooling in and of itself individualistic? I find it difficult to understand how one can support the christian school financially, show interest and support for the christian

school by being a member of the association, be involved in instructing the other children of the church on an individual level as they are "in the way" with the other children of the church in their life together, and yet be guilty of individualism simply due to the fact that they home-school their own children rather than send them to the christian school. When I consider how I as a single member of the church fulfill my calling in this regard, I confess that I do nothing more than such homeschooling parents do. How do I explain to them that I am not being individualistic but they are?

I am thankful for this opportunity to discuss these matters. Truly, they are matters of division between us within the congregation and thus are matters which we must discuss in the light of God's Word in the endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. I am thankful for the editorial, but I must conclude that I do not believe it accurately sets forth the principle of the demand of the covenant. Let us beware of the error of making the covenant to be all about togetherness. This is where many churches today have gone astray and have become more of a social institution than a church. While our unity in Christ as various members of the one body of Christ is what draws us together, so that we delight in one another's fellowship, the demand of the covenant is not that we do things together, but that we do things for one another as servants one of another and fellow members of one body. Let us use our gifts for the good one of another. Let us recognize the gifts of the other members. Let us encourage and assist one another in fulfilling our callings. But let us not mandate more than what God mandates for parents. God calls parents to instruct and rear their children in the fear of the LORD. I do not see, however, that God demands of parents that they must cooperate with the other parents of the church by forming a christian school to fulfill this calling. They may, but must they?

Sincerely and respectfully in Christ,
Sara Doezema

REPLY

The strength of the above letter is that it makes the strongest possible case that the Christian school is *not* the demand of the covenant. If any reader of *Sword and Shield* has disagreed with the position of my editorials that the Christian school *is* the demand of the covenant,¹ then this is the letter for you. The letter sets forth a certain interpretation of scripture and the confessions on the matter, and the letter lays out a mostly cogent argument. The letter affirms what I trust everyone agrees with: the

demand of the covenant is Christian *education* by the parents. But with regard to the Christian *school*, the letter only *permits* the Christian school. According to the letter, the covenant allows the Christian school for those who need it, and the letter even recommends the Christian school as good and even preferable and even necessary for many. But the letter's chief argument is that the Christian school is *not* the demand of the covenant. The letter states the position clearly in its conclusion:

1 Andrew W. Lanning, "The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 7 (October 1, 2021): 9–14; "The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant (2)," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 9 (November 2021): 6–11; "The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant (3)," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 10 (December 1, 2021): 7–10; "The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant (4)," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 13 (February 1, 2022): 8–12.

God calls parents to instruct and rear their children in the fear of the LORD. I do not see, however, that God demands of parents that they must cooperate with the other parents of the church by forming a christian school to fulfill this calling. They may, but must they?

The strength of the letter is also its weakness. The letter makes the strongest possible case that the Christian school is not the demand of the covenant. But the strongest possible case is still not a strong case. The letter is contradictory and deals erroneously with scripture and the confessions. This does not mean that the letter is weak and erroneous throughout. The letter says many stirring and beautiful things about our unity and shared brotherhood in Christ and our calling in the covenant to serve one another with the gifts that God has given. There is much in the letter with which I can agree wholeheartedly. But on the specific issue before us, which is whether the Christian school is the demand of the covenant, the argument of the letter falls short.

In this reply I do not intend to deal with every question or every argument in the letter. As the letter states, it was written in response to the first editorial in this series. Subsequent editorials have developed some of the ideas laid out in the first editorial, so that some of the letter's concerns have already been dealt with elsewhere, at least on a tangent. In this reply there are three things that I would like to focus on.

No Foundation

First, the letter destroys the foundation of the Christian school. The foundation of the Christian school is God's covenant of grace with believers and their seed. God himself lays this foundation of the school in the scripture passages that these editorials have explained, especially Deuteronomy 6 and Psalm 78. In these passages God commands his covenant people to rear their covenant children in the fear of his name. God demands of Israel that she labor together in the upbringing and instruction of the covenant seed. Israel—all Israel—is called to teach God's words "diligently unto thy children" (Deut. 6:7). The members of the church confess that they will show God's words to others than their own immediate children and to later generations than their own in which they may be alive: "That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children" (Ps. 78:6). The letter maintains that these passages refer strictly to the parent-child-grandchild relationship. The letter denies that these passages refer to others who would cooperate with the parents in the rearing of their covenant seed. According to the letter,

Every time I read these passages, it seems like bigger and bigger of a stretch to say that these passages are instructing the church as a whole in what they are to do all together as one group project rather than instructing the church as a whole in the common calling that each individual parent has toward his particular children.

By this argument the letter destroys the biblical foundation of the Christian school. The school that the letter envisions has no foundation in scripture. The school does not rest upon God's command to parents to raise their children in the fear of God's name. The necessity for the Christian school is not found in God's covenant. The vital connection between the Christian school and God's covenant is severed. God's command to raise the children is only for the parents, and maybe for the grandparents, but for no one else. When a school is formed, it is not because scripture requires it. It is not because the covenant requires it. After all of the other scripture passages have been cited, it will have to be acknowledged that none of them actually require the Christian school. After all of the beautiful statements about covenant fellowship and unity in Christ have been made, it will have to be acknowledged that the covenant does not actually demand the Christian school. Whatever the foundation of the Christian school may be, it is not the covenant, and it is not scripture. In the covenant and scripture, there is no demand for the Christian school.

But a school must have a foundation. What is the foundation that the letter envisions? What is it that makes a school necessary, if that necessity is not the demand of the covenant? The foundation is merely the inability of the parents to train their children adequately.

In today's world, which requires more and more education to live in society and fulfill one's God-given calling, parents may find that they need help in educating and rearing their children.

Or the foundation is merely the extra benefits that some people may find in a school setting.

To be clear, I believe there are many benefits to educating the children together in a christian school, which benefits ought to be considered, even if one is able to instruct their children themselves.

But the foundation is not the covenant. The foundation is not the demand of the covenant or the demand of scripture. Scripture and the covenant only demand Christian education but not the Christian school.

Yet, the demand of the covenant is simply that the parents rear and instruct their children in the fear

and admonition of the Lord and that the church sees to it that they are instructed in the fear of the LORD, for they ultimately are the children of the LORD. The mandate that parents must send their children to the Christian school, I believe, is a mandate that goes beyond the demand of the covenant.

What a bleak and dreary vision for the Christian school!

There are two significant consequences of destroying the biblical and covenantal foundation of the Christian school. First, the Christian school itself will eventually fall and be destroyed. The Christian school cannot stand on any other foundation than God's covenant of grace revealed in his word. If the covenant and scripture do not demand the Christian school, then the vital connection between the covenant and the school is severed, and the school will die. If the letter's view of the Christian school prevails in the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC), the fall of the Christian school will happen much more quickly than in our Reformed ancestors. At least in the Christian Reformed Church and the Protestant Reformed Churches, for example, their schools can coast along for many years yet on their form and tradition. The RPC, which is not interested in coasting along on anyone's form, will much more easily cast off the Christian school. When a Reformed Protestant school is challenged as being a wicked thing or an unnecessary thing or a vain thing, as has already been done by Reformed Protestant members, the school will have no firm foundation upon which to weather the storm. When the pressures and difficulties of establishing a new school and finding teachers and operating the school mount, as has already happened or will happen in every location where there are Reformed Protestant churches, the school will have no firm foundation upon which the members can stand to endure the difficulties. With no foundation in the covenant, those Reformed Protestant schools that already exist will more and more be abandoned for homeschooling or for Protestant Reformed schooling or for some other option. With no foundation in the covenant, those places that do not yet have a Reformed Protestant school will much more willingly and eagerly fail to establish one.

The second consequence of destroying the biblical and covenantal foundation of the Christian school is that the churches may not even permit Christian schools to be formed. Instead of seeing to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed, the consistories must see to it that the parents are not using any Christian school but are themselves exclusively instructing their children. After all, according

to the letter, God exclusively commands the parents, and maybe the grandparents, to rear their children. God does not command anyone else to rear the children. What right, then, would any parent have to join with any other parent to hire a teacher to stand in one's place? For a parent to do so would be for that parent to abdicate his calling from God. In such a case the parent's own inabilities are not the issue. In such a case any additional benefits of a Christian school are not the issue. The issue is what God requires! According to the letter, God commands the parent alone, "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children" (Deut. 6:7). The parent who hires a teacher to help or cause his child to be instructed in the truth is not himself doing the teaching, as God commands. Therefore, the parent may not tolerate another to instruct his children. The consistories may not tolerate the parents' finding others to teach their children. God says to the parent, "Thou shalt teach," and teach thou shalt. The parent and the church must become the enemy of the Christian school and seek to dismantle it. There may be no peace between the school and the home, so that some homes maintain a Christian school together and some homes do not. In obedience to the word of God, the parents and the consistories must oppose the Christian school as an abdication of the God-given calling that comes exclusively to the parent.

