

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

# SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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

Deuteronomy 33:29

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*For the LORD's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.  
He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about,  
he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. — Deuteronomy 32:9–10*

A lovely verse in the song of Moses. He sang to Joshua and to the whole congregation of the children of Israel. Moses' song was of God, Jehovah, in his gracious and merciful dealings to save and to bring into his covenant fellowship an undeserving people according to God's eternal purpose and grace.

The faithful God.

Unfaithful Israel.

The electing God.

Elected Israel.

Jehovah's love of Jacob is the explanation of God's dealings with all men: "When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deut. 32:8). Yes, especially after the flood, after Babel, when Jehovah divided the children of Adam into tribes and tongues and peoples and nations, he had Israel in view. Long before Israel was a nation, when God gave to each people its place in the earth, he had Israel and Israel's good in his mind's eye. For Jehovah's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of Jehovah's inheritance. His mercy toward Israel was an eternal mercy. Always God had Israel as his possession, and always God dealt with all nations according to their number. Always also, then, he so deals with Jacob; for Jehovah is a rock, and his purpose and mercy are unchanging.

This Jacob, this people of Jehovah: what shall we say of him? The man Jacob was the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, who was the friend of God. Jacob was a twin, but he was the younger, the weaker, and the less desirable. God made of Jacob a nation. The nation that came from him was called the children of Israel, the people of Jehovah, and Jeshurun. Was that nation better than other peoples? Were the children of Israel more numerous? Did Jacob seek Jehovah and so was found of him? Did Jacob turn to God, and so God turned to Jacob? Was there something in him that explained this word of God in Deuteronomy 32? Did Jacob choose Jehovah? Did Jacob distinguish himself among the masses of the nations? Did Jacob make himself worthy of God's choice?

God forbid!

Jehovah told Jacob who he was.

The children of Israel corrupted themselves! When Jehovah showered upon Jeshurun nothing but good things, so that he rode on the high places of the earth, and when

the Lord made Jeshurun suck honey from a rock and oil out of flint and fed him with butter and milk and the fat of lambs and rams and gave the finest wine, then Jeshurun waxed fat. He forsook God and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation. Israel sacrificed to devils! Israel forgot God. A very froward people, a people in whom was no faith. A nation void of counsel and without understanding.

God did not choose a faithful people or a believing people, and he did not save an obedient or a repentant people. Rather, he chose a corrupt and perverse people and an unbelieving one, who provoked God to wrath and forgot his covenant.

God saved the unbelieving, the unfaithful, the disobedient, and the unrepentant because Jehovah's portion is his people, and Jacob is the lot of God's inheritance! Jehovah chose them as his own and destined them to be wheat among chaff, light out of darkness, a portion of God's among all the peoples and nations and tribes and tongues, to be of his party and to stand in the world as his people. As Canaan was divided by lot and a portion was divided to each tribe and family for its inheritance, so God divided the nations and took Jacob as God's own inheritance.

Amazing grace!

Jehovah, the Lord, who is strong in power and the maker of heaven and earth, chooses his people. By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. He stretched the heavens and filled them with the starry hosts. He knows them all and calls them all by name. He spoke, and all things came into being, and he gave to every creature its being and shape and several offices to serve him. He measured the waters in the hollow of his hand. He meted out the whole heaven with the span and weighed the dust of the earth in a balance. Jehovah is his name! All the nations are as the bead of water that drops from the lip of a bucket and disappears into the dust of the earth. If the whole world were consumed as a sacrifice, it would not add to God's glory. Among the nations he sets up kings, princes, and governors. He raises them up for the very purpose of showing in them his power. As with Pharaoh—the puny, insignificant piece of clay that replied against the God of heaven—he raises up rulers, and he tears them down. God made his angels spirits and his ministers flames of fire. The cherubim and seraphim and all the serried ranks of the innumerable heavenly host serve him and do his pleasure.

And the wicked and all the hosts of hell he comprehends within his sovereignty, upholding them even in their opposition to him, giving them a portion in the earth in order that in the midst of that world he might realize his sovereign good pleasure to the glory of his holy name.

From among the nations this Jehovah chose Jacob. Jehovah's portion is his people. Among the nations of the world, there is one nation and people who is Jehovah's and who has been divided to him as his inheritance. Calling his people "the lot of his inheritance" expresses the same thing. A *lot* is that which is measured out. A cord is cast about a piece of land. All within that boundary is included in the inheritance, and all outside that boundary is excluded from the inheritance. God cast a cord about Jacob. Jacob is the lot of God's inheritance. Jacob is that about which Jehovah cast a cord of divine and eternal love. Within that cord is Jacob, and outside that cord is not Jacob. By that cord God determines who is Jacob and who is not Jacob. Jacob, the least. The smaller. The younger. The deceiver and supplanter. The helpless. The despised. Yet Jacob, the chosen.

When God casts a cord about Jacob, Jehovah declares about Jacob, "He is mine. He is my possession. He is my delight. He is the one in whom I will dwell and who will dwell with me." It is this Jacob, then, whom God also redeemed from Egypt, formed into a peculiar people, led through the wilderness, and brought to the very doors of Canaan and to whom he gave the earthly Canaan as the picture of the heavenly Canaan.

Jacob is Israel according to the election of grace. Thus Jacob includes the elect of all ages, whom God gathers, defends, and preserves in his church and with whom he dwells and about whom he says, "Mine." The church according to the election of grace is the Israel of God, the peculiar nation, the holy people, whom God calls Jacob.

Divine choice!

Sovereign choice! It is not as though God wants all the nations as his possession, but because man is unwilling, the Lord is able to salvage only the nation of Israel from the race of fallen Adam.

No! God forbid!

It is God who determines and actually takes Jacob as his possession. By God's choice he makes Jacob his possession and the lot of his inheritance. Jehovah—who is a rock, the Lord whose work is perfect and whose ways are judgment, a God of truth and without iniquity, who is righteous in all his dealings—so divides the people of the world, the sons of Adam, into those who are his portion

and into those who are not his portion. Of one lump the divine potter makes one vessel to honor and another to dishonor. He divides Jacob to himself, and he puts all others from him. He is the one who casts the cord of love about Jacob; and by casting that cord about Jacob, he determines who will be Jacob and who will not be Jacob and separates Jacob from the rest of the children of Adam, upon whom God's wrath abides.

Indeed, even in the nation, a sovereign choice!

Jacob was a twin, the younger twin, the lesser twin of Isaac and Rebekah. So that the division of which Jehovah speaks is made also within the sphere of the covenant of God, in the earthly nation of Israel and in the church as she manifests herself in the world. They are not all Israel that are of Israel. Among the offspring of Isaac and Rebekah, God chose Jacob and not Esau. Esau and the rest of the world, God wholly rejected. They do not come within the line that God laid down and the cord that he cast about Jacob. They are the objects of God's

holy wrath, appointed to eternal destruction, also for the glory of his name. And like the chaff must serve the wheat until the time of the winnowing, so the reprobate must serve the elect until the time of the end, when the wheat will be gathered into the Lord's granaries and the

chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire. As the scaffold must serve the house that is being built until the time of completion and then be torn down, so the reprobate must stand until the building of God is perfected. So all nations and all peoples and tribes and tongues, even within Israel herself, were divided by the Lord into beloved Jacob and into hated Esau. The elect of all nations are God's nation, his portion, and his lot according to his own sovereign choice. The rest he hates and hardens.

An eternal choice! Before Israel was, God had Israel in view, in view from all eternity, as the precious object of his grace. Eternally God loved, eternally he chose, eternally he divided all men before they had done good or evil.

A choice according to Jehovah's good pleasure alone!

No one instructed him in this choice. No one influenced God's choice because of some quality in himself. Israel was not blessed because of what she did or how faithful she was to God in the covenant. Moses' song was an indictment of the nation. The children of Israel repaid the Lord's kindness and mercy with unfaithfulness, unthankfulness, rebellion, and murmuring. They tempted God in the wilderness. They refused his land. They questioned his power, his goodness, his mercy, and his faithfulness. Moses told them what would happen in the latter days

Eternally he loved, eternally he chose, eternally he divided all men before they had done good or evil.

after he died. They would turn from Jehovah. They would corrupt themselves. Moses accused them of great unbelief and unspeakable crimes. He told them that they would revolt from God, corrupt themselves, and turn aside from the way. Yes, the Lord knew this too when he chose Jacob. And it pleased him to choose Jacob.

A costly choice!

Jacob is God's inheritance, and an inheritance only falls to the heir by death. God divided to himself his people. God chose Jacob, and God appointed himself in the person of his Son according to his human nature as the one to die for that inheritance. At the very heart of Jacob, as the seed, the child of Jacob, the one in whom Jacob finds his meaning and purpose, stands Jesus Christ. It is ultimately because of him and in him that Jacob is chosen. And by Jesus Christ, too, Jacob is redeemed. The God who chose Jacob is a God of justice, truth, and right. His inheritance he takes in the way of the satisfaction of his own justice by dying in the person of his Son according to his human nature in order to redeem his Jacob and his people. Is God not thy Father who bought thee? Striking phrase: a Father bought his children? He bought them at the price of his own and only-begotten Son.

Ah, yes, Jehovah's portion is his people, and Jacob is the lot of God's inheritance!

And with Jacob, in Jacob, God dwells. Jacob is God's inheritance. The line that God cast about Jacob to mark him as his own was the line of his covenant love. Jacob, and Jacob alone, is God's covenant people, whom he blesses and whom he draws into his most intimate friendship. Jehovah's choice of Jacob as his inheritance and possession explains all God's dealings with his people.

Jehovah did not go and find his covenant people in the wilderness in order to make them his possession. They were his. Because they were his, he went and found them. Jehovah did not lead them about in order to make them his. Because they were his, he led them about. Jehovah did not instruct them to make them his. They were his, so he instructed them. Jehovah did not keep them in order to attempt to keep them from falling away from being his. Because they were his, he kept them, and they were absolutely secure. Under them he placed the everlasting arms of the God of Jacob.

Thus Jehovah treated Jacob as he treated no other. What tender care! What grace! What power! What mercy is spoken of in the text! God found Jacob in a desert land and in a waste-howling wilderness. Moses said that Jehovah found Jacob in the desert not because this was first but so that God's people, then at the door of the land of Canaan, might more readily fix their minds on God's great mercy toward them.

The wilderness and the desert were places full of horror.

There was not a crumb there for the people to eat or a drop of water for them to drink. A land of hostile enemies and fiery serpents. A thousand ways to perish were in the wilderness. And there was enough room in it for millions of graves. The desert and the waste-howling wilderness are symbolic of death, destruction, sin, and all that is evil. This is all that characterizes this world of sin, fallen under the curse.

Is not this our lot? We are born into the desert of this world, a dry and a thirsty land; and we are beset by the sins of our natures, the allures of the wicked world, and the draw of sin. We are surrounded by the fiery serpents of Satan and of his demons. There are a thousand different ways to perish spiritually in this waste-howling wilderness. And Jehovah finds his own. He finds them in their troubles, in their afflictions, in their pains, in their sins and miseries, and, yes, also in their murmurings. He finds them. He always finds them. None go lost!

It is not as though God sets out to search out who will be willing to be his people. But knowing them, he finds them. He goes, and he fetches them for himself and establishes his covenant with them. He knows them all by name. He finds each one known unto him, and all of Jacob he finds. God regenerates them. He calls them by his word. He works faith in their hearts. He justifies them from all their sins. He sanctifies them and separates them from the world of sin, darkness, and night. He gathers them into his church in the world. Having chosen Jacob, God secures him as his own.

And when Jehovah found Jacob in the wilderness, God also led Jacob about. He had no guide. If left to himself, how terrible would have been the lot of Jacob in that wilderness. He had no power to make his way one step through the wilderness and into Canaan. If his life were spared and not snuffed out by the hostile forces of the wilderness, he could not know the way through the desert to the land of Canaan. And even if he knew the way, he would have been incapable of bringing himself to Canaan through the wilderness. And if he could have roused himself to take a few steps toward Canaan, he would have quickly left the way and returned to Egypt. So God led Jacob. God encircled Jacob, guided and directed the ways of his feet and the footsteps of his path. God himself circumscribed Jacob and was a wall about him on every side. And God also determined the way as through the wilderness. Not an easy way but the way determined and led through by God.

This is Jehovah's careful and gracious care of his people in order to bring them to the goal that he has appointed for them in his eternal counsel. The counsel of election appoints the goal of salvation and prescribes the way of salvation. And God himself carries this out by his guidance and care of his people. He not only finds them in the wilderness of sin and death, but he also guides them

through it and out of it into the everlasting joys in the presence of God in the heavenly Canaan.

God instructed Jacob. Jehovah found Jacob not only hopelessly stuck in the wilderness, but Jehovah found Jacob also ignorant and foolish. God found Jacob so willing to trust in his own strength, so willing to question God, so willing to see by sight and not by faith, so willing to return to Egypt. Jacob was a people devoid of counsel, knowledge, and wisdom; and God taught him. God causes us to discern good from evil, right from wrong, wise from foolish. He causes us to know spiritual things spiritually, to see through the wilderness to the joy of the heavenly Canaan. He teaches us to submit to him, to obey his precepts, to follow him, and to joy in God as the God of our salvation. He teaches us to apprehend the glory of God in all things and to subject ourselves to that goal of his glory. He teaches us to lay aside our thoughts and to think his thoughts. He teaches us to abandon our own ways and to follow his way.

God kept Jacob as the apple of his eye. The apple of your eye is your pupil, the tenderest, most sensitive spot in your whole body. The tiniest speck of dust can cause unspeakable agony, and so you guard your pupil. And thus God guarded Jacob. God kept Jacob. God found Jacob vulnerable and weak and of no strength, and God took Jacob to himself and dwelt among him, and God kept Jacob as one keeps the apple of his eye. God so joined Jacob to himself in his fellowship and friendship

that to touch Jacob was to touch God himself. Whosoever touched Jacob poked a stick in God's eye. Jacob was indeed the apple of God's eye, that precious and tender possession of Jehovah's choosing.

Where in all the world is there such a people as Jehovah's people, his possession and the lot of his inheritance? Exactly because God's grace toward his chosen people is not dependent upon them is there comfort for them. As we look back over the past year, as Moses with Israel looked back over their wanderings in the wilderness, do we not confess with him that indeed such is the case with us? How believing, faithful, and repentant have we been? And God saved us! Has he done us harm in one thing? Has there failed one word of what he has promised to do unto us? Cannot we say that this is true from generation to generation and from years past? Ask your fathers and your elders. They will tell you.

And as we look forward to another year of God's goodness and grace, we expect nothing different. This God is our God. He will be our guide even unto the end because his purpose to bless Jacob is an unchanging purpose, as he is the unchanging God. He found, and he finds. He led, and he leads. He taught, and he teaches. He kept, and he keeps. He is a rock. And he does not swerve one inch from his gracious purpose to bless his people. For Jehovah's portion is his people, and Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.

Let this be our confidence in the coming year!

—NJL

## EDITORIAL

# WHY REFORMED PROTESTANT?

*And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. — Revelation 5:13*

## *Introduction*

The topic of the speech tonight is “Why Reformed Protestant?”<sup>1</sup> That question demands an answer. Why in the year 2021 did a new denomination of Reformed churches appear on the earth? There are already many Reformed

denominations. There are Reformed denominations that are large and influential and Reformed denominations that are small. Why in the year 2021 did there have to be another Reformed denomination known as the Reformed Protestant Churches? Why Reformed Protestant?

1 This is a copyedited transcript of a speech given December 1, 2022, in Hudsonville, Michigan. The speech can be found at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CE3ND\\_LVJOs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CE3ND_LVJOs).

The purpose of this speech is not to justify the existence of the Reformed Protestant Churches. The formation of this denomination was a work of the Lord Jesus Christ from the right hand of Jehovah. Jesus Christ by his word and Spirit formed this denomination, and as the work of the ascended Lord, this denomination does not need a justification to exist. The Lord gathers his church. The Lord defends and preserves his church. And when he does so, no one may say unto him, "What doest thou?" The speech tonight does not justify the existence of the Reformed Protestant Churches.

But the speech tonight *is* intended to explain the existence of these churches, explain why they had to be brought into existence. That is for our encouragement who are members of these churches, but especially that explanation is for the broader church world. The target audience tonight is the broader church world—not first of all Reformed Protestant men and women, not first of all Protestant Reformed men and women, but the broader church world. Why Reformed Protestant?

The purpose of answering the question, why Reformed Protestant? for the broader church world may seem foolish. It may seem foolish because as a denomination we are very, very small and virtually unknown. We are not on the radar of the ecclesiastical world. The ecclesiastical world is not lined up around the block to hear an answer to the question, why Reformed Protestant? There is no clamor from the church world for us to explain how we came into existence. To those who *are* clamoring for an answer—and there are some—that answer has been given many times. The question, why Reformed Protestant? has been asked by family members; it has been asked by our mother church and members of our mother church. That answer has been given many, many times. But in general the Reformed church world is not clamoring for an answer to the question, why Reformed Protestant?

If you add to that the fact that, as Reformed Protestant Churches, we have our own controversies already in two short years of existence, then it may appear even more foolish yet that we would seek to give an answer for the broader church world to the question, why Reformed Protestant?

And yet that question, why Reformed Protestant? is a vital question. It is a necessary question. That is because the Reformed Protestant Churches stand in the line of the Reformation in a way that no other Reformed denomination does. The Reformed Protestant Churches stand in the line of *Christianity* the way no other denomination on earth does. The Reformed Protestant Churches stand in the line of Christianity and the Reformation in a way that the Christian Reformed Church does not and the United Reformed Churches do not and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church does not and the Presbyterian

Church in America does not. That is not because of the people in the Reformed Protestant Churches. The people in the Reformed Protestant Churches—we as members—are weak, we are small, we are not strong, we are not faithful in ourselves, and we are not grateful in ourselves. We Reformed Protestant members must confess about ourselves that there is no weaker people in all the earth, so that we would confess what God said about Israel: "I did not choose you for your great size or for your great strength." Our confession as people is that we are the chief of sinners, and you don't have to live among us very long to see that. Nevertheless, I maintain that the Reformed Protestant denomination stands in the line of the Reformation and Christianity in a way that no other denomination on earth does.