Over against this position of the letter, the word of God does give to all Israel the covenant calling to rear the children. The calling comes primarily to parents, who will most often be by the way and in the home with the children, but the calling comes to all Israel. God's address to Israel in Deuteronomy 6:4 is not what might be called a distributive use of the word *thou*, so that God is addressing the whole nation in common but speaking to every individual parent about his own individual children. Rather, God addresses Israel. Throughout the passage, he does not stop addressing Israel. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou [Israel] shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine [Israel's] heart...And these words, which I command thee [Israel] this day, shall be in thine [Israel's] heart: And thou [Israel] shalt teach them diligently to thy [Israel's] children" (Deut. 6:4–7). For a fuller explanation of the passage, see the first editorial in the series.²

A Curious Interpretation of Article 21

The second thing that I would like to address from the letter is its curious interpretation of article 21 of the Church Order. Article 21 reads: "The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which

2 Andrew W. Lanning, "The Christian School as Demand of the Covenant," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 7 (October 1, 2021): 11.

the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 387). The letter interprets the “good Christian schools” of article 21 to include homeschools.

Because I do not believe “all together” is an essential principle of covenant education, I do not see how a home-school could not be considered one of the christian schools that CO Art. 21 directs the office-bearers to maintain.

And:

Considering the home-schools to be good christian schools as well, I believe CO Art. 21 directs us to take care that they are also maintained.

This interpretation of article 21 is curious because it acknowledges that the school is a demand of the covenant after all. It acknowledges that article 21 demands that the school be maintained. It acknowledges that the school is a matter of necessity for the covenant children. It acknowledges that the school is “the necessity for ministers and office-bearers in the church,” which necessity includes seeing to it that there are schools and that the parents use them. Whereas the entire letter argues against the Christian school as the demand of the covenant, the letter acknowledges that article 21 requires Christian schools as the demand of the covenant, and the letter agrees with that requirement.

The letter tries to get around that requirement of article 21 by including a homeschool in the definition of the good Christian school. With this redefinition the demand of the covenant is really nothing more than the demand for Christian education all over again, but it is not the demand for a Christian school. This redefinition of the Christian school as also including a homeschool is not correct. The history of article 21 shows clearly that the Church Order referred to a teacher who stood in the place of the parents in the instruction of the covenant seed. The Church Order never referred to and never intended to refer to a home but to a school.

Nevertheless, in trying to include a homeschool in the definition of a school, the letter recognizes that article 21 makes the school the demand of the covenant. Instead, one should oppose article 21 as unbiblical. One should call for a revision of article 21 or its removal from the Church Order. One who does so will also have to call for the removal of question 3 in article 41, the removal of the reference to the schools in Lord’s Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism, and the removal of question 18 of the church visitors’ questions. In all of these confessions and documents, *school* means school, not home and not homeschool. And in all of these confessions and documents, the school as school is treated as the necessary demand of the covenant.

Confused and Contradictory

The third thing that I would like to address from the letter is the fact that it is confused and contradictory in its argument. The letter is arguing that the Christian school is not the demand of the covenant. But the letter at the same time says there are circumstances when the Christian school is the demand of the covenant.

If parents are not able to fulfill their calling without setting up a christian school, then the christian school is necessary and is a demand of the covenant.

But on what basis could the Christian school sometimes be a demand of the covenant? The letter has argued that there is no demand for the Christian school in scripture. The letter has argued that there is no demand for the Christian school in the covenant. The letter has argued that the only demand of the covenant is Christian education. On whose authority will the Christian school now become a demand of the covenant? At one point the letter rightly fears the attempt to legislate godliness. But that is exactly what the letter’s position will do. Denying that the Christian school is God’s demand in the covenant but saying that sometimes the Christian school is the demand of the covenant requires that someone other than God decide when the school is a demand. Who is that someone going to be? Me? You? Someone is going to have to legislate godliness with this position.

Another example of the confused and contradictory argument of the letter is its treatment of the relationship between the covenant members and the covenant seed. The letter argues that the parents are responsible for the rearing of the covenant seed, but the other covenant members are not responsible for that rearing. For example:

Throughout the Bible, God repeatedly calls parents to this work of rearing and instructing the children God has entrusted to their care (Eph. 6:4, Prov. 23:19-22, Deut. 4:9, Deut. 21:19).

The letter also makes this point by putting some serious spin on the argument of the editorials:

We are not one big family that raises all of our children together. This idea of togetherness is not covenantal, but socialistic.

And:

Together does *not* mean that, as one body, we together become one parent of all the children of the church so that we form a school in order to instruct all the children together.

That is putting some English on it, but the point is being made with some vigor that the parents, but not the covenant members, are responsible for the rearing of the covenant seed.

However, the letter also maintains that the covenant members do have responsibilities toward the covenant seed after all.

I agree that there is a shared responsibility that we all have toward all the covenant children in the church.

And what might that shared responsibility be?

Whenever we are “by the way” with the covenant seed, we are to be an example of how they are to live as children of God (Titus 2).

But the language of “by the way” is from Deuteronomy 6. That passage was already ruled out for all Israel and was limited to the parent but now must be applied to

others than the parent as God’s demand also upon them.

I believe that this confusion and contradiction in the letter are not due to some weakness in the author but are due to the inherent contradiction of the argument itself. It is impossible to isolate the covenant seed from the other members of the covenant with regard to their rearing but at the same time try to recognize the relationship of the covenant members to the covenant seed. This inherent contradiction is solved by recognizing that the Christian school is the demand of the covenant.

Conclusion

The letter makes the strongest possible case that the Christian school is not the demand of the covenant, but the argument actually destroys the Christian school. Let the parents and the church not depart from the biblical and confessional view of the Christian school as the demand of the covenant.

—AL

SOUND DOCTRINE

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

FAITH ALONE FOR CHRIST ALONE

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.

—Colossians 2:8–10

For the long time spent breathing in the smog of philosophy and vain deceit, the traditions of men, and the rudiments of the world, it is necessary to spend time breathing in the clear air of Christ, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. It must become evident how much the child of God has been spoiled during that time of breathing in the smog of philosophy and vain deceit, robbed in his heart and soul of the riches of Christ Jesus and the blessedness of full confidence and assurance in him. How much there is to gain back in newfound freedom in the simplicity of the gospel of Christ. How much the churches of Colossae, of Galatia, and of Corinth must have delighted to breathe

the fresh air brought by Paul’s letters to them after being stifled with the errors of those whom the apostle to the Gentiles called “false apostles” (2 Cor. 11:13).

In time it becomes easier to see through the smog of so much needless controversy, controversy created because of dissatisfaction with Christ alone.

Two outstanding features or patterns of language, which were confusing in the middle of controversy, become far clearer in the light of God’s word.

The first is the crucial division regarding the description of faith. One side of this division is the description of faith as “doing.” All the qualifications and negations make absolutely no difference. One simply cannot have

faith as “doing” without having faith also as a deed, an act, or a work of man. Some professor or minister may claim that he can affirm that faith is a “doing” and then deny strenuously that such an affirmation makes faith into a deed or a work, but the denial is vain.

It cannot but be noted that such confusing language about faith, confusing because of these vain distinctions between faith as a “doing” and faith as a deed or work, stands in stark contrast to the simple testimony of faith on the other side, which simply states that faith is the gift of God worked by the Holy Spirit, with the result that the believer himself does actually believe on Jesus Christ.

The Canons of Dort give simple, clear instruction. “Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of that grace received” (Canons 3–4.12, emphasizing “that grace” as described earlier in the article; *Confessions and Church Order*, 169).

The manner of this operation cannot be fully comprehended by believers in this life. Notwithstanding which, they rest satisfied with knowing and experiencing that by this grace of God they are enabled to believe with the heart, and love their Savior. (Canons 3–4.13, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 169)

If any dissatisfied soul should raise a quibble or storm about the word “enabled,” he must be silenced with what is so clearly stated in the following article, with its application of Philippians 2:13: “He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also” (Canons 3–4.14, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 169).

The second prominent feature or pattern of language is the reduction of faith to a mere label: believer. This is a strange feature in the context of the above division, so strange as to be outstanding when it is first noticed. When it is noticed, the feature becomes obnoxious to the point of causing grief. In the broader context of the controversy that recently took place in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), a distinction was forged. This distinction was supposed to cover concerns about legalistic sermons: obtaining assurance of justification by good works, doing good works to have prayers answered, and the like. When it was pointed out that such sermons indicated a conditional covenant theology, the response was given that such was impossible. The sermons could not possibly be teaching conditions because the sermons were about elect and regenerated believers. The doctrine could not be conditional because the subjects of the doctrine were already believers!

As it turns out, this strange feature means that a minister or seminary professor can speak and write about all

kinds of things that believers are supposed to do. Believers must fulfill certain obligations and callings imposed on them. When they do these things, they obtain blessings and benefits from God. They have done their part, so that God can then do his promised part. They fulfilled the conditions of the promises. God can then fulfill his end and show his faithfulness by supplying subsequent grace and blessings. But, of course, none of this is conditional because the people are already believers, already in a state of grace.

Both of these features are significant for a proper understanding of the doctrinal controversy at its core.

First, these features reveal what is most abhorrent about the whole controversy. The controversy truly turns on the nature of the covenant of grace. Is the covenant of grace a means to an end, or is the covenant the end itself? Does the covenant of grace continue to describe man as a party over against God, or is the covenant of grace God’s redeeming man back to himself to be forever in spiritual fellowship and unity with him in Christ, the head of the covenant?

Both features or patterns of language used in the doctrinal controversy *demand* that the covenant of grace be a means to an end and not the end itself. Both features *demand* that man be a party over against God. With respect to Christ both features signify that Christ is not the glorious head of the covenant but only acts as a mediator. Christ indeed graciously restores man to a position where he is in God’s favor. But in this new position man remains his own creature, to one degree or another independent of God. In this new position man is supplied with available grace, but it is in his power to do or not to do. And dependent on what he will do or not to do are all subsequent blessings from God. In other words, man is restored by means of the new covenant of grace to a new covenant of works.

The PRC have been insistent that the above is not at all the theology of Andrew Cammenga and Hubert De Wolf that led to the schism of 1953. How could it possibly be? There are no conditions *unto* salvation, only conditions *after* salvation. The subject matter is no longer “all of you,” as De Wolf infamously stated, but only elect, regenerated *believers*. Even when it comes to faith as “doing,” members of the PRC are assured that this “doing” of faith belongs only to the elect and regenerated. The subject matter is limited to the elect, regenerated believer’s believing. It certainly cannot be an elect unbeliever’s believing, much less a reprobate believer’s believing. What logic! No, the conditional covenant theology of today is not exactly the same as that of the 1950s. But it is still the same. No matter the persons speaking it, no matter the synodical or classical approval, no matter the

history of faithful orthodoxy, the theology is the same. It is still conditional theology, which partakes of the same error of Arminianism. Available grace, two tracks, conditional fellowship, obedience to receive blessings—all the same theology: conditional theology.

Debate and controversy must therefore cease in the PRC. Those insistent on debate and controversy have been labeled as slanderous and schismatic and accordingly shown the door. No longer may it be debated whether faith is man's "doing" or faith is the gift of God's grace. Faith can only be the "doing," the deed, and the work of man. Neither may it be debated whether faith is passive or active. It can only be active and never passive. Neither may it be debated whether man is redeemed to constant dependence on Christ, his Lord, or whether man must stand in some respect independent, on his own before God. Man must be independent, a party over against God. Faith must be man's own, his own action. If faith is merely passive, merely receptive of Christ, faith has no validity whatever in the conditional covenant.

Consistent with this, any teaching of faith as passive must be condemned as heresy. The truth about faith as passive must be condemned before that truth can condemn the teaching of the conditional covenant. If faith is merely passive, then how can it possibly count for anything before God? How can it count for salvation? How can faith count for following blessings and prosperity from God? If good works are like faith, only God's gifts and only God's gifts as the fruit of faith, how can God possibly reward good works?

Yes, that is exactly the point. It is the point on which the entire doctrinal controversy must collapse on itself. The glad, glorious news of the gospel is that faith is truly, really nothing by itself. Faith is nothing of itself. Just as God must be all in all and man nothing at all, so must faith be nothing at all for the sake of Christ and the fullness of Christ, the complete savior.

This faith that is nothing for the sake of Christ, its everything, must carry its point of Christ alone through the entire life of the child of God and all his way to the glory of eternal life. Faith can never bring the believer to say, "My faith" but always, "God's gift." Faith can never bring the believer to say, "My good works" but always, "The grace of God." Faith can never bring the believer to say, "My perseverance" but always, "God's preservation."

Why must faith speak that way? Why must faith ascribe nothing to the believer but ascribe all to God? Not because of rigorous debate and discussion. Not because of greater force or threat of force exercised by a majority against a minority. Not because of the overwhelming power of logic or reason. Not by force of

rhetoric or by appeal to history. Not because of correct doctrinal formulations that demonstrate clear grounds in scripture.

In fact, there is only one way to settle the controversy. The truth about faith is that it is all about Christ alone, the only savior.

I think an illustration is helpful. I have heard people talk about how they have gotten through difficult circumstances. I have heard many of them say something that has stopped me in my tracks, words to the effect of, "My faith got me through." Yes, it seems like a nice thing to say. It even suggests a deep spirituality. So often it is taken for such. But what good is it really? To whom does that statement really point: to the believer's believing or to Christ the savior? To whom does it really give glory: to the person saying the words or to Christ, the object of faith?

So must we see the controversy over faith as passive or active. As long as faith by itself is in view, or as long as the believer's believing is in view, faith must be active. Faith must be a "doing," a deed, or an act. However, where the truth of Jesus Christ as a complete savior is in view, faith must be passive. Its character as receptive is the simple consequence of Christ's being the complete savior. Faith must be regarded as the bond that places the believer in spiritual union with Christ. Faith must make the believer one with his savior, the branch with the vine, the member with the head. Faith must be the instrument of apprehending the person and work of Christ. To speak more broadly, a proper Reformed theology must make for a proper Reformed Christology, and a proper Reformed Christology must make for a proper Reformed soteriology.

Similar to the above illustration is my experience in being exposed to many sermons and many theological writings. What is prominent among so many of them is an emphasis on Christians and Christianity, what Christians are like, and what Christians do. Some are descriptive, teachings and doctrines. Others are prescriptive, demonstrating and showing how Christians ought to be and how they ought to behave themselves. Studying these sermons and writings, I go along happily, seeing where the speakers and authors are going. But I am suddenly interrupted by a thought. Where is Christ in all this? Going back over what I have heard and reviewing what I have read, I realize that Christ is missing. He was never there. The speaker was speaking and the writer was writing about Christless Christians, about what is truly impossible. The sermon or speech, the book or article, was a meal without food, a worthless, vain pretension.

So must any controversy about faith be: a worthless, vain pretension without Christ.

It must be and always continue to be such a worthless, vain pretension without the living reality of faith in Christ. Can the member be anything without the head? The branch without the vine? The believer without Christ?

There must come a point where debate in controversy shows itself to be dangerous and vain: when Christ is so far removed from the debate that he is simply gone. Then heresy must rule because the truth is gone with Christ. With Christ removed from the debate, faith can only be regarded as the work of man rather than the work of the Spirit of Christ. Faith must become all about a psychological or moral effort of the heart.

Discussion about faith is impossible without faith in Christ.

Such is the powerful testimony of scripture. In Paul's epistles there is often recorded the apostle's desire for the churches, a desire which is often expressed as his prayer.

I...cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers...that ye may know... what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places. (Eph. 1:15–20; see also Col. 1:9; 2:2–3; 2 Thess. 1:11–12)

The apostle's desire is that the saints in those churches would grow in their knowledge of Christ, being filled with the incomprehensible riches of the grace of Christ and the love of God so immeasurably shown in the gift of his Son. According to this prayer, the churches are to busy themselves with exploring the glorious, wondrous abundance of their savior.

Why this Spirit-inspired desire and prayer? Scripture gives ever-growing knowledge of Christ to be not only the everlasting praise of Jesus Christ, the only savior; but also to be a powerful safeguard against the destruction of the church, its removal from Christ, her only foundation, to anything less than Christ alone. Ever-growing knowledge of Christ is to be the safeguard against moving from Christ to merit, to good works, to man's will, or to faith as a good work of man's willing and doing. Ever-growing knowledge of Christ is also to be the safeguard against moving from Christ to mere words that pretend to honor him but must leave room for man in one way or another. Colossians 2 in particular leads

the church to the fullness of Christ in order to leave no room for doctrines of works taught by men in their unbelieving opposition to Christ.

Similarly, scripture gives other formulations about faith that demand the completeness and fullness of Christ to the exclusion of faith as "doing."

There is the expression that is presented in the context of the rejection of man's works for salvation: "the faith of Christ" (Phil. 3:9; see also Rom. 3:22; Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:22). Observe in these passages the connection between "the faith of Christ" and justification. This is not only the justification that brings the believer into living fellowship with God, but it is also all of the believer's assurance of his salvation from God. As the sole foundation for a life of gratitude in good works, the faith of Christ never forsakes the fullness of Christ to add faith itself, much less faith's fruits of good works.

Also powerful are the expressions of Christ to various individuals: "Thy faith hath saved thee" (Luke 7:50; 18:42). Christ spoke those words. He worked the deliverance. Those individuals came to Jesus knowing that what they so desperately needed was in him and not in themselves.

Then there is the simple expression of faith that is so easily overlooked because of its prominence: "in Christ." In Christ as the branches incorporated into the vine; as members into the head; as hungering and thirsting; as eating and drinking Christ, who is their life and nourishment. In Christ to live, no longer of self, no longer according to what is old. Each time "in Christ" is used in scripture, it must be a powerful reminder of what faith truly is: in Christ. In Christ always and forever, in Christ to have salvation as comfort and all assurance, in Christ to be fruitful in good works always from him and by him.

The overwhelming truth of scripture means that these truths cannot be debated merely intellectually. These truths cannot be reduced to mere concepts or ideas pitted against one another.