In fact, I go a step further and maintain that Reformed Protestant doctrine is the doctrine of heaven. The saints who are in heaven right now, at this moment, believe Reformed Protestant doctrine. The angels in heaven believe Reformed Protestant doctrine. The saints and angels in heaven do not believe United Reformed doctrine. They do not believe Orthodox Presbyterian doctrine. The saints and angels in heaven believe Reformed Protestant doctrine and only Reformed Protestant doctrine.

When I say that, I do not mean that we Reformed Protestants on earth are the measuring stick for what must be believed in heaven. Not at all. What I mean is this: heaven has a doctrine. Heaven has its own confession. That is the confession that was read tonight in Revelation 5. The saints and angels have a doctrine in that confession. And that doctrine, as they confess it in heaven, is the doctrine of the Reformed Protestant Churches. It is the doctrine of the Reformed Protestant Churches in a way that it is not the doctrine of other denominations, even Reformed and Presbyterian denominations. The saints in heaven do not confess Baptist doctrine. They do not confess a well-meant offer of the gospel. They do not confess salvation by the will or the work of man. The saints in heaven confess God. That is who they confess: God. And they confess the work of God as the sovereign work of their salvation—which is why I say that in heaven the doctrine is Reformed Protestant.

Also, this question is vital because we in the Reformed Protestant Churches desire to have fellowship in the gospel with others—with many others. We desire that those who believe the doctrine of heaven join with us, not so that our fellowship would be that as different denominations we work together or cooperate in projects but so that our fellowship in the gospel would be that you leave your denomination and join the Reformed Protestant Churches. Now, that is not a naked attempt to steal

sheep, as they say. This is our hope as Reformed Protestant Churches and our fervent desire: that those who agree with the doctrine of heaven, who agree with the doctrine of God as God is confessed in heaven, join us in this denomination, where that doctrine of heaven is preached and taught and believed and confessed, by the grace of God. There is a standing invitation to all who love that pure Reformed truth, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ, to join us in the worship of our God.

And so the question, the vital question, that faces us tonight is this: Why Reformed Protestant?

The answer to that question is simple. It is as simple as can be. It is as clear as a sunny morning. The answer to the question, why Reformed Protestant? is this: because of the truth of the gospel. Why must there be this denomination of churches that formed last year? Because of the Truth—the capital-T Truth. Because of the truth of God and the truth of the gospel. That truth formed the Reformed Protestant Churches. We are founded upon it. That truth determines what the Reformed Protestant denomination is. It determines our character as churches. And that truth of the gospel determines our relationship as churches also to all who are around us. Why Reformed Protestant? Because of the truth of the gospel.

In order to understand that, then, we do not begin first of all with the history of the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches. We could begin there: we could talk about the events that led to our formation; we could look at the dates and put all of them in chronological order. But that is not where we begin. The answer to *why Reformed Protestant?* is not first an answer of history but an answer of doctrine. The Reformed Protestant denomination exists because of the truth of the gospel. And so we begin by looking at that truth of the gospel.

### *The One Truth of the Gospel*

There is only one truth of the entire gospel. There is one thing that the gospel says. In fact, you can say the whole gospel in one word. The one truth that the gospel teaches is this: *God*. God. That is all the gospel teaches: God.

You can see that when you open the scriptures to the very first verse and find that the first thing God reveals about himself is himself. “In the beginning *God* created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). And you can go to the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, and find at the beginning of that chapter the throne of God and the river that proceeds from it (v. 1). You can go to the last verse of the Bible and find the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the revelation of God, proclaimed upon all of God’s own (v. 21). The one thing that the gospel teaches is God.

That was the truth of the gospel as Jesus Christ preached it, according to Mark 1. When we get to the part of Mark 1

that describes Jesus’ sermons—not just his sermon on that day but all of his preaching and teaching—we find that the content of all his preaching was the kingdom of God. “The kingdom of God is at hand,” Jesus said (v. 15). That was his message, so that Jesus taught God.

And that was the song of the citizens in heaven, the saints and angels, as we read in Revelation 5. “They sung a new song, saying [to Jesus], Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (v. 9). And again, “Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (v. 13). That is the one doctrine of the gospel: it is God.

The gospel proclaims God in his holy being. It proclaims God in all his glory. It proclaims God in his mighty working. The one truth of the whole Bible is God.

That truth is marvelous. It is breathtaking. There is nothing like that truth that any man can teach.

What is the doctrine of God, the theology of God, that the Bible teaches as its great truth? It is this: Jehovah God is the true and everlasting God. He is God, from eternity to eternity the same. There is no shadow of turning with him. The Lord Jehovah is the true God over against all the pagan gods of the nations. No idol is a God. Every idol is a stone dug out of the earth, but our God made the earth. Every idol is the imagination of man’s mind, but our God made the heavens. The Lord Jehovah is the true God.

And that God is the living God. That is the truth of Jehovah God: he is the living God. His life means that he lives together with himself in his own perfect covenant fellowship. He is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost dwelling together as the divine family in eternal, perfect fellowship: the Father breathing the Spirit to the Son and the Son breathing the Spirit to the Father. God is the living God, who is God with God in God and fellowships as God with God in God. That is the truth of the Bible regarding our God.

That God has an eternal good pleasure. His eternal good pleasure is to make himself known outside of himself. Jehovah God did not need the fellowship of any other. He is the ever-blessed God as the living God. But it was his eternal good pleasure and therefore his eternal decree to reveal himself outside of himself. And that revelation of himself is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the brightness of God’s glory and the express image of God’s person, so that he who sees Jesus Christ has seen the Father. He who sees the Lord, who has come in our flesh, has seen Jehovah God himself, as Jesus told his disciples when they



were sad at his going away: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). God’s good pleasure is to reveal himself outside of himself in Jesus Christ, so that the heart of God’s good pleasure, the very center of all of his counsel and decree, is Jesus Christ as the revelation of the living, triune, true God.

God, the living God, who lives in perfect fellowship in himself, has as his good pleasure not only to reveal himself but also to bring a helpless people into that fellowship through Jesus Christ. And whenever God deals with that people whom he has decreed to bring into his fellowship, he reveals that his dealings are pure grace and that in those dealings he is the sovereign God, and he alone is sovereign, and he alone is gracious. There is no dealing of God with anyone outside of himself in which God makes himself depend on that one outside of himself, but in all of his dealings he is purely gracious to his people and deals with them in tender mercy and undeserved love and favor.

That is evident even in God’s choosing this people to whom he would reveal himself and whom he would take into his fellowship. From all eternity, before any of those people were born or had done any good or evil, God set his love upon them and decreed that they would belong to him. And he emphasized the graciousness of that election by also decreeing regarding many, many others—before they had done any good or evil—that they would not belong to him. He reprobated many, and he chose few, so that everyone who is chosen would know all his life and on into eternity, “I do not deserve this. According to my nature and my flesh, according to what I have done in my life, I deserve to be rejected.” But God elected his own and reprobated many others to highlight to his people, “My dealings with you are entirely gracious. Before you did anything, I gave you heaven. I gave you to Christ. I brought you to my own fellowship. Before you were born or knew anything or did anything, I gave you all things in Christ.” God shows that his dealings are gracious. That is the truth of the gospel that proclaims *God* as the gracious God and the merciful God.

Even when God created in the beginning, he showed that this fellowship that his elect people would enjoy with him was entirely gracious because this people was made of the dust. That is no great thing. God made the dust what you walk upon! He made the dust what you wipe off your feet before you go into your house! That is what you are! That is what you are made of! You are the dust! So that we would know for all our lives that our fellowship with

God and belonging to him is gracious, entirely gracious. He is the God of mercy.

And God decreed that the whole human race, made of dust so that they were already of the lowest part of the earth, would fall in Adam. God decreed that. God decreed that fellowship with him would come in the way of sin, would come in the way of the fall of the whole human race. He decreed Adam’s fall—not as its author but in order to show that our fellowship with God and being restored to his fellowship in Christ are pure grace. God is the God of mercy. That is the truth of the gospel.

And God redeemed his people in Christ, sending his only-begotten Son into our flesh in the great wonder of the incarnation, which is the only way that salvation could be accomplished. No man could make God flesh. No man could manifest the Godhead bodily. *Only* God could send his Son in our flesh, so that the incarnation is another testimony that God deals with his people *only* in grace and in pure mercy.

Jesus Christ, as the revelation of God and as the officebearer of God upon this earth, obeyed God to the smallest detail, taking upon himself the curse that was due to God’s people and bearing that curse away on the cross. Christ rose again the third day according to the scriptures for the glory of

God, that by his death and his resurrection, by which he redeemed and saved his people, all men might know that *this* alone is the way of salvation. The way of sin and the way of grace, which is the way of Christ—that alone is the salvation of God’s people. That is grace! That is the truth of Jehovah God as the God of grace.

Even when you talk about the people who are saved by that grace as rational, moral creatures—and you must talk about them that way, for God made us with a mind and a will, so that we are rational, moral creatures. We think. We do. Even when you talk about God’s people that way, as rational, moral creatures, the only way you can talk about their salvation is by the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, who takes those who are dead in trespasses and sins in themselves and unites them to the Lord Jesus Christ and abides with them and gives to them all the blessings and benefits of Jesus Christ. Even if you want to talk about man’s activity of believing, that is given to him; even if you want to talk about man’s reigning, that is given to him, so that the only thing you can ever say about the salvation of the people of God is that it is of pure sovereign grace. God did it that way deliberately! At no point does God’s relationship with his people depend upon those people. Never. At every point their fellowship

The saints in heaven confess  
God...And they confess the  
work of God as the sovereign  
work of their salvation.

with God depends upon God, who gives them himself and all things for nothing, for absolutely nothing. And that is grace: something for nothing.

In that grace God gathers his people into his church and makes them members of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the worship of the church, they hear his voice. You don't deserve that, and I don't either. To hear the voice of God and to be fed and nourished unto everlasting life by that voice of God—that is grace. To partake of his body and blood in the Lord's supper and to be washed with his blood in baptism, the sacraments that Christ gave to his church, to fellowship with him through the Holy Spirit and his Word and with one another as fellow members of the body of the Lord—that is grace. That is all grace.

And the grace of God in dealing with his people is this: the culmination of all things shall be the Lord Jesus Christ's returning, raising the bodies of his people from the dead, casting the wicked into everlasting fire, and bringing his people to the new heavens and the new earth to live with him forever, where God shall be all in all, so that no matter where you look in the new heavens and the new earth—in that corner, behind that tree, or before the throne of God—there you see God in all his glory. God is all in all, so that you do not think or see or know anything except as the revelation of God. That is the one doctrine of the whole Bible; that is the one truth of the whole gospel: God in all his being, in all his work, in all his glory.

That truth of God is the Christian faith. That is all the Christian faith is: the truth of God, who is the Father of Jesus Christ. That is what we confess in the Apostles' Creed: I believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. That confession of God as the truth of the gospel did not begin with the Reformed Protestant Churches. This simply *is* the Christian faith. I believe in God! This is the confession of all of the ancient creeds—not only the Apostles' Creed but also the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. Those creeds all declare the one truth, "I believe in God." This is the truth of the three forms of unity, the Reformed confessions, which are in order of their publication the Belgic Confession in 1561, the Heidelberg Catechism in 1563, and the Canons of Dort in 1618–19. The first of those was the Belgic Confession. This is article 1 of the first Reformed confession:

### There Is One Only God

We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that He is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 23)

This truth of God, especially now in his dealings with his people—which, remember, is gracious and merciful and *only* gracious and merciful—is what the Reformed faith means when it talks about TULIP or the five points of Calvinism or the doctrines of grace, all referring to the same thing. Those doctrines of total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the preservation of the saints are all simply the confession *God!* God as the sovereign one, God as the merciful and gracious savior, who does for man what man cannot do because man is depraved in himself. The confession of the Reformed faith is just the confession of God as sovereign and gracious.

Or we could talk about the five *solas* of the Reformation: *sola scriptura*, scripture alone, by which all truth is judged; the glory of God alone; and salvation by faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone. Those five *solas* are simply the Reformed way of saying, "God, who is sovereign and gracious in his salvation." That is a beautiful, glorious, joyful truth and gospel. And that is all the saints in heaven sing. When they sing praise to the Lamb, who has redeemed us unto God, they are singing this truth. When they sing praise to him who sits on the throne, who has sent the Lamb, they are singing this truth. The one truth of the whole gospel is God. That is beautiful. That is a beautiful song.

### *The One Corruption of the Gospel*

Just as there is one truth of the gospel, so there really is only one corruption of the gospel. That too can be summarized in one word. The truth of the gospel is God. The corruption of that truth is Man, Man with a capital M. Always the truth of God has been attacked by the lie of Man.

That is the way it was at the beginning. When the serpent, controlled by Satan, came to Eve, with Adam apparently in attendance, the serpent told this lie to Eve: you shall be as God. You, Adam and Eve—man—shall be God. That is the attack on the truth of God. It is the attack that man is God. And if man is God, then man saves himself and blesses himself. That was the next thing Adam and Eve did. Having fallen into sin, in the grip of that false doctrine that man is God, they tried to save themselves by making aprons of fig leaves to cover their nakedness. If man is God, then man is savior! That flies in the face of the truth that God is God and that God deals graciously and mercifully with his people, so that he alone saves them.

That false doctrine of man was evident in the first worship recorded in the Bible, by Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve. The worship of Cain and Abel looked almost identical. Formally, their worship was the same.

Abel built an altar; Cain built an altar. Abel made a sacrifice; Cain made a sacrifice. Abel brought a lamb of the flock of which he was a shepherd; Cain brought the fruit of the ground of which he was a farmer. Formally, those sacrifices were the same. But they were radically different. One was God; one was man. Abel's sacrifice was the confession "God, because I am a sinner, and only shed blood can cover my sins, which blood must be offered to God because Jehovah God alone can provide the sacrifice." That was his offering: God. And Cain's offering was man. "In the sweat of my face and my brow I have labored to till the soil and pull the thorns that grow there, and out of the earth I have brought this crop. Here, Lord, is my work. Here is man that I offer unto thee." That is the false doctrine. That is the corruption of the truth. The truth is God, and the attack on it is always, always man.

You can trace that through the whole scripture. The doctrine of the Pharisees in Jesus' day was man. By their keeping of the law, they would be right with God. The doctrine of the Judaizers in the apostles' day was the doctrine of man. By their keeping God's law, they would be just and right with God. All the terms were the same. They spoke of Christ; they spoke of God; they spoke of grace. Formally, everything looked very similar to the truth. But the doctrines were radically different. The truth was God and his grace; the lie was man and his work.

And that is the nature of every idol of every pagan nation. Every idol is really simply man, because how does one appease every god but by his own work and his own doing, so that man makes himself right with his gods? That is *always* the attack on the truth of the gospel: it is the exaltation of man at some point.

Can you imagine the saints in heaven singing *that* gospel? "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain. All glory be to him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb and unto us, who have done that thing that we must do in order to be here." That would be a discordant, jarring, obnoxious note in the beautiful song of the gospel. Man doesn't belong in that confession! But that is always the attack of false doctrine. Always it exalts man.

### *The Corruption of the Gospel in the Protestant Reformed Churches*

That is the lie that entered into the mother denomination of the Reformed Protestant Churches. Our mother denomination is the Protestant Reformed Churches

in America and her sister churches in Northern Ireland, in Singapore, and in the Philippines. The Protestant Reformed Churches in America began well. They began with the gospel. They professed *God*. They professed that to their own hurt, to their expulsion from their mother, the Christian Reformed Church, in 1924. The confession of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) in 1924 was particular grace—the grace of God that is for his elect alone, the grace of God that is powerful to save his elect alone—over against the teaching in the Christian Reformed Church of a common grace that made God gracious and merciful to all men but left so many of those men to perish in hell. Over against that lie that made God a weakling and a beggar, the Protestant Reformed Churches confessed sovereign, particular grace, grace for God's people alone. That is the confession of God and God's grace, which alone saves.

The Protestant Reformed Churches were infiltrated in the 1940s by a covenant theology that made man's continuation in the covenant to be man and his fulfilling of a condition. It was the covenant theology of the Liberated churches in the Netherlands, whose representatives in North America today are the Canadian Reformed Churches and the American Reformed Churches. Those Liberated churches taught that God made a promise at baptism to all of the children of believers, but it was a conditional promise, and it was up to the child to fulfill the condition of faith and obedience when he came to years of discretion, in order to make that promise real for him and to obtain the blessings of that promise. That was a conditional covenant doctrine. That doctrine infiltrated the PRC so that fully half of the churches and ministers were infected with it through friendships with the Liberated churches in the Netherlands. God preserved the Protestant Reformed Churches by maintaining among them an unconditional covenant.