Faith, true faith in Christ alone, triumphs gloriously in the controversy. Having Christ in the heart through faith is the end of the controversy. Christ is the conviction that faith must be passive, the sole wondrous instrument to apprehend him who is the complete savior. Christ is the fullness that must make true faith marvel and wonder at his incomparable riches and rejoice to be nothing for faith's object, Christ, to be everything.

—MVW

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

HUMPTY DUMPTY (1): JABBERWOCKY

Which Is Master

“There’s glory for you!”

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘glory,’” Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t—till I tell you. I meant ‘there’s a nice knock-down argument for you!’”

“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down argument,’” Alice objected.

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

Alice was too much puzzled to say anything, so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. “They’ve a temper, some of them—particularly verbs, they’re the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, *I* can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That’s what *I* say!”

“Would you tell me, please,” said Alice, “what that means?”

“Now you talk like a reasonable child,” said Humpty Dumpty, looking very much pleased. “I meant by ‘impenetrability’ that we’ve had enough of this subject, and it would be just as well if you’d mention what you mean to do next, as I suppose you don’t mean to stop here all the rest of your life.”

“That’s a great deal to make one word mean,” Alice said in a thoughtful tone.

“When I make a word do a lot of work like that,” said Humpty Dumpty, “I always pay it extra.”

“Oh!” said Alice. She was much too puzzled to make any other remark.¹

Prof. Brian Huizinga instructed his audience about the phrase *in the way of* recently in a series of eight articles

published in the Protestant Reformed periodical, the *Standard Bearer*.² He wrote:

The concept “in the way of *repentance*” must be related to and distinguished from “in the way of *obedience*.” As was evident in protests to synod, confusion arises when it is *wrongly* assumed that repentance and obedience are one and the same, and that, therefore, the phrases “in the way of repentance” and “in the way of obedience” communicate the exact same meaning and can be used interchangeably. (222)

Positively, synod taught, “we experience covenant fellowship with God *in the way of* obedience.” (222)

When we say that “we receive remission in the way of repentance” we are also expressing a relation between two things...However, we do not merely mean that remission and repentance occur simultaneously (like fellowship and obedience), but we also mean that repentance *precedes* remission as *the way unto* it. (222)

Synod 2018...taught, “Obedience never gains us or obtains anything in the covenant of God. Though we may lose the experience of covenant fellowship by continuing in disobedience, we never gain it by our obedience, but it is restored by faith in Christ and in the way of repentance.” This statement from Synod 2018 very clearly teaches that while our good works of obedience are not the way back to the restoration of fellowship, repentance is. (222)

So to summarize: remission is in the way of repentance but not in the way of obedience. In this case *in the way of* means *way unto*, *precedes*, and sometimes *simultaneous with*. But fellowship is in the way of obedience, and presumably fellowship is also in the way of remission, which is in the way of repentance; but in this case *in the way of* means something different from fellowship in the

1 Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*; <http://www.literaturepage.com/read/throughthelookingglass-54.html>.

2 Brian Huizinga, “Synods 2020/2021 and ‘In the Way of Repentance,’” *Standard Bearer* 98, nos. 4–11 (November 15, 2021–March 1, 2022). Page numbers for quotations from these articles are given in text.

way of obedience. In the case of fellowship in the way of obedience, *in the way of* means *simultaneous with* and not *precedes* or *way unto*.

We have not heard exactly *what* the relationship between remission in the way of repentance and fellowship in the way of obedience is. We presume that fellowship is also in the way of remission, which is in the way of repentance. In this case *in the way of* means *precedes* and not *simultaneous with*. Once you are repentant and have remission in the way of your repentance, which means remission preceded by repentance, then fellowship is in the way of obedience; but in this case *in the way of* means *simultaneous with* and not *precedes*. So, *in the way of* sometimes means *precedes* and *way unto* and sometimes *simultaneous with*. Sometimes *in the way of* can only mean *simultaneous with* (as in the case of fellowship in the way of obedience), and sometimes *in the way of* just means *in the way of*, which in that case means *way unto*.

“Thus, when we do our theology, it is good and necessary to strive for theological precision and to maintain distinctions established by the Word of God,” The Professor said, sitting on a very high and very thin wall (102).

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

Obvious Development

Prof. Brian Huizinga has finally finished his series of articles on the doctrine of repentance and its connection to the phrase *in the way of*. Interested readers can read the whole series in the *Standard Bearer*. I caution you not to lose your faith. The articles, along with Professor Engelsma’s recent speech on antinomianism and his “privately published paper” “Ignorant, Lying, or Merely Mistaken,” which were treated in the last couple issues of *Sword and Shield*, have been instrumental in my thorough and complete rejection of the theology that they espouse and teach. I thought that I hated the theology before. After reading this series of articles though, I hate the theology espoused in them with all my being. I never want it to cross my lips. If some form of it ever has crossed my lips, I pray that the Lord will forgive me my sins and not impute my trespasses unto me.

Professor Huizinga’s articles also convinced me, if I needed more convincing, that the Protestant Reformed

Churches cannot be saved. The man who wrote the articles teaches dogmatics at the Protestant Reformed seminary. He is young, and if he lives long, he will teach generations of young men this theology. These men will fill the pulpits and the souls of the listeners with this theology. The result will be even more ecclesiastical destruction.

I cannot blame him. He is the product of the preaching of his youth. He grew up listening to Rev. K. Koole week after week. Koole makes a living preaching that there is that which man must do to be saved. Professor Huizinga’s dogmatics professor was Prof. R. Cammenga, who would not know the gospel if it bit him on the nose. He actually said that Christ did not personally accomplish all of our salvation. Professor Huizinga’s practical theology professor was Prof. B. Gritters, and Gritters lamented the decision of the Protestant Reformed Synod 2018 in his prayer right after the decision to sustain the appeal of Connie Meyer. He prayed about the dark clouds that had descended on the Protestant Reformed Churches. He was cagey because he would never come out with his position, but after his prayer there was no doubt where he stood on the gospel. And Professor Huizinga’s church history professor was Prof. R. Dykstra, who after Synod 2018 was finished could not wait to minimize in the *Standard Bearer* the false doctrine condemned by synod.

“The egg only got larger and larger, and more and more human.”³

I must confess that when Professor Huizinga was called to be professor of dogmatics in the Protestant Reformed seminary, I thought that perhaps he did know the truth but was only a coward. Nicodemus was a coward, but in the end he came to beg the body of Jesus. One day Joseph went away from Jesus sad because he (Joseph) would not pay the cost of discipleship, but Jesus loved Joseph, and in his own newly hewn tomb he buried Christ. I thought that perhaps Professor Huizinga was just a coward like Nicodemus but that he would eventually come to beg the dead body of Christ from the cross to which he had been nailed in the Protestant Reformed Churches. I thought that perhaps, like Joseph, the cost of discipleship made Professor Huizinga sad but that one day afterward he would bury the crucified Christ in the tomb of the professor’s ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

When he officiated at Rev. A. Lanning’s relief of duties (actually suspension), I thought, “He is being used!”

And I thought similarly when the professor dutifully came to Crete Protestant Reformed Church to officiate at my suspension. After the sermon Professor Huizinga listened to the two elders—Steve Huisenga and Ryan Van Overloop—who were ringleaders in my suspension

3 Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, <http://www.literaturepage.com/read/throughthelookingglass-49.html>.

as they cried great, big crocodile tears to the professor. He told me how they had said that that Sunday was a terrible day for the church. But it wasn't a terrible day for them. They hated my preaching and had attacked it viciously for months, while the other elders did nothing. Those two elders were as sad as those who sent presents to one another when the two witnesses in Revelation 11 had finally been murdered. "They...shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets *tormented them*" (vv. 7–10; emphasis added). I thought, "He has been duped!"

I felt sorry for him because he had the ignominious distinction of officiating at not one but two ecclesiastical murders, and I thought of the terrible grief of conscience that he would have to live with when he realized that he was both used and duped. Suspending two ministers unrighteously, betraying his friend with a kiss, and denying Christ publicly is not *unforgiveable*, but surely, as Peter, the professor would go out and weep bitterly.

But he was neither used nor duped. He was playing his role to perfection: the dutiful churchman carrying out a thankless task that someone had to do.

Now he also reveals that he believes the doctrine that we condemned and were fighting against with all our might and at terrible cost. What is more, he is now developing and defending that doctrine. In the last article of his series, in particular, his scorn for the doctrine of the Reformed Protestant Churches comes out when he mocks it bitterly as leading to antinomianism:

If the theology of repentance and forgiveness is that repentance may not precede forgiveness but must always follow forgiveness, then consider how different our approach to sin would be...

If the consistory takes the alternative approach of "forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration, then repentance as the fruit," they will forgive, reconcile and restore the man whether he repents or not...

If that backwards theology of man takes root in the church, it will work itself through and lawlessness will reign. (247–48)

A man who could write that after all we have written on the subject does not understand the gospel and takes the slander of the enemies of the gospel onto his own lips. He makes the gospel of grace appear absurd. He does what Paul's opponents did to him: "Let us sin that grace may abound!"