The problem is that in 1953, when the main teacher of that conditional covenant, Rev. Hubert De Wolf, was expelled from the PRC, the PRC had unfinished business on their hands. They had expelled a *man*, but there was an aspect of his theology that Protestant Reformed theologians were comfortable with. The aspect of conditional covenant theology that they were comfortable with was this: in the *experience* of covenant fellowship, there are conditions. Not in God's making that covenant bond; not in God's maintaining that covenant bond; not in God's perfecting that covenant bond—all of that is

By the truth the Lord delivered us into the Reformed Protestant Churches and gave to us in these churches the heritage of the truth that the PRC once held.

unconditional. But in the experience of it—my enjoyment of it, my participation in it—there is a condition. That condition is the thing that I must do. Whether that doing is my activity of believing or whether that doing is my activity of working, there is something that I must do in that fellowship to enjoy it. That is the language that De Wolf used! At his Formula of Subscription exam, he said that in the experience of that fellowship, there is a condition. He said that outright, black on white.<sup>2</sup> And the judgment of those who examined him was this: “We rejoice in his exam.”<sup>3</sup> That was the judgment of the minority report—for those who are familiar with that history—which was the strongest of the two reports at Classis East of the PRC in May 1953! The writers of the minority report said, “We rejoice in his exam”! How can you rejoice in that exam?! Because there was unfinished business. *Man* was there and had infected the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Following 1953, in the 1960s and 1970s, there was a deliberate attempt by the new ministers coming into the Protestant Reformed denomination to preach less doctrinally and more practically. *Less doctrinally* means *less God*. *More practically* means *more man*. “Reverend, tell us what we have to do! Tell us how to have a happy life and a happy marriage!” That is the perennial cry of a church that is tired of the gospel of God. That is the perennial cry of a church that has itching ears and will not endure sound doctrine. “Tell us what to do. We’re sick of hearing what God has done.” So that, as the Protestant Reformed Churches themselves have said, there was a deliberate move in the

1960s and 1970s away from doctrinal preaching to practical preaching.<sup>4</sup> For many decades the Protestant Reformed Churches had the form all right; they had the vocabulary—unconditional covenant, particular grace, grace alone, five *solas*, TULIP, Reformed confessions. They had the words right, but within the bosom of the PRC there was poison. It was the poison of man.

We didn’t realize how deeply that poison had sunk until in 2015 a sermon in Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan, was protested. That sermon said about the “way” of John 14:6 that Jesus is that way, and our obedience is also the way to the Father. Jesus and our obedience. When you have that, you do not have the gospel. You do not have God. You have man. You have only man. You can say the word *God*. You can say the word *grace*. But you do not have God. You have man. You have man as much as Cain had man. He had an altar; he made a sacrifice; he brought something on top of that altar; but he had only man there. When you say that Christ and man are the way to salvation, you don’t have Christ; you have only man.

We didn’t realize how far that poison had sunk into our own thinking, as evidenced by how long it took us to understand that false doctrine, how long it took us to see, by the grace of God and his Spirit, that that was indeed the lie. We were tardy. We were slow. That is why I say that what the Reformed Protestant Churches are is not due to Reformed Protestant people. We would have perished before anyone else would have.

The Protestant Reformed synods could not ever rid the denomination of man. Man remained the doctrine of

2 “I believe that in that conscious sense, as we experience salvation, that that salvation is contingent on our believing...On the plane of our experience, as we experience these blessings of salvation as rational, moral creatures...the gift of the Holy Spirit is conditional upon the use of those means...If you mean by assurance of the Holy Spirit the conscious personal assurance of our personal participation in that salvation...it’s conditional. It is from the subjective point of view of our experience” (“De Wolf’s Examination,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 17 [April 2022]: 13–14).

3 “We may rejoice that his examination shows that he does not believe the heresy implied in them [De Wolf’s statements for which he was being examined]” (“Report of the Committee of Pre-advice in Re Protests of the Revs. H. Hoeksema and G. M. Ophoff against the Consistory of First Church,” minority report, in Herman Hanko, *For Thy Truth’s Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches* [Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000], 502).

4 “Along with the changing of the guard [the ministers of the early decades of the denomination giving way to those who began their ministries in the 1960s] there emerged a change in the preaching. I do not believe this to be an essential change but a change of emphasis, nonetheless. What do I mean by that? The preaching today—and this has gradually emerged in the last twenty years—is less polemical, that is, less anti other churches, other positions, and so on than it was. And I think there are a number of reasons for that...All of this, I think, led in our churches to more emphasis on the practical application of the gospel to the lives of God’s people. Sermons of a generation or two ago and before that—Protestant Reformed sermons, I mean—were decidedly doctrinal, or what we call in the seminary *didactic*, which means teaching. Herman Hoeksema was fond of saying to us in seminary, as well as from the pulpit of First Church, ‘When God’s people come to church, the minister must preach in such a way that the people put their thinking caps on. You must preach at a level just above the average of your congregation. They must grow in knowledge’ and so on. That was the emphasis. That was good; it remains good. But in addition to that, there’s much more of a practical emphasis in the preaching today. [The schism of] 1953 had a lot to do with that too. I tell you, it took us a long while to get over that whole tragedy. In the years following 1953, preachers hardly dared to preach admonitions for fear of being accused of adhering to some kind of conditional theology. People would say in our churches—and, admittedly, they were of the more radical bent—but people would say in our churches, ‘Don’t tell me what I must *do*; I want to know what God *did* for me.’ But that changed, and now the preaching is much more concerned with the Christian life: with marriage, with admonitions against worldly-mindedness, and so on” (Robert Decker, “The P R Churches in the 1960s and 1970s,” speech given for the Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church’s Young People’s Society on April 27, 1983).

the Protestant Reformed Churches throughout the whole controversy. When it came to Synod 2016, synod could not condemn the sermon. They should have damned it to hell! That is what they should have done with that sermon. “This stinks like the sulfur of the devil’s breath”—that is what they should have said. They could not condemn it.

In 2017, when protests came against their previous decisions and the synod even upheld those protests, even then the synod had to hold man to its bosom; for in 2017 they said, “Properly done, the preaching of the law *is* the preaching of the gospel, and the preaching of the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.”<sup>5</sup> They couldn’t let go of man, here represented by the law and man’s obedience to the law.

In 2018, even when they used language that fooled me for years, the strongest language that I had ever heard the PRC use in the whole controversy up to that point—that the doctrine of several sermons was out of harmony with the Reformed confessions and displaced the perfect work of Christ and compromised the truth of the unconditional covenant and justification by faith alone—even then they had to say, “This is our doctrine: ‘We experience fellowship with God through faith...on the basis of what Christ has done...and in the way of our obedience.’”<sup>6</sup>

Even then they could not get rid of man! At some point during all of that, they should have said, “You know what? We are finished talking. We’re just going to say, ‘God’; we’re just going to say, ‘The grace of God and his sovereignty’; and we’re going to leave man out of it.” But the PRC never could. They couldn’t leave man out of it. They needed him. That is an attack on the truth. It is an attack on the gospel of Jehovah God.

Immediately after Synod 2018 it became clear which direction the denomination wanted, with statements in her publications like this: “If a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do.”<sup>7</sup> And today the Protestant Reformed Churches are *full* of capital-M Man. And they’re full of Man in the heart of the gospel: justification by faith alone. The Protestant Reformed Churches’ big project that many of their writers have signed on to and their preachers pursue is the project to show that the state of justification is by faith alone, but the forgiveness of sins is by faith and by repenting and by forgiving those who sin against you, and who knows what else has been added to that by now. Oh, they know enough to say,

The way of sin and the way of grace, which is the way of Christ—that alone is the salvation of God’s people.

“Justification by faith alone.” But your forgiveness? That is another matter.

What is Reformed? The Reformed doctrine of justification is taught in article 23 of the Belgic Confession under the title “Justification”: “We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins for Jesus Christ’s sake” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 51). The Reformed confession defines *justification* as forgiveness of sins, so that if you have added faith and repenting and forgiving others to forgiveness, that means you have added them to justification. You don’t have justification by faith alone. You have justification by man. And if you have lost the heart of the gospel, you have lost the gospel.

Those who are now members of the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) protested, preached, and wrote against the error of our mother church, where we were members at the time, until finally our mother threw us out, deposing officebearers and leaving no room for the people of God, who wanted the gospel of God and not the gospel of man.

That is why our evaluation of the Protestant Reformed Churches is not that the RPC are just the PRC but in a different degree, so that what separates us is just a matter of degrees. Our evaluation of our mother is that what separates us is *kind*. She is not the true church; she is a false church. She is a prostitute, and her lover is Man in all her doctrine of man. She does not serve God. Though she has worship services and practically screams the word *grace*, she worships man. She is a manifestation of the harlot who rides the beast in Revelation, a synagogue of Satan.

Whether God has his elect people in the PRC is for him to know. The judgment that I make is about the institution and the denomination. She is apostate. How do you know? By the truth. The truth determines that. The truth determines what is true and what is false. By the truth she is known.

By that truth the Lord delivered us into the Reformed Protestant Churches and gave to us in these churches the heritage of the truth that the PRC once held. The Reformed Protestant Churches consider themselves the true continuation of the Protestant Reformed Churches, the true continuation delivered from that doctrine of man in the experience of covenant fellowship. That is reflected even in our name: Reformed Protestant. Why Reformed Protestant, even as a name? When the Protestant

5 *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2017*, 88; emphasis is synod’s.

6 *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2018*, 74.

7 Kenneth Koole, “What Must I Do...?,” *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 1 (October 1, 2018): 7; emphasis is Koole’s.

Reformed Churches were organizing as a denomination in 1925, they had two options for their denomination's name: Protestant Reformed Churches or Reformed Protestant Churches. They chose Protestant Reformed. The name that we chose reflects our conviction that we are the continuation of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

### *The Corruption of the Gospel in the Broader Church World*

What about *why Reformed Protestant?* with a view to the whole ecclesiastical scene today? That same lie of man has infected all Reformed and Presbyterian churches that I know of. (I say, that I know of. I don't know every church.)

The lie of man is represented in the theory of theistic evolution, which is rampant in Reformed churches, believed by many, and taught by Christian Reformed and United Reformed professors in Christian and Reformed colleges. That lie of evolution takes away the grace of God in his salvation of this dust that he had made. He made man of the *dust*—not of a monkey. He made man of the dust because dust is lower than a monkey, so that man would always know that his salvation is gracious.

The well-meant offer of the gospel is taught in many Reformed and Presbyterian churches today. That is the majority opinion in the churches: the well-meant offer of the gospel, which says that God on his part desires the salvation of all, but he doesn't actually save everyone he desires to save. He wants to; he preaches to them; he offers them Christ in the preaching; but he doesn't save them all. That is a weak God! That is not God; that is a god of silver and gold. It is a stock and a block, a stone. That is all it is.

Divorce and remarriage, which is tolerated and is rampant on the ecclesiastical scene today, is an attack on the truth of the covenant. Marriage *is* the covenant. Marriage is the symbol of the covenant, for God has taken his church to himself as his bride *forever*—until death do them part, and God will never die. God has taken his bride to himself forever and ever in the bonds of the covenant. And when divorce and remarriage is tolerated in churches today, every divorce for unlawful grounds and every remarriage while the spouse remains says, "God is a dirty adulterer. He is a fornicator." That is what they say about God. God has given marriage for life as a symbol of his purity and his faithfulness to his church for life.

The federal vision, which turns faith into a work and makes everything that man receives conditional upon what man does, has found a comfortable home in Reformed and Presbyterian denominations for a long time.

All of that is man. All of that is an idol. In fact, it is two idols. On one side of the pulpit, those doctrines build an idol of man. Look how grand man is, who contributes

something to his salvation. And on the other side of the pulpit those doctrines turn the true God into an idol and say, "God depends on this man over here." That is not the true God; that is an idol too. There are two idols every time false doctrine is proclaimed.

God abhors those idols. He hates them. That is evident in Reformed and Presbyterian churches today in the rampant homosexuality that infects those denominations. The Presbyterian Church in America has an openly homosexual minister who identifies himself as homosexual. It doesn't matter that he says he is celibate. He openly identifies as a homosexual. And what does the Reformed world do? They run around trying to figure out how to keep a man like that out of office. Let's change our directory of worship—our Church Order. Let's ask these questions at their synodical exams before they're made ministers. Let's do all these things. Homosexuality in Reformed and Presbyterian denominations is not the problem. Homosexuality is God's judgment on the problem. The problem is those two idols. You don't fix homosexuality that is institutionalized in the church by fighting homosexuality; you'll never be rid of it. Homosexuality is not the problem. The problem is the idolatry of false doctrine. And God says in Romans 1 what his judgment is on idolatry. "If you change me into that kind of an image, I'll change you and make your men lust after your men and your women lust after your women." That is God's judgment on false doctrine.

The way to fix it, then, is not to fight homosexuality. The way to fix it is to fight that false doctrine, fight that lie of man. When God sends the Babylonians into Israel as his judgment on Israel's idolatry, don't make laws against the Babylonians; put away your idols.

### *Implications of Why Reformed Protestant?*

Because of the truth of God, there are three implications of *why Reformed Protestant?*

First, for the Reformed Protestant Churches, that truth of God must be the measure of all things. There is a temptation for Reformed Protestant Churches not to have that. There is a temptation to make the face of man the measure. There is a temptation to make popularity the measure. Our mother fell into that. She was tired of bearing the reproach of the gospel. She was tired of being called one-sided. She was tired of being called antinomian and hyper-Calvinist. No one will ever call her that again. She has what she wants. But all of that is the fear of man and respecting the persons of men. That may not be the measure of anything in the Reformed Protestant Churches. The truth must be. All things must be measured by the truth.

Second, the implication of *why Reformed Protestant?* is

that the truth is always antithetical. Being founded upon the truth and characterized by the truth will mean that we have enemies. And when those enemies appear, outside or within, we don't try to smooth things over. That would be possible. You can make the way smooth. But to do that you have to get rid of the truth. You can't preach God. You can't have God as sovereign if you are going to smooth things over with men. The truth is antithetical. God himself put enmity between two seeds, remember. And wherever the truth appears, the lie *will* come to attack it. This *must* be. Wherever the light shines, there the darkness hates it and denies it.

That is why the Reformed Protestant Churches consider the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) to be an abomination of hell. I don't say that lightly, but I say it very sincerely. It is an abomination of hell because at NAPARC churches come together to do things and put down the truth to do it. "What will unite us is all the things we have in common and all the projects we want to do. What we will not deal with is all the differences of doctrine that we have." That is man. Satan goes to lunch at NAPARC.

That also means that the Reformed Protestant Churches have an ongoing controversy with denominations that teach man: the well-meant offer, theistic

evolution, divorce and remarriage, federal vision. Our desire as churches is not to affiliate with such denominations—not at all. Our desire is to fight those denominations, to fight with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. I say that to a broader audience not to snarl and bare my teeth but so you may know what governs and must govern the Reformed Protestant Churches.

And third, the implication of *why Reformed Protestant?* is this: that to all who love the gospel of God and hate the lie of man, who desire to fight that lie and oppose it wherever it rears its head, there is a standing invitation to join the Reformed Protestant Churches. The truth of the gospel is what the denomination stands for—not by any strength of man but sheerly by the grace of God. And we *love* fellowship in that gospel, communion in that precious truth.

When the Reformed Protestant Churches formed, the individual churches and then their federation together, this was written into or implied in our documents: we invite all who love this like precious faith with us to join us in the worship of Jehovah God.

Why Reformed Protestant? God and his truth.

I thank you.

—AL

## UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

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

# THE DEMAND AND NECESSITY OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

## *Introduction*

I want to welcome everyone who came tonight, as well as those who are listening online.<sup>1</sup>

The origin of this speech was an email that I received from a concerned member of Sovereign Reformed Protestant Church, asking for a lecture on the school in light of the opposition that was being faced. That opposition came from the most curious source: the then and now former members of the consistory of Sovereign Reformed

Protestant Church. The request for this lecture precipitated the series of events that exposed the deep opposition to the Christian school in the consistory at Sovereign. The school, then, as it has all through Reformed church history, also faces controversy in the Reformed Protestant Churches. It is the purpose of the speech tonight to address some of those issues.

I don't have the time to deal with all of the issues, but I am going to deal with this issue in particular: that

<sup>1</sup> This is a copyedited transcript of a speech given October 14, 2022, in northwest Iowa. The speech can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3dmgPsLXzU>.

the school is the command of God and that the school, therefore, is necessary as the demand of God's covenant. This means that the school institution—formed by parents, in which teachers are employed, and that is run by a board—is, in fact, commanded by God and is the demand of God's covenant.

I want to begin by reading just two passages of scripture. I could read many more. The first is 1 Corinthians 15:50–58:

50. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.
51. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,
52. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.
53. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.
54. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.
55. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?
56. The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.
57. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
58. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Then another passage, Philippians 2:1–11:

1. If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,
2. Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.
3. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.
4. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.
5. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6. Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:
7. But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:
8. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.
9. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:
10. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;
11. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

These passages and many other passages in the sacred scripture are about the school.

I want to make clear tonight at the very beginning that this speech is against homeschooling.

Many of you have probably read Reverend VanderWal's post on his blog, in which he carves out a place for homeschooling. He also argues that the school as an institution, formed by parents for the purpose of educating their children, is *not* the demand of the covenant. Reverend VanderWal in that post presents the Protestant Reformed position on the school.<sup>2</sup>

The Protestant Reformed Churches in 2008 and 2009 gutted article 21 of the Church Order. Those churches gutted article 21 in that they removed the principal doctrinal basis of the good Christian school in the covenant and its demand for the education of the covenant children. Removing the principal doctrinal basis of the good Christian school, therefore, the Protestant Reformed Churches fatally injured the movement of the good Christian school.

That position I opposed. I was at Synod 2008 and Synod 2009, and I spoke against that position. I preached against that position. I gave speeches against that position, and I wrote against that position. I am opposed to everything that Reverend VanderWal proposes in his blog post. The position that he takes in that blog post is diametrically opposed to the truth of the scriptures and of the Reformed creeds. His position is diametrically opposed to what I believe, to what I have believed my entire life, to what I have taught my entire ministry, and to what I am going to present to you tonight.

The good Christian school as an institution is the demand of God's covenant; and, therefore, the movement

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2 Martin VanderWal, "Good Christian Schools and Article 21," October 13, 2022, <https://notallpiousandecclsiastical.wordpress.com/2022/10/13/good-christian-schools-and-article-21/>.



for homeschooling is contrary to God's covenant. I am not opposed to a parent's teaching his or her children schooling at home. I am not opposed to that as an emergency measure. What I am opposed to is the homeschool movement, which would give homeschooling an equal footing with the good Christian school, which would teach that the homeschool and the good Christian school are both demands of God's covenant. I am opposed to that. Indeed, I cannot exist in the same denomination with the homeschooling movement. The homeschooling movement in all of its principles is opposed to the movement for the good Christian school. The homeschool, whatever the homeschool is, is not a school. A school is an organization formed by parents for the purpose of educating their children by qualified teachers. A homeschool is not that. And a homeschool is, indeed, opposed to that. These two movements, the homeschool movement and the good Christian school movement, cannot coexist in the same denomination.