The consistory, if it is a consistory of Jesus Christ at all, does not only say, "Repent" to an erring man, but the elders preach to him the gospel of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. It is that gospel which says that before one ever repents, before one ever believes, before one does

anything at all, God has reconciled his people to himself in his Son Jesus Christ, not imputing their trespasses unto them. The consistory uses the ministry of the gospel! This the professor defames by mischaracterization, holds up to ridicule, and then mocks as lawless.

And this attack on the gospel is the end result of a series of articles in which the professor set himself to promote confusion and false doctrine. Defending and teaching the doctrine "that there is an activity of the believer that is *prior* to the *experience* of a particular blessing from God" (79), he must attack the gospel, for the gospel of Jesus Christ is antithetical to that theology.

Nonsense

I can summarize the series of articles for you.

Article 1 is an introduction that tells us that he will develop the doctrine of repentance because this was the subject of recent synodical decisions of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Article 2 states that the distinction between repentance and good works is necessary and that this distinction is scriptural.

Article 3 defines repentance and includes more distinguishing between repentance and good works, warns of the terrible dangers of confusing them, and seeks to prove that this distinction is found among Reformed writers.

Article 4 is an attempt at defining repentance narrowly as sorrow for sin according to scripture and then includes a list of the many things that repentance does. (It's odd that something that does so many things is not a work!)

Article 5 states the sources of repentance.

Article 6 finally contains a statement of the real issue that brought the series to light, which is that repentance precedes and is unto remission.

Article 7 descends into the bizarre as the professor begins to explain still more that repentance precedes remission and how this is related to and distinguished from obedience that precedes fellowship.

Article 8 mercifully ends the series, but not before the professor takes up the slander and mockery of the enemies of the gospel onto his lips.

I was tempted to dismiss the theological musings of the Protestant Reformed professor of dogmatics in the same way that his colleague dismissed the theology of Herman Hoeksema about the salvation of the Philippian jailor: "Nonsense!" For Rev. K. Koole, in the March 15, 2019, *Standard Bearer*, Rev. Herman Hoeksema's theology of the Philippian jailor was not just nonsense, but it was nonsense with an exclamation point! Reverend Koole spoke for many in the pew and many of his colleagues. I have their emails to prove it. The Protestant Reformed Churches believe Reverend Koole's evaluation. That is why he said it.

Having dismissed the theology of Herman Hoeksema that the call of the gospel means do nothing, nothing but believe, the Protestant Reformed Churches are left with nonsense for theology. It is more than that, of course. It is confusing, false, dangerous, wicked, man-glorifying, God-denying, graceless, Christless, and damning. But it is at least nonsense. On many different levels it is just theological jabberwocky. One is left scratching his head and saying to himself, "What did he just say?" Some sentences you have to read ten times; and this reader, after reading many times, still cannot figure out what is being said.

If *nonsense* were all that one could say about the theology that is being taught on the pages of the *Standard Bearer* and that we know is being taught in the dogmatics room of the Protestant Reformed seminary, that would be reason enough to flee for your life. Speaking nonsense for sound theology is a dangerous practice that leads to speaking lies for sound theology. It comes perilously close to "the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:14).

But *nonsense* is not all that we can say about this series of articles.

Misleading, Etc.

The articles are misleading. Whatever good there might be in the articles serves the false and serves to soften up the audience for the false. I think, for example, of the professor's description of the source of repentance in article 5 of the series. That article functions as a kind of sleeping pill that is slipped into a drink to put one to sleep so that you can take that person where you want to.

I would like to think that the professor can be excused of the charge of deceit only because he first labored so hard to deceive himself. He has swallowed many of his own sleeping pills.

Besides, while he is playing in the bushes worrying the phrase *in the way of* and trying to talk it straight, his colleagues are making perfectly clear what they mean by *in the way of*. They mean that repentance is a part of faith; that faith and repentance are both means unto remission; that remission of sins waits on the believer's love toward his neighbor in forgiving him; and that there are acts of man that not only precede the mercy of God but also upon which the mercy of God waits. In other words, his colleagues are busy espousing naked conditional theology in everything from justification to the covenant. They only will not use the word *condition*, although that word plainly and clearly expresses their theology. And so the professor's articles, if they do nothing else, serve as a diversion from the advances that are taking place elsewhere.

The articles are barren. The author does theology the way a coroner performs an autopsy: cold and sterile. His

polemics lack any real spirit. He supposedly contends for the gospel, but there is no slash, bite, or punch in his writings. His polemics are done with a wooden sword and are better suited for the parade ground or for the armchair general who will never contend in the battlefield at the expense of his own life but who has assiduously saved his life.

The articles are condescending to the people of God, whom he constantly chides, as a teacher would schoolchildren, that they must do theology with precision and with distinctions. He will show us the way. Would that the professor had taken his own advice. He would not have written those confusing, misleading, and barren pieces of writing.

Besides being barren, misleading, and condescending, the articles are oppressive. The author labors mightily to convince us that what he writes is the Reformed faith, the gospel of the scriptures, the old paths, and historical Protestant Reformed truth. He preens himself that his writing is even a development of the truth. He trumpets the many decisions of his synods but seems ignorant of the fact that Reformed men cannot be made by synodical decisions. In all of that he oppresses the heart of the believer with works. The professor is at pains to explain what repentance is and what it is not. While he is at it, he tells his audience all the many things that repentance does; and according to him, repentance does many, many things. It is a busy little thing, is repentance. Then he teaches his audience that repentance is not a work and that repentance precedes justification. Unless the believer repents, he does not have justification. His justification waits upon his repentance. That is soul oppressing.

Still more, even if nothing written in the eight-part series on the phrase *in the way of* was wrong, it was still a colossal waste of time. The recent history of the Protestant Reformed Churches has shown that corrupt ministers can drive a freight train full of heresy through that phrase. The professor of dogmatics majors in minors, if he does nothing else. He contends for the phrase *in the way of* as though it were the very essence, heart, and soul of a proper, indeed, a necessary expression of the relationship between repentance and remission and of the relationship between obedience and fellowship with God.

The recent history of the Protestant Reformed Churches should at least make any thinking theologian question the very use of the phrase. Not commenting now on the rightness or the wrongness of the various uses of the phrase in recent history; but if one minister, a consistory, and several classes and synods could use the phrase to bolster the heresy of a conditional covenant and justification by faith and works; then other synods could use the phrase to teach the proper place of good works; then

protestants could use the phrase to contend that recent synodical decisions were a lie; and then still other synods could use the phrase to teach that there are activities of man that precede blessings of God; would not someone, anyone, especially a professor of dogmatics, say, “Maybe we should reconsider our use of this phrase”?

But there has not been any reconsideration. The professor contends for the phrase as though the doctrine of God’s gracious salvation of the sinner hinged on that phrase. Indeed, he says as much. He has a hermeneutic of *in the way of*. He cannot conceive of any other way to interpret many passages of scripture than *in the way of* this and *in the way of* that.

Dishonest

The series is also historically dishonest. Professor Huizinga states that “the origin of the dispute [concerning the doctrine of repentance] was the protest of a minister’s sermon on Proverbs 28:13” (77). True, that sermon was protested. But another sermon was protested too—the sermon on Lord’s Day 24, “The Reward of Grace.” These sermons were preached by Rev. David Overway at Hope Protestant Reformed Church after he had been examined by the Protestant Reformed synod for corrupting the doctrines of justification by faith alone and the unconditional covenant. The sermon on Lord’s Day 24 was so bad that even the sympathetic committee of Classis East wrote a secret but damning evaluation of that sermon. Perhaps one day someone will publish the so-called “Red Letter Report.”⁴ I believe it was authored by Rev. C. Spronk.

It is dishonest to say that the origin of this dispute about repentance was the sermon on Proverbs 28:13. The committee of Classis East that was brought in to help the consistory of Hope church saw the connection of the Proverbs 28:13 sermon and the Lord’s Day 24 sermon with the controversy that had been raging in the Protestant Reformed Churches for three years prior. The protests that brought these sermons to subsequent synods in 2020 and 2021 also stated what the origin of the dispute about repentance was. The origin was Reverend Overway’s preaching that Jesus Christ is the way to the Father along with the works of obedience worked in us by the Holy Ghost, a sermon on John 14:6 preached in 2015!

Professor Huizinga says that the origin of this dispute was the sermon on Proverbs 28:13 only because it serves his invented narrative, the narrative created by the Protestant Reformed hierarchy and dutifully parroted by the

professor, that there were two ditches in the controversy over the preaching of the minister at Hope. There was the ditch of legalism, which the Protestant Reformed people all said they did not believe, and there was the ditch of radicalism and antinomianism, which they all swore represented a terrible threat to the Protestant Reformed Churches.

So following that narrative, the professor of dogmatics says that the origin of the dispute was a sermon on Proverbs 28:13 and that the protests of that sermon represented the other ditch of antinomianism in the controversy that raised its head after the Protestant Reformed Churches had successfully kept themselves from the ditch of legalism. So the story goes that the minister who preached that sermon had been successfully rescued from the ditch of legalism; and when he preached his sermon on Lord’s Day 24, he only preached what he did—a reward of grace by works; the more you do, the more you will get—to save the denomination from the other ditch of antinomianism. So the story goes that he was only emphasizing that there is a reward *in the way of* good works. In fact, this was the first point of the sermon.

However, the minister had been teaching wrongly about works for years, and with him many others did the same. The synod that saw yet another protest of a sermon by Reverend Overway should have hurled him into the ditch of antinomianism and told him to stay there until he understood the gospel. Or they could have suspended and deposed him. Neither of those things happened.

And now the professor of dogmatics brings up the sermon on Proverbs 28:13 as the origin of another and different controversy that had—thankfully—afforded the Protestant Reformed Churches a good chance to reflect on and develop the doctrine of repentance that radicals and antinomians had corrupted. The professor’s analysis is not even historically honest. It is very historically dishonest to serve a narrative purpose. That was evident in the first article. And you cannot expect much good to come out of a series that begins with dishonesty. But, as I said before, he can probably be excused of deception, only because he has taken such pains to deceive himself.

Self-serving

Besides the historical dishonesty there is also the self-serving use of history. For instance, that Rome is the great example of confusing repentance with works. You have to understand that his bogeyman in the articles is those who supposedly confuse repentance with works and so

4 The “Red Letter Report” was a marked-up transcript of the “Reward of Grace” sermon. The report, produced by the special committee to help Hope church, was a scathing condemnation of the sermon that the committee attempted to keep from the public. The document was given to all the delegates of Synod 2019. A member of the Protestant Reformed hierarchy required that all copies be turned in after the closed-session discussion regarding the sermon was finished. Mysteriously, there was one copy not returned.

those who say that we are justified before we do any works, including repentance. They are the enemy because if repentance is a work, the naked conditionality of the gospel that Professor Huizinga promotes becomes apparent. If repentance is a work and the Protestant Reformed Churches are teaching that repentance precedes and is unto justification, then you have justification by faith and works. And so he attacks those who say that repentance is a work.

Strictly speaking, repentance is not to be put in the category of “good works.” When we think theologically, and think with precision, we ought to think of repentance as one thing, and good works as something else. (101)

The professor grants, “Merely *labeling* repentance a good work, or *referring* to repentance as a work when one is looking at repentance all by itself is one thing, a harmless thing” (101).

But we are told, “Scripture distinguishes repentance and good works” (102).

If in doing our theology, we do not maintain this biblical distinction between repentance and good works but conflate or confuse them in our thinking, then we run into problems interpreting Scripture. (103)

I note that there are problems with not distinguishing repentance and work, especially when one is trying to teach a theology in which repentance is prior to and unto the remission of sins. If repentance is unto justification, then repentance must be distinguished from works, in order supposedly to free oneself from the damning implication of corrupting the gospel. Professor Huizinga’s distinction does not save him in the end, but we will grant him the distinction for the moment. Repentance is not a work; for if repentance is a work, then works are prior to, precede, and are unto justification; which, of course, brings upon you the anathema of the Holy Spirit for corrupting his gospel; separates you from the entire Protestant Reformation; and puts you with Rome, the federal vision, and other deniers of the gospel.

The professor does not tell his audience that. He does not, in fact, tell anyone in the whole eight articles why in his theology repentance cannot be a work. Repentance cannot be a work in his theology because then he has obedience unto remission. He wants us to think that repentance and works must be distinguished so that we can call people to repent in order to be justified. But the fact is that if repentance is a work and repentance is unto remission, you have a very clear false doctrine of justification by faith and by repentance. The professor, therefore, insists that repentance is not a work. He grants that you can call repentance

a work if you are just talking about repentance by itself, and we thank him for allowing us this dispensation. But obviously if you make repentance unto justification, then you cannot call it a work, and so it is not a work.

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

To make repentance a work is a grave sin for the professor. And he cites Rome! Rome! Rome is the example of those who have committed this sin of conflating repentance and works.

Speaking of Rome, if there is a well-established historical example of a detrimental confusing of repentance and good works...Rome turned repentance into works. Most egregiously, Rome turned repentance into a whole elaborate system of *meritorious* works. (103)

The root of Rome’s error was not turning repentance into a work. Rather, Rome made repentance external and equated it with doing penance. Another of Rome’s errors was teaching that faith does not justify without faith’s works. Still more, Rome made repentance a part of justification. Doing penance was a good work by which one received the assurance of forgiveness. By her doctrine of repentance, Rome overthrew justification by faith alone. But now Rome is pressed into the service of illustrating the dangers of conflating repentance and work. Rome! Rome is now the example of one who failed to make a distinction. This distinction between repentance and works must be very important indeed; for if you do not make the distinction, you can become legalists like Rome or antinomians like the protestants that he ridicules. This use of Rome is simply self-serving.

There is also the professor’s use of John Calvin. Using Calvin as proof for the professor’s contention that good works and repentance are to be distinguished, he quotes Calvin’s commentary on Matthew 3:8:

It ought to be observed, that good works...are here called fruits of repentance; for repentance is an inward matter, which has its seat in the heart and soul, but afterwards yields its fruit in a change of life. But as the whole of this part of doctrine has been grievously corrupted by Popery, we must attend to this distinction, that repentance is an inward renewal of the man, which manifests itself in the outward life, as tree produces its fruit. (103)

So Calvin is supposed to support the Protestant Reformed Churches' doctrine that repentance is not a good work. But anyone can see that Calvin was not sharply distinguishing repentance from works, as the professor contends; but Calvin was noting the corruption of Rome that made repentance an external act, while the word of God makes repentance an internal and invisible grace that manifests itself in good works. Calvin in other places simply called the whole holy life of the believer *repentance* because repentance is the inward source of good works, and the attitude of repentance characterizes the whole Christian life.

Creeds Not Standards

Professor Huizinga's handling of the creeds is worse, if that were possible. He exhorts his audience to be sharp and precise and says that not doing this can easily lead to errors. He grants that we are permitted on occasion to speak broadly about repentance as the Christian life. Remember, he had said previously that this use of repentance as a synonym of the Christian life is imprecise. Now it is merely used broadly. But we are permitted to speak this way about repentance if we are only considering repentance by itself. Speaking broadly—and imprecisely—he grants that repentance “includes the concept of the quickening of the new man and a walk in a holy life” (126). And then what does he give as an example of this imprecise way of speaking about repentance? He cites the Heidelberg Catechism! “The Heidelberg Catechism permits the use of the term ‘repentance’ in this broader [read, imprecise] sense” (126).

The Heidelberg Catechism uses the word *repentance* in Lord's Day 33 to refer to the believer's whole life of gratitude! The Catechism, the professor admits, calls repentance work. So we are also permitted to speak that way; if, of course, we want to speak imprecisely and loosely and broadly, and only if we are not considering repentance as the way unto the remission of sins. For, obviously, if repentance is the believer's whole life of gratitude out of a renewed heart, then you have works as the way unto justification, and that is a serious problem, which the professor knows.

And he knows that the whole scripture and all of Reformed theology condemn that theology as no gospel at all. So the professor insists that loosely, broadly, and imprecisely, repentance is the believer's life of gratitude. But not when repentance is unto the remission of sins. Then repentance is not one's life of gratitude. Then repentance is to be distinguished.

It never seemed to have crossed the professor's mind—or maybe it did, and he dismissed the thought as inconvenient—that the Catechism describes the believer's whole life of gratitude and that the Catechism does it

almost offhandedly because the professor's distinction is a worthless distinction. It does not seem to have entered his mind—or maybe it did and he wrote it off—that the Catechism calls the believer's whole life of gratitude repentance because repentance is not faith.

Repentance Is Not Faith

This is the important distinction. Repentance is not faith! Whatever else repentance is—work, activity, or standing on your head—it is not faith! We are saved by faith alone. We are justified by faith alone. And repentance is not faith. It never seemed to have crossed the professor's mind that his sharp distinction between repentance and works of obedience that he insists is necessary is not, in fact, necessary at all. This distinction between repentance and works in his hands and in the hands of the other Protestant Reformed ministers is yet another distinction by which they undermine the gospel.

The Catechism calls our life of gratitude repentance because it is not necessary at all to make a sharp distinction between repentance and good works. The Catechism is not merely speaking broadly—and imprecisely and loosely—but giving the doctrine of scripture. Repentance and obedience can perfectly well be treated as the same thing, and the Catechism does because scripture does. Professor Huizinga shamefully treats the Catechism and those who wrote it and those who approved it for the churches, while he is busy overthrowing the doctrine of grace in the creeds by means of his distinction between works and repentance.

“You seem very clever at explaining words, Sir,” said Alice. “Would you kindly tell me the meaning of the poem called ‘Jabberwocky’?”

“Let's hear it,” said Humpty Dumpty. “I can explain all the poems that were ever invented—and a good many that haven't been invented just yet.”

This sounded very hopeful, so Alice repeated the first verse:

*‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.*

“That's enough to begin with,” Humpty Dumpty interrupted: “there are plenty of hard words there. ‘*Brillig*’ means four o'clock in the afternoon—the time when you begin *broiling* things for dinner.”