The homeschool movement comes with a plea for toleration. That plea for toleration was present at the recent Reformed Protestant classis. So the story went: All we are asking for is that the homeschool movement be tolerated in the churches. That plea was also present in Reverend VanderWal's blog. All we are pleading for is that the homeschool movement be given an equal footing, recognized as a legitimate form of schooling along with the good Christian school. But I say to you that those two movements cannot coexist. The principles put forward for the good Christian school militate against the homeschool, and the principles put forward for the homeschool militate against the good Christian school. Toleration of homeschooling will not lead to coexistence. Toleration of homeschooling will lead to the destruction of the Christian school movement. I want to make clear tonight that, as much as I am promoting the good Christian school, I am opposed to homeschooling. Homeschooling is selfish, loveless, independent, and anti-covenantal, just as the school is self-sacrificial and full of love and flows out of God's covenant. In our denomination they cannot coexist.

I do not want anyone tonight to use the word *school*—for I am going to speak of the school—as an excuse to say, “Well, homeschooling really fits in the definition of a *school*.” It is disingenuous on the part of the homeschooler to take the word *school* and to say that the word *school* really is the equivalent of the word *education*. A school is an institution. A school is an institution alongside the church and the home. That school as an institution flows out of the church and flows out of the home. That school as an institution is an expression of God's covenant.

Furthermore, no one in the Reformed Protestant denomination ought to be surprised that there is a

controversy in our churches about the school. Whenever there has been a reformation of the church, the schools have always been involved. And here, with regard to the specific doctrinal issue that resulted in the Reformed Protestant Churches, the schools are a part of that. The specific doctrinal issue was the life of God's elect child in God's covenant, whether that life is a life of unconditional fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. And the school belongs to that life.

Indeed, it is not at all an exaggeration to say that the lives of God's covenant people revolve around the schools. For nine months out of the year, their entire lives are geared to the schools. The father wakes up in the morning to make money to pay for the school. The mother gets up in the morning to get her children prepared for the school. The children spend eight hours a day at the school. They come home, and they do schoolwork. They go to bed at a certain time because they have to get up for the school. The school is the life of the Reformed home.

We fought a controversy over that life, whether that life is a gracious gift from God to be enjoyed in Jesus Christ without any conditions. The covenant, as that covenant comes to expression in the school, also, then, was reanimated by that recovering of the truth of the covenant. God wanted the school issue to come up so that the school issue could be faced again in light of a fresh appreciation and a fresh understanding that the life of the covenant is an unconditional gift of God.

So we have controversy with regard to the school. I welcome the controversy. That controversy was present with us from the very beginning. In the very beginning of our churches, almost as soon as we signed the Acts of Separation, the issue of the school was present. The issue then was whether we were even going to have schools. There were those who said, “We are going to keep using the Protestant Reformed schools, and those who can't use them can fend for themselves.” It was a disgusting and loveless display that characterized the beginning of the churches.

When it was settled that we were going to have our own schools, then the controversy became, are those schools going to be denominational in character? There were those who did not want the schools associated with the churches at all. “Keep the churches out of the schools” was the hue and cry. But the parents who take the vow of baptism to teach their children the aforesaid doctrine of the church that they attend have no other option but to send their children to a school that teaches them that doctrine. If that school doesn't exist, the parents must form one. If that school exists, the parents must use it.

And when that issue was settled, then this controversy came into the foreground and reared its head again

regarding these questions: What is the specific basis of the school? Why do we form schools? Why do we maintain them? Why do we use them? Is the school demanded—if we would even use that word *demanded*—by merely practical considerations? By that I mean, is the school simply an extension of the reality and does it flow out of the reality that most parents cannot teach their kids in their homes? But homeschooling is really the ideal. If we could all homeschool, we should homeschool. Homeschooling is the best. And we really make a concession when we form a school. The school, then, is the next best option. Is that the basis of the school: a mere practical reality? We can go on with that line of reasoning. The complicated nature of life means that there must be qualified teachers, so we must have a school. Is the basis merely practical? Or is the basis doctrinal? Is the basis rooted in an eternal and an unchangeable principle? Which means that the basis of the school is rooted in God himself.

The answer of the Reformed Protestant Churches, and I believe the answer of the Reformed churches all through history, is that the school rests on an eternal and an unchangeable principle. That principle is the principle of God's covenant. The school rests on God's own nature as the covenant God. The school rests on God's establishment of a covenant of grace with us. The school rests on the covenant. And so, really, the answer to the question of the command of the school is the covenant. The answer to the question of the necessity of the school is the covenant. The covenant, the covenant, the covenant: that is the basis, that is the demand, and that is the necessity of the school.

I want to establish that from scripture and the creeds, and I want to establish that from church history. The doctrine of the Reformed Protestant Churches on the schools is no new doctrine. It has been the Reformed position all through history.

### *The Command and Necessity*

Now, we must understand that when we speak of the command and necessity of the good Christian school, by that word *command* we mean God's command. God in Jesus Christ commands the Christian school. As God commands "Do not commit adultery" and "Do not steal," God commands the good Christian school. As God commands "Go to church" and "Get married," so God commands the good Christian school.

When we say that the command for the good Christian school is from God, then we also free ourselves from

the charge of legalism. Just as it is not legalistic for the church to preach, "You may not have idols; you may not have images; you may not commit adultery; and you may not steal," so it is not legalism for the church to preach, "You must have a good Christian school." That is not legalism because as we preach that you may not have idols, and you may not have images, and you may not commit adultery, and you may not steal, we preach those not as requirements for your salvation—the law is never a demand for salvation—but as the law is the guide of your thankful lives. The law expresses what is written by the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the child of God. I don't have to have the preacher come to me to tell me, "You shouldn't have an idol," so that I need to be informed of that in the first instance. I already have it written on my heart. That is already the delight of my heart. And when the preacher says, "You can't have any idols," I say, "Yes, yes, I love that law of God. That is the delight of my heart." So also with the school. God is a covenant God,

Christ is a covenant Christ, and the Spirit is a covenant Spirit; and he writes the covenant and the love of the covenant on our hearts. And as far as writing the covenant on our hearts, he writes the school on our hearts. When the minister comes to you and says, "You must have a good

Christian school," you say, "Yes, yes, that is the delight of my heart out of thankfulness for God's salvation of me and his promise to me and my children." On our hearts we have written "Form a good Christian school," so that we recognize that there is a command; but that command is not a legalistic command. That command is simply the teaching of the word of God, informing us of what God already wrote on our hearts by his Holy Spirit.

And when we speak of the necessity of the good Christian school, then, we mean two things. First, we mean the obedience of covenant parents to God's command to form a good Christian school. The necessity of the school *is* the demand of God's covenant. God said, "Form a school," and, therefore, that is the necessity of the school. God established a relationship of fellowship and friendship with us. God incorporated us and our children into that covenant. As part of our lives with God and with one another in the covenant, God commands—and we obey—to form good Christian schools.

That necessity of the good Christian school also includes the practical necessity of the covenant. What I mean by that is that the task of rearing the covenant child is the central work in the lives of covenant parents. That task of raising the covenant child is what the covenant

The school rests on an eternal  
and an unchangeable principle.  
That principle is the principle of  
God's covenant.

parents swore before God and the church to do, so that when the covenant parents took their child for baptism, they said, “I will teach my child in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause him to be instructed therein, to the utmost of my power.” The parents took that vow before the entire congregation, so that the entire congregation is taken up into that vow. The entire congregation is obligated. The members are obligated, by virtue of having witnessed that vow, to help those parents. The congregation must do it. It is lovelessness; it is cruelty; it is disobedience; it is hatred for those parents not to do so. Members of the congregation who saw the parents take that vow and who nodded their heads at that vow in a figurative way when they watched those parents take that vow were saying, “We will help you.” Then when it comes to the school, they say, “Except for that.”

The task of raising covenant children is an all-consuming task. That task takes phenomenal resources not only of money but also of time and of talent and of information. The children have to be taught to be friends and servants of God in this world that we live in. This world develops, and this world increases in complication. To teach those children all that they need to know to live in this world takes the entire church. Out of that practical necessity and the fact that the church said, “We will help you,” the baptism form demands the school. You cannot read the baptism form any other way. The baptism form is not an individual’s coming up before an empty church, but it is an individual’s or a family’s coming before the entire congregation and that individual’s swearing to teach his children, and the whole congregation saying, “We will help you.” That is the necessity of the school. That is the demand of the school.

Then also, in connection with the practical necessity of the school, there is the very idea of the covenant itself. The covenant is life together. That’s simply what it is. We in common are partakers of Jesus Christ. Being partakers of Jesus Christ, we are his body, and we have fellowship one with another. That covenant is life together, and our children belong to that covenant. They must have a life together. They must have a life together as children of the church. If one is off homeschooling his children over there, and another is off homeschooling his children over there, and still another is off homeschooling his children over there, the children do not have a life together. They are not together. The homeschooling parent separates his children from the other children. He separates his children from the church and from fellowship with the other children of the church. Those parents by doing that teach their children, “You don’t need the church. You can be separate from the church six days out of the week.” And those children develop no practical relationships with

their fellows. Why do you think God wants his children together as children? They are learning. They are not only learning math and science and Bible, but they are also learning how to be together as children. The homeschooling parent takes the children away from the other children of the church, and they don’t develop those relationships; so those children have no strong relationships with the church. And the parents who do that then have the temerity to complain, “Our children don’t have any friends at church.” Well, no kidding. The children don’t see each other for six days out of the week. What do you expect? I say the very idea of the covenant, of togetherness—not now as parents but as children—demands the school.

The school, then, is an exercise in love. The school is an exercise in love on the part of the whole church, the church that saw the parents take the vow at baptism. In love for those parents and in love for those children, recognizing that the parents are not going to be able to teach their children by themselves, parents band together to form a school. Where would be the love of a congregation that sees a mother come up who is utterly incapable of schooling her children, and the congregation watches her take the vow, and the members know she cannot teach her children math and science and writing? The members of the congregation know that. They watch her take the vow, and they say, “Yes, we will help you.” And they leave her to fend for herself. They say, “We are going to homeschool our kids because we know how to do that. We are going to homeschool our kids because we are capable of doing that. And you—we’re sorry about that—had better fend for yourself.” Where is the love in that? There is no love in that. Where is the love of the church for the mother of nine children who comes with her tenth to the front of church and has the child baptized and promises to teach that child, along with the other nine, the truth of God’s scripture as it applies to all the areas of life, and the members of the church say, “We are not going to help her at all”? Where is the love in that? She can’t teach all those children. There is no love in that. It is loveless; it is selfish; it is anti-covenantal. It is love for the children that you see those children as needing the other children of the church: needing to be with them, needing to play with them, and needing to learn with them. In love for that need, you form the good Christian school.

### *Taught in Scripture*

Anyone who says, “There is no demand in scripture for the good Christian school,” is actually saying, “There is no verse in the Bible that says, ‘Thou shalt form a good Christian school.’” When they say that, they take me for a fool. There are many things in the Christian life where

there is no verse in the Bible that says, “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not.” And it is a demand for all that. The demand of the good Christian school is everywhere that scripture teaches the covenant. If you sit down and think through the covenant for five minutes, you will say, “Yes, of course, we need a good Christian school. Our children need to be together. The covenant demands it.” Everywhere scripture teaches the communion of the saints, it teaches the school. Oh, the parents get to have communion, but the children don’t? If you think through the communion of the saints for five seconds, and you apply it to the children, you will see that the school is demanded. The children have to be together.

The baptism form demands the school. It doesn’t say, “Thou shalt have a school.” But the parents stand up in front of the congregation, and they take the vow to help or cause their child to be instructed. And the whole congregation says yes to that. That demands the good Christian school.

Everywhere the scripture teaches love. Love does not look on its own things. Love could never say this: “I’m going to teach my children, and you can fend for yourself.” That is a loveless, hate-filled statement. That statement is an attack on God and an attack on the covenant and an attack on the church. Love couldn’t say that. Scripture tells us what love’s attitude is. Love does not look only on its own things, but love looks also on the things of others. That is the mind of Christ. How do you know someone has the mind of Christ? They don’t look only on their own things; they look also on the things of others.

Apply that to the school. You do not look only on the things for the education of your own children, but you look also on the things for the education of all the church’s children. That is love. That is the mind of Christ.

Love, according to the book of Acts, has all things in common. The early church was one in doctrine; the members had one mind; they had one table; and they had all things in common. And that wasn’t teaching communism among the members of the church. They all had their individual possessions, but they so looked on the things of others that their things were the things of everybody else in the church.

Apply that to the school. It is as much an obligation for the church, for the families of the church, to educate one family’s children as another family’s children. We have all things in common, *especially* the education of our children. Of all the consuming activities in the life of the child of God, that has to be central. Reformed parents expend themselves for the education of their children, and that in particular we must have in common.

Besides all these things, there are the passages in

scripture that speak to Israel as a nation and address the fathers of the nation as the heads of homes and tell them, “Teach the children.” You do not need those passages to establish the school; you can establish the school without them. You can establish the school as the demand of God’s covenant on the basis of scripture’s teaching on the covenant, scripture’s teaching on baptism, scripture’s teaching on love, and scripture’s teaching on the communion of saints. Besides, there are all those passages in which God says to the fathers of the nation, “Now, teach the children,” and he obligates the entire nation in the task of educating the nation’s children. There are those who say, “Well, that only refers to the fathers themselves.” I would say that that interpretation reveals the anti-covenantal mindset of the person who says it. Even if those passages are addressing an individual father, they address the individual father as he is part of God’s covenant, so that the calling of that individual father has to be interpreted in light of the entire covenant of God. Scripture teaches in multiple ways the school institution as the demand of God’s covenant.

### *The Witness of the Reformed Creeds*

And because scripture teaches it, the Reformed creeds teach the same thing.

First, in the Reformed creeds there is the explicit, black-on-white mention of the word *school*. That word is not up for grabs. It is a school. It is not a seminary school; it is a grade school or a high school, primary or secondary education. That is how the actual authors of the Heidelberg Catechism interpreted the term: a school. That the demand for the school is included in Lord’s Day 38 did not come about by happenstance, so that the authors said, “Oh, we haven’t mentioned the school yet in thirty-seven Lord’s Days. We’d better get a mention in.” But Lord’s Day 38 is where the subject of the school belongs. That is where the subject of the demand for the school belongs because, first, Lord’s Day 38 is in the section of the Catechism that teaches concerning the law, that teaches about God’s demands upon his people whom he has redeemed. And one of those demands is the school. Second, the school comes up in the context of Lord’s Day 38 because Lord’s Day 38 is about the covenant. You could preach a sermon on Lord’s Day 38 simply entitled “The Covenant.” That is the theme of the Lord’s Day. That is because the theme of the Lord’s Day is God’s rest. God in himself is a God of rest as the covenant God. As the covenant God, God has decreed to give rest to his people: rest from all their sins, rest from condemnation, rest from the dominion of sin and the devil, rest with God in covenant fellowship with him. And God gives his people rest. And in the fourth commandment, God

always says this: “Enter into my rest!” For six days of the week, we enter into God’s rest. By faith we live out of the finished and completed work of Christ. We live out of that as one body, and on Sunday we come together as the body of Jesus Christ to worship God and to enter into the rest through the preaching of the gospel. And the school is simply the children’s entering into God’s rest. God, as it were, is saying in Lord’s Day 38, and the Reformed fathers were saying when they put schools in Lord’s Day 38, “Give your children rest. Let them enjoy God’s covenant. Let them fellowship together as fellow members of the church. Let them learn together. Give them rest.” That is why the school is in Lord’s Day 38. That is the logical place for God to teach the demand of the school as the demand of his covenant.

Second, by implication the school is also in Lord’s Day 21. We are all members of Christ. And with that statement the authors of the Catechism were saying that we are one body with Jesus Christ. We have all things in common in Jesus Christ, and that includes the education of our children. The school is not mentioned explicitly, but it is there. Imagine a builder who is going to build a house. That is a complicated and an all-consuming task for him. Imagine that the builder would say, “I can build the house myself.” Now, technically, that might be true. Maybe he can. Maybe he has that system figured out, and he doesn’t need any help. He can build the house by himself. The building of a house is a task that requires cooperation. The very nature of the task requires that. You need a framer; you need an installer; you need a finish carpenter; you need people to hold things while you nail and screw them together. That is a huge task, and so is the raising of our covenant children. It is an enormous task. The very nature of the task requires cooperation, mutual goodwill, mutual support, and sharing of resources. When Lord’s Day 21 mentions the communion of the saints and that we are all one body, by implication the Lord’s Day demands the school.

Third, there is the baptism form. As I said, the baptism form, which requires the parents to take their vow before the entire church, never explicitly mentions the school, but the form demands the school, nevertheless. The entire church, after witnessing the vow, is involved in the raising of the covenant seed.

Because scripture and the Reformed creeds teach the school as the demand of the covenant, the Reformed fathers put schools in the Church Order as the demand of God’s covenant. They believed what scripture and the

creeds say. Article 21, where the school is mentioned, has always been the object of the loathing of those who hate the Christian school. They want the article gone because that article makes explicit the school as the demand of the covenant. If English words have any meaning, that is what the article is teaching: the school as the demand of the covenant. And the Reformed fathers, without any shame and without any hesitation, put that into the Church Order so that the elders would see to it. Such an important task it is that the elders must see to the good Christian school.

### *The Reformed View*

Thus the Reformed all through history had that view. I want to establish that tonight. The view of the Reformed Protestant Churches is not something new. The emphasis of the Reformed Protestant Churches upon the schools is not something new. This is Reformed. We would even

say that it is Reformational. It is true that there has always been development in the doctrine of the schools. All through history there has been development in the doctrine of the schools. During the time of the Reformation, the Reformation with its recovery of the gospel not

only reanimated the church but also reanimated the schools. That Reformation cause of the schools was taken up enthusiastically by the Reformed. The Reformed already at Dordt talked about the consistory’s seeing to it that there were good Christian schoolmasters who would teach in the state-run schools all the children of the Reformed faith. The Reformed fathers took up that demand of God’s covenant for the education of the children. They didn’t see clearly all of the issues involved with the schools. That had to come through controversy. There was always controversy over the schools.

The Reformed used the state schools in the Netherlands for years. When the *Afscheiding* came, then the Reformed fathers had to reexamine the schools. They saw that those schools should not be formed by the government but should be formed by the church, and they tightly connected those schools to the church and to God’s covenant. And they really said this: “Let there be a school formed by the church, and let it teach the truth of the church.”

Later on, when the *Doleantie* came with Abraham Kuyper, the Reformed fathers saw and realized that the school is not the work of the church institute but that it is to be the work of parents to form the school. And another advance was made in the doctrine of the school.

The Reformation with its recovery of the gospel not only reanimated the church but also reanimated the schools.

Then again, in the United States, when the Christian Reformed Church was formed, the Reformed fathers saw the importance of the school. So important was the school to them that the church could be split over it. It was not a matter that could be allowed to be an either/or in the church. The church could be split over the matter of the school because it involves God's covenant. There is no more important doctrinal issue in the church than the covenant of God. And although the Christian Reformed Church did not mention the school explicitly in its Act of Separation from the Reformed Church in America, the school was the undercurrent. And as a Christian Reformed minister, Herman Hoeksema split his congregation over the school. He preached and preached and preached the school until the members of the church choked on it, and they left. Over half of his congregation left over the matter of the school. That was an advance in the doctrine of the school. So important is the school that when it is opposed and threatened, then you stand and fight for that school, even to the division of the church.

So also in the Protestant Reformed Churches of Herman Hoeksema, there was an advance through the struggle for the school. It is shocking to me, and it will remain shocking to me, that in the Protestant Reformed Churches it took so long to get Protestant Reformed schools. That was because there was an issue that had to be clarified. There had to be controversy over the schools. Protestant Reformed parents were using the existing Christian Reformed schools, just like Reformed Protestant parents wanted to use Protestant Reformed schools. That was happening. That happened for years, decades. And that instruction in the Christian Reformed schools was wrecking the church. There was a whole generation of children who were being taught Christian Reformed doctrine. And that affected the children. They were together with Christian Reformed children five days out of the week, and the Protestant Reformed children didn't see any reason to be separate from the Christian Reformed for one day out of the week. That was wrecking the churches. That would have happened in the Reformed Protestant Churches too if we had continued to use Protestant Reformed schools. It was gracious of God that they threw us out the door because we would have stayed. And the very same thing would have happened to us as happened to the Protestant Reformed Churches. The use of those schools would have wrecked the churches. The

It is a gracious gift of God to us that we can have this controversy, so that the school can be established on the doctrinal foundation and so that we can be one together on this issue.

schism of 1953 was the result of not only the infiltration of false doctrine into the Protestant Reformed Churches, but also it was the result of using Christian Reformed schools for decades. And that brought up an advance in the doctrine of the schools. Protestant Reformed parents were forced to reckon with the reality of their baptismal vows. In the Netherlands there was never any other option: the Reformed used the state schools; then they used the *Afscheiding* schools; then they used the *Doleantie* schools. There was no other option. In the States there was an option. Do we form Protestant Reformed schools, or do we stay with the existing Christian Reformed schools? And that forced the parents to reckon with the fact of what their vows were. They had vowed to teach their children the aforesaid doctrine, the doctrine of this Christian church. That is not a generally Reformed doctrine; that is the doctrine of this Christian church. That

is the doctrine that comes off the pulpit that the parents hear every week. And that demanded a denominational school.

I would say that in light of our baptismal vows, even if we could, it would be entirely illegitimate for us to use the Protestant Reformed schools, the Christian Reformed schools, or the Reformed schools. It would be entirely improper. Our vows will not let us. We are going to teach our children the aforesaid

doctrine. Then you cannot put them in a school for five days out of the week where they do not learn the aforesaid doctrine. In the public school they learn the world's doctrine. The world has a doctrine, and the children are being taught something, but it is the world. And in the apostate Christian schools, the children are being taught apostate Christianity. And so also in this connection has been an advance.

Always the Reformed had to face the issue of the school. Always there was controversy over the school. And always there was an advance in the doctrine of the schools. That we have to fight about the schools is not any new thing.

Here we have to face the question of the specific doctrinal basis of the school. It is a gracious gift of God to us that we can have this controversy, so that the school can be established on the doctrinal foundation and so that we can be one together on this issue. If someone does not believe that the school is the demand of the covenant, just leave. Leave. But I'm never going to stop preaching the school as the demand of the covenant. If your church

does not believe that the school is the demand of the covenant, and you ask me to come and preach for you, you are getting two sermons: “The School as the Demand of the Covenant (1)” and “The School as the Demand of the Covenant (2).” And you will get those sermons until you either throw me off the pulpit or you start a school. We must be one on this.

### *Nothing New*

This insistence that the school is the demand of the covenant is not new. It is not new in my ministry. No one should ever be surprised that when Reverend Langerak became a Reformed Protestant minister, he preached the schools. You cannot be surprised at that. This is not the first speech that I gave on the schools. This is not the first speech that I gave in northwest Iowa on the schools. In 2009 I spoke to the then high school association in northwest Iowa. The subject of my speech was “The School as the Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.” My text was 1 Corinthians 15:58. The risen Lord Jesus Christ has only one work. The risen Lord Jesus Christ’s work is the perfection of his covenant, which is the bringing of the kingdom of God, so that God be all in all. And I said this, and I’m going to quote what I said in 2009 in Iowa about the schools.

Related to these two great aspects of the work of the Lord in the church and home is the work of the organic life of the church in the schools. The institutions of grade and high schools run by school associations through their duly elected boards and filled with hired teachers and students are not the church, and they are not the home. Yet those institutions are intimately connected with both. They are part of the threefold cord of church, home, and school that is not easily broken. To the church the school is connected as a work of the organic life of the church, growing out of the church’s belief in the covenant with believers and with their children and demanding a specifically Christian and distinctively Reformed education in obedience to the command of God and the oath of baptism to instruct these children in the aforesaid doctrine.

I spoke that in 2009. I also said this:

It [the school] is the labor of the church, inasmuch as it is the church’s children who are being instructed. And the baptism form gives not only to the parents the responsibility to educate their children, but the very questions themselves give also to the church institute a vested interest in what and in how her children are educated. As an old Reformed consistory stated: “Our Christian schools are the feeders of our Christian churches.” The elders

considered that axiomatic. Where the schools prosper, so does the church of Jesus Christ. He sees to it, for it is his work.

And to the home the schools are connected as the necessary means whereby parents carry out their God-given right to instruct their children through doctrinally steadfast and doctrinally unmovable teachers, who function in the schools in the place of the parents and teach the children what the parents themselves would teach them. In the place of parents, the teachers give the children an education in every subject from Bible to physical education on the basis of the truth that the parents, who formed those schools and hired those teachers, believe to be the truth of the word of God. We must not take it for granted that the work of education in the schools is viewed by all as the work of the Lord in his covenant and kingdom.

There was a threat; there always is a threat to the Christian school by those who want to rip away the school from its foundation: the covenant and the kingdom.

Christian education is an application of the text. That that work is Christ’s means that the risen Christ—who has only one great, grand, and glorious work—labors in the school to perfect his covenant and kingdom to the glory of God. Christ is Lord of all; yet all his labors aim at that goal. There is no other work of Jesus Christ. This includes the work of the church institute and the home. Because the school is related to both, the labors of the school are the work of the Lord for his covenant, church, and kingdom. The schools are the work of the risen and exalted Christ. The schools are the work of the risen and exalted Christ in his covenant and kingdom. The labor in the Christian schools is his work entirely. It is his work in the sense that he gave those schools as gifts. It is his work in the sense that in those schools and by means of those schools, the risen Lord Jesus Christ carries out his work, causing the coming of his kingdom, increasing and building up his covenant, and strengthening his church.

Then this:

If parents, teachers, and churches are not convinced that the Christian school is the work of the Lord and the work of the Lord for his covenant, then they have fatally compromised the Lord’s work in the school. They undermine by their doubts the efforts and sacrifices of the association for the existence and support of those schools, the work and decisions of the boards who run those schools,

and the labors of the teachers who teach in those schools. They even undermine the zealotry and attitudes of the students in their studies. If one does not believe that those schools are the work of the Lord in the interest of his covenant, kingdom, and church, then one cannot abound in that work. And, in fact, he does not even have the right to engage in that work.

If the school is not the demand of the covenant, if the school is not the work of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, you may not even engage in that work because Christ has only one work. That is the work of his covenant. It is exactly because the school is the work of the risen Lord Jesus Christ for his covenant—it is exactly because the school is the demand of the covenant—that we engage in that work.

That is what the Reformed fathers believed. That was clear by their decisions. They told their ministers to preach the school. You cannot tell a minister to preach something that is not the word of God. That is wickedness. Ministers do not bring their opinions; they bring the word of God. When the Reformed consistories said to the ministers, “Preach the school,” they might not have said, “Because it is the demand of the covenant,” but they were saying that when they demanded that the school be preached. When the Reformed fathers gave to the consistories the mandate to see to the schools, those fathers were teaching that the school is the demand of the covenant. When Christian parents engage in the schools with all of their blood, sweat, and tears, they do not do that for practical reasons. They are Reformed. Reformed men and women live out of only one thing: God’s covenant.

And that conviction expressed itself in the reformers. I can prove that. A church historian, Philip Schaff, stated the following in his eight-volume work on the Reformation and church history: “Education [by which he meant schools] and the advance of true religion are inseparable.” “Church and school go together.” And again, “The Reformation gave a powerful impulse to common schools.”<sup>3</sup> The Reformation was as much about the school as it was the church. Then there is church historian Merle d’Aubigné, who wrote, “It was not the public worship alone that the Reformation was ordained to change. The school was early placed beside the church, and these two great institutions were equally reanimated by it.”<sup>4</sup>

You want to know why we are talking about the school? Because we just had a controversy about the doctrine of the covenant. The church was reanimated by that. And the school was reanimated by that too.

In 2008 and 2009 the Protestant Reformed Churches killed the schools. They killed them. The schools are dying a slow death. And they will die because the Protestant Reformed schools are not based on God’s covenant. The Protestant Reformed people fill their schools with their lies and their filth.

### *The Gospel Reanimates the School*

The school had to be reanimated. We had to be filled again with the conviction that the school is the demand of the covenant, so that we zealously engage in that labor and so that we oppose all that is opposed to it. That is what the gospel does.

All the major reformers wrote treatises on the schools. Luther wrote two. In 1524 he wrote the tract “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools.” If you replace the word “Councilmen” with “parents with the encouragement of the consistories,” then you have the two main parts of article 21 of the Reformed Church Order. Melancthon wrote so many textbooks for the schools that he was simply called the Schoolmaster. Ulrich Zwingli wrote two treatises on Christian education. From Luther we read this:

Because they are not willing to support and keep the honest, upright, virtuous schoolmasters and teachers offered to them by God to raise their children in the fear of God and in virtue, knowledge, learning, and honor by dint of hard work, diligence, and industry and at small cost and expense, they will get in their place incompetent substitutes, ignorant louts, such as they have had before, who at a great cost and expense will teach the children nothing but how to be utter asses and beyond to dishonor their wives, daughters, and maidservants, taking over their homes and property as has happened before. This will be the reward of the great and shameful ingratitude into which the devil is so craftily leading them.<sup>5</sup>

The people would not start schools, and Luther clubbed them. He also laid his finger on one of the reasons that there was resistance to the school. Luther, if nothing else, was shrewd. The people would not bear the

3 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 7:512–13.

4 J. H. Merle d’Aubigné, *History of the Reformation* (New York: Hurst & Company), 3:172.

5 Martin Luther, “Sermon on Keeping Children in School,” in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1967), 44:218.



cost. Sometimes the opposition to the school is that vulgar. It is simply a matter of dollars. They won't pay for the school. Sometimes the opposition to the school is vulgar in another sense. The school does not have the right program; the school involves sacrifices for my brilliant student, who has to sit with idiots. And such parents, who have no love for the school and oppose it, teach their children no love for the school. That position is carnal and vulgar. And Luther laid his finger on that.

Luther went after the nobles too. They were the ones who had the money to start the school. Today we would say that Luther went after the rich men, the rich men who had the money to start the school but who would not do it. They would not put their necks to the labor. Luther went after them.

We admit, you say, there should and must be schools. But what is the use of teaching Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and other liberal arts? Could we not teach in German the Bible and God's word, which are sufficient for salvation? Yes, I answer. I know well, alas, that we Germans must ever be and abide brute and wild beasts, as the surrounding nations call us. The arts and languages, which do us no harm, nay, which are a greater ornament, benefit, honor, and advantage both for understanding Holy Writ and for managing civil affairs, we are disposed to despair. And foreign wares, which are neither necessary nor useful, which moreover peel us to the very bone, these are not willing to forego.<sup>6</sup>

Those nobles wanted to spend their money on everything else but the school. And Luther again laid his finger on one of the points of opposition. It was as vulgar as a dollar. They simply did not value education. They did not see it as necessary.

And that Reformation insistence was taken up by the Dutch. H. Bouwman, Church Order commentator during the time of Abraham Kuyper's *Doleantie*, wrote in his Church Order commentary this:

Initially, the fight was only for the Christian school, that is, the school with the Bible, but through force of circumstances the question of the independent, free school comes up. With the development of the controversy, it was necessary that the Christian schools be established and maintained by

associations. The rule ought to be that the school comes from the parents, according to the ordinance of God's covenant. [There he lays his finger on it.] The full task of rearing children rests, first of all, with the parents. It follows from this that the school must stand on the self-same foundation as the Christian home. That is to say, on the basis of the covenant.<sup>7</sup>

When he mentioned controversy, Bouwman meant that when the Reformed churches came into existence in the Netherlands, there was immediately controversy about the school. What are these schools going to be? And he says that through that controversy the Reformed came to understand not only that there had to be schools but also that those schools had to be started by parents. And those schools had to stand on the foundation of God's covenant.

A similar thing happened in the United States in the Christian Reformed Church. The Christian Reformed Church came out of the Reformed Church in America. The Christian Reformed Church was started by men who left the Netherlands because their ability to form Christian schools had been hampered. They wrote that "they wanted freedom to establish their own Christian schools...and to enjoy the great privilege of having their children taught in Christian schools."<sup>8</sup> That is what they wanted, and that is why they came to the United States. In the 1848 minutes of the original Classis Holland of the Dutch immigrants who came to western Michigan, there is this decision:

Art. 6. Rev. Ypma proposes that the interests of the schools shall be discussed. The discussion takes place, and the judgment is: the schools must be promoted and cared for by the church, as being an important part of the Christian calling of God's church on earth. All lukewarmness and coldness toward that cause must be condemned and rebuked.<sup>9</sup>

The school issue is one of the reasons that the Christian Reformed Church separated from the Reformed Church in America and started a new denomination. And the early minutes of the synods and classes of the Christian Reformed Church are full of references to the schools.

In 1870 the Christian Reformed Church said that

6 Quoted in Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 7:514–15.

7 H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht I*, § 51 *Scholen* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1928), [kerkrecht.nl/node/2664](http://kerkrecht.nl/node/2664). The translation of the Dutch is mine.

8 Henry Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church in North America: Its History, Schools, Missions, Creed and Liturgy, Distinctive Principles and Practices and Its Church Government* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eastern Avenue Bookstore, 1923), 139.

9 John H. Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Church: A Study in Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1949), 134.

“the school is the nursery of and for the church, and that every congregation was called to open a free school.”<sup>10</sup>

In 1873: “They obligated consistories to establish free Christian schools.”<sup>11</sup> They obligated them. You must do this. And what was the source of that obligation? The source of every obligation in the life of the child of God: the covenant. That is what the baptism form teaches. God’s covenant obliges you to new obedience. And the Reformed fathers used that language with regard to schools.

Then in 1892 the church insisted that “the congregation take steps to bring such a school into being.” Again, the church advocated the establishment of school societies.<sup>12</sup>

In 1898: “The general synod declares that Christian education according to Reformed principles is the incontrovertible duty of Reformed Christians.” And by “Christian education,” you understand, the Reformed fathers meant schools. It is the “incontrovertible duty.” And the synod warned all the ministers, “All ministers and elders are to work for the cause of Christian education in every place where such is at all possible.” Then the synod grounded that. Why are we telling the churches to start schools?

One, God’s word demands that our children be trained in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Two, the promise of the parents at the time of baptism. Three, there may be no separation between civil, social, or religious life, education, and training. Four, the honor of our king demands it, since all power is given him in heaven and on earth, also in the realm of education and all knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

The same synod also said about the necessity of starting schools that we “must recognize the covenant relationship in which God has placed his children.”<sup>14</sup>

Is that any different from what we are saying? It is not any different at all. That was the position of the Christian Reformed Church way back in 1898. It was under those convictions that the Christian Reformed Church without any hesitation changed the wording of article 21 of the Church Order to read that the consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools established according to the demands of the covenant.

Then in 1936 the Christian Reformed synod was addressed by a church of one of its classes, which asked about the questions of article 41. These questions of article 41 were the origin of the suspension and deposition of two officebearers from Sovereign Reformed Protestant Church. That is how the matter came to classis. That was perfectly legitimate. And the meaning of those questions was also before the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1936. What does that question mean about the consistory’s supporting the good Christian school? And they said, “Schools in article 41 refer to the Christian, primary, grammar, and high school.”<sup>15</sup> Not homeschools.