“That'll do very well,” said Alice: “and ‘*slithy*’?”

“Well, ‘*slithy*’ means ‘lithe and slimy.’ ‘Lithe’ is the same as ‘active.’ You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word.”

“I see it now,” Alice remarked thoughtfully: “and what are ‘*toves*’?”

“Well, ‘*toves*’ are something like badgers—they’re something like lizards—and they’re something like corkscrews.”

“They must be very curious looking creatures.”

“They are that,” said Humpty Dumpty: “also they make their nests under sun-dials—also they live on cheese.”

“And what’s the ‘*gyre*’ and to ‘*gimble*?’”

To ‘*gyre*’ is to go round and round like a gyroscope. To ‘*gimble*’ is to make holes like a gimlet.”

“And ‘*the wabe*’ is the grass-plot round a sun-dial, I suppose?” said Alice, surprised at her own ingenuity.

“Of course it is. It’s called ‘*wabe*,’ you know, because it goes a long way before it, and a long way behind it—”

“And a long way beyond it on each side,” Alice added.

“Exactly so. Well, then, ‘*mimsy*’ is ‘flimsy and miserable’ (there’s another portmanteau for you). And a ‘*borogove*’ is a thin shabby-looking bird with its feathers sticking out all round—something like a live mop.”

“And then ‘*mome raths*?’” said Alice. “I’m afraid I’m giving you a great deal of trouble.”

“Well, a ‘*rath*’ is a sort of green pig: but ‘*mome*’ I’m not certain about. I think it’s short for ‘from home’—meaning that they’d lost their way, you know.”

“And what does ‘*outgrabe*’ mean?”

Well, ‘*outgrabing*’ is something between bellowing and whistling, with a kind of sneeze in the middle: however, you’ll hear it done, maybe—down in the wood yonder—and when you’ve once heard it you’ll be *quite* content. Who’s been repeating all that hard stuff to you?”⁵

The jabberwocky of the poem and Humpty Dumpty’s definitions are about as clear, whimsical, and arbitrary as

the theology of Professor Huizinga’s articles. The phrase *in the way of* has about four or five different meanings in at least two different contexts. Repentance is a work if you are speaking about it all by itself, imprecisely, loosely, and broadly. The professor acknowledges that the creeds do speak this way, so you are permitted to as well—a gracious dispensation from the professor. But when your doctrine of repentance preceding remission and being unto remission—but not simultaneous with remission, although sometimes it is simultaneous with remission—is charged with making works unto justification, then repentance is most definitely not a work. Then it is an activity. Granted, it is a very busy activity, but it is most definitely not a work, that is, if you want to be sharp and precise. And you must be sharp and precise because remission is in the way of repentance. But then remember that *in the way of* means *that repentance is unto and precedes remission*. But fellowship is also in the way of obedience, but then *in the way of* means *simultaneous with* or just plain *in the way of*.

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

Jabberwocky!

I will evaluate the Jabberwocky next time.

—NJL

“LET THEM ALONE!”

He answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. —Matthew 15:13–14

What immediately attracts attention about these words of Christ is his description of the Pharisees: “blind leaders of the blind.” Those were sharp, striking words of condemnation. There was no qualification and no concession. Jesus said nothing

redeeming and made no attempt to weigh any good over against the evil. Simply, “blind leaders of the blind.”

There was something else that made those words so striking: the ones about whom the Lord spoke those words of judgment.

⁵ Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*; <http://www.literaturepage.com/read/throughthelookingglass-55.html>.

They were the leaders of the church. They steered the church as representatives of God's will for the people of God. Even more, the Pharisees were the most highly trained and most well-educated Jews. The Pharisees were prominent in the minds of the people, the leading lights of the theocratic kingdom of God. The Pharisees were leaders in the church, in society, and in Jewish culture.

Remember how knowledgeable the Pharisees were. They knew their Bibles well, as well as so many commentaries on the Bible. They knew their theology. They were doctors of the law. They knew the Old Testament, cover to cover and backwards and forwards. They could expound and apply scripture. They could bring scripture to life. They were charismatic. They could present. They were skilled in public speaking and could hold people's attention and garner their respect. The Pharisees were impressive.

How impressive they were in the synagogues and in the schools! Wherever the Pharisees went, they were surrounded by an aura of honor and dignity. The common people fell to respectful silence. The people constantly solicited the religious opinions of the Pharisees. Their gatherings in the councils were deeply impressive. As the Pharisees paraded into the councils, each one taking his seat with great gravity, reverence would steal over the hearts of the observers.

The Pharisees' advice carried the stamp of divine authority. Their councils were understood to be assemblies of the holy, which would surely and infallibly express the will of the living God of heaven and earth. Approval by the Pharisees was considered the sunshine of heaven and their disapproval, the outer darkness of hell.

Such divine disapproval the disciples felt penetrating deep into their hearts, disapproval caused by the teaching of their Lord and master. How could he say such things about the highly-respected leaders of the people? Because the disciples held the Pharisees in high regard, the Lord found it necessary to speak his very striking words of condemnation.

The Pharisees were not worthy at all.

"They be blind leaders of the blind."

Jesus' words were necessary. They were necessary to strike hard, shattering blows upon the deception employed by the Pharisees, which ensnared those who followed them. The esteem, respect, and honor held by Jesus' disciples had to be broken into pieces. Appearances had to be dissolved and masks torn off.

The Pharisees were not enlightened, knowledgeable, wise, and understanding. They were in truth blind fools.

Such words are necessary today, as necessary as they were when Jesus spoke them to his disciples.

Still today, there are these outstanding, adored, honored, and esteemed religious leaders. Still today, they are venerated in their fellowships. Still today, their opinions are sought and rested upon as divine revelation. Still today,

they gather in their holy assemblies. They gather in their colleges, colloquiums, and conferences. They gather in their presbyteries and general assemblies, in their classes and synods. They gather with great honor and dignity in the convocations, calling on the Lord's name and seeking his guidance for their assemblies. They steer and guide their denominations with the understanding that God is leading them.

Such is the way of men, a phenomenon common in both Roman Catholicism as well as in much of Protestantism.

But what is so highly esteemed among men is lightly esteemed in the sight of God.

The judgment of Christ continues to sound: "They be blind leaders of the blind."

Who will see? Who can see?

These blind leaders have many blind followers. Who would be so foolish as to follow blind leaders? Only those who are blind themselves. Indeed, they are blinded to the truth of God's word, the only light. In that light, the light of Jesus' words themselves, these blind followers would so easily be able to see that their leaders are not worthy at all to be followed and instead should be abhorred and shunned.

But the followers of the blind do not see and cannot see. The followers are blinded by the so-called light of men. They are blinded by outward appearances. They are blinded by the splendid appearances of their leaders and the leaders' apparent religiosity. The followers are blinded inwardly by the pride of man that always esteems external, superficial appearances rather than the things of God and his sovereign, glorious kingdom. They must in that blindness despise Christ crucified, the meek and lowly savior, who saves sinners who cannot save themselves. In their blindness the followers look for the majority in number and the influential in power. The majority and influential are the ones who must be right. The few and despised cannot be right.

What blindness is evident at present in the blind leading the blind!

See the blindness of false doctrine, the false doctrine of good works obtaining blessings and fellowship in the covenant of grace. See the false doctrine of communion with God that is conditioned on what regenerated, elect believers do. See the false doctrine of faith that cannot be passive, of what a man must do if he would be saved. See the false doctrine of Christ being only a partial savior, leaving part for the Holy Spirit to do and another part for man to do. See the false doctrine of grace that is available to man to use or not to use, as his responsibility. See the false doctrine that denies total depravity, the old man of sin always present in believers until they die.

See the blindness that must distract from the above false doctrines whenever they are brought to light. Observe the distraction that there are all kinds of true things being

said in sermons and articles, not just what is controversial or even false. Observe the distraction that only evil people took note of strange and confusing things said from pulpits and brought those things to the attention of consistories, classes, and synods. Observe the distraction that what is preached from pulpits to congregations does not really matter, but only decisions of synods matter. Observe the distraction that protests and appeals are too long, written in language that is too strong and in a strident, shrill tone. Observe the distraction of charging protestants with heresy, slander, and schism. Observe the distraction of majority vote and the Spirit's guidance of broader assemblies.

There is another blindness of distraction that pretends fresh breadth and new inclusiveness but takes attention away from the doctrine of grace alone and Christ alone as the source of all salvation. Good works are fruit, but they are more than fruit. Gratitude is only one motive for good works, but there are other motives too. New ways of looking at good works are conveniently being discovered and prominently featured. Motives for good works are multiplied, supposedly in the interest of holiness, obedience, and more good works. In truth, however, these new motives and views do not add. They subtract. Gratitude suffers, being pushed more and more out of view. Good works as the fruitfulness of faith in Christ are neglected in favor of legalism. As gratitude for grace is diminished and good works as fruits of faith are placed in the background, true holiness of heart and good works that truly glorify God are not fostered but must wither.