That is the ploy of many. They want to take all of this history and every reference to Christian education and schools and say, “Well, that applies to a homeschool.” The Christian Reformed Church defined *schools* as grammar and high schools. Schools. And then the Christian Reformed Church said, “The expression *support* means the duty of the consistory to use every proper means to the end that a Christian school may be established where it does not exist.” And about article 21: “They must give wholehearted and unreserved moral backing to the existing Christian schools and a measure of financial help in case of need.” And then in response to the question, “What should we do with a consistory that will not do that?” they said, “Admonish them to repent.”<sup>16</sup> It was a matter of repentance when one would not support the good Christian school. Repentance! You’re anti-covenantal. You’re full of hatred toward your neighbor. You’re an independent. You’re selfish and loveless. Repent. That was the Reformed position. That was the Reformed position from the beginning.

The school as an institution is the command of God. The school is necessary as a demand of God’s covenant. And that is what you must understand from the speech tonight. The necessity of the Christian school, the demand of the Christian school, the command of the Christian school, the basis of the Christian school is the covenant, the covenant, the covenant, the covenant.

I thank you.

—NJL

10 Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church in North America*, 140.

11 Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church in North America*, 140.

12 Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Church*, 134.

13 *Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church 1898*, 38.

14 Robert P. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 356.

15 *Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church 1936*, 35.

16 Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Church*, 135.

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

## LAW AND GOSPEL, FAITH AND REPENTANCE (2): BY GOSPEL GRACE ALONE

*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. — Psalm 139:23–24*

### *Repentance as Salvation in Christ by Faith*

There are three reasons that the preaching of the gospel of gracious salvation in Jesus Christ and faith in that gospel are necessary for true, heartfelt repentance in light of the holy law of God as summarized in the ten commandments.

The first reason is that, according to the word of God, the gift of salvation, including repentance and faith, is tied to the name of Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the gospel (Acts 4:12). The preaching of the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16). The preaching of the gospel is the wisdom of God that makes foolish the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 1:18–21), so that those who are saved by the gospel know it (the knowledge of experience) as the power of God to their salvation. It is the gospel that brings salvation according to the living and abiding word of God, which word is communicated through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:23–25).

The second reason is that the Holy Spirit applies the power of Christ to the elect through the preaching of the gospel. As the Heidelberg Catechism places the doctrines of Lord's Days 32 and 33 in their proper order, it teaches that true conversion, including repentance, is the result of Christ's renewing the believer after Christ's own image by the Holy Spirit. True conversion follows deliverance through faith in Christ alone.

These first two reasons are related to one another because grace must be truly proclaimed to be grace. If repentance were to be out of the law, by the law, or of the nature of the law, by the very definition of the law, repentance must have two aspects that are the opposite of grace. Repentance must then be of man—a human effort or a human achievement—and repentance must merit. The nature of the law is what man must do apart from God. The nature of the law is merit. “Do this and live.”

How important it is to keep repentance away from the

law as the law and to see repentance always as the fruit of the grace of the gospel of salvation in Christ alone! If repentance were of the law or according to the law, repentance would always have the same character as the sham of good works according to the law without faith and without the gospel. Repentance according to the law is legalistic and cannot rise to the level of the perfection that the law requires. That kind of repentance must lead to despair or rebellion that will turn repentance into impenitence. Another possibility of repentance in relation only to law is that repentance is merely an outward, superficial sham and self-oriented appearance. It is the fasting that seeks and rests in the praise of men (Matt. 6:16).

It is necessary to issue a sharp warning against legalistic, law-centered, and law-conforming repentance. This is the repentance promoted by hyper-Calvinism. Hyper-Calvinism denies the public, promiscuous preaching of the gospel and legalistically limits the preaching of the gospel, with the summons to believe on Christ, strictly to those who demonstrate some kind of ability to believe the gospel. (In this respect hyper-Calvinism is the mirror opposite of the well-meant offer. While the well-meant offer, building upon the public and promiscuous preaching of the gospel, arrives at a general love of God and a desire to save all those who hear the preaching, hyper-Calvinism demands that the particularity of God's love in election limit the number of those who are to hear the preaching of the gospel.) How is this limitation of hyper-Calvinism practically applied? The law without the gospel is to be publicly and promiscuously preached. When certain persons under that preaching of the law show signs of distress, being burdened by the law, it is taken as a sign of God's Spirit working according to the decree of election. So the elect are given repentance by the preaching of the law. After the condition of repentance is met by those distressed persons, only then may they hear the preaching of the gospel.

The understanding is that they will then believe in Christ Jesus, as he is offered conditionally to them in the gospel. Practically, then, this doctrine of hyper-Calvinism ascribes repentance to the law separated from the gospel.

The warning must be clearly sounded. This doctrine of hyper-Calvinism is the necessary result of drawing an absolute division between repentance and faith and requiring repentance as a necessary condition to faith. This view of repentance, making it prior to faith, keeps repentance from being a proper repentance before God, such a complete and thorough humbling of the sinner as a sinner before God. Legalistic repentance is the necessary result: shallow, superficial, and pleasing to the flesh.

A very similar kind of repentance is to be seen in the same light, and the same warning must be given about it. That is a repentance that is a substitute for true repentance. It is a legalistic repentance in that it earns the favor of men and is pleasing to the flesh; and because it is false and not from the heart, it is displeasing to God as a sham of true repentance. This repentance is the mere *doctrine* of repentance. It is a thorough understanding of the true doctrine of repentance. Its language is the language of knowledge. Its language gives all place to the knowledge of sin and the depths of depravity. This mere doctrine of repentance can even confess total depravity and plumb the depths of the law and the application of the law to the human condition according to the consequences of Adam's fall into original sin. It can know intimately what repentance is as true, heartfelt sorrow for sin and a heartfelt determination no longer to sin. It can lecture on repentance. But it substitutes mere knowledge for reality, intellectual depth for the depths of the heart. What makes this substitute for true repentance so displeasing before God is that it is actually an expression of intellectual pride. It is the opposite of a broken spirit and a contrite heart, which are the well-pleasing sacrifices of God (Ps. 51:17).

So must the gospel of Christ be placed at the center of the public worship of the church of Jesus Christ. So must that gospel occupy the same place in all the work of the church. The gospel must control and be the power of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper. So must the gospel be preached in the church in connection with the administration of the sacraments. So must the Reformed rules be maintained that the sacraments are only to be administered by men ordained to the office of the ministry of the word and sacraments and in the congregation

where God's people are gathered to hear the word of God. That gospel must also control the work of Christian discipline for the care of the sheep of the flock that go astray. Indeed, discipline must be carried out according to the law of God. The sheep are to be cared for by the rule of God's word alone. The word of man must be rejected as wholly unsuitable for the sheep of God's pasture. The law of God alone is to be used to show to the sheep where, how, and how far they have strayed. But the gospel must also be brought to bring the sheep to repentance over their sins. The law can never do it. Even the sheep gone astray must know that the power of God's grace alone is their only restoration to the path of the divine word of truth. Not their sorrow. Not their repentance. Not their confessions.

### *Assurance for Repentance*

The third reason that the preaching of the gospel and faith must come before repentance is the application of the gospel

through faith to the consciousness and conscience of the elect child of God. The gospel of the forgiveness of sins gives the child of God the clear, gracious pathway back to his Father in heaven. The gospel of the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ alone gives the child of God the blessed knowledge that enables him to take that pathway back to his heavenly Father and to bring before the Father all the sins that he has committed and all his depravity that he carries

as the fountain of pollution within. The child of God is assured that forgiveness is his: his to ask, his to receive, his to take with him in his heart and soul through all his life on the earth. He is able to say in the depths of his heart before God, "O wretched man that I am," at the same time giving thanks to God for divine deliverance through the free gift of justification (Rom. 7:24–25).

At two distinct points the Heidelberg Catechism, in accordance with scripture, identifies the law as the proper means for repentance in relationship to the gospel of salvation in Christ through faith. In Lord's Day 1 the believer makes his confession that his only comfort is belonging to Jesus Christ in life and in death. Immediately following that glorious, full confession, the Heidelberg Catechism states what is necessary for the believer to know in order to live and die happily in that comfort: "how great my sins and miseries are" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 83–84). The source of that knowledge, according to the following question and answer, is the law of God. This is the law that is identified as God's moral law according to its summary

If repentance is of the law or according to the law, it will always come to have the same character as the sham of good works according to the law without faith and without the gospel.

given by Christ in Matthew 22:37–39. The knowledge of sin and misery according to the law of God follows upon faith's confession of comfort. The comfort of the gospel of peace with God through Christ alone is that which enables the believer to explore the depths of his misery before God. It enables the believer to confess the depths of all his depravity before God. It enables him to confess his most heinous sins before God. The child of God knows that by the righteousness of Christ he is justified and forgiven.

In Lord's Day 44 the Heidelberg Catechism makes the second distinct point. Why is the law to be "so strictly preached" to the believer in Jesus Christ? This question appears in the middle of the last section of the Heidelberg Catechism. It is asked of the believer who is delivered from his sins and miseries by the righteousness of Christ. It is asked of the believer who is fully conscious of his deliverance. It is asked of him in his walk of thankfulness to God for salvation. It is asked of the believer as he comes to the Lord's house to gather with the company of the redeemed to hear God's law strictly preached.

This first reason for the strict preaching of the law is so "that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin and righteousness in Christ" (A 115, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 134). This reason for the strict preaching of the law of God is for the greater knowledge of the believer's sinful nature. The believer, given the gift of faith by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, is graciously given the law for his help. He is to attend to the strict preaching of the law. His attendance is to know the law in its application to him. God's law does not show the believer what kind of progress he has made. The law does not affirm how good a Christian he is. The Catechism's point about the strict preaching of God's law is to give the believer a greater understanding of his sin. With the gospel of Christ in his heart by faith, this knowledge does not bring about the believer's condemnation. Nor does it lead him to doubt his salvation. The purpose of the law is not wrath but grace, to lead the believer again to the cross. The law's purpose is to make the believer "the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin and righteousness of Christ."

This same purpose of the law is evident in the Form for the Administration of Baptism. This form expresses the doctrine of holy baptism this way: since we have our baptism as an undoubted seal and testimony that we have an eternal covenant of grace with God, we are led not to carnal security in sin nor to despair over sin but to know that we always have forgiveness with God. Since by their baptism believers are to know that this covenant of grace is unconditional, this knowledge is their admonition and assurance that they will always find a God whose mercy is

infinite, who is ready to forgive their sins and assure them of their pardon.

It is most striking that the first point of examination undertaken by believers before coming to the Lord's supper is of the knowledge of their sins. "Every one [must] consider by himself his sins and the curse due to him for them, to the end that he may abhor and humble himself before God" (Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 268). It is important that this specific point of knowledge stands in the service of coming to the table of the Lord to partake of the signs and seals of the body and blood of Christ. This examination is undertaken by the believer, exercising himself in Spirit-wrought faith, for the purpose of coming to the table of the Lord to be confirmed in the knowledge of his salvation.

### *Freed by the Gospel to Repent*

The gospel gives this confidence of faith in the grace of God to his people in Christ. In this confidence they are to know themselves thoroughly in the light of God's holy law. In this confidence they are to come to their merciful God in all the brokenness of their hearts over their sins and depravity.

True faith, so formed in the heart and soul of the believer by the work of the Spirit through the gospel of Christ, is all the strength of true repentance over sin. This true faith will refuse to come before God for forgiveness with vain, formal words upon the lips. This true faith will refuse to hide itself in mere assertions of the doctrine of repentance. This true faith, for the sake of the battle against sin, expresses itself in the prayer of Psalm 139:23: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts." True faith expresses its praise of God's law for its ability to show what lies within. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word" (119:9).

The assurance of God's mercy from the gospel applied to his heart by the power of the Spirit is the confidence that allows the believer to plumb the depths of his heart and soul. He has the blessed assurance that, however deep he goes and whatever he sees there, he has the blood of Christ throughout his nature for its cleansing. It is his blessedness to know that, whatever filth he finds within himself with the light of God's law, the gospel is with him to assure him that God will surely and certainly pardon it for the sake of Christ's righteousness alone as he confesses that filth to God.

By the power of the gospel the believer is free to discover his sins. He is free to own them entirely and wholly before God. He is freed from the need to make excuses. He is freed from the need to diminish the heinousness of

his sins or to diminish the accursedness of his guilt for his sins. He is free to be wholly broken in heart and wholly cast down before his God in Christ. He is free to lay hold on forgiveness without any ground in himself. He does not feel the need to declare before God anything about his confession of sin being meritorious or being the only way of receiving forgiveness. He *has* the mercy of God in all its glory by the cross of Jesus Christ proclaimed to him in the gospel of Christ. The believer has that mercy by faith alone in Christ alone.

This same knowledge of the gospel places the believing child of God in the proper frame of mind to take up the bitter fight against sin. His beginning point must be the same for justification as for sanctification: the cross of Christ proclaimed in the gospel. By faith the believing child of God is brought not just before the mercy of God promised in God's word but also before the cross of Christ by faith, to know from that sacrifice his forgiveness of sins in the clearest and most direct way. By the preaching of that same gospel, the apostle Paul wrote about the churches of Galatia, "Before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you" (Gal. 3:1). The cross of Christ, seen and known by faith, is the seal and testimony of the forgiveness of sins. That same cross is also the power of the mortification of the old man, the power of true conversion. As proclaimed in the gospel, that sacrifice is the power to

hate sin more and more and the power to fight against it in the power of the Spirit of Christ.

In light of the glorious gospel of the forgiveness of sins by the abundant mercy of God in Christ Jesus, Psalm 139 is of great value in repentance. This word of God leads the child of God on a journey first through himself, then through heaven and hell, through "the uttermost parts of the sea" and the depths of darkness, and then again through the believer's frame from beginning to end. The result of this journey is an appeal to God, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me" (vv. 23–24).

How can this prayer be raised by the believer? How can he pray this from the heart? How can he so openly plead with God to turn him inside out, to show him everything about himself? How can he so zealously seek the application to himself of the perfect law of the holy and righteous God, and that as the work of God himself?

Only because the believer has the ground of the prayer that ends the psalm: "and lead me in the way everlasting." Not in himself, not in his repentance, not in his confession, and not in the law of God. Only in Christ, in whom is all the righteousness of the law for justification. Only in Christ, who has removed all the curse and condemnation of the law by his sacrifice on the cross.

—MVW

## CONTRIBUTION

# THE LAW AND GOSPEL DISTINCTION APPLIED TO EDUCATION (1)

**T**he perennial contrast that exists between the role of the law in salvation versus the role of the gospel in salvation is profound. The gospel saves; the law damns. When the separate function of each one becomes confused in our thinking, however, the problem is as profound as the difference between the two roles. When such confusion is allowed to permeate our idea of how we ought to teach our children, that problem enters a realm that is particularly problematic. Do we educate our children using a framework for education that is modeled after the law or after the gospel? That is the question. Ultimately, those are the only two choices we have. And the answer affects souls.

What would be a *law model* for education? The law says, "Do this, and you will live; don't do this, and you will die." It is a system of good rewards versus bad consequences. Which one you end up with is up to you and the behavior that you choose to exhibit. Work hard, study hard, follow the rules, and you will likely receive an *A*. Don't do the work, don't follow the rules, don't bother to study, and you will likely receive a poor grade. The result depends on the student's ability, motivation, and drive. It is up to the student to perform.

Under the law you get what you deserve. Under the gospel, however, you don't. A *gospel model* for education will function quite differently. The gospel is all about grace,

the undeserved favor and love of God. The gospel is all about free and unconditional salvation. The gospel of God takes the law of God and turns it inside out, so to speak.

Note well that the gospel does not annihilate the law. Quite the opposite, in fact. Jesus said that he came to fulfill the law, not to destroy it. “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Matt. 5:17). But in fulfilling the law, Jesus did more than simply keep the law of God perfectly for us. His obedience to the law not only counts as ours in God’s plan of salvation, but also his obedience affected the law itself. The law is established. “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Rom. 3:31). This means that the foundation of the law is set. What is the sum of the law? First, to love God and then, *ipso facto*, to love the neighbor. Thus it was in the Old Testament, and thus it is now. So what has changed? The *possibility* of keeping the law has changed, and that has everything to do with Jesus Christ and his work of salvation. This is not to be confused with our *ability* to obey the law or even with Christ’s ability to obey it. Possibility is the issue, not ability.

It is true that only Jesus Christ as the Son of God was able to obey the law of God perfectly. It is also true that only those who are in Jesus Christ and have been given the Holy Spirit to live in their hearts will be able to obey the law of God with the principle of a small beginning. But before the gospel came, before Jesus Christ loved God perfectly in our place while dying on the accursed cross in order to atone for all of our sins, the law could not be *fully* obeyed by any mere man at all, ever. It was impossible even for Adam, though Adam was perfect. Why? Because in the end, obeying the law of God amounts to pure, full, and complete gratitude to God. That is what pure, full, and complete love for God is. In order to understand how this applies to Adam, it may be helpful to answer two more questions.

First, how could any of the Old Testament children of God be fully and completely grateful for a salvation that had not yet happened in time? Christ, the promised Messiah, still had to come. Even though his coming was absolutely certain and, from that point of view, thanks could be given for salvation in the Old Testament as well as in the New, the fact remained that those main events involving salvation still needed to unfold. Satan still roamed the roads in heaven and needed to be cast out of God’s dwelling place forever, even though there was no doubt that Satan would be defeated and forever cast out. Now

to see such salvation come in all its glory, power, wonder, and wisdom gives both the angels and the children of God every reason to thank and praise God in all purity and fullness forever and ever. Such was the celebration in heaven when Christ ascended his throne there.

Concerning Adam, however, one more question remains. In Adam and Eve’s perfect existence before the fall, they could thank God for many things, and they undoubtedly did; but they knew nothing of thanking God for a bloody sacrifice that would atone for all their sins. Not until they experienced how utterly miserable sin is and not until God sought them out in the garden and made them coats of skins to cover their nakedness did they begin to comprehend that news, news that was the gospel to them. Before they fell such news would have meant little or nothing to them. They would not have understood. After they fell that news would have meant everything to them. And that is what the gospel is to all of us. It is everything.

That the gospel is everything to us will include how we view education. There is a gospel model for education. What might such a model look like? On the surface it might not look so different from a law model. Even though the law of God and the gospel of God are diametrically opposed to one another in what they contribute

to salvation, the gospel never destroys the law of God. Rather, the gospel changes the law’s use. The law of God is good. But that law of God naturally functions from the outside in. The law is an external power that leaves only two options for those placed under it: obey and live or disobey and die. And since this is God’s law and God is absolutely perfect and holy and righteous, the obedience that he requires must be absolutely perfect as well. The law of God is indeed good. It is absolutely good. Nor is the good law of God thrown out of a gospel model for education. Instead, the law is seen differently within such a model.

Under the law, to disobey and die is the only option left for all men. “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). No mere human has obeyed nor ever will obey the law of God perfectly; and even if any human could, he would still bear the guilt of original sin. Thus all men from all time are bound under the law’s sentence of condemnation. It is bondage of and unto death. But that is not life in the gospel.

What is life in the gospel? It is to be set free from that bondage of death under the law unto the freedom of life in the gospel. And here we must take one step back before moving forward, for this is where many people stumble.

To be joined to Christ is to already have everything because Christ is our all; he has everything. What could we possibly lack?

They hear the word *freedom*, and they immediately think that there is freedom to sin if one pleases; and so they charge the gospel itself with antinomianism. Those who make such a charge have no concept of what this freedom really is. It is no freedom to sin.

The bondage we were under was exactly this: we were bound to sin. In Adam we were not only “free,” or able, to sin; but we became bound and doomed to sin, so that sin is our bondage. To continue in the misery of sin is part of the death we deserve. Although Adam’s last breath would be many years hence, the very day that Adam sinned, his body began its descent into the grave. That was his physical death. Adam’s spiritual death occurred that same day as well. God did not lie when he said that the day Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, he would surely die. On that same day our spiritual death occurred with him. We became bound to be sinners who can do nothing but sin every moment and every hour. That is our spiritual death and misery. To sin is not our freedom. Freedom is being able to serve God perfectly with no sin at all. To be bound under the law as a sinner is to be held in bondage to sin. It is to be a slave to sin in no less manner than the children of Israel were slaves to the Egyptians. That is our bondage under the law. And we deserve it.

Now enters the gospel. Jesus Christ. The Son of God come into our guilty, hell-bound flesh. In his very person is salvation. He *is* salvation. The miracle of all miracles! That is the gospel. The cross was the culmination of our deliverance in time, but that deliverance was already there in eternity, and eternity was there on the cross. It took that kind of miracle, a miracle involving both eternity and time, to save us from the never-ending death that we deserve. And now men charge that unfathomably glorious and wondrous gospel with antinomianism? The charge is blasphemous. It is to say that Jesus Christ saved us so that now we can sin even more. To answer that accusation will help us to understand what life in the gospel really is and how that life can be applied to education.

The writers of the Canons of Dordt understood the false charge of antinomianism very well, and their response to it constitutes the whole of the Canons. Their attitude toward that charge is especially revealed in the conclusion to the Canons. They wrote of that false charge as that which they “detest[ed] with their whole soul.”<sup>1</sup> The conclusion explicitly begins with a holy rant against the Remonstrants’ charge of antinomianism, a charge that impugns the doctrines of grace and especially the truth of predestination. To teach predestination, election and reprobation, the Remonstrants said, “by its own proper

nature and impulse, draws away the minds of men from all piety and religion.”<sup>2</sup> The delegates to the Synod of Dordt went on to write at length about that false charge, which tells us what the whole of the Canons is really about. The synod was countering the five points of the Remonstrants, and those five points amounted to exactly this charge: that being comforted and assured by the doctrine of election will *ipso facto* make you careless and profane. In today’s language that can be stated in these terms: if you truly believe in an unconditional covenant and you begin your soteriology with election, you will necessarily be a “doctrinal antinomian,” even if you do not exhibit the signs of being a practical antinomian—yet. There is nothing new under the sun, as Solomon observed. The apostle Paul was accused of that, as was Jesus himself. Paul’s answer to that charge was “God forbid.” “What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (Rom. 6:15).

All of this applies to education. To conceive of a scenario where the law is the main basis for instruction is quite easy to do. “Do this, and you get that” is not difficult to understand. And there is truth to that! Things really do happen that way. There are consequences for certain behaviors, whether the consequences be pleasant or unpleasant. But is that all there is? If we have administered the law, if we have communicated certain facts about this or that subject, have we done our full duty to the students, so that they have truly learned and grown in their understanding of the boundless glory of God? To ask the question is to answer it. No. There must be a certain freedom involved in order to truly learn and grow: a freedom to wonder, to ponder, to ask questions, to discover, and to express what one has found to be true.

To ask *what* is a beginning. To ask *how* is to go further. To ask *why* gets at the core of the matter. And discovery is key to all of that. If I am simply told that fifteen divided by three equals five, I might remember that fact. I also might not. I can believe that fact is true, but I don’t know how the division works, and I certainly don’t know why. In this case it is a matter of sheer memorization for me to know that fifteen divided by three equals five. I don’t understand it, but I will take the teacher’s word for it that it is true. Have I learned? I wrote down the correct answer! I obeyed the law!

The problem is, I discovered nothing. I haven’t put two and two together in my own mind. I haven’t learned how to think. Retaining facts is only the beginning. I have to know how to use those facts, how to apply them, and how to see them in relation to one another. I have to

1 *The Articles of the Synod of Dort*, trans. Thomas Scott (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856), 234.

2 *The Articles of the Synod of Dort*, 232.



understand the *why* of them. And how does one acquire that kind of deep and lasting knowledge? It is by discovery. When one discovers something, one now knows it by experience. One *understands* it. It is an aha moment. Even if someone is teaching me a concept, in the end I have to reach the conclusions involved in the concept myself if I am going to truly understand it. If I am simply told what facts to remember without myself struggling to grasp how those facts function together and why they are important, have I learned, and will I likely remember them, simply because I was told to? Even if I do remember them, what good will it do me if that is all I know?

That is the way the law works. The law tells you what to do. Period. And there are consequences for not doing what the law tells you to do. Ultimately, are those commands of God, as infinitely righteous and authoritative as they are, going to impart to you the strength to actually obey the commands? No, they will not. And that truth is incontrovertibly creedal. Canons of Dort 3–4.5–6 cannot be denied:

5. The reason (...or purpose...) of the decalogue, particularly delivered from God by Moses to the Jews, is the same as that of the light of nature; for when indeed it exposes the magnitude of sin, and more and more convicts man of guilt, yet it neither discloses a remedy, nor confers the power of emerging from misery; so that, being rendered weak through the transgression of the flesh, it leaves him under the curse, and man cannot through it obtain saving grace.
6. What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law could do, *that* God performs by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the word, or the ministry of reconciliation; which is the Gospel concerning the Messiah, by which it hath pleased God to save believers, as well under the Old as under the New Testament.<sup>3</sup>

These articles, which are based entirely on scripture, might be swept under the rug and ignored (and often are!), but they cannot be denied. This is creedal. This is Reformed. This is scriptural. The law does not and cannot save or impart strength to obey the law. Only the gospel saves. Only the gospel imparts faith, and faith is the only thing from which all the blessings of salvation can proceed, including the blessing of obedience to the law.

Only the gospel gives the full *why* to obey the law of God. Apart from the gospel, there are only two reasons to obey the law. One reason is out of fear of damnation, and the other is

a desire for self-preservation out of self-love. Article 24 of the Belgic Confession throws both of these reasons over the cliff as wholly unacceptable.<sup>4</sup> To obey the law for selfish reasons amounts to nothing more than a ruse of pious behavior and is no true obedience at all. With the gospel, however, there is every good reason to obey the law of God, and that reason may be summed up in one word: gratitude. Only the gospel can give a sinner that kind of grateful, enamored heart out of which genuine obedience flows.

Before the fall Adam could love God, and he did; but he also could sin, and he did. After the fall Adam could not possess any measure of love for God without the gospel being applied to him first. Thus it is for all of us sinners for all time. To love God is an infinitely strict command, but it is more than a command. It is also an infinitely blessed privilege, which makes this command to be of an entirely different nature than a command that a master might demand of a slave. To love God is no bondage. To love God is and must be a matter of freedom, or it is no love. And more, Adam's love for God after the fall and after Adam was given the gospel was no mere repair job. Adam's love was a new and better love, a love that was not possible before the fall. It was an incorruptible love. Adam's first love for God was in Adam himself, and thus it could be lost. Adam's second love for God was in Christ and therefore could not be lost, ever. Indeed, Jesus Christ *is* the second Adam (1 Cor. 15:45).

To consider what the gospel is will help us to understand how all of this is so. The gospel is Jesus Christ. The gospel is all our salvation. And Jesus Christ is our righteousness. He is our justification. He is our sanctification. He is our holiness. He is our all.

The gospel does more than give us a correct, grateful motive to love God and obey his law. If that were all that the gospel did, we would still not obey the law. We are sinners. Sheer intent is not enough. But God through Jesus Christ gives us the actual obedience of gratitude too. He must give us the willing and the doing and the thanks, and he does. This is the gospel. In the gospel we have everything.

The devil is not finished with his tricks though. A wrong inference might still be drawn, which would presume that God gives us this obedience in Jesus Christ *so that* we can be saved, as if this proper and grateful obedience must contribute somehow to our salvation. The truth of the gospel is hard for us to grasp because we are still such sinners. We can barely understand what real thankfulness is. When God gives us the gratitude that he wants us to have, we must understand it to be a matter of

<sup>3</sup> *The Articles of the Synod of Dort*, 207.

<sup>4</sup> “Therefore it is so far from being true that this justifying faith makes men remiss in a pious and holy life, that on the contrary, without it they would never do anything out of love to God, but only out of self-love or fear of damnation” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 53).

resting in Jesus Christ, not a matter of trying to see how many good works we can add to a religious scorecard. Gratitude is not a game. Jesus Christ played the game already, so to speak, and there are no more moves left to make. He won, and we won in him. Gratitude is to enjoy and to live in that victory. Gratitude is not an attempt to get something more from God. How could we do that? To be joined to Christ is to already have everything because Christ is our all; he has everything. What could we possibly lack? Gratitude is to rest fully contented in Christ's saving work alone, seeking nothing more outside of him and his gifts. That such contentment constitutes the tenth and final commandment is no coincidence. Contentment is the sum of gratitude.

God made this plain to Abraham: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1). That is justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification all in one. Or, more literally, all in One. What might we yet lack? Because we have not yet reached the glorification part of salvation in time, is that what we still need? We still pray to God to request of him many things, do we not? Isn't that proof of some lack? We ask God for forgiveness exactly because we do not presently experience it, isn't that correct?

No, that is not correct at all. God spoke in the present tense to Abraham. I *am* thy shield. I am. I AM. Abraham lacked nothing. Nor do we. One might scoff that the end of time has not yet come, and so we still look forward to receiving that final perfection. We don't really have everything yet then...right?

Does God lie? Does the I AM THAT I AM lie? Creatures of dust have a difficult time understanding that God does not lie. This means that *we* have a difficult time understanding this. But no, God does not lie. God *is* our shield and our exceeding great reward. We don't wait for that to be true. That *is* true. Of course, there are events that still must happen in time. But that is the point: they *must* happen. They will. And as far as eternity is concerned, they already have happened. To speak foolishly (for that is all we can do on this earth), eternity has already begun. The child of God stands with one foot on earth and one foot in heaven—right now. That is Lord's Day 22, answer 58: "Since I now feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy..." (*Confessions and Church Order*, 105). Even though we dwell in another country at the moment, we are citizens of heaven—right now. And not only can we know that, but we also do know it.

That we belong to heaven means that when this universe is rolled up like a scroll, we will not be rolled up with it. We will be left standing. There was never any question about that, even though time has not yet come to a close. What God has determined from all eternity to be in time

*will be*. Time is a creature that God has made, along with all the creatures found inside of time. Did he not turn the sundial back ten degrees just to prove it (2 Kings 20:11; Isa. 38:8)? Only God can do that. But there is more proof still. God is not stingy in his gifts or in his proofs.

Jesus Christ ascended into heaven in all power, glory, and honor. That means we are there in heaven too. The union that binds us to Christ is faith, nothing more and nothing less. This means that by faith, by union to Jesus Christ, we are there in heaven right now too. This is our reality, creatures of time though we still may be. Because that is not all we are. We were not just born in time. We were also conceived in the mind and decree of God from all eternity. That is our reality. That is our election, our election in Jesus Christ. We would never know that except it were revealed unto us by God, but that does not change the fact of it. We are creatures of time, and we are creatures of eternity as well. We were there in eternity. We were not there in ourselves, but in Christ we were really there.

If we think we cannot comprehend all of this, that is understandable; it is certain that we cannot. How can creatures of time comprehend eternity? We can't. But the truths of *time in eternity* and *eternity in time* happened. They happened in Jesus Christ, in his very person. They happened when the Son of God became flesh and dwelt among us. We must return to that miracle again and again. Indeed, we will spend eternity returning to it. Christ is the elect one, the elect head. Without him our election not only has no meaning, but also there is no election at all. As our elect head he ascended into heaven, so that we are there in heaven too. May we say that we are physically there? Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. Our bodies will not be in heaven until the final resurrection, when they are made new. Yet we *may* say that we are in heaven even now. Why? Because Jesus Christ our head, to whom we are very really united, is bodily there in heaven right now. That is the reality. If he is there, so are we. Period.

That reality will count for great significance in a gospel-based education. When students are seen through the lens of the gospel, they are seen as citizens of heaven. That is how they need to be taught: as little citizens of heaven. Through the lens of the law, they will instead be seen as those who still need conversion and salvation or as "little vipers," as Jonathan Edwards has famously called them. Within the mindset of the gospel, however, Edwards' words become infamous. Such children already have one foot in heaven, just like the adults. At the baptism of infants we confess that they are sanctified in Christ. Not that they will be sanctified if they do enough good works but that they *are* sanctified even as tiny infants, even without their knowledge, even without a good work to their name. A godly education will prepare children for and

instruct them in living that heavenly life that they already possess. They might indeed appear to be little vipers; but if we are honest, before the whole world we adults look like nothing more than big vipers. Faith doesn't live by what is seen. Faith lives by what is not seen (Heb. 11:1).

We may note here that Isaac and Rebekah understood very well that this did not mean that all of their children head for head were elect citizens of heaven. There are Jacobs, and there are Esaus. But this *does* mean that we raise all of our children as citizens who belong to heaven. Whether they actually possess the citizenship papers to the land of Canaan or not is not our judgment to make. God told us that he would take his children from our children (Gen. 17:7). That is all we need to know and act upon.

In practical terms, what will such an education with an eye on heaven look like? Life on this earth is still necessary, after all. Instruction will still need to apply to what happens here. The difference, however, is that when one lives in the gospel, there is more. This life is not all there is. Heaven is not just a goal. Heaven is a present reality. How then do citizens of heaven live on this earth? That is the question that a gospel-based education attempts to answer.

With that in mind we may also ask, how does God teach *us*? Does he use the law or the gospel? Does he simply throw facts at us, or does he allow us to discover and learn by experience? Lessons learned by experience tend to be remembered much more vividly and certainly. Lessons learned by experience are “owned” by the student. God is the master teacher. When he teaches us something, we learn it. We own it. He knows how to teach. His example will show us how to teach. So once more, how does God teach us?

By his Word and Spirit is the simple answer. That is also the full answer. There are necessary facts that are communicated to us in the scriptures, facts we otherwise would never know or guess. How were the worlds created? None of us saw those events happen. We must be told by him who knows how creation happened. He was there. He did it. But the scriptures are much more than a set of true historical facts of which we may be informed. When we are taught by God's Word and Spirit, there is a whole other dimension to the teaching besides setting forth information. Scripture explains this as well: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Heb. 11:3). Through faith. That is the key. Faith and discovery go together. Faith and learning go together. Faith and understanding go together. They go together exactly because of what faith *is*.

Faith is not something we do, as many would have us to believe—that faith is a “doing.” Faith inevitably and infallibly results in a verb, but faith itself is not a verb. Faith is a noun that we are given. It is a gift. Nor is our reception of faith something we must do, which is nothing more than yet another ploy of Satan to deceive the sheep concerning the doctrine of faith. Our receiving of faith has nothing to do with the meaning of faith. We are passive in our reception of faith. The only one active in faith is God, as he alone gives it to whomsoever he wills. And his saving gifts are irresistible. He is God. If he gives something to someone, will that one be able to refuse his gift? The answer to that question could not be clearer. Does God ever fail to accomplish his will? No, never. He is God. Whomever God delights to unite to his Son will surely be united to Jesus Christ. That is faith. It is what *God* does. God, by the Holy Spirit, who works faith in us, unites us to Jesus Christ. Faith is an instrument in God's hands, not ours.

All of this translates into education because that is also exactly what God does when he gives us faith, uniting us to Jesus Christ: he educates us. He instructs us. He teaches us. He reveals his truth to us insofar as we are able to bear it. That is why we often think of covenant

history as unfolding. In the Old Testament God showed the Israelites with more and more clarity who their savior would be. It was a learning process for them. And so it is for us. Jesus sent the comforter, his Holy Spirit, into our hearts—in order to do what? In order to teach us more and more of his truth (John 14:26). It is a learning process for us in the New Testament as well. God teaches, and we learn. That is our salvation. When God gives us faith, we are the saved ones. When God teaches us, we are the saved ones too. Faith and learning go together.