But there is another, similar blindness of distraction that is far darker and far more perverse. Sovereign grace is neglected in favor of man's responsibility and accountability. What God's grace accomplishes effectually according to his will is placed in the background, made into a mere footnote. In the foreground is what man is enabled to do by that grace. Attention is distracted from the head to the members, from the bridegroom to the bride, from Christ to believers. The bride becomes enraptured with what she has and what she does. Forgetting the divine giver of all that she has as good, she becomes enamored with herself. Faith becomes the believer's act of believing over against the God in whom he is supposed to believe. Good works become the actions and doings of the believer, his gifts to God rather than God's gifts to him. The clay no longer wants to be clay in the hands of the divine potter. The workmanship begins to ignore the worker. Self-centeredness pushes out God-centeredness.

All these distractions are not the distractions of mere magicians' tricks. Nor are they just the clever distractions of those wishing to avoid proper, biblical scrutiny. But

the distractions are the expressions of simple, self-centered pride, which makes the distractions so easy to promote and follow.

This was the pathway of Israel's apostasy, according to Ezekiel 16 (see also Ezek. 17). This was the pathway of the Babylon of Revelation 17. This is the pathway of Satan to his downfall, as described in Ezekiel 28. This is the great evil of using the very gifts of God to deny him as their source.

All grievous blindness.

All the blind leading the blind, and the blind blindly following the blind.

All condemned by the light.

Condemned to destruction. "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

This ditch of which Jesus spoke is not the ditch of antinomianism. Nor is it the ditch of legalism. From those ditches there is always hope of recovery by the gospel of grace alone without works, the grace that both justifies and sanctifies. The blind and their followers are condemned to the ditch of complete destruction, the abyss of the condemnation of hell.

It was before that yawning, fiery abyss that those words of Christ brought his disciples. His disciples had to be brought to face the sobering end of the blind leading the blind.

The disciples had to see that end of the blind not merely for the sake of understanding it, but also because the disciples carried that dreadful disease of blindness within themselves. Their savior had to save them from themselves by warning them. He had to warn them of their own tendency to gratify themselves, to triumph over others, to consider themselves superior in their own wisdom and discernment, and to be blind followers of the blind. All that Jesus said to them about the blind following the blind and both falling into the ditch was to warn his disciples against themselves.

"Let them alone."

Those words caught the disciples in their tracks of following the way of the blindness of the Pharisees and their blind followers. Jesus' words had to stop the disciples in their tracks, to turn from that way and to follow after their Lord, the light of the world.

How many ways there are blindly to follow the blind! The prince of darkness has many temptations at his disposal to entice Jesus' disciples to ignore his sharp words of warning and condemnation.

There is the temptation of accommodation. Yes, there are still the people of God among the blind. Look at Nicodemus. Look at Joseph of Arimathaea. Yes, there is still a great deal of truth in what they say and write. Yes, mistakes were made, but they will work themselves out. Yes, the older ones are messed up in so many ways, but

the younger ones can be counted on to straighten out the messes. Yes, things are basically on the right track.

There is the temptation of the ability to answer or to engage in debate. So easy it is to show from scripture, the creeds, the confessions, and the Church Order that there is so much wrong and so little right. A host of good motives present themselves. Is it not good to keep trying to correct the denomination? Is it not helpful to try to bring about the desperately needed repentance and reform? Isn't there a moral obligation to open the eyes of the blind?

There is the temptation to use history. Surely, these must remember their own history that they have been taught in school, have read about in books, and have discussed in society meetings. If only they could be reminded of their own history, they would see how the present so sharply contradicts history. Similar is the temptation to use the force of sound doctrine that is still presented somewhat, although compromised. Perhaps, if sound doctrine were repeated enough or strongly stated enough, more would open their eyes to the dreadful compromise that cries out for heartfelt repentance and true, thorough reformation.

What is the specific evil of these temptations offered by the prince of darkness?

According to the word of Christ, the blind are moving. The blind are leading the way. The blind followers of the blind are moving after their blind leaders. Ever nearer they draw to the ditch of their destruction.

The evil is that the disciples of the Lord fasten their eyes on the blind leaders or the blind followers. The evil is that the disciples simply lose their own orientation, their own sense of where they are and where they need to be, orienting themselves instead to the blind and their movements. In efforts to communicate with the blind, disciples of the Lord might accommodate some of their blindness with concessions. Those accommodations their own depravity also favors. In their desires to empathize with the blind, these disciples might decide that the light of the truth is too harsh. In trying to untangle the ever-growing knot of teachings and doctrines, these disciples might become entangled themselves. In seeking to lead the blind out of the fog of confusion and error, they run the frightful risk of getting lost in the same fog.

The depths of that evil and the necessity of those sharp words of the Lord become most evident when the occasions for his warning to his disciples are considered.

The occasion was, first, the sharp words spoken by the Lord to the scribes and Pharisees.

7. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying,
8. This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.

9. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Matt. 15:7–9)

Jesus' words had a demonstrable effect on the scribes and Pharisees. So great was that effect that it made a significant impression on Jesus' disciples. They felt obligated to call the Lord's attention to that effect. The disciples' words can be understood to have the force of a rebuke of Jesus, for the record of Matthew 15 declares, "Then came his disciples, and said unto him..." But it is especially what they said to Jesus—"Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?" (v. 12)—that became the second occasion for his warning to the disciples.

Offended!

So their Lord had to answer his disciples.

To be sure, he had to answer them with an explanation of the Pharisees. His explanation, however, would not be any less offensive. He had to first speak to the Pharisees about the doctrine of reprobation. "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." Second, Jesus had to speak to the Pharisees about their blindness, according to their reprobation. "They be blind leaders of the blind" (vv. 13–14).

But the Lord drove his explanation with all its force not against the Pharisees but against his disciples. "Let them alone."

No longer look to those leaders, the blind leaders of the blind. Disregard them. Be not moved by their impressiveness, their eloquence, their charisma, their accomplishments, or their followers. Neither be moved by their smiles or frowns. Know that especially their offended disapproval is a particularly fearful snare. Leave them alone. Let them keep their offenses.

How necessary it is to take note of this warning of our Lord in the present! We live in a time when respect of persons and the fear of man are so dominant. So much of what motivates us and controls us is what others think about us. In circles of state, society, and church, our acceptance and places in them depend on what others think of us. At exactly the same time, figures of authority and control wield incredible power. The smiles and approvals of the influential and those in authority form the ground of all acceptance. Withdrawal of those smiles and approvals of men means banishment. Offense has become a powerful tool of manipulation and coercion.

Let them alone!

Let them all alone, and follow Christ alone! He alone is the truth. He alone is the freedom from all blindness. He alone is the freedom from the offense of the blind. He alone gives his blessed grace for the only acceptance that counts—acceptance with the living God, the life that is everlasting fellowship in the light of heaven.

—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

Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?—Psalm 56:8

Precious liquid! The tears of saints. Precious to God. Every tear that wells up in the soul and falls from the wet eyes of his people, he diligently collects and keeps in his bottle.

Tears stand for all the sorrows that come to the people of God on account of Christ and the gospel. They sob with their heads in their hands, and their shoulders heave, and waters of sorrow run from their eyes. These tears are not tears of rebellion but expressions of deep sorrow of heart. The soul is oppressed and in anguish, and words fail to express what the tears in their eyes tell so clearly.

Jesus wept. David wept. Saints weep.

Surely, this world is a valley of tears, of sorrow, and of the shadow of death. God is near his saints, and he collects their tears in his bottle as he comforts them with the truth that they belong to Jesus Christ, their faithful savior. It is a bottle of remembrance. Their sorrows will not be forgotten.

These tears of the saints are brought to the souls and to the eyes of the saints by many wanderings. David was harried from place to place by the reprobate Saul. Finally, David was driven from the land of Israel to the land of the Philistines! So God's people are made fugitives in the earth. They are estranged from mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, and lifelong acquaintances. They are dismissed as clients by some, and others will not do business with them. They are stripped of their inheritances and their possessions. All day enemies wrest your words. All their thoughts against you are for evil. The enemies meet, they lurk, and they watch. They wait for your soul. And many tears flow from the eyes of God's people.

Are not these collected in his bottle?

And is there not a book in which all these tears and wanderings are recorded? A record of remembrance.

Yet the tears and the wanderings that caused them are not merely recorded but ordained! Yes, not only a book of remembrance but a book of the decree. God ordained the wanderings. He gave the enemy the power to afflict his saints. He ordained the enemy and the affliction and all the tears.

Is that not the cross? They took Jesus Christ, and wicked hands crucified and slew him; yet according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. And so all our tears are but the extension of Christ's, and all our wanderings are a share in his, for whom the world had no room. Christ's anguish is our salvation.

A book that is also a record of the tears and wanderings according to God's judgment. In his ledger is God's evaluation of the enemies of his people. He is angry with the wicked every day. And the sufferings they inflict upon his people he hates. He holds the enemies guilty, whose fierce persecution and love of war bring these tears to the eyes of his saints. God judges his saints righteous in Christ. God's record of their wanderings and tears is one of love in Christ, and so God judges that all their sorrows and even their very tears must serve for their glory in heaven, for so he ordained.

—NJL