We might throw our hands up at this point and say, “But we can't teach like that!” Can we enter a child's heart like the Holy Spirit enters ours to create that bond that unites us to Jesus Christ? Not at all, but that is not the point. The point is that real learning happens from the inside out and not from the outside in. That is how the gospel operates as well, from the inside out. The law by itself operates from the outside in. That is why Paul said that the law was “weak” and “beggarly” (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:9). The law cannot save. Only the gospel saves, and it does so from the inside out. Nevertheless, the gospel does not throw the law of God out as if it were useless. On the contrary, the gospel uses the law to great effect. That is how the law of God enters our hearts, after all. God writes

Gratitude is to rest fully  
contented in Christ's saving work  
alone, seeking nothing more  
outside of him and his gifts.

his law in our hearts (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10; 10:16). The law has no power of its own to enter into our hearts. All the law can do is externally exert its rightful authority over us with all of its threats, guilt, and consequences. But God takes that law and places it within our hearts. With that law placed inside of us, we love that law. It is no bondage for us to obey it. It is exquisitely blissful freedom and privilege to obey it. All we want to do is obey it. Not that I *have to* love God, even though that is abundantly true. But there is no hope in that command alone. Rather, all hope abides in this: that I *get to* love God. That is what Reformed Protestant education will be all about—*gift and privilege*.

This is just an initial attempt to understand what education modeled after the gospel might look like. Many questions remain. Let it suffice to say that the goal and purpose of Reformed Protestant education is not to learn how to earn a million dollars or more so that the schools and churches can be supported by future generations. That may happen in God's providence, but that is not

the end goal. That is only an outward circumstance that God may or may not grant according to his will. Earthly wealth can be used of God for blessing or for cursing. Rather, the ultimate purpose and goal of Christian education is to be prepared for heaven. That is an inward thing, and that is a sure thing. That is where all our riches lie. No man knows the day or the hour, but that the day of the Son of man's appearance is near is no secret. God has plainly revealed to us the signs of Christ's coming. He has also plainly told us it will happen soon. That is what we look for at this point in history. That is what we need to know. That is the knowledge that prepares us for all the tribulation that is to come in what remains of this earthly history, and that knowledge also prepares us for all the blessedness of the new heavens and earth that we may anticipate with all certainty. God is with us, and he will be with us forever. That is the point of it all. That is all that matters. That is what education in the sphere of the gospel is all about.

—Connie L. Meyer

## FAITH AND LIFE

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

### IDEALISM (3)

Before entering into the consequences of idealism, it is worth understanding some important ramifications that Plato drew from his cave analogy.<sup>1</sup> Philosophy alone is able to enter into the world of truth in order to understand it. Philosophy alone is able to return back to the world occupied by men and their thoughts and actions. The philosopher therefore ought to occupy a prominent position in “the republic.” The philosopher ought to be the king of the republic or at least be acknowledged as a guiding force in the republic. The knowledge of ideas from the realm of the ideal is the wisdom that ought to guide the republic, as well as defend and preserve it from all enemies.

So Plato wrote in his *Republic*:

But we have brought you into the world to be rulers of the hive, kings of yourselves and of the other

citizens, and have educated you far better and more perfectly than they have been educated, and you are better able to share in the double duty. Wherefore each of you, when his turn comes, must go down to the general underground abode, and get the habit of seeing in the dark. When you have acquired the habit, you will see ten thousand times better than the inhabitants of the den, and you will know what the several images are, and what they represent, because you have seen the beautiful and just and good in their truth. And thus our State, which is also yours, will be a reality, and not a dream only, and will be administered in a spirit unlike that of other States, in which men fight with one another about shadows only and are distracted in the struggle for power, which in their eyes is a great good.<sup>2</sup>

1 See Martin VanderWal, “Idealism (2),” *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 8 (December 1, 2022): 34–37.

2 Plato, *Republic* (New York: Scribner Press, 1928), 281.

The teaching regarding who is to be a qualified leader of Plato's republic is an important and necessary part of Plato's ideal world. If philosophy is to govern the republic, then the philosopher is certainly the only person equipped with the necessary knowledge and ability to lead. If idealism is to reign, then the idealist should be the lord.

No doubt the above is an enticing thought. People readily give themselves to the pursuit of a grand vision. When that vision is demonstrated to be higher than they are, a goal that is worthy of their utmost endeavors to attain it, they are willing to give themselves to its pursuit. For its attainment they will sacrifice themselves and their resources. They will be prepared to sacrifice their individuality, their persons, and even their lives in warfare, as the funeral oration of Demosthenes for Athens so clearly demonstrates. They will be willing to forsake their families and friendships. Even more, they will be willing to destroy their families and friends for the sake of the ideal set before them.

It is astonishing to grasp that all the above pursuit and sacrifice are for an idea, an idea that is not one's own but someone else's idea. It is not real. History has shown that the idea is not attainable. No matter how widely believed or desired, the idea has not been accomplished. Though it has been widely pursued by nations, the deep desire has not been realized. Though so much has been sacrificed, even so much blood shed, the goal has not been attained. The result is a broken ruins and a dispirited populace.

### *Idealism and Babel*

Idealism as rebellion against God is the record of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11). The gathered people had their ideal: "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (v. 4). To attain this ideal they devoted their resources. "They had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar" (v. 3). To accomplish their goal they pledged together their strength and ability. "Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly" (v. 3).

In the words of God himself, scripture then gives notice of their idealistic pursuit: "Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do" (Gen. 11:6). It was a united people, who shared one language and who by their language shared their imaginations to accomplish their goal of disobedience and rebellion. The judgment of God on their words and actions is the particular expression of what he had declared about man earlier: "For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8:21).

The work of God to confound the language of the people was in direct relationship to their statements recorded

in Genesis 11:3–4. They declared their common dedication, as it is recorded in the beginning of each verse: "And they said...Go to, let us..."

Genesis 11 is instructive as a record of the rebellion of the people against God. "Let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11:4). These words the people spoke in direct opposition to the word that God had spoken to Noah and through Noah to his descendants: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. Bring forth abundantly in the earth" (9:1, 7).

The testimony of holy scripture stands against the human race. Idealism is no neutral matter. Idealism is the product of the imaginations of men in their purposes to establish a world that stands over against God's. Idealism is rebellion against God. It is rebellion against the commandments of God, against the judgments of God, and against the world as God has created it, upholds it, and governs it by the power of his providence. Idealism is, in fact, the labor of men to remake the world as they vainly desire it to be. They desire it to be a utopia that is free from the judgments of God. Men desire the world to be without the government of the sovereign God over all. Men desire the world to be a heaven on earth, attained by man alone, apart from the grace of God in Christ. One can easily see the kingdom of antichrist arising out of the imaginations of the people to build a city and the tower of Babel to "make us a name."

Looking at the rebellious labor of wicked men in the light of scripture's judgment presents the opportunity to distinguish *idealism* from its related term, *ideology*.

*Idealism* is a category of thought. It ought to be recognized as being broader than a mere kind of philosophy because it incorporates matters into it beyond the scope of philosophy. *Idealism* might be better described as a philosophy that has very practical effects. *Idealism* considers the realm of events and circumstances in the world in which men carry on as physical creatures and judges that realm to be under the control of another, higher realm. This higher realm that has control of the lower is superior. This superiority is not due to mere control, but the higher realm is better or even perfect in relationship to the lower realm. Access into this higher, ideal realm signifies superior knowledge, namely, wisdom. This access into the higher realm also signifies a qualification to exert an influence or control over the lower realm.

*Ideology* is agreement by a number of persons over a particular set of ideals. These persons agree to be controlled by this set of ideals, always in their thoughts and very often in their actions. They agree to be governed by this set of ideals and in doing so submit to leaders that have access to these ideals.

Then it is easy to see Plato as an idealist and his philosophy as idealism. His teaching was too broad and general to be represented as an ideology. However, the agreement of men recorded in Genesis 11 was an ideology, especially as that ideology laid behind the building of the tower of Babel.

### *Idealism of Communism: Consequences*

One of the most striking demonstrations of the power of ideology presented itself throughout the twentieth century and strongly carries its effect into the twenty-first. Communism wiped out populations throughout countries in the eastern hemisphere. Communism is the form of government of the countries of China, North Korea, and Cuba. It is the form of government also of several countries in South America. It should also be observed that communism is still a power that entices many in Western civilization; for example, the United States still has the Communist Party on its voting ballots and Communist Party members running for office.

Chiefly the brainchild of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and their *Communist Manifesto*, communism came to its revolutionary beginning with the overthrow of the tsars and their government in Russia and, in their place, the ascendance of Vladimir Lenin with his Bolshevik Party. The communistic ideal was intolerant of any rivals or any dissent. Religion was not allowed to teach a heaven to come about through the return of Christ in glory: heaven was on earth, the “workman’s paradise.” Higher level education in the liberal arts was shut down: education was only to serve the interests of the state and its programs; the physical science alone could properly serve the interests of the state. Liberal education was too dangerous because of its critical thought. Art and literature carried the same dangers but were allowed only in the service of propaganda. In the same interest of propaganda, freedom of the press and freedom of speech were both denied for the sake of eliminating all criticism. These denials must be noted in connection with the severe ideology of communism. For the same reason that religion could not be tolerated in a communistic society, all faith had to be turned to support the ideology of the state. Just as faith in the ideology was to be the unity of the people, so all dissent by a free press and free speech was a manifest form of unbelief.

But the most tangible consequence of communistic ideology was the death of an estimated one hundred million people.

Communism took so many lives because of the nature of communism. In communism, so clearly by definition, the individual person has absolutely no value. The only unit having any value is the collective, the unit that is the productive, controlling, overarching state. Think of Plato’s “hive” in the quotation above from the *Republic*.

This collective was not meant to be limited to the individual nation. The ideology of communism was meant to spread over the entire globe as a movement that took up nation-states into a single collective. The first line of *The Communist Manifesto* is important: “Workers of the world, unite!” What matters is the collective. The individual means nothing. What matters is the global reach of the movement. The more widespread the movement, the less the individual *can* matter.

The irony of communism is that some certain, specific individuals do matter. In God’s just judgment communism cannot exist without the elevation of certain men to the glorious height of divinity. So Lenin and Stalin came to be gods in the Soviet Union; Chairman Mao in China; Kim Jong-il in North Korea and presently his son, Kim Jong-un; Fidel Castro in Cuba; Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam; and Pol Pot in Cambodia. Idealism needs its ideologues: men of vision, men of will and determination, men of speech and rhetoric, men arrogant and ruthless. One or two must embody and run the ideology that requires the devoted sacrifice of millions to bring about their “workman’s paradise.” Plato’s *Republic* needs its “guardians.”

At present, society is confronted with an ideology that is even more revolutionary. Though it is so different from communism in its form and expression, this ideology has the same targets in view as communism: God and marriage, home and family. The movement is sometimes associated with the constantly augmented acronym LGBTQ. More specifically, the energy of this movement is directed into one area, so it is being called “the transgender movement.” The basic ideology of this movement is that gender is a sociological construct that is not rooted in the physical makeup of this world, not only the world of human beings but also all of the biological realm.

In comparison with other ideologies, the above ideology of gender so clearly shows the conflict between idealism and reality. This ideology seeks to obliterate every distinction between male and female, to make every distinction invalid. The terminology demanded by the movement is clear: “pregnant person” and “gender fluid.” Historical persons are described as “cisgendered” because they understood themselves to be either male or female in a setting in which all understood that men were men and women were women. But another feature that makes this gender ideology so outstanding as an ideology is its widespread acceptance and promotion. Before the idol of this ideology bow artists, politicians, corporate executives, and collegiate and professional sports associations. News media not only covers the progress of this gender ideology but also shamelessly promotes it while “canceling” and denigrating those critical of the ideology in any way. It seems to be only a matter of time before dissent

from and criticism of this ideology will result in outright persecution.

Though both communism and the transgender movement are ideologies, there is a notable difference between them. Communism needed the revolutionary force of violent overthrow. Thus the deaths of so many millions. In sharp contrast the transgender movement has required no such force. So many willingly throw themselves into this movement. How remarkable it is that fear of being “cancelled” now carries the same force as the threat of torture and death previously did!

Ideas have consequences. Idealism has consequences. Ideology has severe consequences.

Especially gender ideology directly reveals one of the most severe consequences of idealism.

No matter how real idealism is thought to be, no matter how many promote it or are caught in its grip, idealism is always at war with reality. Idealism is not a way of understanding or comprehending reality. Idealism is only the product of man’s sinful and vain imagination, whether the imagination of one or the imagination shared by a vast multitude. No matter how much the nations rage, the heathen will always be imagining a vain thing (Ps. 2:1). No matter how much the ideology of the transgender movement may prevail among men, the order of God’s creation—creating man and animals and fish and birds as male and female—remains and will remain unchanged.

The consequence of idealism is the loss of contact with all reality: the reality of this world under the providential government of God, the reality of God’s revelation of himself in his word, and the reality that is God himself. Rebellious man must not only lose contact with these points of reality and truth outside of himself, but he must also ultimately lose contact with himself and therefore destroy himself. It is no coincidence but is the consequence of God’s judgment that self-destructive behavior is so prevalent with idealism.

It ought to be evident from the above examples of communism and the transgender movement that the world’s refusal to accept the created order of family and gender is an aspect of God’s judgment upon those who refuse to worship and serve him. But that refusal, under God’s judgment, must be the sharp, clear warning to God’s people to flee from even the least inclination to adopt and follow any ideology, let alone to give themselves over to the vain philosophy of idealism. How blessed it is to be rooted and grounded in the reality that is God’s created order, providentially sustained and governed by him alone! How blessed it is to be rooted and grounded by a true and living faith in scripture alone as the authoritative word of God! How blessed it is to live in fellowship and friendship with the living and true God! The church of Jesus Christ has

been redeemed by his blood. Her redemption is from the vanity of idolatry, the idolatry of the vain ideas of men. Her redemption is from the service of them that are no gods and from the service of those who are only men posing themselves as God. Her redemption is from following the blind and vain thoughts of men to follow her God according to the word of his truth: “Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men” (1 Cor. 7:23).

### *Idealism and the Church*

The consequences of idealism carry their force into the church. The inroads of idealism into the church have taken and still take the form of allegiance to worldly ideologies. The schism among the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN)* that led to the deposition of Klaas Schilder and others in 1944 was due not only to tension between the distinct differences between the *Afscheiding* and the *Doleantie*. But it was due also to the allegiance of many in the *GKN* to the Nazi party in the country, both before and during the war. The question ought at least to be raised in this connection whether Schilder’s ouster from the *GKN* was due to sympathies shared among idealists in defense of their respective idealisms. Schilder was opposed to the idealism of the Nazi party and what he saw as idealism in his own denomination.

In the present day there is a great deal of turmoil in Reformed and Presbyterian denominations due to pressures from society. What was unthinkable to have present in these denominations a few decades ago is openly invited. Those who attempt to keep the doors closed are slandered. Tension is leading to divisions in mainline denominations. These divisions are continuing into more conservative denominations. The liberal consensus sees these divisions as mere clashes of ideologies. But the clashes are between ideologies and the word of God. Or, to speak more generally, the clashes are truly between idealism and the word of God.

As can be seen in the above paragraph, there is only one power to protect God’s elect, covenant people from the inroads of these threatening ideologies of men: the living and abiding word of God. His word is the light to shine on the darkness to show its deceitfulness. His word alone declares the vanity of the thoughts of men, that men will be unable to prevail with their words against God and his people. His word is that God’s people cannot be plucked out of their savior’s hand. God’s word is the light to shine upon them, upon their God, and upon all their pathway before God. God’s word is the word of his kingdom that stands in triumph over all the kingdoms of men.

The consequences of idealism in doctrinal debate in the church will be treated next, the Lord willing.

—MVW



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## FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

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

*In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.  
—1 Thessalonians 5:18.*

O brethren, beloved of God in Jesus Christ, what a blessed will of God there is concerning you! God did not will that you be mercenaries who labor for pay in his kingdom. God did not will that you live all your lives in fear, not knowing what your eternal states will be. God did not will that you exist in a state of perpetual instability, knowing his favor and losing the sense of his favor, perhaps many times a day, a favor only to be restored to you when you make a move toward God first. God did not will that you toil under the law and its terrible demand that you keep it in order to live, to be blessed, and to have hope.

God wills that in everything you give thanks. His eternal, unchangeable, and irresistible will in love for you is that you give thanks. So his eternal will for you is that you be saved from the misery of your fall in Adam. God's will, therefore, is that you be delivered from the guilt of Adam and the condemnation of his sin. God's will is that you be forgiven your debts and that you be made alive with eternal life from your death in Adam. And thus God's will is also that you know him, the only true God. His will is that you be translated out of darkness and the prison of sin and Satan into the glorious kingdom of his dear Son. His will is that you be delivered from under the law and walk in liberty, living before his face without fear. So God's will is that you live in the blessed assurance of your salvation and of his favor and that after this life you be immediately translated into heavenly glory to live and reign with his Son, Jesus Christ, forever and ever, world without end, when God will be all in all.

His will in Christ Jesus! Jesus Christ is first. God willed that Christ be glorified and exalted. God willed that in all things Christ have the preeminence. God willed that Christ be the firstborn of every creature. God willed that we be given to Christ to be saved by Christ to the glory of God the Father and for the magnification of his wonderful grace in Christ Jesus, so that every creature shouts this song: "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever" (Rev. 5:13).

So God works by his almighty grace to give to you your salvation without works but for his glory because his will is not that you work for your salvation but that you give thanks. Thus God's will is that—having your salvation and certain assurance of eternal life and knowing God and Jesus Christ whom God sent—in your hearts and minds and souls and with all your strength and in all your lives you bless the Lord for all his benefits to you. He has forgiven you all your sins, healed you of all your diseases, and given to you eternal life now and in the world to come.

O Lord, we weep! How little do we give thanks in everything! We thank thee for Jesus Christ, who did all thy will because we do not. Make us thankful in everything, O Father!

—NJL